



**NORTHLIGHT HERITAGE** | Practice at Plean

DATA STRUCTURE REPORT: 136 | **Community Heritage Project at Upstanding  
World War I practice trenches**

PROJECT ID: 4435161 | Plean Country Park, Stirling



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Plean Country Park, Plean, Nr. Stirling

NGR: NS 8255/8660

Data Structure Report

*on behalf of*

Stirling Council

Cover Plate: Topographic Survey under way

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**Date:** .....

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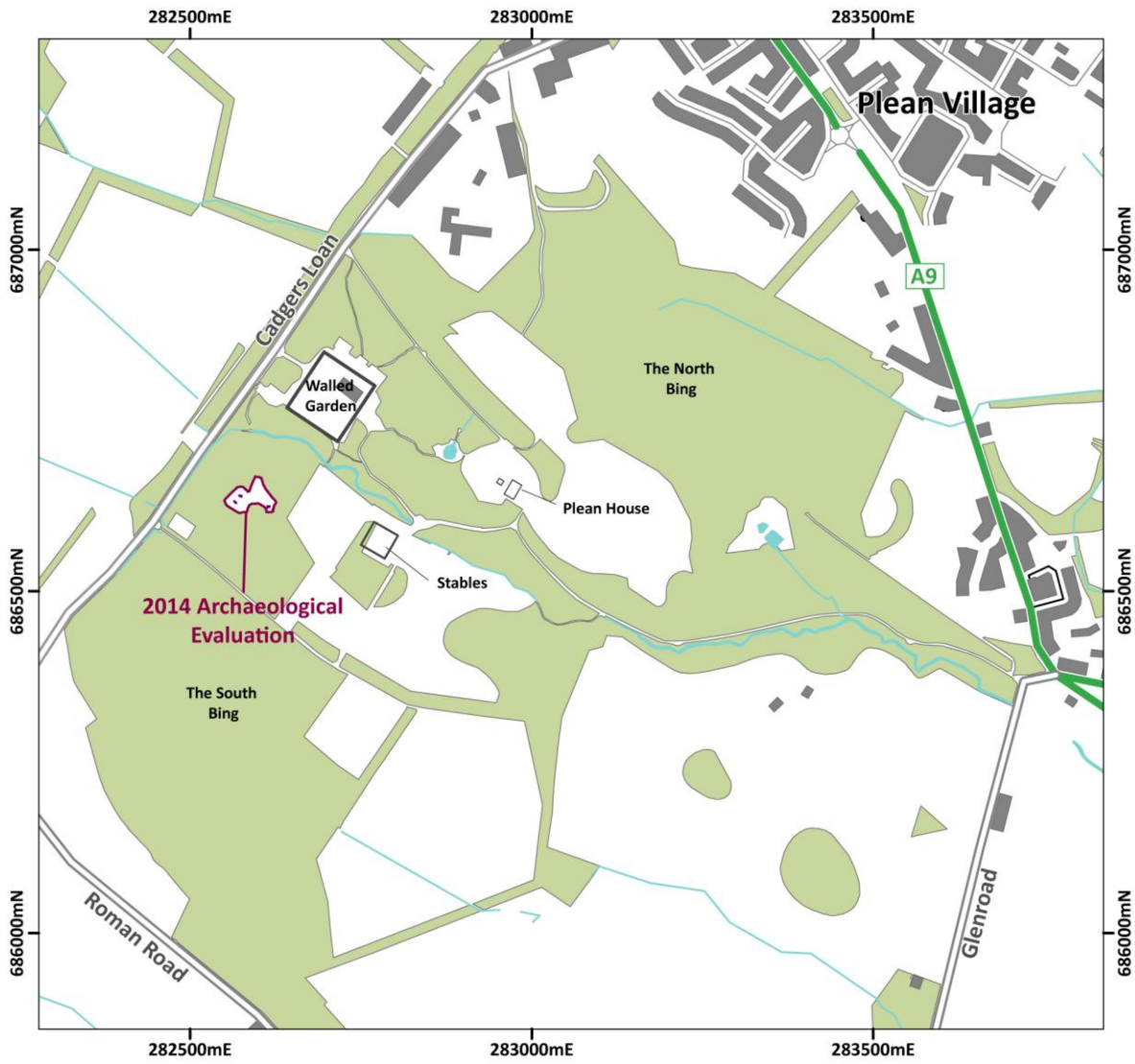
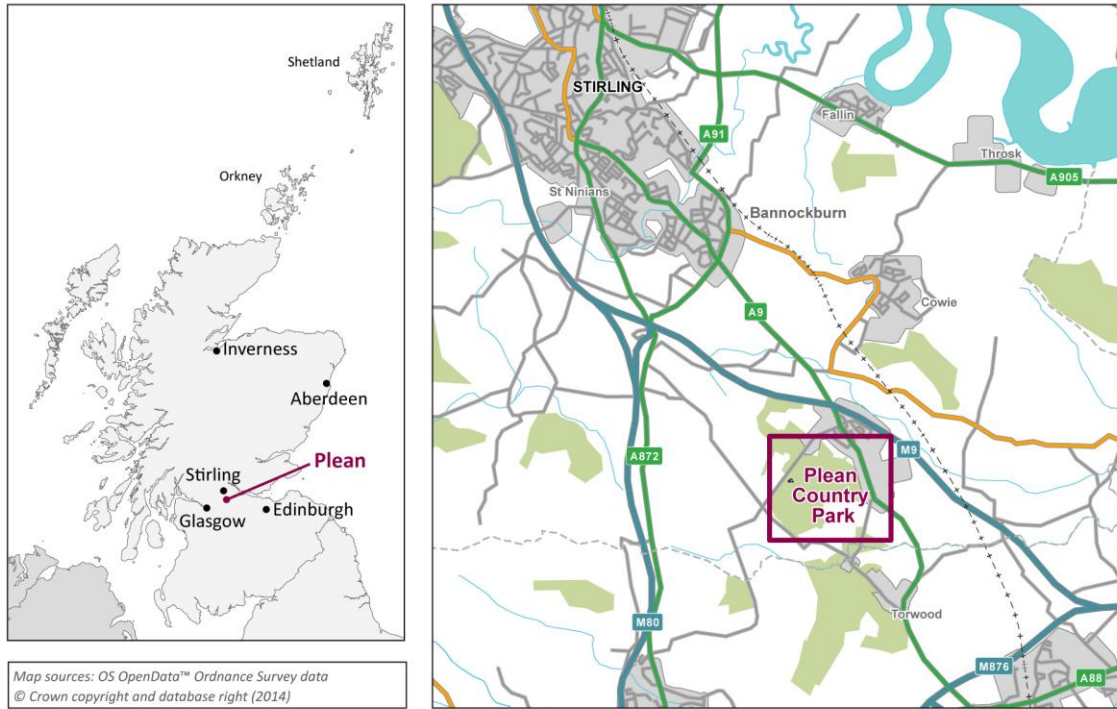


