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Summary

Four trenches were inserted, their spatial distribution ensuring that any monument approximating to the dimensions of a milefortlet would be encountered.

A walk-over of the site strongly suggested that the study area had been disturbed by recent cultural activity, confirmed by a housing development to the north and former use as a holiday camp during the mid to later 20th century. A modern service and a modern pit were uncovered during the fieldwork

Examination of the geological sequence beneath modern topsoil illustrated past dune formation overlying water-lain sand and to the east gravel and pebbles. Beneath the sand was a clay deposit that extended into the fields to the south (Bennett *pers comm.*).

It would appear highly likely that if the Roman coastal defence did extend northwards towards Milefortlet 9 at Skinburness, then the alignment has been lost to coastal erosion.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project origins

An archaeological evaluation has been requested by Cumbria County Council Historic Environment Service in order to ascertain whether sensitive past cultural features and deposits may be extant relating to the potential survival of Milefortlet 10. This putative fort formed part of the Roman coastal defences, protecting the Cumbrian coast from Bowness-on-Solway to Ravenglass, a fortification contemporary with Hadrian's Wall.

Because of the archaeological significance and sensitivity of this location, the curatorial planning authority has stated that development is subject to the "developer" securing the implementation of a formal programme of archaeological observation and investigation (archaeological evaluation) prior to the forthcoming development.

Gerry Martin has been commissioned by Mr Alf Bennett (the client) to prepare a Specification of Works for a Programme of Archaeological Evaluation Action relating to the redevelopment of land at 158 Skinburness Road, Silloth and following approval by the curatorial authority execute an archaeological evaluation.

