

**N18 Ennis Bypass  
and N85 Western Relief Road**

**Site AR107, Ballymacahill, Co. Clare**

**Final Archaeological Excavation Report  
for Clare County Council**

**Licence No: 04E0053**

**by Markus Casey**

**Job J04/01**

**(NGR 136768 180018)**

**1<sup>st</sup> August 2006**

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## Summary

**Site name:** N18 Ennis Bypass and N85 Western Relief Road, Site AR107, Ballymacahill, Co. Clare

**Townland:** Ballymacahill

**Parish:** Kilraghtis

**Barony:** Bunratty Upper

**County:** Clare

**SMR/RMP Number:** N/A

**Planning Ref. No:** N/A

**Client:** Clare County Council, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare

**Landowner:** Clare County Council, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare

**Grid reference:** 136768 180018 (OSI Discovery Series 1:50,000, Sheet 58. OS 6" Clare Sheet 34)

**Naturally occurring geology:** Pale gravel and boulder clay with outcropping limestone bedrock

**TVAS Ireland Job No:** J04/01

**Licence No:** 04E0053

**Licence Holder:** Markus Casey

**Report author:** Markus Casey

**Site activity:** Excavation

**Site area:** 430m<sup>2</sup>

**Sample percentage:** 100%

**Date of fieldwork:** 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> February 2004

**Date of report:** 1<sup>st</sup> August 2006

**Summary of results:** Excavation of a shallow layer of marshy discoloured soil on outcropping limestone pavement revealed three small spreads of discoloured and burnt soil. These deposits, that had been uncovered in earlier testing, were shown to be non-archaeological and the nature of the location makes the survival of original levels or features of archaeological significance unlikely.

**Monuments identified:** None

**Location and reference of archive:** The primary records (written, drawn and photographic) are currently held at TVAS Ireland Ltd, Ahish, Ballinruan, Co. Clare.

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Report edited/checked by: Kate Taylor ✓01.08.2006

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Final Archaeological Excavation Report**

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**Report J04/0lt**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the final results of an archaeological excavation of deposits that proved to be natural in origin (Site AR107) on the route of the N18 Ennis Bypass at Ballymacahill, Co. Clare (NGR 136768 180018) (Fig. 1). The excavation forms part of the Ennis Bypass Archaeological Contract 6.

A preliminary archaeological report for this site was produced in June 2004 (Casey 2004).

The National Monuments Act 1930 (as amended) provides the legislative framework within which archaeological excavation can take place and the following government publications set out many of the procedures relating to planning/development and archaeology:

*Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage* (DAHGI 1999a)

*Policy and Guidelines on Archaeological Excavation* (DAHGI 1999b)

*Code of Practice between the National Roads Authority and the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands* (NRA/MAHGI 2001)

## **Project background**

As part of the National Roads Authority scheme for upgrading the N18 Limerick to Galway Road, Clare County Council, in consultation with NRA Project Archaeologist Sébastien Joubert, requested a series of archaeological investigations along the route of the proposed Ennis Bypass and a Western Relief Road. The proposed scheme has an overall length of 21km and involves the construction of a 13.8km eastern bypass of Ennis from Latoon, north of Newmarket-on-Fergus, to Cragard, north of Barefield. The Western Relief Road is 7.1km long and is to link Killow and Claureen (Fig. 1).

A number of sites of archaeological interest were known to lie on the route of the new roads and the mitigation strategy agreed by the Project Archaeologist and the national licensing authorities for these sites was preservation by record, i.e. full archaeological excavation. Further sites, without surface expression, were located as the result of intensive test trenching along the course of the road (03E1291 Hull 2003 and 03E1293 Roger 2004). As preservation *in situ* was not a reasonable option, the resolution strategy for these new sites was also preservation by record.

The archaeological excavation and post excavation work were funded by Clare County Council through the National Roads Authority and part-financed by the European Union under the National Development Plan 2000-2006.

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site was located in the townland of Ballymacahill, parish of Kilraghtis, barony of Bunratty Upper and lay approximately 4km north-east of Ennis town centre (the O'Connell Monument), 2.5km south of Barefield village and was centred on NGR 136768 180018 (Figs 1 and 2).

The site was located in a low-lying marshy area overlooked by higher land to the west (Plate 1). Streams, drystone walls and overgrown hedgerows formed the field boundaries and some areas in the immediate surroundings were overgrown with scrub. The section of the field under investigation sloped down to the east and formed part of the run-off from the nearby farmyard.

The soil cover was very shallow, with the flat limestone pavement exposed in many areas. Grass cover was sparse and the area is generally under water during the winter months, partly due the flooded stream nearby and partly from wash running downslope from the farmyard.