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## **Abstract**

An archaeological evaluation and topographic survey were carried out by Northlight Heritage with local community volunteers to investigate the World War I practice entrenchments in Plean Country Park, Stirling. The fieldwork consisted of walkover survey, followed by trial excavation and topographic survey to map and characterise the practice trenches.

The survey recorded networks of trenches extending over an area c 100m north/south by 60m east/west , with some portions well-defined and others much more amorphous. Three exploratory trenches revealed very shallow profiles in the western part of the network (Trenches 2 and 3) and a deep practice trench in the eastern part (Trench 1). The later use of the area for World War II practice trenches and quarrying appears to have led to some disturbance of the World War I trenches and the formation of a complex set of extant earthworks. No artefactual evidence of World War I activity was found.



Illus 1: Site location.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation and topographic survey carried out by Northlight Heritage with local community volunteers. An initial walkover survey was conducted on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September and the excavations were conducted between the 24<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> September 2014. The project aimed to investigate the World War I practice entrenchments in Plean Country Park to the south of Stirling.

### Project background

- 1.2. Northlight Heritage were commissioned by Stirling Council to map, characterise and explore the extent and nature of the upstanding World War I practice trenches at Plean Country Park as part of a larger heritage project, involving research into the origins and subsequent use of the trenches and their use as a focus for community events, including poetry. The project was designed to raise awareness among the local community both of the practice trenches and how they were used, and of the wartime experiences of soldiers who built and practiced in them before departing for the Western Front.

## 2. Location, Geology and Topography

- 2.1. The site is located in Plean Country Park, south-east of the city of Stirling and c 1 kilometre south-west of Plean village (Illus 1). The specific area of interest within the park measures approximately 80m by 60m and lies 125m south-west of the walled garden and 70m from the public road, Cadgers Loan.
- 2.2. The local solid geology consists of Carboniferous period upper limestone formations belonging to the Clackmannan group type, which were formed between 318 and 326 million years ago (British Geological Survey 2015).
- 2.3. The overlying superficial deposits are predominantly glacial material, including Devensian glacial till and alluvial deposits of clays, silts, sands and gravels, which were all formed within the last two million years (ibid).
- 2.4. The site lies in an area of dense, deciduous woodland with extensive rhododendron cover, and with thick and extensive bracken cover in the clearings. The broader surrounding landscape consists of undulating agricultural land interspersed with heath.

## 3. Archaeological and Historical Context

- 3.1. During the long stand-off that characterised much of the First World War on the Western Front, as Allied and German forces held positions that were geographically static in the main, trench warfare evolved as a means of protecting troops from increasingly lethal weapons, to improve communications and to make life on the Front more viable over the long term.
- 3.2. During the course of the war, trenches evolved from simple, improvised excavations providing rudimentary protection to complex, interlocking defensive works spanning huge areas, with shell-proof dugouts designed to resist artillery bombardments and mass infantry assaults. At their most complex, trench systems usually consisted of three lines, inter-connected by communications trenches: a front line trench guarded by lines of barbed wire; a support trench, and a reserve line. Trenches zigzagged along their course rather than running straight, and later trenches were broken into firebays of nine metres long

connected by traverses to mitigate the effects of enfilade (sweeping fire) along the line.

- 3.3. The construction of practice trenches on UK soil was an attempt to provide soldiers with realistic training before their departure for the Western Front, as well as increase their fitness and encourage team spirit. Practice trenches identified from aerial photographs and field surveys across Britain are generally zigzag in plan along the front lines and they could be quite complex, with fire steps, bunkers and communication trenches. Some examples, such as one identified by the RCAHMS in Ross-shire, had both German and British lines separated by no-man's land. In spite of the elaborate lengths to which such training extended, the contrast between soldiers' experiences in practice trenches in the UK and in combat trenches on the Western Front was extreme.
- 3.4. The features at Plean are an unusual, extant example of practice trenches that were left open after being used for training. They are intimately linked to the wartime experiences of the troops that built and used them before their deployment, although research into which regiments practiced there have so far been unsuccessful (M Cook, pers comm).
- 3.5. There is anecdotal evidence that the area was also used to create practice trenches during World War II (ibid). A previous archaeological evaluation was carried out at the northern end of the area. This revealed a very shallow cut into bedrock, which occurs close to the surface at this point, with spoil having been piled at either side to create ramparts for the practice trench (F Watson, pers comm).