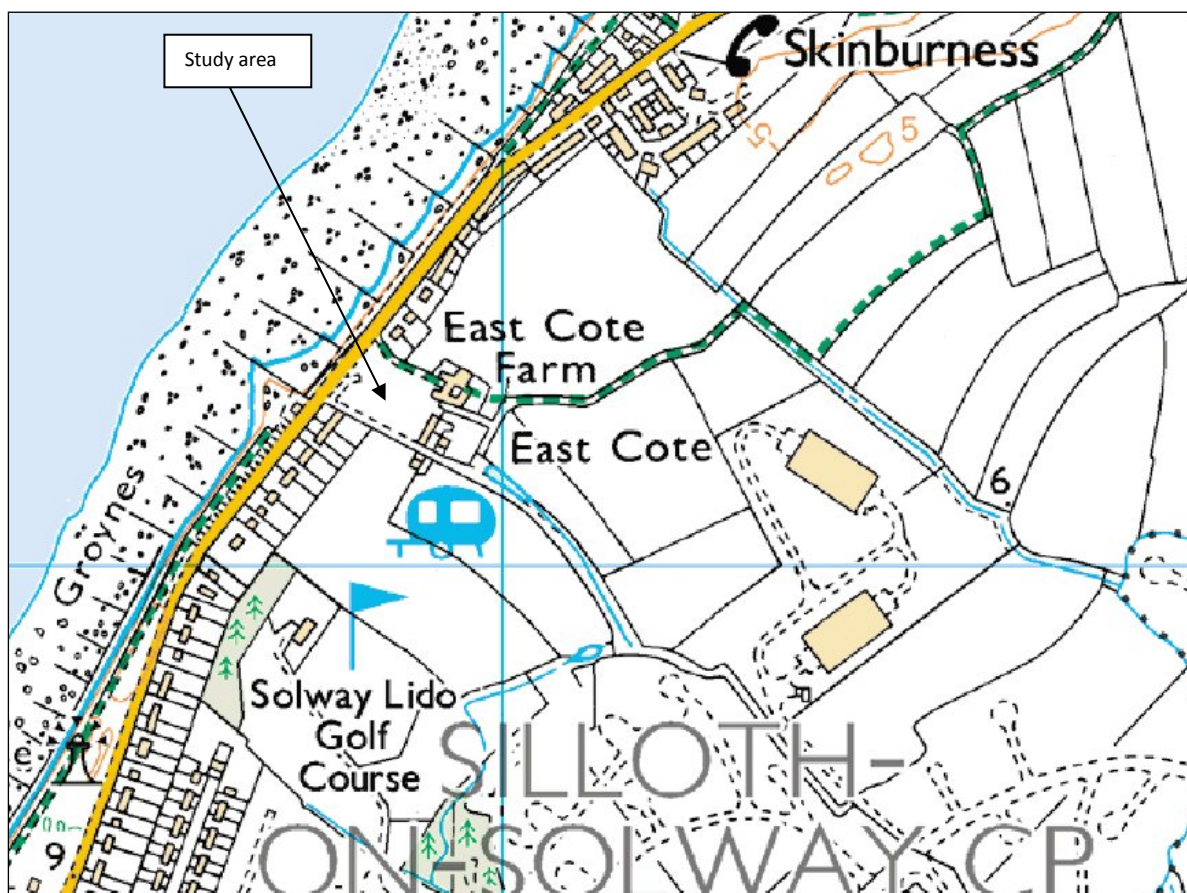


Figure 1. Location of study area at 158 Skinburness Road, Silloth. (OS Copyright, Licence no. 100044205)

1.2 Project outline

The first response was the compilation of a rapid desk-based assessment in order to gather a corpus of data relating to the study areas cultural past. This informed the second response, an archaeological evaluation, the scope of which was driven by the results of the desk-based assessment.

A written scheme of investigation (WSI) was produced by the archaeological contractor and details the methods and procedures to be employed during the archaeological evaluation. It was submitted to the curatorial authority (County Historic Environment Service) for approval and accepted.

The study area is not scheduled as an ancient monument but has the potential to possess significant archaeological remains. The results will provide informed advice for the Local Planning Authority and the County Archaeologist.

The development of the study area will involve the clearance of topsoil and other extraneous material in order to construct a bungalow with the option to build a further three dwellings.

The following report has been assembled to the relevant standards and protocols of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, combined with accepted best practice and in accordance with the brief prepared by the curatorial authority.

1.3 Desk-based assessment

In accordance with the Design Brief, the desk-based assessment investigated primary and secondary historical sources, maps and other literature in order to set the survey results into their past cultural, historical and topographic context.

The physical study area focused on NY 11870 55176 and consisted of research into a 500m radius from the development.

The desk-based assessment required a search of three archival repositories:

- Carlisle Library provided sources for published works including newspaper articles, archaeological and antiquarian reports and trade journals.
- Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle provided the earliest tithe map for the parish, details of landowners and occupiers and cartographic evidence.
- The Historic Environment Record provided the Sites and Monuments Record and aerial photographs describing previous archaeological observations within the study area.

1.4 Archive

The site archive comprised eight contexts describing past cultural activity whilst thirty three photographic images taken.

The archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design and the guidelines set out by Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991) and the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994 and 2007).

The archive will be deposited with an appropriate repository, Tullie House Carlisle and a copy of the report donated to the County Sites and Monuments Record, as requested by the curatorial authority.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, topography and geology

The study area is located approximately at a height of 10m OD on relatively flat ground above a beach which has endured constant erosion within living memory.

Around thirty years ago, a coastal scheme to prevent further erosion was initiated that secured the road as the barrier between the sea and a ribbon development of post-war housing.

Nearby, land use is notable for a series of sub-rectangular plan fields used for both arable and pastoral farming. Within the sub-soil (Type: Clifton and Brickfield Association), there exists evidence for inundation by flooding.

The underlying solid geology comprises Stanwix Shale.

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Historical background

The study area has been identified as the probable location for Hadrian's Wall Milefortlet 10 (HER 352), although an investigation to the north in advance of a housing development failed to isolate evidence for this assertion.

In 1989, Tom Clare, the former County Archaeologist undertook an evaluation at the location of a new bungalow at Whinbarrow, a position NY 1188 5520 that was marked on the Ordnance Survey map as Milefortlet 10.

This affiliation was based on the report of a field investigator in 1955, who identified the presence of a poorly defined rectilinear platform, represented by a slight bank 0.20m in height, with evidence of a rounded corner.

The putative site lay within a small, irregular-shaped parcel of land located between East Cote farmhouse and the road which followed the seawall.

In advance of construction upon the platform two trenches were dug through the platform measuring 15m x 1m. Both trenches revealed a very clean (0.05m thickness) A-horizon topsoil overlying a c 1.00m depth of soft yellow brown sand. This rested above a deposit of gravel, beneath which was at least a further metre of hard, compact, brown sand.

The sequence was interpreted as a lower level of wind-blown sand interrupted by a flood deposit of gravel followed by further wind-blown sand consistent with dune formation (Turnbull 1991, 267-268).

Clare was adamant that the platform observed and noted by Ordnance Survey was a truncated dune and similar to several other dune-like mounds in the immediate area.