Beneath the thin topsoil layer the natural geological deposits were pale gravel and boulderclay with occasional outcropping limestone bedrock.

The excavated area sloped from 12.3m above Ordnance Datum in the west to 11.2m OD in the east.

### **Archaeological background**

As part of the environmental assessment process for the road scheme, Clare County Council commissioned desk-based and walkover surveys that formed part of an Environmental Statement (Babtie Pettit 2000) and an archaeological study for the Environmental Impact Statement (Doyle 1999). A total of 36 sites of known or potential cultural heritage significance were identified along the entire route of the proposed Ennis Bypass and Western Relief Road.

Earthwork and geophysical survey were undertaken on potential archaeological sites and invasive testing and excavation took place in 2002 and 2003 on some of the above ground sites affected by the proposed road (Aegis 2002, IAC 2003, Geoquest 2002, Earthsound 2003).

A systematic programme of testing along the new road route, involving the mechanical excavation of a central linear trench with offsets, took place in Summer/Autumn 2003. Twenty-two previously unknown sites, including cremation cemeteries, burnt stone spreads, enclosures and brick clamps were found (03E1291 Hull 2003 and 03E1293 Roger 2004). Monuments dating from the Bronze Age to the modern period were found.

Earlier phases of archaeological intervention on newly constructed stretches of the N18 (Dromoland to Carrigoran), to the immediate south of this road project, have demonstrated that the locality has a rich range of prehistoric and later monuments (99E0350 Hull and Tarbett-Buckley 2001).

Recent archaeological work on the BGE Gas Pipeline to the West in the neighbourhood of the new road route has tended to support the picture of continuous human activity in Co. Clare from the Neolithic and even becoming intensive from the Bronze Age. A number of burnt stone spreads and burnt mounds were excavated near the route of the new road in the summer of 2002 (MGL 2002).

Potential archaeological deposits were found during testing (03E1293 Roger 2004). This material was a spread of burnt and shattered stone in a dark charcoal rich matrix. The deposit measured 6m north to south by 2.4m. A depression was located in the centre of the mound/spread. This depression was 1.6m long by 1.5m wide and was interpreted as being a potential trough. The spread was bounded to the north by an outcrop of limestone bedrock. This potential site was allocated the number Site AR107 and is the subject of this report.

A small site, AR108 (04E0054, Casey 2006), was excavated 350m to the south as part of the Ennis Bypass project. Three pits were examined and charcoal was radiocarbon dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

## **Excavation aims and methodology**

A licence to excavate was granted to Markus Casey by the National Monuments Section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, in consultation with the National Museum of Ireland, on behalf of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The licence number is 04E0053.

The aims of the excavation were to:

- 1) Preserve by record all archaeological deposits and features within the excavation area
- 2) Produce a high quality report of the findings

The fieldwork took place between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2004 and was directed by Markus Casey, supervised by Richard Oram and assisted by Frank Mulcahy.

The excavation area was broadly rectangular, measured 9m east to west at the north, widening to 19m at the south and was 32m long (430m<sup>2</sup>). Topsoil and overburden were removed by a 15 tonne, 360°, tracked machine, operated under direct and continuous archaeological supervision. The digger was fitted with a 6 foot toothless bucket. The northern half of the site was stripped first, then the area was extended south.

All features were hand-cleaned then fully excavated.

A full written, drawn and photographic record was made following procedures outlined in the TVAS Ireland Field Recording Manual (First Edition 2003).

## **Excavation results** (Fig. 3 and Plates 2 and 3)

No surface features were visible in advance of the excavation.

A layer of topsoil mixed with farmyard slurry varied in thickness from <0.01m along the western edge to 0.06-0.08m along the east. The boggy soil was nearly black in colour and in an almost liquid state along the eastern edge.

Beneath the soil and lying directly on top of the limestone bedrock was a layer of gravel mixed with boulderclay. This was only evident along the eastern half of the site and ranged in depth from 0.02m at the west to 0.10m along the eastern edge.

Two small oval deposits of dryer dark peaty fill, deposits 1 and 2, each about 2m in diameter were visible near the southern edge. A larger deposit, 3, roughly rectangular in plan was exposed at the northern edge. This deposit measured 4m north to south by 6m and sloped steeply down to the east. These deposits were most likely natural depressions in the boulderclay, filled with the peaty fill.

No finds or features were uncovered either within the peat or the topsoil cover. There was no trace of the possible area of burnt material found during the initial investigations in 2003 (Roger 2004).

