

LAND AT SEAWAYS FARM, PORTHLOO, ST MARY'S, ISLES OF SCILLY

NGR SV 9108 1125

Results of archaeological monitoring and recording

Council for the Isles of Scilly planning ref. P/16/025/FUL

Prepared by:
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With contributions from:
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On behalf of:
Mr May

Report No: ACD1618/2/0

Date: September 2017



archaeology

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Client	Mr May
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Report Author	Abigail Brown
Contributions	Paul Rainbird and Henrietta Quinnell
Checked by	Paul Rainbird and Simon Hughes
Approved by	Simon Hughes

Acknowledgements

The archaeological work was commissioned by Mr May. The fieldwork was carried out by Abigail Brown with the illustrations for this report prepared by Leon Cauchois. Thanks to Sean Taylor, Cornwall Council Development Management Archaeological Advice Officer, who provided advice during the course of the work.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of AC archaeology and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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Summary

Archaeological monitoring and recording on land at Seaways Farms, Porthloo, St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly (NGR SV 9108 1125) was undertaken by AC archaeology during May and June 2017. The work comprised the monitoring of groundworks associated with the construction of a new agricultural building.

A total of 18 archaeological features comprising small pits and a possible posthole were exposed during the monitoring. Finds were recovered from five the pits which provided a broad date range extending from between the Mesolithic and Late Iron Age or Romano-British periods. These consisted of worked lithics, including a flake fragment of Portland chert; an unusual find from the Isles of Scilly. Other finds comprised Bronze Age and Late Iron Age or Romano-British pottery sherds.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report sets out the results of archaeological monitoring and recording associated with the construction of a new agricultural building on land at Seaways Farm, Porthloo, St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly (NGR SV 9108 1125). The work was required as condition 3 of planning permission (reference: P/16/025/FUL) granted by the Council for the Isles of Scilly, following consultation with the Cornwall Council Development Management Archaeological Advice Officer.
- 1.2 The archaeological work was commissioned by Mr May and was carried out by AC archaeology between April and June 2017.
- 1.3 The site is situated to the southwest of Seaways Farm and the hamlet of Porthloo. It comprises part of a rectangular agricultural plot bounded by hedgebanks and with a farm track extending along its southwest boundary. The site lies on ground that slopes gradually to the southwest at around 11m aOD (above Ordnance Datum), with the underlying solid geology comprising granite of the Scilly Intrusion (www.bgs.ac.uk).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 There were no previously recorded heritage assets within the development area. However, the site lies in an area containing numerous prehistoric remains and find spots. A number of these are positioned on Carn Morval Down and Halangy, some 700m to the north of the site. Here, a number of platform and chambered cairns, prehistoric field systems and settlement sites are located, with these dating from the Neolithic to Bronze Age periods. In closer proximity to the site, a series of find spots have been recorded including the recovery of a socketed stone and prehistoric pottery from Newford Island to the west; eight Iron Age coins from Porthloo Bay; and, a collection of finds including a whetstone, a worked pebble and pottery from Porthloo (Cornwall Council Historic Environment Record reference MC030879, MC0030880, MC031166, MC0031165).
- 2.2 The area also contains a number of remains related to the Civil War. These include a battery and associated platform on Carn Morval Down (National Heritage List for England ref. 1015665) and a breastwork and battery on the nearby Newford Island (1015667).
- 2.3 The site lies in an area of anciently enclosed land adapted into 19th century strip fields associated with the cultivation of bulb flowers. An intact row of these are located to the

southwest of the site, while in the surrounding area and including the site, many have subsequently been amalgamated into larger plots (MC041963).

3. AIM

- 3.1** The aim of the archaeological monitoring and recording was to preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits exposed during the groundworks associated with the scheme.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** The monitoring and recording was carried out in accordance with a project design prepared by AC archaeology (Hughes 2017) and with reference to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014). It comprised the bulk reduction of the footprint of the new agricultural building, an area that measured 27m by 18m, using a machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Stripping of soils was carried out under the control and direction of the site archaeologist and ceased at the level at which archaeological deposits or natural subsoil was exposed.