## 4. Summary Objectives

- 4.1. The objectives of the project were to raise the profile locally of the practice entrenchments and:
  - to identify the location, nature and extent of any hitherto unrecorded features or objects of archaeological significance;
  - to characterise those archaeological features or objects identified, through excavation;
  - to involve and train volunteers in survey and excavation techniques,
  - and to use the entrenchments to inspire poetry workshops and a poetry event.

## 5. Methodology

### Walkover Survey

- 5.1. The first stage of the survey comprised a site walkover to establish the extent and layout of the network of World War I entrenchments. The area was systematically walked in transects wherever possible, given the dense undergrowth and tree cover, to identify extant trenches and understand the character of the network. These and any other features identified were recorded by measured sketch, written description and digital photographs.

### Archaeological Excavation

- 5.2. Three evaluation trenches were excavated in areas where undergrowth and tree cover were not too restrictive. Trench 1 (Illus 4) measured 3 m by 2m, was orientated east-west and was located to evaluate what was thought to be a bend in the zig-zag pattern of the practice entrenchments. Trench 2 (Illus 7) and

Trench 3 (Illus 10) both measured approximately 4m by 1m and were orientated approximately north-west/south-east; they were positioned to explore a section of possible entrenchment identified by the Stirling Council Archaeologist.

- 5.3. The trenches were opened and excavated by hand. Bracken was first cleared by hand and then the turf and topsoil were removed to the level of the first significant archaeological horizon. Identified Features were then half-sectioned or excavated in sondage to determine their character, extent, quality, date and complexity.
- 5.4. All archaeological features, deposits and finds were recorded by means of conventional pro forma record cards. Scaled hand-drawn plans were also made at 1:20 and sections at 1:10. High-resolution digital photographs were taken of all deposits. The locations and dimensions of all trenches were recorded using a Leica TS09 Total Station from control base-stations established on the Ordnance Survey grid using a Leica GS15 (Smartnet enabled) GPS.

#### **Topographic Survey**

- 5.5. In light of the extensive tree, rhododendron and bracken cover, the topographic survey was conducted using a Leica TS09 Total Station based on control base-stations established on the Ordnance Survey grid using a Leica GS15 (Smartnet enabled) GPS. A grid of points were recorded that were then used to generate a contour model of the site.

## **6. Results**

#### **Walkover Survey**

- 6.1. The walkover survey identified three clearings within the woodland, between the South Bing and the Walled Garden, which contain earthworks possibly related to practice trenches. In discussions with the Stirling Council Archaeologist and local volunteers, it was decided to concentrate on the western two of these areas (see Illus 1-3). The third clearing lay to the south of the Trench 1, adjacent to the area known as the events field.

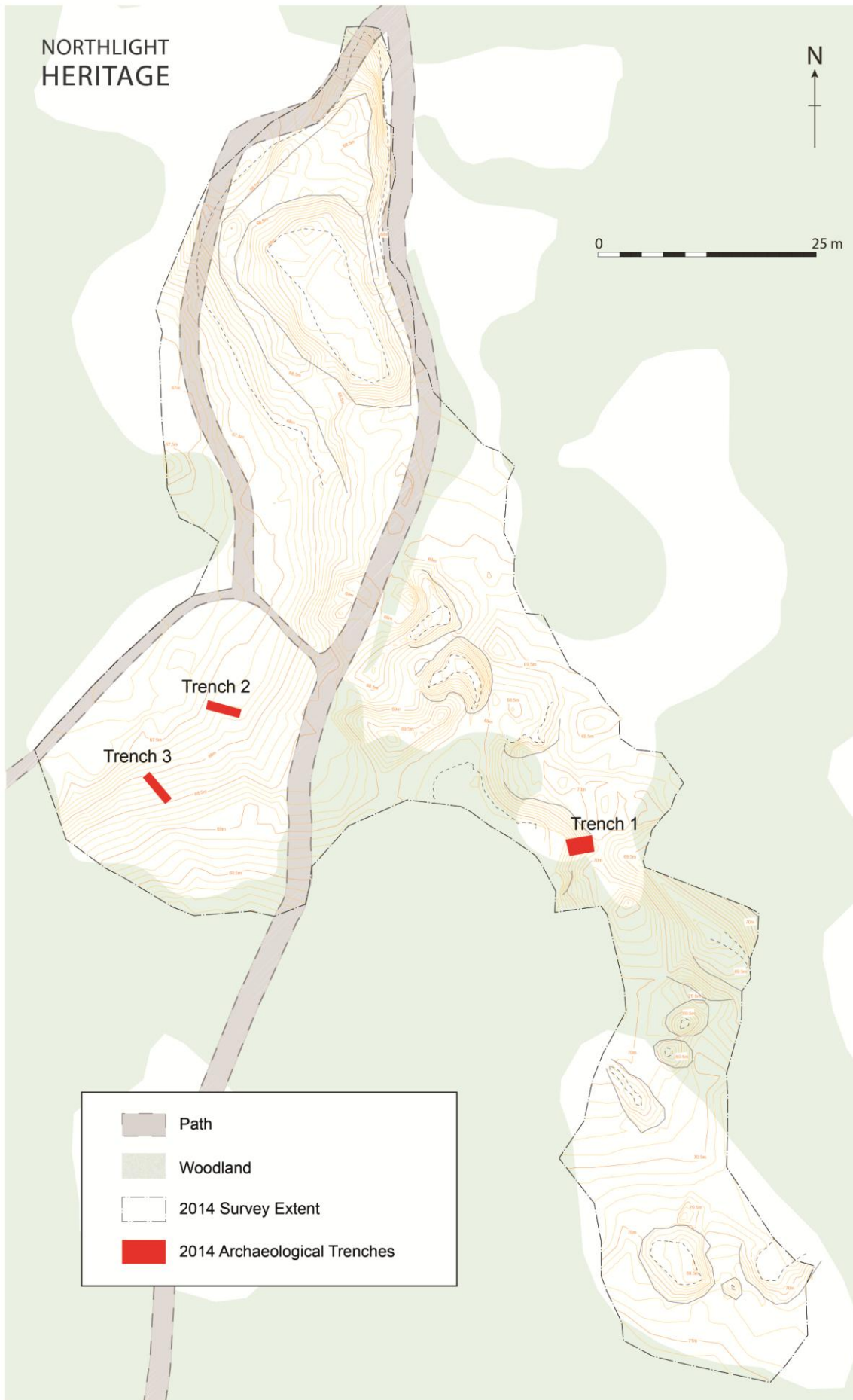
#### **Topographic Survey (Illus 2 and 3)**

