RPS Planning, Transport and Environment

INDEX DATA	RPS INFORMATION
Scheme Title A69 Haltwhistle Bypass	Details Archaeological watching brief
Road Number A69	Date July 1996
Contractor Northern Archaeological Associates.	
County	
OS Reference NY766	
Single sided ✓ Double sided A3 1 Colour 0	

Northern Archaeological Associates

A69 HALTWHISTLE BYPASS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

REPORT ON A SIGNIFICANT DISCOVERY

FOR A69 HALTWHISTLE CONSTRUCTION JV

NAA 96/30

July 1996

15 Redwell Court, Harmire Road, Barnard Castle, Co. Durham DL12 8BN

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The construction of the A69 Haltwhistle Bypass does not impact upon any known archaeological remains, however, due to the presence of alluvial deposits and numerous palaeochannels in the section of the road corridor south of the River South Tyne it was deemed necessary to undertake a watching brief during the site excavations in this area. An archaeological watching brief commissioned by the Construction Joint Venture (CJV) in accordance with Annex 14 to Schedule 4, Part 2 of the Agreement has recently been completed. The watching brief was undertaken by Northern Archaeological Associates on behalf of the CJV.

This report presents the results of an evaluation of a group of archaeological features identified in O.S. Field 6035 at chainage 2030 which, in the opinion of the DBFO Co Archaeologist, are potentially a significant discovery as defined in Annex 14 of the Agreement. It makes outline recommendations for further archaeological work at the site in order to allow a mitigation strategy to be developed.

2.0 BACKGROUND

The route of the A69 Haltwhistle Bypass runs between NY 690638 and NY 720640, passing to the south of Haltwhistle and to the north of Bellister Castle (Fig. 1). An archaeological inspection was required during site works between chainages 1300 - 2600 to record the archaeological resource during development. To this end a watching brief was conducted over a 0.9km section of the route between NY 700631 and NY 709633, from near Bellister Castle westwards towards the embankment of the disused Haltwhistle - Alston Railway line between 19 - 26 June 1996. All of the fields crossed by this section of the bypass corridor were under pasture at the time the watching brief was undertaken.

South of the river the bypass route traverses the edge of a late Pleistocene alluvial terrace and areas of Holocene age alluvium (deposited in the last 10,000 years) to the north. Although it was considered that the Holocene alluvium might conceal waterlogged archaeological sites and features of some significance, the late Pleistocene terrace was thought not to have been significantly alluviated during the Holocene and that sites of archaeological interest were likely to be confined to the surface in that area.

It is on the northern edge of the late Pleistocene terrace that the archaeological discovery which is the subject of this report is located.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The watching brief aimed to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within an area of the proposed road corridor and to determine the extent, condition, quality and date of any archaeological remains present.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

Topsoil, areas of possible buried plough-horizon, and colluvial deposits were removed from the area of the watching brief under archaeological supervision using a tracked excavator with a toothless ditching bucket. With the exception of a *c.*2m strip at each side, the whole width of the corridor was stripped from the top of the slight escarpment near the centre of O.S. Field 8135 (from chainage 2250) westwards across O.S. Fields 6035 and 4228 (Fig. 2). To the west of this the road rises up on an embankment, and only a *c.*2m wide trench was stripped across O.S. Fields 2323 and 0010, again under archaeological supervision, in order to observe the subsoils for engineering purposes. An additional *c.*2m wide trench was also monitored crossing part of O.S.Field 0029 adjacent to the River South Tyne.

The resulting surface was then investigated to evaluate the presence/absence of potential archaeological features and a full written, illustrative and photographic record was made of any features subsequently identified in accordance with the NAA standard method (Tavener, N. ed. 1994). Archaeological features observed during the stripping were hand-cleaned and appropriate sections hand-excavated. The work was carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Code of Conduct and Code of Practice.

5.0 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

A brief description of archaeological features recorded during the watching brief is given below. They will be more fully described, together with a description of the palaeochannel evaluation in a subsequent report (Speed, forthcoming).