## **Finds**

No finds were recovered.

## **Samples**

Although bulk soil samples were taken from each of the three deposits on the site these were not processed as the material did not represent stratified archaeological deposits.

## **Discussion**

The excavation of Site AR107, Ballymacahill, Co. Clare did not produce evidence of archaeological deposits or features.

The nature of the area and evidence of recent on-going disturbance suggests that nothing of archaeological significance that ever existed beneath the ground would have survived. No features, objects or levels of archaeological significance were noted, with the areas of dark peaty fill being most likely natural phenomena.

## **Archaeological potential off the road CPO**

The potential archaeological deposits found at Site AR107 during testing were fully resolved within the road CPO. The undulating marshy nature of the land might indicate a reasonable potential for further archaeological deposits without surface expression outside the road-take.

## **Publication plan**

A summary of the findings of the excavation has been submitted to *Excavations 2004*.

Copies of this final excavation report will be deposited with the Clare County Museum and the Local Studies Library, Ennis, Co. Clare

A summary article, describing the findings of this road project has been published in the local journal *The Other Clare* (Hull and Taylor 2005).

An illustrated information brochure describing the findings of this road project has been published by Clare County Council.

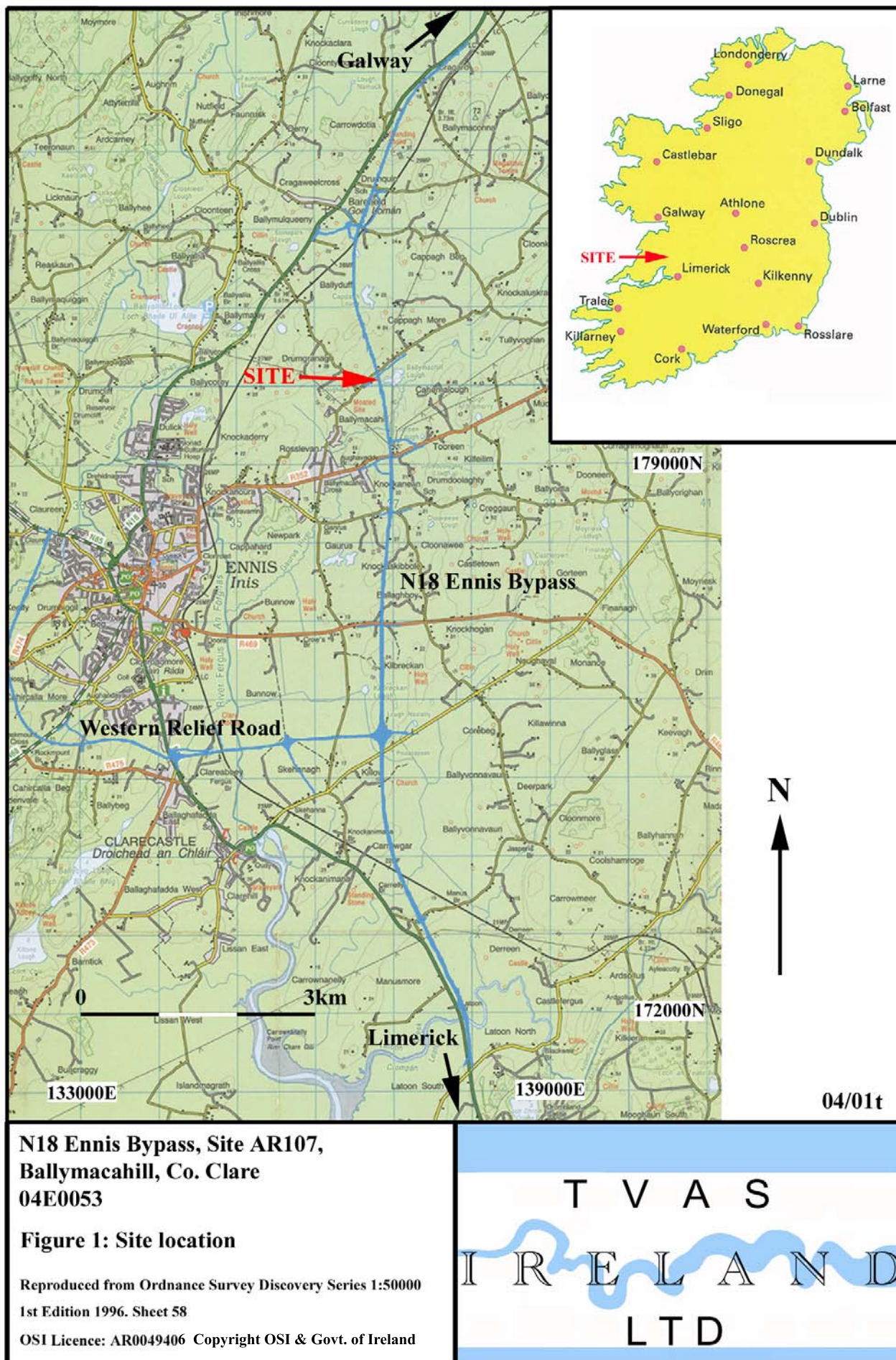
The stated aim of the National Roads Authority with regard to archaeological publication is clear, (O'Sullivan 2003) and it is anticipated that the negative results of this excavation will be disseminated as a small component of a monograph dedicated to the archaeology of the Ennis Bypass. Publication is expected to take place in 2006/7 at the latest.

