An
Archaeological Survey
of

THE ROMAN SIGNAL STATION
FILEY
NORTH YORKSHIRE

BY

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INTRODUCTION (fig 1)

This report discusses the results of a survey undertaken by the authors on September 7th 1991 on the site of the Roman Signal Station on Carr Naze, Filey. The survey was prompted in response to recently voiced concern about the damaging effect weathering of the boulder clay sea cliffs of Carr Naze is having on the remains of the signal station. Possible archaeological deposits are exposed in both the north and south facing cliffs and also in several places on the surface.These remains were mapped and the contours of the site surveyed for earthwork traces of the signal station.

The equipment used consisted of a Sokisha Red Mini 2 and DT4 EDM/theodolite combination connected to an automatic data logger. There was insufficient time for the lengthy traverse necessary to tie the station points to the Ordnance Datum so all measurements of height are relative to a temporary datum with the arbitrary value of 100m. Computer processing of the readings was undertaken at the York Archaeological Trust using Autocad based software.

PREVIOUS WORK ON CARR NAZE

It is beyond the scope of the present work to enter into a detailed discussion of past work on the site. According to Kitson-Clark's 1935 publication "A Gazetteer of Roman Remains in East Yorkshire" the site was first investigated after a cliff fall exposed Roman remains in 1857. A plan appeared of the site (most recently published in 1990 by M. Fearon in his history of Filey) which later excavations by F. G. Simpson, the excavator of Scarborough Roman signal station, found to be quite inaccurate. Simpson's work, which has never been published, exposed remains which Kitson-Clark described as a "normal fourth century signal station".A plan of the site has recently been published from Simpson's records by Peter Wilson in his 1989 article "Aspects of Yorkshire Signal Stations".

SURVEY RESULTS (fig 2)

(A) NORTH FACING CLIFF

The north facing cliff consists of a relatively stone free glacial clay apart from one section towards the western end of the survey area where angular stones are visible randomly scattered throughout the clay to a depth of around two metres (1).

Further to the east, a distinct horizon of stone fragments can be seen just below the surface extending for about 12 metres along the cliff face. At one point it contains a lens of mortar and limestone chips containing several bone fragments (2).

(B) SOUTH FACING CLIFF

A layer of stones and stone chippings is clearly visible for a length of 24 metres in the south face of the cliff. The horizon is most pronounced to the west where the stones are larger, some an estimated 20-30cms across, and the most numerous (3).

