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The Lands of Ancient Lothian

Interpreting the Archaeology of the A1

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Chapter 2

A burning desire to build: Excavations at Eweford West and Pencraig Hill (3950–3380 BC)

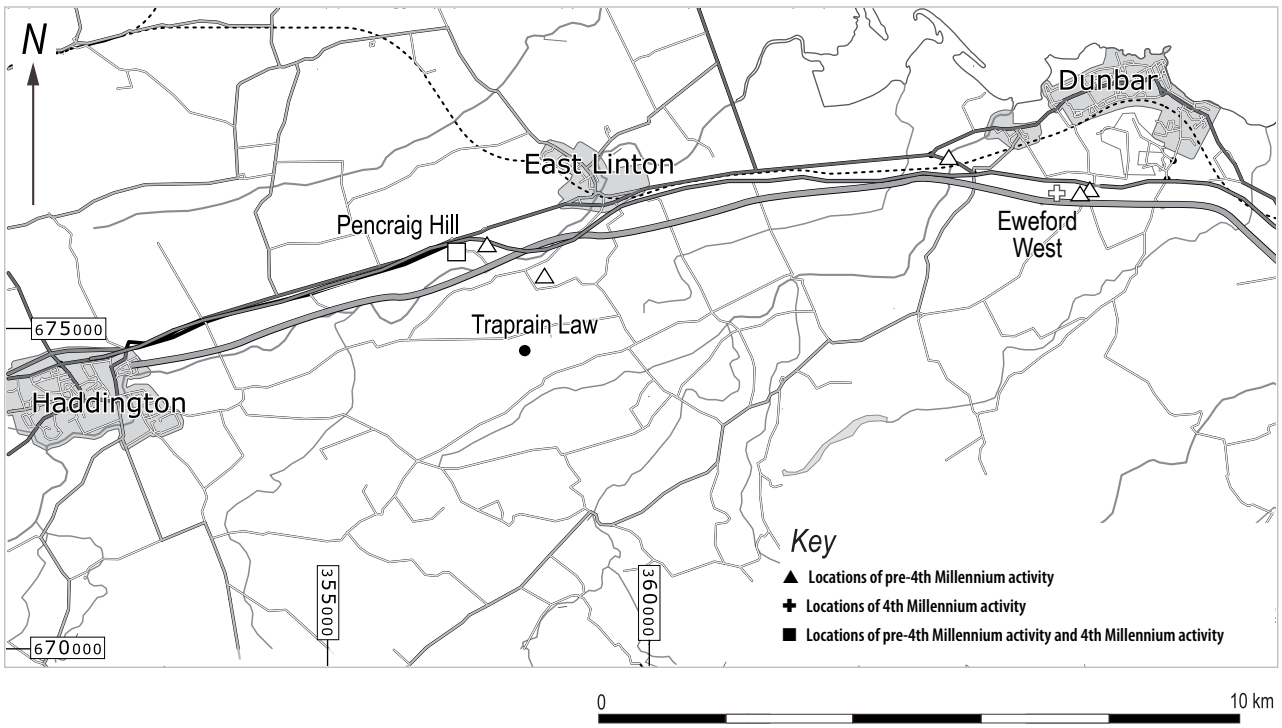
GAVIN MacGREGOR and KIRSTEEN McLELLAN

Introduction

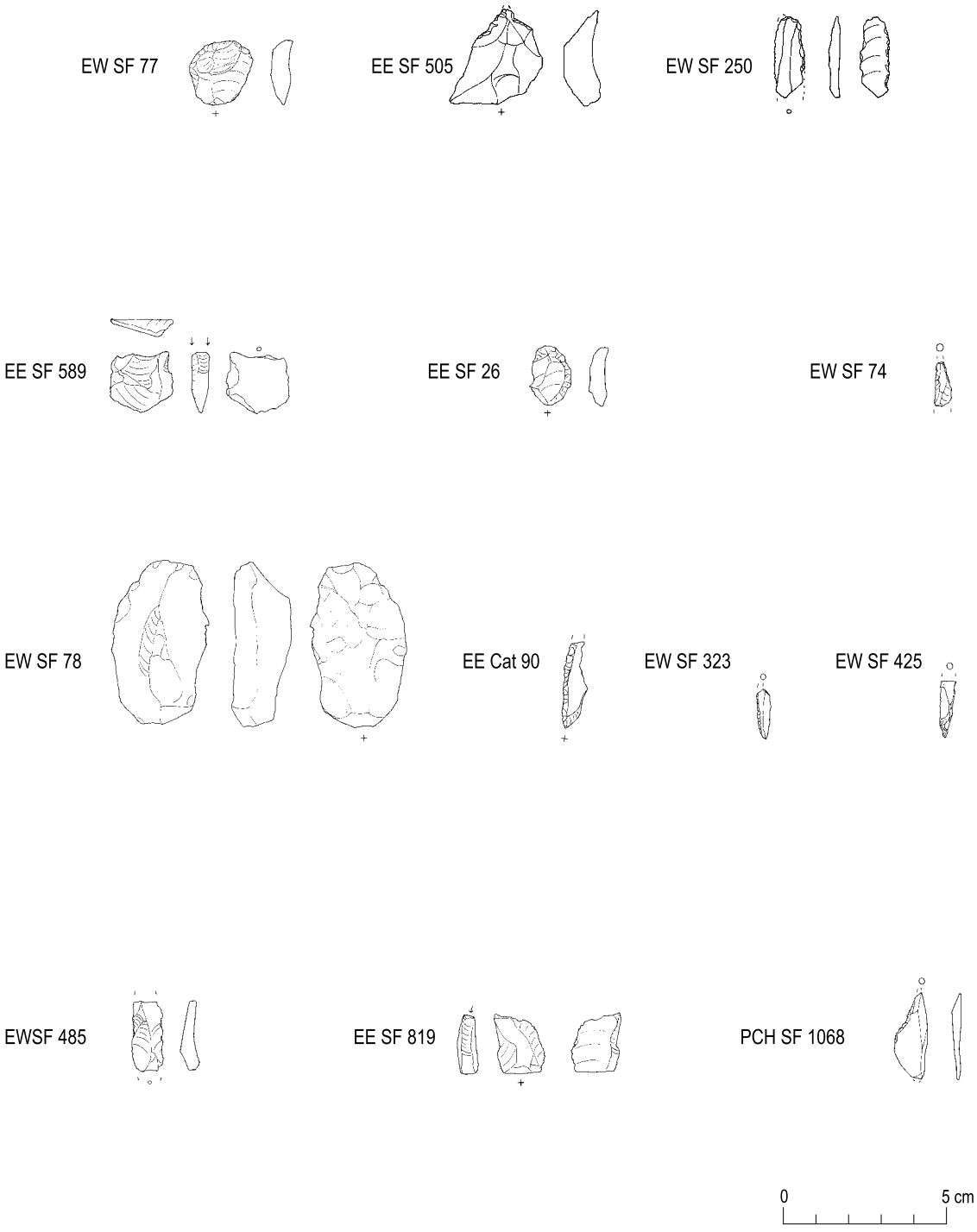
Several of the sites excavated along the A1 produced evidence for human activity before the fourth millennium BC, mostly in the form of struck stone. These earlier remains are not only important in their own right, in terms of what they tell us about the people who left them, but also because they provide the context for the emergence of monument building at two places, Eweford West and Pencraig Hill (Figure 2.1). Communities built large wooden structures at both of these sites during the fourth millennium BC. Radiocarbon dates spanning 3950 to 3380 BC have established that the activity occurred in several phases, over several hundred years; it clearly involved several different generations.

The construction and use of the structures at Eweford West and Pencraig Hill were linked to ceremonial activities – activities which are comparable to those taking place in many parts of Britain at the time (for examples, see Kinnes 1992). In part due to the substantial size of the structures, their associated ceremonial activities are typically perceived as social enterprises which involved the congregation of large groups of people, perhaps drawn together from a wider network of communities.

This chapter presents the results of excavation and specialist post-excavation analysis at both Eweford West and Pencraig Hill, and it then considers the implications of the similarities between two structures that were built at broadly the same time and only 10km, or a few hours



2.1 Map showing the locations of sites mentioned in the chapter.



2.2 Mesolithic stone tools from the excavated sites.

walk, apart. Not all contexts identified during excavation at Eweford West and Pencraig Hill are discussed here, as such high levels of descriptive detail would detract from understanding the activities at the site; these details form part of the site archive (see also MacGregor and Shearer 2002; McLellan 2003a).

In the beginning

For thousands of years, groups of people hunted, gathered and fished in the Lothians before they began to adopt farming about 4000 BC. These activities dating before 400 BC, and thus to the Mesolithic period, are most frequently evidenced today in pieces of struck flint and chert: the waste from tool production and pieces broken through use. The excavation teams on the A1 recovered such remains from several of the sites, with distinctive evidence for later Mesolithic activity at Pencraig Hill, Phantassie, Eweford East, Eweford West and Eweford Cottages (see Figure 2.1). In most cases, it is impossible to distinguish whether or not the artefacts were the result of a single phase or several phases of activity at each site.

Some of the evidence is slight. For example, a single scalene triangle microlith at Pencraig Hill (Figure 2.2: SF 1068; Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive) may have resulted from the simple loss of an element from a composite tool. The microlith may have become detached when it was fired, as part of an arrowhead, at prey.

At Phantassie, a background scatter of struck stone incorporated into later deposits and features indicates other phases of activity preceding the Iron Age farm there. Analysis of the assemblage has shown that its Mesolithic component comprises evidence for blade technology, including several diagnostic forms such as four flint microliths, backed bladelets and scalene triangles (for example, SFs 713 and 715; Figure 2.2). The presence of blades, flakes, scrapers and piercers in the assemblage, some of which may be Mesolithic, also suggests that people were butchering and skinning animals and working hides at the site (Pannett, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

Among the assemblage of struck quartz, chert and flint from the two large scoops at South Belton (see Chapter 6) there were fragments of tools that are also probably Mesolithic in date. It is possible that other components of the struck stone assemblage from this site are also contemporary with the diagnostically Mesolithic pieces. In the fills (004/005) of scoop A, there were fragments of two broken-backed bladelets, both of light-grey/white flint (SF 18 (Figure 2.2) and SF 20 (not illustrated)), and a bifacial bipolar blade/flake core (Pannett, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The presence of the core, and its association with debitage, suggests that there could have been a short episode of knapping in the vicinity. The fragmentary microliths may be the residue created in repairing a broken composite tool, or perhaps they were brought to the site embedded in an animal that had been hunted.

Mesolithic activity was also recorded at Eweford, in two discrete areas: Eweford East and Eweford West. At Eweford West, the focus of activity was a natural glacial bank running south-west to north-east. Analysis has shown that most of the lithic assemblage here comprises pieces that probably relate to the production and use of tools (Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Notably, the larger part of the assemblage is of chert, which had been collected from fluvio-glacial deposits rather than from outcrops like those that occur in the uplands to the south. Among the Mesolithic-type artefacts were five microliths, including a complete chert scalene triangle (Sample Cat. 17), a fragment of a scalene triangle (Sample Cat. 33), an edge-blunted form (SF 323), a unclassifiable fragment (SF 425) and a near-complete sub-triangular geometric type (Sample Cat. 44) (Figure 2.2). Two edge-trimmed chert flakes (Figure 2.2: SF 250, SF 485), one with evidence of wear, probably also indicate Mesolithic activity.

At Eweford East, *c.* 10m north of the pit-defined enclosure (see Chapter 3), a discrete scatter of struck stone on the subsoil extended over an area of *c.* 15m by 10m. A range of possible Mesolithic-type artefacts was also found as residual pieces in several later features or as a general scatter of unstratified topsoil or surface finds. Analysis has identified a number of Mesolithic-type artefacts (Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive), including portions of seven microliths: a near complete edge-blunted microlith (Sample Cat. 90); fragments of scalene triangles (Sample Cat. 109 and 110), an unclassifiable obliquely blunted form (SF 74, Figure 2.2), three fragments of unclassifiable narrow-blade microlith forms and a possible *lamelle a cran* (SF 820). Also probably Mesolithic are a chert side-scraper (SF 50), a flint end- and side-scraper (SF 26), a flint end scraper (SF 74), a flint burin (SF 589), a chert burin (SF 819), a piercer (SF 505) and a flint fabricator (SF 78).

Further Mesolithic activity also took place nearby at Eweford Cottages (see Chapter 6). Analysis has shown that blades dominate the assemblage in this instance (Pannett, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The assemblage may be multi-period in nature, but includes two fragments of microliths from the fill of a pit dating to the late third millennium BC (see Chapter 4).

While the evidence for pre-fourth millennium BC activity on the A1 generally takes the form of struck stone (lithics), re-deposited in secondary contexts, radiocarbon dates from residual charcoal at a number of sites may be contemporary with these episodes of activity. Included here are dates of 4230–3960 BC (SUERC-5489) from Phantassie, 5210–4840 BC (SUERC-8198) from South

Belton, 6000–5800 BC (SUERC-5339) from Eweford East and 7600–7525 BC (SUERC-7519) from Overhailes. This cumulative evidence, derived from seven different places along the A1 during excavations, evaluations and topsoil strip monitoring, shows that people were active in the region at this time.

Within this random sample of Mesolithic activity, there are two notable and distinct concentrations: one on

2.1

Tools and the stone to make them

The main raw material used to make the struck stone tools from the A1 sites is flint. Flint is a silicious mineral, formed within chalk, which is very suitable for artefact manufacture because of its hardness, its predictable fracture pattern and its ability to provide a sharp and resilient edge. Chalk, originally much more extensive, is now restricted in Britain to parts of eastern and southern England, but the flint which it contained resists erosion well and it often survives as pebbles and cobbles in river gravels, beaches and glacial tills. Scotland, which has no remaining chalk cover, does have some flint available, mostly in the form of small pebbles found in secondary deposits of this type.

These secondary flint sources were exploited during prehistory; this was certainly the case at Eweford, where most of the artefacts were made from small, rounded pebbles. In fact, in the Mesolithic period people relied almost entirely on such locally available raw materials. Although some local flint was used in later periods, during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age many flint artefacts were imported into Scotland from flint-rich areas further south. For example, virtually all the flint axeheads found in Scotland have been imported, since the locally available flint was not normally adequate in size or quality for the manufacture of such pieces. With smaller flint implements it is often more difficult to be certain of their origin, but it seems highly likely that the scrapers and serrated-edge flakes from Overhailes and the arrowheads from Eweford are all imported pieces.

The other common raw material used at Eweford is chert, a silicious mineral with similar properties to flint, but distinguishable by its more matt appearance. Chert forms in a variety of ways; it can develop organically in limestone deposits or inorganically in volcanic and other contexts. Chert is quite a common material in southern Scotland, occurring both *in situ* in seams and dykes and as pebbles in secondary deposits. The chert used at Eweford seems to have come from pebbles, and these were almost certainly found locally in East Lothian.

Prehistoric people would have collected pebbles of other workable raw materials wherever they found them, and this explains the occasional pieces of baked mudstone, agate and chalcedony at the A1 sites. Some use was also made of quartz, a raw material which is readily available but not so suitable for flaking. Definitely non-local are the single pieces of worked pitchstone found at Eweford and Pencraig Hill, since this only occurs in workable form on the island of Arran and would have had to be imported. Pitchstone is a type of volcanic glass that fractures in the same way as flint and chert, but which was perhaps appreciated more for its exotic quality, being a desirable rarity in East Lothian.

It appears that, for the most part at the A1 sites, stone tools made from non-local materials were brought in as finished implements, or at least the blanks for implements, rather than the raw material itself. We could envisage settlers from East Lothian travelling south to England or west to Arran to acquire artefacts, or their receiving artefacts that had been handed on across exchange networks that operated across Britain. The latter scenario is perhaps the more probable.

ALAN SAVILLE

the higher ground around Traprain Law and the other in the area of Eweford. No diagnostic Mesolithic material was found elsewhere during the evaluation or topsoil strip monitoring. It is possible that these concentrations of material represent specific locales that groups revisited several times before the fourth millennium BC. These locales may have been distinctive clearings in the woodland, where people sourced raw materials (see text box 2.1), made tools or used them to process animals and plants. In some cases, these locales may have been used as hunting stands, taking advantage of more extensive views from the higher ground at Pencraig Hill and Phantassie.