Feature group 21

Near the centre of the corridor within O.S. Field 6035 at chainage 2030, machine stripping revealed an arc of stones forming the south-eastern half of a sub-circle 8.8m in diameter (Fig. 3). Hand cleaning of the feature revealed a small concentration of charcoal and burnt bone at its centre and a north to south aligned subrectangular pit cutting the northern edge of the arc of the stones. A circular ditch *c.*2m wide and 8.8m in diameter was recorded with the arc of stones (context 19) defining the outer edge on the southern and eastern sides, and with a slightly clayey fill. An arc of apparently undisturbed natural sand *c.*4m in diameter was recorded close to the centre of the feature group,

within which a slightly darker, siltier soil (context 29) and the deposit of charcoal and burnt bone (context 17) were recorded. The outer edge of the ditch was cut on the northern side by the rectangular pit (context 13). A section across this feature was hand excavated and it measured 1.6m by 0.6m by more than 0.25m deep. No finds were recovered from the fill.

The lack of clear colour and textual differences between the archaeological deposits and the natural sandy subsoils prevented the clear definition of all the cut features present. No further excavation was attempted on this group of features at that time since they were deemed likely to conform to the criteria for a 'significant discovery'. They were left fenced and clearly marked pending further examination.

Other features

Two parallel ditches were observed at the western side of O.S. Field 8135, the western of which had formed part of the extant field boundary.

A large, shallow curvilinear feature of modern date and indeterminate function was recorded near the eastern side of O.S. Field 6035.

Two parallel stone-built drains and a third parallel linear feature (probably a robbed-out drain) were recorded towards the western side of O.S. Field 2323, and a rectangular pit interpreted as a possible sheep burial was located adjacent to the western field boundary.

6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The group of features identified in O.S.Field 6035 are likely to represent the truncated remains of a burial cairn or barrow with a central cremation burial. The pit at the northern side possibly represents a secondary inhumation burial into the barrow ditch. The lack of bone within the feature may be accounted for by the acidity of the sandy soils.

No other archaeological features were identified in the immediate vicinity of feature group 21 and no other features of significance were identified during the watching brief. The majority of other features identified were either related to drainage or field boundaries.

Prehistoric sites are principally recorded on higher ground to the south of Broomhouse and Plenmeller, to the south of the road corridor, although these are earthwork enclosures of probable Iron Age or Romano-British date. Bronze Age period remains a largely unknown in this area and except for a number of dubious 'tree-trunk coffins' discovered in the 19th century at Wydon Eals, which were attributed to this period, the nearest known site is a tumulus at Little Shield near Housesteads, some 10kms to the north-east. Bronze Age period remains are therefore rare in this area, largely as a result of a lack of

previous archaeological fieldwork, and the location of the putative barrow, on a low-lying river terrace, is atypical of this class of monument.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

The barrow feature is located in the centre of the road corridor in an area where the road is in cut. Preservation in-situ is not therefore a viable mitigation strategy.

In view of the potential significance of the site it is recommended that a staged programme of further works is undertaken. This staged programme would entail:

- the total excavation and recording of all the stratigraphic components associated with feature group 21, including the recovery of bulk soil samples from appropriate deposits for environmental analysis and radiocarbon dating;
- Site archive consolidation in accordance with the specification set out in English Heritage's "Management of Archaeology Projects" (MAP2), Appendix 3;
- Post-excavation assessment and report preparation, incorporating an updated project design for detailed post-excavation analysis, in accordance with MAP 2 Phase 3 (Appendices 4 and 5);
- A programme of detailed post-excavation analysis, as defined in the updated project design, leading to the production of a research archive and the final report including a publication report, as defined in MAP 2 (Appendices 6 and 7)

Report: NAA 96/30
Date: July 1996
Text: G.P.B. Speed, R. Fraser
Illustrations: R.K. Simpson

