

# Archaeological Excavation

## Penfillan, Dalginross, Perth and Kinross



Aerial photograph of fort and outer enclosure looking North East (site visible top right) (© RCAHMS)



28th August 2012

## **Introduction**

This programme of archaeological excavation was carried out for Mrs Catherine Hendry to satisfy the addendum to the archaeological condition on the planning consent for this development, as noted by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust in the memorandum to Planning Application 12/00313/FLL, dated 7<sup>th</sup> June 2012. It was undertaken by the author and one other between Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> August and Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2012 (site code PEN02); weather conditions were generally bright and sunny with occasional very heavy showers and thunder and lightning.

## **Archaeological Background (Illus 1 to 5)**

The Roman fort at Dalginross has been known since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has been identified as one of the 'glen-blocking' or Highland Line forts in use in the late first century AD however the complexity of the remains identified from aerial survey and the collection of Roman coins found in and around the site suggest that the fort was re-occupied during the Antonine and Severan periods of campaign and occupation.

Aerial photographic survey has revealed two phases of construction with what has been interpreted as two forts (an inner and outer) superimposed on top of each other (Illus 3). An alternative suggestion is that the outer defences form an annexe around the inner fort. The development site is considered to be archaeologically sensitive as it straddles the outer defences.

A nationally significant monument, the majority of the fort is protected as a Scheduled Monument (SM1612). In 1961 a trench was excavated at Penfillan by Anne Robertson in advance of the planting of an orchard, this trench was placed across the line of the outer enclosure and a V-shaped ditch was recorded (4.88m wide, 1.22m deep) (Illus 4 and 5). Anne Robertson also recorded a 3m wide stretch of gravel which she interpreted as the intervallum road (Robertson 1963-64, 196-198). No other internal features were uncovered. It is worth noting that the internal features of the inner fort show up clearly on aerial photographs providing evidence for interior buildings and roads however few features have been revealed within the outer fort. This may be due to cropmark formation or it may suggest a real dearth of archaeological features within the area enclosed by the outer ditch.

## **Site Excavation (Illus 6)**

Following the recommendations of Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust three trenches were opened across the line of the Roman ditch where it crossed the proposed footprint of the new building. Initial topsoil removal was carried out by a tracked mini-excavator under archaeological supervision, excavation of the ditch then continued by hand in trenches that were 2m wide and crossed the visible ditch line. Exposed areas of the natural ground surface in the vicinity of the ditch edges were also cleaned up by hand and any visible features or deposits recorded and sectioned as necessary. To avoid unnecessary confusion the same trench numbering sequence that was used for the site evaluation was also used for this excavation.

### *Trench 3 (Illus 7 to 15 and 23)*

The ditch line was exposed following the machine stripping of the topsoil (300) and a 2m wide trench was laid out across it. Excavation continued by hand and a layer of dark brown silt with small gravel (310 and 301) was located c 0.30m deep. This layer overlay a sequence of fills of mid grey sandy gravel (311) 0.20m deep and mid grey silt and stone (312) 0.36m deep. 312 overlay a distinct fill of orange pink clay with small to medium stones (313 and 314) 0.28 deep. 313 was removed to reveal a band of medium to large stones in a dark-brown silt (320) which appeared to fill a narrow linear trench in the base of the ditch c 0.48m deep. Varying bands of silt and gravel and redeposited orange yellow gravel were encountered in the base of the ditch (316, 317 and 318). Evidence for where a rampart had been pushed into the ditch as part of its backfilling was visible as both soil staining on the natural gravel on its Western edge and decayed turves in fill 321. At the completion of the excavation the bottom of the ditch lay 2m below modern ground level.

To the South of the ditch edge a narrow linear cut feature (306) was cleaned up and half sectioned, it was filled with redeposited natural gravel (307) and dark grey brown silt (308) and was 0.72m deep. This linear feature appeared to respect the presence of the ditch and contained a possible gaming piece in its fill (Illus 23).