- 4.2** All features and deposits revealed were recorded using the standard AC archaeology *pro forma* recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2* (revised August 2012). Detailed sections and plans were produced at a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Introduction (Detailed plan Fig. 2, Plate 1)

The natural subsoil (context 102), which comprised a mid brownish-yellow clayey-sand, was exposed at a depth of around 0.5m below existing levels. It was overlain by a 0.2m thick mid brown sandy-loam subsoil (101) and a dark greyish-brown sandy-loam topsoil (100). A total of 18 features were exposed, which consisted of 17 pits (F103, F105, F109, F111, F113, F115, F117, F119, F119, F121, F123, F125, F127, F129, F131, F133, F135 and F137) and a probable posthole (F107). Pits F113 and F115, F119 and F121, and F129 and F131 were intercutting.

5.2 Pit F103 (Section Fig. 3a; Plate 2)

Pit F103 was located on the north side of the area investigated. It was sub-oval in plan and measured 0.82m long, 0.75m wide and 0.12m deep. The pit had gradually-sloping sides and a concave base. It contained a mid brownish-grey sandy silt fill (104). One sherd of Bronze Age pottery was recovered.

5.3 Pit F105 (Section Fig. 3b)

Pit F105 was oval in plan and measured 0.46m long, 0.25m wide and 0.16m deep. It had a vertical northeast side and a gradually-sloping southwest side. The pit contained a dark greyish brown sandy silt clay fill (106). No finds were recovered.

5.4 Probable posthole F107 (Section Fig. 3c; Plate 3)

Probable posthole F107 was located close to the north extent of the area investigated. It was sub-circular in plan and measured 0.34m across and 0.2m deep, with steep to

vertical sides and a flattish base. The possible posthole contained a light brownish-grey sandy-silt loam (108). No finds were recovered.

5.5 Possible pit F109 (Section Fig. 3d; Plate 4)

Possible pit F109 as located on the east side of the site and was sub-rectangular in plan. It measured 1.37m long, 0.55m wide and 0.49m deep. The possible pit had an irregular profile comprising gradual, irregular sides with an undercutting northeast edge and an irregular base; suggesting it was perhaps of natural origin. The pit contained a mid brownish-grey clayey-loam fill (110). One sherd of late Iron Age to Romano-British pottery was recovered.

5.6 Pit F111 (Section Fig. 3e)

This pit was circular in plan and measured 1.22m long, 1.2m wide and 0.29m deep, with steeply-sloping sides and a flat base. It contained a dark greyish-brown sandy-silt loam with common granite rubble piece inclusions of up to 0.3m long. No finds were recovered.

5.7 Pits F113 and F115 (Section Fig. 3f)

Intercutting sub-circular pits F113 and F115 were located towards the middle of the site. Pit F113 was the earlier of the two. They measured 1.20m and 1m long respectively and both had shallow concave profiles of around 0.1m deep. The pits were filled with dark brown sandy-silt loam fills (114 and 116 respectively). No finds were recovered.

5.7 Pit F117 (Section Fig. 3g)

Pit F117 was located to the west of pits F113 and F115. It was sub-circular in plan measuring 1.3m across and 0.18m deep, with steeply-sloping side that were probably truncated away to the west and a flat base. The pit contained a dark brown sandy-silt loam fill (118). No finds were recovered.

5.8 Pits F119 and F121 (Section Fig. 3h; Plate 5)

Intercutting pits F119 and F121 were adjacent to intercutting pits F113 and F115. Round pit F121, which was the earlier of the two features, measured 1.05m across and 0.16m deep with gradually-sloping sides and a concave base. It contained a dark greyish-brown sandy-silt loam fill (122) that was undated.

Pit F119 was oval in plan. It measured 1.9m long, 1.05m wide and 0.34m deep with gradually-sloping sides that broke to a steeply-sloping round portion to the south. The pit contained a dark greyish-brown sandy-silt loam basal fill (139), which was overlain by a dark brownish-grey sandy-silt loam (120). One piece of worked flint was recovered from fill 120.