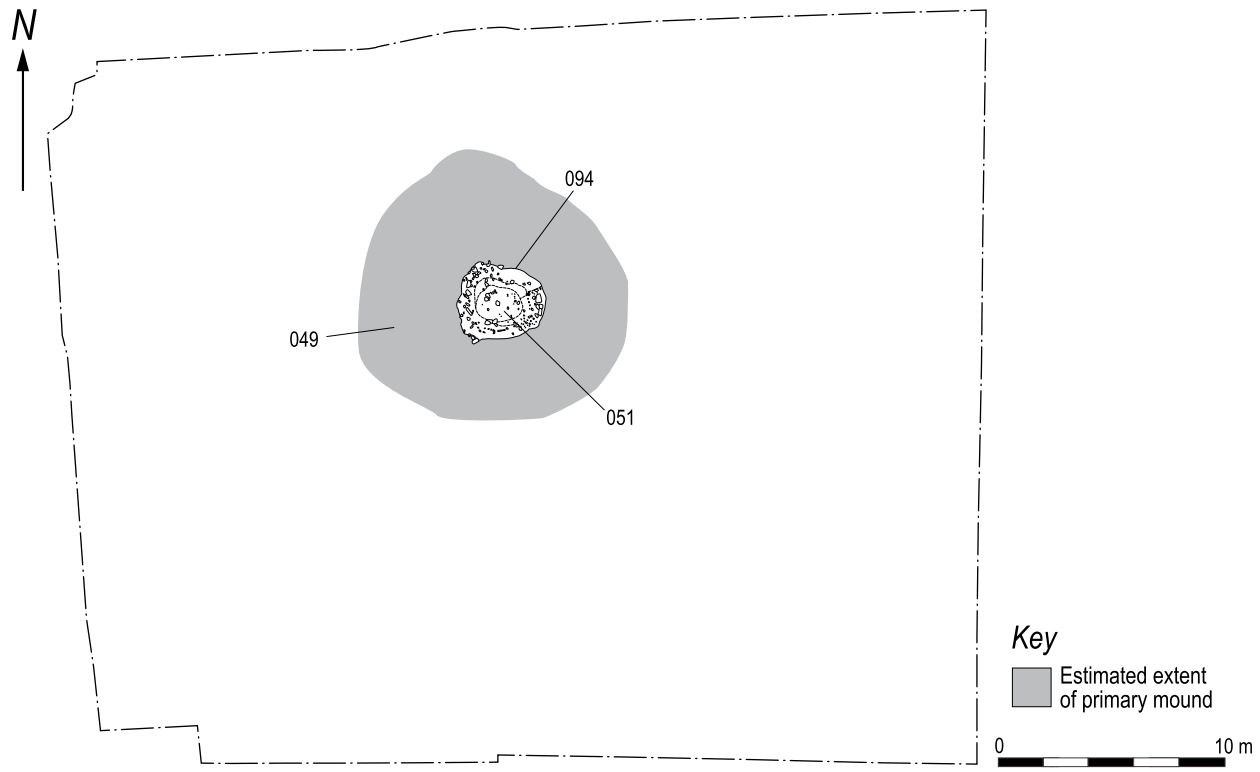
Eweford West

The primary mound

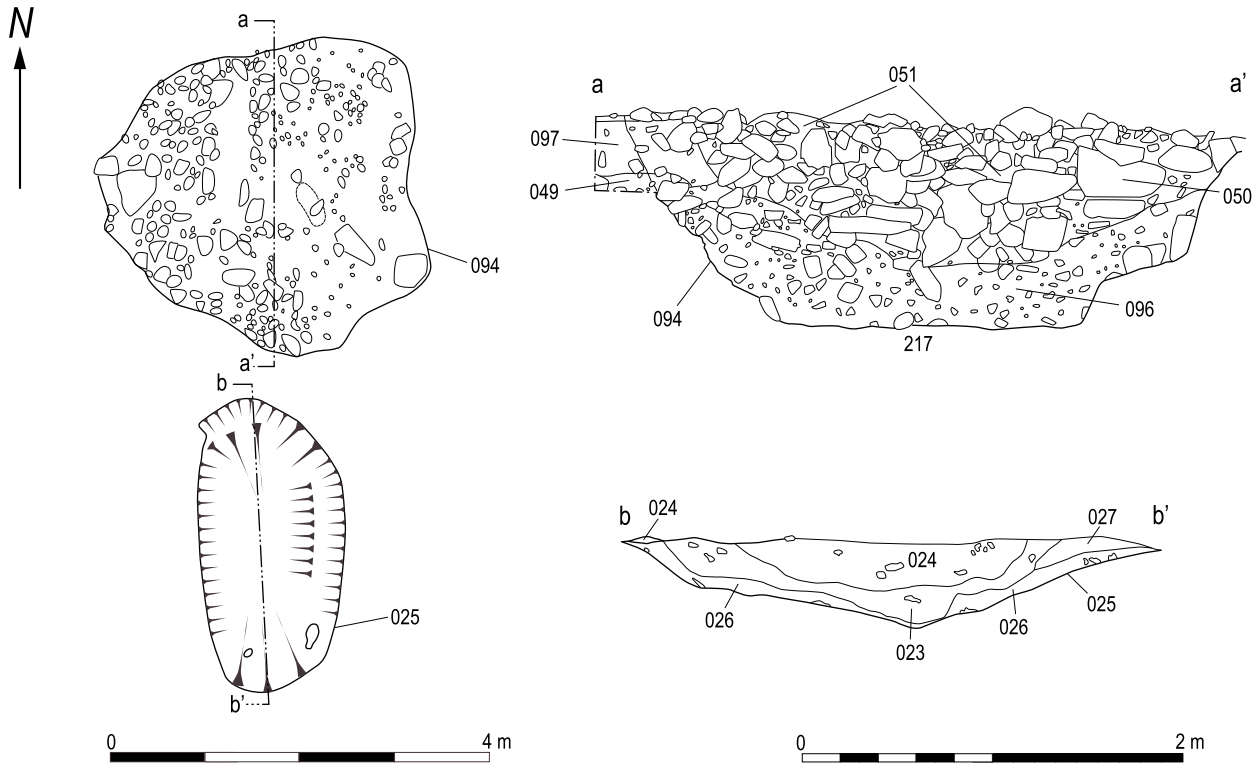
It is not clear how long a period intervened between the time when people were working flint and chert at Eweford West and the time when others later began to leave more tangible traces. What is clear is that, at some point during the first quarter of the fourth millennium BC, a group came to the same location to begin building.

These people came to the north-east end of the natural glacial bank, on which earlier generations had made and used tools, and began to change its shape. Analysis of the sediments at Eweford West has revealed that a low earthen mound (049) was created, at least in part of turves (McKenzie, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Destruction of parts of this low mound by subsequent activities means that we cannot now be certain of its original size and shape, but the evidence suggests that it was sub-circular or oval, up to *c.* 15m across and at least 0.14m high (Figure 2.3). As ground was broken during the turf cutting, levels around the mound may have dropped, enhancing its apparent height.

After the first low mound (049) was constructed, a large, sub-circular pit (094), up to 3.5m across, was dug into it (Figure 2.4). The diggers excavated this pit deep into the natural subsoil, possibly as a quarry to retrieve stone for building material. They later backfilled the pit with different layers of gravel (096), tipping them into the pit from the east before flinging in some large stones (051). This deposit of stones was mounded up above the pit's mouth, and it may have stood for some time as a low, irregular cairn on the surface of the mound (049). Many of



2.3 Plan of the primary mound and stone-filled pit at Eweford West.



2.4 Pits 094 and 025 in plan and section.

the stones (051) were reddened and charcoal stained, as if they had been in contact with fire, and, in one case, a large piece of animal bone was fused to the surface. It is possible that the stones were originally part of a structure that had been burnt down, demolished and backfilled into the pit – perhaps the same pit from which the stones had originally derived. (It is also possible that the stones had been burnt in a hearth, and in fact there were no other traces of an earlier, demolished structure.)

Among the stones (051) were several pieces of unburnt bone, found in small concentrations. Analysis has identified these as fragments of large ungulate vertebra, cattle long bone and a cattle tooth. One piece of bone bore tool marks, suggesting that the animals had been butchered (Smith, see Chapter 12 and Archive). A radiocarbon date of 3960–3780 BC (SUERC-5280) was obtained from a cattle radius. Also among the stones, sometimes associated with these concentrations of bone, were patches of charcoal, all derived from oak (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The stratigraphic relationships between the large stones (051) and the deposits (202) that sealed them clearly showed that the stones were flung into the pit before a second mound was built.

The pottery pit (025)

At this time in the history of the site, people's activities were not restricted to the primary mound. Another feature close by, about 30m to the south-west, testifies to a short episode of activity in the wider area. A large, sub-rectangular pit (025) was dug, measuring 2.9m by 1.2m (Figure 2.4). After this pit had been dug, it was partially backfilled with a layer of light brown/grey sand (026), then a charcoal-rich deposit (023) was tipped into it from the east. This latter deposit contained alder, hazel and oak charcoal and occasional fragments of burnt hazelnut shell (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). It also contained numerous sherds from seven pots made in the Carinated Bowl tradition (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive) (Figure 2.5: CBs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6) and an edge-trimmed flint flake. Each of the pots had clearly been broken before deposition, and only a small proportion of each vessel (generally 1/10 or less) had been placed in the pit. Four of the pots were large Carinated Bowls (CBs 1–4), while a large collared jar (CB 5) and an Uncarinated Bowl or cup (CB 6) were also used. Someone put material in the pit on another occasion (024), depositing more sherds from two of the broken vessels that had already partly been deposited (CBs 1 and 6: SFs 54, 59 and 65). A

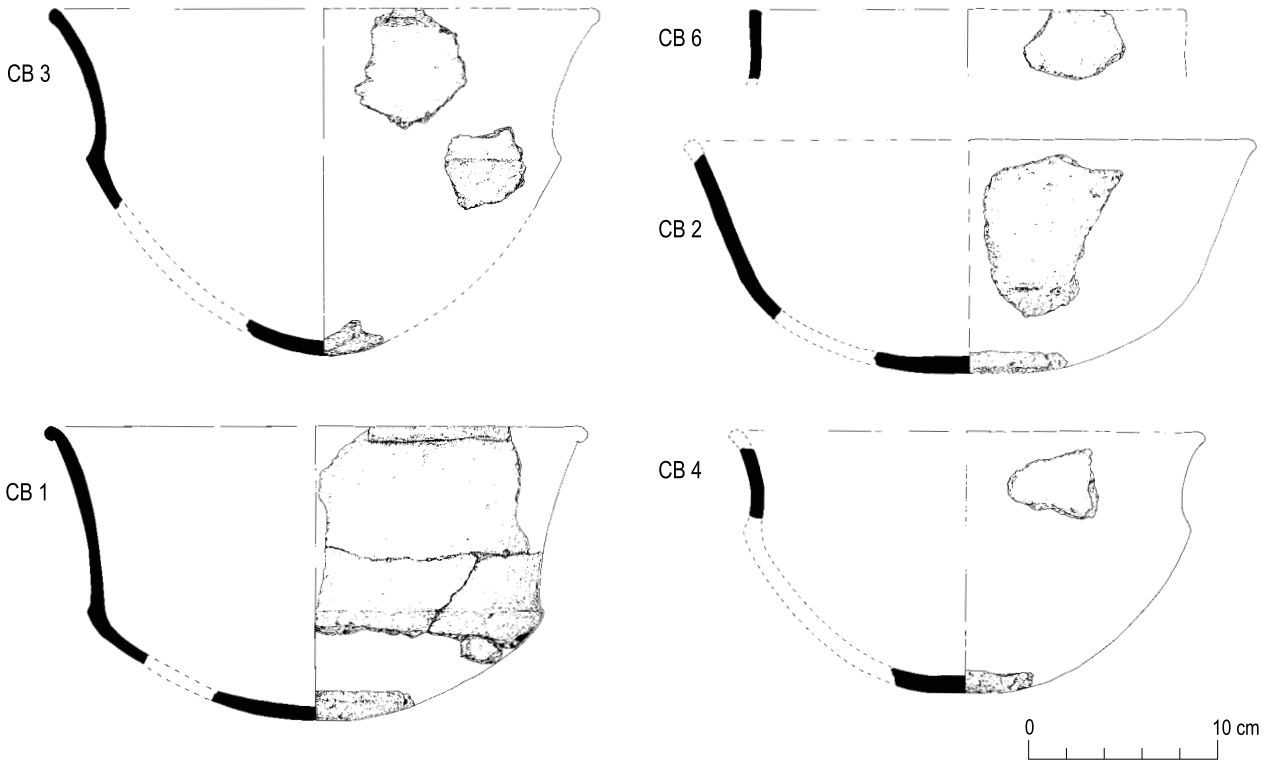
sample of alder (*Alnus*) charcoal from the charcoal-rich lower fill (023) produced a radiocarbon date of 3960–3710 BC (SUERC-5298).

By the end of the phase, we can envisage a low earth-and-turf mound which might have sat in a small clearing, or in a larger one which might have afforded views to the north across the river Forth. On top of the mound was a small, irregular cairn that extended like an iceberg into the ground below. The area around the mound had been scalped of turf. At this time, another pit (025) also formed a focus of activity and its presence 30m away may suggest more extensive clearance had taken place in the vicinity of the mound.

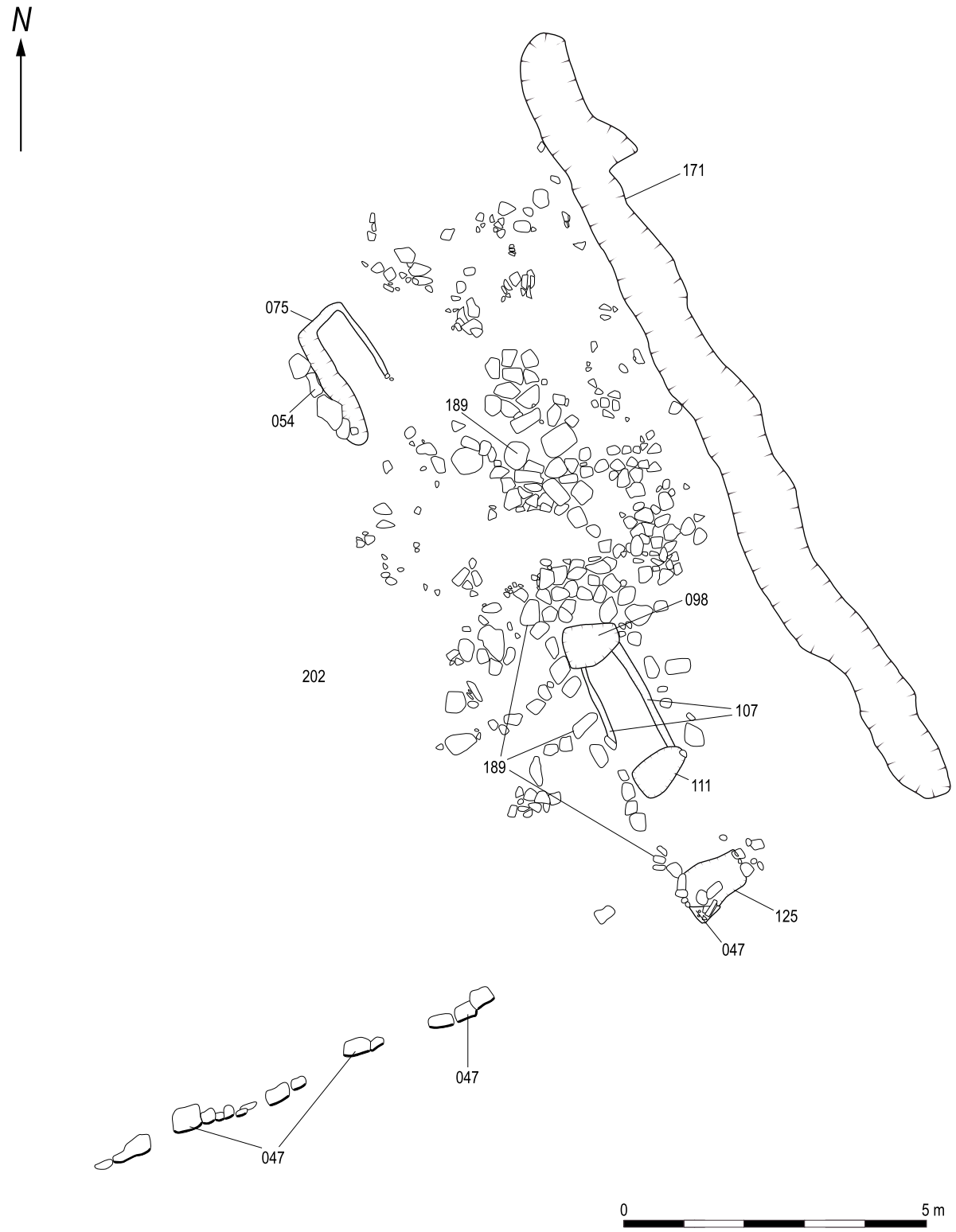
The secondary mound and mortuary structures

After the large pit (094) which had been dug into the primary mound (049) had been filled in with gravel (096), and probably after the stone (051) had been tipped into it, another mound was built of earth (202). Micromorphological analysis has shown that this secondary mound was composed at least in part of turves (McKenzie, see Chapter 12 and Archive), and this earthen deposit had slumped or been tipped into the upper part of the large pit (094). This more substantial, secondary mound (202) was up to 20m across and 0.35m deep. Its surface was exposed for long enough to allow leaching (102) of sediment, although this might have taken place after the site was scalped in the late third millennium BC (see Chapter 4). After creating the secondary mound, the builders constructed wooden and stone structures on top of it (Figure 2.6). The association of these structures with burnt human bone suggests that they were used for mortuary rites; such structures are typically called mortuary structures.

