Monitoring Report No. 090

SITE AT ROSSMACAFFRY
LISNASKEA
CO. FERMANAGH

LICENCE NO.: AE/07/78

BRIAN SLOAN

Site Specific Information

Site Name: Rossmacaffry, Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh

Townland: Rossmacaffry

SMR No. : FER 245:014 and FER 245:015

State Care Scheduled Other √ [delete as applicable]

Grid Ref.: H 3338 3317

County: Fermanagh

Excavation Licence No. : AE/07/78

Planning Ref / No. : L/2005/2978/F

Dates of Monitoring: 14 – 15th May 2007

Archaeologist Present: Brian Sloan

Brief Summary:

Archaeological supervision of topsoil stripping in advance of the construction of a residential dwelling was carried out at an application site in Rossmacaffry Townland, Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh. The application site is situated in an area of archaeological importance with numerous sites and monuments being in the general vicinity. A substantially disturbed counterscarp rath (FER 245:014) lies directly to the south-west of the application site, and an undated enclosure (FER 245:015) was located following archaeological mitigation at a development to the south-east of the application site (Planning Reference L/2000/1286/O).

The research design for this programme of works stipulated topsoil stripping of the access lane and the proposed house footprint. Archaeological features and deposits encountered in the access lane were to be preserved *in situ* under a layer of geo-textile, whilst any features or deposits encountered in the proposed area of the house were to be subject to archaeological excavation. Two modern field drains, roughly running north/south, were uncovered in the access lane but there were no remains of archaeological significance. It is envisaged that no further archaeological work is necessary in this area of the application site.

The proposed area of the development was also stripped to the surface of the natural subsoil. A crescent-shaped spread of burnt angular stones and fragments, as well as charcoal-rich soil was observed in the south-eastern portion of this area (Figure One). This is interpreted as representing the remains of a burnt mound or *fulacht fiadh*. It is possible that this burnt spread represents activity associated with the counterscarp rath (FER 245:014) and/or the undated enclosure (FER 245:015). It is proposed that the burnt spread is subject to full archaeological excavation in advance of the proposed development.

Type of monitoring:

Excavation of the development area and access lane by mechanical excavator equipped with a 'sheugh' bucket under archaeological supervision.

Size of area opened:

Access lane: 6m north-west/south-east by approximately 110m south-west/north-east
Application site: 22m south-west/north-east by 27m north-west/south-east

Current Land Use: Pastoral agricultural

Intended Land Use: Residential

Brief account of the monitoring

Introduction

The application site is located in the townland of Rossmacaffry, Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh. The site is just outside the village of Lisnaskea, lying approximately 3km south-west of its centre and at a height of approximately 50m above sea level. The application site is located on a north facing slope that runs down towards the Colebrook River (Figure Two). The application site is situated in a roughly rectangular field, the boundaries of which are delineated by a wire and post fence interspersed with mature trees and gorse bushes. The field slopes gently downwards towards the north-east. The surrounding landscape consists of agricultural land, predominantly pastoral, interspersed with residential dwellings.

The application site is situated in an area of archaeological importance with numerous sites and monuments being in the general vicinity. A substantially disturbed counterscarp rath (FER 245:014) lies directly to the south-west of the application site, and an undated enclosure (FER 245:015) was located following archaeological mitigation at a development to the south-east of the application site (Planning Reference L/2000/1286/O). Both these sites are shown on early editions of the Ordnance Survey maps, although the undated enclosure (FER 245:015) is indicated as having been destroyed by the 1954 edition (Kerr 2006, Fig 4).

The evaluation took place as part of the planning application for the construction of a new dwelling, and was carried out on behalf of the landowner, John Lynch. The programme of works for this monitoring exercise was advised by Edith Gowdy: Caseworker with Environment and Heritage Service: Built Heritage. It was requested due to the proximity of the application site to the counterscarp rath (FER 245:014) and the undated enclosure (FER 245:015) (Figures Three and Four) and the possibility that there may be previously unrecorded remains associated with these sites. The archaeological findings of the monitoring exercise are detailed below, along with recommendations for future archaeological work on site.

