

# ***Graig Hill, Newcastle-on-Clun, Shropshire, 2011***

***A Watching Brief on the Installation of  
New Path Furniture on Offa's Dyke Path***

by  
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Archaeology Service



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August 2011

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**A WATCHING BRIEF ON THE INSTALLATION OF**  
**NEW PATH FURNITURE ON OFFA'S DYKE PATH**

by  
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A report for  
Countryside Access, Outdoor Recreation  
Shropshire Council

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## SUMMARY

*In 2011 the Archaeology Service carried out a watching brief on the installation of new path furniture at five sites along the Offa's Dyke Path on Graig Hill, Newcastle-on-Clun, in southwest Shropshire. This section of Offa's Dyke is a scheduled Ancient Monument, and it was part of the scheduled monument consent for the work that it should be carried out under archaeological supervision, and the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, carried out a watching brief on the work. At three of the sites new post-holes were located on the bank element of the Dyke. Otherwise no significant archaeological deposits were located in the excavations for the new furniture.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** Graig Hill overlooks the village of Newcastle-on-Clun, about 5km northwest of the small town of Clun in southwest Shropshire. The Dark Age earthwork monument Offa's Dyke runs across the western slopes of Graig Hill. This section of the Dyke has been scheduled as an ancient monument as defined by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (Monument No. 32599, Offa's Dyke: section 175m east of Cefn Bronydd).

**1.2** The scheduling description for this section of the dyke notes that it "...runs for 1.9km southwards from a stream at Lower Mount along the west shoulder of Graig Hill as far as the stream at Bryndrinog Farm. At the northern end, the bank is well-preserved for some 150m and defines the north bank of the stream, with the ditch serving as the streambed. The Dyke continues southwards where the profile of the remains is influenced by the hill slope. Here the bank is visible as a terrace jutting out from the hillside. The ditch to the west cuts into the hill, and a high counterscarp bank has been formed from the spoil cast up from this work. Towards the southern end of this section the ditch has been partly infilled by land slippage but will survive as a buried feature. There are three gaps in the monument, including a road junction 110m east of Wellfield, although the bank and ditch will survive as buried features..."

**1.3** In 2011 a number of stiles and gates were replaced and a new finger post erected on the Offa's Dyke path at five locations on the line of the dyke over Graig Hill (see Figure 2, sites A - E). These locations lay within the area of the scheduled ancient monument.

**1.4** In accordance with the scheduled monument consent for this work, an archaeological watching brief was maintained by the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, on the excavation of post-holes for the new stiles, gates, and fingerpost. The excavations were all carried out by the Shropshire Council Outdoor Recreation Countryside Access team. The excavations were carried out with minimal disturbance to the ground.

**1.5** The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to allow for the preservation by record of any archaeological remains that were encountered during the excavations for the new path furniture.

**1.6** A schedule of work was prepared for the work on each of the sites and submitted to English Heritage with the application for scheduled monument consent, and a written scheme of investigation was prepared by the Archaeology Service for the watching brief (Hannaford, 2010b).

**1.7** The Archaeology Service had previously carried out a watching brief during the replacement of two finger posts either side of the lane immediately south of Bryndrinog Cottage (SO 2560 8260; Hannaford, 2009). No archaeological deposits were seen in those works. There have been no known previous archaeological interventions at the remaining locations for the current work on the Dyke at Graig Hill.

## **2 THE WATCHING BRIEF**

### **2.1 Graig Hill A:** NGR: SO 2564 8356; SAM: 32599; Site Code: ODP11-GHA

The site at Graig Hill A lay on a hedgerow alongside and above a farm track which runs up the west slope of the hill. The farm track has been terraced into the hillside and has cut across the dyke and removed a section of the bank. On the south side of the hedge a section of the dyke has also been removed by access for farm vehicles and livestock. The footpath work here involved the removal of the old stile in the hedgerow and its replacement with a new kissing gate and stone-filled steps from the gate down to the farm track.