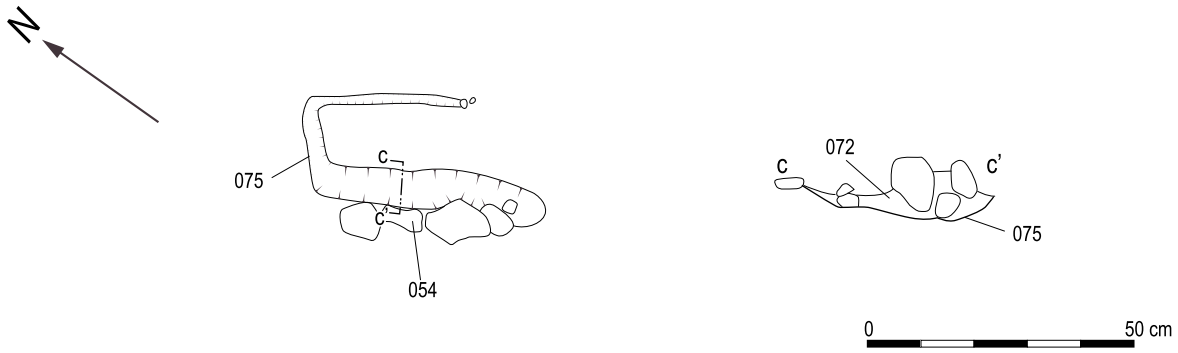
The people active at Eweford West at this time may first have built a small structure (1) (075) with straight sides and one end open to the south-west. Analysis of charcoal from the shallow foundation trench (075) of this structure has shown it all to be oak, suggesting that the trench held oak timbers that were subsequently burnt (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The monument builders set large stones (054) against the timbers to revet them, at least on the southern-western side, but these probably extended around the north and east sides as well (Figure 2.7). Small quantities (5.9g) of burnt human bone were found in the foundation slots, and these quantities of bone proved to represent the remains of at least one adult and one immature adult (Duffy, see Chapter 12 and Archive).



2.5 Carinated Bowls from pit 025.



2.6 Plan of the traces of mortuary structures, screens and walling.



2.7 Detail of the remains of the first mortuary structure in plan and section.

It is not clear whether the bone was already burnt when it was brought to the structure or if it burnt when the timbers were incinerated, but its small quantity evokes the fragmentary remains overlooked when a pyre was raked through to collect larger fragments. Together, this evidence suggests that those using the monument built a timber and stone structure and placed human remains inside it. They later burnt the building down, removed most of the burnt bone and heaped stone (053) over the collapsed remains.

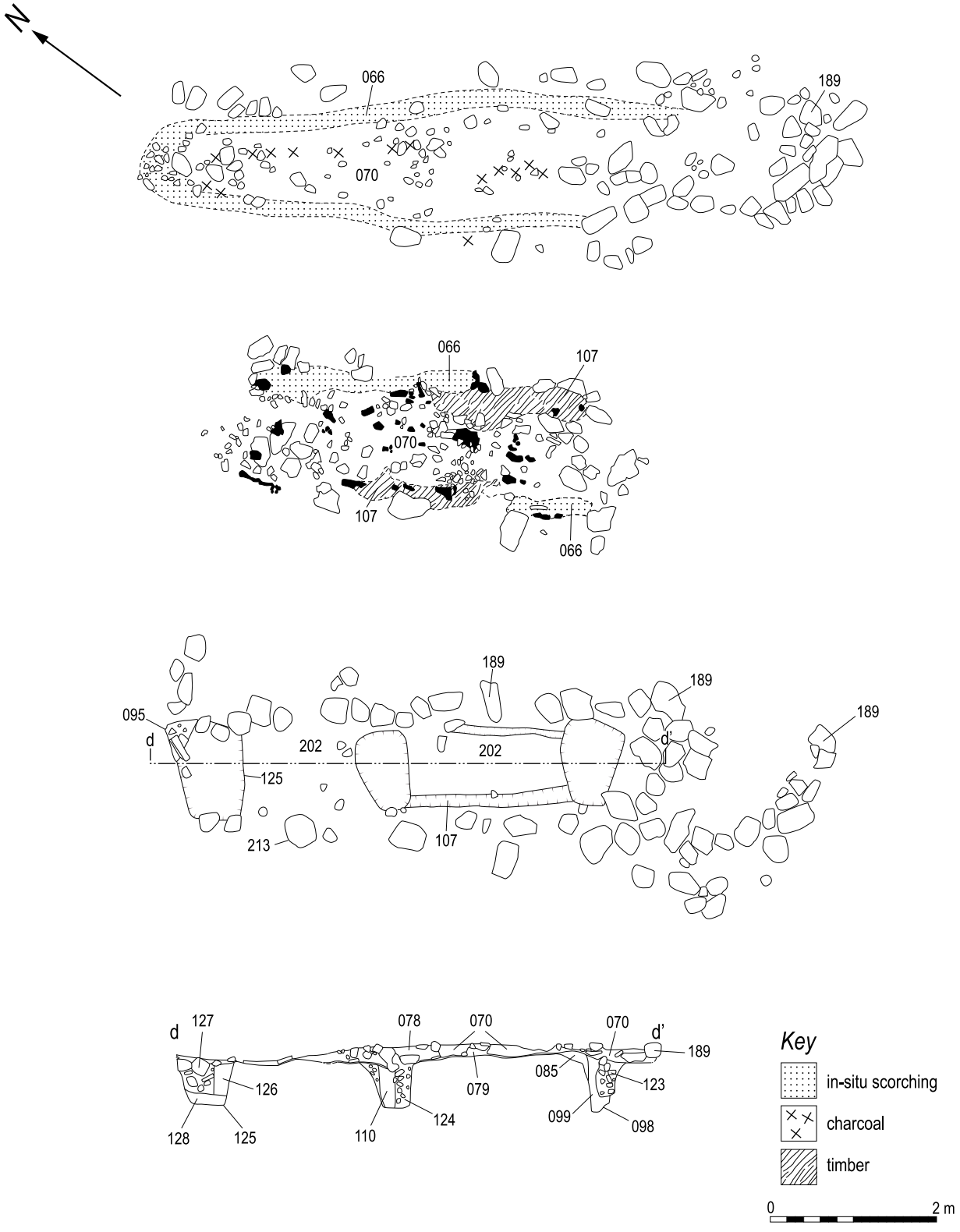
A second wood-and-stone structure (2) was also built on the mound (202), five metres to the south-east of the remains of the first. This second structure was more complicated in form (Figures 2.6 and 2.8). Its builders dug two sub-rectangular pits (111 and 098) through the mound material (202/049) and into the natural subsoil (217) below. They cut slight ramps for each pit, and in each one they placed an oak timber, evident to the excavators as a post-pipe, towards the south side of the cut. The builders dug a third post-hole (125) to the south and partly backfilled it with soil containing oak and hazel charcoal, before placing an oak post in the north side of the hole (Figures 2.8 and 2.9). Traces of timbers (107) burnt *in situ* suggest that the builders also ran timber planks between the three large posts, attaching these planks to the outer faces of the posts. They then set large revetment stones (188) against the outer side of the plank-built structure, forming two parallel lines that met to the north but formed an open end to the south. The revetment stones were placed along each side in a single row, but at the northern end they were laid three rows deep. Alternatively, it is possible that the stones were originally stacked up in three or more courses and later collapsed. This building was also burnt down.

Excavation identified evidence suggesting that the second structure held artefacts and bones, including parts of a Neolithic carinated pottery bowl. Two sherds of an open, burnished, fine ware Carinated Bowl (CB 9, Figure 2.10; see Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive) were found in the upper fill (078) of the collapsed building. Human remains may also have been placed inside this structure; bone (88.3g) was found in its upper fills (070 and 078) and also associated with a timber burnt *in situ* (107) (17.8g). However, cereal found in the same fill as the burnt timbers (107) produced a radiocarbon date of 2140–1890 BC (SUERC-5284), relating to a later phase of activity at the site (see Chapter 4), so it is also possible that the human bone was intrusive.

The building's upper fills (070 and 078) contained the remains of two people, one adult and one infant (probably foetal or neonate), whose bodies were fleshed when they were cremated (Duffy, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The bone associated with the burnt timber (107) represents at least one adult, and the lack of warping of that bone indicates that the soft tissue had decomposed before cremation. This shows that some of the human remains were excarnated, possibly on the mortuary structure, before cremation.

The destruction of the second structure by fire left quantities of oak charcoal inside it (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive) and scorched sediments (066) running parallel to the outsides of the burnt timbers (107). The revetment stones (054 and 188) surrounding both Structure 1 and Structure 2 were fire-reddened and charcoal-stained, and these stones had clearly been in place when the timbers were burnt. These stones were also in very similar condition to the stones (051) that had been cast into the earlier pit (094).

The revetment stones (188) surrounding the north end of Structure 2 extended further to the north, forming an arc (189) about 3m long that met the south-eastern end of Structure 1 (Figure 2.6). It is not clear why these stones were put in place, as there was no evidence of timbers set against them. It is possible that they were designed so as to



2.8 Detail of the remains of the second mortuary structure in plan and section.

2.9 The post-holes for the second mortuary structure, taken from the north.

delineate certain ways of moving around on the secondary mound.

Three stake-holes (213, 215, 216) hinted at the presence of more flimsy structural remains. The stakes had been inserted into the mound and later burnt down. Hazel (*Corylus*) charcoal from one stake-hole (216) provided a radiocarbon date of 3960–3770 BC (SUERC-5290).

The screen and façade trench

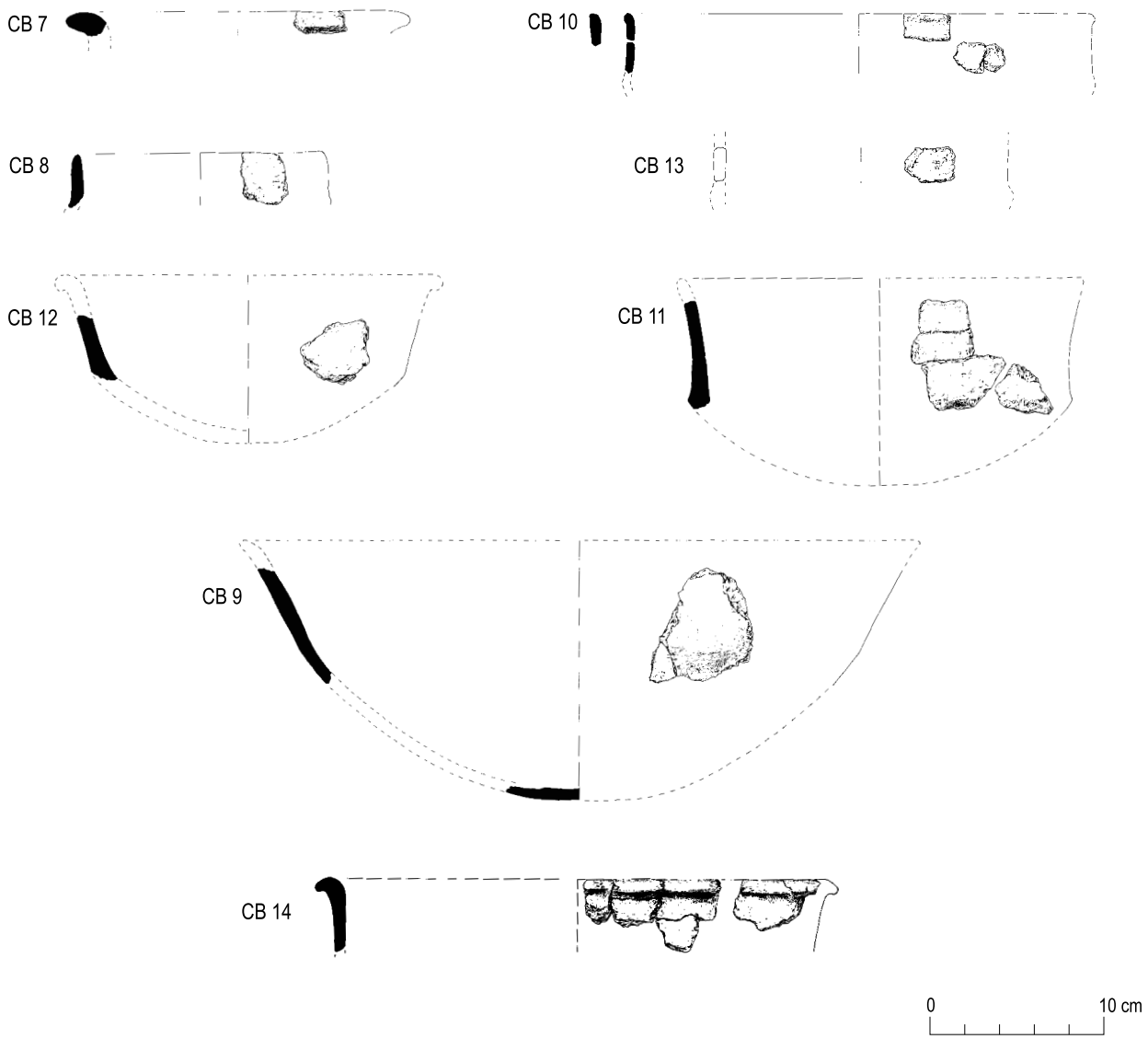
The monument builders at Eweford West also excavated a deep trench (171), up to 10m long and up to 0.75m deep, on the mound (Figures 2.6 and 2.11). The sequence of sediments in the trench showed that the people who excavated this trench placed substantial timbers in it, probably of oak and alder (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). They set the timbers to pitch westward at an angle of perhaps 45 degrees, forming a continuous row or screen. Palaeo-environmental analysis suggests that hazel and oak roundwood may have formed wattle work between or attached to the timbers (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The timber screen later burnt so intensely that the sediment around it was scorched to a depth of 0.6m. To achieve this, more wood was probably piled against the timbers, and the fire tended to ensure that the uprights burnt to ground level and below.

After this screen was burnt, there was another clear phase of rebuilding, with timbers again set at a pitched angle in the same trench, forming another screen. The timbers of this second screen were again burnt to such an extent that the soil below the ground scorched. Analysis of the charcoal in the trench suggests that these later timbers were mainly oak, with some alder (see Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive, appendix).

A radiocarbon date of 3800–3650 BC (SUERC-5286) was obtained from alder charcoal in a post-pipe relating to the first phase of construction. During analysis, small, circular holes were observed on the fragments of oak; these were made by woodworm. This shows that the timbers were exposed for long enough after felling to season before being infested with woodworm.

To the west of the screen trench (171), its builders set a line of three posts or stakes (206, 207, 209) (Figure 2.11). Hazel (*Corylus*) charcoal from the fill of one of these (209) produced a radiocarbon date of 3890–3650 BC (SUERC-5289). The exact relationship between the façade and the posts is unclear, but it is possible that the posts supported some of the pitched timbers when the façade was standing (Figure 2.12). Charcoal in the post-hole fills suggests that the posts had burnt down, probably at the same time as the first timbers in the façade trench. If we accept that the height of a post may be three times the depth of its post-hole, the trench depth of 0.75m suggests that the timbers stood up to 2.25m above the ground. With the timbers extending this length and pitched at 45 degrees, they would have extended to meet the east side of Structure 2. In these circumstances the space between the façade and structure 2, effectively forming a timber room.