5.9 Pit F123 (Section Fig. 4a; Plate 6)

Pit F123 was located towards the southeast extent of the area investigated. It was rectangular in plan, measuring 1.04m long, 0.65m wide and 0.1m deep with steeply-sloping sides that were truncated to the south, and a flat base. It contained a mid brownish-grey sandy-silt loam fill (124), from which a sherd of late Iron Age to Romano-British pottery was recovered.

5.10 Pit F125 (Section Fig. 4b)

Pit F125, which was circular in plan, measured 0.59m in across and 0.12m deep with moderately-steep sloping sides and a concave base. It contained a dark brown sandy-loam fill (126). No finds were recovered.

5.11 Pit F127 (Section Fig. 4c)

This pit was sub-rectangular in plan and measured 1.06m long, 0.5m wide and 0.11m deep. It had steeply-sloping sides and a flattish base and contained a light greyish-brown sandy-silt loam fill (128). No finds were recovered.

5.13 Pits F129 and F131 (Section Fig. 4d; Plate 7)

These intercutting pits were located towards the south side of the site. Pit F131, which was the earlier of the two features, measured 1.36m long, 1.30m wide and 0.27m with steep to vertical sides and a flat base. It contained a dark greyish-brown sandy-silt loam fill (132), which was undated.

Pit F129 was sub-circular in plan and measured 1.25m long, 0.92m wide and 0.18m deep. It had steeply-sloping sides and an irregular base. The pit contained a dark greyish-brown sandy-silt loam fill (130). No finds were recovered.

5.14 Pit F133 (Section Fig. 4e; Plate 8)

Round pit F133 measured 0.85m in diameter and 0.09m deep with moderately-steep sloping sides and an irregular flattish base. It contained a dark brown sandy-silt loam fill (134). No finds were recovered.

5.15 Pit F135 (Section Fig. 4e; Plate 8)

This pit was sub-rectangular in plan and measured 2.1m long, 1.06m wide and 0.33m deep. It had a gradually-sloping concave profile and contained a dark brown sandy-silt loam fill (136), from which contained one piece of prehistoric worked flint was recovered.

5.16 Pit F137 (Section Fig. 4f)

Pit F137 was oval in plan and measured 0.8m, 0.3m wide and 0.07m deep. It had gradually-sloping sides and an irregular base. The pit contained a dark brown sandy-silt fill (138) that was undated.

6. THE FINDS by *Henrietta Quinnell*

6.1 Introduction

All finds recovered on site during the monitoring and recording have been retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. They have been quantified according to material type within each context and the assemblage examined to extract information regarding the range, nature and date of artefacts represented. The collection of finds is summarised in Table 1 below and consisted of worked lithics, prehistoric and Roman pottery.

6.2 Worked flint

Two pieces of worked flint were recovered from contexts 120 and 136. The fragment from context 136 is of Portland chert, broken either from a core or core trimming flake. This material from Dorset is in occasional use across South West Britain from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age (Stewart 2012, 127-8). It is an unusual, if not unique, find, from the Islands. The other piece of flint is a core trimming flake, it has a nodular cortex: its form is not dateable, but the use of nodular flint, originating in East Devon, suggests a date before the Bronze Age.

Table 1: Summary of finds by context (weights in grams)

Context	Context description	Worked flint		Prehistoric pottery		Roman pottery	
		No.	Wt	No.	Wt	No.	Wt
104	Fill of pit F103			1	6		
110	Fill of pit F109					1	12
120	Fill of pit F119	1	3				
124	Fill of pit F123					1	4
136	Fill of pit F135	1	4				
Total		2	7	1	6	2	16

6.3 Prehistoric pottery

A single sherd of prehistoric pottery was recovered from context 104. This is a thick, probably local, granitic fabric, with an oxidised red exterior. It is of Bronze Age date range somewhere between 2000 and 800 BC (Quinnell in Johns 2012, 87, 98, 115). It cannot be dated more closely because of the lack of formal or decorative features.