### *Trench 4 (Illus 16 to 20)*

The ditch line was exposed following the machine stripping of topsoil (400 and 401) and a 2m wide trench was laid out across it. A layer of mixed bands of yellow sandy gravel, light grey brown sandy clay and occasional decayed turf with frequent small to medium stones (403) 0.55m deep overlay a fill of abundant small stones mixed with light grey silty clay (406) 0.20m deep and a deposit of light grey clay and abundant small stones (404) 0.11m deep which was focussed against the Southern edge of the ditch (402). A compact grey brown clay and stones (407) 0.25m deep was then exposed which filled the width of the ditch and overlay light brown silty clay and abundant small stones (408) and a grey black sandy silt (409) which both filled a narrow linear trench in the base of the ditch c 0.45m deep. Evidence for a rampart being pushed in from the Western side was visible on the edge of the ditch as soil staining (405), decayed turves were also visible. On completion of the excavation the base of the ditch lay at 1.80m below modern ground level.

### *Trench 5 (Illus 21 and 22)*

A compact layer of gravel and stone containing fragments of tarmac and the former course of a gas pipe (500) 0.15m deep were machined off to the top of natural gravel 501. A 1m wide sondage was laid out across a visible soil stain which ran across the trench. A light grey silt clay and stones (503) 0.75m deep was removed to expose a purple brown silty clay and occasional decayed turves (504). The Western edge of the ditch was traced where it ran through the trench.

### **Conclusions**

Trenches 3 and 4 produced complete sections across the line of the ditch and located good evidence for an apparent 'ankle-breaker' running along its base. Trench 5 also located the Western edge of the ditch line; its Eastern edge has apparently already been destroyed by deep excavations associated with the construction of services associated with the former house on the site.

All three trenches also contained good evidence for an internal turf built rampart line which had been pushed into the ditch when it was backfilled. No artefacts were recovered from any of the ditch fills although a sample for possible C14 dating was taken from the rampart collapse in Trench 5 (Context 504). The only other feature recovered was a linear cut in Trench 3 (Context 306); this appeared to respect the presence of the ditch and was probably contemporary with it. It seems likely that this feature was designed to drain water into the ditch line. It contained a possible gaming piece in its fill (pers comm. M.Hall Perth Museum and Art Gallery).

This phase of excavation has confirmed the line of this outer enclosure around the fort and recorded its depth below modern ground level as being 2m in Trench 3 and 1.80m in Trench 4. Both sections dug in Trenches 3 and 4 located the line of an 'ankle-breaker' running along its base. No finds were recovered from any of the excavated ditch sections. It is worth noting that the ditch as excavated in trenches 3 and 4 is deeper than recorded in Robertson's excavations of 1961 (see Illus 5).

### **Recommendations**

This concentrated phase of excavation has allowed for the careful full excavation of two sections across the Roman ditch line and has revealed important new evidence for its construction and subsequent backfilling. The third section lay in a part of the site which had been disturbed by previous building on the site and was not fully excavated but the line of the inner face of the ditch was located and recorded. Of most interest is the fact that this ditch appears to have been backfilled quite quickly, there was no sign of any later recutting of the feature which might imply a later reoccupation of this part of the site. It is suggested that it would be unwise to c14 date the charcoal sample collected from Trench 5 due to the wide date range (at least 100 years) that will be given at this point on the radiocarbon curve (pers comm. G Cook).

## **References**

Robertson, A S 1964 'Miscellanea Romano- Caledonica, *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 97 (1963-64), 180-201.

## **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank Bob the machine driver and Ray Cachart of Alder Archaeology Ltd for their help with this excavation.

## Illustration List

Illus 1 Site Location (red circle) (based on Ordnance Survey map Crown Copyright 2012. All Rights Reserved. Licence number 100049628)

Illus 2 Location of site on General Roy's map of 1747-1755 (© Trustees of National Library of Scotland)

Illus 3 Aerial photograph looking North showing site (indicated by red arrow) and crop marks of Roman forts (© RCAHMS)

Illus 4 Published location of trench by A Robertson in 1961 (©PSAS Vol 97 1963-64, 196)

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Illus 23 Sub-circular flat stone from 308, possible gaming piece?

