Eildon Hill North, The Scottish Borders

Data Structure Report

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COMPARATIVE KINGSHIP
The Early Medieval Kingdoms of Northern Britain and Ireland

Project Background and Eildon hill North Hillfort

In 2017, the Department of Archaeology at the University of Aberdeen began a Leverhulme funded project focusing on the early medieval kingdoms of Scotland and Ireland. The nature of societies existing beyond the Roman Empire's boundaries, in regions such as Ireland and northern Britain, is one of the most contentious debates about late- and post-Roman Europe. While research has focused on broad-scale narratives concerning the transformations of the late Roman World that gave rise to the so called successor states at the core of Europe, emerging evidence highlights that peripheral communities were more complex than previously characterised. Rather than being small-scale and poorly developed, these kingdoms were highly stratified, with complex strategies of rulership and governance. Though impacted by late Roman practices, these groups witnessed a very different genesis and development to those of central and southern Europe, yet to date, there have been no integrated and comparative studies of these early kingdoms.

The Comparative kingship project adopts an innovative interdisciplinary focus designed to critically evaluate the nature of elite power in northern Britain and Ireland in the first millennium AD. The project utilizes archaeological, historical, toponymic and palaeoenvironmental methodologies along with Bayesian-modelled chronologies, to create a new synthesis of the dramatic changes that ultimately led to the formation of the state societies that existed beyond the edges of the Roman Empire.

A major element of the project will be investigating the nature of the Pictish kingdoms of early Scotland. Recent excavation at Tap O'Noth in Aberdeenshire has produced evidence for the largest identified hillfort of the early medieval period of Britain and Ireland. Prior to our excavations, it was assumed this hillfort was either Iron Age or even Bronze Age (Mercer and Tipping 1994, 5; Armit 1997, 54). The resultant early medieval dating, therefore, was both striking with regard to placing the local landscape, that of Rhynie, into context, but also for hinting at the potential chronology of other large, densely settled hillforts in Northern Scotland. A number of comparable examples exist, including Yeavering Bell and Old Fawdon, both in Northumbria, Hownam Law and Eildon Hill North both in the Scottish Borders, Burnswark, Dumfries and Galloway and a number of other less well known sites. Eildon Hill North, however, is the most comparable to Tap O'Noth, in terms of its size and density of internal settlement.

While a number of excavations have been undertaken at Eildon Hill since the late 19th century, most recently by Owen in the late 1980s, the exact chronology of the enclosing elements have never been

truly understood (Figure 1 and Figure 2). Owen (1992) suggests the outer enclosing elements are Late Bronze Age, though she also noted Roman material within the core of the rampart, arguing that these artefacts related to modern disturbance (see below for a more detailed analysis). However, radiocarbon evidence suggests that some of the internal platforms date to the Roman Iron Age, while stray finds and a possible Roman signal station found within the hillfort, along with the nearby Newstead Roman Fort (also known as Trimontium), attest to significant native and Roman activity in the area at this time. One of the major questions about this hillfort is its relationship with Newstead. Was Eildon Hill a contemporary native settlement or a centre that developed after the withdrawal of Roman troops from the area? The proposed excavations at Eildon Hill will help to answer this critical question, allowing us to develop a chronology for the site in order to assess how it developed over time and how the hillfort fits into the broader chronology of the local environs. The remainder of this document sets out proposals for test excavations at Eildon Hill North.

The Monument and Context

Eildon Hill North (**Canmore ID:** 55668**; Site No:** NT53SE 57; **NGR:** NT 55450 32800) is positioned on the eastern summit of three hills which dominate the surrounding lowlands, immediately to the south of the of Melrose town in the Scottish Borders. The site is the largest known hillfort in Northern Britain, occupying an area of 18.84ha and comprising at least three phases of construction (Royal Commission 1956; Owen 1992). The largest of these phases, the three closely-spaced outer ramparts (Enclosure A), surround a number of natural terraces, the most substantial of which is a sub-rectangular area at the very summit of the hill. The Royal Commission (1956, 309–310) recorded the possible presence of an enclosing element defining the edge of this terrace (Enclosure B), as well as a more ephemeral system delimiting the higher, southern portion of the summit (Enclosure C), though our recent photogrammetry survey strongly suggests the latter was a trackway and does not represent another enclosing element.

While the fort of Eildon had piqued the interest of a number of local antiquarians (for example Milne 1747), it was not until 1894 that Christison produced the first detailed account of its archaeology. He (Christison 1894, 111; 116–117) described the site as a ‘fortified town’, being the first to identify the hundreds of scooped platforms and correctly interpreting these as evidence for occupation. Describing Enclosure A, he noted seven breaks, two in the east and west which he suggested were original (Christison 1894, 115). While Christison (1894, 116) did not recognise the presence of Enclosure B or C, he speculated that the upper plateau could have easily been reinforced.

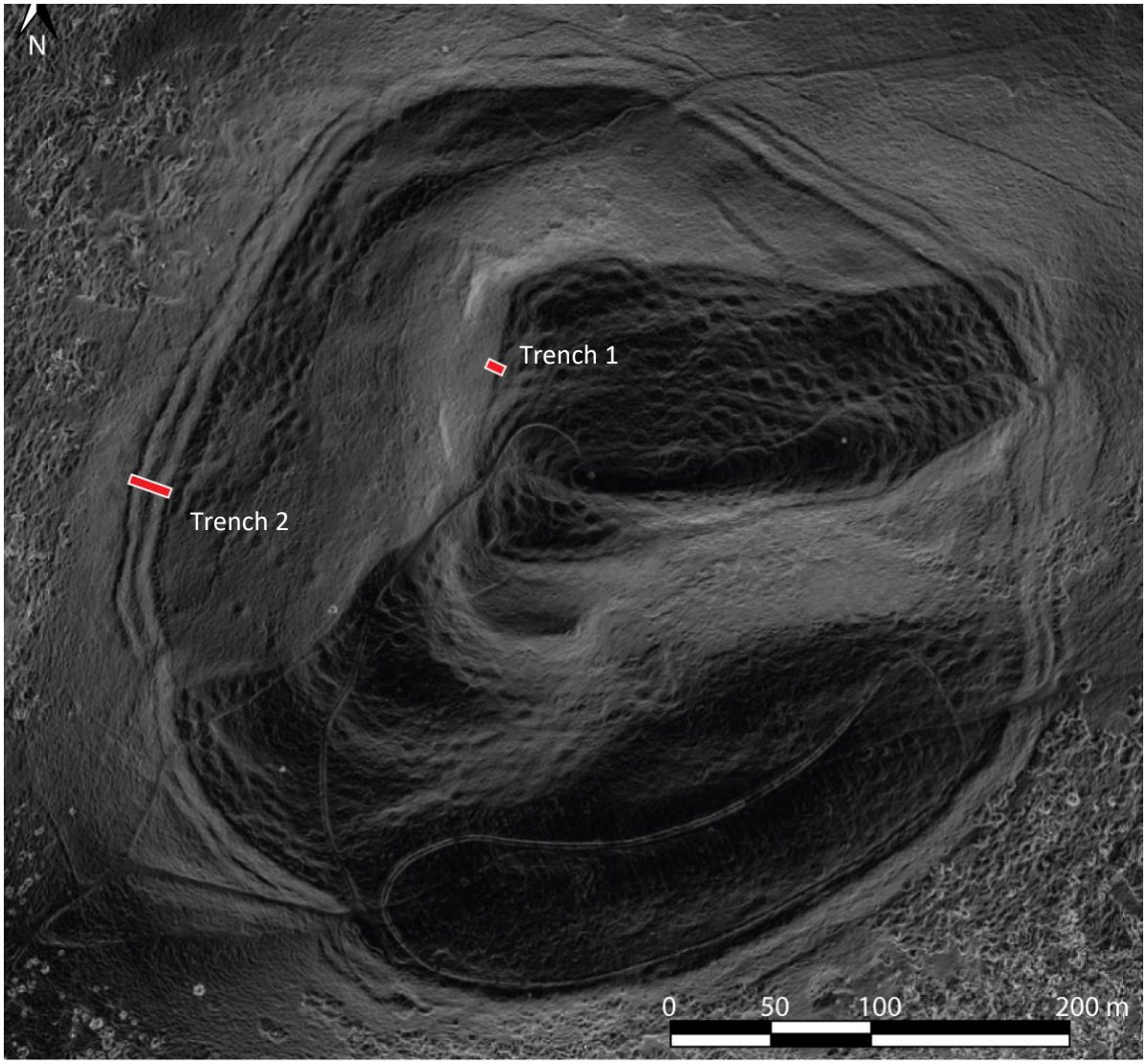

Figure 1: results of photogrammetry survey at Eildon Hill, Scottish Borders, with location of excavation trenches.