- 6.2. The topographic survey covered the area surrounding the three evaluation trenches. The area immediately around Trenches 2 and 3 proved to have very little topographic variation, and this was confirmed by the shallow cut features found in the excavation trenches (see below). The area immediately adjacent to and north-west of Trench 1, in contrast, had significant topographic variation and something of the pattern of trenches is apparent, although it is not possible to get a clear sense of whether a typical crenellated or Greek key pattern is present.

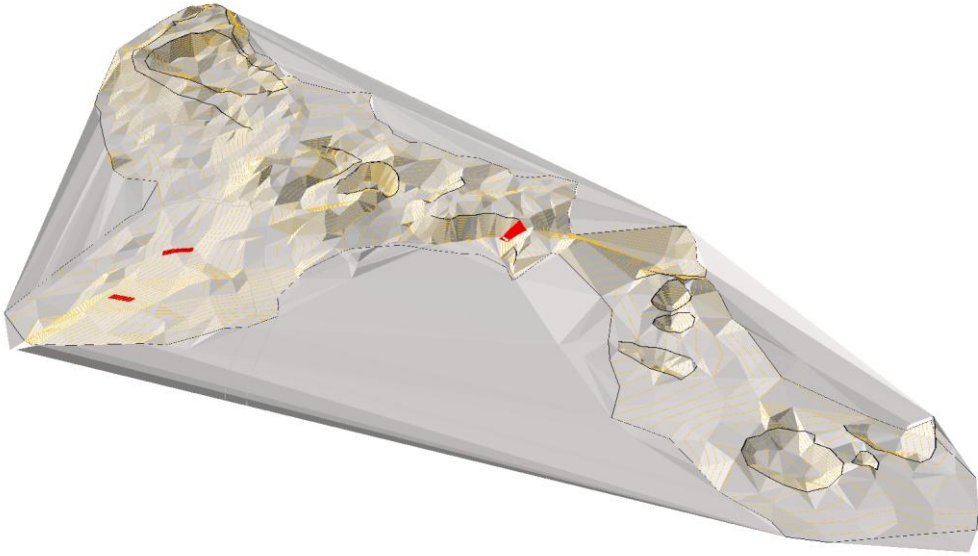
#### **Trench 1 (Illus 4, 5 and 6)**

- 6.3. The natural subsoil identified in Trench 1 was a firm, mottled yellowish grey clay (012), observed against the southern baulk section. This was cut by [014], a deep cut with near vertical but irregular sides, interpreted as part of the network of practice trenches. The cut was at least 0.8m wide and was observed to extend beyond the end of the trench. The line of the trench [014] indicates that it was orientated north-west/south-east, and continued through the embankment on which Trench 1 was

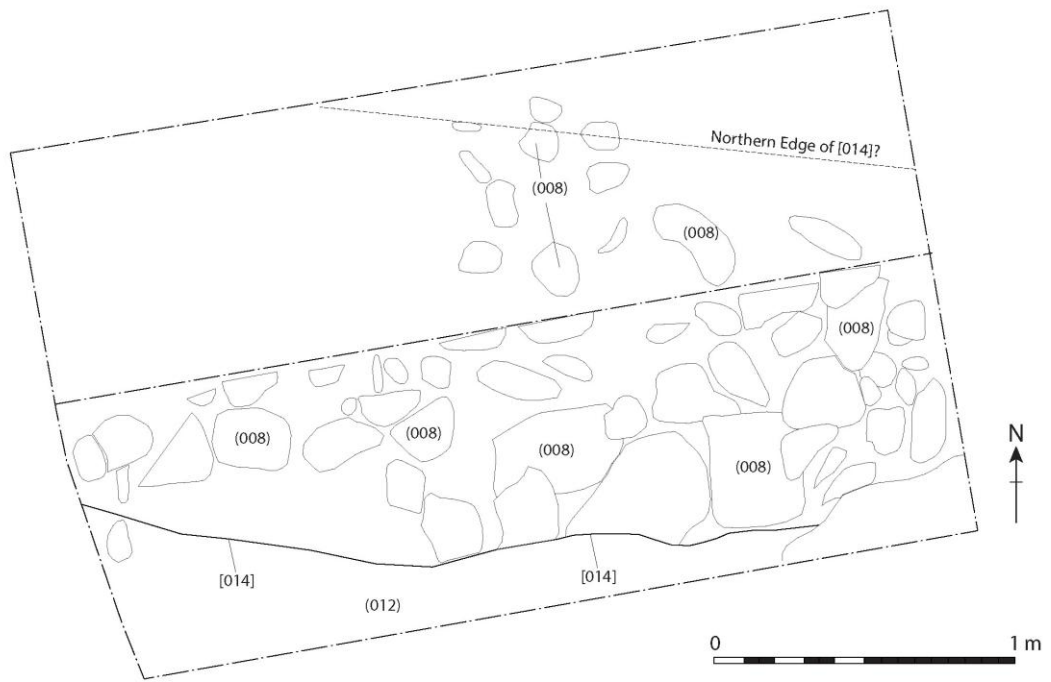




*Illus 2: Contour model of the practice trenches at Plean.*



*Illus 3: Digital Elevation Model (DEM) of the practice trenches at Plean, from the north-east.*



