

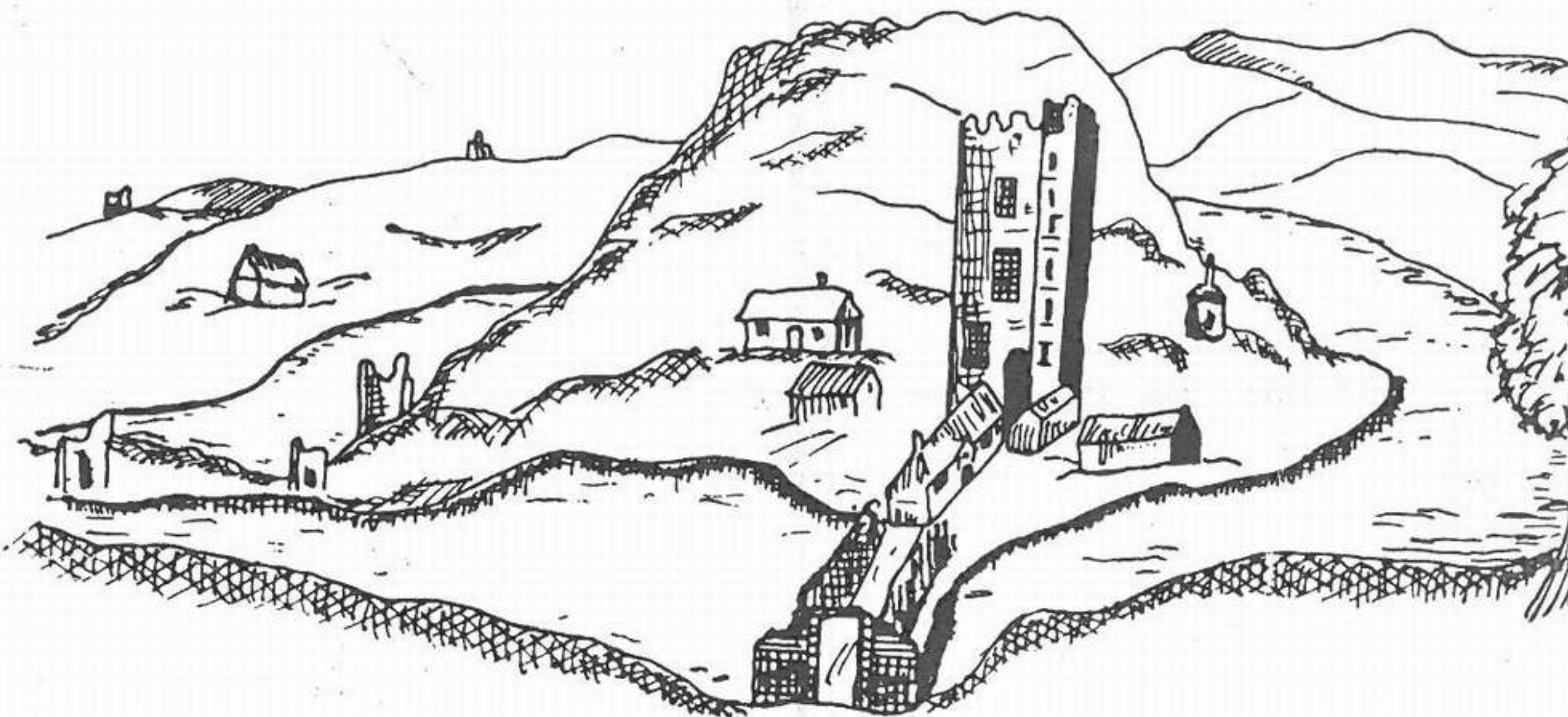
ILLUSTRATED GUIDE

to

LOUGH GUIN

Co. Limerick

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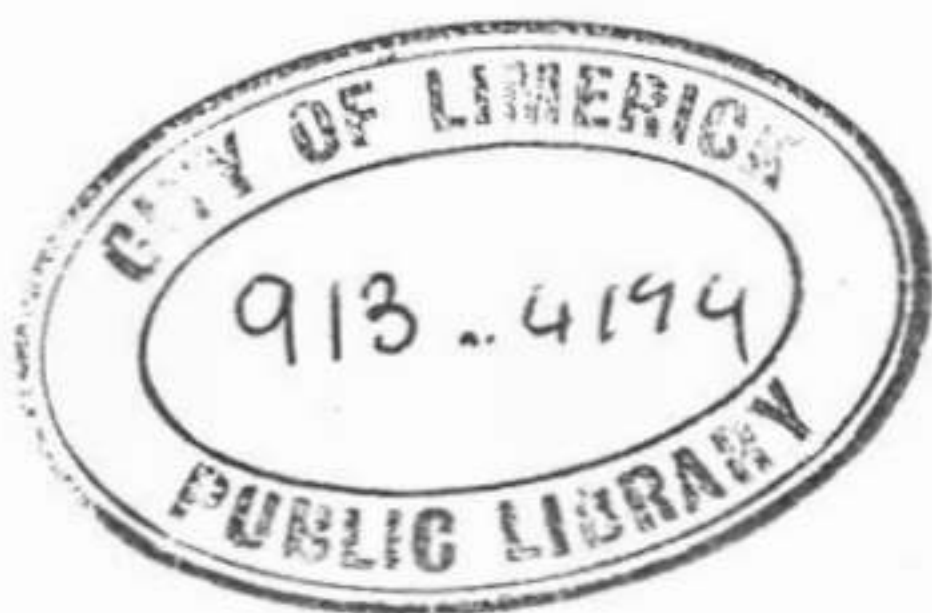


M. J. D. C. O'Neil

Lou

17.

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LOCH GUIRR

This lake, all Munster knows, is enchanted ; but the spell passes off once in every seven years. The lake then, to whoever has the luck to behold it, appears dry ; and the Tree may be partly seen at the bottom of it, covered with a Green Cloth. A certain bold fellow was at the spot one day at the very instant when the spell broke, and he rode his horse towards the tree and snatched away the Brat Uaine that covered it. As he turned his horse, and fled for his life, the Woman who sat on the watch, knitting under the cloth, at the foot of the tree, cried out,

*Chúghat, chúghat, a bhúaine bhalbh !
Marcach ó Thír na mBan Marbh
A' fúadach an bhruit úaine dhom bhathas.*

*Awake, awake, thou silent tide !
From the Dead Women's Land a horseman rides,
From my head the green cloth snatching.*

At the words the waters rose ; and so fiercely did they pursue him that as he gained the edge of the lake one half of his steed was swept away, and with it the Brat Uaine, which he was drawing after him. Had that been taken, the enchantment was ended for ever.

(Old woman from Askeaton, 24th April, 1879).

*(Fitzgerald, D. 1879-1880 Irish Popular Traditions.
Revue Celt, IV, 185-6).*

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Preface

The area around Lough Gur is famous for the number and variety of its field monuments which range in date from the neolithic (new stone age) up to medieval times. Numerous objects dating from these periods have been picked up in the past around the shores of the lake and its environs and are now in various museums in Ireland and elsewhere. Indeed it is true to say that there is scarcely a museum or a private collection in these islands which does not contain one or more of them. Visitors to the British Museum will see many an object with the Lough Gur label in the sections devoted to antiquities of the British Isles.

The antiquities were first brought to scientific attention by Sir Bertram Windle, former president of University College, Cork, and first professor of archaeology there. He made a survey of the monuments and designated them by letters of the alphabet (Windle 1912). Excavations began in 1936, conducted by the late Seán P. Ó Ríordáin, also professor of archaeology at University College, Cork. He worked at Lough Gur throughout most of the war years and spent a few seasons there after the war as well. His untimely death in 1957 was a serious blow not only for Irish archaeology, but for Lough Gur also, as many of his excavations were, and still are, unpublished.

He contributed a wealth of information and established not only the presence of beaker people at Lough Gur, c.2000 BC, but also that the area was extensively inhabited in the neolithic period, c.3000 BC. By reason of its rich pasturage, abundance of water and because of the animals, birds and fish which were readily available, it was eminently suitable for prehistoric man. Bones of mammals, such as the Giant Deer, which had become extinct in Ireland before the coming of man, have been found, as well as interesting flora of the period. Today, the lake is the haunt of many unusual species of birds and it has been declared a bird sanctuary.

A recent and welcome development is the provision of an amenity area for visitors at the north-east side of the lake, under the aegis of Limerick County Council and Mid-Western Regional Tourism. In advance of this, the area in question has been excavated by the archaeology department of University College, Cork.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are indebted to the photo section, Shannon Development Company for the photographs of Lough Gur; to the National Museum of Ireland for the photograph of the Lough Gur Shield; to the County Development Team of Limerick County Council for assistance with printing costs.

The cover drawing is from Dinely's *A voyage through the Kingdom of Ireland in 1681*; the two Du Noyer drawings are from 'Unpublished Geraldine documents'. *JRSAI* 1873, 414-5; the O'Ríordáin drawings are from his published work as listed in the Reference Section; the O'Kelly drawings are from the Survey of the Barony of Small County (see Reference Section).

Lough Gur is truly an 'antique land' and many visitors will be conscious of the aura of mystery and magic which pervades it, whether in the bad weather when the lake can become unbelievably wild and forbidding, or in the golden evenings of summer when one can almost believe that at any moment Gearóid, Earl of Desmond, will come cantering over the water on his milk-white horse with the silver shoes. The legend says that he must do so once every seven years until the shoes are worn out and that then he will be freed from the spell of Lough Gur. Not everyone, however, will wish to be released from this particular bondage. Those of us who worked there with the late Ó Ríordáin are still conscious of it and, like the earl, feel we must return again and again. Two of his students offer this booklet as a small tribute to their former professor, known to all as 'Seán P'.



Lough Gur (after Du Noyer)

Introduction

Lough Gur is a small lake set among limestone hills somewhat less than 20km from Limerick city and about 4km from the nearest town of Bruff. In early Irish literature it is called Loch Gair and its modern name is an anglicisation of this. The lake is roughly C-shaped, the rocky peninsula of Knockadoon (highest point c.122m OD) is set within the arms of the 'C', the lake being to north, west, and south, and a marshy area to the east.

In the middle of the last century the level of the lake was lowered by drainage and its extent diminished, so that it is now 184 statute acres as compared with 232 before the drainage. The lake is fed mainly by a stream which rises through a crevice in the rock bottom between Knockfennell and Knockadoon and the original outflow is at the NE corner. After running along an open surface channel for a short distance, it disappears into a rock crevice called Pollawaddra. The stream emerges again beyond the NW side of Knockfennell. When Pollawaddra became blocked by floating debris, the lake level rose, falling again when water pressure forced a clearance. In the drainage scheme a surface channel was cut westward from the NW corner of the lake. This not only reduced the lake level by about 3m but now maintains it at a more or less constant level.

Two castles guarded the points of easiest access to Knockadoon, Bouchier's Castle at the north end of the marsh and the Black Castle at the south. At the time they were built, Knockadoon must have been virtually an island. At each end of the marsh there was a solid or nearly solid strip of land connecting with the hill and the castles were erected on these, converting the peninsula into a fairly secure fortress. A map of 1681 shows the lake completely surrounding Knockadoon and shows a fore-building and a drawbridge leading from Bouchier's across the lake to the mainland.

Throughout its long history the level of the lake must have altered many times, particularly having regard to the surrounding limestone terrain. Ó Ríordáin was of the opinion that in pre-historic times the level may have been even lower than at the present day. After the alteration in the lake level of a century ago numerous objects were picked up in and around its shores and in its immediate vicinity, e.g. in

the marshy area. Among the finds were over 20 bronze axes, 12 bronze spearheads, two leafshaped swords, a rapier, three daggers and a halberd. A circular bronze shield, now in the National Museum of Ireland, is locally believed to have been found in the marsh. A gold-chased bronze spearhead, now in the British Museum, is regarded by some as a votive offering which was cast into the lake and this explanation is offered for many of the other finds also. Stone, flint and bone objects from the area are very numerous and at least 120 stone axes have been found. The excavations produced large quantities of prehistoric pottery as well as artifacts of later periods, so that, taken as a whole, Lough Gur is one of the richest sites in respect of artifacts in the country.

The number and variety of its field monuments are equally striking. More than 30 ancient sites and monuments can still be identified in the immediate neighbourhood of the lake and as many more may have been present originally, now either destroyed or still concealed in the ground. The identifiable sites consist of megalithic tombs, stone circles, hut sites, ancient fields and roads, standing stones, forts, crannogs (lake dwellings), caves and castles.

It is not so easy to identify the people who erected these monuments. The first settlers, who must have come about 3000 BC, are only known to us from their circular and rectangular houses on Knockadoon and from their domestic utensils, many of which were excellently made and which showed affinities with similar ware in the British Isles at the same period. At a somewhat later date, beaker ware made its appearance, again denoting contact with the British Isles and Europe. There does not appear to have been any hiatus between this stage and the earliest neolithic one so that settlement must have been continuous throughout the thousand or so years represented. The early bronze age remains consist in the main of the stone circles, perhaps also some of the standing stones, and new weapons and ornaments made their appearance. Perhaps by this time the lake had begun to be regarded as sacred and had become a focus of religious life. In the early iron age and in the early Christian period many of the forts and crannogs were erected.

In early historic times the chief people of the area were the Érainn, later to be superseded by a more powerful sept, the Eóganacht, who ruled Munster until the middle of the tenth century. The Eóganacht

Áine Cliach, a branch of the parent sept, had their headquarters at Knockainey (Cnoc Áine) south-east of Lough Gur. Professor F.J. Byrne (1973) says of the Eóganacht that they probably came to power in the fifth century and that they owed their rapid rise to successful raids on Roman Britain and perhaps also to their early adoption of Christianity. Their mythological traditions seem to centre on Cnoc Áine and the goddess Áine herself and many legends are connected with the hill and its vicinity. Before the end of the tenth century the Eóganacht supremacy in Munster had passed away and the Dal Cais, of whom Brian Boru was the most distinguished member, were in the ascendant.

It is recorded in the Book of Rights (*Lebór na cert*) that Brian fortified sites at Lough Gur between 1002 and 1012 in order to protect the area from the Norse. Knockadoon was probably the place in question. After his death the Norse destroyed one of the reconditioned fortresses.

After the advent of the Anglo-Normans the area came into the possession of the Fitzgeralds, later to become earls of Desmond, and it is with them that the history of Lough Gur is bound up for the next 400 years. The two castles already mentioned were Desmond castles though the date of their erection is in some doubt. Some sources claim both castles as belonging to the thirteenth century but, while this may be true of the Black Castle, Bouchier's is a century or so later, perhaps a re-edification of an earlier castle, the likelihood being that a defensive structure of some kind or other must have been present at these two vital points as long as Knockadoon was in any danger from the outside world. At the height of their power the Desmonds were said to be the equal of any prince but finally they rebelled against the Queen and lost. Their leaders were killed or executed and the earl himself was proclaimed a traitor, his castles and great houses (of which he was said to have had at least 20) were taken one by one, and when the rebel force was reduced to a handful, he was tracked down and killed at Glenageenty in Co. Kerry in 1583. Munster was by this time a devastated land and the Desmond power was no more. Henceforth, confiscation and plantation were to be the order of the day, Lough Gur castle being granted to the Bouchier family.

Subsequently, the de Salis family became owners of Lough Gur and are remembered to the present day as benevolent landlords.

The Antiquities

For convenience, the sites are divided into groups so that, depending on one's interest (and endurance), a short or an extended tour can be made. A word of warning may be in place, however.

Though a small number of the monuments are in State care, it must be stressed that there is no right of public access to any of them and visitors are reminded that permission to visit must be obtained from the various landowners. These latter have shown a remarkable degree of interest in the antiquities and in their protection and preservation and have at all times cooperated wholeheartedly with the many archaeologists who have trowelled into the rich Lough Gur soil. It is hoped that the visitors, who nowadays come to Lough Gur in ever increasing numbers, will be equally mindful of its rich heritage, will not disturb the monuments, leave litter, disturb the stock, or fail to secure gates and fences. At some sites an official entrance and official parking places are provided; please use them.