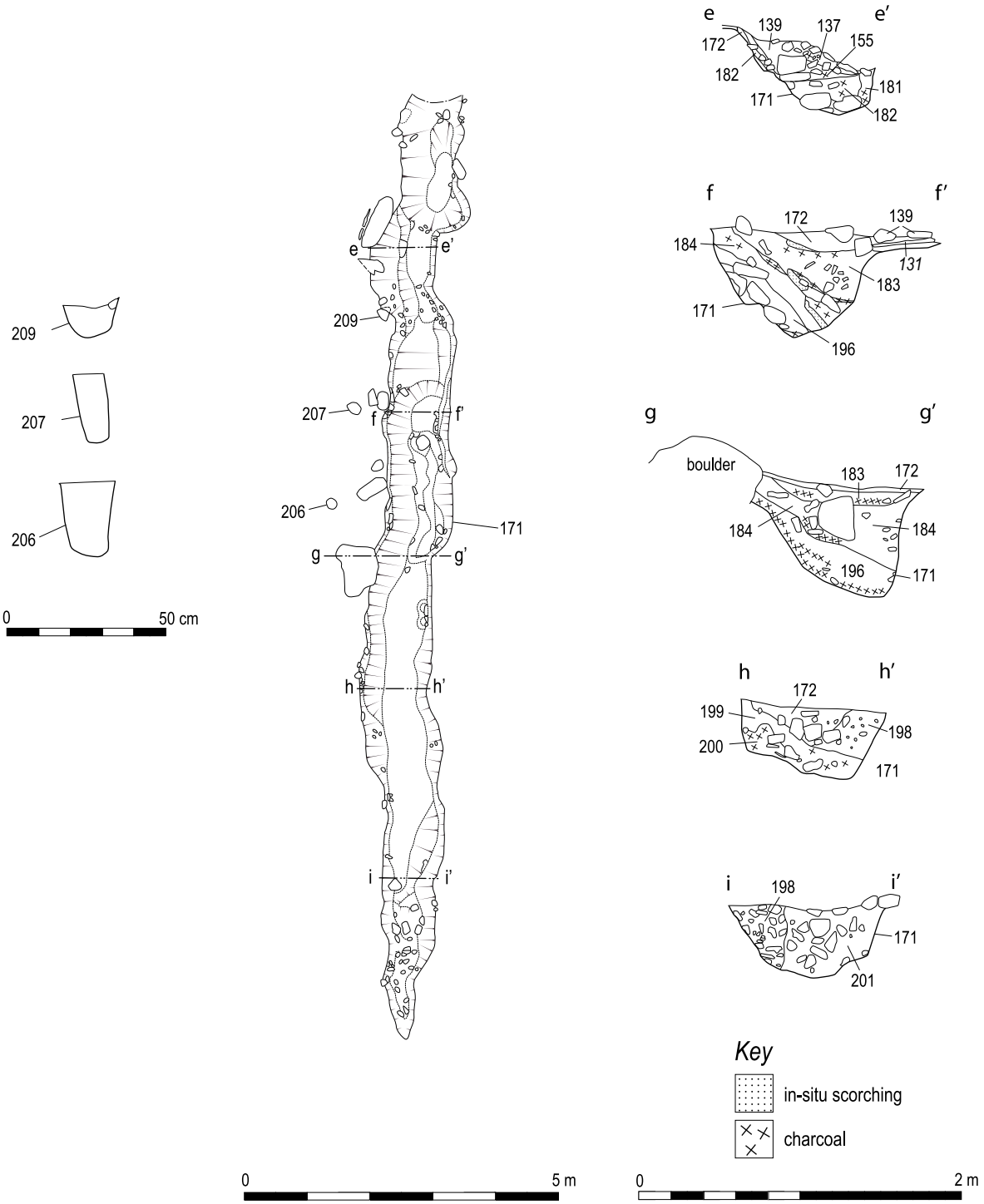
At the same time that people were building and burning structures on the secondary mound, they were also bringing pottery vessels to the site. Analysis has identified evidence for at least seven Carinated Bowls (Figure 2.10; Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Particular care was taken in the production of some of these pots, CB 9 in particular having a finely burnished surface. Burning of CB 11 and encrusted residues on CB 9 and CB 10 suggest that these vessels were used for heating liquid. The distribution of the sherds from these vessels suggests that they were deliberately broken and scattered around the site. The majority of sherds were located on the upper mound, but with notably more scattered to the southern side than elsewhere. The distribution of sherds



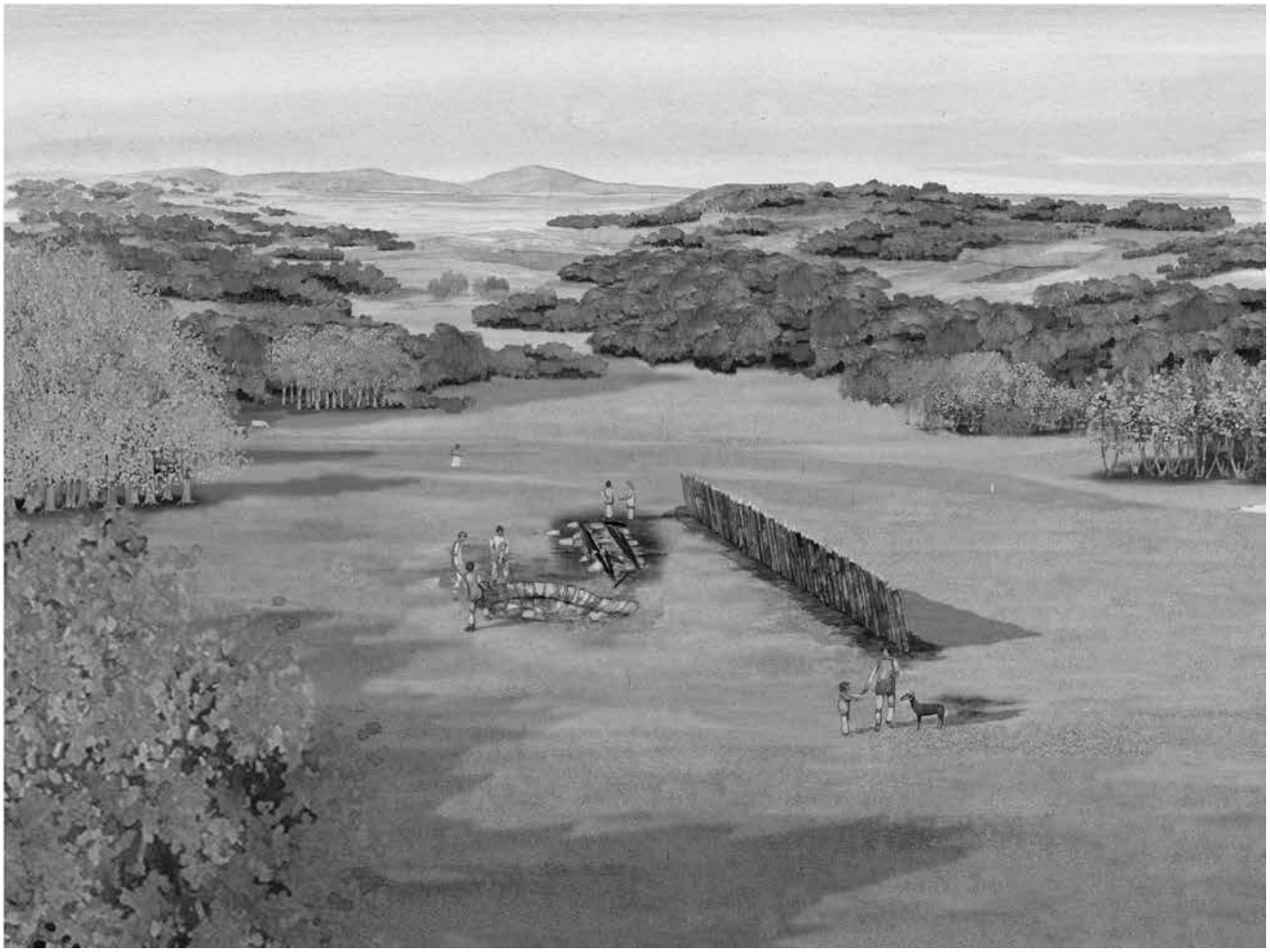
2.10 Carinated Bowls from the second phase at Eweford West.

from CB 9 is particularly striking, as pieces of this large, burnished, fine bowl had been deposited in the mortuary structure but also incorporated in deposits to the north of the mound and in an upper fill (139) of the screen trench; this suggests that the vessel had been broken at the site and its parts dispersed there. Sherds from CB 7 and CB 8 were recovered from the northern hollow, while sherds from CB 11 and CB 12 were recovered from the southern hollow (see below for a description of these hollows). It is possible that the sherds had been deposited on the margins of the mound and subsequently migrated into the hollows. It is particularly striking that there is no evidence for the deposition and breaking of pots to the east of the screen or façade.

Other activities also took place at Eweford West, or at least deposits were made, while the pottery was being brought to the site. This is suggested by fragments of ungulate tooth (Smith, see Chapter 12 and Archive) and by struck stone tools and waste scattered across the surface of the mound (202). They predominantly comprised chert chips (7) and flakes (7) and a retouched chert core-rejuvenation flake (SF 441), but also included chalcedony (2 flakes) and flint (1 flake). These could, of course, be residual from earlier activity.



2.11 The façade trench and stake features in plan and section.



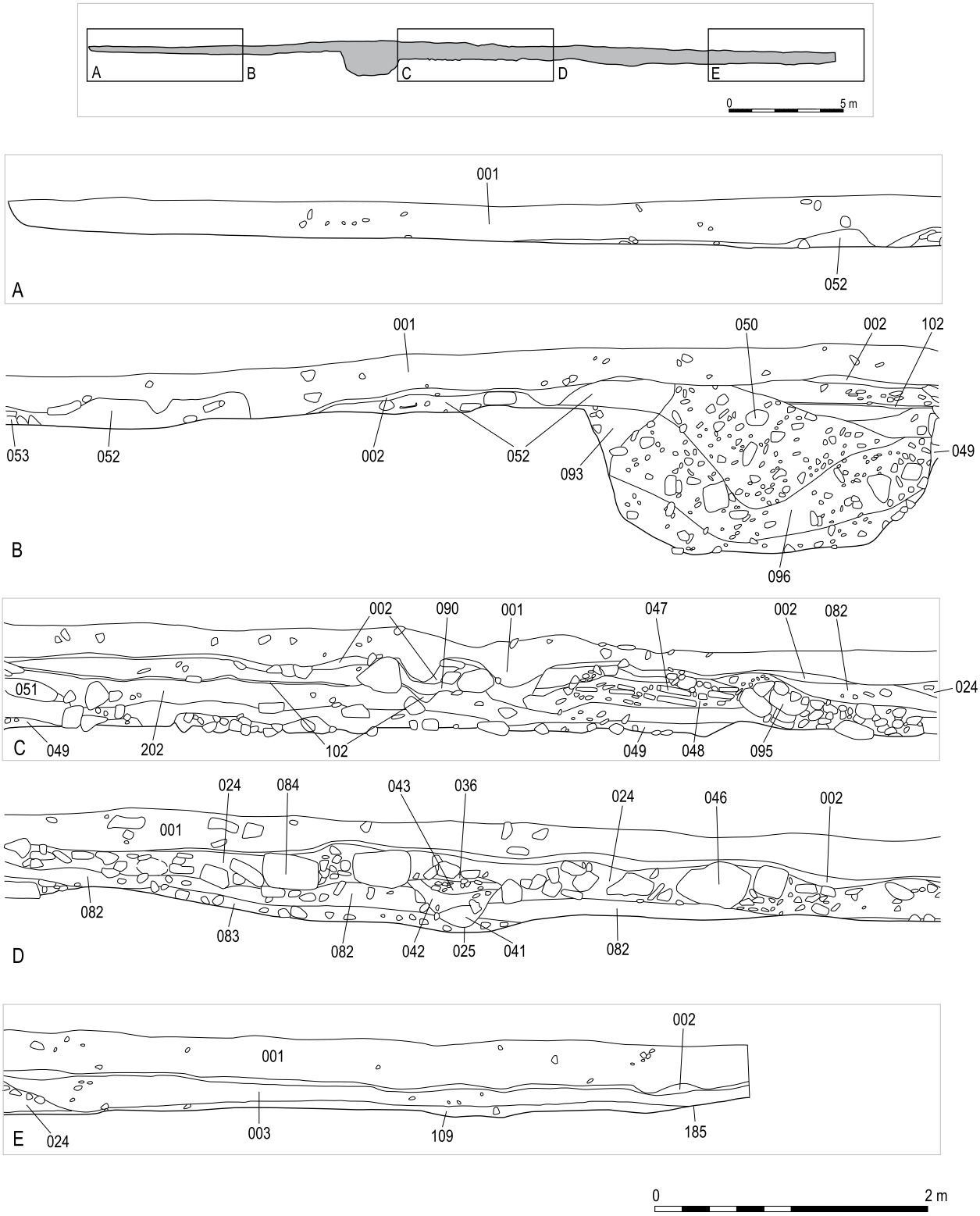
2.12 Reconstruction of the façade and other features at Eweford West.

The final mound

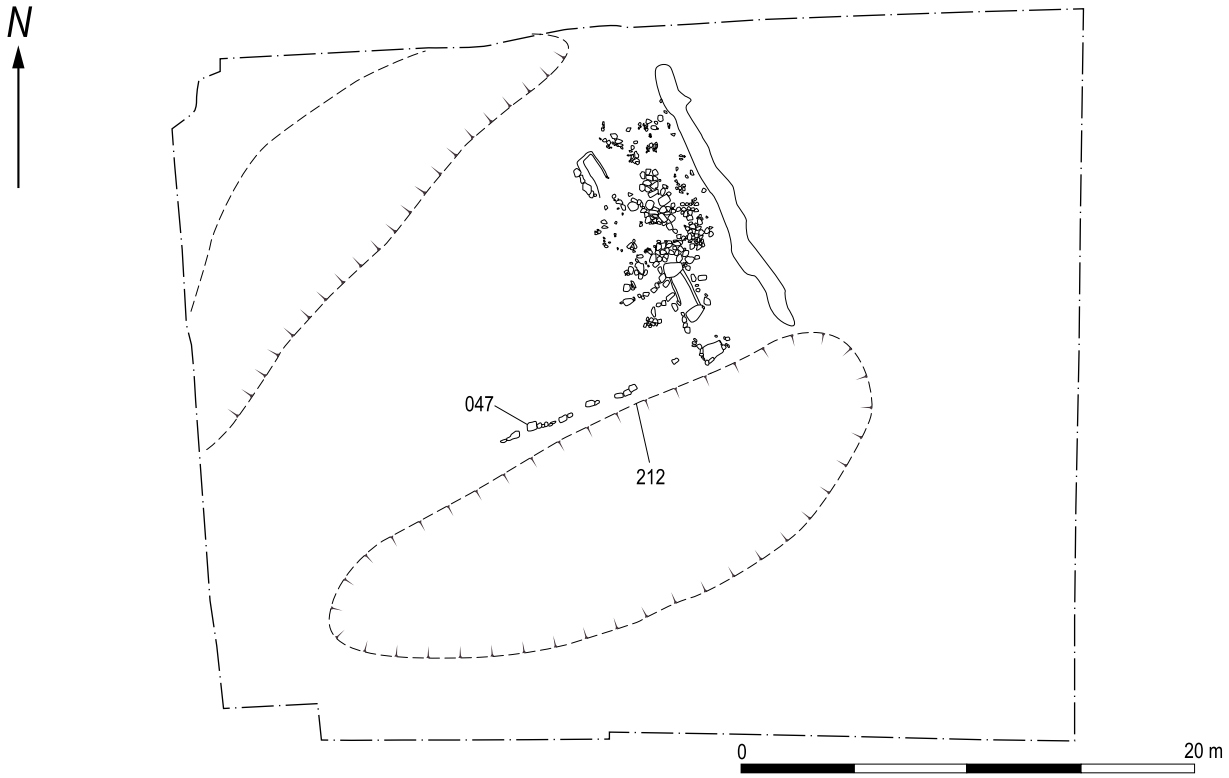
After the building and destruction by fire of the structures on the secondary mound (202), people began to increase the height of the mound by depositing more earth (048, 087 and 090) (see Figure 2.13 for the section through the mound). How high the mound eventually became is unclear, due to scalping of the site in the late third millennium BC (see Chapter 4), erosional processes which resulted in the formation of colluvium (003) and later plough truncation (002), probably after the Iron Age (see Chapter 6). The imported, mound-heightening deposits comprised sands and silts (048, 087 and 090), and these soils may partly have derived from turves (McKenzie, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The builders also laid down a distinctive layer of pinkish gravel (115), which partially sealed the leached ground surface (102) and mixed with the mound deposits above (048, 087 and 090).