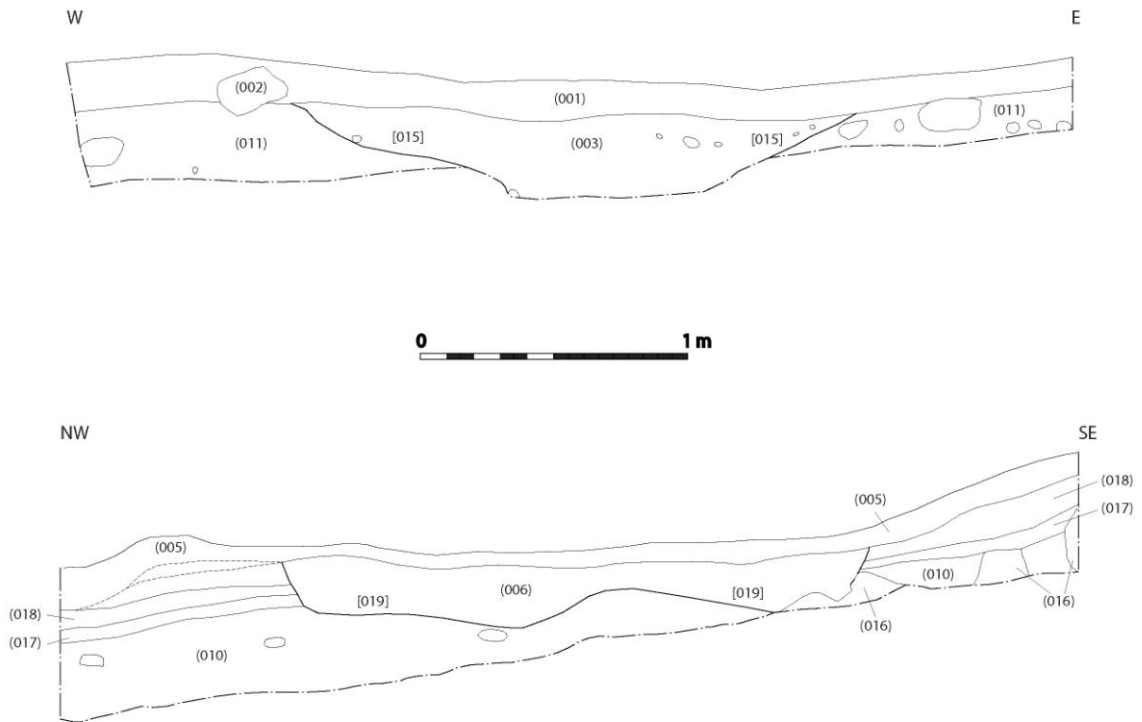
*Illus 4: Trench 1 - Plan and section.*



*Illus 5: Trench 1 - Pre-excavation view of stone rubble (008), with cut [014].*



*Illus 6: Trench 1 - Post-excitation view of (008), with backfill (013) and cut [014].*



*Illus 7: Trenches 2 and 3 - Sections.*

situated. Excavation stopped at a depth of 1.2m below the surface for safety reasons, but the cut continued down below this point.

- 6.4. The lowest fill identified in the cut [014] was a firm, mottled yellowish brown sandy clay (013). An area c 0.8m by 0.7m in the base of the cut appeared to be redeposited subsoil, which had probably slumped from the sides while the practice trench was in use. Overlying this and filling the rest of the cut [014] was a loose deposit of large, irregular limestone blocks with a small amount of sand and topsoil filling some of the voids (008). The limestone blocks were present across most of Trench 1 over an area at least 0.85m wide and up to 1m deep.
- 6.5. A deposit of friable, yellowish brown sand (007) was recorded across the whole excavation trench, overlying the limestone blocks and tipping from the top of the bank down the slope. It was not more than 0.05m deep at any point, and the type and purity of the sand suggest that it originated from sandbags that had been arranged along the top of the slope.
- 6.6. Friable, very dark grey brown silty sand (004) formed the topsoil across the trench, beneath turf and bracken.

#### **Trench 2** (Illus 7, 8 and 9)

- 6.7. The natural subsoil identified in Trench 2 was a firm, mottled yellowish brown clay (011). This was cut by a shallow ditch [015] c 0.2m deep and orientated roughly north/south, with a gently sloping western edge but a less distinct eastern edge. Despite its shallow depth, this is also thought to be part of the network of World War I practice trenches. It was filled with a firm, mottled yellowish brown sandy clay (003) which appeared to comprise redeposited subsoil, although it was more heavily re-worked than its equivalent (013) in Trench 1.
- 6.8. At the western end of Trench 2 was a line of large stones (002), crossing the practice trench on a roughly north/south alignment. Three of the stones formed a rough course about 0.5m wide. They sat 0.5m west of the defined edge of cut [015] and slightly higher than it, creating a low ridge in the ground surface. They seem likely to have been a foundation for a sandbag wall.
- 6.9. Overlying the stones (002) was a friable, very dark greyish brown silty sand (001), which formed the turf and topsoil covering Trench 2, 0.05 – 0.1m deep.