The accounts of the monuments are taken, in the main, from a survey of the barony made by M.J. O'Kelly (1942-44) together with Ó Ríordáin's excavation reports. A certain amount of unpublished material is also used which has been gathered by M.J. O'Kelly from personal knowledge of the area over a considerable period of time. The sites surveyed by Windle (1912) were designated by letters of the alphabet from A to T and these letters have been retained, though not all his sites are dealt with here. House-sites excavated on Knockadoon by Ó Ríordáin were also lettered, from A to I. Lest confusion arise, in the text the former are marked WIN and the latter SPOR. Some additional sites have been given numbers, from 10 to 12.

The sites are grouped as follows:

- I West side of the lake, including Grange Stone Circle (Site B).
- II South side of the lake, including the megalithic tomb (Site H).
- III East side of the lake, including Carraig Aille.
- IV Knockadoon and the two castles.
- V Northern arm of the lake, including the islands.
- VI Knockfennell.

GROUP I

This comprises the sites called A, B, C, D and E (WIN), and all except E are on the left-hand side of the road as one approaches Holycross from the direction of Limerick city. The most important of them, Circle B, is the most easily located since it can be seen just inside the road fence opposite the landowner's farmhouse, and a car park and entrance way are provided.

Site A

This is a standing stone, called the 'Pillar' on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map, and it is something over 300m NE of Circle B. It is just over 3m high and now inclines considerably from the vertical.

Circle C

As one returns towards B, this circle can be seen about 100m north of it. It consists of a ring of 15 free-standing low boulders, well separated one from another and enclosing a space of between 16 and 17m average diameter. One unduly wide gap seems to be due to the removal of at least two stones in recent times. A low mound occupies the centre of the circle and there is a slight suggestion of an external bank. Not excavated.

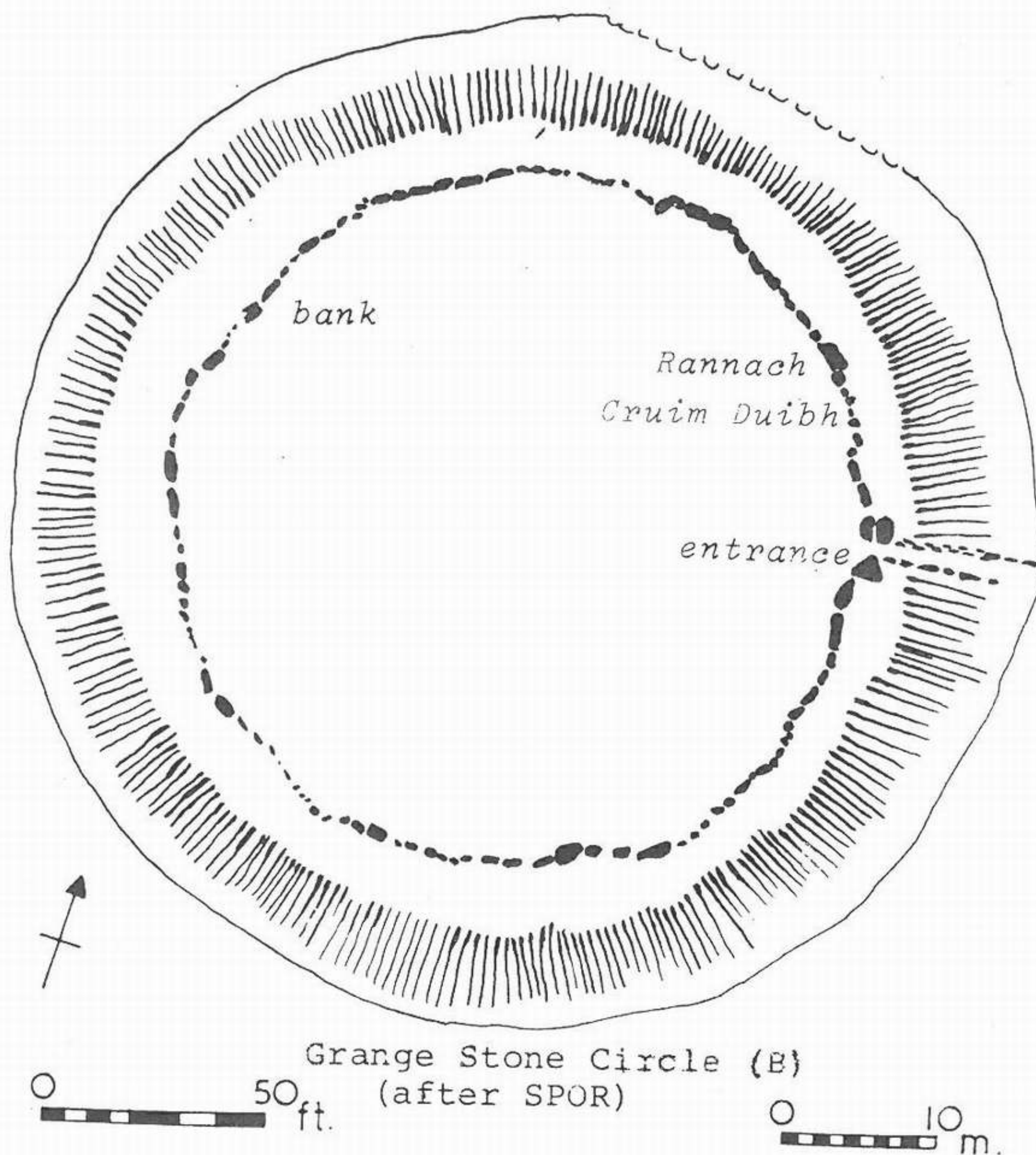
Circle D

This is near C, towards the road. Only a short arc of nine free-standing low boulders now survives of what must have been a large circle and not all of them are in their original positions. It is not possible to construct an accurate diameter but it may have averaged 55m. Not excavated.

Circle B

This fine stone circle was excavated by Ó Ríordáin in 1939 and published (1951). It consists of an accurately set out ring of contiguous orthostats, 45.7m. in internal diam. A posthole found at the centre is believed to have held a stake from which the circle was struck out by means of a cord. Some of the stones are of large size, one in the NE measuring 4m in height. This is marked *Rannagh Croim Duibh* on the OS map of 1903.

When the larger stones had been set into sockets in the old ground

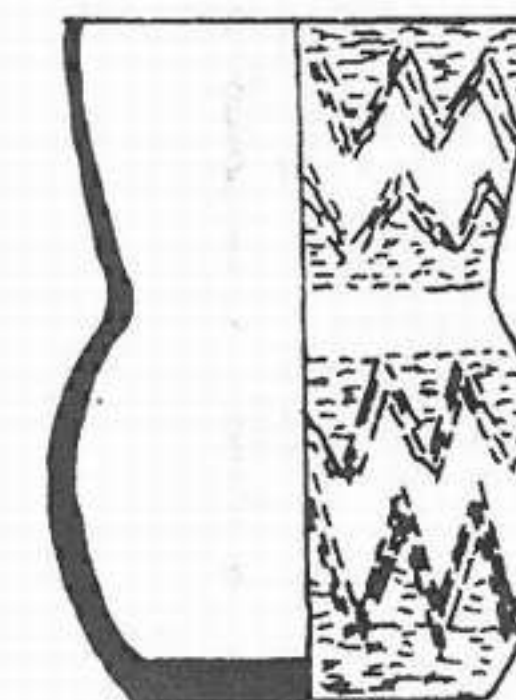


surface, their bases were packed about with boulders. Outside the orthostats and forming a backing for them is an earthen bank, 9m in width and about 1.2m high. As there was no ditch, the material for the bank must have been obtained in some other way, such as by scraping up the surface of the surrounding area. The level of the interior of the circle is about 60cm higher than that of the field outside due to the

deposition of soil inside to level the area and to hide the boulder packing around the bases of the standing stones, as well as to hold in place those orthostats too short to be set in sockets in the old ground surface.

The entrance to the circle is on the east side, a slab-faced cobbled passage through the bank giving access to the enclosure between two large orthostats. Thus, this is a very unusual site among Irish stone circles and its impressive size surely represents a strong religious impulse and a high degree of social organisation.

Finds came in the main from the old ground surface in the area immediately inside the orthostats and from the boulder packing around the orthostats. Fragments of human bones were found in three places but in no case was there evidence that they formed part of a formal burial. Neither was there any evidence of habitation. There were many flints - arrowheads, scrapers, blades, etc. Pottery included sherds of round-bottomed neolithic bowls, sherds of coarse flat-bottomed bucket-shaped neolithic pots, sherds of beaker ware and of food vessel, all sealed down by the layer of soil put in to level the interior and therefore, all in contemporary use on the site. A considerable amount of one beaker came from the socket of one of the large orthostats near the entrance. This pot is very similar to one from Wick Barrow in Somerset, England.



Reconstructed beaker (after SPOR) Scale 1 : 6

In general, the pottery from Circle B suggests the late neolithic period as the likely time of building. Since the finds also included a bronze awl fragment and a dagger sheath mount in bronze, the excavator put forward the 18th century BC as the actual time of erection. Nowadays, so as to bring it into line with more recent developments due to the techniques of radiocarbon dating, a date centring on 2000 BC is regarded as more feasible. Ó Ríordáin pointed out, however, that stone circles are notoriously difficult to date accurately due to the scarcity of datable finds. Circle O (dealt with below) gave no evidence of date nor did examples examined at Kealkil and Muisire Beg, both in Co. Cork. He further made clear that many structures at Lough Gur which are marked as stone circles are not in fact so, e.g. Circles J, K, and L on Knockadoon. These will be described below.

Other Sites

Ardaghlooda Hill lies to the NE and here there are the remains of ancient field walls, enclosures and hut sites. An ancient road, called *Cladh na Leac*, runs from the west side of the hill in a southerly direction between the circles and the lake. It peters out to north and south but can be traced in between as a sunken way marked on each side by low fences on which low boulders are placed at intervals.

South of Circle B is another standing stone, called *Cloch a'Bhile*, close to the northern fence of the field just south of the circle. Many other sites, once recorded, have now disappeared.

On the other side of the road, opposite Circles C and D, is a very ruined structure which may represent a type of megalithic tomb known as a court cairn. This was marked as a circle on the OS map and Windle referred to it as Site E.

GROUP II

These sites are south of the lake, close to the road from Holycross to Loughgur Cross.

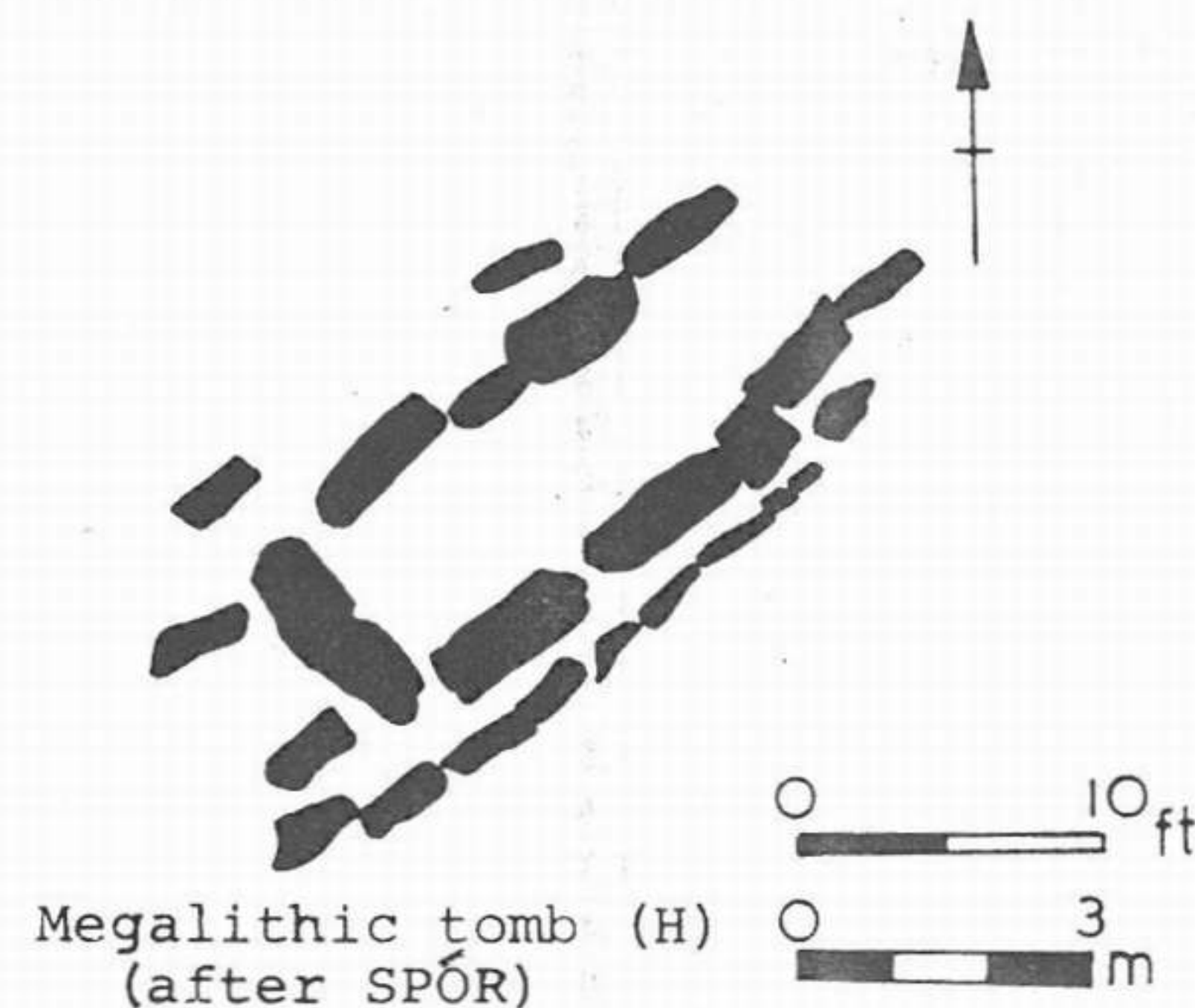
The New Church (in ruins)

This is on the left-hand side of the road and is surrounded by a graveyard. Thomas Ó Connellan, the minstrel bard who died about 1700 at Bouchier's Castle, is said to be buried there. The church was a chapel of ease for the earls of Desmond. When it was re-edified for use in the reformed church of Ireland it became known as The New Church. It was repaired by Count de Salis c. 1900 and a glazed plaque of the Madonna and Child was inserted high up on the south wall.