Large quarry pits were also dug on two sides of the mound (Figure 2.14). These were observed as a hollow (185) to the south-east, measuring 25m by 10m, and another hollow to the north-west, measuring at least 20m by 10m. The monument builders probably obtained much of the material which they used to heighten the mound from these quarry pits, and it was probably at this time that a pitchstone bladelet (SF 483) was incorporated in the lower fill of the north-western hollow (184). Sherds from two large open Carinated Bowls were also deposited in this hollow (CB 7 and CB 8: see Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

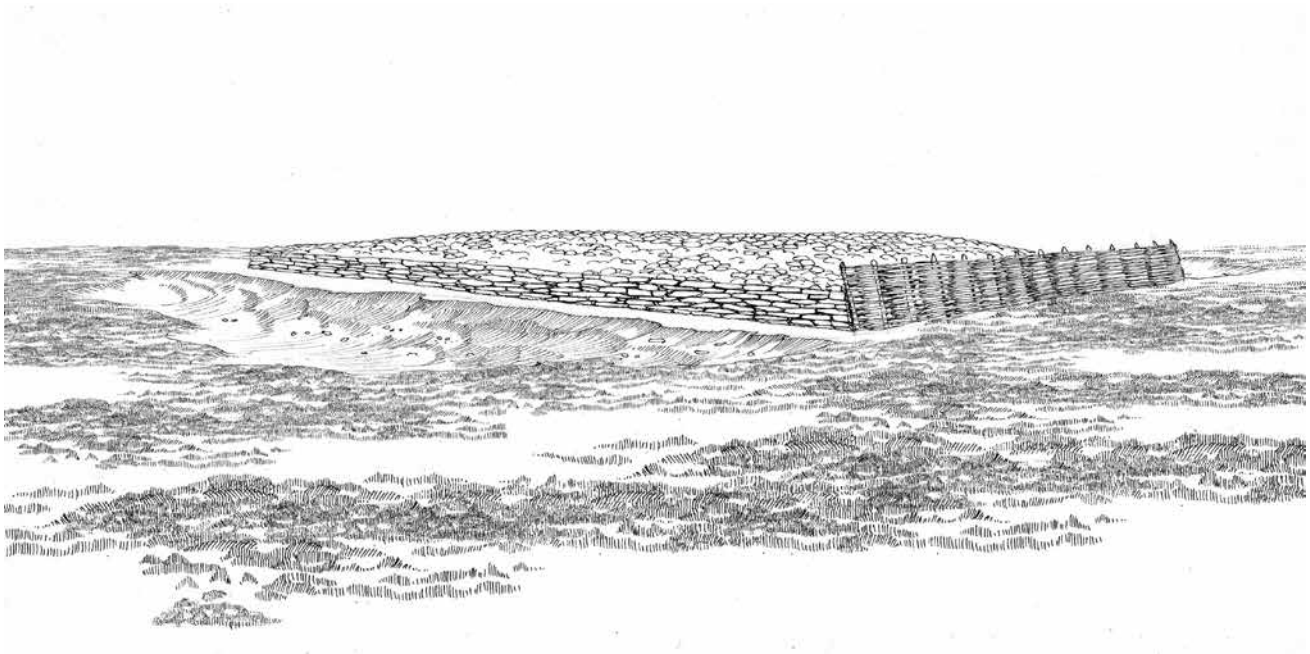
At the same time as the digging of the two hollows, the builders of Eweford West may also have been modifying the mound's southern side. They cut through it to create a straight edge (212) that sloped down into the south-eastern quarry pit. Then they built a drystone wall (047) of sandstone slabs running parallel to this



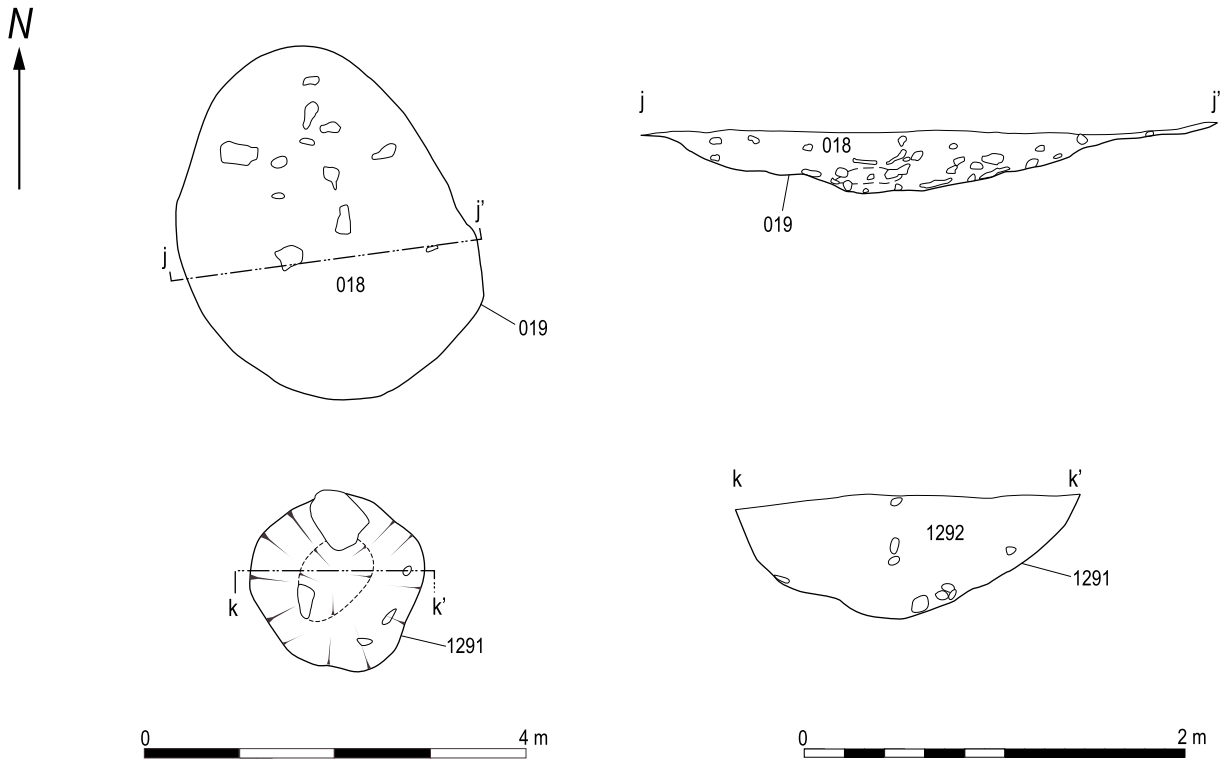
2.13 Section through the mound, pit 049 and later cairn material.



2.14 Plan of the quarry pits that flanked the mound.



2.15 Reconstruction of the mound in its final form.



2.16 Pits 019 and 1291 in plan and section.

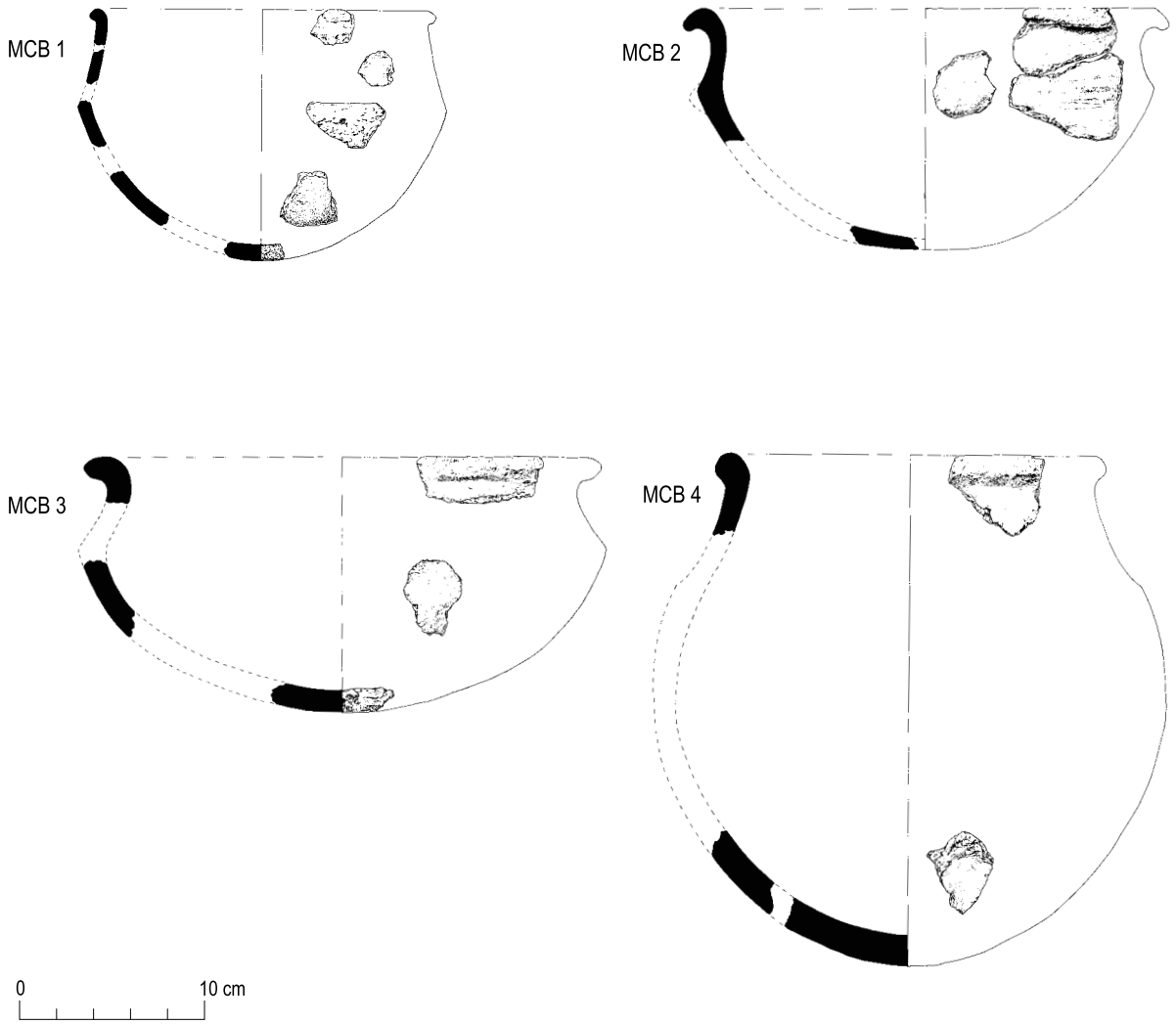
edge, about 0.6m away from it, effectively defining a path between the wall and the hollow (Figure 2.14). The wall survived to a length of 10m, but probably originally extended for 20m. The wall consisted mainly of red stones, with some coloured grey and white, and its collapsed remains (see Chapter 4) indicated that it originally stood to a height of at least 13 courses, perhaps 0.65m. The sandstone slabs (047) extended over the southern end of the second mortuary structure. This spatial relationship may explain why the southern post (126) of Structure 2 stood to the north side of the cut (125) and not the south side, in order to accommodate the wall. It would also suggest that the walling was built while the second mortuary structure still stood. There was no clear evidence for any similar walling on the north edge of the mound; however, a cut (108) sealed beneath later cairn material may indicate where a wall had been robbed out (see Chapter 4).

Probably also at this phase in the history of the site, the trench (171) for the timber screens was extended at either end, increasing its length to about 14m, and more timbers were set along its length (Figure 2.11). This time, however, the timbers were not burnt down but left to rot *in situ* (as indicated by the sections through this feature), forming a façade along the front of the final mound. This most recent timber façade and the drystone walling would have retained the uppermost mound material (048 and 090). It is also possible that mound layer (090) was capped with stones to form a cairn which subsequently collapsed or was dismantled (see Chapters 4 and 5).

We can envisage, then, that the monument at Eweford West, in its final form during the fourth millennium, was a substantial, sub-trapezoidal mound (Figure 2.15). This mound was retained by timbers at its higher, northern-eastern end and by bands of red and grey stone walling along its sides. The top of the mound, which may have been visible above the revetments, was capped with a cairn of grey stone. To the south-east of the walling, and possibly to the north west, was a narrow path, beyond which lay quarry scoops. With time, the oak timbers would have faded to silver grey before rotting away.

Further pottery pits (019 and 1291)

Finishing the mound did not mark the end of human activity at Eweford West; there was another clear phase of activity 20m to the south of the stone-filled pit (094). Here, someone dug another large, oval pit (019), up to 4.5m



2.17 Modified Carinated Bowls from Eweford West.

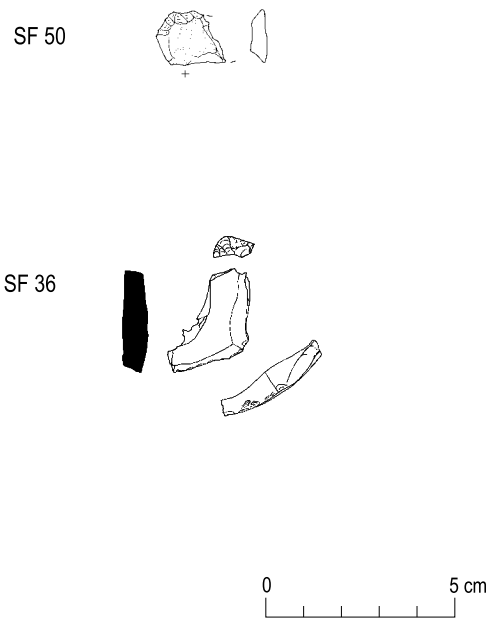
across and up to 0.5m deep (Figure 2.16), and scattered fragments of modified Carinated Bowls in it (Figure 2.17: MCB 1–4). The pottery comprised less than one-tenth of three Carinated Bowls (MCB 1–3), of which MCB 2 had lugs, and one-fifth of a deep-bellied bowl or jar (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The pit also contained flint and chert flakes, a chert scraper (Figure 2.18: SF 50) and an incomplete, retouched flint piece (Figure 2.18: SF 36; Saville, see Chapter 12 and Archive), as well as a hammer stone (SF 47) and a polished stone implement (SF 48, Figure 2.19). Palaeobotanical analysis has shown that the pit contained hazel, blackthorn-type and willow charcoal, and small fragments of burnt hazelnut shell. A sample of hazel (*Corylus*) charcoal produced a radiocarbon date of 3660–3510 BC (SUERC-5297).

About the same time, someone dug another small pit (1291) 275m to the west (Figure 2.16). It contained a sherd from a pottery bowl, a grey flint bladelet with slight edge trim or retouch (Figure 2.18*:* SF 587), pieces of burnt hazelnut and a little burnt human bone, the remains of an adult (0.5g). A sample of hazel (*Corylus)* nutshell from the pit produced a radiocarbon date of 3640–3370 BC (SUERC-5338).

Pencraig Hill

The first phase

In the early fourth millennium BC, a community began to build ceremonial structures at Pencraig Hill (Figure 2.1). These builders selected a spot on the south-western



2.18 Stone tools from Eweford West and East.

slopes of the hill, where the topography obscured views to the north but allowed open views to Traprain Law and the Lammermuir Hills to the south. Analysis of the soil micromorphology suggests that the initial phase of construction comprised the clearance of trees or rough scrubland (Simpson, see Chapter 12 and Archive), perhaps to prepare the ground symbolically as well as physically before any building work took place, creating a working area free from stones and weeds. While no tree holes were observed, any created during clearance may have been removed by the ploughing that later truncated the site.

