

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

Site AR125, Clareabbey, Co. Clare

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

Licence No: 04E0023

by Graham Hull

Job J04/02

(NGR 134366 175353)

14th August 2006

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Summary

Site name: N18 Ennis Bypass and N85 Western Relief Road, Site AR125, Clareabbey, Co. Clare

Townland: Clareabbey

Parish: Clareabbey

Barony: Islands

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: 134366 175353 (OSI Discovery Series, 1:50,000, Sheet 58. OS 6" Clare Sheet 33)

Naturally occurring geology: Yellow mottled sandy clay

TVAS Ireland Job No: J04/02

Licence No: 04E0023

Licence Holder: Graham Hull

Report author: Graham Hull

Site activity: Excavation

Site area: N/a

Sample percentage: N/a

Date of fieldwork: 21st January 2004

Date of report: 14th August 2006

Summary of results: A burnt stone spread of possible prehistoric date was found during testing (03E1291, Hull 2003). The archaeological deposits were destroyed by a contractor re-routing services for the new road.

Monuments identified: Burnt stone spread

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

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Report edited/checked by: Kate Taylor ✓14.08.06

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Report J04/02r

Introduction

This report documents the preliminary results of an archaeological examination of a probable prehistoric burnt stone spread (Site AR125) on the route of the N18 Ennis Bypass, Clareabbey, Co. Clare (NGR 134366 175353) (Fig. 1). The site was found during testing (03E1291, Hull 2003) but destroyed by contractors diverting services for the new road. The work forms part of the Ennis Bypass Archaeological Contract 7.

A preliminary archaeological report for this site was produced in May 2004 (Hull 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)

The planning 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 Clareabbey, parish of Clareabbey, barony of Islands, approximately 2km south-east of Ennis town centre (the O'Connell Monument) and is centred on NGR 134366 175353 (Fig. 1).

The site was in a large field that was generally flat with outcropping ridges of limestone. The field was mostly poor crag but a wetter peaty area was noted at the north-east. It would seem that parts of the field had been reclaimed as dumps of small stones were noted during testing in some of the natural hollows and drainage ditches had been cut through the boggy parts at the north-east.

Topsoil was thickest at the north and west of the field and was typically 0.15m deep. At the south and west the topsoil was less than 0.15m thick and very gravelly with bedrock frequently outcropping. The natural geology differed between the east and west of the field. At the east the natural was a yellow mottled sandy clay and at the west limestone with gravel in the hollows was present.

Archaeological deposits were found in the wetter part of the field to the north-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). 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).

Archaeological deposits, allocated the site number AR125, were found during testing (03E1291 Hull 2003). These deposits were a larger and smaller spread of burnt stone. Open areas were stripped around the archaeology to define the full extent.

The larger burnt spread was found to have maximum dimensions of 10m (north to south) by 8m and was 0.35m thick. The spread (or perhaps 'mound') was made of burnt limestone pieces with charcoal flecking. A modern drain cut the mound and excavation of this drain allowed a full profile of the archaeological feature to be made (Figs 3 and 4 and Plate 3)

The smaller spread of burnt stone was 2.8m long (north-west to south-east) and 0.8m wide. The spread was no more than a discrete dump of heat cracked limestone with charcoal flecking. A modern plough scar truncated the feature and it was demonstrated that the burnt spread was filling a depression in the natural and was 0.15m deep.

Excavation aims and methodology

A licence to excavate was granted to Graham Hull 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 04E0023.

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 on 21st January 2004 and was undertaken by Graham Hull and assisted by Tim Dean.

Destruction of the site (Plates 1 and 2)

The burnt stone spread described above was found on 15th September 2003. The full extent in plan of the spread was ascertained during testing (03E1291, Hull 2003). The depth of the archaeological deposits was also recorded as a drain cut the spread. A written, drawn and photographic record of the deposits was also made at testing.

After recording, the site was covered with geotextile and backfilled. The location of the site was notified to the Project Archaeologist and the County Council's Engineer's Representative and an exclusion zone was notified by Clare County Council to other contractors on site.