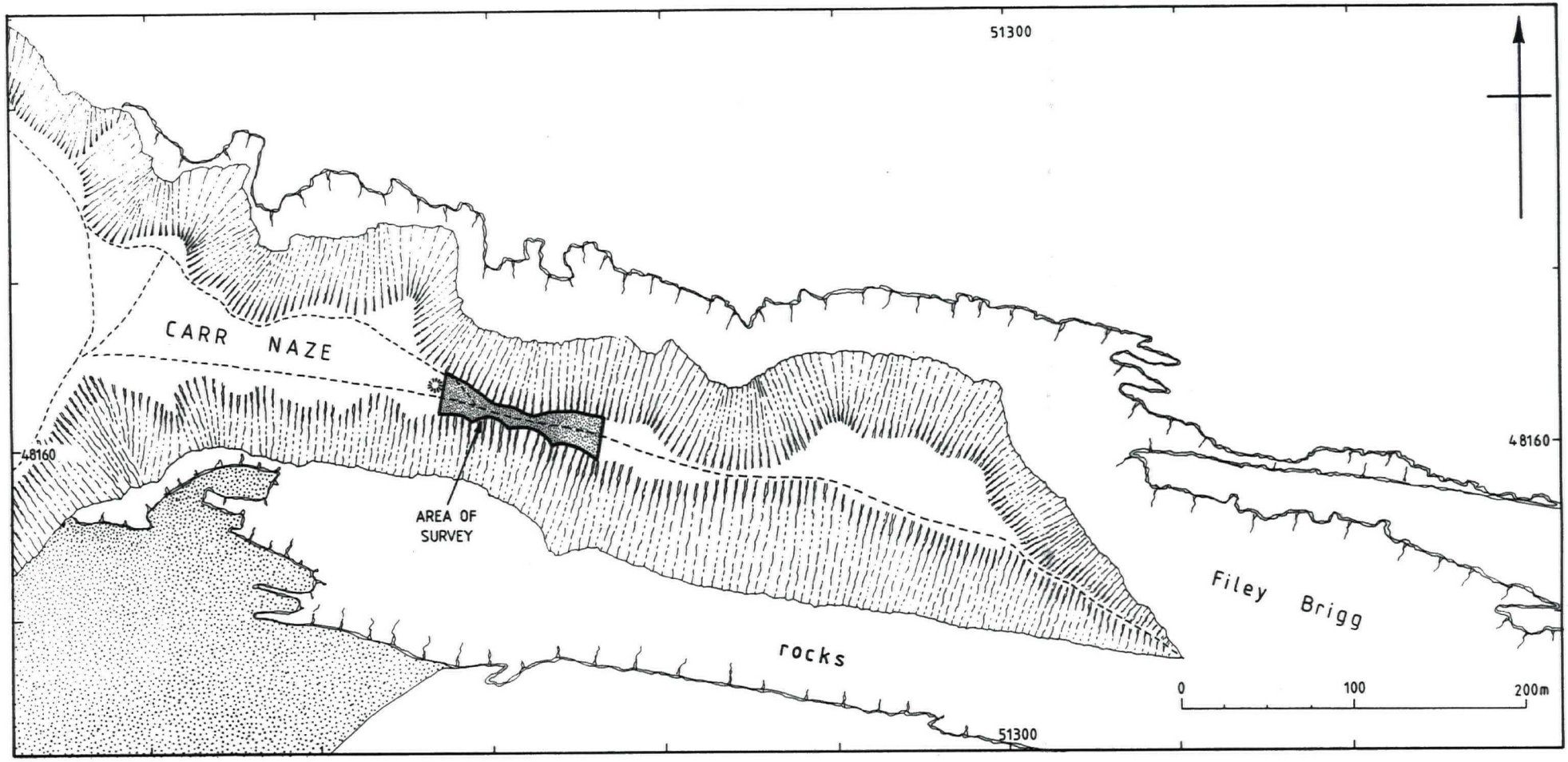

Fig 1: Location of Survey Area

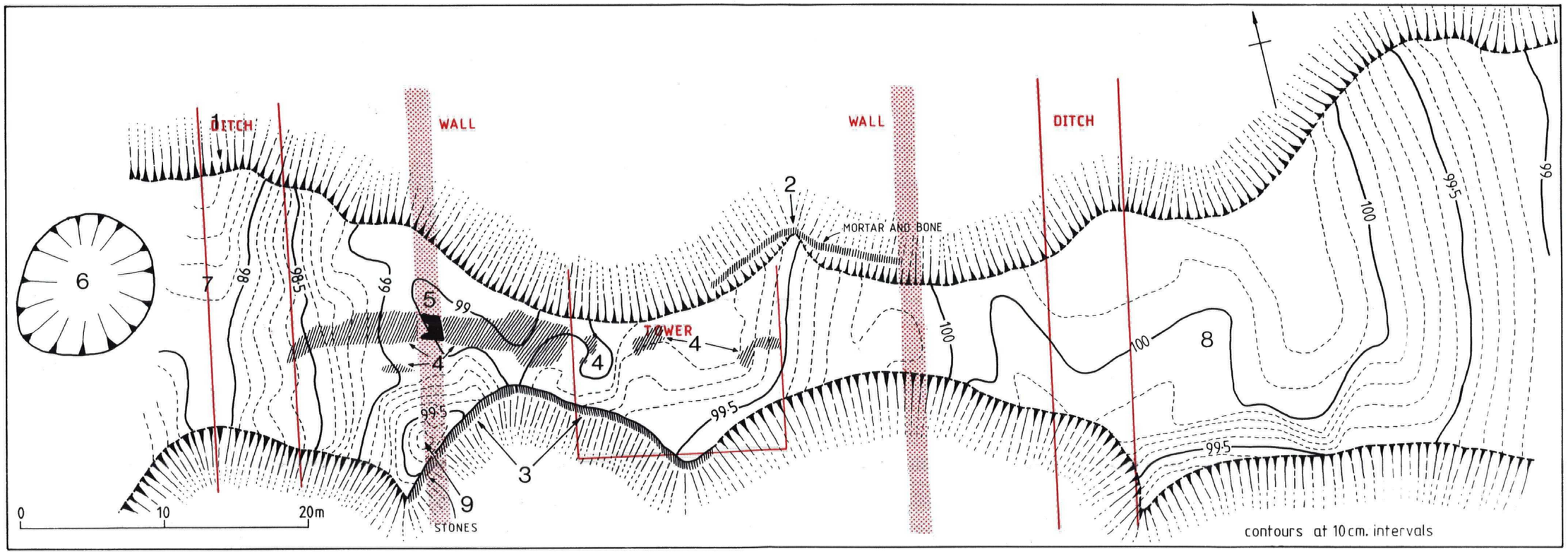

Fig 2: Survey Results (scale 1:300)

Conjectured Outline of Signal Station
(after Simpson, 1923)

(C) GROUND SURFACE

Discrete areas of small angular stones and gravel embedded in the glacial clay are visible in several places where the grass cover has been worn away (4). The most extensive has been exposed in the bottom of a gulley eroded by the main path along Carr Naze. At about the middle of the gulley there occurs an area of densely packed boulders embedded in the glacial clay (5).

(D) CONTOUR SURVEY

Viewed from a distance the site of the signal station occupies a plateau slightly over a metre higher than the rest of the promontory as is shown by the contours at the eastern and western edges of the survey area. Apart from the remains of a second world war bomb crater (6), there are no pronounced earthworks on the plateau, although the contours pick out two shallow depressions crossing the promontory at opposite ends of the survey area (7 and 8). More prominent is a mound about a metre high towards the western end of the south facing cliff (9).

INTERPRETATION

By overlaying the recently published plan of the signal station on the survey map, tentative interpretations of some of the features can be made.

The distance between the two shallow depressions traversing the promontory (7 and 8) broadly matches that between the eastern and western ditches of the signal station. Moreover the point where the western depression meets the north cliff is the only place that angular stones occur in the face of the cliff (1) reinforcing the suggestion that the depression is a backfilled ditch. Landslips and vegetation obscured any sign of the ditch in the opposite face of the cliff nor, for the same reason, was the eastern depression exposed in either face of the cliff.