## Discovery & Excavation in Scotland Entry

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Perth and Kinross
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Penfillan, Dalginross
PROJECT CODE:	PEN02
PARISH:	Comrie
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR(S):	Derek Hall
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Derek Hall, archaeologist and ceramic specialist
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Archaeological Excavation
NMRS NO(S):	NN72SE2
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Roman fort
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	None
NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)	NN 7732 2104
START DATE	14th August 2012
END DATE	21st August 2012
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. <i>DES</i> ref.)	Site evaluation PEN01
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	Three trenches were opened across the line of the ditch of the outer enclosure around the fort at Dalginross on the site of a proposed new house and garage. The line of the ditch was located in all three trenches and the feature was bottomed in two of them. Good evidence was located for rampart demolition and backfilling of the feature, this appeared to be a single episode there was no sign of any recuts to the ditch. The line of an 'ankle-breaker' in the very base of the ditch was recorded. No finds were retrieved from the backfill. In trench 3 a contemporary drainage feature was recorded and half sectioned.
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	None
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Catherine Hendry
CAPTIONS FOR ILLUSTRS	N/A
ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:	34 Glenfarg Terrace, Perth, PH2 0AP
ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended)	NMRS
EMAIL ADDRESS:	Derek.hall1@blueyonder.co.uk



## **Context index**

### **Trench 3**

- 300 Black brown sandy loam
- 301 Organic silty loam and decayed turves with moderate stones
- 302 Small to large rounded stones close to base of cut 322
- 303 Clayey silt loam around stones 302
- 304 Orange clayey silt around stones 302
- 305 Mid brown silt
- 306 Linear cut in natural gravel running NNE-SSW
- 307 Orange brown gravel (redeposited natural) (fill of 306)
- 308 Light grey black silty clay (fill of 306)
- 310 Dark brown silt with small gravel (same as 301)
- 311 Mid grey sandy gravel with some large stones
- 312 Mid grey silt and stone
- 313 Orange pink clay with small-medium stone
- 314 Orange brown clayey silt
- 315 Small band of blue grey gravel
- 316 Orange brown silty gravel
- 317 Mid – dark sandy silt
- 318 Grey brown silt and small gravel
- 319 Greenish gravel (Natural)
- 320 Small to large rounded stones in dark brown silt
- 321 Gravel in dark brown silt
- 322 Linear cut in natural gravel ('ankle-breaker')
- 323 Ditch cut

### **Trench 4**

- 400 Dark grey brown sandy clay with frequent small stones

- 401 Moderate grey brown sandy clay with abundant small stones
- 402 Linear feature cut into natural gravel (Roman ditch)
- 403 Mixed bands of yellow sandy gravel, light grey brown sandy clay and occasional decayed turf with frequent small to medium stones
- 404 Light grey clay and abundant small stones focussed against Southern edge of cut 402
- 405 Light grey silty clay and patches of black peaty decayed turves on Northern side of cut 402
- 406 Abundant small stones mixed with light grey silty clay
- 407 Compact grey brown clay and stones
- 408 Light brown silty clay and abundant small stones (fills potential 'ankle-breaker' in ditch)
- 409 Grey black sandy silt against North edge of cut 402 (within 'ankle-breaker')
- 410 Linear cut ('ankle-breaker')

#### Trench 5

- 500 Compact gravel and stone
- 501 Natural orange brown gravel
- 502 Linear feature cut into natural gravel (Roman ditch)
- 503 Light grey silt clay and stones
- 504 Purple brown silty clay and occasional decayed turves (charcoal sample from here)

### **Sample Index**

#### Trench 3

- 301 Organic silty loam and decayed turves with moderate stones
- 305 Mid brown silt

#### Trench 4

- 409 Grey black sandy silt (fill of 'ankle-breaker')

#### Trench 5

- 504 Charcoal sample from rampart demolition

## **Finds Index**

### **Trench 3**

300 3 sherds of industrial tin-glazed pottery (19th century), 2 sherds of glazed red earthenware (19th century), 3 pieces of glass and a fragment of iron key

308 Small flat sub-circular stone (gaming piece?)



Illus 1 Site Location (red circle) (based on Ordnance Survey map Crown Copyright 2012. All Rights Reserved. Licence number 100049628)