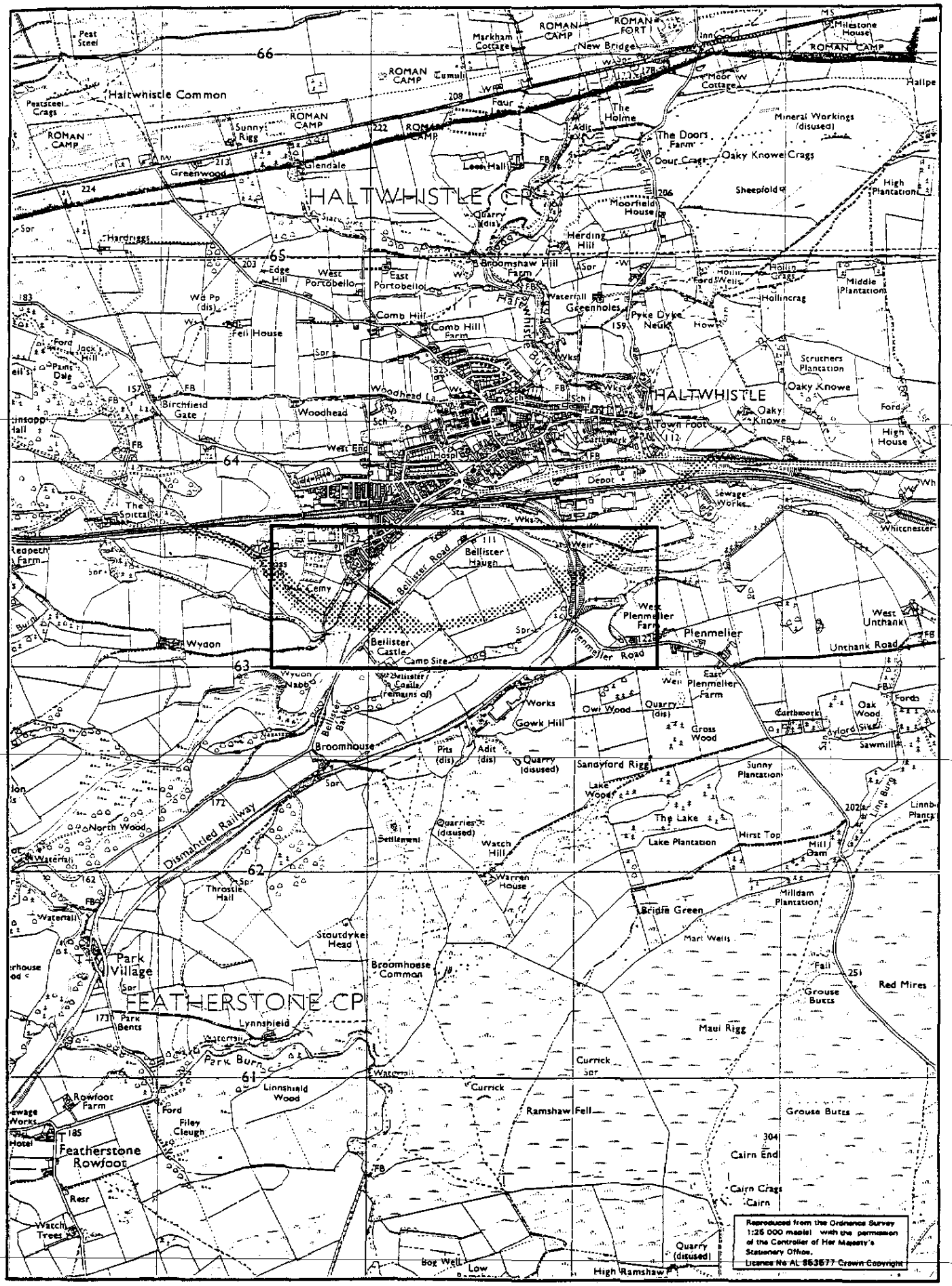

Fig. 1 Road corridor location (tone).