Site H (WIN)

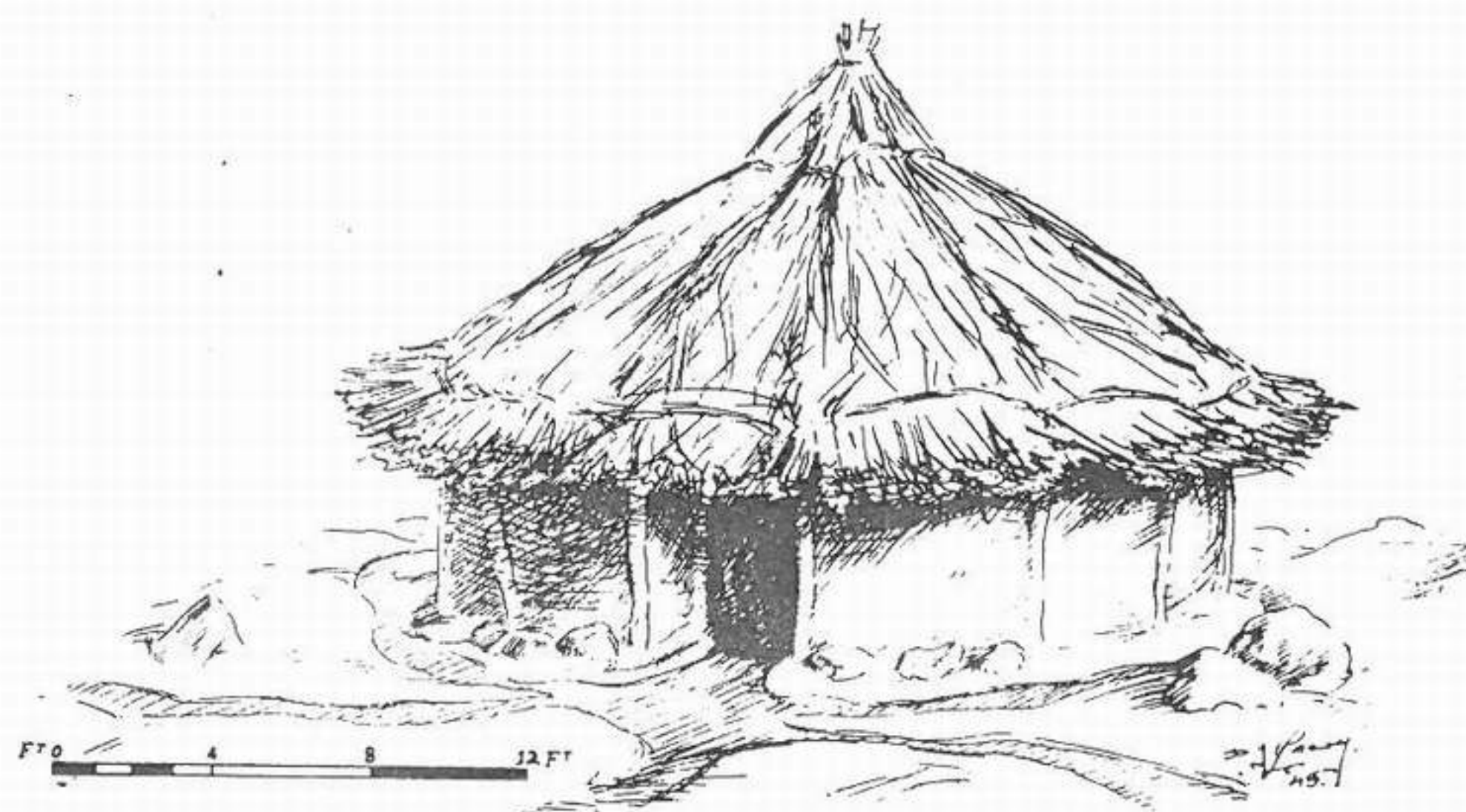
This megalithic tomb, marked 'Giants' Graves' on the OS map, is on the opposite side of the road from the last site, c. 300m farther on and a little way up the slope of the hill. It was excavated in 1938 and published (1955).

The tomb, 8.8m by 3.6m overall, runs NE-SW and consists of a long gallery divided into two chambers, the western one being cut off by a

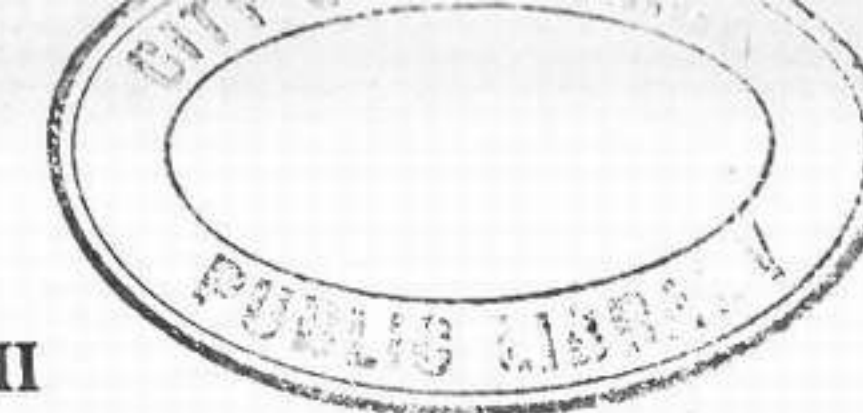


dividing slab from the other. The sides of the tomb are formed of double walling with rubble in between. It belongs to a type of megalith known as a wedge-shaped gallery grave. This example is fairly typical of ones found throughout the south of Ireland.

The finds consisted of some human bones, fragments of pottery which included sherds of both round-bottomed neolithic ware and also coarse flat-bottomed ware; also sherds of beaker and food vessel. Some flints of poor quality were also present.



House C, Knockadoon, scale model, suggested reconstruction.



GROUP III

Turning north (left) at Loughgur Cross, one comes to a group of sites on the left-hand side of the road on top of the hill known as Carraig Aille. This overlooks the road on the one side and the marshy area east of the lake on the other. There are two stone forts on the hill, both of which were excavated in 1937 and 1938, together with a number of associated hut sites, and published (1949).

Carraig Aille I

This is the more northerly of the two and it was well preserved before excavation. Its rampart remained for most of the circumference and it enclosed an oval area, 42.6m by 32m. The entrance was at the east. The rampart was 3m thick at this point and was well faced with stones inside and out. On each jamb of the entrance there were recesses to take the two halves of a wooden door. At two points inside the rampart there were steps leading up to the top. The greatest height of the rampart was something over one metre, but it must originally have been higher and there would have been a wall-walk.

Areas of paving and fragmentary well-bases inside the rampart, as well as hollows in the rock floor containing habitation refuse, indicated where domestic activity was concentrated, though, in the words of Ó Ríordáin: 'The general impression one gets regarding the occupation of the fort is of slovenly dwelling'. Formal dwelling houses were at a minimum and for the most part advantage was taken of hollows in the rock surface to provide shelter.

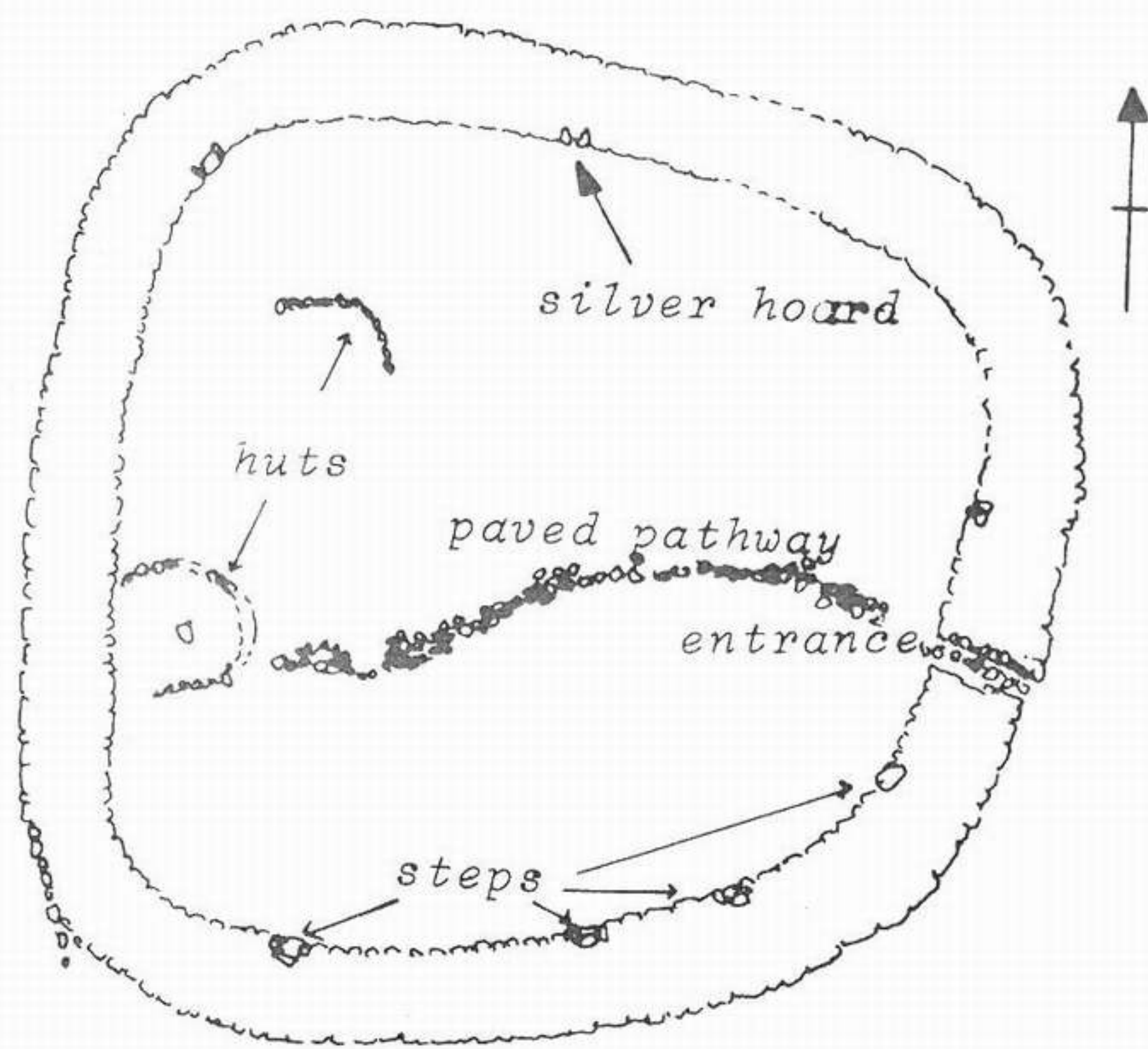
The finds included bronze and iron ring-pins and an iron hand-pin, 10 iron knives, an iron saw, 25 bone combs, 10 stone spindle whorls, a grindstone, fragments of several rotary querns, some flint scrapers, fragments of jet bracelets, six stone axes, one bead of amber and three of glass. The finds indicated a date towards the end of the first millennium AD.

Some structures to the NW were also excavated with inconclusive results and no datable evidence or artifact of any kind was recovered.

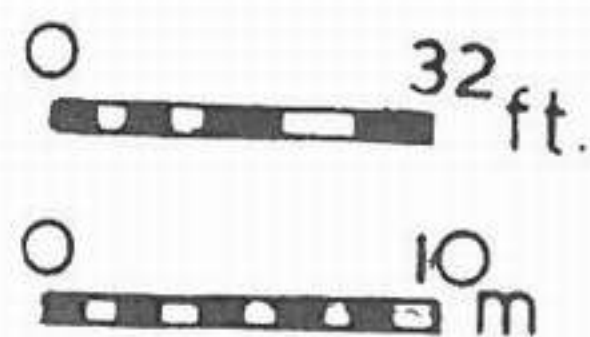
Carraig Aille II

On excavation, this was found to be very well preserved, the stone

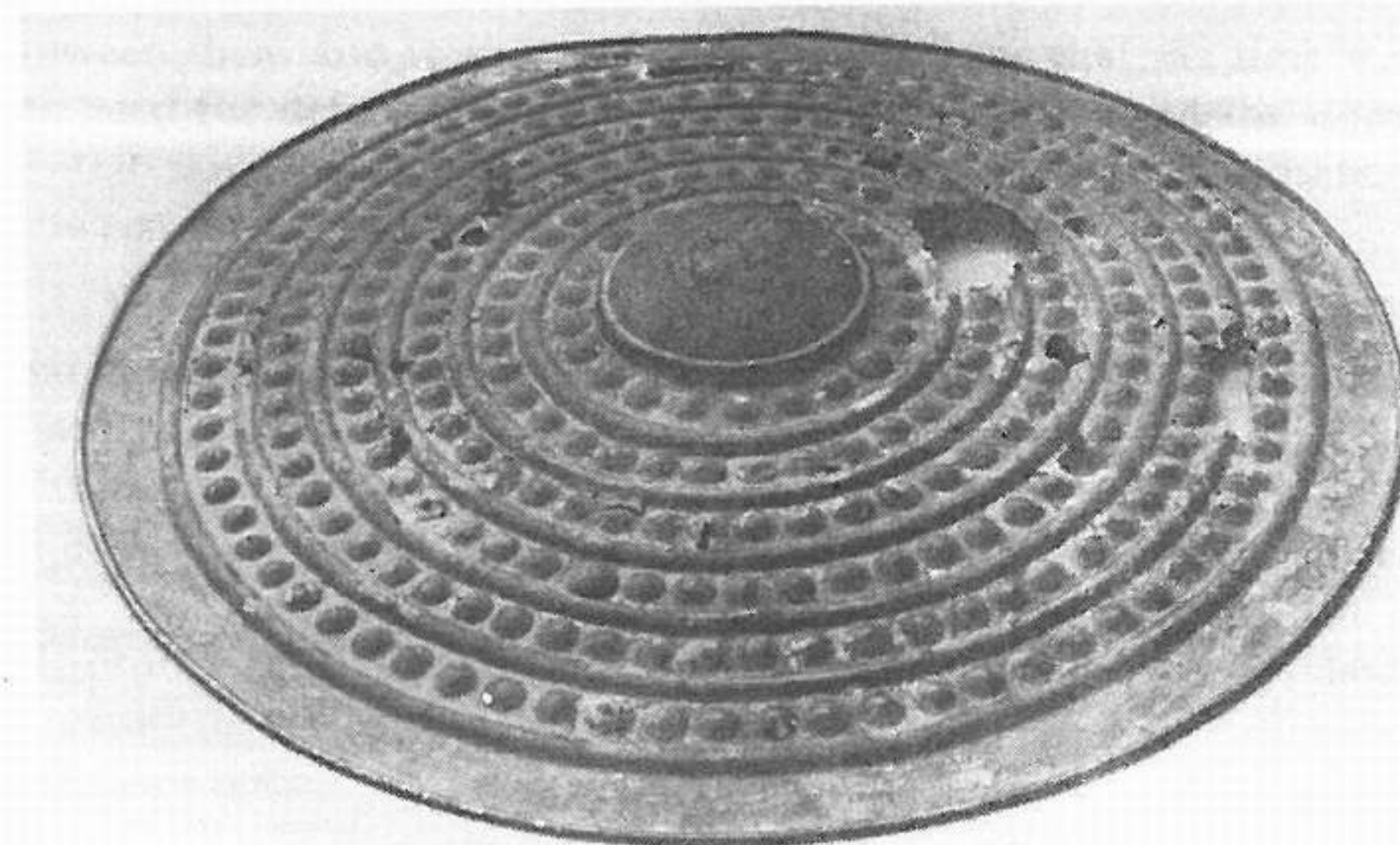
rampart being present for the whole circumference with an excellent facing of large blocks both inside and out. It was sub-rectangular, max. overall diam. 47m and the rampart was 1.2m high. At six points in the interior there were steps giving access to the top of the rampart. The entrance was at the east and had recesses similar to those at the other fort. A paved pathway led from the entrance through the interior of the fort where small circular huts had been built, followed later by rectangular ones. There was evidence of a long period of occupation, the latest houses actually ran up on to the rampart itself. These had substantial walls and paved floors.