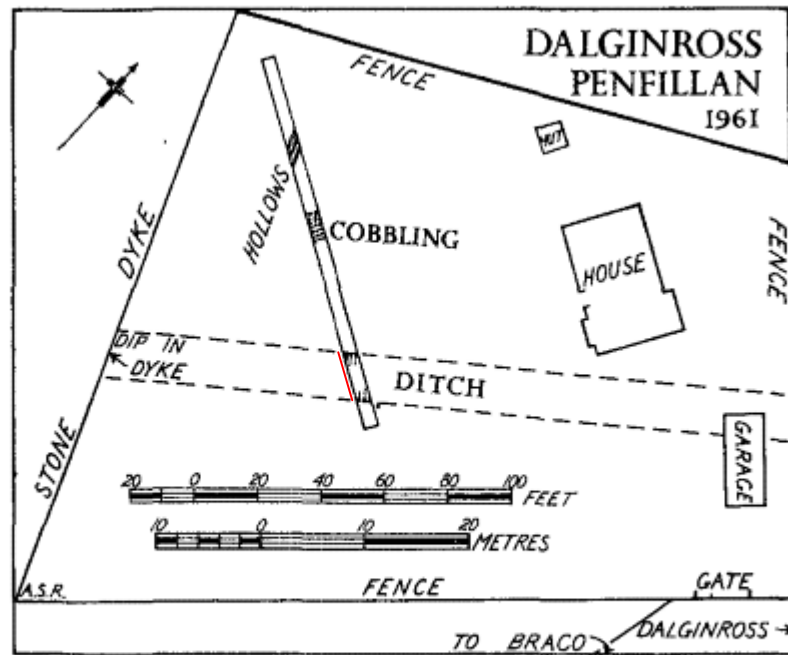


Illus 2 Location of site on General Roy's map of 1747-1755 (© Trustees of National Library of Scotland)





Illus 3 Aerial photograph looking North showing site (indicated by red arrow) and crop marks of Roman forts (©RCAHMS)



Illus 4 Published location of trench by A Robertson in 1961 (PSAS Vol 97 1963-64), red line indicates drawn section (see Illus 5)