He conceded that if any Roman remains were extant then they would be deeply buried in the sands but that they would be undisturbed by small-scale development.

He speculated that if a Roman site did exist, it would be to the east where Roman builders were not compromised by shifting and unstable dunes typical of the immediate coastal margin.

The Roman Cumbrian coastal defence began at Bowness-on-Solway where Hadrian's Wall terminated. Milefortlet 1 was west of the fort at Bowness and at intervals of 490m a military installation was constructed comprising a fortlet with intervening turrets, mirroring the same two turret arrangement between each mile fort as on the Wall (Symonds 2009, 56).

However, the interval between modern Silloth (Milefortlet 12) and Milefortlet 5 is poorly understood.

Milefortlets and other installations between Milefortlets 5 and 9 are now considered illusory and have been abandoned as a probable sequence as part of the coastal defence (Ibid 57). Moricambe Bay it seems was secured by the fort at Kirkbride and a fortlet (Milefortlet 9) at its western approach.

Conventional thinking suggests that the coastal defence continued along the present coastline linking Milefortlets 9 and 12 with two presumed Milefortlets (10 and 11) at the regulation intervals. However, these putative facilities and their accompanying turrets have only been intimated by aerial photography (Milefortlet 11 SMR 361 and Turret 10b SMR 360) (Dodds 2007, 4). However, Richard Bellhouse in a systematic programme of investigation failed to uncover any evidence for installations between Milefortlet 9 and 12 although he "noted" a Milefortlet at East Cote (Dodds 2006, 14).

Three explanations may be germane to the absence of these military facilities.

1. Fieldwork has simply not isolated these features and they await discovery e.g. they are beneath flood deposits, modern development or sand dunes.
2. These features may be lost due to coastal erosion, their original position now within the Irish Sea
3. That the salient around Skinburness was not worthy or required defence and that the fortifications may have instead stretched from Milefortlet 12 eastwards to Kirkbride fort (Martin 2010, 23).

The Historic Environment Record reveals three entries in close proximity to the study area, namely:

- HER 352. Hadrian's Wall Milefortlet 10 (proposed)
- HER 15226. Pillbox World War II
- HER 41520. East Cote Farm comprising a farmstead and a Victorian horse engine.