6.4 Roman pottery

Two sherds of late Iron Age or Roman pottery were recovered, these are one sherd from context 124 and one from context 110. These are both of gabbroic fabric. This does not appear in the islands until the end of the Iron Age and then is in frequent use during the Roman period.

7. DISCUSSION by Paul Rainbird

7.1 The watching brief at Seaways Farm has identified 17 small pits and one posthole. The pits contained a small number of finds that provide a very broad date for the possible use of the site spanning from the Mesolithic through to the Romano-British period. Until recently the general consensus has been that, although there is evidence for use of the archipelago in the Mesolithic and Neolithic, the isles were not permanently occupied until the Bronze Age (Johns 2012; Charman *et al.* 2016). Excavations at Old Quay, St Martin's has added significantly to the evidence for Mesolithic and Neolithic use of the islands as here a settlement site of Neolithic and Bronze Age date comprising postholes, pits and midden, indicating more than brief visitation in the Neolithic, has also produced 80 worked flint microliths of Late Mesolithic type (Anderson-Whymark, Garrow and Sturt 2015; Garrow and Sturt 2017). Only five worked flints of Mesolithic type have been found on St Mary's (Anderson-Whymark, Garrow and Sturt 2015, table 1) and none of these are from features of Mesolithic date. In this regard, the current pits are most probably of a later date. Neolithic pits are known from Scilly, the group at Old Quay and two small pits at East Porth, Samson, and have been characterised as falling into the phenomenon of Neolithic pit digging that is well-known (but poorly understood) on the mainland, where pottery and other artefacts are deliberately deposited in pits or tree throws (e.g., Anderson-Whymark and Thomas 2012). The known Bronze Age and later prehistoric pits on the Isles of Scilly appear to be more obviously functional and are clay-lined with the probable use for holding water; on St Mary's several were uncovered at Bar Point and others at Pendrathen and Halangy Porth (Johns 2012, 83).

7.2 Finds were recovered from five of the pits. The Portland chert lithic from pit F135 is unusual, possibly a unique find of this material from the Isles of Scilly, and could date from as early as the Mesolithic through to the Bronze Age. All of the finds, except the locally made Bronze Age pottery from pit F103, appear to have been imported from the

mainland with the late Iron Age/Romano-British pottery from pits F109 and F123 manufactured from gabbroic clay sourced in the Lizard Peninsula. The piece of worked flint from pit F119 is of material typically sourced from East Devon. The site is currently located in a low lying position approximately 200 m from the beach, but modelling of sea level rise indicates that it would have been located at a significantly greater distance from the open sea in prehistory (Charman *et al.* 2016).

- 7.3** The distribution and morphology of the pits containing dated finds may indicate some small change in the focus of activity on the site over time. The Bronze Age pottery and posthole (F107), although not necessarily contemporary, are located at the north end of the trench. The two pieces of worked flint are both derived from larger pits in the central and west of the site. The two sherds of late Iron Age / Romano-British pottery are derived from two small sub-rectangular pits on the east side of the site. Other than the solitary posthole, the function of the pits could not be determined and although some of them may have been for the purpose of deliberate deposition the later pits are more probably of an undefined domestic purpose. However, pit F109 which contained a sherd of later Iron Age / Romano-British has a rather odd profile, being undercut on the northeast side and this may be of natural origin, perhaps from animal burrowing or plant root action.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1** The monitoring and recording at Seaways Farm, Porthloo, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly has recorded a collection of pits which, from the finds recovered, provide a broad date of between the Mesolithic through to the Romano-British periods. It therefore appears that site had been a repeatedly-used location for activity over much of this period. The function of the pits is unknown. A solitary posthole was undated but may indicate that a structure was present on the site.

9. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 9.1** The finds, paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ under the unique project code of **ACD1618**. It will be held until the need for any further archaeological work on the site is established and ultimately will be offered to the Isles of Scilly Museum under accession number **RN07989**.
- 9.2** An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier **296545**, which includes a digital copy of this report.