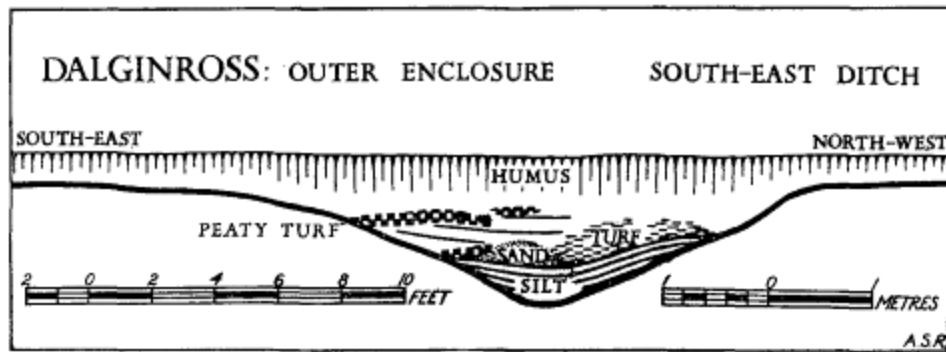
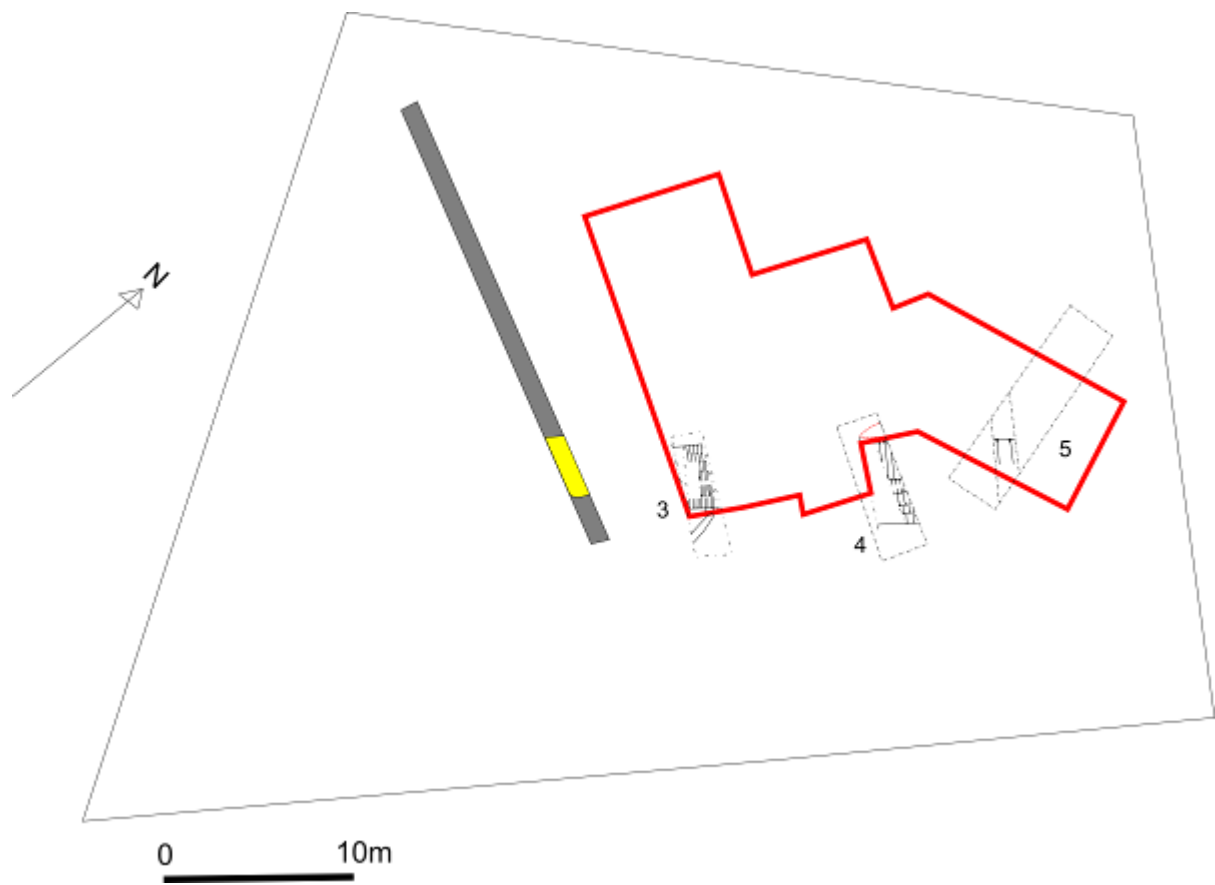


FIG. 8

Illus 5 Published North East facing section of A Robertson's trench of 1961 (PSAS Vol 97 1963-64)





Illus 6 Trench locations showing ditch sections and footprint of proposed new house (in red), trench excavated by Anne Robertson in 1961 shown in grey with her excavated ditch section in yellow.



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Illus 8 Trench 3 detail of stone and clay fill 314 of ditch 323 looking North West





Illus 9 Trench 3 looking North East ditch section completely excavated



Illus 10 Trench 3 ditch section showing banded stone and clay fills and fill of 'ankle-breaker' 322 at base of scale looking North East





Illus 11 Linear cut 306 in trench 3 as first exposed in natural gravel looking West