Excavation

Both the access lane to the application site and the application site itself were subject to complete topsoil stripping during the monitoring exercise. The access lane measured approximately 110m in length by approximately 6m in width and was orientated roughly south-west/north-east. The proposed location for the house is situated to the north-eastern end of the access lane and measured approximately 22m by 27m. Both areas were excavated to the surface of the natural subsoil which varied from glacially-derived orange gritty clay (in the access lane) to a yellow orange silty clay (in the application site). A simple stratigraphy was encountered in both areas with the sod and topsoil overlying a cultivation soil which directly overlay the natural subsoil (Plates Three and Six). For the purposes of this report, the Context Nos. have been separated between the access lane and the application site. The deposits encountered in the monitoring exercise were similar in the two areas.

The access lane

The access lane ran from the edge of the road, towards the north-east up to the application site. The access lane measured approximately 110m in length by 6m in width and was excavated to the surface of the natural subsoil (Plate One). The research design stipulated that any archaeological remains encountered in this area were preserved *in situ* beneath a layer of geo-textile. The subsoil was encountered at an average depth of 0.3m.

The sod and topsoil layer in this area (Context No. 101) consisted of a mid to dark brown silty loam. This deposit contained occasional inclusions of small rounded and sub-angular stones (average size: 30mm x 30mm x 20mm) and was an average of 0.2m deep.

The sod and topsoil layer (Context No. 101) overlay a layer of dark brown silty cultivation soil (Context No. 102). This deposit contained frequent inclusions of small to medium angular stones (average size: 50mm x 40mm x 30mm) and was on average 0.1m thick. Numerous active tree roots were observed throughout this layer, probably derived from the field boundary along the western/north-western edge of the

field. The cultivation soil (Context No. 102) directly overlay the natural subsoil (Context No. 103) (Plate Three).

Two field drains (Context Nos. 104/105 and 106/107) (Plate Two) were observed cutting the subsoil. Each of these were characterized by their fill (Context Nos. 104 and 106) of small angular stone and gravel. These field drains were roughly aligned north/south. No other features were observed cutting the subsoil.

The subsoil (Context No. 103) in this area consisted of glacially derived orange gritty clay which contained occasional inclusions of medium to large angular and sub-rounded stones. Nothing of archaeological significance was encountered in this area.

The application site

The proposed location for the new dwelling lies to the north of the access lane. According to the research design for this programme of works, the entire area was to be excavated to the surface of the subsoil (Plate Seven). The area measured roughly 22m south-west/north-east by 27m north-west/south-east, and the subsoil was encountered at an average depth of 0.25m.

The sod and topsoil layer in this area (Context No. 201) consisted of a mid to dark brown silty loam. This deposit contained occasional inclusions of small rounded and sub-angular stones (average size: 30mm x 30mm x 20mm) and was an average of 0.1m deep. This layer contained no finds or features of an archaeological nature.

The sod and topsoil layer (Context No. 201) overlay a layer of dark brown silty cultivation soil (Context No. 202). This deposit contained frequent inclusions of small to medium angular stones (average size: 50mm x 40mm x 30mm) and was on average 0.15m thick. The cultivation soil (Context No. 202) directly overlay the natural subsoil (Context No. 203) (Plate Six).

Upon removal of the cultivation soil (Context No. 202), a crescent-shaped spread of stone (Context No. 204) was observed towards the south-eastern portion of the application site (Figure One, Plate Four). The spread consisted of angular fragmented stones (average size: 30mm x 20mm x 20mm) within a dark grayish black silty clay. This clay contained an abundance of charcoal flecks and smears. The spread (Context No. 204) measured approximately 9m north-west/south-east by

approximately 6.5m north-east/south-west. This feature was not excavated during this initial investigation but is tentatively interpreted as representing the rake-out from a burnt mound. It appears that the stony spread (Context No. 204) directly overlay the natural subsoil (Context No. 203), although this stratigraphical relationship will only be confirmed through the excavation of the feature.

The subsoil (Context No. 203) in the application area consisted of a yellow orange silty clay, with infrequent inclusions of small rounded and angular stones. The surface of the subsoil was encountered at a depth of approximately 0.25m.