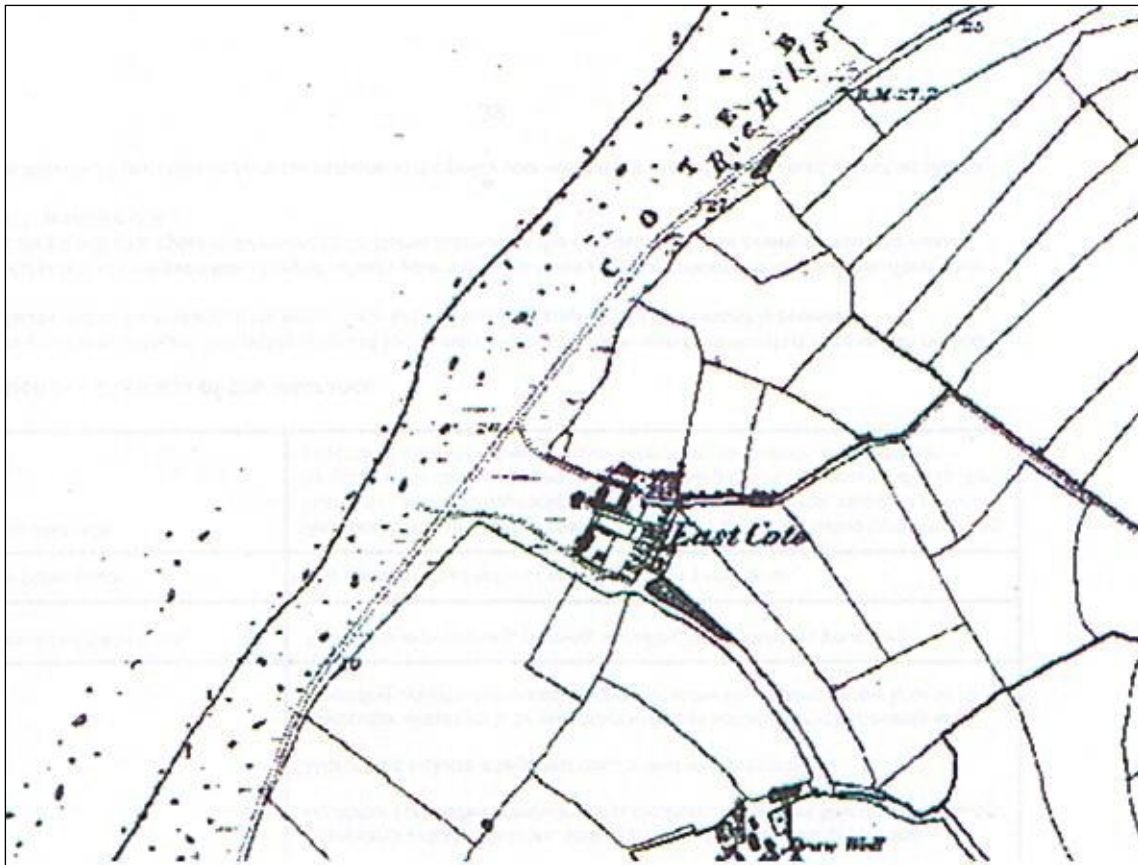


Figure 2. First Edition 1868 Ordnance Survey map

The 1868 Ordnance Survey map (figure 2) demonstrates the land as being vacant but not part of the encircling field system. The study area appears to be unenclosed, perhaps serving as a front lawn or garden for East Cote Farm.

It should be noted that land extended west of Skinburness Road, whereas nowadays this ground has been lost to the sea, the road forming the present boundary between coastline and land.

3.2 Walk-over study

The study area was formerly used as a holiday camp until around 1971 when the business failed. Since that time, the site has lain abandoned where casual use for leisure and recreation has been pursued associated with colonisation by gorse and weeds.

The road to the south leading to East Cote was raised above the flanking ground with the ground slightly higher to the south.

The study area was rather uneven with occasional hollows and spreads of nettles suggesting that the terrain had been subject to *ad hoc* excavation in the past.

There did not appear to be any earthworks or raised areas that may have indicated platforms, tofts or ridge and furrow.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Project design

The objective of the evaluation is to carry out a formal programme of archaeological observations and investigation that provide a documentary account of any archaeological remains.