In the 20th century, the Royal Commission completed a topographical plan of the fort in 1956. This was the first detailed survey of the site, and the only to map the number and distribution of hut platforms within the interior, of which 296 were identified (Figure 3). Unfortunately, only the location of these platforms were recorded, with no information regarding their size or shape. At the summit of the interior, a small ditched enclosure was recorded by the Royal Commission which excavation would later identify to be a Roman signal station, though more recent assessment has questioned this interpretation and has proposed this may instead represent a Romano-British temple.

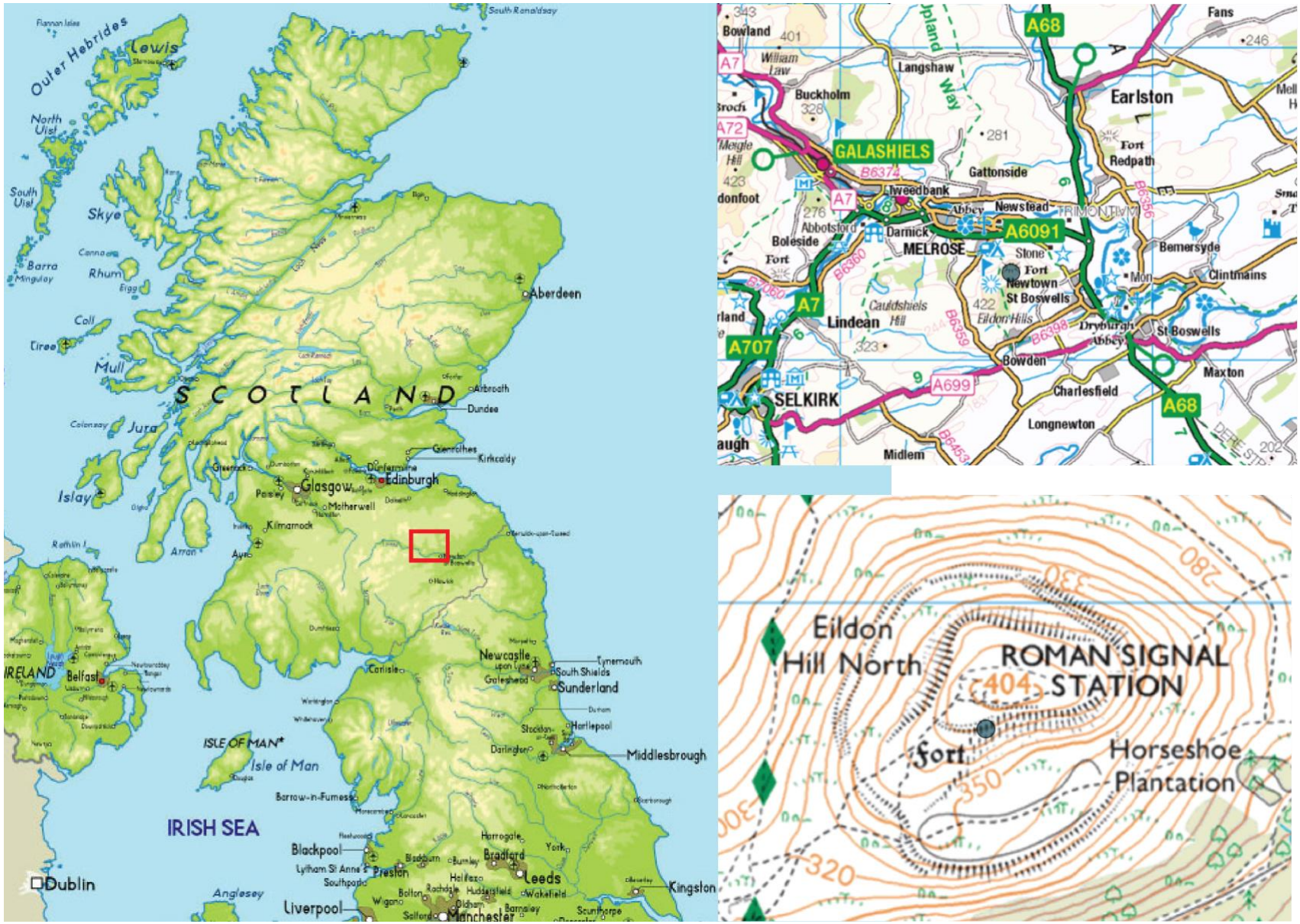

Figure 2: Location of Eildon Hill, Scottish Borders.

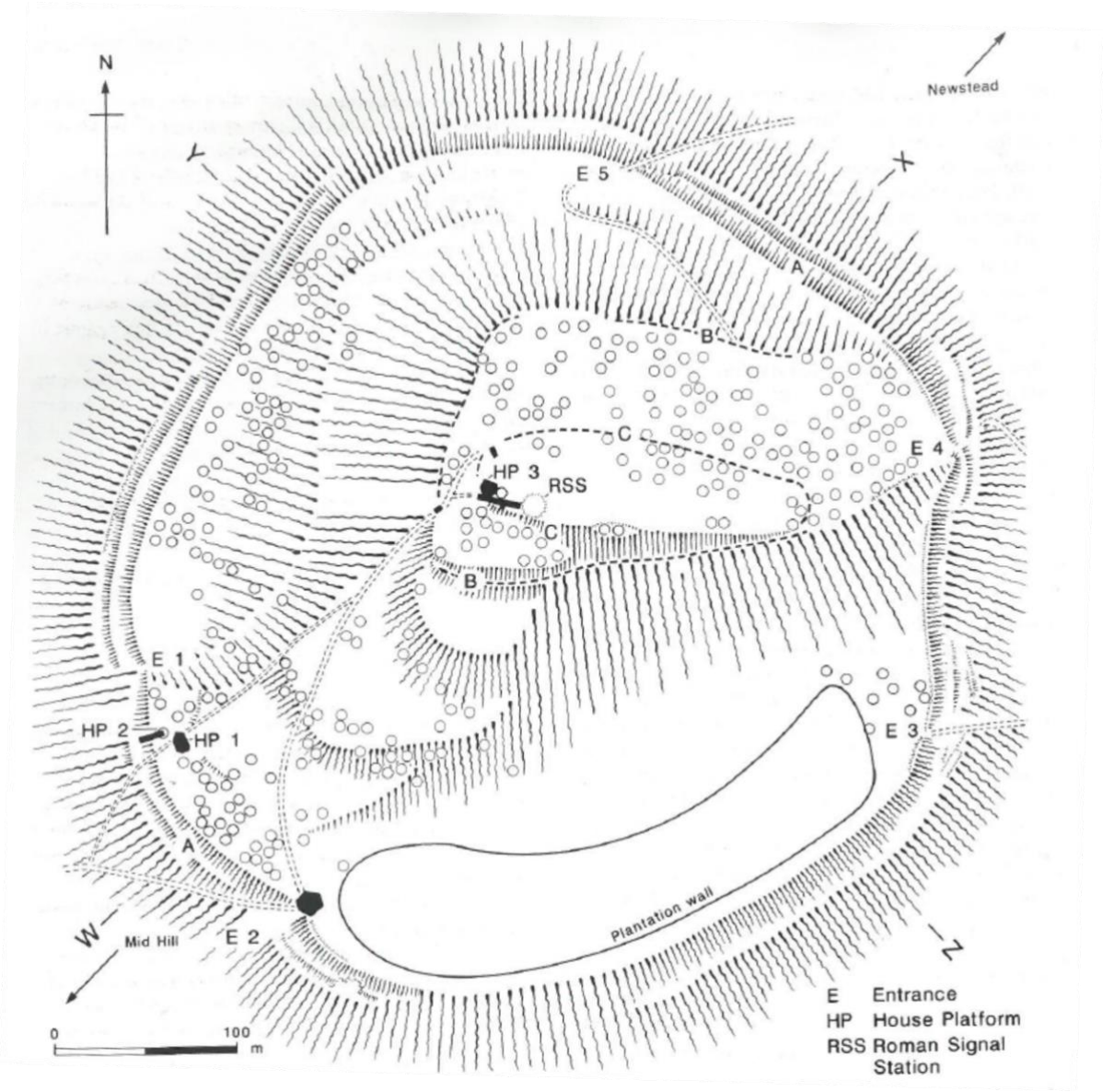

Figure 3: Royal Commission survey of the archaeology on Eildon Hill with previous excavation trenches.

Previous Excavations

Curle undertook excavations on three of the hut platforms in the late 19th century, though only a summary account of work in progress was produced by Christison (1894). All three platforms produced occupation surfaces, with at least one example showing evidence for multiple phasing. Some 'coarse pottery' was discovered in one surface, but this has not survived.