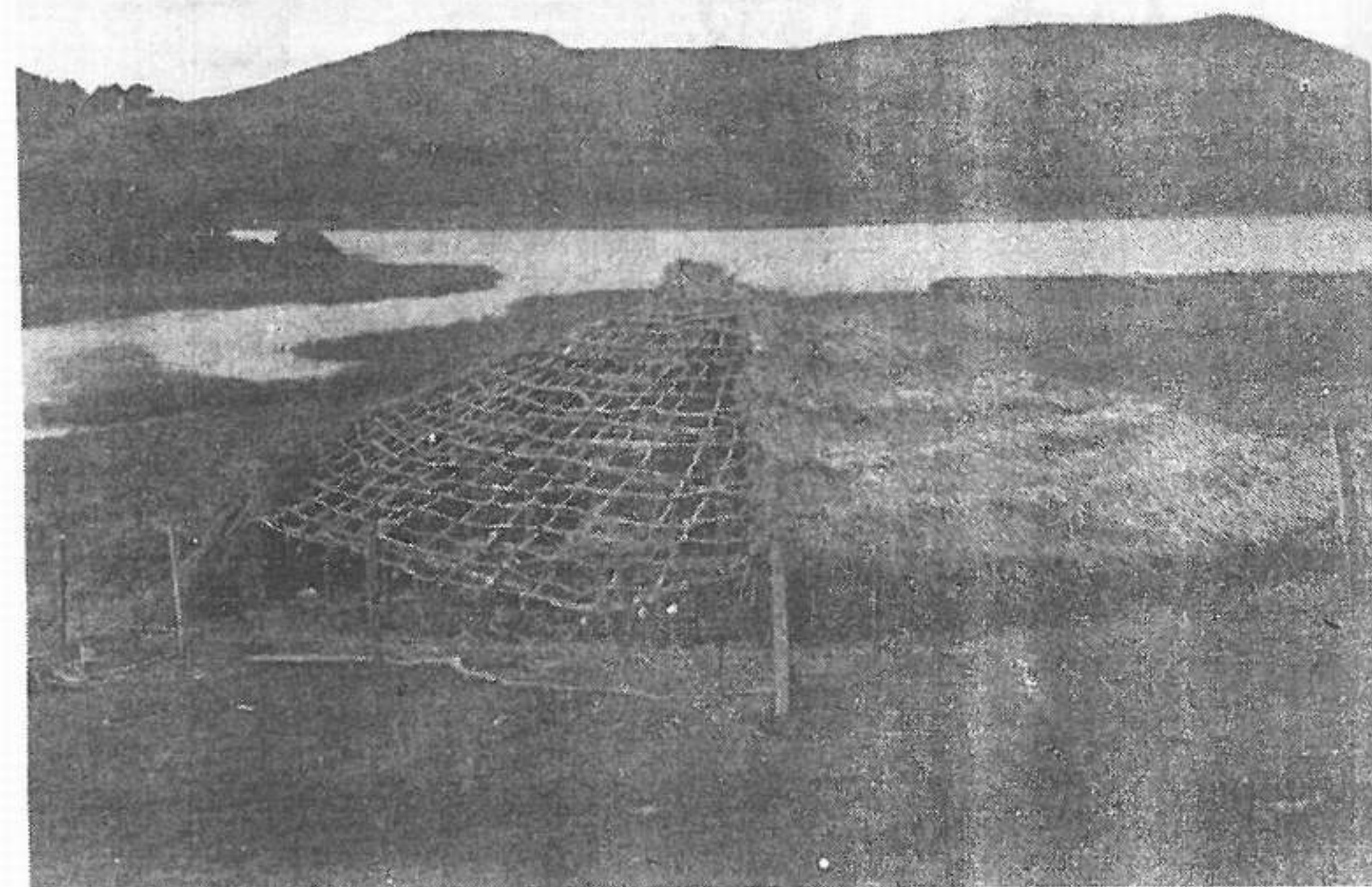
Carraig Aille II
(after SPOR)



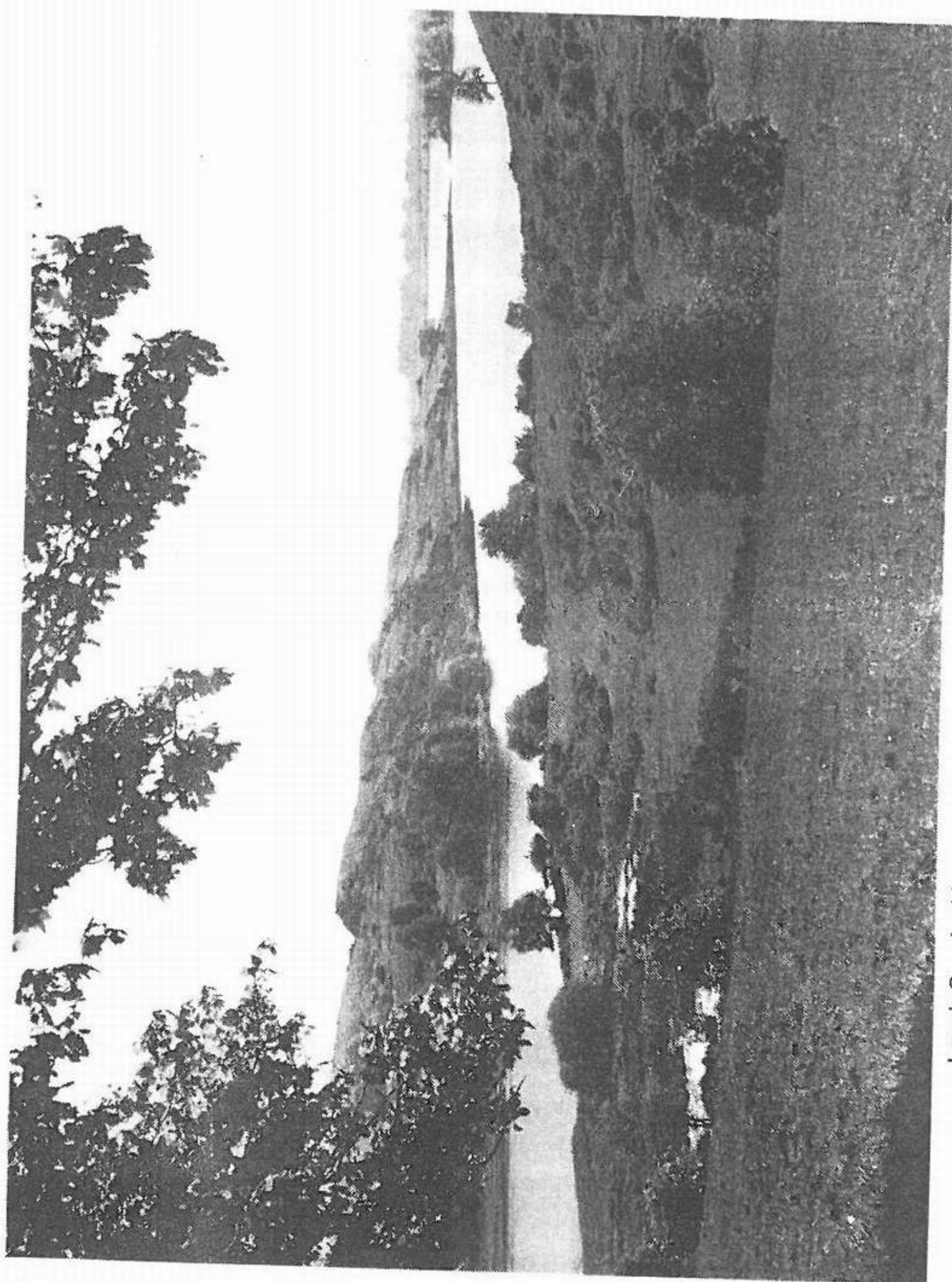
Between the two forts, on the more level ground near Carraig Aille II, were a series of rectangular houses and yards which excavation showed were, at least in part, contemporary with the fort and access



Bronze shield, Lough Gur. Diam. 72 cm. C. 700 BC.



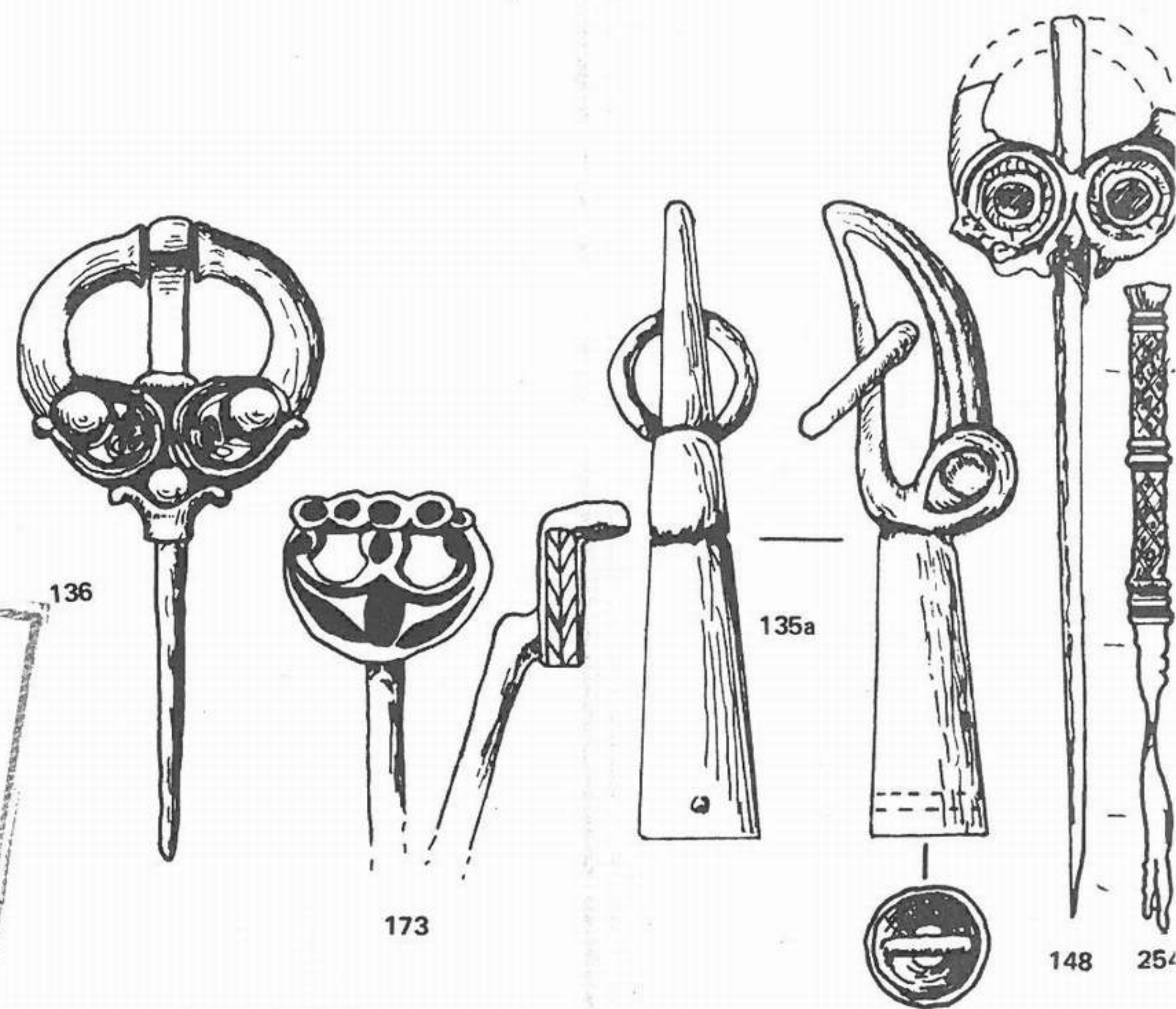
Reconstruction of House A, Knockadoon (not on original site). Knockfennel in background with stone fort on left summit and ring-cairn on right.



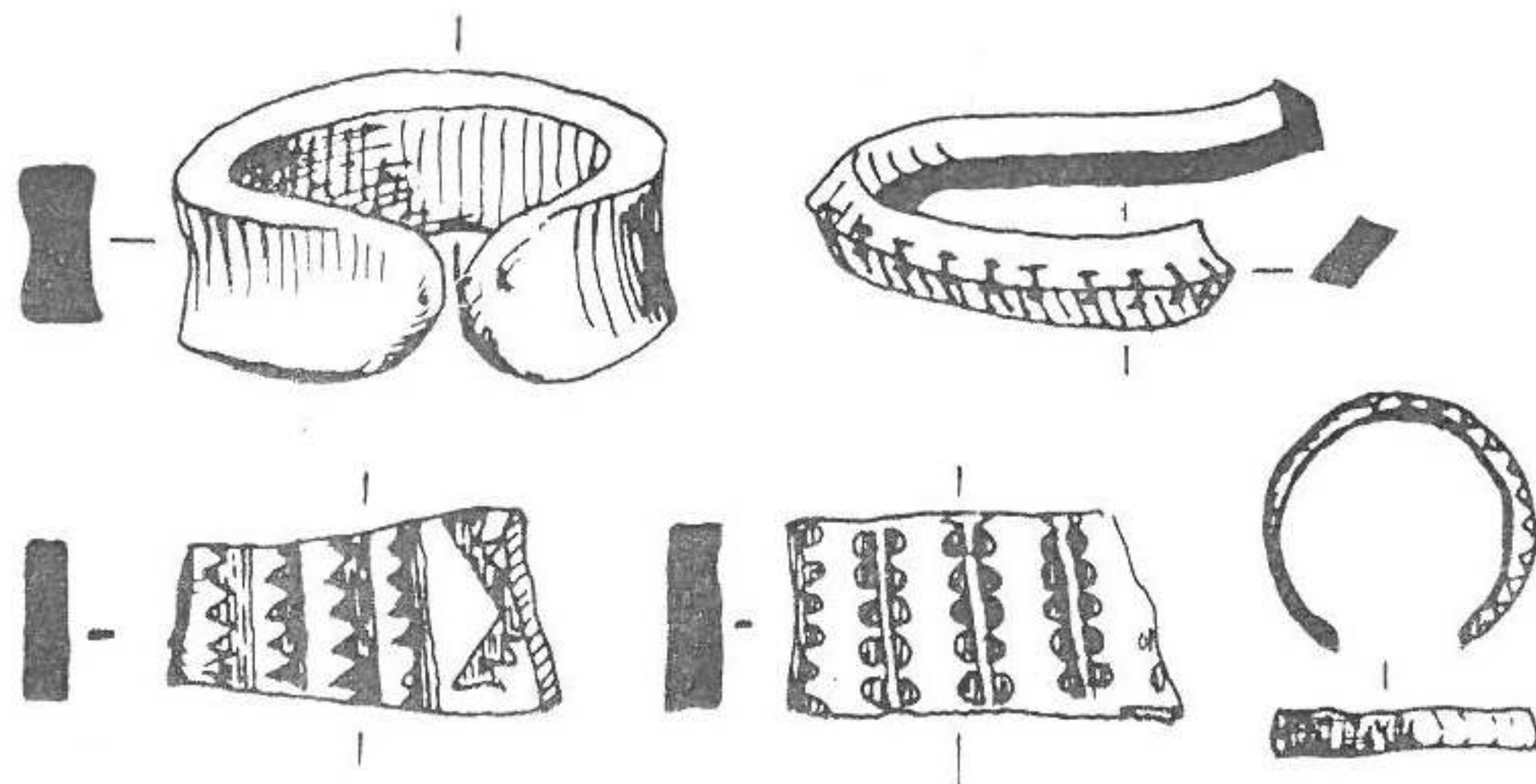
Lough Gur, looking towards Knockadoon with Garret Island at extreme right.

between them and it was easy. It would appear that, as time went on, the need for defensive structures became less acute and the upper part of the rampart on the north was pulled down to facilitate traffic between the houses and the fort.