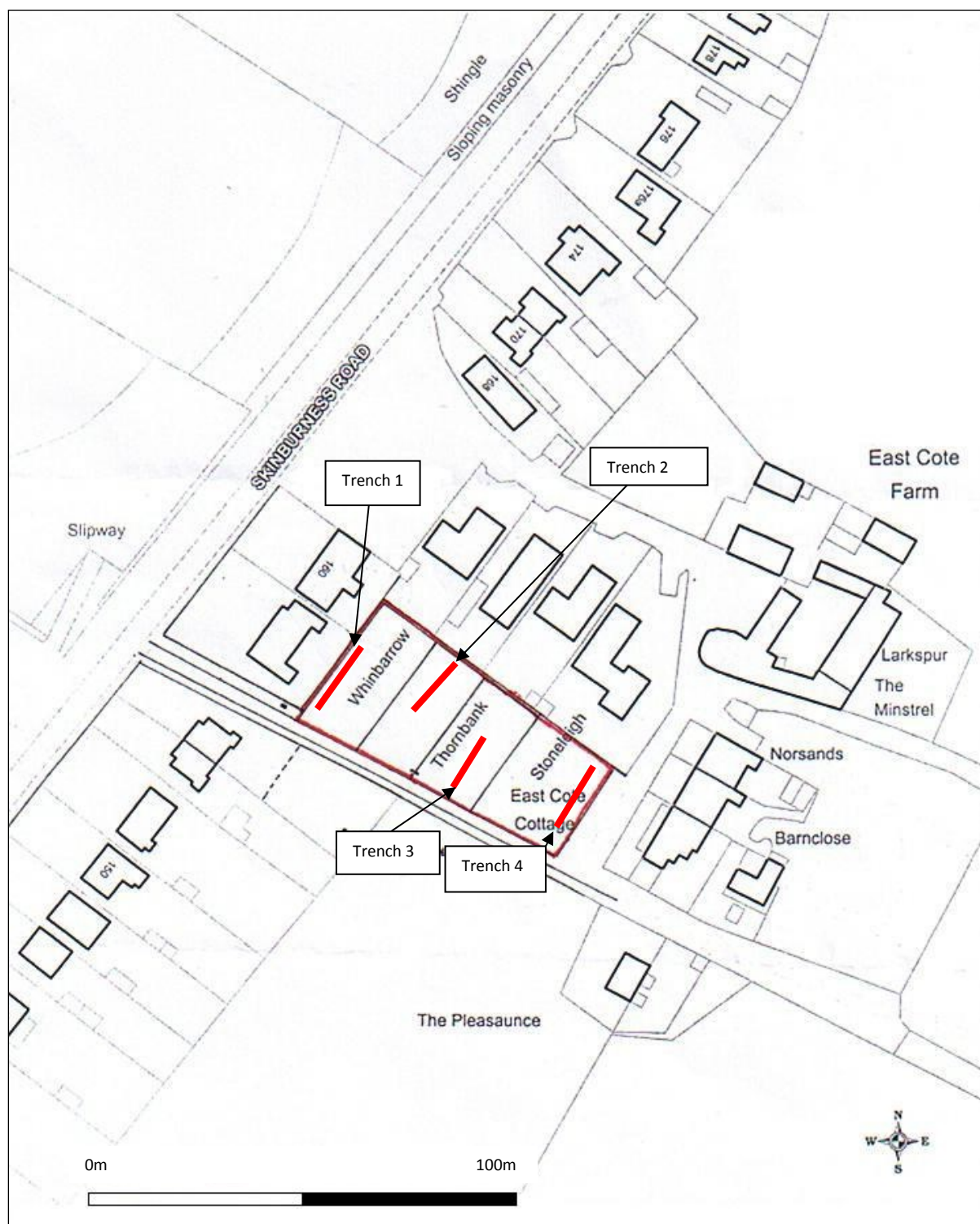


Figure 3. Location of Trenches at 158 Skinburness Road, Silloth

The evaluation seeks to construct a model of the archaeological potential of the site from which an informed strategy can be formulated to preserve *in situ* any significant archaeological remains. Its aims are to:

- Provide a detailed account of surviving archaeological strata and structures
- Determine the depth of survival of any significant archaeological deposits
- Characterize the extent, date, form and importance of any encountered cultural activity

The evaluation consisted of four trenches (figure 3), measuring 15.00m in length x 1.80m in width to be reduced to a depth no further than 1.20m below ground level. These trenches were excavated by machine in order to remove the topsoil and any potentially masking sand. Once this objective was achieved the trench was assessed for its past cultural potential.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Trench 1 (south end NY 11838 55181, north end NY 11848 55194)

Trench 1 measured 15.00m x 1.80m (figure 4) and was located towards the north-west of the site reduced to a depth of 0.70m.

It consisted of 0.40m in depth of brown silty sand topsoil 1 containing corrugated asbestos sheet overlying a further 0.20m thickness of loose buff sand, sealing orange sand reduced by 0.10m that develops into pinkish brown sand to the north.

No archaeological features were revealed and the trench appeared to be devoid of any past cultural contact.



Figure 4. Trench 1



Figure 5. Trench 2

5.2 Trench 2 (south end NY 11857 55180, north end NY 11867 55191)

Trench 2 measured 15.00m x 1.80m (figure 5) and was located towards the centre of the site, reduced to a depth of 0.40m except above modern pit 8 which was excavated to a depth of 0.80m.

It consisted of 0.20m in depth of mid brown silty sand topsoil 2 overlying a further 0.20m thickness of yellow sand that developed into pale yellow gravel and clay strata.

Sealed by the topsoil was a dark brown silty sand 7 containing modern brick and other building debris within an amorphous plan cut 8 (figure 6) at least 0.80m in depth that was dug as a borrow pit for gravel around 1989 (Bennett *pers comm.*).