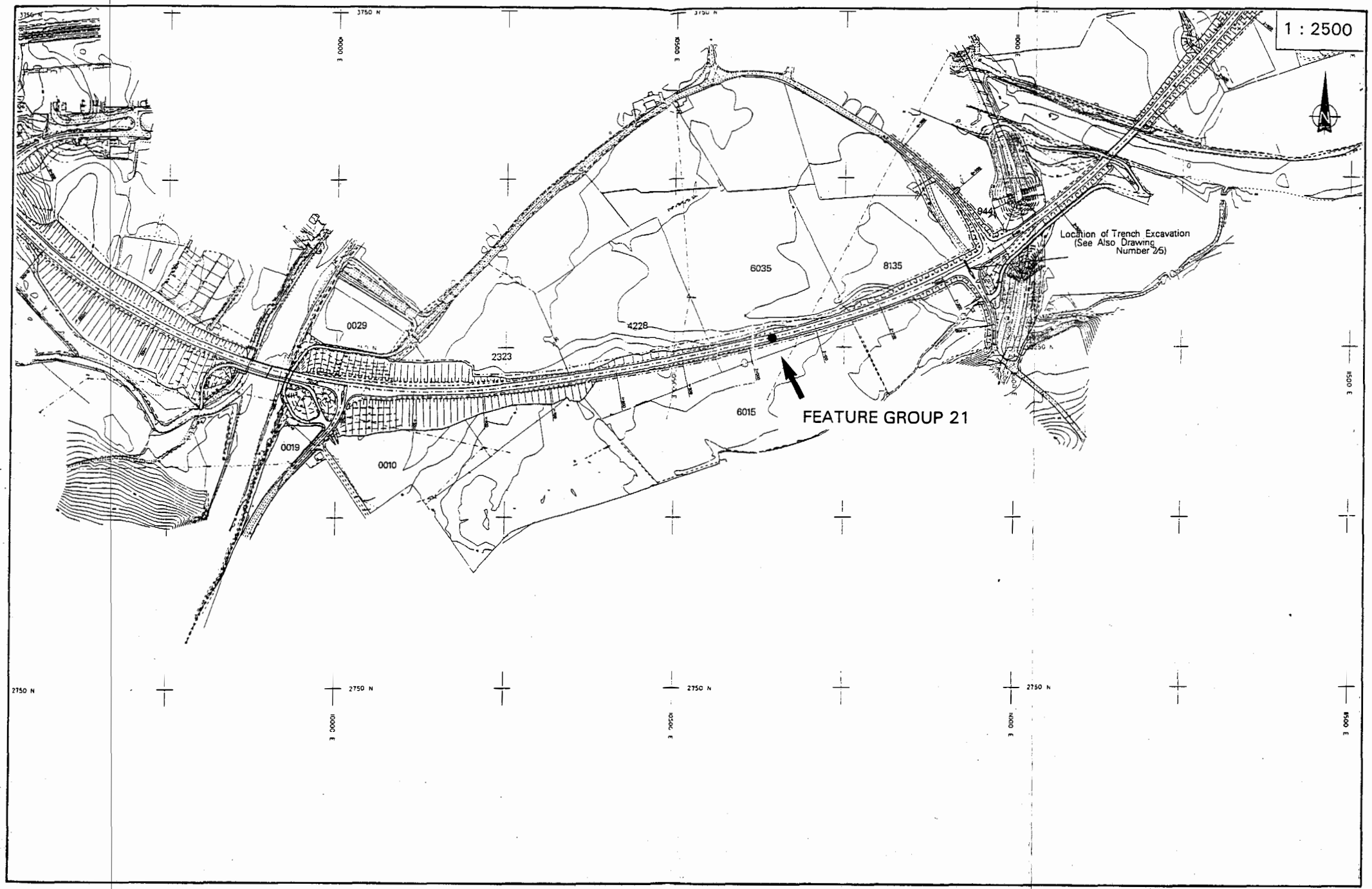

Fig. 2 Plan of bypass under construction with