The results of the monitoring exercise carried out at Rossmacaffry indicate that there are archaeological remains present in the application area. The stony spread is interpreted as representing the raked out by-product of a burnt mound or *fulacht fiadh.* On the whole this site type is dated to the Bronze Age, although evidence exists of their use in the Early Christian and Medieval times. The presence of a burnt mound at this site is not overly surprising. They are most commonly located close to a water source (in this case the Colebrook River) and although more prevalent in the South of Ireland, are particularly common in County Fermanagh (Waddell 2000, 174). It is also possible that the burnt spread (Context No. 204) represents activity associated with the counterscarp rath (FER 245:014) and/or the undated enclosure (FER 245:015).

The true nature of the archaeological remains at the site can only be estimated at this stage, and the extent of the survival of the archaeological remains is not clear. It is recommended that the site is subject to full archaeological excavation in advance of any further development works. Following excavation, it is recommended that the report is prepared for full publication in the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology.*

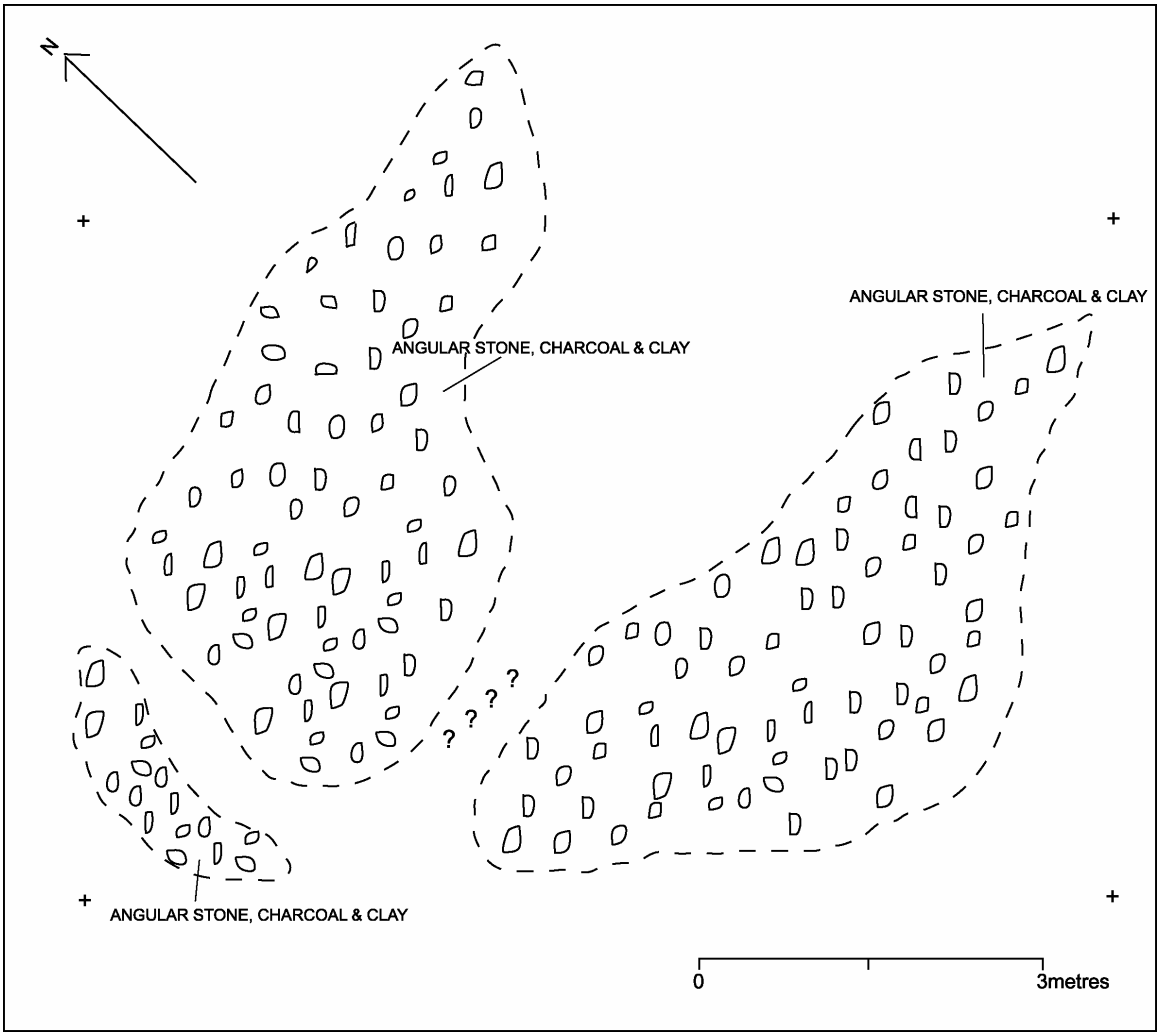

Figure One: Plan showing spread of burnt mound material (Context No. 204).

References

Kerr, T. 2006 *Archaeological Impact Assessment: AIA004 Rossmacaffry, Co. Fermanagh.* Unpublished impact assessment compiled by the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, Queen's University Belfast.

Waddell, J. 2000 *The Prehistoric Archaeology of Ireland.* Wordwell ltd., Dublin, 174.

Archive:

Finds: N/A

Photographs:

The digital images (39 in total) taken during the monitoring exercise are archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Plans / Drawings:

The original plan of the spread of burnt mound material shown in Figure One is archived within the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork, School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology, Queen's University Belfast.

Signed:_____ Date:_____

Figure Two: Location map showing Rossmacaffrey (red dot).