The finds included a hoard of Viking silver objects found between two stones on the inner face of the rampart and ascribed to the 10th century; a bronze terminal mount from a drinking horn dated 8th to 10th century by the excavator; a red-enamelled bronze hand-pin of 7th to 8th century date; a bronze ring-pin (no. 148) of 8th to 9th century date; an ibex-headed pin and a number of bronze ring-headed pins; a gilt-bronze ring-brooch (no. 136) of 8th to 9th century date; iron



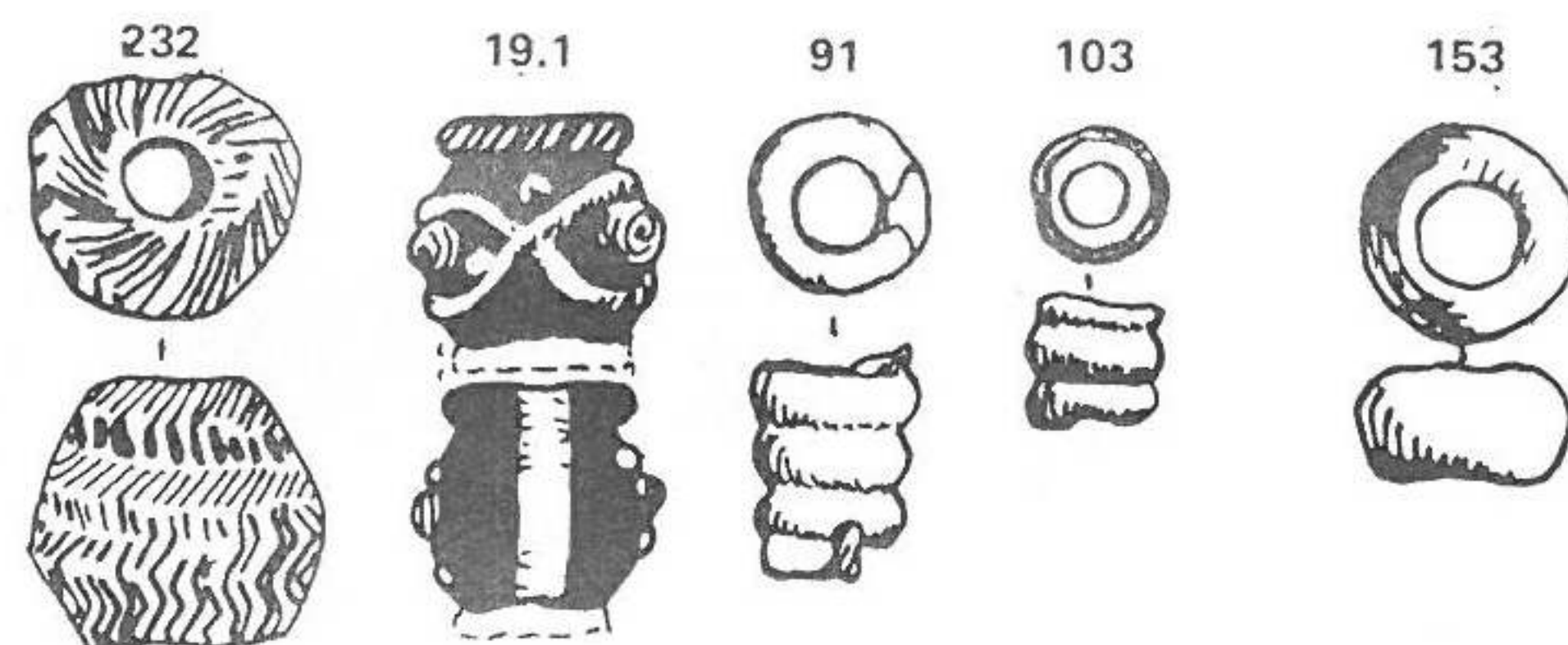
Carraig Aille II. Bronze objects: nos. 136, 148 ring-pins; no. 173 hand-pin; no. 135a drinking horn; no. 254 toilet implement (after SPOR) Scale 1 : 1



Carraig Aille II. Viking silver hoard: rings and fragments of bracelets (after SPQR)

Scale 1 : 1

ring-pins, knives, saws, etc; 22 bone combs, 34 bone discs, whetstones, objects of flint, jet and clay. Ó Ríordáin gave the 8th to 10th or early 11th centuries as the likely period of occupation.



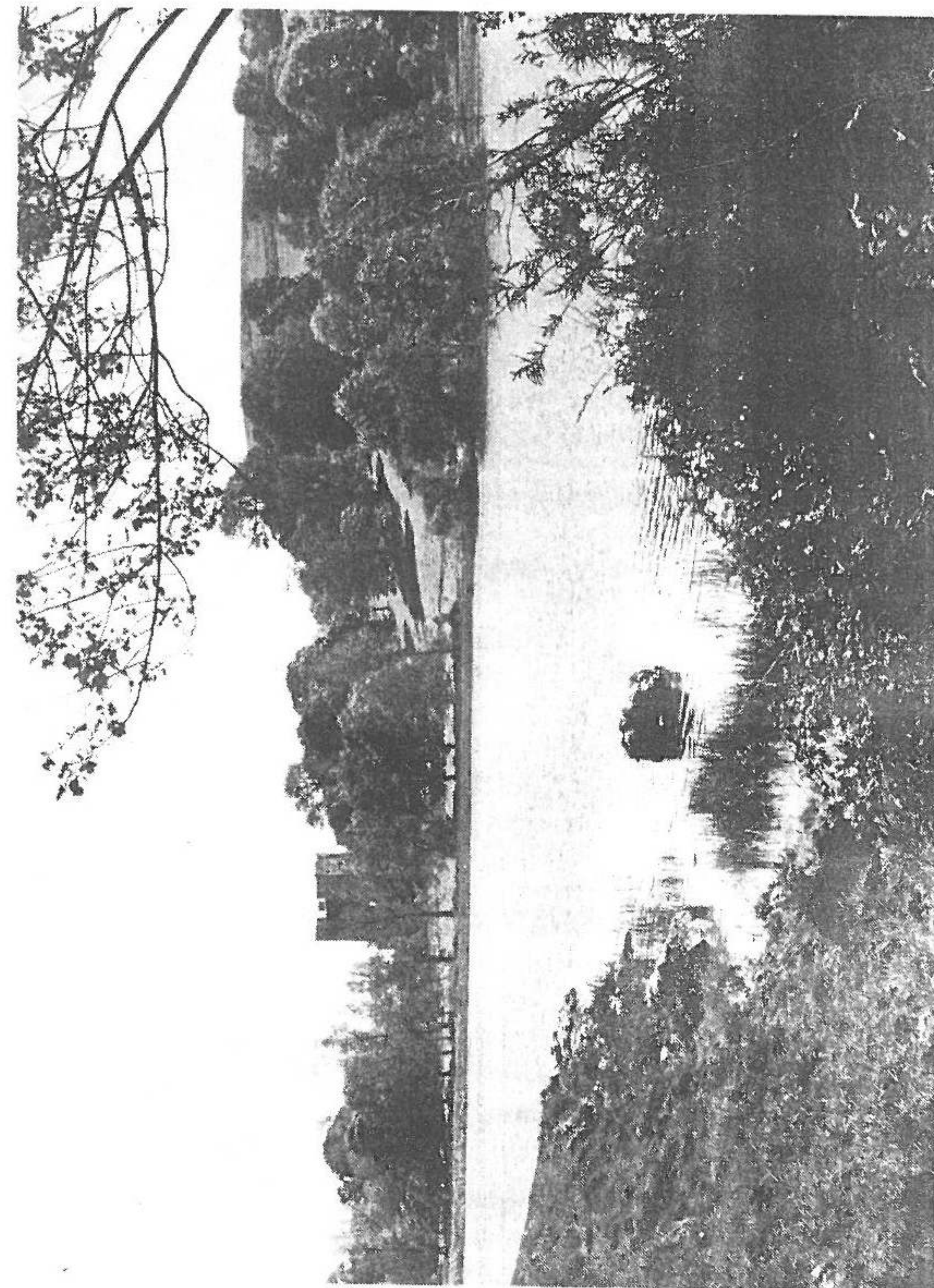
Carraig Aille II (except no. 19.1 which is Carraig Aille I): glass beads (after SPQR)

Scale 1 : 1

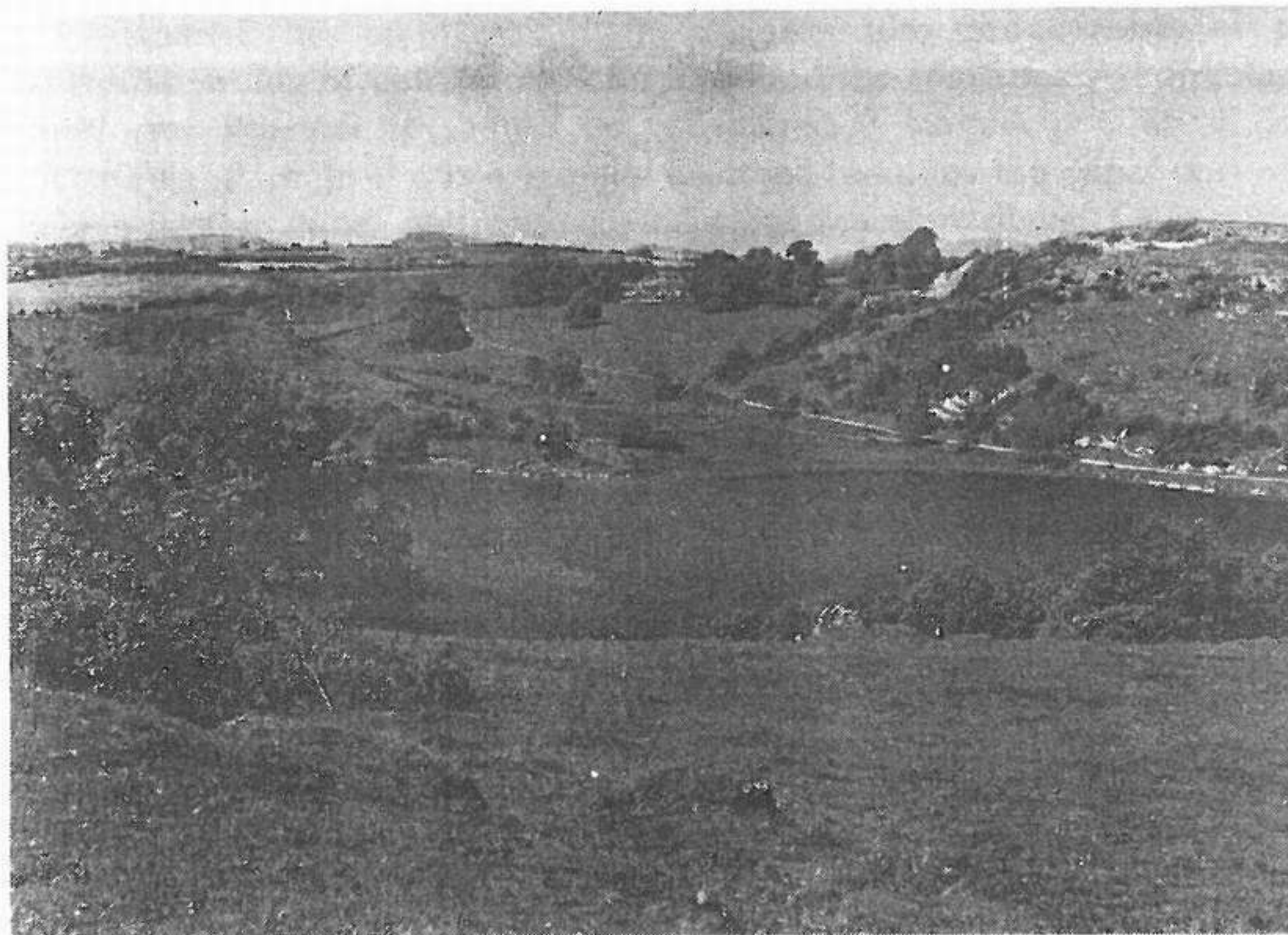
Circles O and P (WIN)

These sites are on the opposite side of the road from Carraig Aille, about 300m farther on. A gateway on the side of the road gives access and they are a few fields up the hill from it. Both sites were excavated in 1936 but remain unpublished.

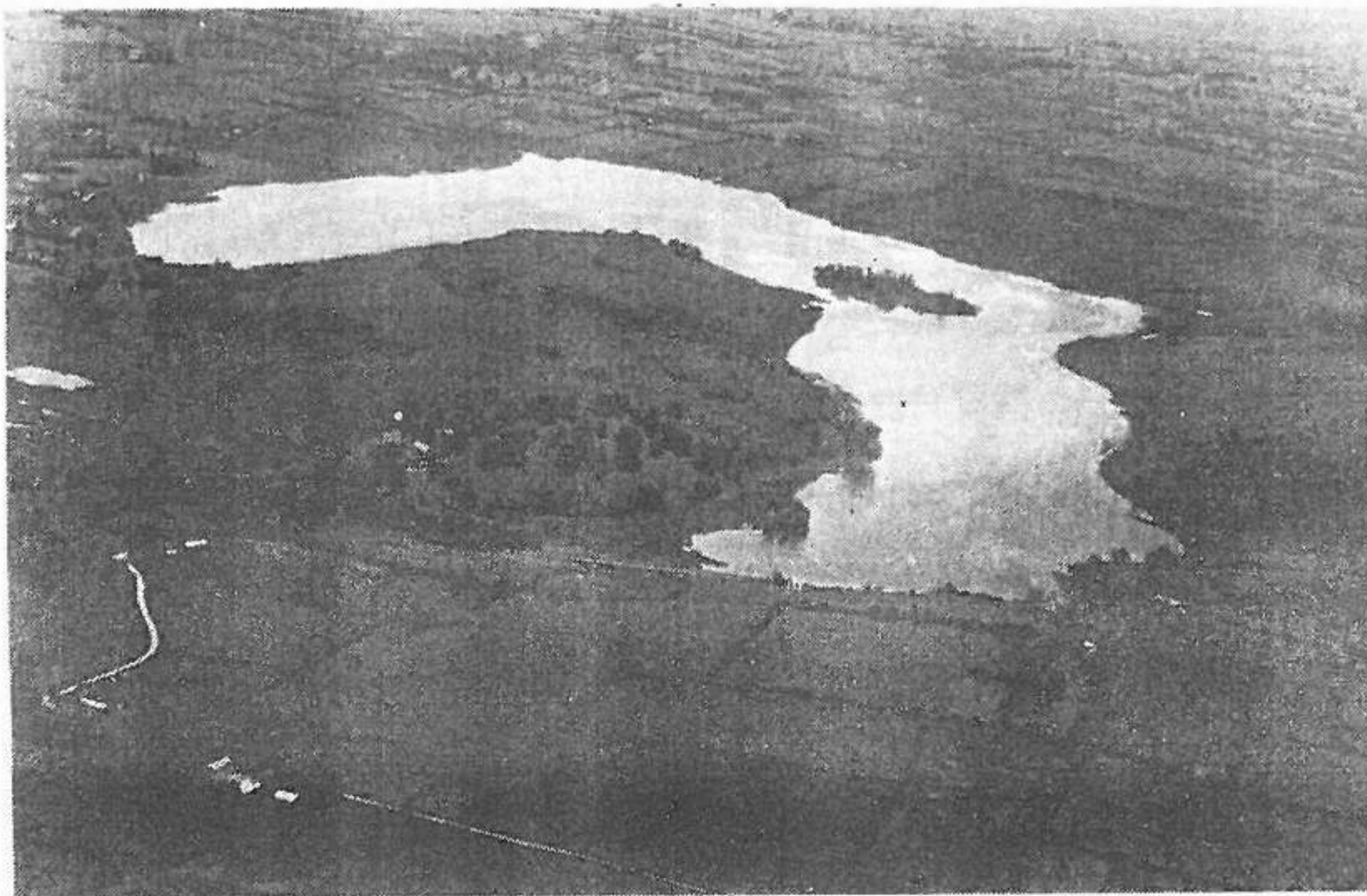
Circle O is the more northerly and the more impressive of the two. It is 56m in overall diam. and consists of an earthen bank faced on both sides with standing slabs of stone. The position of the original entrance is not known. Excavation showed that there was a ditch inside the bank



Lough Gur, looking from The Spectacles towards Bouchier's Castle and Knockadoon.