location of feature group 21

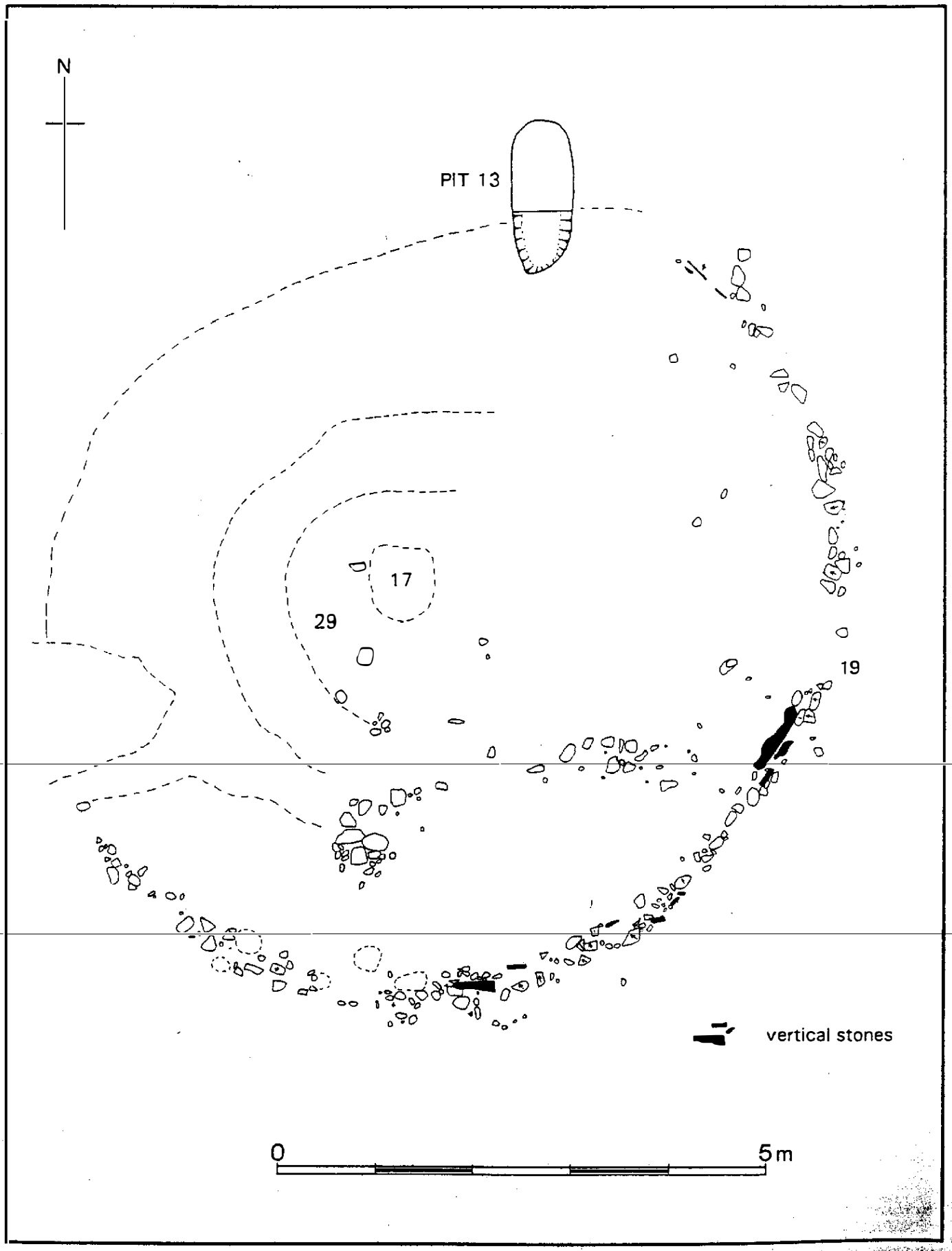

Fig.3 Feature group 21