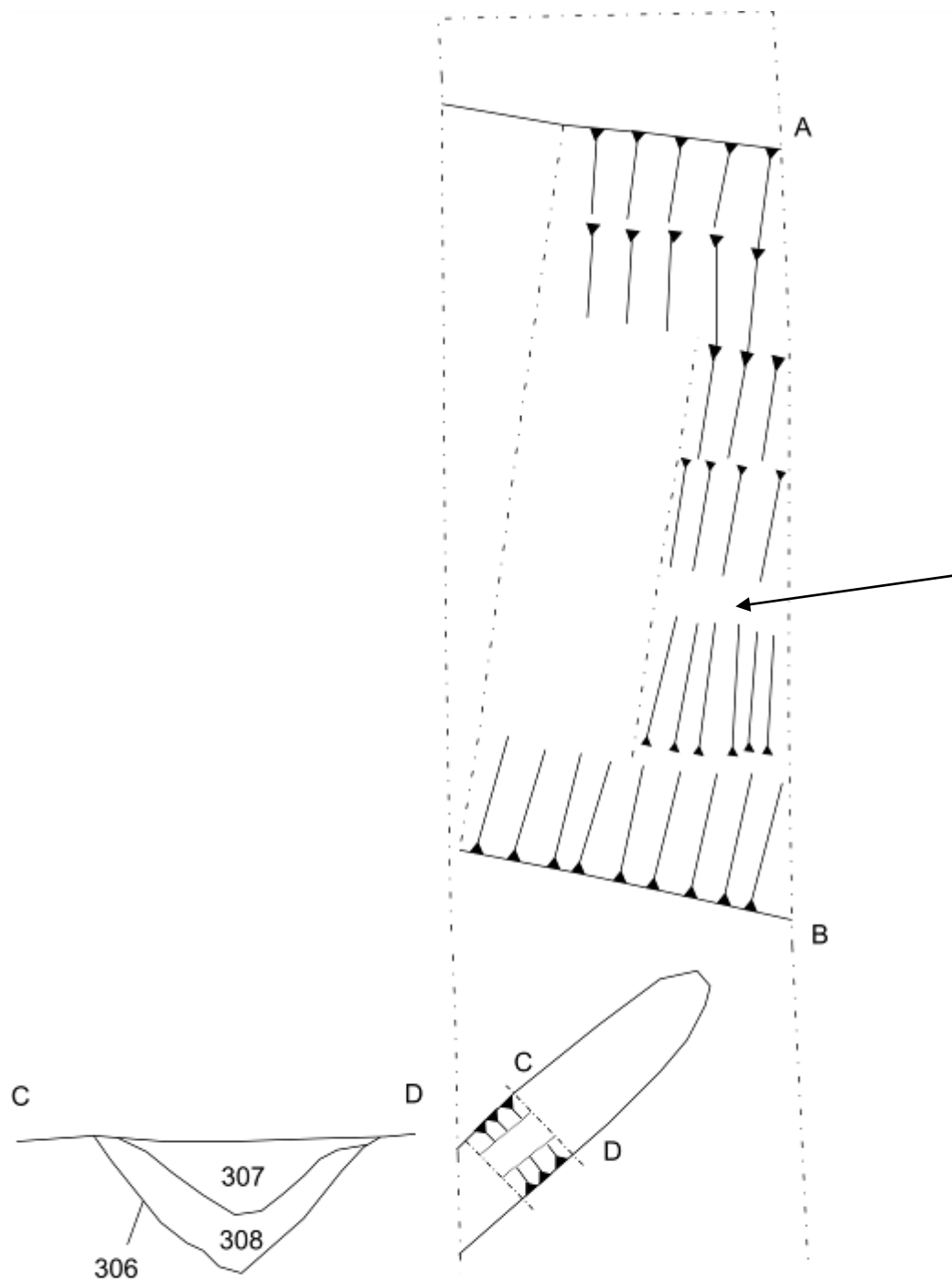
Illus 12 Half section across linear cut 306 looking North