Immediately before excavation was due to take place (mid January 2004) the archaeological contractor noted that the site had been damaged or destroyed. The archaeological contractor reported the damage to the Project Archaeologist and the County Council's Engineer's Representative on 20th January 2004.

Contractors (Coffey Ltd), diverting services for the new road, had mechanically dug through the archaeological site and surrounding ground. This digging took place in December 2003/early January 2004, even though the area had been highlighted as being archaeological.

On 21st January 2004, archaeologically controlled machine stripping at the location of the archaeological site demonstrated that the burnt stone spread had been destroyed.

Discussion

While it is unfortunate that the burnt stone spread was destroyed before full archaeological excavation could take place, it is of some consolation that the location, composition, plan and profile of the deposit were recorded at testing. A sample of the burnt stone spread was not taken at testing.

Burnt stone spreads associated with wet ground or streams are commonly shown to be prehistoric, typically Bronze Age, in date. It is very likely that the destroyed Site AR125 was an example of an episode, or episodes, of stone heating linked to warming water - perhaps for cooking.

Similar sites, characterised by burnt stone dumps, were excavated in fields nearby as part of this road project: AR121 (04E0031 Taylor 2006a), AR122 (04E0032 Taylor 2006b) and AR124 (04E0022 Hull 2006).

These three sites have been dated to the late Neolithic, early Bronze Age and late Bronze Age. It is very likely that the destroyed site was of similar antiquity.

Archaeological potential off the road CPO

The disturbance caused by the service diversion work that destroyed the archaeological Site AR125 was extensive but confined to the CPO. Given the relative proximity of Clare Abbey and also wet ground nearby that might contain further burnt stone, archaeological deposits just off the road CPO cannot be ruled out.

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).

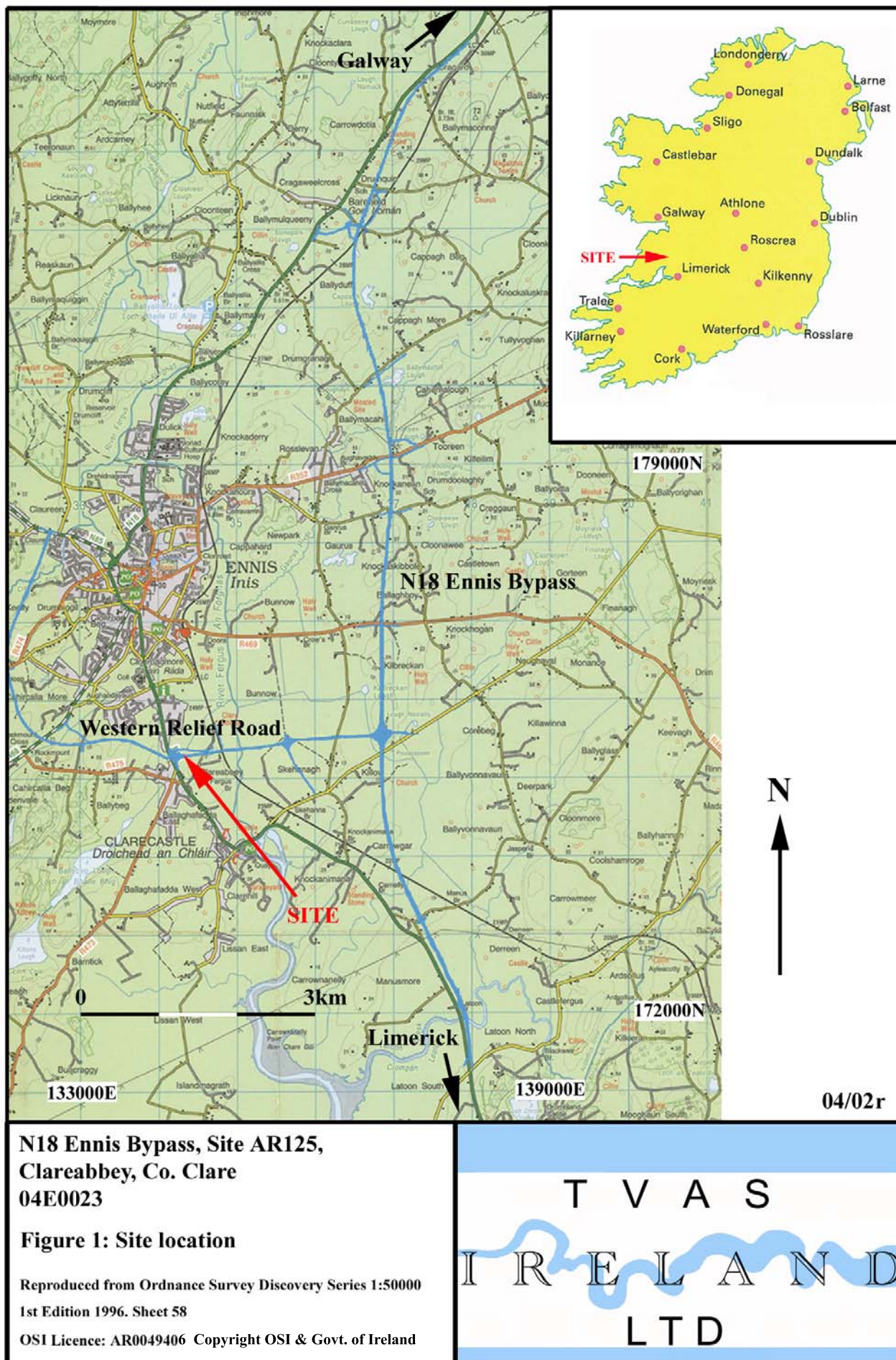
An illustrated information brochure describing the findings of this road project has been published by Clare County Council.