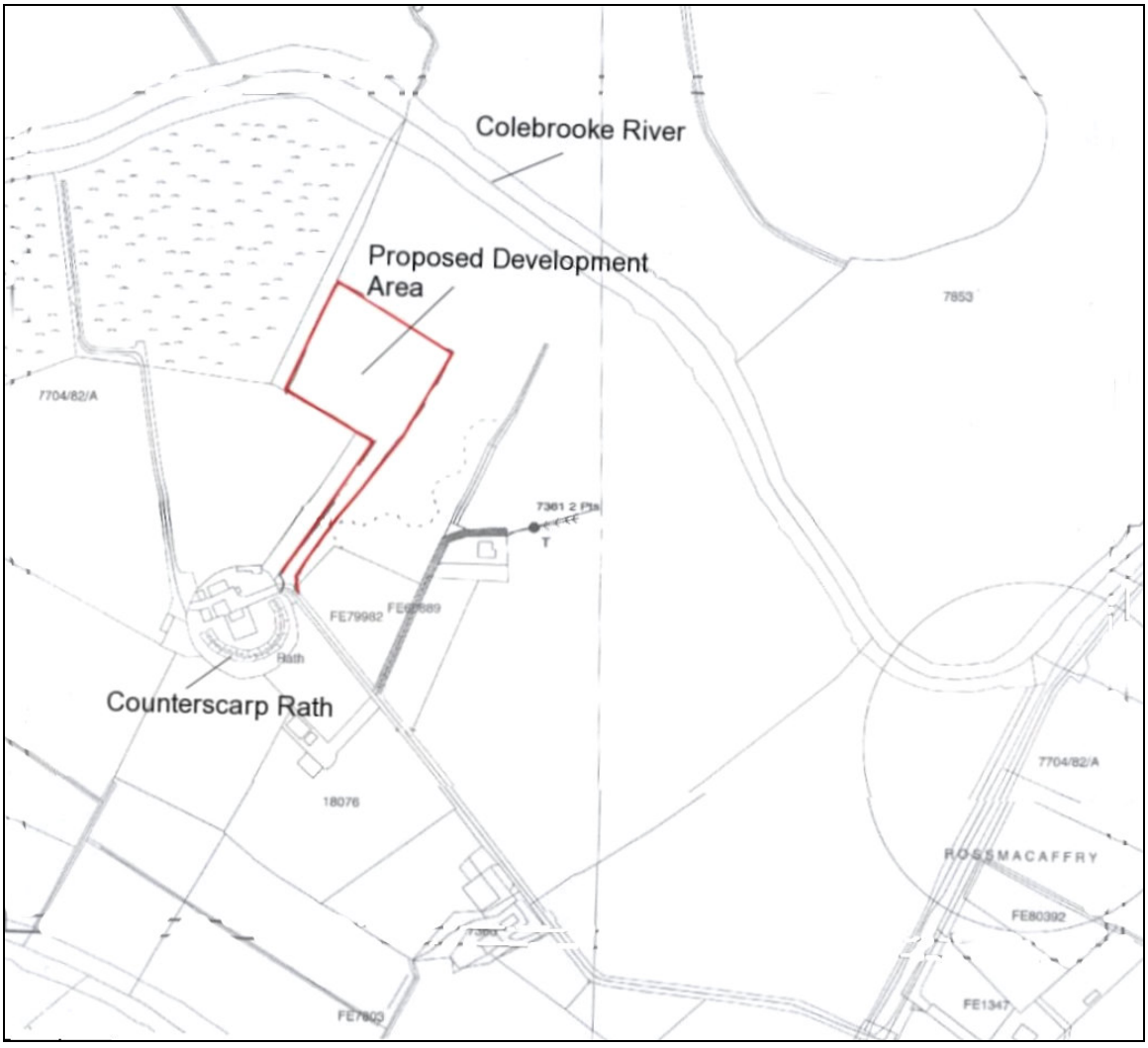

Figure Three: Plan showing application site and access lane (outlined in red).