If the two depressions picked up by the contour survey are the backfilled ditches of the signal station then the patch of densely packed boulders exposed in the gulley corresponds with the likely position of the western Roman curtain wall (5). Projected southwards the presumed line of the curtain wall also matches the area of large stones visible in the face of the south cliff (3). It follows from the above argument that the surface spreads of stone and gravel (4) extend over the presumed area of the western berm and courtyard. However some,if not all, of these spreads could be nothing more than eroded path surfaces and therefore of no great antiquity or archaeological significance.

The mixed stoney layers visible in the north and south faces of the cliff (2 and 3) are more likely than some of the surface spreads to be derived from the Roman Signal Station especially since bones and lumps of mortar occur in one section of the north cliff. This is in approximately the position occupied by the station's central tower as shown on fig 2. Nevertheless, in view of the excavations which have taken place on the site since its discovery 134 years ago, it does not necessarily follow that the material exposed in the cliff face represents in- situ archaeological deposits. It all could have been disturbed by past excavators and indeed an

old spoil heap is the most likely explanation for the prominent mound on the edge of the south cliff (9).

SUMMARY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The survey has admittedly posed more questions than it has answered about the various remains visible today on the site of Filey Roman Signal Station. However one fact is beyond dispute. At its narrowest point the top of Carr Naze is barely 5 metres wide and as this coincides with the location of the Roman signal station , much of what remains of this archaeological site is clearly facing imminent destruction.

This work arises out of recent informal discussions about the site between the authors, Prof. Phillip Rahtz and the planning department of Scarborough Council. As surveyor for the York Archaeological Trust, Trevor Pearson would like to thank the Trust for permission to use its equipment on this project.

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