The most recent excavations were undertaken by Owen (1992), who attempted to date the three phases of enclosure construction, as well as a number of hut platforms. Sample excavation of the inner

rampart of Enclosure A, incorporating a possible original entrance and rampart terminals, did not produce any secure construction dates. It revealed a pre-rampart occupation phase comprising a large oval pit, a probable hearth and a number of localised burnt spreads (Owen 1992, 27–28; Figure 2.3). A bronze tool from the pit is similar to a Late Bronze Age artefact found at Traprain Law (Owen 1992, 61), while two radiocarbon dates from composite multi-species wood samples produced dates of 1014–811 cal. BC (GU-2190; 2760 ± 50) and 1208–917 cal. BC (GU-2370; 2870 ± 50). Another narrow section across the inner rampart also indicated pre-rampart Late Bronze Age/Iron Age activity in the form of a shallow rock-cut pit dated 1193–431 cal. BC (GU-2197; 2680 ± 130).

The terminals of the hillfort rampart and its subsequent collapse overlay these later prehistoric features. The rampart was constructed of local clayey silts intermixed with stone rubble, with some decomposed turfs and small amounts of charcoal. In places there is evidence for a rough stone facing and this would have been augmented by a wooden revetment identified by a series of rock-cut post-holes outlining the original edge of both rampart terminals (Owen 1992, 27–32).

While no samples from the rampart were radiocarbon dated, the artefacts found within its core may provide a tentative date. Although Owen (1992, 31; 63–64) argues the rampart was either Late Bronze Age or pre-Roman Iron Age (see below), a number of Roman artefacts, including fragments of a glass bead and armlet, both of 1st/2nd century date (Henderson 1992, 43), as well as two fragments of Roman pottery dating to the 2nd to 4th centuries AD, were found within its core (Owen 1992, 31). These are intermixed with an Early Bronze Age barbed and tanged arrowhead, stone artefacts of undiagnostic date, crucible fragments and native Late Bronze Age/Iron Age coarseware pottery. The latter are particularly important, as McLellan (1992, 48) suggests the fragments have been heavily abraded, contrasting with other comparable coarseware fragments found in some of the hut platforms or the Roman Iron Age pottery. This might suggest that a significant amount of time had passed before they were incorporated into the enclosing elements, with weathering and/or the churning up of material to construct the enclosing elements of the hillfort damaging these artefacts. This interpretation would support the idea that the inner rampart of Enclosure A was built at the end of the Roman-Iron Age, though Owen (1992, 65) identified the mixed artefactual assemblage as evidence of modern disturbance.

Although modern finds were recovered from the rampart trenches, Owen (1992, 31) suggests that these were found immediately beneath the turf. There is no indication of disturbance in either section drawing (Owen 1992, Figure 2.5), and without contextual information regarding the modern finds (which Owen states she did not record), we might tentatively suggest a *terminus post quem* for the construction of this rampart around the 2nd–4th centuries AD. Excavation of the outer two ramparts of

Enclosure A may produce evidence for Bronze Age or Iron Age construction, though as shown by the photogrammetry results outlined below, it is likely that these represent a separate phase of enclosure construction at Eildon Hill.

Targeted excavation of enclosure B focused on a heavily eroded section of the rampart, and as such only the partial remains of a bank were identified and no dating information, or artefacts, were recovered. Two exploratory trenches, one 25m by 1m east–west running trench and another 6m by 1.5m north/east–south/west cutting, were opened to investigate the reputed Enclosure C identified by the Royal Commission. The excavator did not identify any features indicative of a rampart, or indeed any archaeological remains other than a single post-hole. Owen (1992, 25), however, notes that the line of this feature could not be identified on the ground prior to excavation, and the location of the trenches (Owen 1992, 2.2) do not seem to overly the perimeter of the reputed Enclosure C as recorded in the photogrammetry results.

In total, six hut platforms have been investigated. Three platforms excavated by Curle in the late 19th century revealed a series of floor layers and some 'coarse pottery' (Christison 1894). Owen (1992) excavated two complete platforms and a section through a third. The first produced up to four occupation layers (Owen 1992, Figure 2.9). Three radiocarbon samples from the lowest phase returned dates of 1005–811 cal. BC (GU-2195; 2750 ± 50), 1420–1059 cal. BC (GU-2194; 3020 ± 60) and 895–546 cal. BC (GU-2373; 2600 ± 50). The occupation surface directly above this produced some coarse ware pottery and a radiocarbon date of 974–590 cal. BC (GU-2193). The third occupation surface reveals that the platform was widened at this time, with a more substantial structure evidenced by associated rock-cut posts (Owen 1992, 36). This layer produced much more material culture, including bronze artefacts and metalworking debris, the most interesting being a dragonesque fibula of late first to second century AD date, an almost identical piece being found at the at Traprain Law. Other Roman connections are indicated by the presence of glass fragments of similar date. Radiocarbon samples from this layer returned 401–115 cal. BC (2220 ± 60; GU-2192) and 364 cal. BC–cal. AD 317 (2000 ± 130; GU-2371). A final, fourth occupation surface above this produced a fragment of Roman pottery and a radiocarbon date of 137–386 cal. AD (1760 ± 50). Copper alloy scarp found within these upper occupation surfaces reveal on-site craftworking (Owen 1992, 37).

The second structure survived as a curving slot with associated post-holes near the edge of the platform (Owen 1992, 39–40). No obvious phasing of house floors was noted, though this platform was much more disturbed than the latter. A possible hearth and associated occupation surface was revealed, the hearth producing a date of 915–546 cal. BC (2620 ± 60; GU-2198). Finds include mostly coarse pottery sherds and stone implements probably associated with the hearth layer, though a

Roman period rim sherd comes from an overlying context (Owen 1992, 40), tentatively suggesting a similar sequence of activity to that of the previous platform.

A narrow slot was dug through the southern half of a third platform that abuts the inner rampart of Enclosure A. Here again, a sequence of activity was identified that can be grouped into two distinct phases. The first consists of a construction layer used to create the platform, with a charcoal sample returning a date of 65–346 cal. AD (1820 ± 60; GU-2196). This indicates that newly constructed platforms were also being built in the Romano-British period. Charcoal from a possible hearth overlying this construction layer returned a date of 129–381 cal. AD (1780 ± 50; GU-2372). Associated artefacts include fragments of glass and jet armlets, as well as one fragment of coarse pottery. The glass is from a Guido's Roman cylindrical bead type, a Romano-British type commonly accepted as dating mainly to the first to second centuries AD (Henderson 1992, 43). Similar beads have been found at Traprain Law and the nearby Roman camp of Newstead.

A Roman signal station has been identified at the very summit of the interior (Steer and Feachem 1952). Excavated by Steer and Feachem (1952), they revealed a 2.1m wide and 0.4m deep ditch with an internal diameter of about 10.6m. Its slight nature led the excavators to conclude it was not a defensive feature and was instead used to demarcate the internal features. A break in the ditch on its northern side denotes the entrance, which was also roughly paved. The interior was levelled with a 0.3m thick layer of pitched stone and fragments of 'native' pottery and one fragment of a Roman vessel were intermixed with a paving layer (Steer and Feachem 1952, 203). Six post-holes, forming a 3.4m squared structure, define what Steer and Feachem (1952, 205) interpret as a Roman signal station, with the depth of the posts inferring the structure may have been two stories high. Within the interior, one unstratified Roman coin dating to 116–117 AD was recovered, as well as other artefacts such as roof-tiles. This dated coin is broadly supported by the Flavian architecture of the signal tower, which places its construction around the late 1st century AD. (Steer and Feachem 1952, 205). The station would have served the nearby Roman Fort at Newstead, which has been shown by excavation to have both Flavian and Antonine phases of activity, one of which was associated with Agricola around AD 80, before being abandoned around AD 196 (Curle 1911; Hartley 1972; Hunter and Keppie 2012).

While Steer and Feachem (1952, 203) argued that animal bone intermixed with the levelling deposit of the signal station is evidence that the structure truncated an earlier platform, there is no clear evidence to suggest that the fort was abandoned by natives when the station was built. Considering the multiphase occupation of the structures excavated by Owen (1992), we could equally attribute this to an earlier, Late Bronze Age phase of occupation. Indeed, Owen (1992, 69) argues that the dating

and material culture from the platforms implies that at least some part of the hilltop continued to be used by natives while the Roman fort of Newstead was garrisoned and that it is probable that the signal station was in contemporary use. This is unusual, as it suggests the hillfort continued to be a major focus of indigenous activity throughout the Roman Iron Age, when most other hillforts had been abandoned (Hunter 2012, 6). It also infers a co-existence between Romans and natives at the site. Some surface finds recovered from within the fort in 1966 included five sherds of Roman coarse ware pottery likely to date to the second century AD or later, and two fragments of a black jar dated to the third or fourth century AD (Robertson 1970, 212; Owen 1992, 24), though others have suggested the pottery may be slightly earlier in date. This tentatively infers that the site was used during and after the final abandonment of the nearby Newstead Roman fort. The latter is supported by the recovery of surface finds of second, third and fourth century AD Roman artefacts at the site (Robertson 1970, 212).