10. REFERENCES

Anderson-Whymark, H., and Thomas, J., 2012, *Regional Perspectives on Neolithic Pit Deposition*. Oxbow Books.

Anderson-Whymark, H., Garrow, D. and Sturt F., 2015, Microliths and maritime mobility: a continental European-style Late Mesolithic flint assemblage from the Isles of Scilly, *Antiquity* **89**, 954-971.

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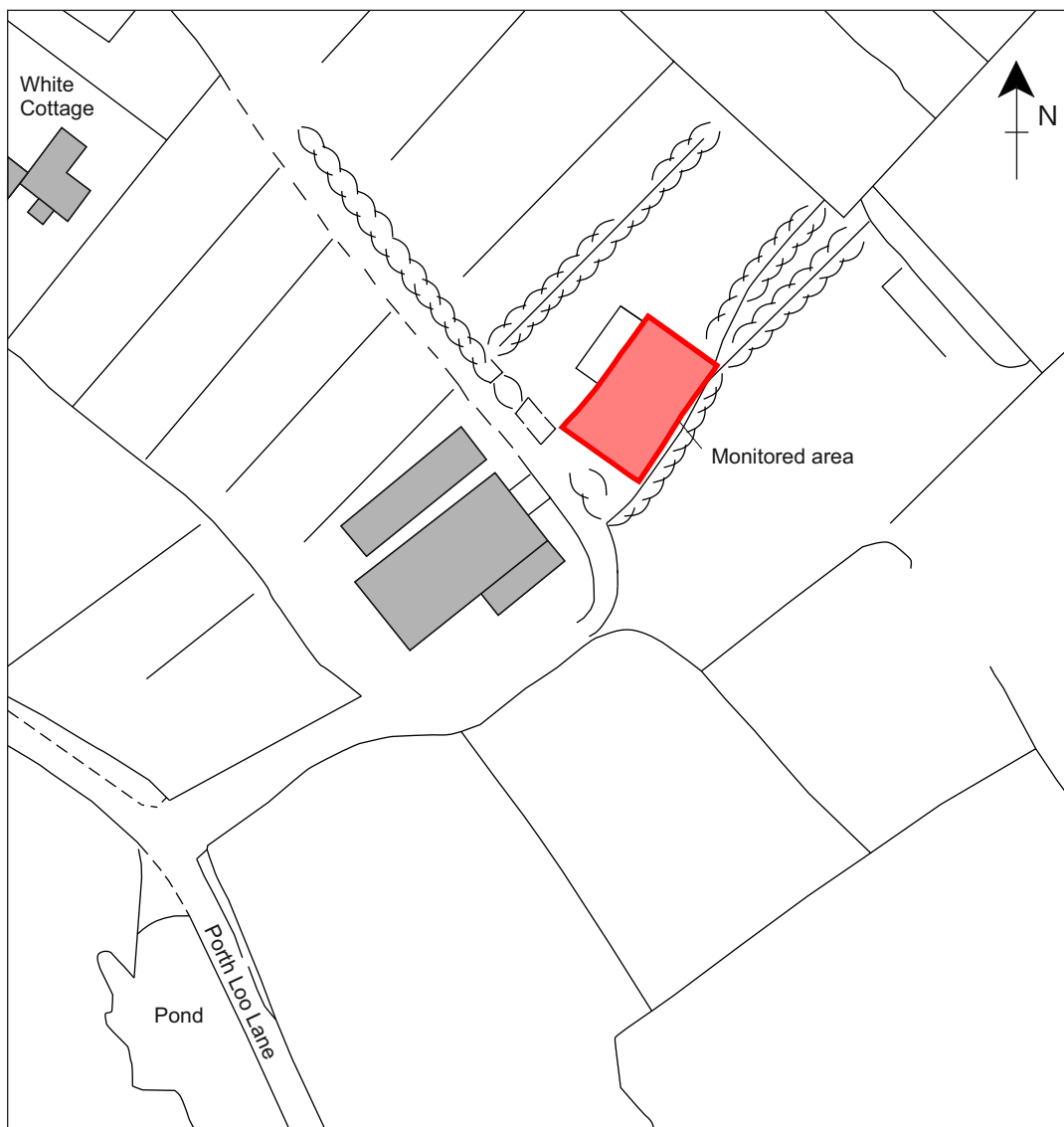
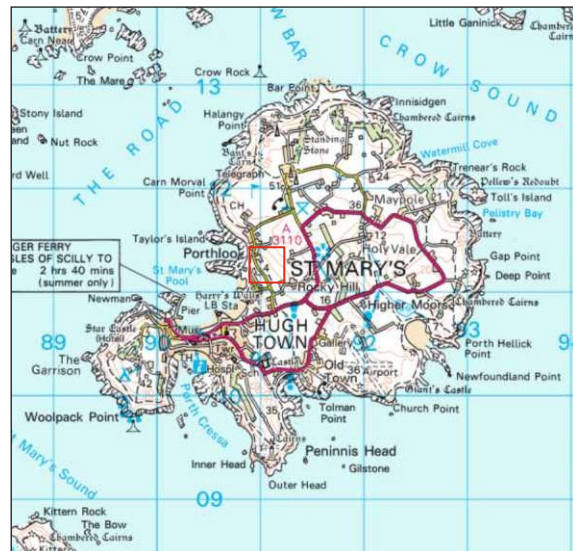
Charman, D.J., Johns, C., Camidge, K., Marshall, P., Mills, S., Mulville, J., Roberts, H.M. and Stevens, T., 2016, *The Lyonesse Project: A study of the historic coastal and marine environment of the Isles of Scilly*. Cornwall Archaeological Unit, Cornwall Council.