Six postholes were excavated by hand; two postholes 0.9m deep by 0.4m x 0.3m in plan for corner and strainer posts on the hedgeline and four postholes 0.9m deep by 0.3m in diameter for the remaining posts. A layer of topsoil (1) up to 0.4m thick sat over a light brown sandy silt (2), probably hillwash which in turn lay over a subsoil of light brown sandy silt with gravel (3).

### **2.2 Graig Hill B:** NGR: SO 2557 8339; SAM: 32599; Site Code: ODP11-GHB

The Graig Hill B site lay on a W-E field boundary marked by a wire fence and hedgerow on the west slope of Graig Hill about 180m south of site A. On the south side of the hedgerow farm access has removed a 5m wide section of the monument. The work here involved the replacement of a stile with a new kissing gate. The new gate was aligned W-E on the north side of the hedgerow on the tail of the bank element of the Dyke.

Six postholes were excavated by hand; one posthole 1.00m deep and one 0.70m deep, both 0.4m x 0.3m in plan, for the corner and strainer posts and four postholes 0.6m deep by 0.3m in diameter for the remaining posts. The fractured surface of the bedrock (24) was seen here at a depth of 0.5m in the post holes for the east side of the gate. This lay beneath a very stony brown silty sand (23) 0.3m thick and 0.2m of dark brown sandy topsoil (21). The postholes for the western part of the new gate were cut through a deposit of brown silty sand with stone fragments (0.22) up to 0.8m thick, which may have represented part of the make-up of the bank element of the Dyke. It lay beneath 0.2m of dark brown sandy topsoil (21).

### **2.3 Graig Hill C:** NGR: SO 2557 8314; SAM: 32599; Site Code: ODP11-GHC

The site at Graig Hill C lay 250m south of site B on a W-E field boundary marked by a wire fence. The work here involved the removal of an existing stile and metal field gate and hinge post and their replacement with a new Bristol 2-in-1 gate. The gateway area was leveled up with imported crushed stone.

The hinge post-hole for the old gate was cleaned out and re-used for the new gate. The post-hole was 1.3m deep by 0.4m in diameter, and lay some 6m to the east of the tail of the Dyke bank. The post hole was seen to have cut through a thin layer of topsoil (5) into natural subsoil of greyish brown silty sand with gritty gravel (6) which became more stony at 1m depth (7). The topsoil in the western post-holes for the slam post and a fence post, this lower natural subsoil deposit lay beneath a yellowish brown silty clay with gritty gravel (8), which also appeared to be natural subsoil.

## **2.4 Graig Hill D:** NGR: SO 2559 8292; SAM: 32599; Site Code: ODP11-GHD

The site at Graig Hill D lay 220m south of site C on a W-E field boundary running up the west slope of the hill. The work here involved the replacement of a stile with a new kissing gate. The new gate was placed on the tail of the bank element of the Dyke, which here had the form of a level platform or terrace on the hillside. A finger post was also erected 6m south of the new gate to mark half-way point of the Offa's Dyke Path between Prestatyn and Chepstow.

Six postholes were excavated by hand; one posthole 0.9m deep and one 0.8m deep, both 0.4m x 0.3m in plan, for the corner and strainer posts and four postholes 0.7m deep by 0.3m in diameter for the remaining posts. The post-hole for the finger post was excavated to a depth of 0.8m by 0.25m diameter

The natural subsoil (14) consisted of a light brown silty sand with stone chippings, cobbles, and pebbles, was seen at a depth of 0.4m below the ground surface in the eastern 4 gate post-holes and the post-hole for the finger post. In the westernmost post-hole this deposit (12) lay at a greater depth (0.8m), probably reflecting the natural underlying slope of the ground. Above the natural was a layer of yellowish brown silty sand (11) with grit and chippings. This appeared to be re-deposited natural and was considerably thicker (0.7m thick) in the western post holes than the eastern post-holes (0.2m thick); this layer may well have represented part of the fabric of the bank component of the Dyke. In the eastern post-holes this deposit lay beneath a layer 0.3m thick of dark brown sandy loam (15), possibly hillwash. These deposits all lay beneath a topsoil of dark greyish brown loam 0.12m thick.