Photogrammetry Survey: The Enclosing Elements

A photogrammetry survey carried out by the University of Aberdeen at Eildon Hill in 2019 was successful in providing a more detailed plan of the site, allowing for a more comprehensive assessment of the relative chronology of the enclosing elements and distribution of hut platforms (Figure 1 and Figure 4).

While the Royal Commission (1956, 306) and others such as Owen (1992) have suggested no more than three phases of enclosure at Eildon, photogrammetry survey indicates a much more complex series of enclosures. The first consists of an oval enclosure at the summit of the interior which occupied a total area of 1.09ha, recorded as 'Enclosure C' by the Royal Commission (1956, 307). This is visible as a 4.39m wide sunken area defined on either side by a slight ridge. Two large breaks at the south-eastern and south-western sides are too large to denote entrances, though a steep natural ridge in this area may have augmented any gaps. It seems that this features, rather than being an early enclosing element, is a trackway associated with the settlement. Test excavation by Owen (1992) did not reveal evidence for an enclosing feature, though as suggested above, the trenches were not positioned over the feature. Hut structures on either side clearly respect its course, and as such, it must have been an extant element when the fort was densely occupied. We could therefore re-interpret this feature as an ancient trackway used by the occupants of the fort. We see much more

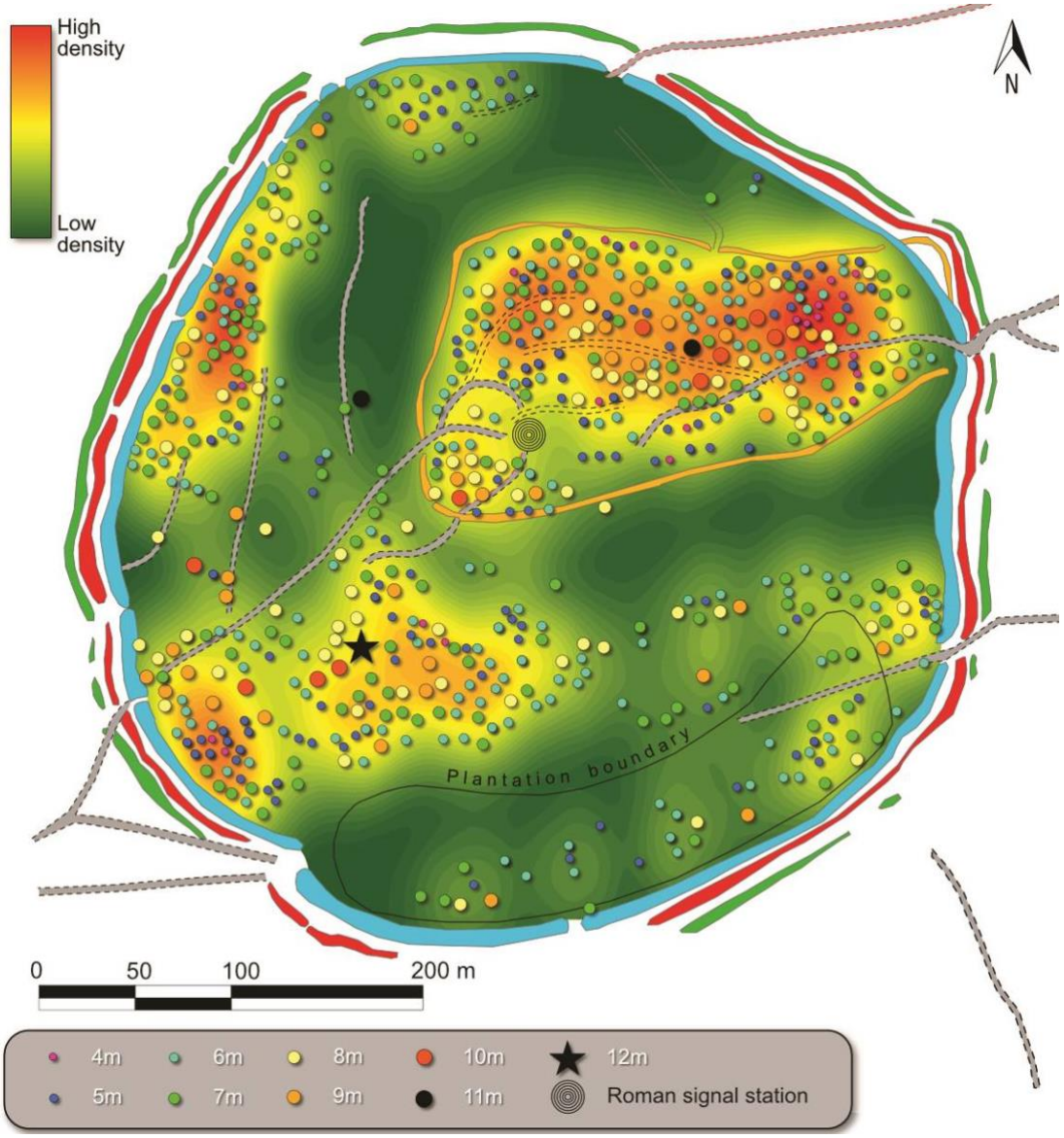

Figure 4: Interpretation of photogrammetry results from Eildon Hill with size and density of hut platforms.

explicit evidence for trackways servicing the platforms at Tap O'Noth, Aberdeenshire, in a dendritic system also noted at other large, densely populated hillforts in Southern England such as Maiden Castle, Hod Hill, etc.

Surrounding the entire flat sub-rectangular summit is 'Enclosure B' (The Royal Commission 1956, 307) which has a total surface area of 3.25ha. This consists of a 5.6m wide bank positioned at the edge of a steep natural scarp, with some indications of internal quarry scoops. Narrow breaks at the north (3.6m) and south-west (6.7m) could represent original entrances, though both are associated with later trackways. A larger break at the east is associated with the truncation of the enclosing elements on this side. This is critical in our understanding of the phasing of the fort defences, as the photogrammetry survey clearly shows 'Enclosure B' is truncated by the inner rampart of 'Enclosure

A', while the outer two ramparts of 'Enclosure A' swerve to avoid it. We can now consider 'Enclosure B' as one of the earliest phases of fort construction.

Surrounding the entire summit is a broadly circular series of three enclosures ('Enclosure A') with a perimeter of nearly 1.64km. The northern, western and southern limits of these enclosures strictly follow the natural contour of the hill, incorporating a shallow terrace following the perimeter around from north to south which gradually expands to form the distinctive southern shelf. This striking natural feature is almost flat and incorporates an area of over 4.4ha. A series of other smaller natural terraces step towards the summit on the southwestern side. The eastern side of 'Enclosure A', however, turns sharply across slope and abuts a steep natural incline which defines the flat summit plateau. 'Enclosure A' comprises three closely-spaced ramparts in many places now reduced to terraces. The inner example is the most extant, with sections of the middle, and particularly the outer rampart being heavily denuded and completely destroyed in places.

The inner rampart survives best on the eastern side as a 7.21m wide bank up to 0.32m high, with evidence for internal shallow quarry scoops. The middle and outer ramparts are notably slighter, measuring around 5.6m (middle) and 5.1m (outer) wide. There are at least five corresponding entrances in the fort, of which the Royal Commission (1956, 309) argue four are original (the north/north-east example being a modern gap associated with a track). Two examples at the southwest are almost certainly original, as all three ramparts of 'Enclosure A' curve inwards at both points.

The Royal Commission (1956, 309) argue that the three ramparts of 'Enclosure A' comprise a single phase of construction broadly contemporary with many of the internal hut platforms. The photogrammetry survey, however, shows a more complex sequence of development. While we have already shown that 'Enclosure C' is probably the remains of an ancient trackway and that 'Enclosure B' is earlier in date than 'Enclosure A', we might now suggest that 'Enclosure A' consisted of at least two, and possibly three, phases of construction. This is clearly apparent at the eastern side of the fort where all except the newly discovered enclosure interact. The inner rampart of 'Enclosure A' truncates 'Enclosure B', while the outer two ramparts notably kink to avoid and tightly hug its northeastern corner. There are instances at the west and southwest where hut platforms slightly cut into or tightly abut the internal edge of the inner rampart of 'Enclosure A', suggesting that many of the hut platforms in these areas were not built before this rampart. Indeed, in places, the inner enclosure is constructed on the edge of break of slope, and it is therefore hard to imagine that the middle and outer ramparts are earlier (which would place them some 10–15m beyond the break of slope). While there are no indications that the remaining ramparts are contemporary or represent different phases of

construction, it is likely that they were built after the inner enclosure and as such, represent the final phase of fort building apparent at the site.