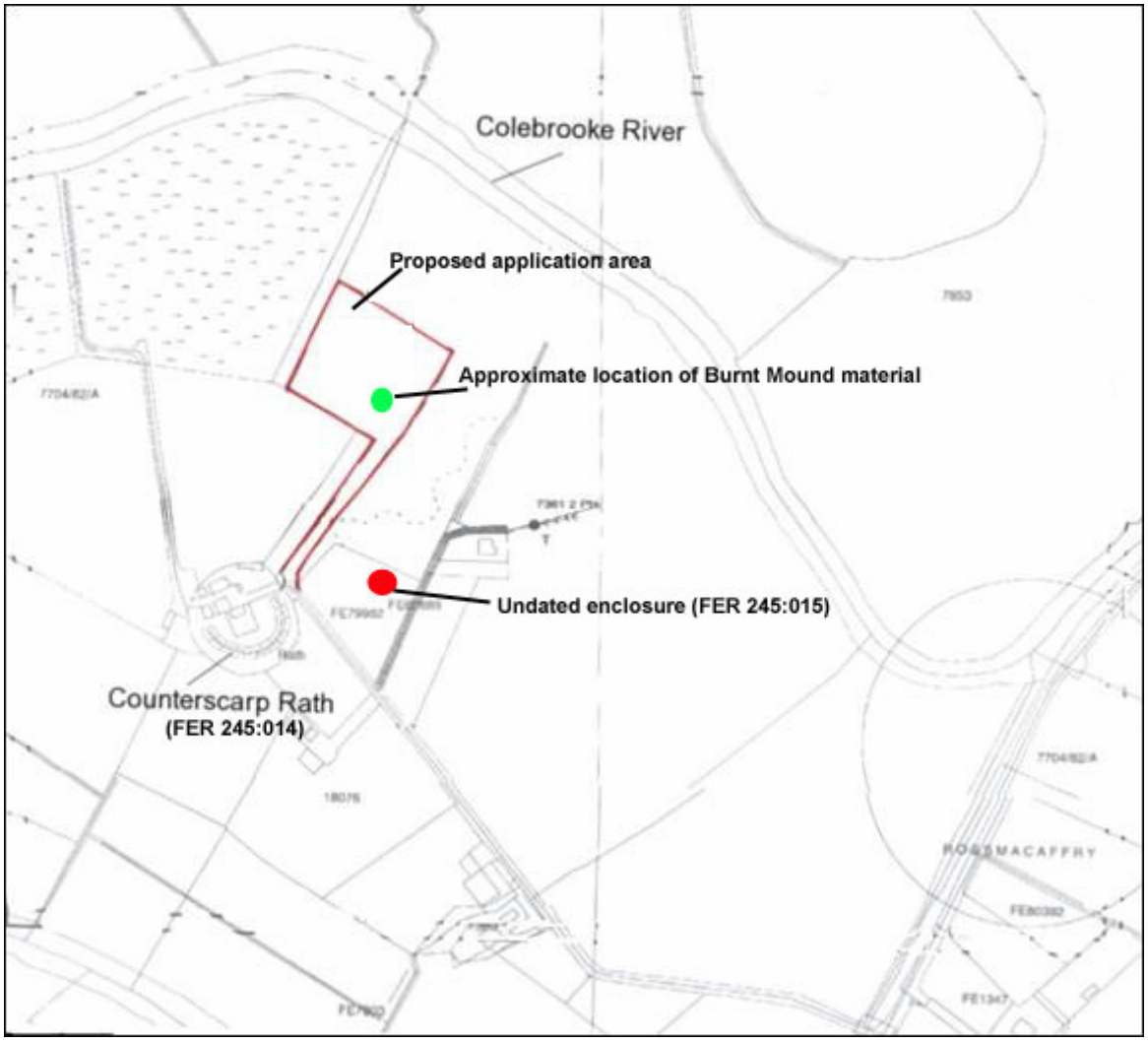

Figure Four: Application site showing the approximate location of the spread of burnt mound material (green dot), and archaeological sites and monuments in the vicinity.