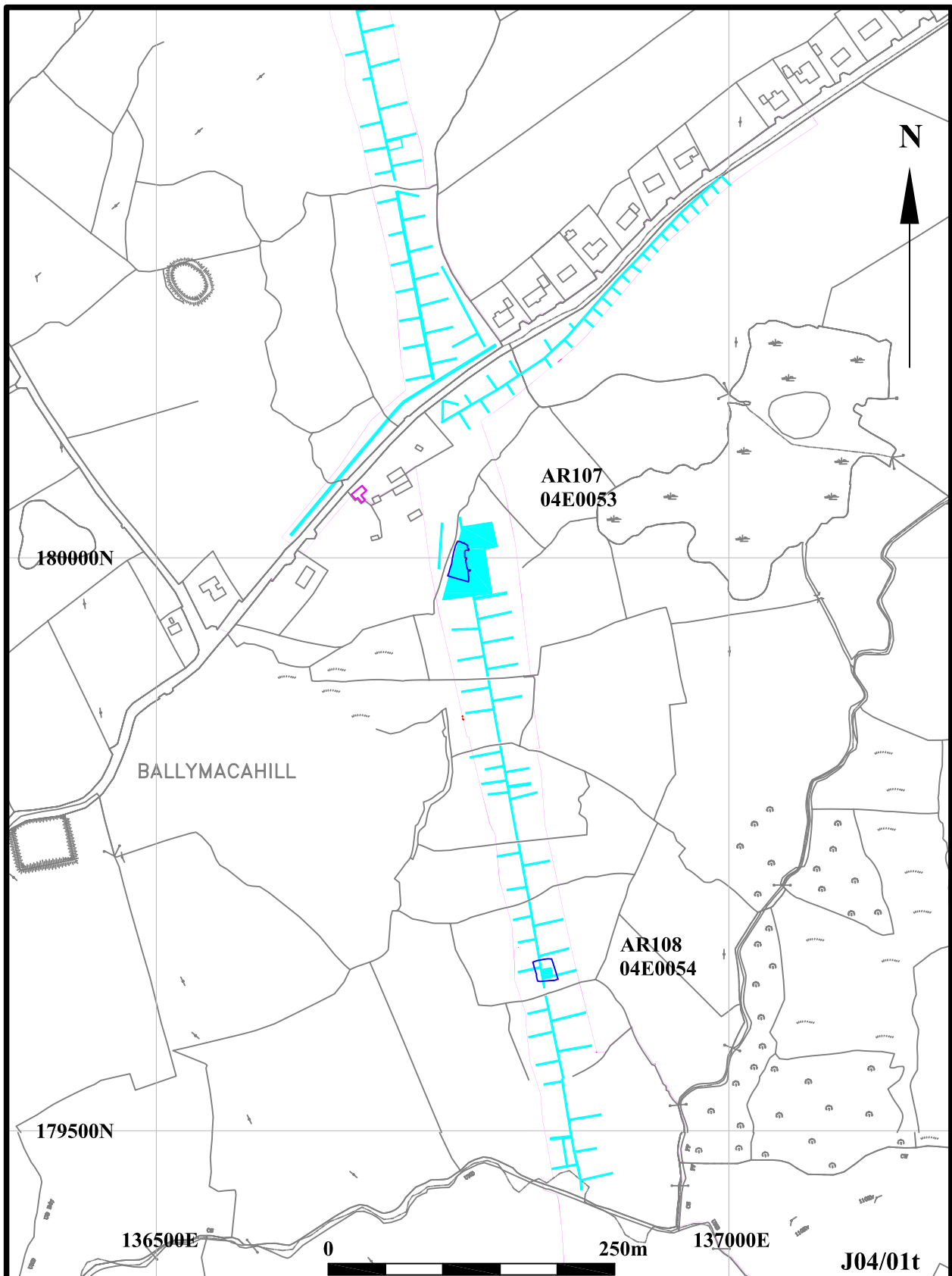
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Markus Casey  
For TVAS Ireland Ltd  
1<sup>st</sup> August 2006