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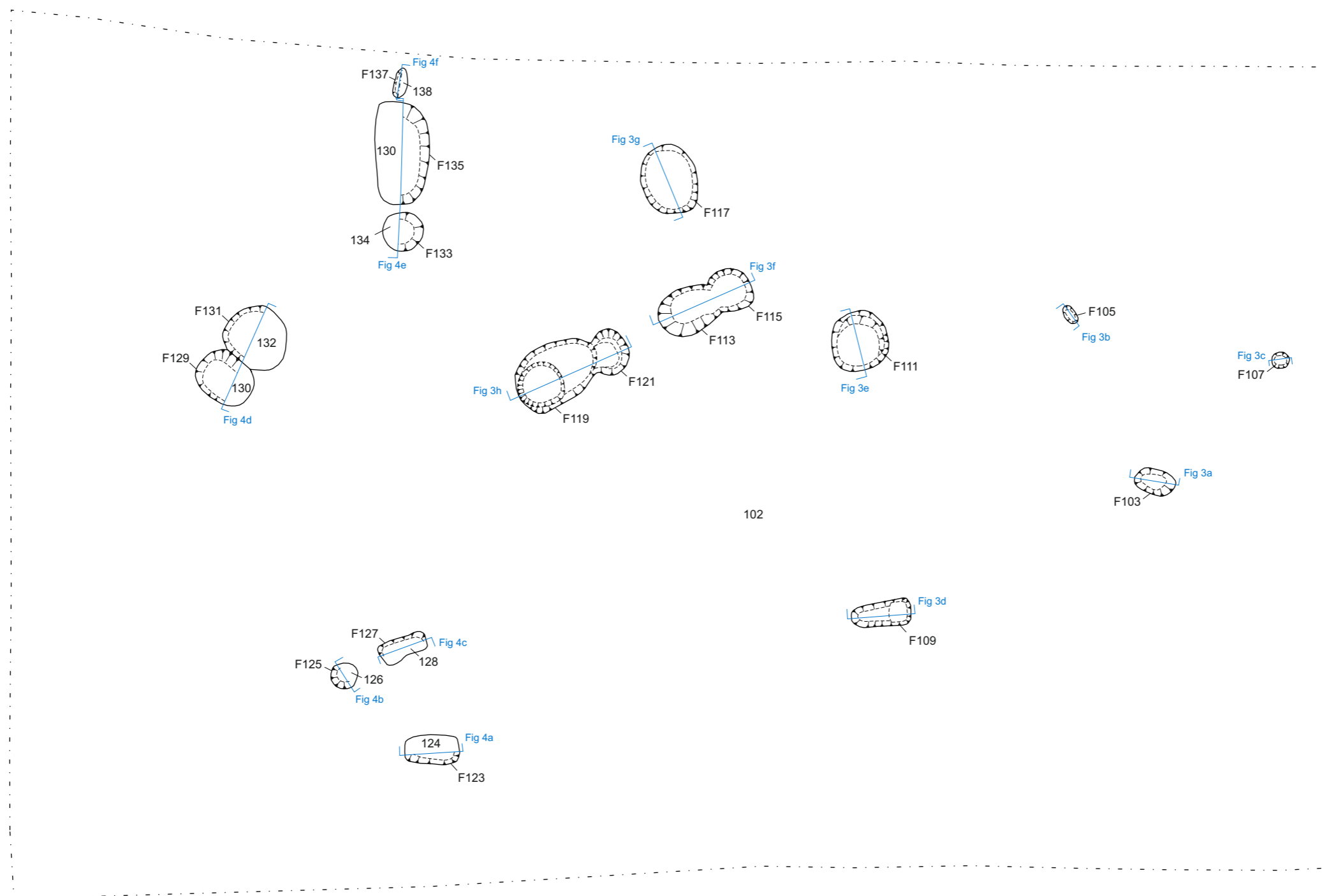