## **2.5 Graig Hill E:** NGR: SO 2559 8271; SAM: 32599; Site Code: ODP11-GHE

The site at Graig Hill E lay adjacent to a sharp bend in the lane up from Bryndrinog in a gap in the monument caused by the splayed entranceway to a farm track. The work here involved the removal of an existing stile and two field gates and their replacement with a new 16ft gates and wicket gates. The post-holes for the new field gates were drilled to a diameter of 0.4m and a depth of between 0.9m and 1.5m depth. The post-holes for the wicket gates were dug by hand to a diameter of 0.25m and a depth of between 0.45m and 1m. In the post-holes on the south side of the track and across the track itself, the natural solid bedrock (20) was seen at a depth of 1.2m below ground and was seen to lie beneath a natural deposit about 1m thick of compact dark brown sandy clay with rock fragments (19). The topsoil here was a dark grayish brown sandy loam up to 0.25m thick. The slam post for one of the field gates and a new fence post were cut on the north side of the track and here the topsoil (16) was 0.25m thick and lay over a deposit of brown sandy silty clay (17) with pebbles. This deposit appeared to be natural subsoil, but because the posts here were in line with the bank component of the Dyke, it is possible that it represented bank material.

**2.6 Discussion** At Graig Hill B, D, and, just possibly, E, some of the post-holes for the new path furniture may have cut through deposits associated with the bank element of the Dyke, although in all three of these locations the bank was not visible as a raised, above-ground earthwork feature. Otherwise, no other significant archaeological features or deposits were seen in the excavations at any of the five sites monitored during these works on the line of the Dyke across Graig Hill. The site archive, comprising the written,

drawn, and photographic records from the watching brief, will be deposited with the Shropshire County Museum Service.