Plate One: Access lane following excavation to the surface of the natural subsoil (Context No. 103), looking south-west.

Plate Two: Field drain (Context No. 104), looking south.

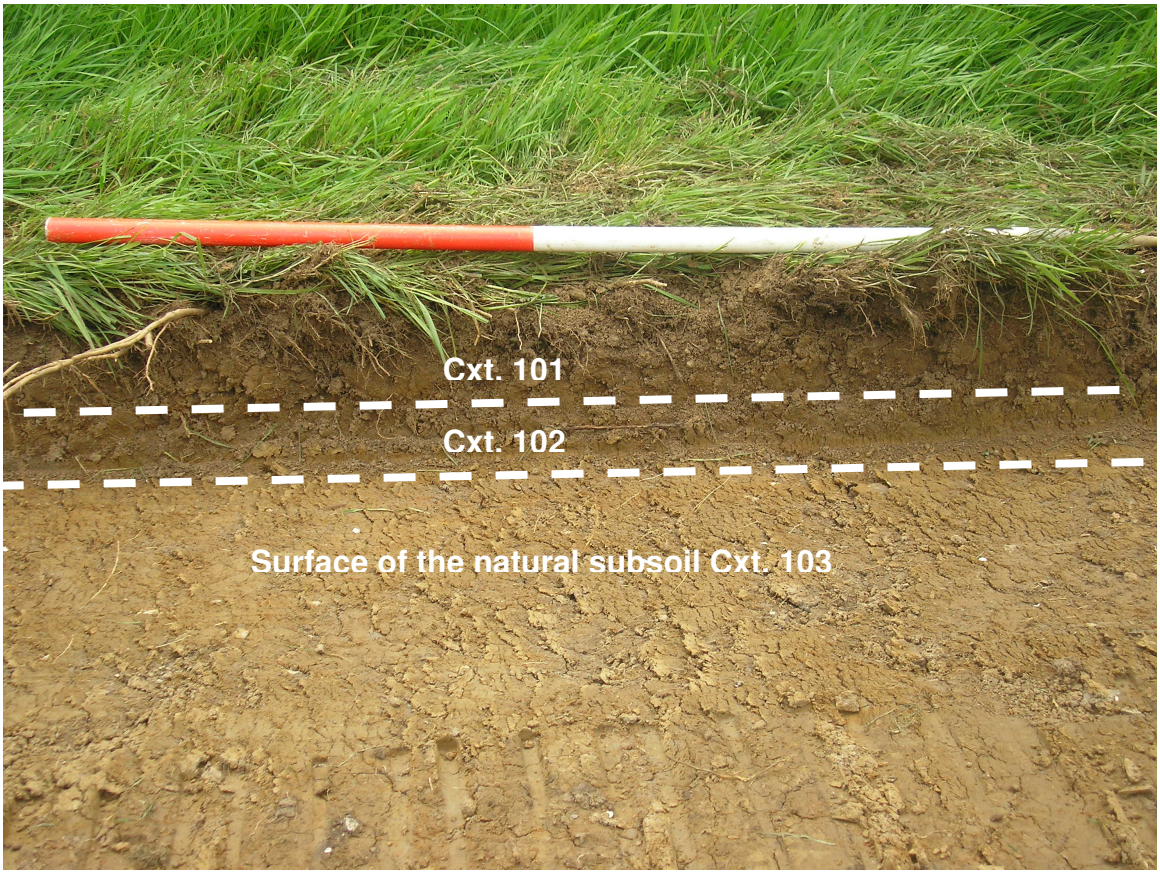

Plate Three: North-west facing section of the access lane.