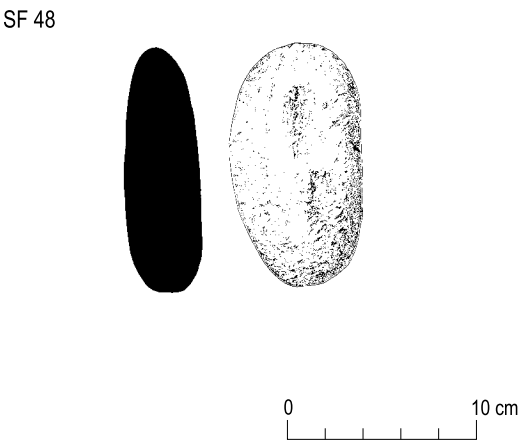
After this initial clearance, several small fires were lit. Evidence for this was found in layers of silt (226) containing charcoal and ash and laced with finer lenses of silt, which seem to indicate *in situ* burning (not illustrated). These deposits were interpreted as the remnants of small fires. After each burning event, the remains of the fire spread outwards, perhaps through trampling, and the next fire was set in the ashes of the first, gradually building up the fine layers seen by the archaeologists. Palaeo-botanical analysis has shown that these layers contained much oak charcoal, with small quantities of alder (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

On the remains of these fires, a small mound or raised area (210) was constructed, stretching for roughly 13m and forming a sub-trapezoidal or axe-shaped feature orientated west-to-east (Figures 2.20 and 2.21). Two sub-rectangular trenches (157) dug into this mound were lined with clay and stones (217 and 218). These clay-lined trenches may have contained upright timbers, as is suggested by palaeobotanical evidence of oak charcoal in the fills (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive), and also stones used to pack the timbers. Another spread of grey-brown silt (204), lying in an irregular hollow cut into the mound (210), may indicate where a similar feature had been disturbed. Together these features (204, 217 and 218) may represent parts of a small, open-ended structure, perhaps built of wood and stone, with an entrance to the west (Figure 2.21). Inside this structure, the builders of Pencraig Hill laid clay (173), and on top of that they lit another series of small fires (122), represented by laminated lenses of charcoal-rich silts. The remains of these fires were similar to the traces of the primary burning events (226), described above, and they also included large quantities of oak charcoal (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

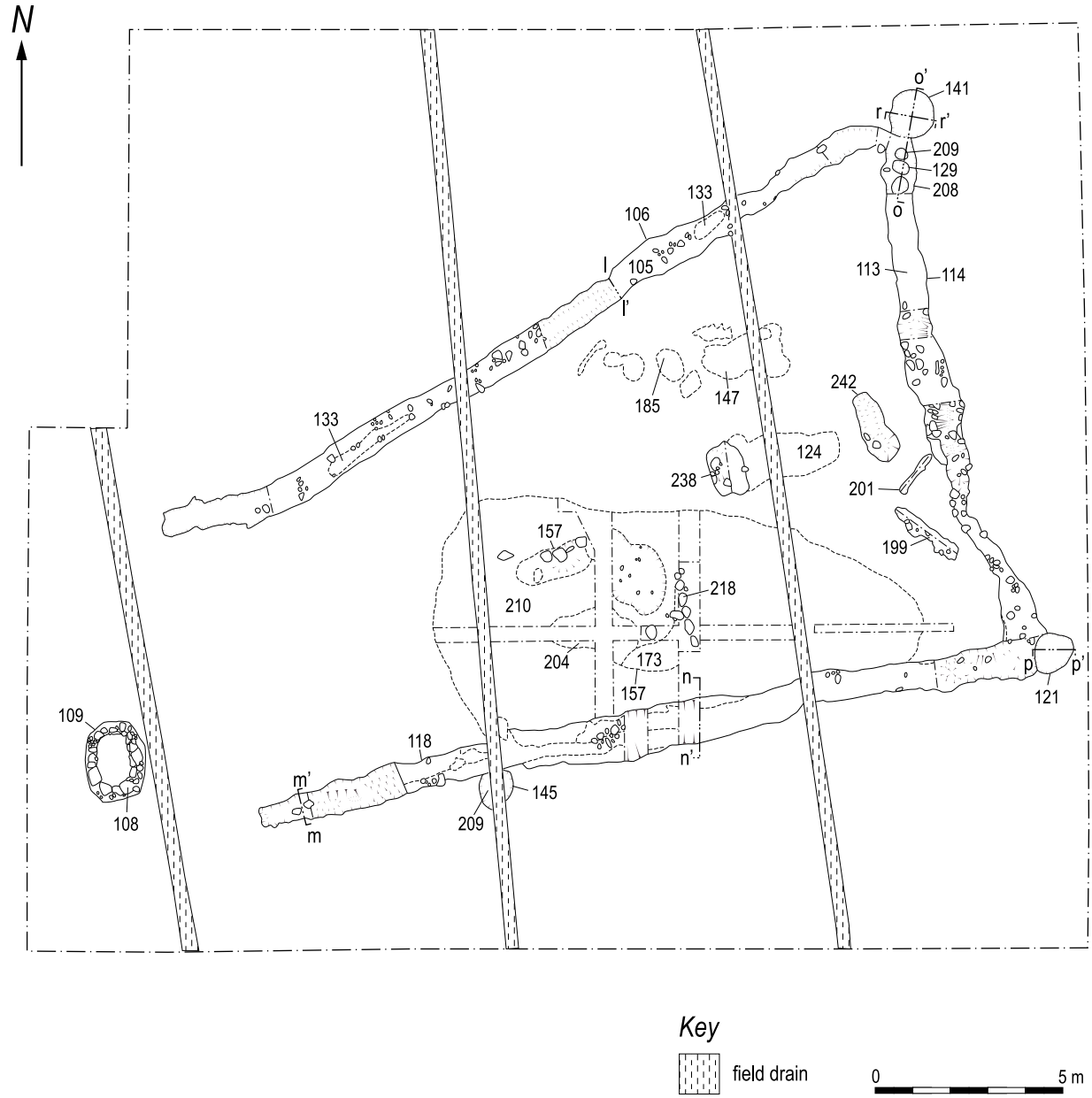
A sample of alder (*Alnus*) charcoal from the later rake-out (122) of these fires produced a radiocarbon date of 3950–3710 BC (SUERC-7663). It is possible that the structure (217 and 218) was also burnt down at the time this later rake-out (122) formed, resulting in a low mound with several short lengths of stone visible upon its surface. Subsequent phases of activity, particularly modern ploughing, dislodged and removed many of these stones.

The trapezoidal enclosure

After building this possibly open-ended structure (217 and 218), people created a more monumental enclosure around it. They dug two large trenches (106 and 118) on either side of the putative building, running east/west and forming converging lines which later became part of a sub-



2.19 The polished stone implement from Eweford West.

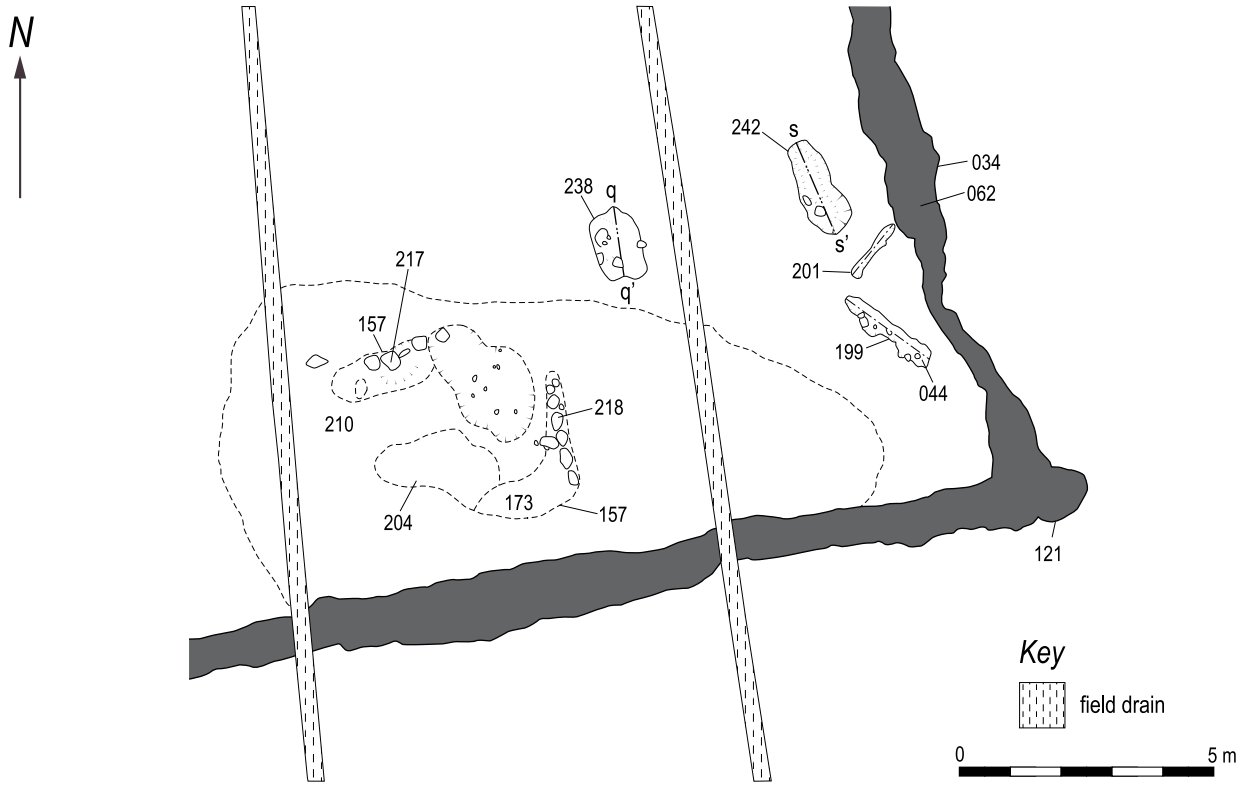


2.20 Plan of the mortuary enclosure at Pencraig Hill.

trapezoidal enclosure (Figures 2.20 and 2.22). The base of trench (118) (Figure 2.23, m-m') undulated in profile and expanded and contracted in plan, perhaps indicating that it was dug in discrete segments. The diggers of this trench may have worked in teams, perhaps drawn from different communities, with each team responsible for a short section of trench. These diggers left the trenches open for some time, as is evident from a silty deposit (165) in the base of the trenches and slumping into them from the sides (164) (Figure 2.23, m-m').

Eventually, the monument builders set a screen formed of planks against the inner edge of the southern trench, represented by a post-pipe (119) in its fill (Figure 2.23, n-n'). Palaeobotanical evidence from the fill of the trench, comprising mainly oak charcoal with smaller quantities of pine, hazel and alder, suggests that the screen was built of oak planks fastened together with pine, alder or hazel pegs (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

Mirroring the construction of this southern screen, a similar screen was built in the northern trench. However,

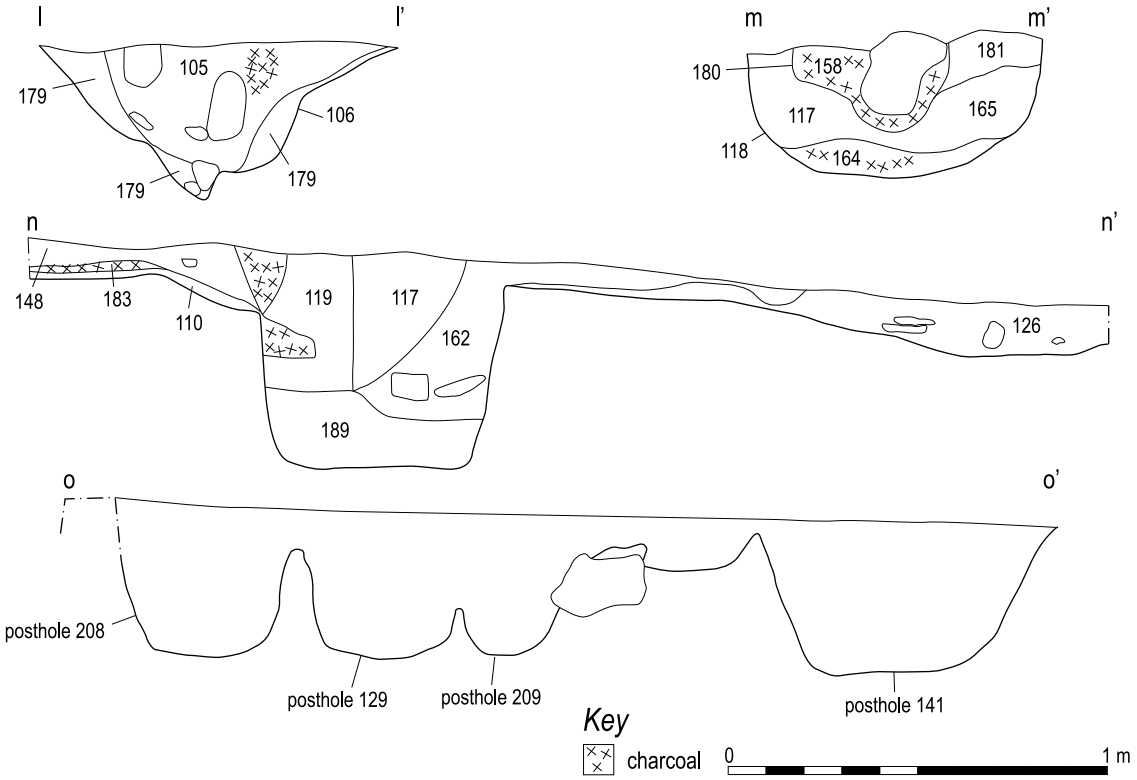


2.21 Detail of the features relating to the first phase at Pencraig Hill.

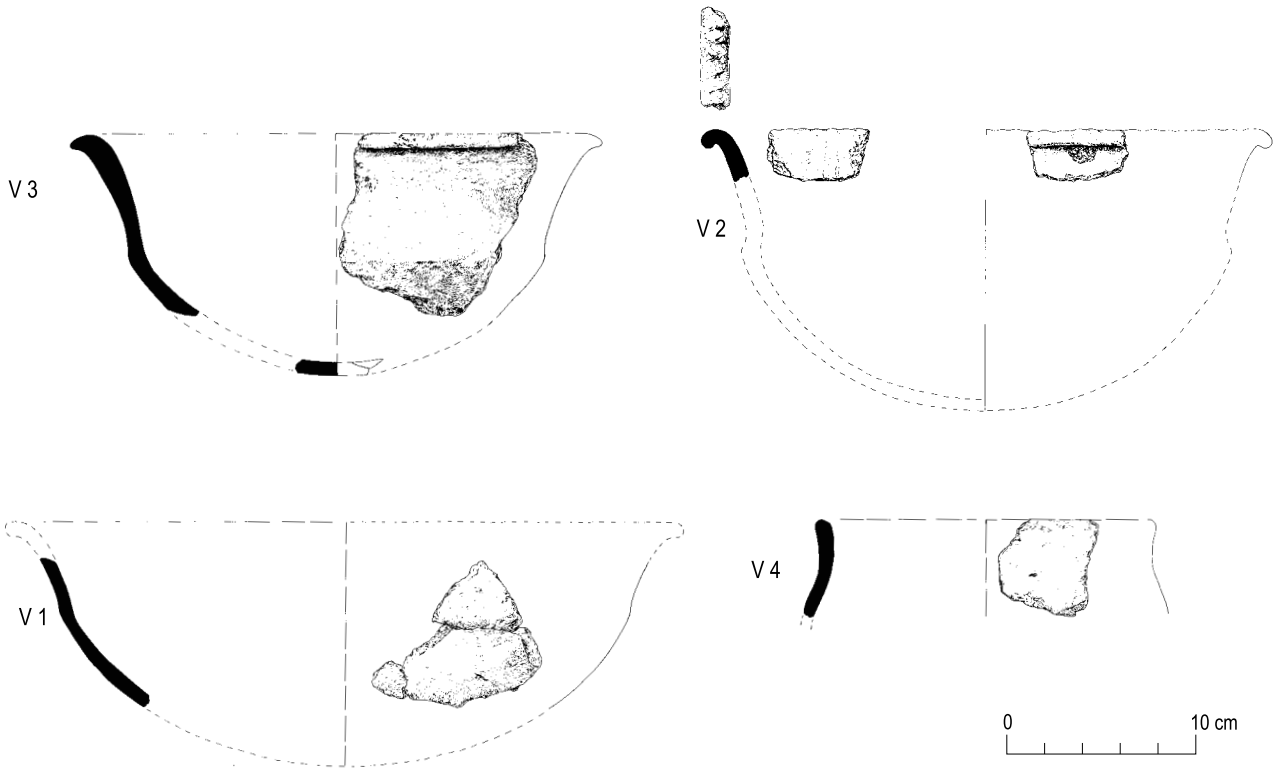
there are two main differences between the archaeology of the northern trench and that of the southern trench. A sherd from an earlier Neolithic Carinated Bowl (Figure 2.24*:* V 3, SF 18) was placed in the fill (105) of the northern ditch. An encrustation adhering to this sherd suggests that the pot had been used for cooking (Sheridan, see Chapter 12 and Archive). The fill of the northern ditch also contained a few grains of six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare sl*), perhaps deriving from hearth waste (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Samples of alder (*Alnus*) and hazel (*Corylus*) charcoal from the main fill (105) of the trench produced radiocarbon dates of 2460–2150 BC (SUERC-7655) and 3910–3650 BC (SUERC-7654). The former date range is much later than other radiocarbon dates from this site, and probably derives from intrusive material.