#### **Trench 3** (Illus 7, 10 and 11)

- 6.10. At the south-eastern end of Trench 3, an area of limestone bedrock (016) was encountered at between 0.15-0.4m below the modern ground surface. Overlying this was a cluster of large limestone blocks (009) which were simply fragments of bedrock. Across the remainder of the trench, natural subsoil was identified as a firm, mottled reddish brown clay sand which overlay (009) and (016).
- 6.11. Overlying it was a buried turf layer (017), which consisted of soft, dark grey-brown clay silt. This lay in two patches – one at either end of the trench, each 0.05m deep and extending beyond the limit of excavation. They were separated by a shallow cut [019], c 1.5m wide by 0.2m deep, most likely a continuation of cut [015] for the practice trench exposed in Trench 2 to the north.



*Illus 8: Trench 2 - Pre-excavation view of (002) possible foundation for sandbags.*



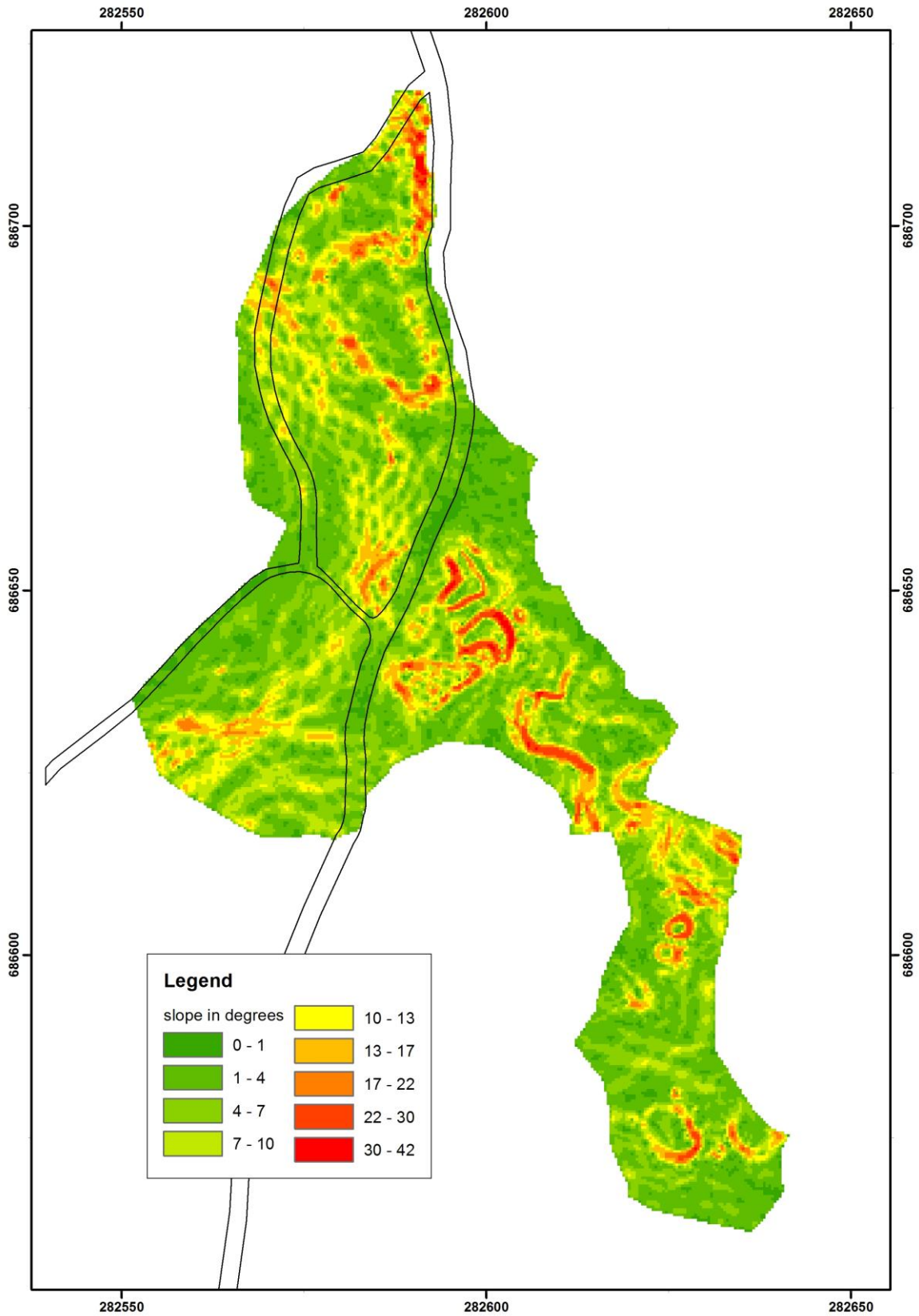
*Illus 9: Trench 2 -South-facing section.*



*Illus 10: Trench 3 - Post-excavation view with bedrock (016) in foreground.*



*Illus 11: Trench 3 - South-west facing section.*



*Illus 12: Slope model of the practice trenches at Plean Country Park.*



However, the south-eastern edge of the cut was indistinct against the overall topography of the ground, and the north-western edge was difficult to define due to animal burrowing.