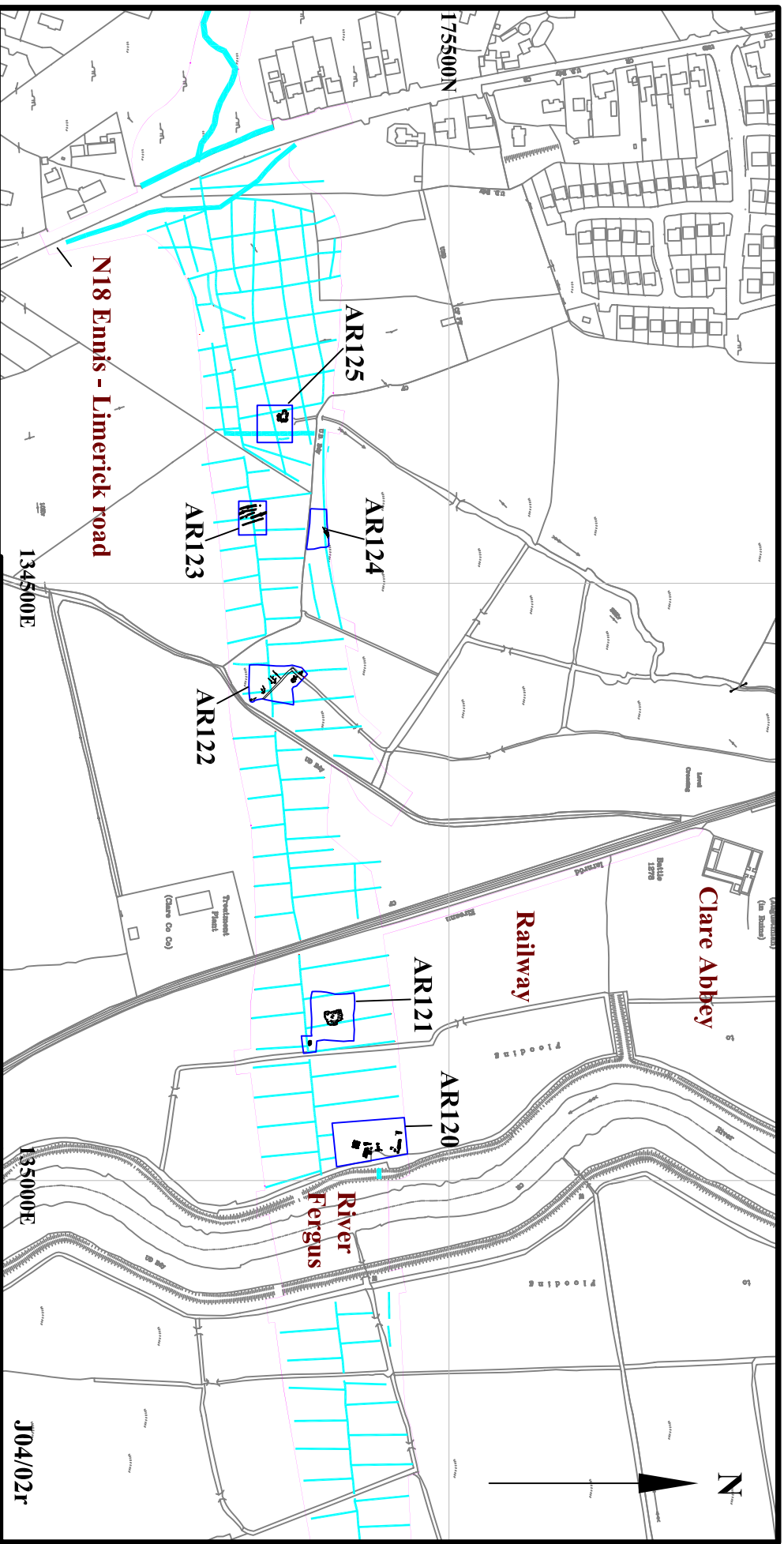
The stated aim of the National Roads Authority with regard to archaeological publication is clear, (O'Sullivan 2003) and it is anticipated that the results of this excavation will be disseminated as a minor component of a monograph dedicated to the archaeology of the Ennis Bypass. Publication is expected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