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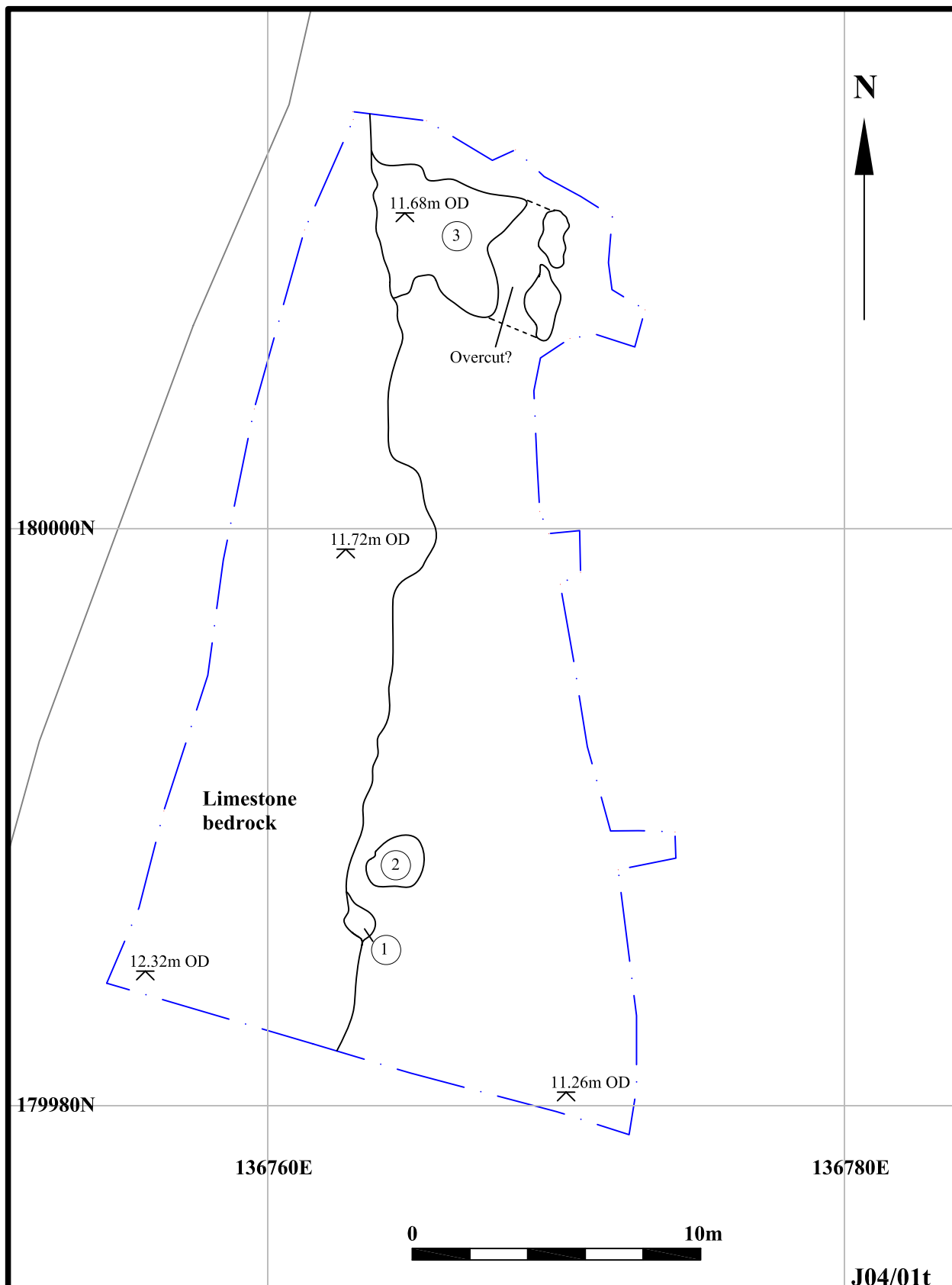
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**Figure 2: Location of site in local landscape, showing test trenches (03E1293)**

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**Figure 3: Plan of site**

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Plate 1. Aerial view of the site location with marshy land in the foreground. Looking north-west



**Plate 2. Northernmost peaty material. Looking west. Scale 1m**



**Plate 3. Southernmost peaty material. Looking west. Scales 1m and 0.3m**