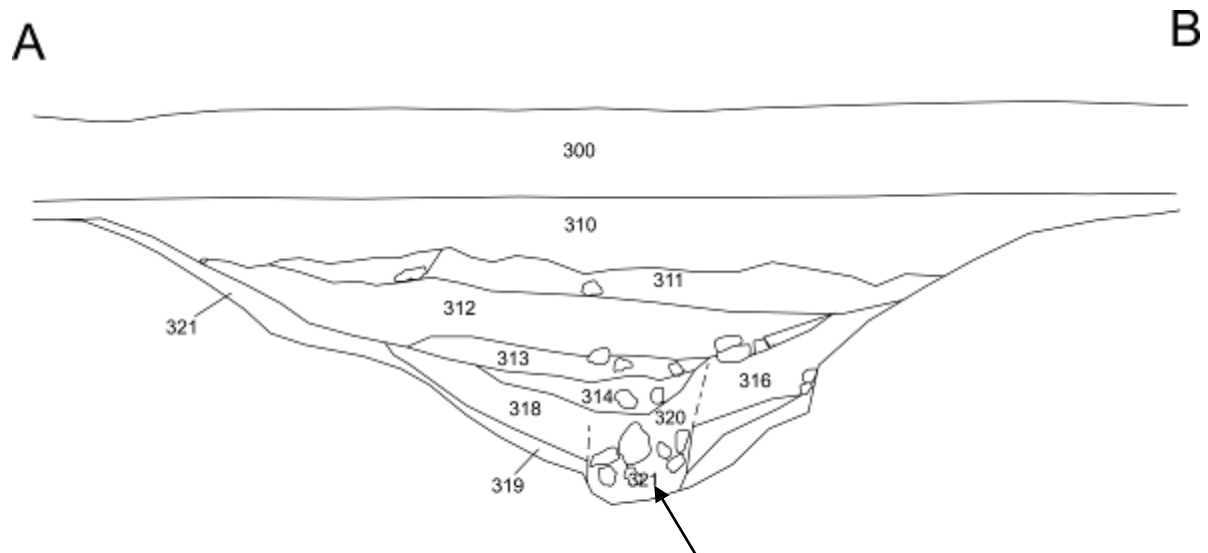


Illus 13 Sectioned linear cut 306 showing its relationship with ditch edge looking North





Illus 14 Plan of ditch and linear slot in Trench 3 looking West showing section across linear slot and location of drawn ditch section (Illus 15), arrow indicates 'ankle-breaker' 322 at base of ditch 323  
Scale 1:40



Illus 15 South West facing section across ditch 322 in trench 3, arrow indicates 'ankle-breaker' 323  
Scale 1:40