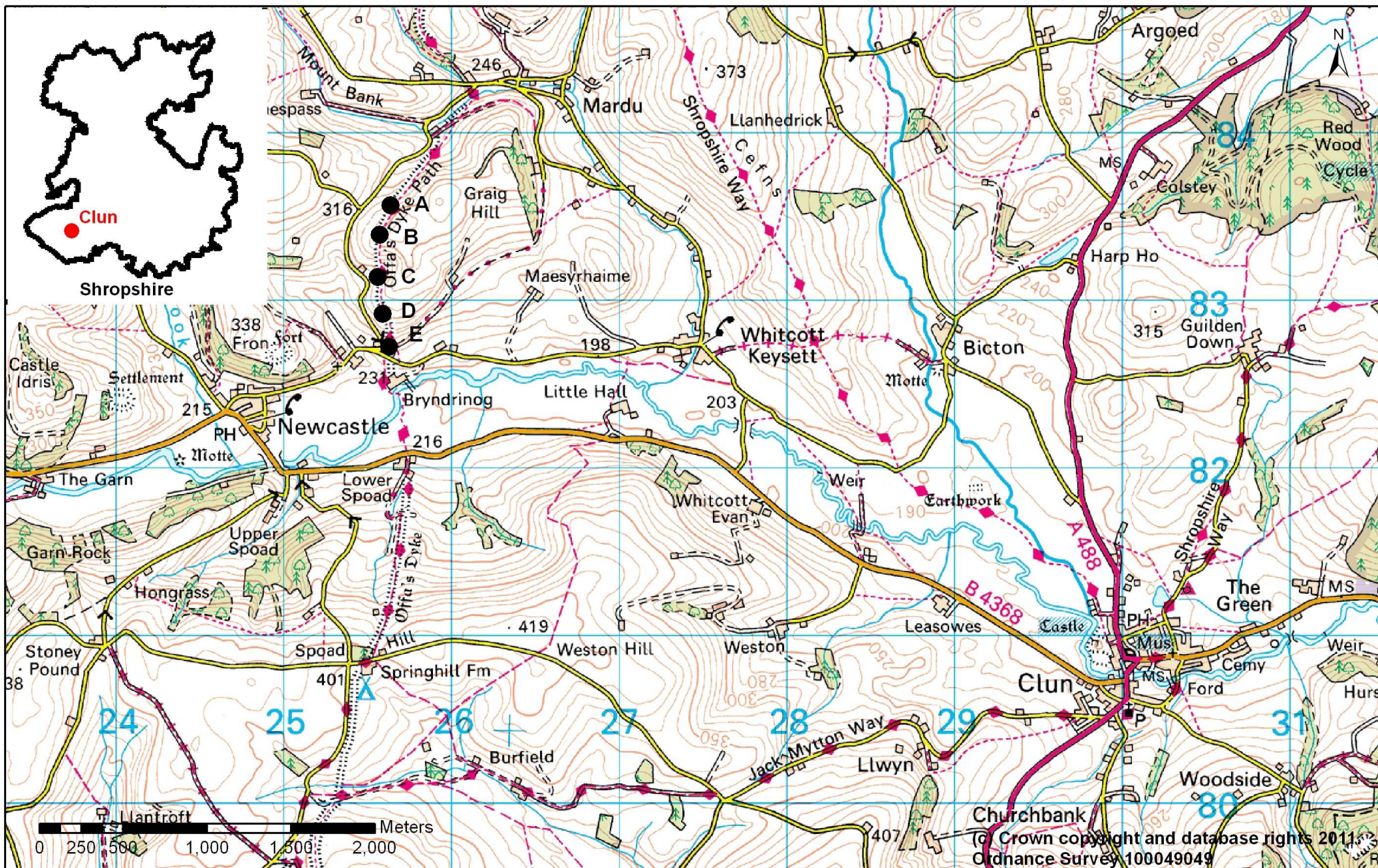
### 3 REFERENCES

- Hannaford, H R, 2008:** *Offa's Dyke Path, Churchtown Wood, Middle Knuck, Nut Wood, and Rownal*, Shropshire Council Archaeology Service internal report
- Hannaford, H R, 2009:** *A Watching Brief on the Installation of New Path Furniture along Offa's Dyke Path, Shropshire, 2009*, Shropshire Council Archaeology Service Report No 269
- Hannaford, H R, 2010a:** *A Watching Brief on the Installation of New Path Furniture along Offa's Dyke Path, Shropshire, 2010*, Shropshire Council Archaeology Service Report No 290
- Hannaford, H R, 2010b:** *Scheme of investigation for an archaeological watching brief on footpath works to Offa's Dyke*, Shropshire Council Archaeology Service internal report

### ABBREVIATIONS

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <b>CBA</b>   | Council for British Archaeology                                      |
| <b>HER</b>   | Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council                      |
| <b>NGR</b>   | National Grid Reference  |
| <b>OS</b>    | Ordnance Survey  |
| <b>SAM</b>   | Scheduled Ancient Monument   |
| <b>TSAHS</b> | Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society |