The limited nature of these excavations has proved difficult to contextualise the enclosing elements. Although there is clearly a major horizon of Late Bronze Age activity at Eildon Hill, and there are many instances where open hilltop settlement occurred in Bronze Age Britain. Therefore, without absolute dating evidence, we cannot link this activity with the construction of any of the enclosing elements. What is more open to interpretation, however, is the possible construction of (at least) the inner rampart of 'Enclosure A' at a time when the Romans occupied Newstead. Owen (1992) sees the incorporation of Roman material, intermixed with artefacts from the Early Bronze Age and Later Bronze Age, as modern disturbance. However, Owen (1992) failed to record any modern finds within the matrix of the rampart, and with no clear indication for any disturbance to the core of the rampart apparent in the section drawings, we could equally interpret this material culture as a *terminus ante quem*, with the inner bank of Enclosure A being constructed around or after the 2nd–4th century AD. The Royal Commission proposed that this was the third and final phase of the hillfort construction, though our more nuanced study of the enclosing elements suggests another phase of construction followed this. It is clear that the enclosing elements represent a much more complex sequence of construction than identified by the Royal Commission. This complex sequence, therefore, could explain the very wide range of dates recovered from the excavation, though without more secure dating information it is difficult to provide an absolute chronology for the hillfort and how it fits into the broader chronology of the local environs.

The possibility of a Late Roman Iron Age and/or early medieval horizon at Eildon Hill is made all the more likely by the recent excavations by the University of Aberdeen at the comparably large, densely settled hillfort of Tap O' Noth, Aberdeenshire. Tap O' Noth is second only to Eildon Hill in size in northern Britain. Like Eildon Hill recent drone-based photogrammetry has greatly increased the number of house platforms inside. The recent dating shows that the rampart enclosing the site dates to the 5th–6th century AD, while two house platforms that had 3rd–4th century Roman Iron Age phases and artefacts, continued to be used in the 5th–6th century. Like Eildon Hill, prior to the excavations at Tap O' Noth it was assumed this hillfort was either Bronze or Iron Age in date, but with the new dating Tap O' Noth is now the largest known early medieval fort in Britain. The new dating at Tap O' Noth has not only put into context the importance of a nearby contemporary elite settlement and ritual complex of the 4th-6th century AD at Rhynie, but on a broader scale, the data from the site has the potential to revolutionise the narrative surrounding the development of early medieval societies in northern Britain. Tap O' Noth along with Eildon Hill is one of a handful of comparably large, densely settled hillforts in northern Britain, yet Tap O' Noth is the only one with reasonably secure radiocarbon

dates for the rampart, but even there much more work could be done to assess the overall development of the site through time.

Photogrammetry Survey: The Hut Platforms

The photogrammetry survey also mapped the size and distribution of the internal settlement of Eildon Hill, with some 530 hut platforms being identified (Figure 4). The majority of these platforms, some 279 (about 53%) examples, measure between 7–9m in diameter, corresponding with the average size of roundhouses found in Haselgrove and Pope's (2007, 218) study of Iron Age structures in Britain. There is a distinct cluster of platforms measuring between 5–12m in diameter (488 platforms representing about *c.*92% of the mapped settlement), with 24 platforms (*c.*5%) ranging 3–4m and 18 (*c.*3%) examples between 13–17m. The former may be regarded as ancillary structures while the latter could be interpreted as the dwellings of elites of high-status families. Both Cleary (2007, 141) and Fernándes-Götz (2014, 28) argue that the size variation in some prehistoric structures may reflect an element of social stratification. A similar picture is seemingly emerging from other densely settled hilltop forts in Ireland and Britain (see O'Driscoll 2016, 331–340; Bergh 2015; Stewart and Russell 2017; Russell 2019).

Indeed, the distribution of the structures at Eildon Hill corresponds with these studies, highlighting distinct clusters of average sized platforms with larger examples, either individually or in small groups, at their periphery. We could argue that these larger structures were residences for the heads of multiple kin groups which quickly gathered and occupying the hillfort. A similar scenario has been suggested at Hod Hill in Dorset, England. Here a 22ha sub-rectangular bi-vallate hillfort enclosed at least 250 structures. The interior was divided by a series of dendritic road systems, with each block being associated with one or two larger structures, defined by an enclosure, at its periphery. Stewart and Russell (2017, 97) interpret these as high-status dwellings, possible heads of individual kin groups. We see more distinct evidence for such delineation at the 6th and 5th century BC *Fürstensitze* site of Heuenburg, where the division of the outer settlement into several quarters may represent the separation of different kinship groups (Fernándes-Götz 2014, 30). While these comparisons are clearly chronologically and geographically detached, they highlight strikingly similar distribution patterns at other nucleated settlements and the potential significance of this. A closer parallel, both in terms of its geographical location and chronology, is Tap O'Noth. The dense internal settlement of over 800 recorded house platforms form clusters within the fort, with larger platforms positioned at the edges of these groups. This could similarly be interpreted as evidence for an internal settlement hierarchy, where individual kin groups clustered together within the fort, with the heads of these groups being

defined by their larger houses and peripheral location at the edges of their respective kin group. Similar evidence may be found at the hillfort of Yeavering Bell in Northumberland, England, where a dense cluster of around 125 house platforms are separated into two distinct groups, with two larger platforms located near the entrance, at the periphery of both clusters. Oswald *et al*. (2006, 97) interpret this distribution as two separate communities occupying the same fort, with the heads of each residing in larger structures near the entrance.

The distribution map also reveals a more uniform distribution of platforms on the upper plateau of Eildon Hill, within the interior of Enclosure B. We might argue here that this represents the original settlement of the hill, before it was expanded, and further settlement was added. The smaller area and density of structures within Enclosure B would have necessitated strict planning, and this forethought is demonstrated by the numerous alignments and rows of platforms apparent here. While such alignment is also visible on a lesser scale outside Enclosure B, less pressure placed on habitation space after the expansion of the hillfort allowed some platforms to be positioned on a more *ad hoc* basis.

The major problem in interpreting these dense settlement conglomerations is the lack of chronological control, particularly considering the dating evidence already obtained for some of the structures on Eildon Hill. However, we might also consider the alignments and lack of overlapping structures to imply some form of contemporaneity, as Bergh (2015, 26–29) has suggested for the hilltop settlements at Mullaghnafarna and Turlough Hill in Ireland. At Eildon Hill, excavation has also shown that the Bronze Age platforms were re-used in the Roman Iron age while new examples were created in areas where no habitation existed. We could argue that most of the Bronze Age platforms would have been re-used before new examples were created. This might also help explain the *ad hoc* distribution of some of the platforms, where newly created structures were created around certain Bronze Age examples, while other platforms were re-used but no further settlement developed nearby. The distribution we see today, therefore, may be more representative of the Roman Iron Age phase than the Late Bronze Age occupation at the site.

Research Questions

Considering the large size of the hillfort, the complexity of its enclosing elements, its dense internal settlement and its locations with respect to the nearby Roman fort of Newstead, Eildon Hill North is a particularly significant hillfort which has the potential to substantially increase our understanding of the native settlement record, native–Roman interactions, early urbanisation, etc. Key to our

understanding of the site itself is the chronology of the enclosing elements, and as such, the proposed excavations will attempt to address this issue. It will also allow us to answer a number of research questions, including

1. What is the chronology of the defences at Eildon Hill and how did they develop through time? Are the enclosing elements contemporary with the Roman Iron Age occupation surfaces identified in excavations by Owen? What was the character of the defences at Eildon Hill? What resources were utilized in their construction? Where these defensive, or simply demarcations of space?

2. How does the chronology tie in with the models that have been developed about the site in the prehistoric period, Roman Iron Age and is there evidence of an early medieval phase to the defences as at the closely comparable site at Tap O' Noth?

3. How does Eildon Hill compare to other close typological parallels such as Tap O' Noth, Yeavering Bell and Old Fawdon, both Northumberland; Hownam Law, Scottish Borders and Burnswark, Dumfries and Galloway, all of which comprise large hilltop enclosures with dense internal settlement?

4. If the chronology for the site encompasses a major Late Roman–early medieval phase as at Tap O'Noth and the sites above can be shown to be clear parallels, what does this tell us about the scale and complexity of Late Roman-early medieval societies in northern Britain? How did the site relate to the nearby Roman fort of Trimontium and what can this tell us about native–Roman interactions? Can these sites be characterised as proto-urban?

The proposed excavations at Eildon Hill North comprised two trenches; a 23m by 3m (0.18 per cent of the 1.64km perimeter) wide trench over the three outer enclosing elements ('Enclosure A') (Trench 2) and an 6m by 3m (0.37 per cent of the 748m perimeter) wide trench over the inner enclosure ('Enclosure B') (Trench 1). The trenches were been de-turfed by hand, recorded by photogrammetry before being excavated, features sampled and recorded and the trenches backfilled.