Illus 16 Trench 4 looking North West ditch section completely excavated



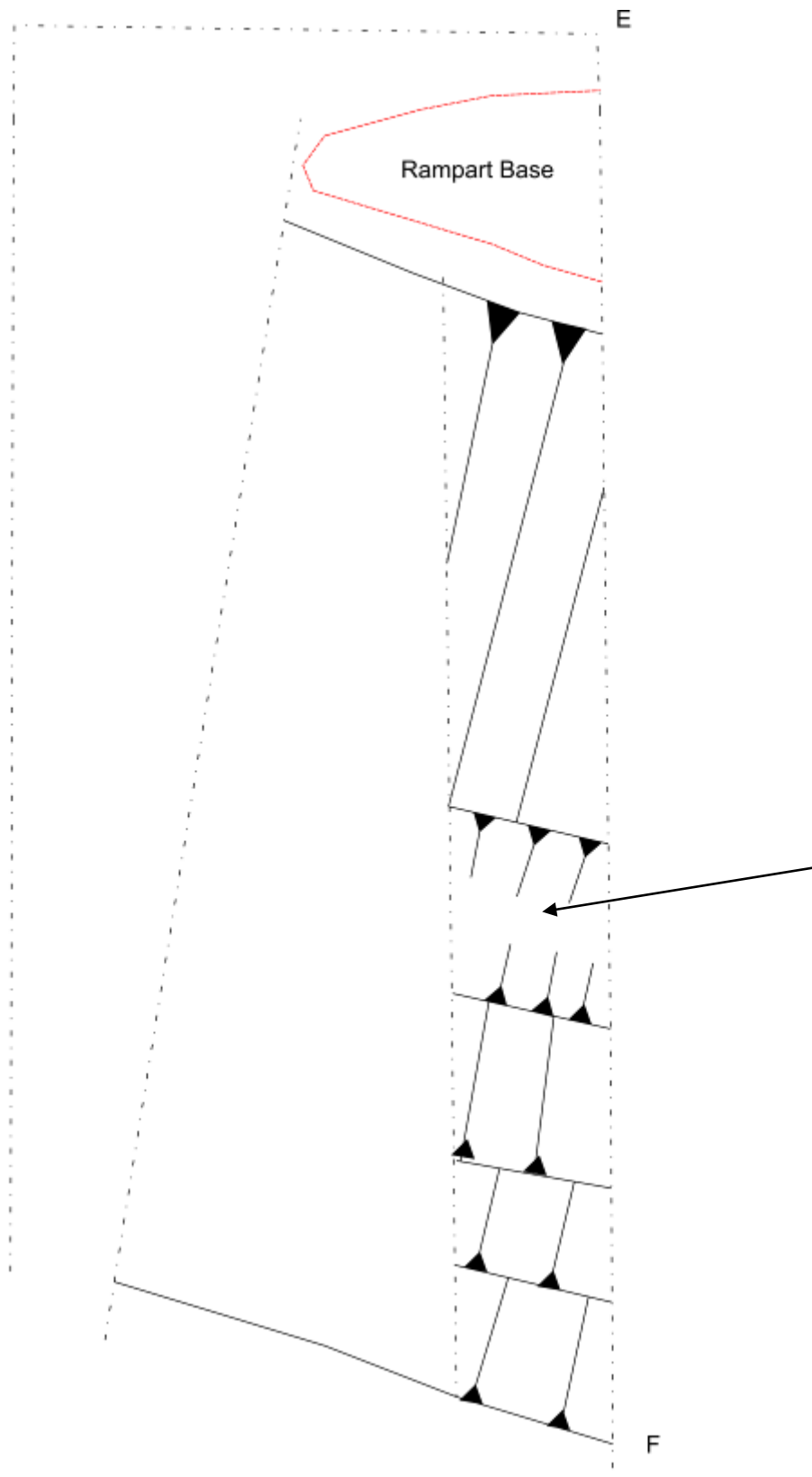


Illus 17 Trench 4 base of ditch section showing 'ankle-breaker' 410 at base of scale

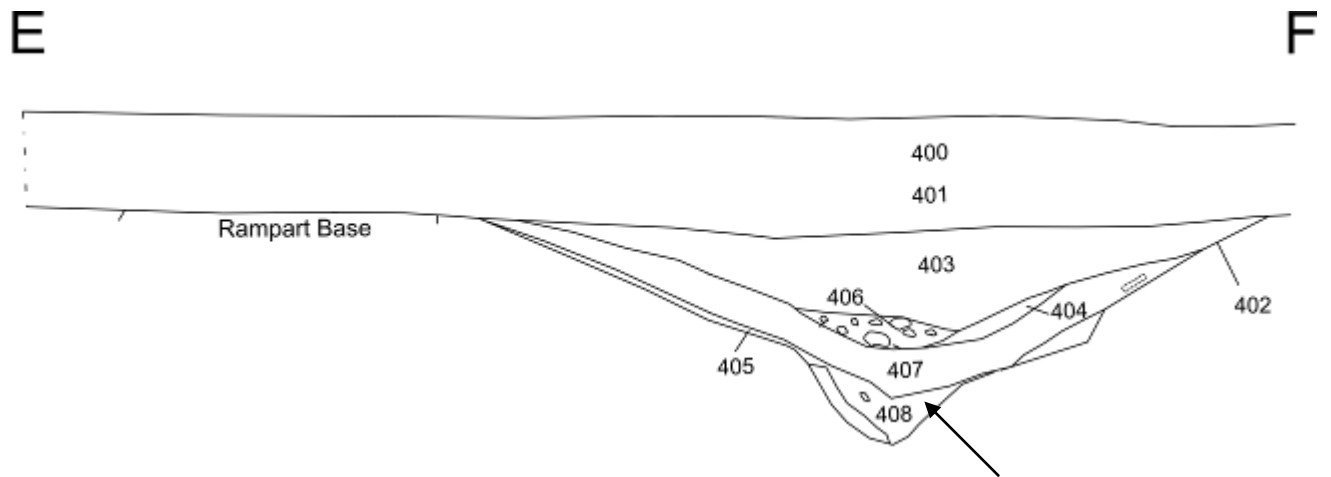


Illus 18 Soil staining from rampart base (405) on North side of ditch line in Trench 3 looking West





Illus 19 Excavated ditch line in Trench 4 looking West showing location of soil staining from rampart base (405) (see Illus 20) and location of drawn ditch section, arrow indicates 'ankle-breaker' (410) at base of ditch Scale 1:40



Illus 20 South West facing section across ditch line 402 in Trench 4, arrow indicates 'ankle-breaker'  
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Illus 21 Western edge of ditch 502 in Trench 5





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