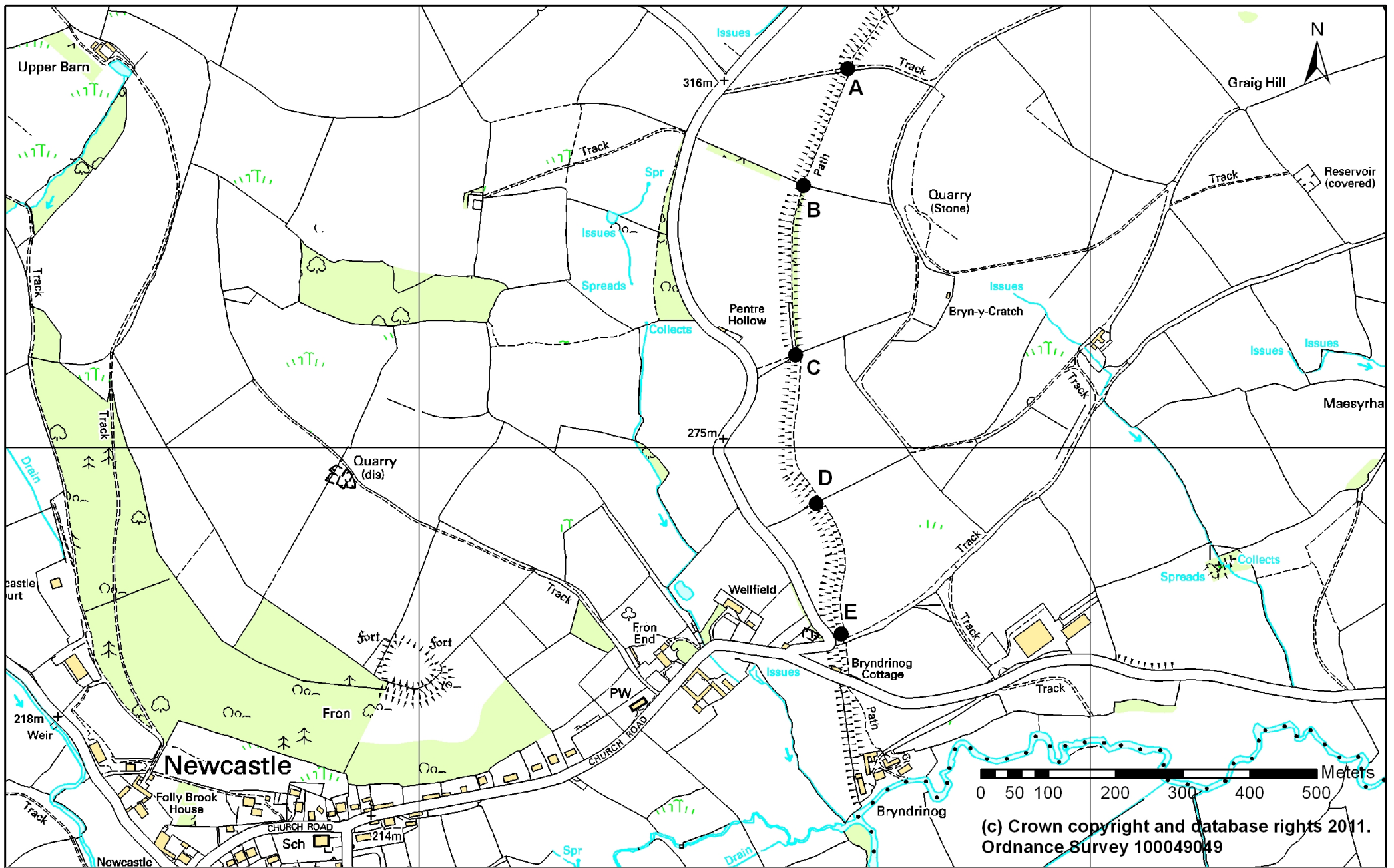




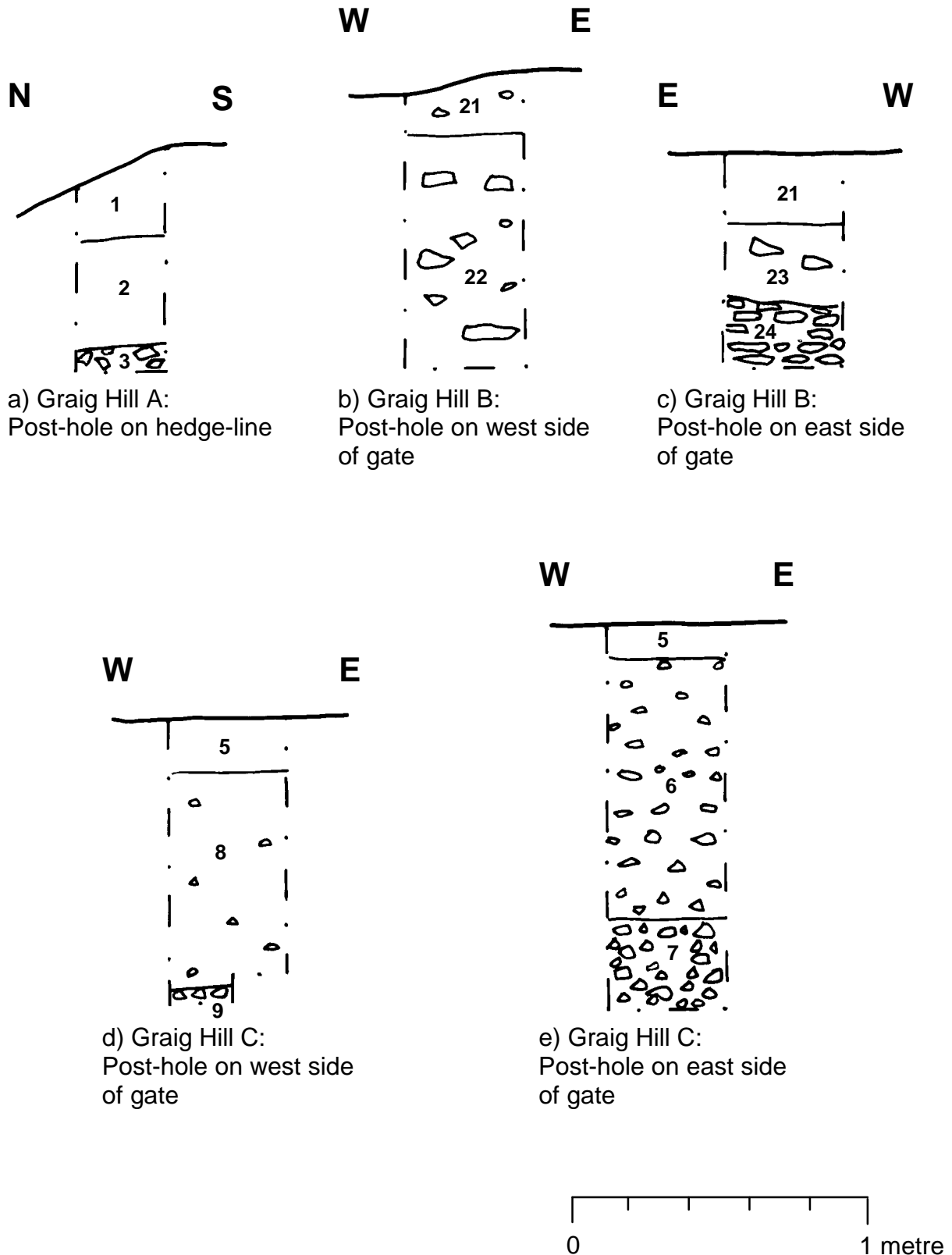
**Offa's Dyke Path 2011**  
**Figure 1: Location of Graig Hill (sites A - E)**

**Archaeology Service**  
 Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates,  
 Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY1 2AQ  
 Scale: 1:30,000