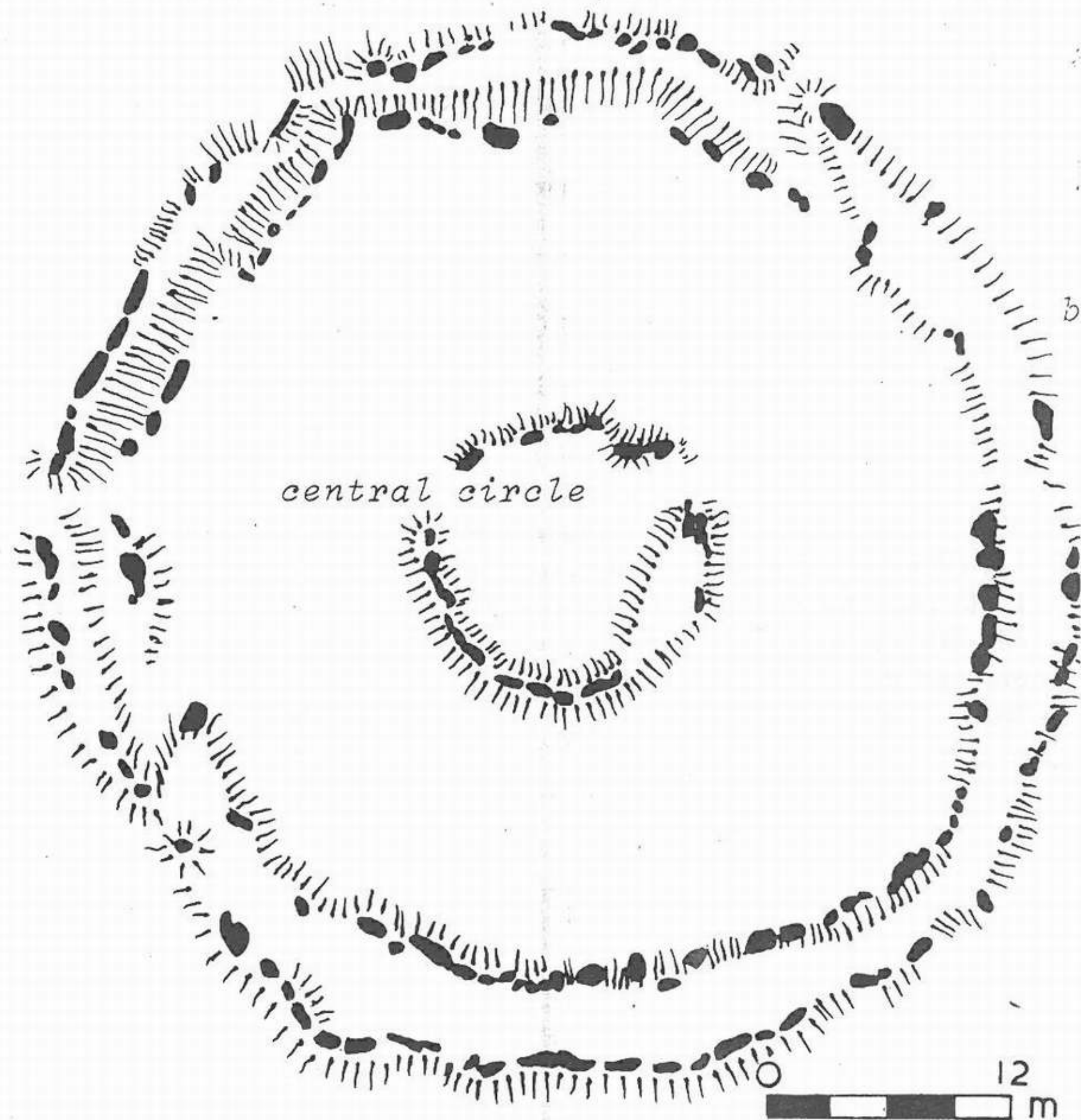


The farm by Lough Gur.

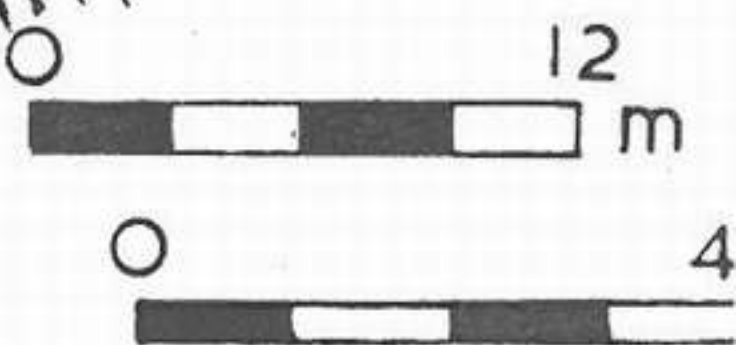


Lough Gur, aerial view.

and beyond the ditch there was an annular space surrounding a central circle of contiguous stones. This inner circle was 15m in overall diam. In the NE quadrant of the circle a pile of boulders was revealed which had been thrown together without any apparent arrangement. There were no finds and hence the date is unknown. Because of the finding of a ditch inside the bank, the site is considered to have been a ritual one.

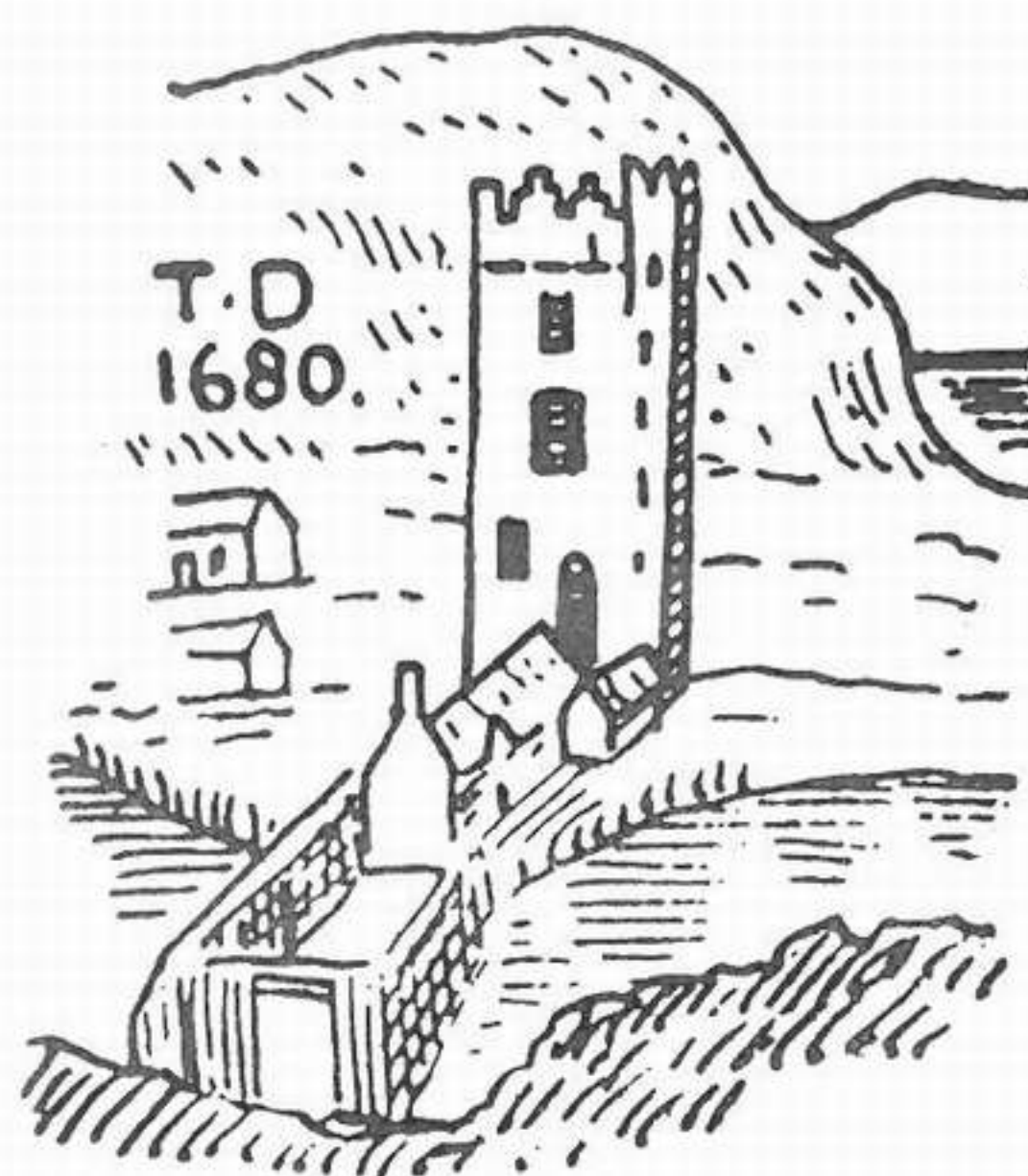


Circle O
(after MJOK)



Circle P has an overall diam. of only 10m and consists of a kerb-like setting of contiguous stones around the edge of a flat circular platform. Whether it should be considered a stone circle at all is debatable. Perhaps it was originally a kerbed tumulus, the upper part of which is now gone, built into an adjacent fence, perhaps. Or it may have been a 'cairn circle' or 'kerb-cairn' of kinds known in Wales and Scotland.

In the NE quadrant two pottery vessels described as 'urns' were found. This term suggests that they were thought of at that time as middle or late bronze age burial vessels. If they did denote urn burials, the date should now be revised so as to place them in the early bronze age. On the other hand, it is possible that the pots are not urns in the archaeologically accepted sense, but vessels of the flat-based coarse ware of the late neolithic which became so familiar in subsequent excavations at Lough Gur.



LOUGH GUR

(after Dinely)

GROUP IV

Bourchier's Castle is at one of the points of entry to the peninsula of Knockadoon, the most picturesque and the most famous part of the whole area and also the one richest in antiquities. In neolithic and early bronze age times, the whole of the peninsula must have been inhabited and, while a total of at least 18 sites of various kinds have been identified there, they are only a small part of the whole, owing their recognition to clear or fairly clear surface indications. Many others exist, or once existed, of which there is now very little or no surface trace. It is not an exaggeration to say that the findings at Knockadoon changed the face of Irish archaeology in the forties and fifties.

The Knockadoon sites are in three groups. As one goes from Bourchier's Castle along the track towards the Black Castle, the marshy area is on the left and Circles M and L and Site E (SPOR) are on the hill on the right though they are not easily accessible by this route. A second group, Sites I and J (SPOR), are in the valley running N-S which separates this part of Knockadoon from the western part. The third group, comprising all the remaining sites, is in this western part, mainly on the more southerly slopes, viz, Circles J and K (WIN) and House-sites A, B, C, D, F, G and H (SPOR), together with nos. 10, 11 and 12. Most of the sites in this group have been excavated but only the house-sites have been published (1954). The most important sites are Circles J and K and House-sites A and C, though the latter is no longer visible, even in outline.

Bourchier's Castle (Lough Gur Castle)

The castle is owned by Count de Salis, a descendant of the former landlords of the area. The windows, doors and other fittings are due to the late Count John, who intended using it as a shooting lodge. Built in the 15th century, it was granted to Sir George Bourchier, son of the second earl of Bath, on Desmond's forfeiture. Previous to this, and subsequently also, it figured in many engagements.

The castle was built on what was then a narrow neck of land between the two ends of the C-shaped lake. By defending this point of access, the whole of Knockadoon became virtually a fortress, and hence, presumably, the name of the hill itself, *Cnoc a'Dúin*. Thomas

Dinely (1681) shows the lake as completely surrounding Knockadoon and shows a fore-building and drawbridge leading from the castle across the lake to the external mainland. The ground plan of the castle is a rectangle, consisting of a tower of five storeys, 22.8m high, and like many castles of the period, it was built in two sections, the joint line being clearly visible. The roofs of the ground floor and of the top floor are stone vaults. The original roof was a pitched gabled one. A stone spiral stairs gives access to all floors and to the present flat roof.

Circle M (WIN)

The best way to reach this site is to go straight to the top of the hill from behind the castle. It is marked Dun Gair on the OS map. In the absence of excavation, it is impossible to say whether the irregularities of the ground surface are the remains of a destroyed monument or merely rock outcrop.

From this point there is a wide view and it is a useful place from which to get one's bearings and identify other monuments.

Circle L (WIN)

This is a short distance south of the latter site and at a somewhat lower level, overlooking the marshy area. It was excavated but remains unpublished. It consists of two concentric rings of stones with rubble in between, the NW arc being formed by the natural rock outcrop. Overall diam. 22m. In the interior there were two superimposed houses, the earlier of which has been dated by radiocarbon to approx. 2600 BC. The later house was associated with beaker pottery and this would give it an approx. date of 2000 BC.

Site E (SPOR)

This is nearer to the track running between the two castles than the last site, being only about 10m above it on a small rocky shelf. One side of the rectangular hut is formed by the rock face and the others by rough stones. It seems to have been used as a temporary shelter for a brief period but the finds which were very scant indicated the probability of a neolithic date. Published (1954).

The Black Castle (Killalough Castle)

This is now in a ruined state. Like Bouchier's Castle, it protected one of the access points to Knockadoon, though it is older, being probably 13th century. The remains consist now of a rectangular enclosure, at the

two southern corners of which there are the remains of square towers connected by a high curtain wall. Part of one tower remains for some of its height but the other is more ruinous. The main entrance was in this tower and from here a stone causeway led out across the marshy shallows to solid land where there was a gate-house, now gone. The causeway evidently stood above the level of the water before the drainage of the last century. Nowadays, the causeway can be followed



The Black Castle and causeway (after Du Noyer)

only as far as a stream which marks the boundary between two farms. Beyond this point it was removed in recent years.

The Black Castle is said to have been one of the chief seats of the earls of Desmond. Near the castle there is a rectangular enclosure which may be part of earlier fortifications or it may be prehistoric.

Sites I and J (SPOR)

As already mentioned, these are in the valley running between the two parts of Knockadoon. Site J, the more northerly of the two, was found on excavation to consist of a 17th century farmhouse, but directly beneath the floor there was a hearth and some neolithic pottery.

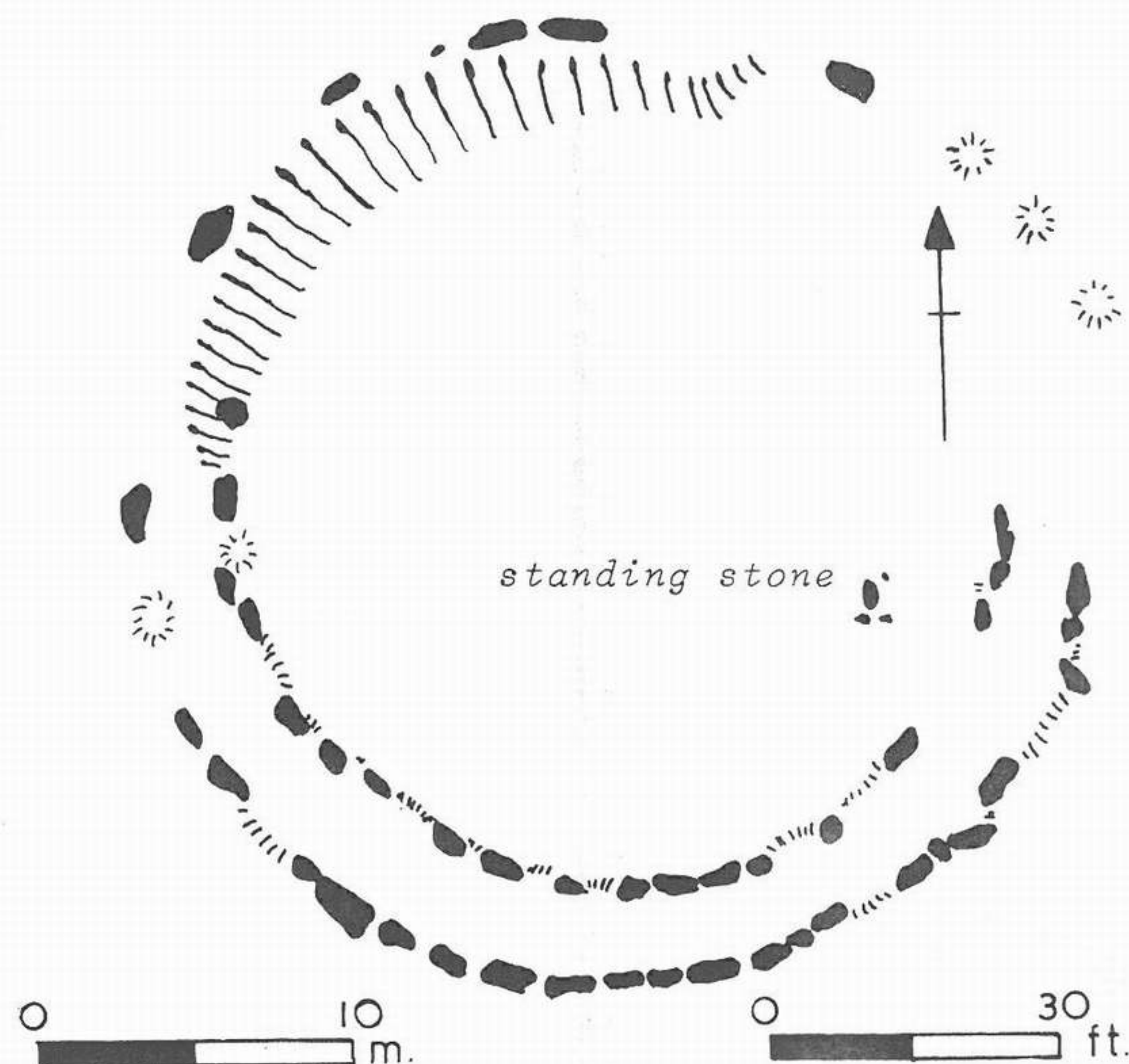
Site I was a hut associated with the terracing of the valley for agricultural purposes. The terracing, which consists of rows of large stones crossing the valley, has neolithic pottery associated with it. The hut would appear to have been of bronze age date. Both sites are published (J in 1947 and I in 1954).