- 6.12. On the crest of the north-western and south-eastern edges of cut [019] were deposits of firm to friable mottled reddish brown clay sand (018). These were clearly redeposited subsoil and must have formed as a direct result of digging the practice trench [019]. They were up to 0.1m deep, although generally deeper toward the north-west. These deposits would have originally increased the depth of the practice trench by creating a small bund or rampart on its crest. Unlike in Trench 2, no stones were found on top of these deposits.
- 6.13. Filling the practice trench cut [019] was a firm, dark grey-brown sandy clay (006) up to 0.2m deep. This may have been formed from heavily mixed, redeposited subsoil like (003), but the presence of animal burrowing through it makes interpretation slightly more difficult. A deposit of friable, very dark grey-brown silty sand (005) formed the topsoil across the trench. It was very rich in humic content, particularly bracken roots and leaf mould.
- 6.14. No artefacts were recovered from any of the trenches.

## 7. Discussion and Summary

- 7.1. The evidence from Trench 1 is intriguing, in that it clearly shows that significant effort was put into creating deep practice trenches in the south-eastern part of the area. In contrast, the practice trench revealed in Trenches 2 and 3 was much shallower, while previous investigation in the northern part of the area had found a very shallow practice trench cut into bedrock (F Watson, pers comm). The evidence from Trenches 1-3 indicates that the natural subsoil is, at least in places, quite deep with only occasional areas of bedrock close to the surface in the south part of the site. It is therefore unclear why the practice trench exposed in Trenches 2 and 3 was so narrow and shallow.
- 7.2. Although there is anecdotal evidence that the area was used to create practice trenches during both world wars, it has not proven possible to locate documents that detail when or by which regiments these were dug (M Cook, pers comm). However, the topographic complexity of the site as recorded in the survey would appear to confirm accounts of subsequent re-use, which would have reconfigured and disturbed the original ground plan (see Illus 12).

## 8. Sources

*British Geological Survey (2015) Online Map Viewer, <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>, accessed 05/01/15.*

## 9. Acknowledgements

- 9.1. The authors would like to thank Murray Cook of Stirling Council for his enthusiastic support during the fieldwork. They would also like to thank the volunteers who helped with the survey and excavation for their hard work and enthusiasm: Duncan Aitken, Lucy Arthur, Morag Bulloch, Rebecca Phin, Stephen Robinson, Lorne Scott-Kerr and Nick Wardlaw. The project was generously funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.



## 10. Appendices

### APPENDIX 1: Tables / Concordances

Table 1: Context Information

<i>Context No.</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Description/Interpretation</i>	<i>Stratigraphy and/or phasing info</i>
1	Deposit	\	\	0.05-0.1	Topsoil/Turf	Over (002) & (003)
2	Deposit	1	0.5	\	Allocated to 3 large stone found immediately below turf (001) at western end of Trench 2. Thought to be foundation of sand bag wall.	Under (001), over (011)
3	Deposit	1	1	0.2	Backfill of WW1 entrenchment [015]. Probably formed from redeposited natural.	Under (001), over [015]
4	Deposit	0.1	0.2	\	Topsoil/Turf	Over (007)
5	Deposit	\	\	0.05-0.1	Topsoil/Turf	Over (006) & (018)
6	Deposit	1	1.5	0.2	Backfill of WW1 entrenchment [019]. Probably formed from redeposited natural.	Under (005), over [019]
7	Deposit	3	2	\	Tip of clean sand across Trench 1, possibly from decade sandbags.	Under (004), over (008)
8	Deposit	3	0.85	1	Pack of large irregular blocks filling a deep ditch/entrenchment [014].	Under (007), over (013)
9	Deposit	1	1	\	Allocated to patch of stone rubble/blocks identified over area of bedrock (016).	Under (017), over (016)
10	Deposit	\	\	\	Natural clay sand natural seen overlaying bedrock (016).	Under (017), over (016)
11	Deposit	\	\	\	Natural clay identified across base of Trench 2.	Cut by [015]
12	Deposit	\	\	\	Natural clay identified against southern baulk section, forming cut [014].	Cut by [014]
13	Deposit	0.8	0.7	\	Backfill of WW1 entrenchment [014]. Probably formed from redeposited natural.	Under (008), over [014]
14	Cut	3	0.8	\	Cut of supposed WW1 entrenchment. Clearly a substantial excavation.	Under (013), cuts (012)
15	Cut	1	1	0.2	Cut of very shallow, supposed WW1 entrenchment.	Under (003), cuts (011)
16	Deposit	\	\	\	Allocated to small patch of bedrock exposed at south-east end of Trench 3.	Under (009) & (010)
17	Deposit	1	0.9	0.05	Allocated to two patches of buried turf identified at either end of Trench 3, separated by cut [019]. *Dimensions given represent deposit at each end*	Cut by [019], over (009) & (010)
18	Deposit	1	0.9	0.05-0.1	Allocated to two patches of redeposited subsoil identified at either end of Trench 3, separated by entrenchment [019]. Clearly created as direct result of digging [019].	Under (005), over [019]
19	Cut	1	1.5	0.2	Cut of very shallow, supposed WW1 entrenchment.	Under (006) & (018), cuts [017]

Table 2: Drawings

<i>Drawing No.</i>	<i>Sheet No.</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Scale</i>
001	1	(001), (002)	Pre-ex Trench 2	1:20
002	1	(006)	Pre-ex Trench 3	1:20
003	2	(007), (008)	Pre-ex Trench 1	1:20
004	3	(009), (010), (016)	Mid-ex Trench 3	1:20
005	4	(001)-(003), (011), [015]	Post-ex Plan Trench 2	1:20
006	4	(011)	NW-Facing Section Trench 2	1:20
007	4	(001)-(003), (011), [015]	SE-Facing Section Trench 2	1:20
008	5	(008), (012), [014]	Mid-ex Trench 1 Sondage	1:20
009	3	(005), (006), (009), (010), (016)-(018), [019]	S-Facing Section Trench 3	1:10
010	6	(003), (011), (015)	Mid-ex Trench 2	1:20