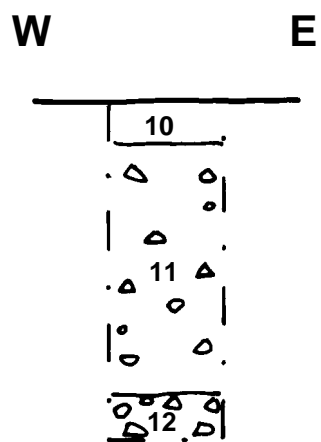


**Offas Dyke Path 2011**  
**Figure 2: Location of Graig Hill sites A - E**  
**along Offa's Dyke**

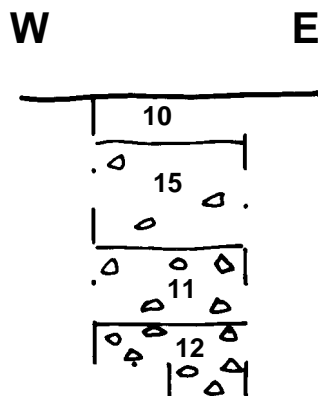


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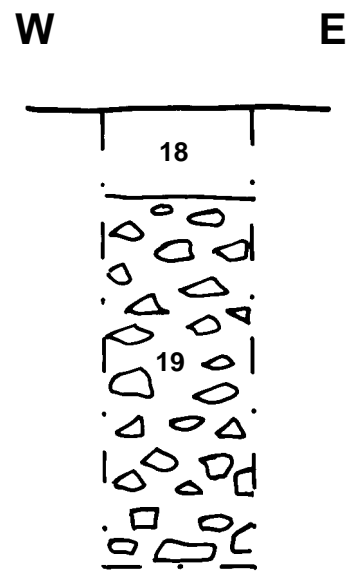
Figure 3: Sections through post-holes on sites Graig Hill A - C; 1:20 scale



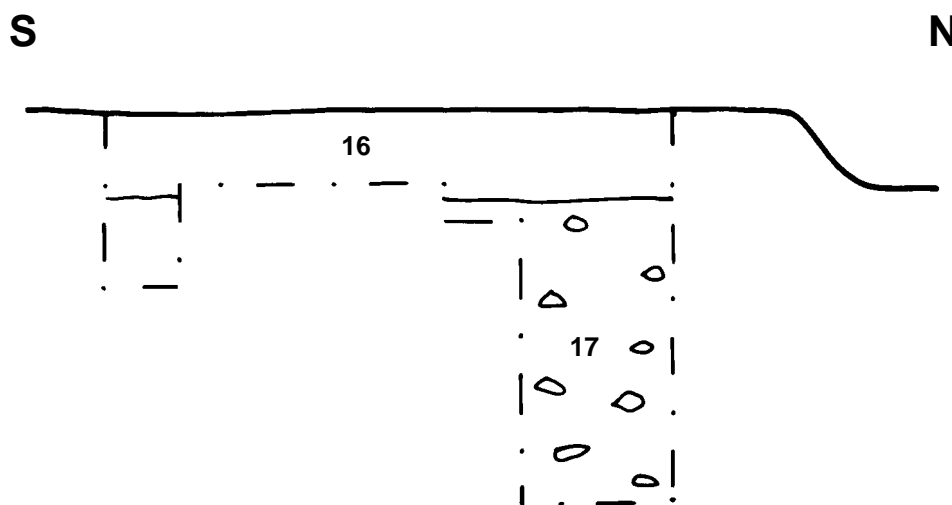
a) Graig Hill D:  
Post-hole on west side  
of gate



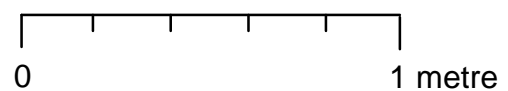
b) Graig Hill D:  
Post-hole on east side  
of gate



c) Graig Hill E:  
Post-hole on north side  
of track



d) Graig Hill E: Post-holes on south side of track for field and wicket gate



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Figure 4: Sections through post-holes on sites Graig Hill D & E; 1:20 scale





Photo 1: Graig Hill A, finished gate and steps



Photo 2: Graig Hill B, post-hole for hinge post on west side of gate



Photo 3: Graig Hill C, new gate hinge post

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Photo 4: Graig Hill D, new kissing gate, looking southeast



Photo 5: Graig Hill D, new gate and finger post, looking northwest



Photo 6: Graig Hill E, new field and wicket gates