Results

Trench 1

Trench 1 (6 x 3m) (Figure 5 and Figure 6) was opened over the rampart enclosing the large upper terrace of Eildon Hill North. The rampart was identified on the surface as a slight rise defined on its

western side by a notable scarp. A 1m sondage (Sondage 1) on the northern side of the trench was bottomed to natural, revealing the rampart as a substantial deposit of stone and gravel which was abutted by a series of floor layers on its eastern side. Sondage 2 extended over the remaining parts of the upper floor layers.

The rampart was built on partially sloping ground and no apparent attempt was made to level the area prior to its construction, though considering the substantial slopes immediately to the west of the trench, it is seems that the rampart was positioned at the edge of a natural terrace. The core of the rampart (1010) overlay a coarse gravel intermixed with a greyish red clayey sand (1011) which measured up to 0.16m deep. It contained frequent charcoal and lacked any medium to large stone which are frequently found in overlying deposits. A similar deposit (1014) extended beyond the limits of the overlying rampart and underneath the floor layers on the eastern side of the trench, though it differed from (1011) by having infrequent charcoal inclusions and larger stones.

The core of the rampart (1010) comprised an unstructured deposit of small to medium angular stones intermixed with a mid brownish-red clayey sand containing infrequent charcoal. The core measured up to 1.1m in depth and may be defined on either side by larger stones which could have formed a facing which had subsequently collapsed. No basal stones for such facing could be identified however, and it is possible that turf organic materials could have been incorporated into the structure of the rampart.

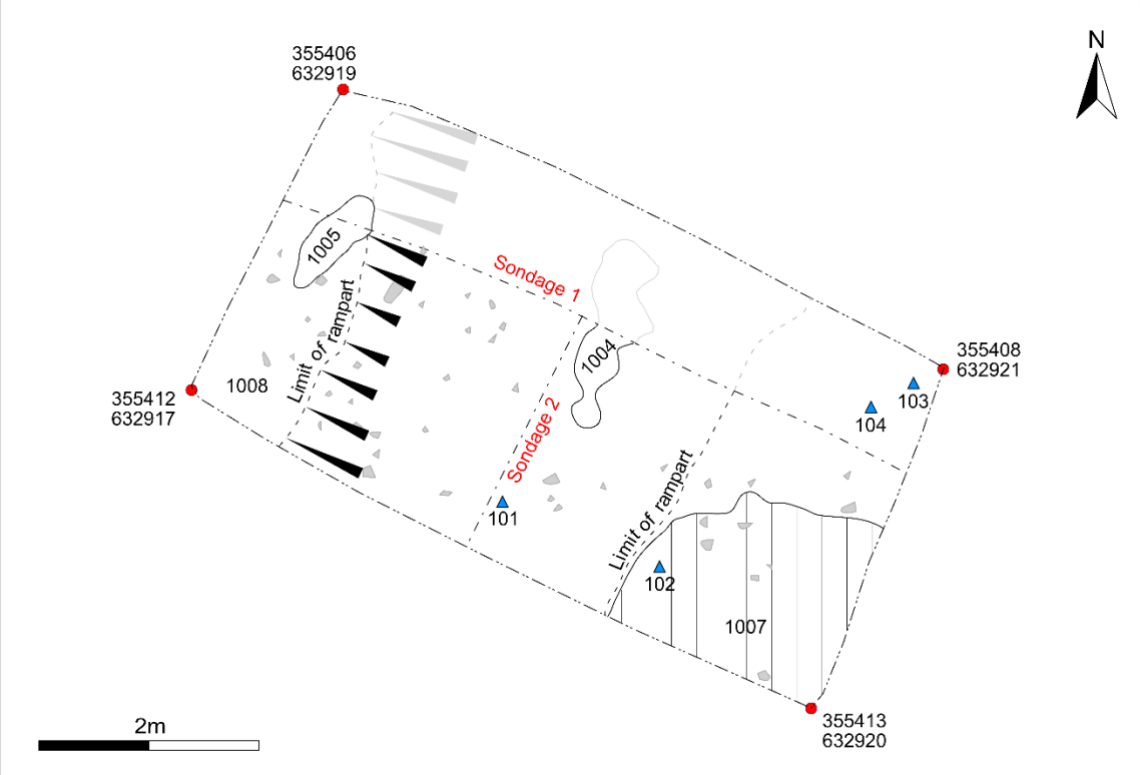

Figure 5: Plan of Trench 1 at Eildon Hill North.

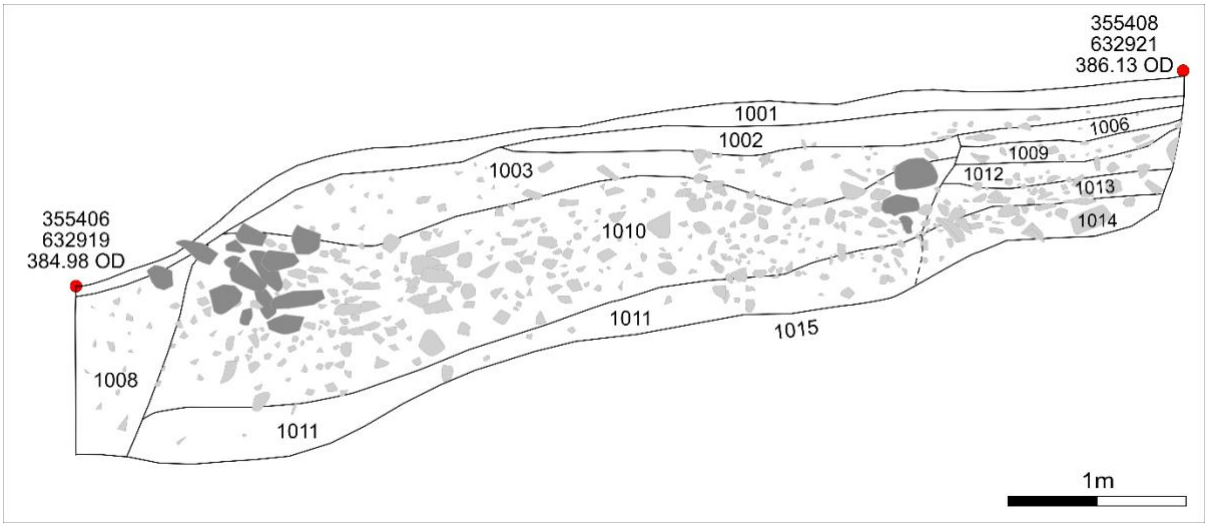

Figure 6: Trench 1 western facing section at Eildon Hill North.

Abutting the northern edge of the rampart core (1010) and cutting through or abutting the underlying gravel deposit (1011), a dark greyish brown clayey sand with moderate charcoal and small stone inclusions (1008) was recorded. Given its position near the edge of the wall core, it is possible that this represents midden deposits produced from the nearby house platforms, or, more likely, that (1008) represents the degraded remains of a turf revetment. An amorphous spread of charcoal and dark brownish black clayey silt (1005) on the northern edge of the trench may have represented vestiges of the upper levels of (1008).

Overlying the core of the rampart (1010) was a 0.35m think deposit of mid greyish-brown sandy sily with occasional charcoal and frequent small angular stones (1003). This was restricted to the limits of the rampart core (1003) and as such, it may represent a capping of the core or a second phase of use/remodelling of the rampart. A concentration of degraded cattle teeth (Sample 111) was recovered from the interface of (1003 and (1010) which may prove a key context for dating.

On the southern side of the trench, a series of possible floor layers and levelling deposits (1002; 1006; 1009; 1012; 1013) were recorded. These floor layers probably relate to a sub-circular platform and a series of occupation deposits occupying the edge of the natural terrace on the summit of Eildon Hill North. Overlying (1014), a 0.16m thick levelling deposit comprised a dark-brownish gravelly clayey-silt with frequent small angular stones (1013). This deposit produced a single sherd of pottery (Find 104). Above was floor layer (1012) – a dark yellowish brown clayey silt with occasional charcoal and small angular stones some 0.15m in thickness. Overlying this was another floor layer (1009) which consisted of a 0.14m thick dark brownish grey clayey silt with occasional charcoal and moderate small angular stones. A large collection of pottery fragments (Find 103) were recovered

from this floor layer, concentrated in the southeastern corner of the trench. These were similar to the fragment (Find 104) found in the levelling deposit (1013).

Another possible levelling deposit (1006) some 0.15m in thickness separated (1009) from floor layer (1002), the latter comprised a light brown sandy silt with occasional charcoal that was notable for its relative lack of stone inclusions. This had a maximum thickness of 0.15m and was the only floor layer to partially overly the rampart (1010; 1003). This layer, therefore, is a key context for dating. A large fragment of a shale bracelet (Find 101) was recovered from the upper levels of this floor.