After creating the trenches to support the north and south screens, the builders excavated a third trench (114) along the east side (Figure 2.20). Excavation by the archaeologists revealed that the techniques used to create this east trench varied from those used for the southern and northern trenches. Large, circular pits (209), (129) and (208) were dug to form the northern portion of the east trench,

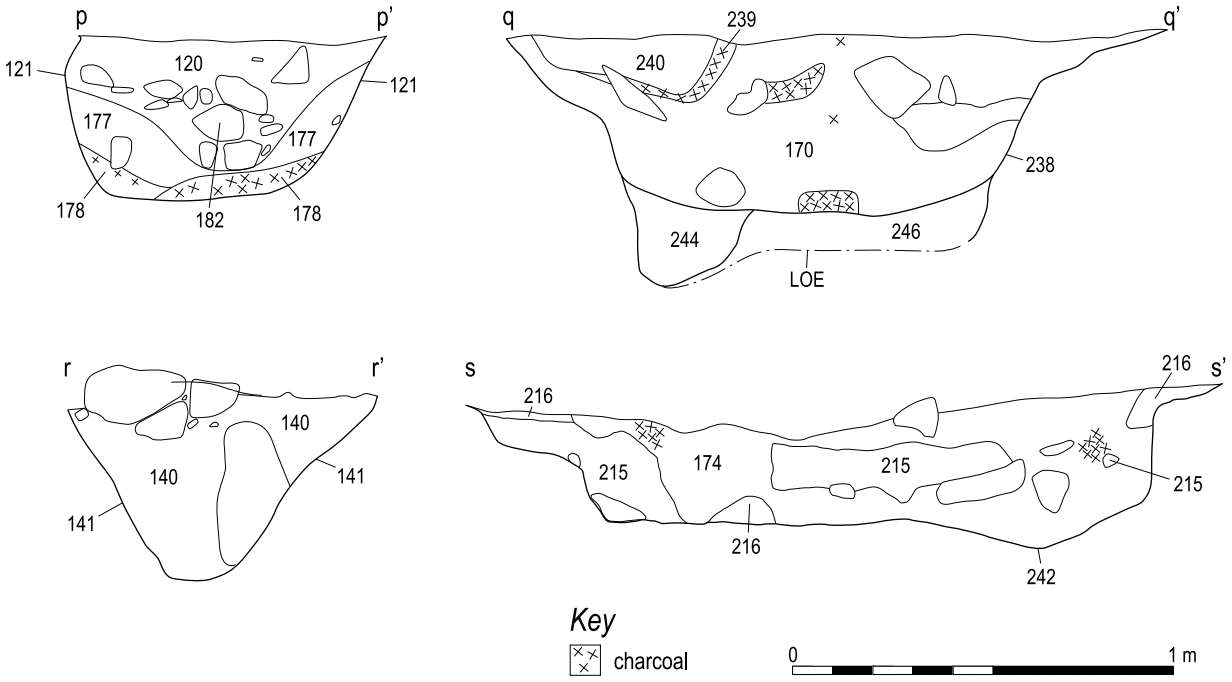
2.22 The trapezoidal enclosure during excavation, from the SSW.



2.23 Sections through the enclosure trenches.



2.24 Carinated Bowls from Pencraig Hill.



2.25 Sections through the post-pits for the screen and mortuary structure.

covering a distance of several metres. Charcoal from oak, alder, hazel and pine indicates that, again, oak timbers were set in the pits to form a screen (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). To the south, the east trench narrowed markedly and there was no evidence for individual post-holes. This difference in form, combined with field observations of fragments of daub along this section of the trench, could indicate that a wattle-and-daub screen stood here instead of a timber one.

A wattle-and-daub screen might have been more mobile; it could be removed to allow onlookers to watch activities taking place inside the enclosure. It is also possible that a light screen could have been used as a mobile door, allowing a different way into the enclosure. Analysis of the main fill (113) of this part of the east trench found alder (*Alnus*) charcoal (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive), a sample of which produced a radiocarbon date of 3800–3650 BC (SUERC-7658). There was also evidence for particular acts beside the eastern screen. Those using the monument smashed a Carinated Bowl and put 15 of the sherds (about a quarter of the vessel) into the screen trench (Figure 2.24: V 1, SF 26–30). Two cereal grains (one identified as six row barley) and the alder charcoal may suggest that hearth waste was also dumped into the trench (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

Directly to the west of the putative wattle-and-daub screen, by the narrowest part of the eastern trench, two linear slots (199) and (201) formed an 'L' shape, creating a small, triangular space inside the palisade (Figures 2.17 and 2.26). The slots contained abundant fragments of oak charcoal, and one slot (199) had evidence for several possible stake-holes set in its base. These may have held screens that channelled people's movement through the eastern façade and into the enclosure. One fragment of hazel (*Corylus*) charcoal from the fill of slot (199) produced a radiocarbon date of 3800–3650 BC (SUERC-7656).

Those creating the monument also dug two large pits (141 and 121) at the eastern end of the north and south timber screens, and both of these pits cut into the side and front (east) screen-construction trenches (Figure 2.20). The northern pit (141) had been packed with stones and redeposited subsoil (237), suggesting that it held a substantial timber (Figure 2.25, r-r'). A charcoal-rich deposit was dumped into the base of the southern pit (121), and then a timber was inserted, as indicated by packing stones (182) (Figure 2.25, p-p'). Palaeobotanical analysis has established that oak charcoal dominated the fills of both pits, so they may have held large oak timbers (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). A radiocarbon date of 3780–3520 BC (SUERC-8001) was

obtained from hazel (*Corylus)* charcoal in the northern pit (140).

The interior of the enclosure contained a redeposited till (Simpson, see Chapter 12 and Archive), which may suggest that there was a phase of mound-building or filling of the interior before the next phase of activity on the site.

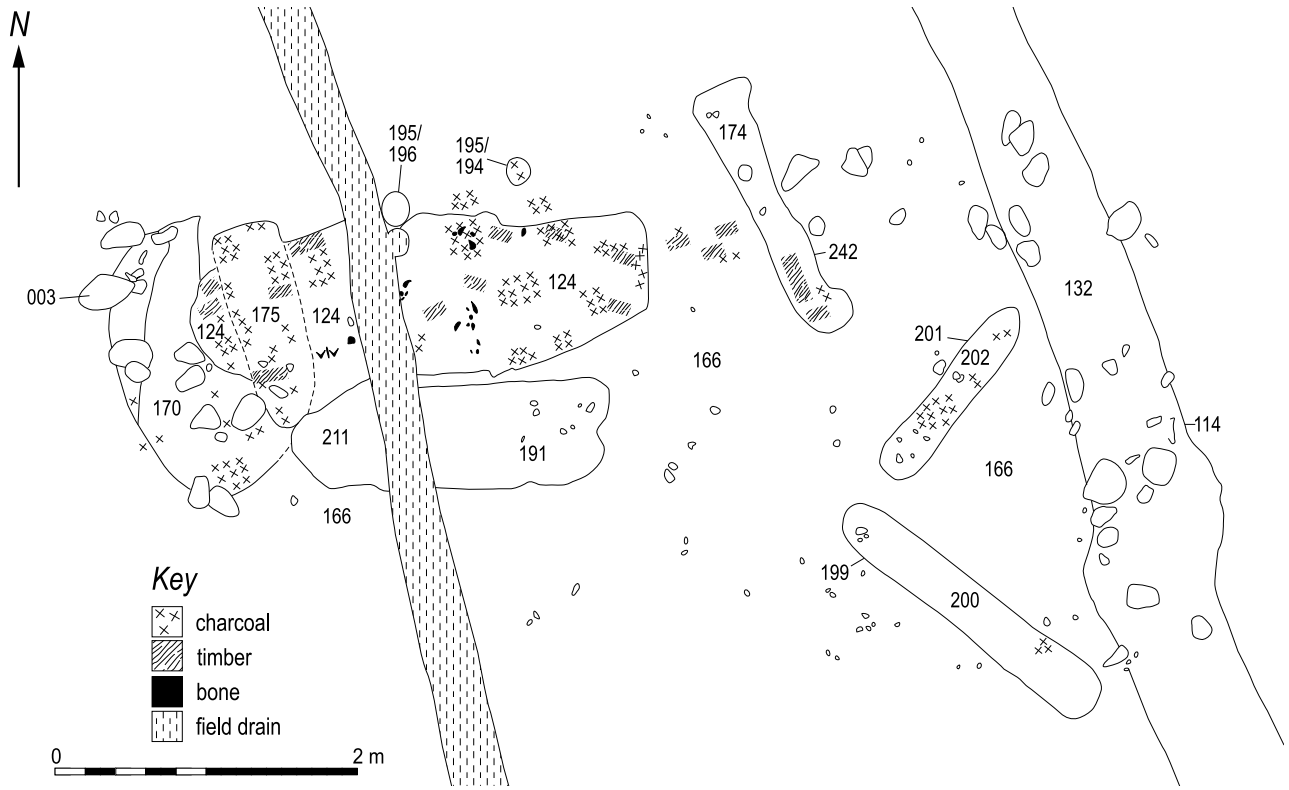
The mortuary structure and pyre

After digging the three trenches (106)/(118)/(114) and erecting screens to create a sub-trapezoidal enclosure, those using the monument built another structure. These later activities appear to have taken place on the modified till deposit (166). Into this the monument builders dug two large pits (238 and 242), set *c.* 3.2m apart (Figure 2.21). These formed the foundations for a timber mortuary structure measuring *c.* 4.4m long by 1.4m wide.

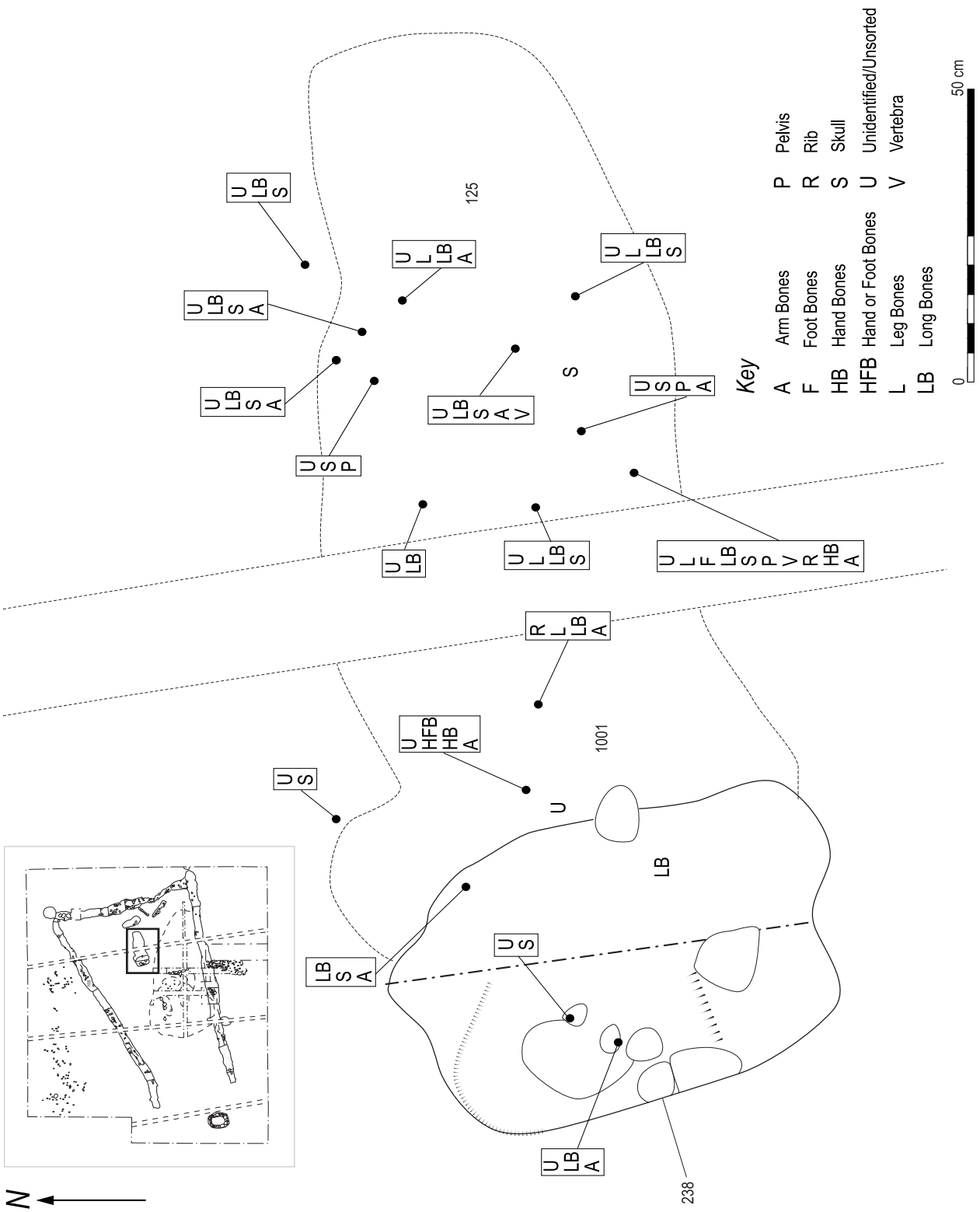
The western part of the mortuary structure's remains consisted of a large, sub-rectangular pit (238) measuring 1.4m across and up to 0.6m in depth (Figure 2.25, q-q'); this was not fully excavated due to time constraints. The builders set two wooden posts (244) at either side of the pit, indicated by post-pipes, placing a large, flat stone (246) between the posts to brace them and inserting other packing stones. Palaeobotanical analysis indicates that the posts were of oak (Miller and Ramsay, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Eventually, the posts – which probably formed part of a larger structure – were burnt where they stood, and fragments of charcoal mixed with the packing (170). The unburnt, below-ground portions of the posts decayed, causing heat-reddened, ashy, charcoal-rich deposits (239 and 240) to slump into the pit. Palaeobotanical analysis identified just oak charcoal and carbonised bark, evoking the remains of an undressed oak timber burnt *in situ* (Ramsay, and Miller see Chapter 12 and Archive).

Along the west and north edges of the pit (238) were several stones (003), which may originally have been set around the upright post, or placed to form a kerb or revetment for the timber mortuary structure. If the stones were originally set against the wooden structure, they later collapsed and were moved about by the plough. Equally, some may have been packing stones within pit 238.