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Land at Seaways Farm, Porthloo, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, Cornwall

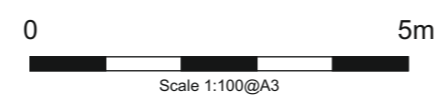
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Fig. 1: Site location

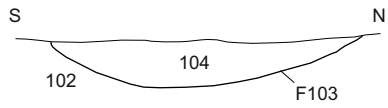


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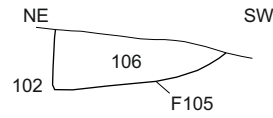
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Fig. 2: Plan of monitored area



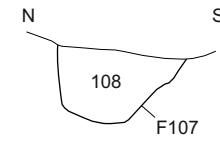
a) Section of pit F103



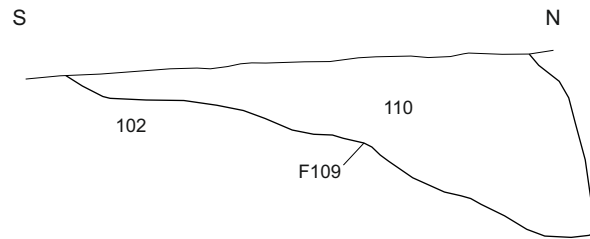
b) Section of pit F105



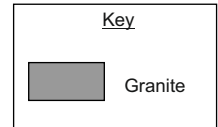
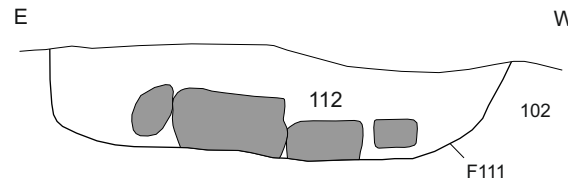
c) Section of posthole F107