Plate Four: Spread of burnt material (Context No. 204) in application area, looking south.

Plate Five: Detailed shot of burnt mound material (Context No. 204).

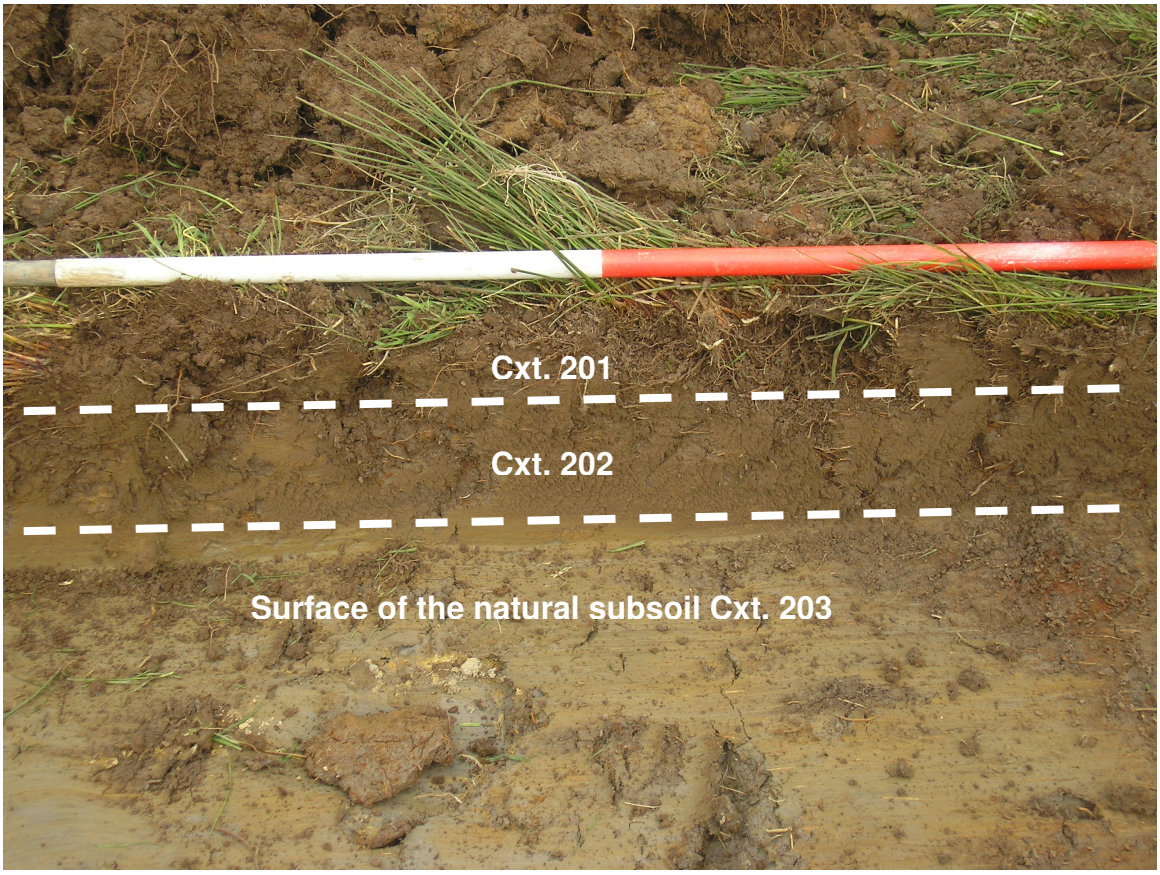

Plate Six: North facing section of the application site.

Plate Seven: General shot of the application site showing burnt mound material in the background (circled), looking south-west.