Graham Hull MIFA MIAI
TVAS Ireland Ltd
14th August 2006

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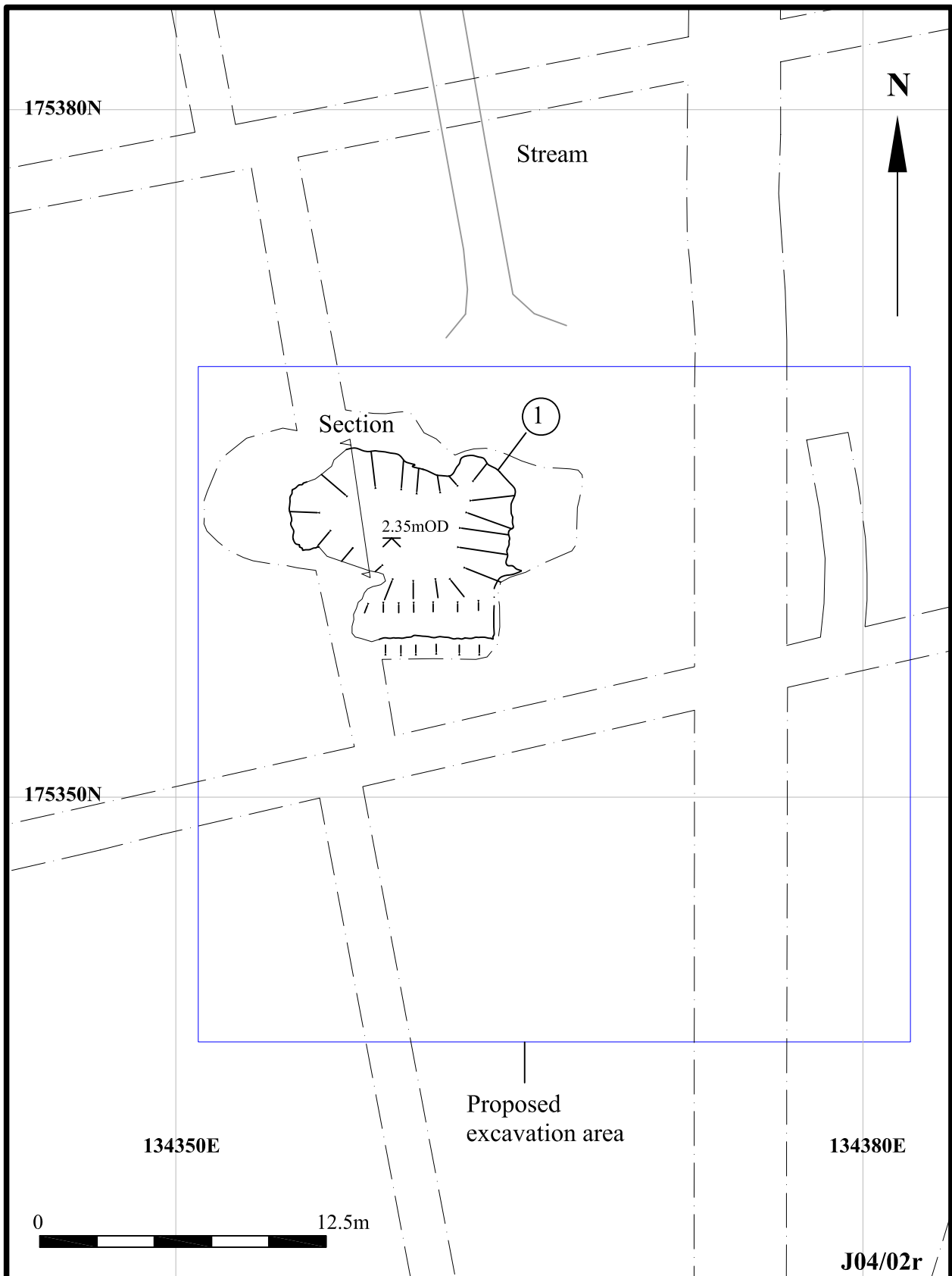