Circles J and K (WIN)

It has been mentioned already that the name 'stone circle' has been rather loosely applied in the Lough Gur area. There are a number of stone circles of conventional type, such as Circles B and C in Grange townland, but there are others, of which J and K above, and L, already mentioned, are examples, which do not readily fit into this classification. This latter type consists of two concentric rings of contiguous stones, the space between the rings being filled with earth and rubble. Of this type of structure Ó Ríordáin wrote (1953):

'At Knockadoon, Lough Gur, there are enclosures defined by two concentric circles of upright stones. These sites were formerly regarded as stone circles but there is clearly evidence from the excavation of some of them that they were habitation sites where the space around a house was enclosed by a wall of which only two concentric rows of upright stones now remain. Originally the wall must have been completed by building a bank of sods between the uprights. That these sites developed in the early bronze age is shown by the large amount of domestic pottery and other finds of that period which they have produced'.

Circle J (WIN) was first examined by Professor Harkness of University College, Cork, who dug some small portions of it (1869). It was subsequently excavated by Ó Ríordáin but it remains unpublished. Many human skeletons were found and, according to Ó Ríordáin, it had been used as a cemetery. Harkness had found the bones of young children and also that some internal structures were present. One of the structures surrounded the base of a small standing stone in the SE quadrant of the circle which is still present.

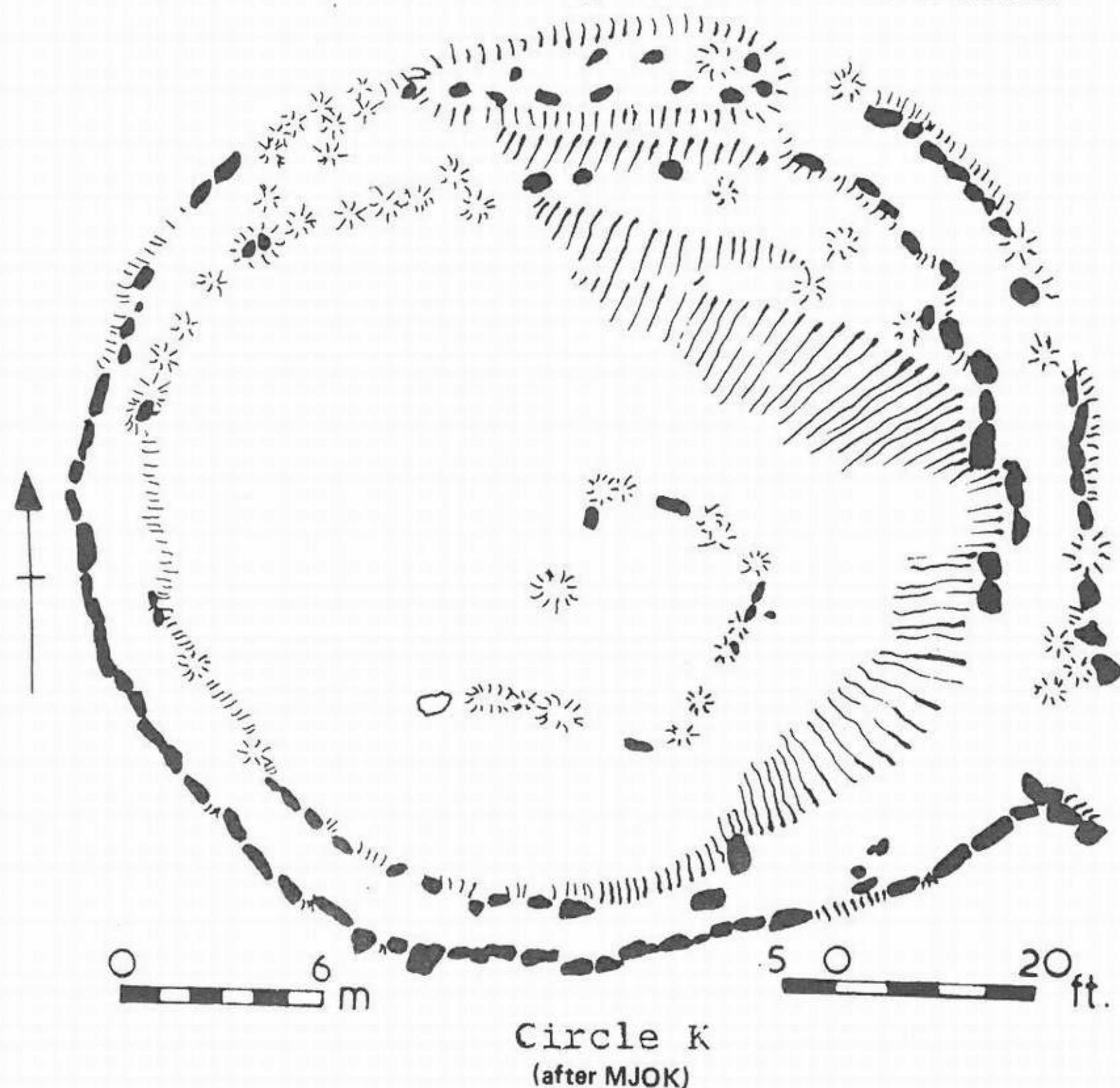


Circle J
(after MJOK)

The circle consists of two concentric rings of stones with the usual rubble filling between. Overall diam. 30m. There was no recognisable entrance. In parts of the circumference, the natural rock outcrop had been utilised instead of stones.

Circle K (WIN) is less than 100m NW of the last site and it is the largest circle on Knockadoon; overall diam. 31m. It was excavated in 1940 but remains unpublished. It is composed of two concentric rings of more or less contiguous stones, the space between the rings being

about 1.2m. The tallest stone is about 1.2m high but many are much smaller than this. On the east there is a gap in both rings and excavation showed not only that this was the entrance, but also revealed the rock-cut postholes which apparently had held the jambs of some kind of wooden gates. In the centre of the enclosure there was a rectangular building, the outline of which was marked by rock-cut postholes and by part of the stone foundation of the wall. This was probably a domestic house protected by the two enclosing rubble-filled circles of stones.



The presence of the gate shows that the two rings were only part of the original enclosing structure. If there had been no more than these rings, a gate would have been pointless, as man or animal could have stepped over them into the enclosure at almost any point. Perhaps then

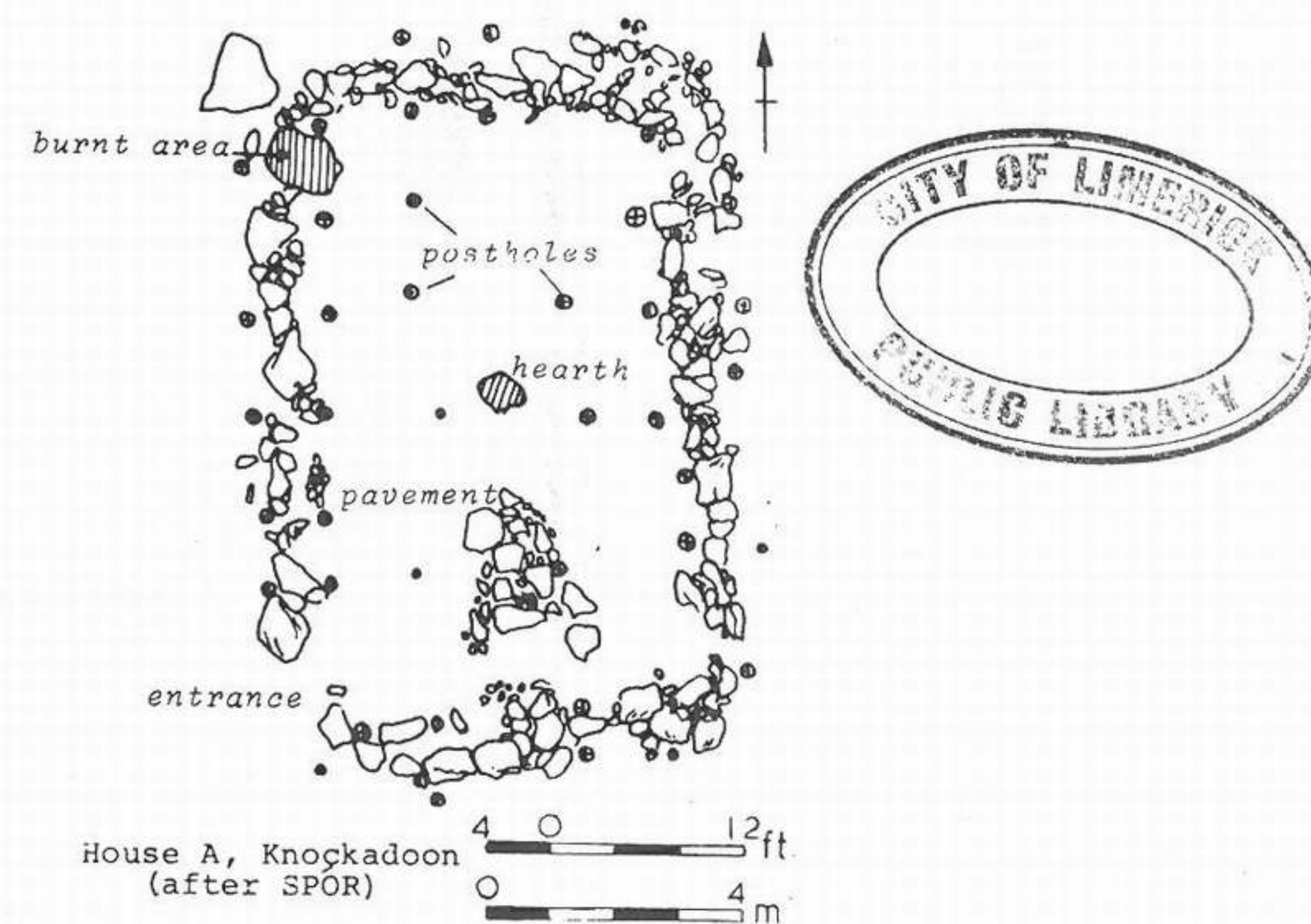
one should see the concentric rings as inner and outer revetments for the base of a solid bank built of turves. If one accepts this as a possibility, we then have in this monument, not a ritual stone circle, but a domestic ringfort.

The pottery was much the same as that from the house-sites on Knockadoon, i.e. a complex of wares which suggested much the same sort of date - late neolithic/early bronze age - and, taken in conjunction with the dating evidence from Circle L, already mentioned, it may be that here on Knockadoon is part of the beginnings of the Irish ring-fort.

Eight burials were found, seven of them children under eight years of age and one an adult female. Outside, but partly underlying the NE arc of the circle (and therefore earlier), was a hut site on the floor of which were the skeletons of two young children. The hut had been a substantial structure, its wall having had a stone foundation.

Sites 10, 11 and 12 (SPOR)

These three sites which are similar to the last have also been excavated but are unpublished. No. 10 is SW of Circle K, No. 11 is to the north and No. 12 is about 40m to the west.

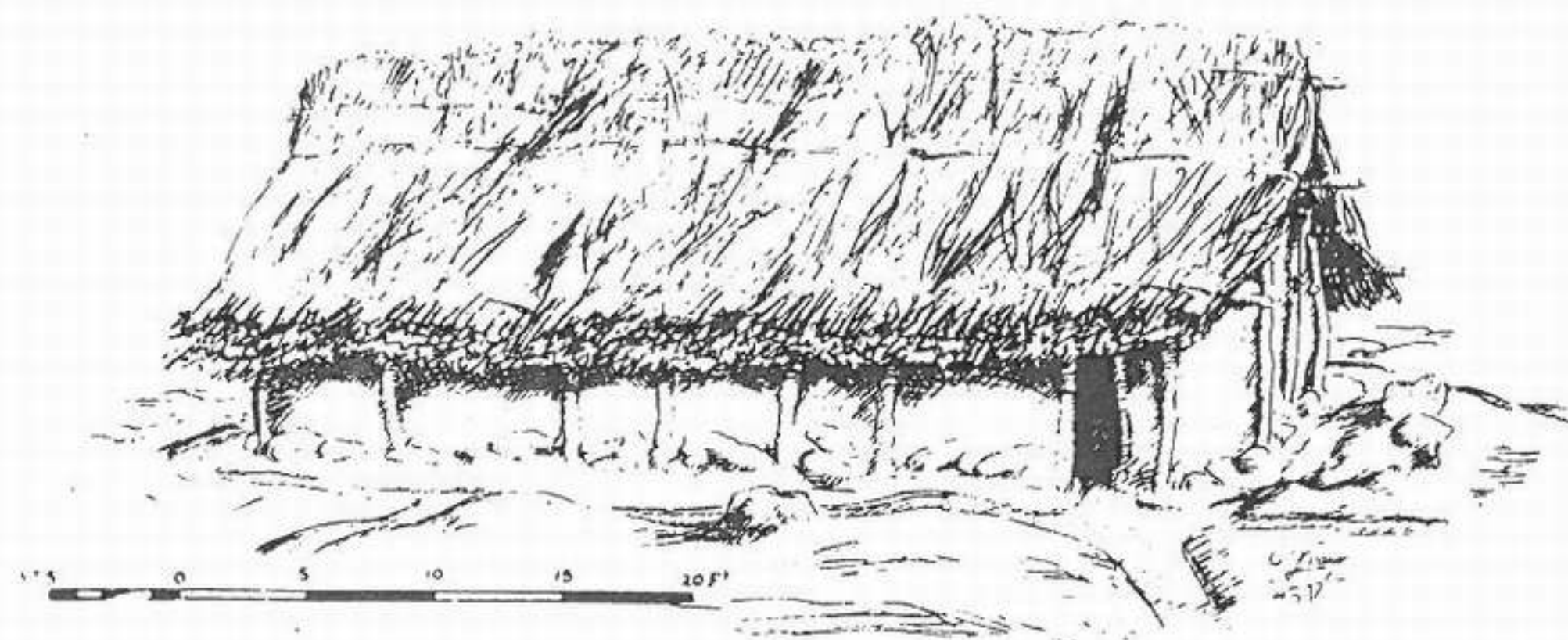


House-sites

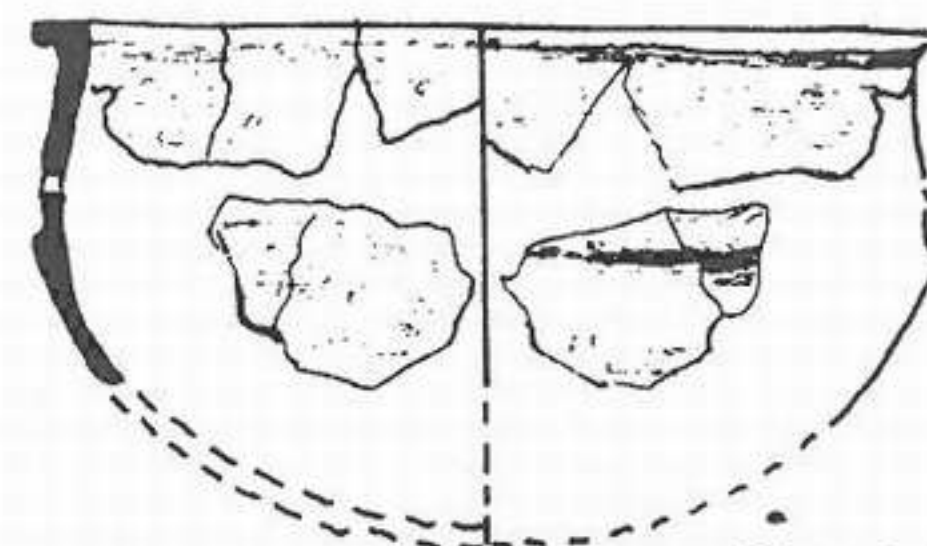
The excavation of the first of these, Site A, began in 1939 and neolithic pottery was found for the first time at Lough Gur in association with a habitation. According as other house-sites were investigated a fairly uniform pottery sequence began to be established which was summarised by Ó Ríordáin as follows:

It began with what became known as Class I and Class Ia ware, round-bottomed bowls with sharply defined shoulders and flat rims, sometimes ornamented. These were found on the old ground level and continued above it also but became increasingly mixed with coarser pottery derived from large bucket-shaped pots. This pottery, Class II ware, was the dominant type in the upper strata. In these levels beaker fragments occurred also though not frequently, and there was no sterile layer intervening, therefore, according to Ó Ríordáin, the sequence was uninterrupted.