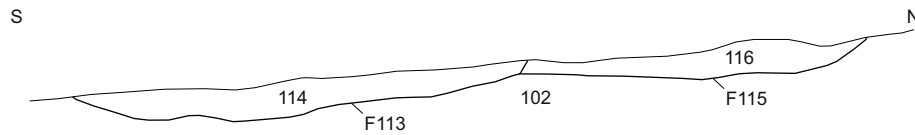
d) Section of pit F109



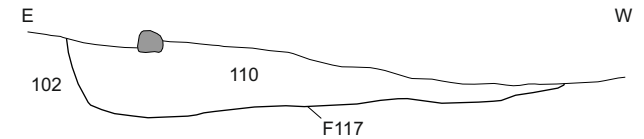
e) Section of pit F111



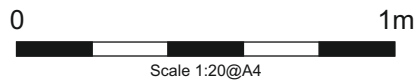
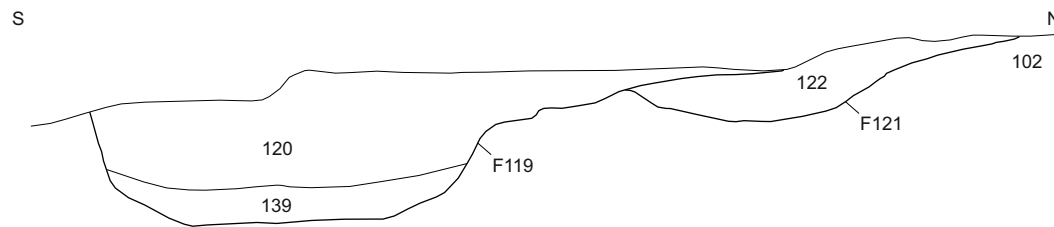
f) Section of pits F113 and F115



g) Section of pit F117



h) Section of pit F119 and F121



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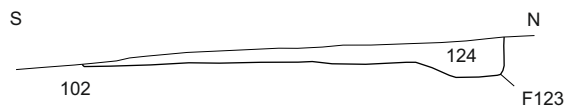
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Fig. 3: Sections

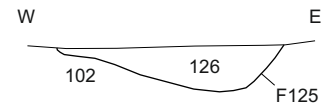


AC archaeology

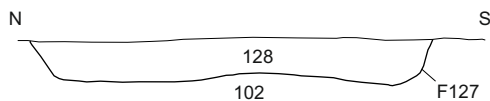
a) Section of pit F123



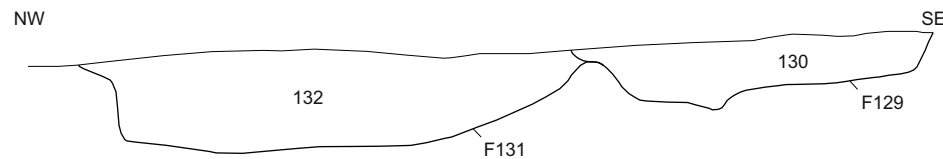
b) Section of pit F125



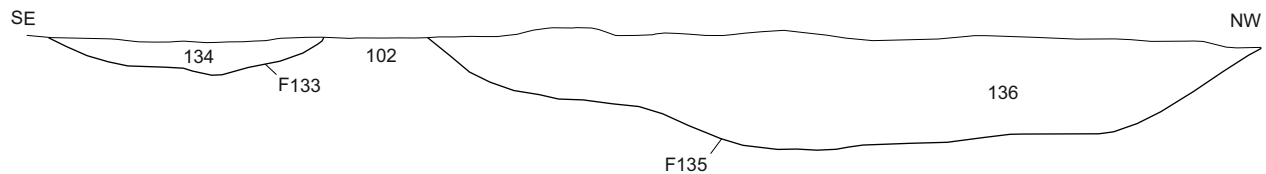
c) Section of pit F127



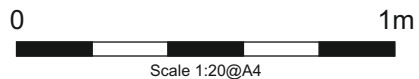
d) Section of pit F129 and F131



e) Section of pit F133 and F135



f) Section of pit F137



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St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, Cornwall

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Fig. 4: Sections





Plate 1: General view of site, work in progress, looking southwest



Plate 2: Pit F103, view to west (0.4m scale)



Plate 3: Posthole F107, view to east (0.3m scale)



Plate 4: Pit F109, view to west
(0.4m scale)



Plate 5: Pits F119 and F121, view to west
(0.4m scale)



Plate 6: Pit F123, view to west
(0.4m scale)



Plate 7: Pits F129 and F131, view to northeast (0.4m scale)



Plate 8: Pits F133 and F135, view to south (0.4m scale)

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