0 250m

N18 Ennis Bypass, Site AR125, Clareabbey, Co. Clare
04E0023

Figure 2: Site location within local landscape.
Showing test trenches (03E1291)
Scale 1:5000. OSI Licence: AR0049406
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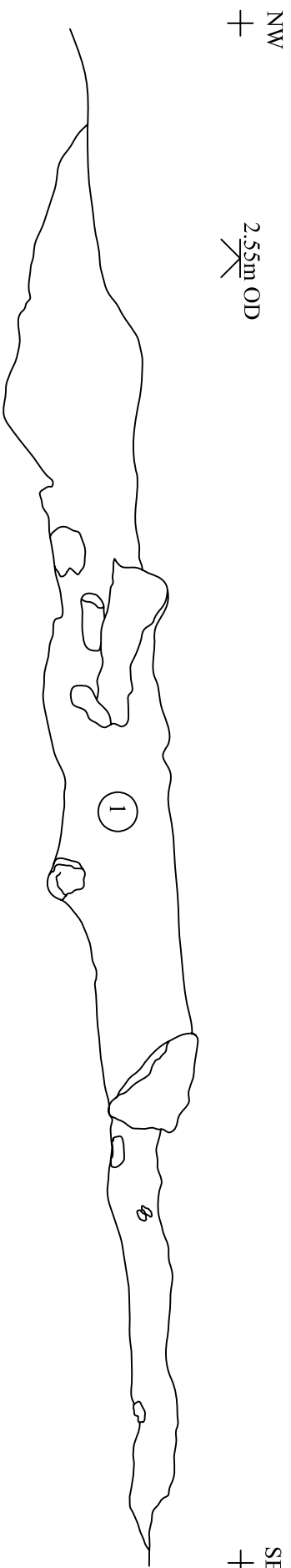


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Figure 3: Location of burnt stone spread, showing test trenches (03E1291) and proposed excavation area

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N18 Ennis Bypass, Site ARI125, Clareabhey, Co. Clare
04E0023
Figure 4: Section through burnt spread as recorded at
testing (03E1291)

Scale 1:20.



Plate 1. Location of destroyed Site AR125. Looking north-west



Plate 2. Destroyed Site AR125. Looking north



Plate 3. Site AR125 at testing (03E1291). Looking south-west. Scale 1m