At the southwest corner of Trench 1, a 0.14m thick spread of dark greyish-black clayey silt with moderate charcoal and frequent small to medium stone inclusions extended beyond the limits of the trench (1007). This was associated with floor layer (1009) and it is possible that it represents discoloration of the soil near a central hearth that lies beyond the limits of the trench. A fragment of a shale bracelet (Find 102), similar in material and morphology to that of (Find 101) but with a thinner cross section (and therefore from a different bracelet), was recovered from this context.

A 0.05m thick amorphous spread of dark greyish-black clayey silt with frequent charcoal (1004) was associated with floor layer (1002). Considering its slight nature, it is difficult to interpret this feature further.

Trench 1 Priorities for dating:

Rampart:

Floor layer (1002) overlying rampart – Sample 102

Cattle teeth in core of rampart (1003/1010) – Sample 111

Basal deposit (1011) underneath rampart core – Sample 109

Deposit/degraded sod (1008) abutting rampart core (1010) – Sample 105

Floor Layers:

Floor layer (1009) – Sample 107

Floor layer (1012) – Sample 112

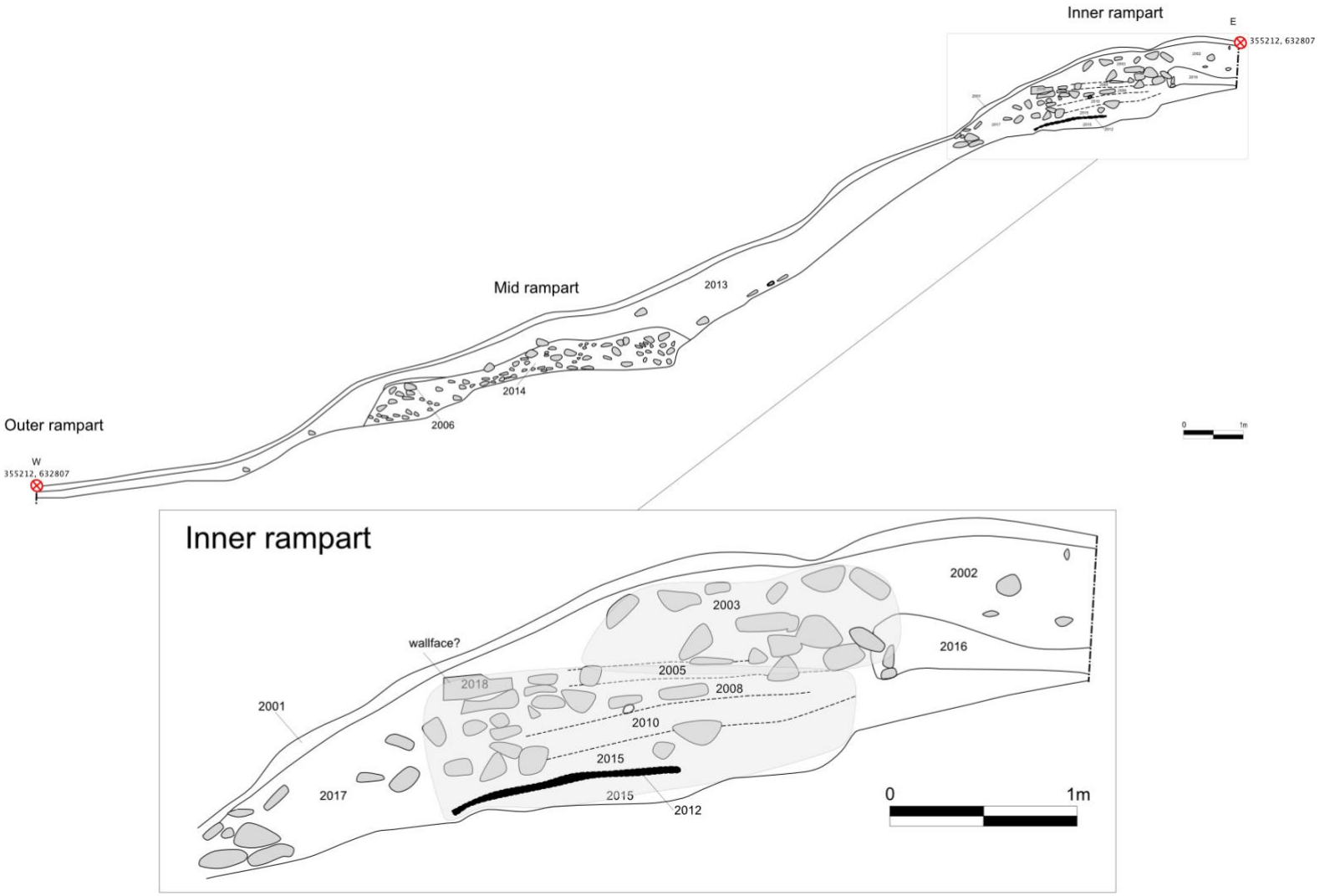

Figure 7: Section of Trench 2 showing the rampart deposits and detail of inner rampart.

Trench 2

Trench 2 (23 x 3m) (Figure 7) was opened over the three outer enclosing elements of Enclosure A on the western side of the lower enclosure of Eildon Hill North. The middle and upper rampart were identified, cleaned, and 1m to 1.5m sondages excavated through each to assess the sequences of construction. The outermost rampart did not survive well in Trench 2 – a flat terrace was all that remained of the outermost defence – it may have been robbed out here – c.10m to the north of the trench the outermost enclosure survives as an upstanding earthwork up to 1m high – future excavations may be able to assess this rampart in more detail.

The innermost wall survived the best/had the most complex deposits. The rampart wall was built on a relatively level platform that had been created by cutting into the hillslope on the upslope side. The wall appears to have been around 2.6m thick, and survived to around 1.2m high. The basal deposits consisted of a red/pinkish brown clay (2015) that had a charcoal-rich (c.0.06m thick) band of dark brown silty clay within. The lower deposits were contained by a possible wallface and rubble core (2018). Above (2015) was a mid brown silty clay with occasional charcoal (2010), which in turn was overlain by a red silty clay with charcoal (2008). (2008) had numerous sherds of thick-walled stone tempered handmade pottery within. These lower deposits and the wallface (2018) may have formed an earlier defence overlain by a later wallcore (2003) and associated deposits. At the interface of the two possible phases was a yellow brown silty clay layer (2005) with occasional charcoal.

The lower deposits (2015, 2012, 2010, 2008 and possibly 2005) gave the appearance of having been regularly laid and made for easily defined layers - it may be that these represent carefully laid deposits within the core of a rampart. The charcoal rich layer (2012) could conceivably come from timber-lacing or timber planks that made up part of the construction of the rampart, but only the edge of this deposit was caught in the northern trench baulk. Likewise only a few courses of possible wallface (2018) were identified – this could conceivably be from slump/collapse from further upslope rather than a defined wallface – more work would be needed to confirm. Indeed, the lower deposits had much less stone than (2003) and could conceivably relate to pre rampart settlement deposits.

The uppermost stones (2003) were of similar character to elsewhere, but made for a more concentrated mass above (2005). A similar situation was evident in the opposite section, with much less stone evident below (2005) in the north facing section. Deposit (2003) was a c.1.8m wide and 0.5m high deposit of angular quarried sandstone. (2003) could be from a refortification phase, but this is tentative prior to further work and dating. Upslope, a deposit of yellow clay abutted the rampart deposits and in the east facing section more organic soils may indicate settlement further upslope

from the rampart and eastern trench edge. Downslope was a loose silt (2017) with stone that appears to represent rampart collapse.

The middle rampart was found below 0.2-0.9m of hillwash (2013) that extended from upslope and covered the rubble core (2014) of the mid rampart wall. The mid rampart wall was again built on a relatively level platform that had been created by cutting into the hillslope on the upslope side. The wall itself was an unstructured dump of angular quarried sandstone rubble (most stones around 0.2-0.3m in max length), surviving to around 5m wide and up to 0.5m thick. No wallfaces were identified on either side, though on the western (downslope) side a layer of charcoal rich silty clay (2006) was found packed against the upper edge of the wall – perhaps part of a capping to the rampart on this side. The soil matrix of the wall was a mid brown pink silty clay that was sterile – no bone or charcoal was identified in any of the wall deposits. Thus, the middle rampart appears to have been less structured and formal than the innermost enclosing line of Enclosure A. However, the wall and the landscaping of the hill – cutting into the upslope side would have formed a significant boundary. No evidence of phasing was identified in the middle rampart deposits.