Table 3: Digital Photographs

<i>Photo No.</i>	<i>From (Compass)</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>From (Compass)</i>
001		Pre-ex of Trench	E
002		Pre-ex of Trench	SE
003		Pre-ex of Trench	NW
004		Pre-ex of Trench	NW
005		Pre-ex of Trench	W
006		Pre-ex of Trench	NE
007		Pre-ex of Trench	SE
008		Pre-ex of Trench	SW
009		Pre-ex of Trench	NW
010		Pre-ex of Trench	SW
011	001	Pre-ex of Trench	NE
012	001	Pre-ex of Trench	NW
013	001	Pre-ex of Trench	SW
014	001	Pre-ex of Trench	SE
015		Pre-ex of Trench	E
016		Pre-ex of Trench	E
017		Pre-ex of Trench	SE
018		Pre-ex of Trench	W
019		Pre-ex of Trench	NW
020	002	Pre-ex of Trench	E
021	002	Pre-ex of Trench	E
022	002	Pre-ex of Trench	SW
023	002	Pre-ex of Trench	W
024	002	Pre-ex of Trench	W
025	002	Pre-ex of Trench (Close up)	N
026	002	Pre-ex of Trench (Close up)	S
027	001/002	Pre-ex	NW
028	001/002	Pre-ex	NW
029	001/002	Pre-ex	NW

030	001/002	Pre-ex	SE
031	001/002	Pre-ex	SE
032	002	Pre-ex of Stone and Trench	E
033	002	Pre-ex of Stone and Trench	W
034		Working Shot	NW
035		Working Shot	NE
036		Working Shot	E
037		Working Shot	NE
038		Working Shot	SE
039		Working Shot	E
040		Working Shot	E
041		Post-ex (004)	W
042		Post-ex (004)	E
043		Post-ex (005)	NW
044		Post-ex (005)	SE
045		Working Shot	NW
046		Working Shot	NW
047		Post-ex (001)	E
048		Post-ex (001)	W
049		Working Shot	SW
050		Working Shot	NE
051		Working Shot; Survey	N
052		Working Shot; Survey	N
053		Working Shot; Survey	S
054		Working Shot; Survey	S
055		Post-ex	W
056		Post-ex	E
057		Post-ex with Sondage	W
058		Post-ex with Sondage	E
059		Post-ex	SE
060		Post-ex	NW
061		SW-Facing Section Tr3	SW
062		NE-Facing Section Tr3	NE
063	008	Pre-ex (008)	W
064	008	Pre-ex (008)	E
065	008	Pre-ex (008)	W
066	008	Pre-ex (008)	E
067	008	Pre-ex Plan (008) A	S
068	008	Pre-ex Plan (008) B	S
069	008	Pre-ex Plan (008) C	S
070		SW-Facing Section Tr2	S
071		SW-Facing Section Tr2 A	S
072		SW-Facing Section Tr2 B	S
073		Working Shot	NW
074		NE-Facing Section Tr2	N
075		NE-Facing Section Tr2 A	N
076		NE-Facing Section Tr2 B	N
077	009	Post-ex of Stone Rubble	SE
078	009	Post-ex of Stone Rubble	SW
079	008	Post-ex of (008)	W
080	008	Post-ex of (008)	E
081	008	Post-ex of (008) Plan A	S
082	008	Post-ex of (008) Plan A	S
083	008	Post-ex of (008) Plan B	S

084	008	Post-ex Plan (008)	N
085	008	Post-ex Plan (008)	NW
086		S-Facing Section	S
087		S-Facing Section	S

## APPENDIX 2: DES

<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY:</b>	Stirling City Council
<b>PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:</b>	Plean World War 1 Practice Entrenchments
<b>PROJECT CODE:</b>	4435161
<b>PARISH:</b>	St Ninians
<b>NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	Peta Glew
<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION:</b>	Northlight Heritage
<b>TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:</b>	Survey and Excavation
<b>NMRS NO(S):</b>	
<b>SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):</b>	World War One Practice Entrenchments
<b>SIGNIFICANT FINDS:</b>	
<b>NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)</b>	NS 8255/8660
<b>START DATE (this season)</b>	05/09/14
<b>END DATE (this season)</b>	29/09/14
<b>PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)</b>	
<b>MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION:</b> (May include information from other fields)	<p>An archaeological evaluation and topographic survey were carried out with local community volunteers to investigate the World War I practice entrenchments in Plean Country Park, Stirling. A walkover survey was followed by excavation and topographic survey.</p> <p>The survey recorded networks of trenches extending over an area c 100m north/south by 60m east/west , with some portions well-defined and others much more amorphous. Three exploratory trenches revealed very shallow profiles in the western part of the network (Trenches 2 and 3) and a deep practice trench in the eastern part (Trench 1). The later use of the area for World War II practice trenches and quarrying appears to have led to some disturbance of the World War I trenches and the formation of a complex set of extant earthworks. No artefactual evidence of World War I activity was found.</p>
<b>PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:</b>	
<b>CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:</b>	
<b>SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:</b>	Stirling City Council/HLF
<b>ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	Northlight Heritage, Studio 406, South Block, 64 Osbourne Street, Glasgow, G1 5QH
<b>EMAIL ADDRESS:</b>	<a href="mailto:northlight@yorkat.co.uk">northlight@yorkat.co.uk</a>
<b>ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)</b>	NMRS intended