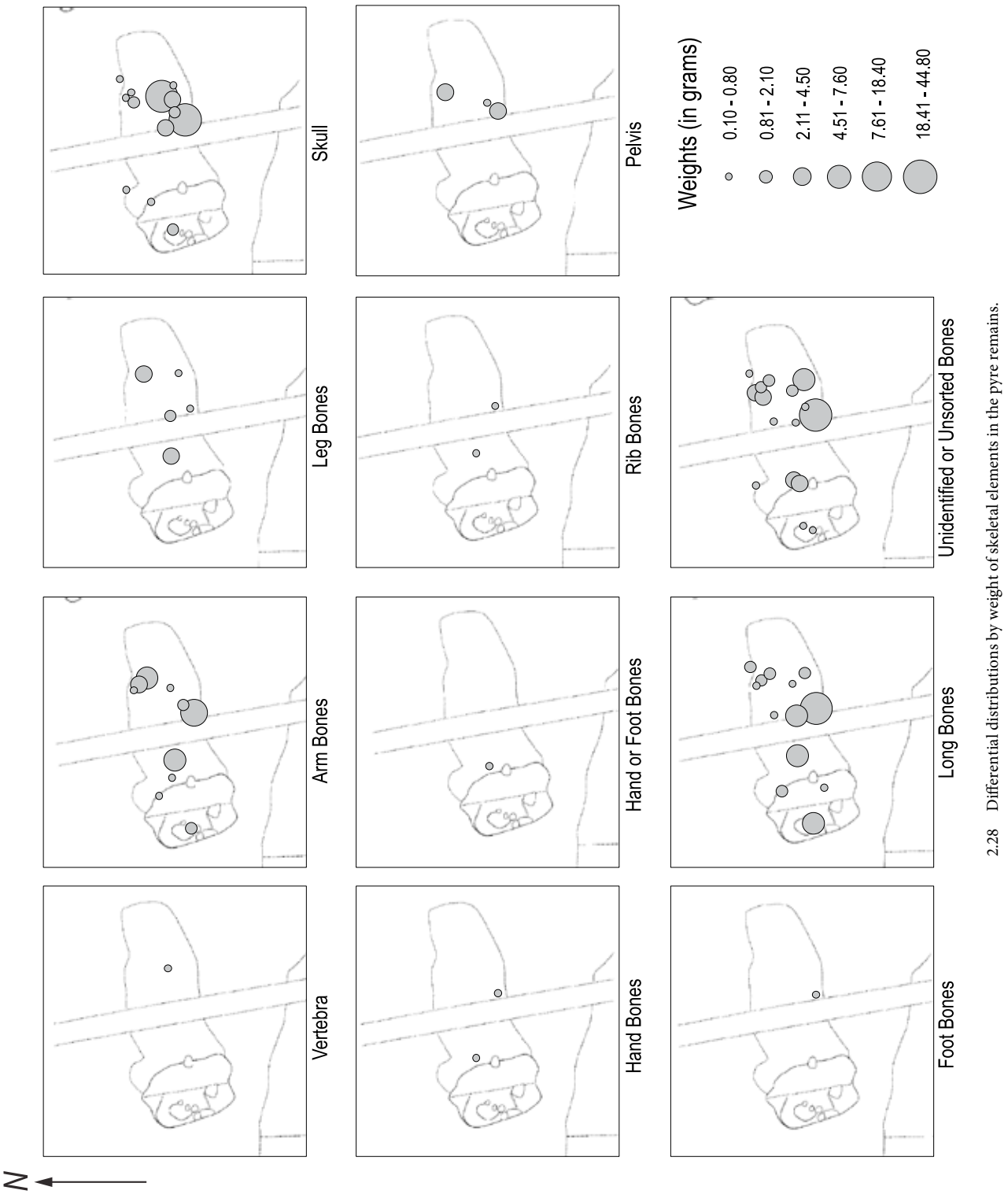
The eastern pit was a sub-rectangular trench (242), measuring 1.9m by 0.4m by 0.4m in depth ((Figure 2.25,



2.26 Detailed plan of the remains of the mortuary structure and pyre.



2.27 Overall distribution of the different skeletal elements in the pyre remains.



2.28 Differential distributions by weight of skeletal elements in the pyre remains.

s-s'). The fill comprised a charcoal rich silt clay (174) in which the excavation team found fragments of collapsed oak beams that had burnt *in situ*. This pit also contained orange-pink sand clay (215) and large stones that probably represent packing. A small quantity (2.5g) of burnt human bone was found in the fill (174).

At either side of the mortuary structure, the builders dug small pits (193), (195) and (197) which may have held small posts, probably made of oak (as the palaeobotanical evidence suggests), introduced to help carry the weight of the mortuary platform (Figure 2.26). The presence of these posts along the sides and the possible presence of revetment stones at the west suggest that a wooden structure stood between posts 242 and 238.

Lying between the two pits (242 and 238) was a charcoal-rich, black, ashy deposit (124), extending 3m by 1m and with a depth of up to 40mm (Figure 2.26). The deposit contained frequent concentrations of burnt human bone and lengths of carbonised wood. A high proportion of the wood appears to derive from oak beams that ran east-to-west across the pyre and which were burnt *in situ*; these may have been the collapsed remains of a mortuary platform. There was also evidence at the western end of the pyre for a concentration of charcoal (175) that could represent cross-planks on the platform. Samples of bark from the collapsed pyre (124, 166, 170 and 239) produced radiocarbon dates of 3940–3660 BC (SUERC-9033), 3930–3650 BC (SUERC-9034), 3970–3760 BC (SUERC-9035) and 3940–3660 BC (SUERC-9039) respectively.

The fragments of burnt bone (534g) showed that bodies (or perhaps portions of them) had been placed on the platform, and then cremated. Cracking and warping of the larger bone fragments indicated that the bodies were fleshed when they were cremated. The pyre had held at least two individuals, one of whom was an adult male. Pitting on the outer surface of cranial fragments indicates that one had suffered from iron deficiency anaemia (Marquez-Grant, see Chapter 12 and Archive). Fragments of bone produced radiocarbon dates of 3920–3630 BC (SUERC-7910) and 3700–3380 BC (SUERC-7911).

The cremated bone assemblage comprised a disproportionate number of long bone and skull fragments. The intriguing possibility that people gathered up most of the bone for use elsewhere, leaving mainly long bone and skull fragments, cannot be dismissed. Alternatively, it is possible that the pyre only ever contained parts of bodies rather than whole individuals. Equally, it may be that the smaller, more fragile bones did not survive the fire. Analysis of the distribution of the bone shows that it lay in one part of the collapsed mortuary structure, rather than along its whole length. The distribution of the different bone elements does not correlate with an extended body position; most of the skeletal elements were scattered throughout the deposit, except for a concentration of cranial fragments near the centre (Figure 2.27 and 2.28). This could in part be due to the collapse of the structure, but equally could relate to the pyre's having been raked through. However, the relatively discrete concentration of bone and the remnants of *in situ* timbers suggest that the pyre had not been greatly disturbed and the remaining bone had not been spread much.

To the north of the pyre were several small pits (157, 185 and 187), one of which (185) contained burnt human bone (73g). Analysis has established that most of the bone derives from the skull (71.7g), with small quantities of rib (0.2g) and long bone (1.1g) (Marquez-Grant, see Chapter 12 and Archive). This may suggest that people deliberately selected skull fragments to deposit in the pit, perhaps from the nearby pyre.

After the mortuary platform had been set alight, or perhaps even at the same time, the entire sub-trapezoidal enclosure at Pencraig Hill was fired and razed to the ground. This was evident from the high concentrations of charcoal in the trenches that held the screens. Thus, after the fire and perhaps for many decades, the monument would have appeared as a blackened outline, perhaps with the stubs of charred timbers poking up. At its centre there would have been a large black stain, with cremated human bone and burnt timbers lying around it, and next to this a small raised area with the remains of the earliest stone structure.

Discussion

Enough evidence emerged from several of the excavated sites along the A1 to suggest that groups of hunters, gatherers and fishers had long occupied the region before the fourth millennium BC. At Eweford, people may have been making and using tools, perhaps during short-term, seasonal visits. At Pencraig Hill, hunters may have felled an animal during a chase, losing a microlith in the process. The activity at Eweford West took place on a low glacial ridge, perhaps in a small clearing. Groups of hunters and gatherers may have traversed the area along well-known paths that led from one place to another within their territories.

At the beginning of the fourth millennium BC, groups of people were drawn to two different locales, Pencraig Hill and Eweford West, where they began to create monuments. At both places, activity extending over several hundred years ultimately resulted in distinctive and substantial monuments. We might consider these monuments to have been inter-generational projects. At both places, the activities were very similar in form and sequence, and this seems highly significant. At the same

time, the monuments created were remarkably different. We want to consider in more detail the nature of these activities and their implications for how we understand these inter-generational projects.

At each site we can identify three broadly similar kinds of activity: the construction of mounds and buildings; the construction of more buildings and their use as funeral pyres; and the formalisation of space into sub-trapezoidal forms.

Both places may first have seen the creation of low, sub-oval mounds or built-up areas, following preparation of the ground involving clearance of vegetation and stone from the surface: neutralising the natural world, creating a clean canvas for what was to follow. In each case, people probably cut turf in the vicinity to obtain material to build the mounds, laying bare the soil below (McKenzie, see Chapter 12 and Archive).

At Pencraig Hill, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that a structure was built on the mound, delineated by stones set in a clay-lined foundation trench and incorporating timber uprights. The fragmentary evidence suggests that this structure may have been three-sided, with an open end to the west; it represented the first creation or formalisation of space at the site. Whatever activities took place in this space, the evidence suggests that they involved at least five episodes of burning.

At Eweford West, the evidence for an early phase of construction is more circumstantial. However, the heat-affected stones which had been pitched into the large pit, associated with oak charcoal, were similar in size and condition to the remains of later buildings on the mound; they evoke the demolished remains of a structure.

Although different in sequence, the secondary and tertiary phases at each site are broadly similar, even with considerable differences in detail. At Eweford West, the second phase involved the creation of two buildings, both comprising stone rows revetting timber uprights to which planking was attached. Both buildings may have been used as mortuary structures, or ultimately pyres, as they were eventually burnt down with human remains inside them. The second phase at Pencraig Hill involved digging trenches and erecting timber planking in them to create two sides of an enclosure. This was followed by the creation of a third trench, which held timber posts and wattle screens, to close off the east end and create an open-ended, sub-trapezoidal enclosure measuring about 15m by 20m.

At Pencraig Hill, in the third phase, it appears that a mortuary structure was built of timber uprights, oak planking and stone revetting. This structure was ultimately used as a pyre. About the same time, two slots that probably held screens outside the eastern wall of the enclosure may have channelled movement into it through a movable wattle-and-daub screen. The third phase at Eweford West is more comparable to the second phase at Pencraig Hill. While evidence for walling survived on only one side at Eweford West, it is likely that the builders constructed two side walls or revetments of drystone, which were complemented by a timber-and-wattle screen. Together these created a sub-trapezoidal form measuring about 14.5 by 20m. While the variations in materials are of significance, ultimately they were combined to create spaces that were effectively of the same size, shape and form.

Although the second and third phases were different in sequence at the two sites, at both they ultimately resulted in a sub-trapezoidal monument. This shows that, while there was clearly scope for variations in how people thought each phase of construction (and potentially use) should proceed, the several generations that built and used both monuments shared a sense of architectural order. It is tempting to see such strong parallels as evidence that each monument was developed according to a plan, conceived long in advance. This, however, misses the significance of these parallel sequences and forms of construction. We believe that these parallel building traditions grew from the wider social landscape in which the communities lived. Changes in practices at each location were the consequences of wider changes, related to the transformation of generations. In Chapter 8, we address what these wider social changes may have been and why they came about.

Changing practices

Beyond the similarities in phase and form, we can observe similarities in other practices at the two sites. For example, the presence of broken early Neolithic Carinated Bowls at both sites shows that people considered it appropriate to bring this sort of material culture to Eweford West and Pencraig Hill and to treat it in a similar manner, depositing the pots in a broken state. The cremated human remains at both sites were also treated in similar ways. At each site, structures were built, human remains were immediately or eventually placed inside them and the buildings were fired, acting as funeral pyres. It is not just significant that human remains were brought to each site, but also that this happened at what were considered appropriate points in the lifespan of each monument. This highlights the fact that, at each place, the phases of building set the scene for other acts which are less archaeologically visible.

While we have stressed the similarities of both the projects at Pencraig Hill and Eweford, there is a fundamental difference we have not yet explored. The locations chosen for each project were very different, both possibly affording extensive but different views, depending

on the degree of woodland clearance: one on the side of a long slope, with extensive views to the south dominated by Traprain Law; the other towards the north end of a low glacial bank with extensive views of the Forth to the north. (Paradoxically, the careful definition of space by building walls and screens would have isolated those inside the monumental enclosures from this wider environment.) We could consider these different topographic positions as local expressions of wider traditions, an indication of the freedoms that individual communities or social groups had to interpret how they produced certain architectural forms. On another level, however, they may hint that the roles of these sites transcended their locations, because each was constructed by members of several different communities and generations.

This introduces the possibility that the monument builders of Eweford West and Pencraig Hill may not have understood these monuments as separate sites; instead, they could have perceived them as inter-connected places, forming foci within wider systems of ceremonial activity. While the activities taking place at both sites were very similar, the differences in sequence suggest that the monuments developed in very different ways. It is equally possible that these differences arose as individual communities and successive generations decided what forms of practice were appropriate at different times.

2.2

The many uses of birch

The charcoal assemblages from Eweford West and Pencraig Hill were unusual in that they contained only trace amounts of charcoal from birch trees. When these sites were being used during the fourth millennium BC, birch would have been one of the most common trees in the local woodlands, so why was it not being used for either fuel or construction? Birch burns well, even when green, and it forms a strong timber when dry. It would seem that people had other priorities when it came to choosing certain woods for particular purposes. It appears that they were actively avoiding using birch for fuel or to build any of the structures that were subsequently burnt down at either place. If birch was being used there, it must have been for some purpose that did not bring it into contact with fire.

Birch trees produce many useful products other than wood for fuel or construction. The twiggy branches can be used to make brooms or as thatch for roofs. Resin in the bark can be tapped off as a sticky glue to fix flint blades to handles or to use as waterproofing. Tannins can be extracted from the bark to use in tanning hides for leather. All of these uses would have made birch trees valuable to the fourth-millennium BC inhabitants of East Lothian, and so the trees may have been used in ways that left no trace in the charcoal record at either site.

Another possible use for birch trees also involves the bark. The silvery white outer bark is both durable and waterproof, and it can be stripped from the trees in large sheets. These can be used to make roofs, canoes or all manner of buckets, baskets, mats or even clothing. The sheets of bark can be sewn together to form even larger pieces or more complicated shapes. Anything made from the bark would have been an eye-catching object because of its intense, silvery white colour. If an entire roof was made of birch bark, for example, it would have been visible from all around and its shine would have reflected light. There is evidence from the ninth-millennium BC site of Starr Carr in Yorkshire that birch bark was incorporated into platforms along with birch twigs, forming a walkway that would have shone with a silvery white glow in sunlight or even moonlight.

It is clear that East Lothian's early prehistoric inhabitants used birch in ways that differed from how they used other trees. It may be that they associated birch with special properties, either physical or symbolic.

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2.29 Reconstruction of the Pencraig Hill enclosure being fired.

In order to understand what took place at each site, we need to consider them both as significant places within wider networks of activity. The surrounding area was the source of wood and stone for building materials, and the specific locations chosen to fell trees or gather stones may have been loaded with deeper meanings. For example, the palaeo-environmental analysis has highlighted the apparent avoidance of birch at both sites (see text box 2.2). Pottery was probably made in other places, and vessels or their fragments were brought to the monuments. The remains of people who had died elsewhere were brought there too, and the bodies were transformed and fragmented. Some bone remained on the sites, becoming part of the monuments after the pyres collapsed, but people may have raked through the ashes and taken some of the bone elsewhere.

We should also consider the visual and auditory effects of both Pencraig Hill and Eweford West. The noise of their construction – hammering of wooden pegs, shaping of stones, the building of structures, as well as the sounds of voices involved in this process – would have been heard in the surrounding area. Their visual impacts would have varied with light and weather. For instance, Pencraig Hill would have loomed large in the land during the day, with its tall screens, but at night it may have blended into the darkness. While elements of the monuments were burning, they would have looked particularly striking from a high vantage point such as Traprain Law, especially if the fires burned at night. The spectacles viewed from afar would have been very different from the sights at ground level, close up. The noises and the smells produced by the rituals carried out here would have travelled across large distances.

Building and burning

Consideration of the parallels between the monuments at Pencraig Hill and Eweford West has been particularly illuminating. While differences in the sequence of activities suggest a degree of fluidity in how these projects unfolded, their common characteristics indicate that people across space and time shared an awareness of what was appropriate to build (Kinnes 1992; Bradley 1998). We argue that this awareness grew as members of different communities, living in wider social networks, collectively undertook inter-generational projects. Whether these groups came together to create and use these monuments or whether the monuments represent the expressions of individual communities is unclear. When we consider the monuments in these terms, we

have to understand what took place at each in the context of the wider, inhabited landscape. These activities were not confined to a rarified ritual or ceremonial context, but grew from and had implications for other arenas of social practice. Thus, while people's activities at each site may appear similar, the effects and meanings of what they did could have been radically different.

Given that both sites produced archaeological traces of substantial wooden structures that were deliberately burnt down, it would be tempting to conclude that, at both Pencraig Hill and Eweford West, communities built with the intention to burn (Figure 2.29). However, consideration of how architecture and practices developed at both sites suggests that the role of the structures and the nature of practices changed over several generations. In the earliest phases, we see evidence of a burning desire to build; for a time, building in its own right may have been significant to the social groups that participated. This creation of new arenas for novel practices ultimately led to a phase in which other rites and practices were more important than the acts of building. Equally, the burning of the structures was not always the final phase of activity: in the case of Eweford West, the mound of earth and stone with its timber façade continued to be a focus for future generations (see Chapters 4 and 5).