Priorities for dating:

Mid rampart:

2006 - capping of rampart

Upper rampart:

2012 Lower charcoal band

2008 layer with pottery

2005 interface between 2018 and 2003

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the 2022 excavations at Eildon Hill North was to obtain dating material to more accurately date the construction of the enclosing elements of the hillfort. In this regard, the excavations were successful, with deposits beneath, within, overlying and abutting the rampart of the upper enclosure recovered, allowing us to produce *Terminus Ante Quem* and *Terminus Post Quem* a possible construction dates for this rampart. The lower system of three ramparts also produced material for dating. The inner rampart and largest of the three, produced material from the core of the bank as well as from the interface between its original construction and a possible remodelling/augmentation phase, allowing the original phase of rampart construction to be dated, as well as producing a *Terminus Ante Quem*. Possible capping material from the middle rampart may also provide a useful *Terminus Ante Quem* for the construction of this enclosing element. Unfortunately, the outer rampart within the excavated area survived only as a flat terrace, with no obvious *in-situ* rampart. As such, this element of the hillfort requires further investigation. Even without dating, it is clear that there are multiple phase of activity, including: pre-hillfort activity, initial hillfort construction and multiple phase of post-hillfort construction, occupation and use. The radiocarbon dates for the enclosing elements at Eildon Hill North are eagerly awaited. If these were built in the Roman Iron Age, its bring about important questions regarding the nature of the relationship between the native occupants of the hillfort and the nearby invaders occupying the Roman Fort of Newstead.

The excavations of the enclosing elements also provided useful information regarding the construction and morphology of the hillfort. In all cases, the ramparts appear to be small in size, however, the builders positioned them at the edges of steep slopes, heightening the apparent size of the enclosing elements. This was accomplished by terracing into the hillside at the break of slope to create a flat area to construct the ramparts. The upper enclosure is similar to ramparts of 'Enclosure A' in its positioning at the edge of a steep slope and its minimal size, though the photogrammetry survey suggests they are temporally distinct. 'Enclosure A', however, is much larger and multivallate, and as such represents a much more impressive, labour and resource intensive construction than the upper enclosure. There are no intervening ditches between the three ramparts of 'Enclosure A'. Instead, the steep intervening slopes, which were partly augmented by cutting into the hill and increasing the gradient, increased the defensibility of the enclosure system with minimal effort and allowed the ramparts to stand out in the landscape. It is still difficult to interpret the function of the enclosing elements, as they are defensively capable, though the extensive size of the hillfort and its 1.64km perimeter may also indicate its importance as a liminal marker and definer of space rather than just a practical barrier.

Identification of floor deposits abutting the upper rampart and possibly the inner rampart of 'Enclosure A' indicates an extensive settlement which is likely much larger than that recorded in the photogrammetry survey. The dating of these layers will allow us to further define the chronological limits of this settlement. None of these floor surfaces were associated with structural features such as post- or stake-holes, and it is possible that the houses which defined these floors were built with turf and other non earth-fast material, leaving little or no trace.

Acknowledgements

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Concordances

Contexts Trench 1:

Context	Type	Basic desc	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	Full description	Interpretation
1001	Deposit	Topsoil			0.1	Mid brown silt	Topsoil
1002	Deposit	Upper floor			0.15	Mid pinkish-brown sandy silt	Floor layer overlying southern side of bank.
1003	Deposit	Upper deposit inner rampart of hillfort			0.35	Mid greyish-brown sandy silt	Capping of the rampart core or a second phase of use/remodelling of the rampart
1004	Deposit	Amorphous spread of charcoal			0.05	Dark greyish-black clayey silt	Upslope from wallcore
1005	Deposit	Firm dark deposit at base of inner rampart			0.05	Dark brownish black clayey silt	Possibly a compact version of (1008).

1006	Deposit	Stoney floor layer/levelling deposit			0.15	Mid greyish brown clayey silt	Probable levelling material for floor surface.
1007	Deposit	Dark patch at SW corner of floor layer			0.14	Dark greyish-black clayey silt	Amorphous spread of dark, charcoal rich soil that might represent discoloration of the soil near a central hearth that lies beyond the limits of the trench.
1008	Deposit	Dark deposit against inner rampart			1.05	Dark greyish brown clayey sand	Midden deposits or degraded remains of turf revetment.
1009	Deposit	Dark brownish grey floor deposit			0.14	Dark brownish grey clayey silt	Middle floor layer
1010	Deposit	Stoney core of inner bank			1.1	Mid brownish-red clayey sand	Core of rampart

1011	Deposit	Gravel with charcoal-underneath rampart			0.16	Mid greyish-red clayey sand	Similar to (1014) but greyer and with charcoal and burnt bone inclusions
1012	Deposit	Floor layer			0.15	Dark yellowish-brown clayey silt	Patchy – possible remains of lower floor layer.
1013	Deposit	Levelling material			0.16	Dark brownish-grey clayey silt	Probably levelling material for house floor.
1014	Deposit	Basal deposit overlying bedrock			0.13	Mid greyish red sandy silt	Similar to (1011) but redder in colour and without frequent charcoal and burnt bone.
1015	Deposit	Natural eroding bedrock				Mid pinkish red	Natural eroding bedrock

Contexts Trench 2:

Context	Type	Basic desc	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	Full description	Interpretation
2001	Deposit	Topsoil			0.3	Mid pinkish brown silty clay	Topsoil
2002	Hillwash	Upper floor			0.5	Mid brownish silty clay.	Hillwash abutting inner rampart
2003	Wall core	Inner rampart upper core	2.2		0.6	Light pink silty clay	Upper wallcore of quarried sandstone blocks c.2.2m wide, 0.6m high.
2004/2016	Deposit	Old ground surface/hillwash	1		0.3	Light whitish pink silty clay	Upslope from wallcore
2005	Deposit	Inner rampart deposit	2		0.1	Yellow brown silty clay layer with occasional charcoal.	Under upper wallcore
2006	Deposit	Mid rampart	5		0.4	Charcoal rich silty clay (2006) was found packed against the upper edge of the wall	Perhaps part of a capping to the rampart on this side

2008	Deposit	Inner rampart	2		0.1	Pink clay layer with charcoal. Numerous hand made pottery sherds	Rampart core?
2009	Deposit	Wallcore	2		0.7	Wallcore = 2018	Rampart core lower (inner)
2010	Deposit	Inner rampart	2		0.1	Mid brown clayey silt with charcoal	Lower rampart core
2012	Deposit	Charcoal lens	1.2		0.08	Dark brown/black charcoal rich lens	Burnt plank within rampart? Hearth spread?
2013	Deposit	Hillwash deposit			0.6	Relatively stone free light pinkish brown silty clay	Hillwash over mid rampart.
2014	Deposit	Wallcore	5		0.4	Unstructured sandstone rubble with silty clay soil matrix. No charcoal or finds	Mid rampart wallcore
2015	Deposit	Basal inner rampart	2		0.25	Mid orange-brown clayey silt, occasional charcoal	Basal inner rampart

2017	Deposit	Collapse	1		0.6	Mid orange-brown silty clay, stone, occasional charcoal	Rampart collapse (inner)

FINDS

Trench 1	Find no.	Context	Find	Number	Description
Trench 1	101	1002	Stone - shale braclet	1	Fragment of a shale bracket found in upper levels of probable floor layer 1002
Trench 1	102	1007	Stone - shale braclet	1	Fragment of shale bracelet found in probable floor layer (1007)
Trench 1	103	1009	Pottery - handmade	10+	Pottery fragments from floor deposit (1009) - some from interface between ((1006) & (1009)
Trench 1	104	1013	Pottery - handmade	1	Pottery fragment from levelling (1013)
Trench 2					
Trench 2	201	2008	Pottery – handmade	2	Inner rampart layer
Trench 2	202	2008	Pottery – handmade	12+	Inner rampart layer
Trench 2	203	2008	Pottery – handmade	1	Inner rampart layer
Trench 2	204	2008	Pottery – handmade	4	Inner rampart layer

SAMPLES

Trench 1	Sample No.	Context	Size	Number	Sample Type	Reason	Description
Trench 1	101	1004	Bag 5L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	100% of feature sampled
Trench 1	102	1002	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	
Trench 1	103	1003	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	
Trench 1	104	1005	Bag 5L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	100% of feature sampled
Trench 1	105	1008	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	
Trench 1	106	1007	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	
Trench 1	107	1009	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	
Trench 1	108	1006	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	
Trench 1	109	1011	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	
Trench 1	110	1010	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	
Trench 1	111	1010	NA	1	Spot	Dating	Bovine tooth; interface between (1003) and (1010)
Trench 1	112	1012	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	
Trench 1	113	1013	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	

Trench 1	114	1014	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	
Trench 2							
Trench 2	201	2004	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	inner rampart
Trench 2	202	2005	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	Under upper wallcore inner rampart
Trench 2	203	2006	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	Revetment of mid rampart
Trench 2	204	2008	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	Lower inner rampart layer
Trench 2	205	2010	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	Lower layer inner rampart below 2008
Trench 2	206	2012	Bag 10L	2	Bulk sample	Dating	Lower rampart charcoal rich deposit