Figure 6. Pit 8 in section, Trench 2



Figure 7. Trench 3

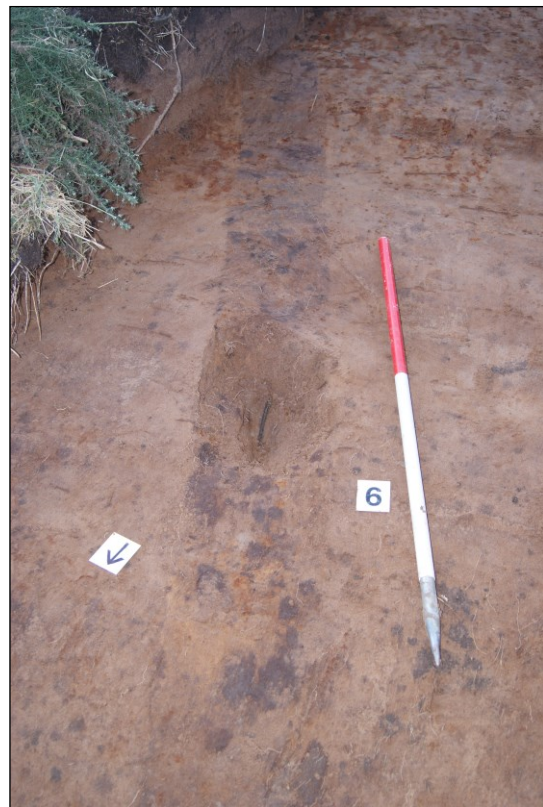


Figure 8. Cable trench 6 showing cable

5.3 Trench 3 (south end NY 11869 55163, north end NY 11878 55176)

Trench 3 measured 15.00m x 1.80m (figure 7) and was located towards the centre of the site reduced to a depth of 0.40m.

It consisted of 0.20m in depth of well-matted, mid brown organic silty sand topsoil 3 overlying a further 0.10m thickness of loose buff sand that developed into bright orange slightly ferruginous sand that sealed pale bluish grey clay.

Topsoil 3 covered a south-east to north-west aligned linear cut 6, 0.25m in width, filled by mixed lumpy brown silty sand 5 that bore a modern cable (figure 8).

5.4 Trench 4 (south end NY 11893 55151, north end NY 11902 55163)

Trench 4 measured 15.00m x 1.80m (figure 6) and was located towards the south-east of the site reduced to a depth of 0.70m.

It consisted of 0.30m in depth of brown slightly silty sand topsoil 4, overlying a further 0.10m thickness horizon of pebbles and cobbles, part of a hard-standing surface for the former holiday camp. Further soil was beneath the cobbling to a depth of 0.20m, sealing coarse orange-brown sand.



Figure 9. Trench 4

5.5 Finds and ecofacts

Modern brick was recovered from pit 8 in Trench 2 and some undated but likely to be relatively recently formed red sandstone blocks within Trench 1.

Within the topsoil covering all the trenches, pieces of corrugated asbestos sheet, brick, mortar and other building debris was recovered, the remains of a former holiday park and its accompanying chalets.

No environmental samples merited recovery.

5.6 Discussion

The study area was relatively low-lying compared to the neighbouring terrain suggesting that the area may have formerly been subject to ground reduction probably associated with the former holiday camp and its abandonment.

Pit 8 (Trench 2) was a borrow pit recognised on the surface by extant nettles and brambles, inserted for gravel extraction when the bungalows to the north were constructed during 1989.

Cable trench 6 (Trench 3) carried a live cable.

A concordant pebble spread in Trench 4 contained modern brick and was part of the lay-out for the former holiday camp.

Investigation of the sub-surface geology confirmed that this material was naturally lain.

The buff sand in Trench 1 was probably the same wind-blown sand identified by Tom Clare in 1989, part of a sand dune located just to the north.

The clean, stiff and ferruginous sand evident in Trenches 1, 2 and 3 were probably water-lain but did not contain rounded pebbles or cobbles, inclusions that would confirm deposition in water.

The coarse sand and gravel seen in Trench 4 (the furthest easterly trench) had been lain within water or where water once flowed.

Clay within Trench 3 was naturally lain. This may have been the same material inadvertently identified by Tom Clare as a putative flood deposit but was of geological rather than historical antiquity belonging to at least the last period of glaciation.

The archaeological investigation confirmed that Milefortlet 10 was not present within the targeted area. This location appeared unlikely as it was low-lying providing largely soft, poor ground. Moreover, the coast-line during the Roman period was probably distant from its current location. If the system of milefortlets was to provide an early warning coastal defence then there exists a strong possibility that the terrain where these facilities existed has been lost to coastal erosion, a process particularly acute at this location.

6 ARCHIVE

The archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design and the guidelines set out by English Heritage (1991, 2006) and the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994, 2008).

The archive will be deposited with an appropriate repository, Senhouse Museum, Maryport and a copy of the report donated to the County Sites and Monuments Record, as requested by the curatorial authority.

7 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the staff of Carlisle Library with my research into the local history of the area and David Bowcock and his staff at Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle with the map regression and documentary material.

Finally, I am very grateful for the help and knowledge of the landowner Mr Alf Bennett who provided the background and recent history regarding this project.

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