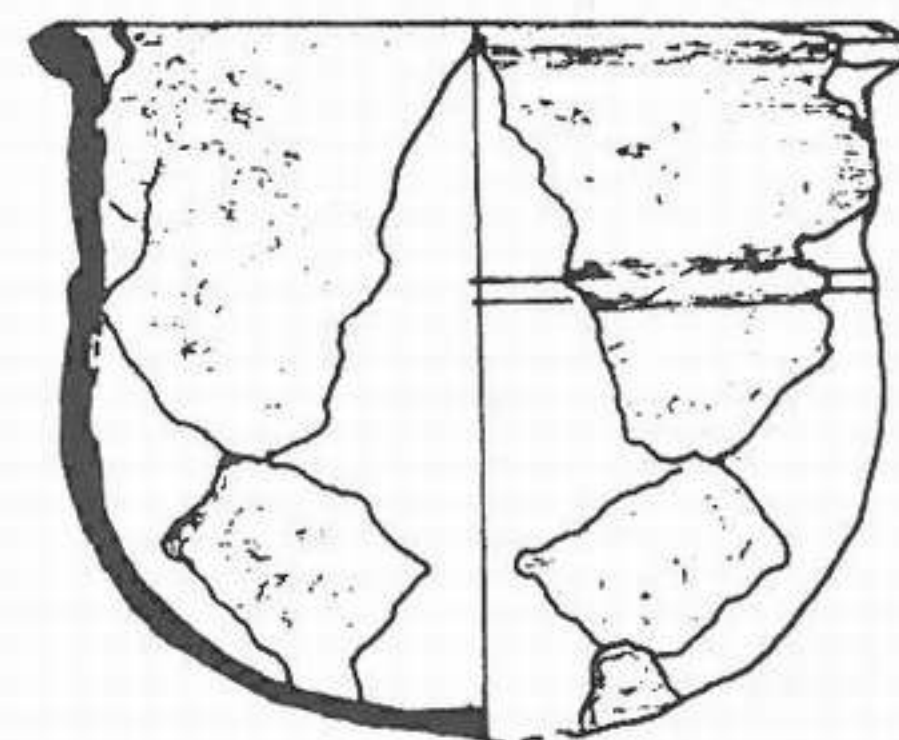
Not every site showed the complete sequence but it was felt that it remained valid throughout the areas investigated. The variety and quantity of the pottery, as also the finding of stone axes manufactured



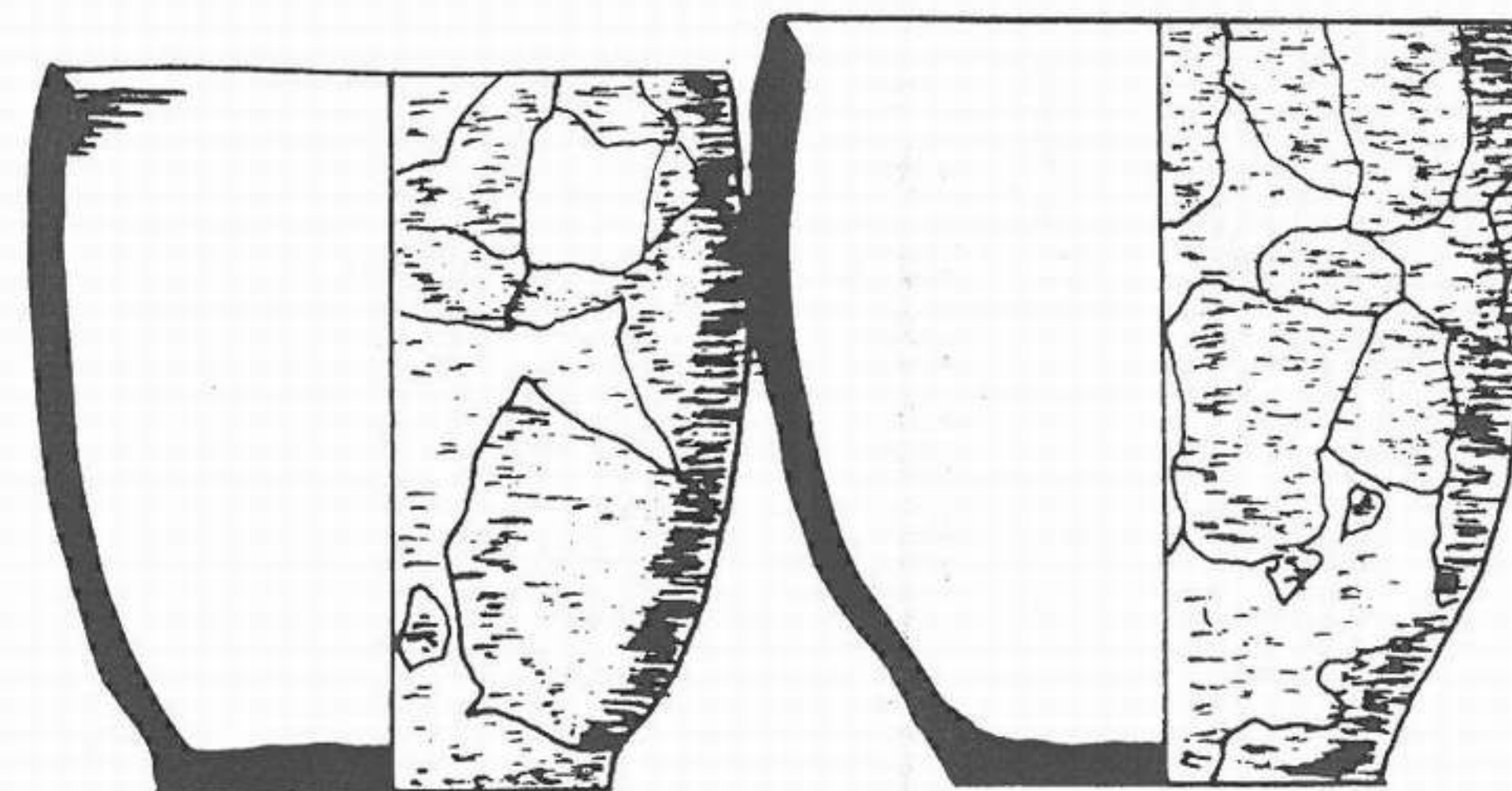
House A, Knockadoon, scale model, suggested reconstruction.



Class I



Class Ia



Class II

Site C, Knockadoon. Reconstructed drawings of neolithic pots (after SPOR)
Scale 1 : 6

as far away as Co. Antrim, showed that the inhabitants of Knockadoon were no closed, insular, isolated community, but one which was constantly receiving new impulses from outside by means of trade and traffic. The fact that habitation was continuous throughout the period represented by the pottery types demonstrates the stable, self-sufficient nature of the inhabitants and the changing pottery styles show that they were receptive to outside influences.

In regard to the houses themselves, stones seem to have been used, if at all, only as foundation courses for the walls which would have been of mud. The roofs were presumably of thatch, supported on timber beams, the postholes for which were found during the excavations. There are now few traces of any of the structures.

House-site D (SPOR)

It is best to start with this site as it is on top of the rock and the other sites, or their location, can be seen from here. Site C was immediately beneath the cliff on which D stands but only a grassy sward can now be seen where the extensive excavations at C took place. Sites A and B can still be traced farther away, and F and G are farther still.

Site D in its earliest phase was constructed of wooden posts and mud walls. Round-bottomed neolithic pottery was present. The stratification was not as deep as elsewhere and it was more disturbed because of the restricted nature of the site itself. The uppermost habitation in the stratification was an oval house with stone foundations, thought to be of middle bronze age date because of the finding of a stone mould for a looped palstave. In this upper level also were found two infant burials.

Site C (SPOR)

A large area was excavated here and because of the deep deposit and the large number of finds, it is the most important site on Knockadoon from the viewpoint of pottery sequence and stratification.

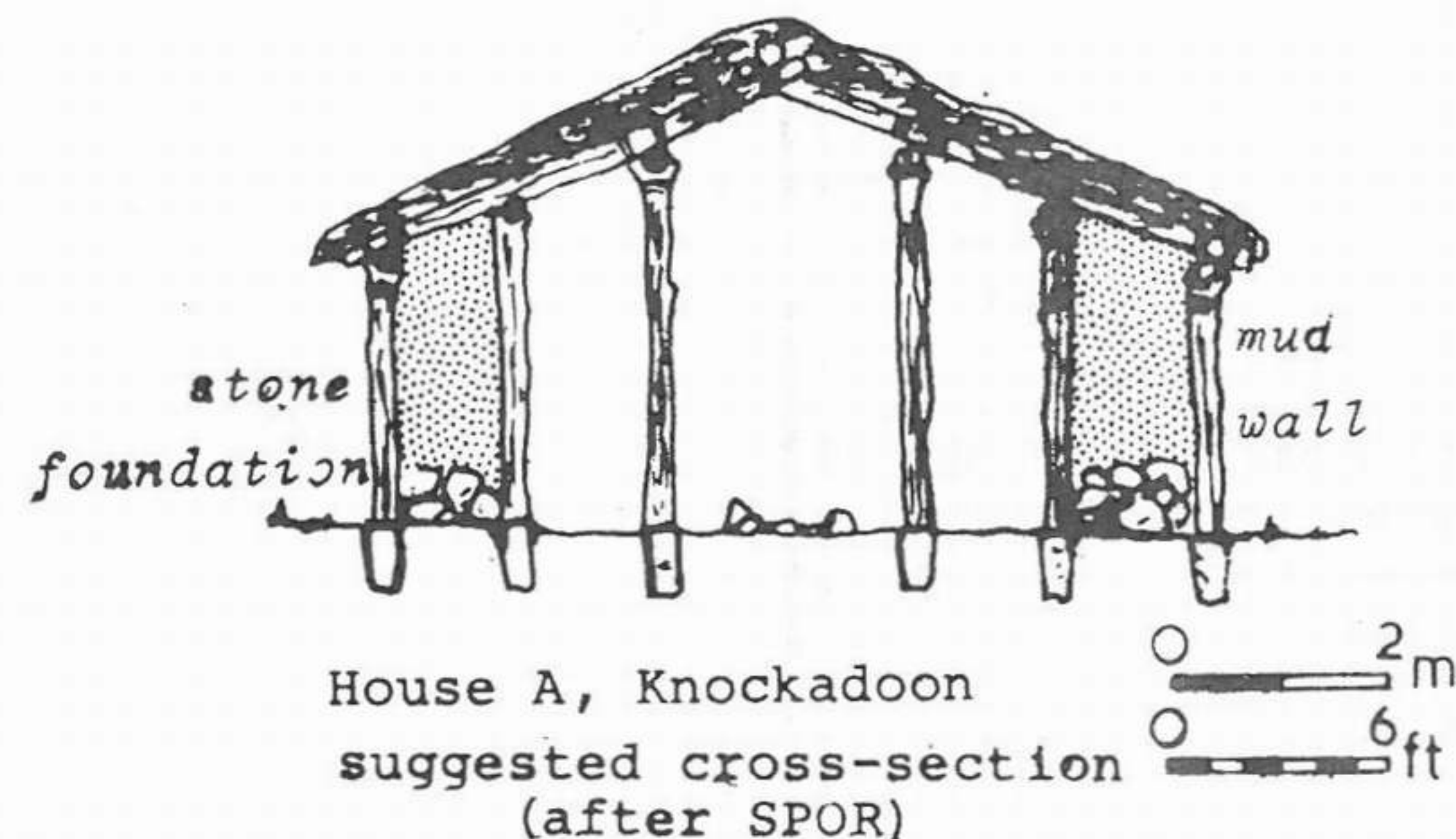
Within an enclosing stone wall there were a number of circular houses marked by postholes, average diam. 6m. They consisted of an outer wall formed of two concentric rings of posts about a metre apart, the space between having been filled with mud. The hearths were in the centre and beside each was a rubbish pit. One of the most noteworthy features of this site was the depth of habitation refuse, in places as much as a metre in thickness; also the quantity and variety of the

pottery. This ranged in uninterrupted sequence from Class I ware to beaker. With the latter were found some typical beaker goods, rivet-hafted knife-daggers and a holed axe-hammer.

Owing to the absence of postholes in the uppermost levels it was not possible to say what types of structure were present. In the topmost level the finds ranged from pottery to crucibles, to stone and glass beads, and to objects of metal, indicating dates ranging from the bronze age into early Christian times. Objects lost on the site and trampled into the ground were thought to account for most of these as they were sealed off from the beaker layer below and from the neolithic one lower still.

Site A (SPOR)

This is still visible on the ground as a rectangle of stones, the long axis



running N-S with the slope of the hill. It was a three-aisled structure, 9.7m by 6m inside, with a doorway at the SW corner, a central hearth and thatched roof. This house was reconstructed as part of a television programme but it is doubtful if the walls were of reeds and brushwood as was envisaged at the time.

Site B

This lay immediately SW of the last site. It was obvious that several

houses had been built one on another over a period of time. These were rectangular though no complete plan was recovered. A large quantity of pottery was found, all, except for a few sherds, neolithic, though there was no coarse ware.

Site F

This was a large rectangular house, the lower parts of the walls being of stone. It is near the western end of Knockadoon at the upper edge of a slope which falls away to the lake about 70m distant. The rock face beneath which it is situated formed one of the walls of the house. It was 8m by 6.5m in internal dimensions. Ó Ríordáin suggested that the house was built on an earlier site, dated by the pottery to neolithic and beaker times, the house itself being used by metal-workers, as evidenced by the finding of clay moulds and bronze waste nearby.

Site G

This is to the north of the last site and was similarly constructed against an upright rock face by piling up stones of varying sizes in no regular order. It was more a hut than a house, being just over 3m in dimension inside, and seems to have been used only temporarily. A small amount of coarse ware was found.

Site H

This is west of Site A and only a small area was excavated. It was difficult to distinguish a satisfactory plan but pottery - mainly coarse ware - was recovered. The final occupation of the site was thought to be not later than beaker times.

GROUP V

Instead of retracing one's steps, one can now proceed northward along the shore of the lake, taking a look at it in the process. The level of the water is about 75m OD. The shores slope gently and are generally fringed with reeds. Some 50 or so swans live on the lake, also numerous coot, ducks and moorhens. The area is now a bird sanctuary and shooting is forbidden. Fishing is strictly preserved. Owing to its horseshoe shape, the whole of the lake cannot be seen from the ground at any one time and this adds greatly to its charm and mystery. There are several good descriptions of it in *The Farm by Lough Gur* by Mary Carbery which depict the lake in all seasons and in all weathers.

Garrett Island (Geróid Is)

This low wooded islet more or less divides the lake into two. The main feature is a large platform of stones about 40m in diam. which is said to be the remains of one of the Desmond castles, of which mention was made in *Pacata Hibernia* under the year 1600. A trial excavation conducted on the island (Liversage 1958) found evidence of neolithic occupation. The island is a natural feature and not a crannog as has sometimes been suggested.

Bolin Island

This is at the most northerly part of this side of the lake and is not a natural island but a crannog or lake dwelling. Since the drainage, however, it is no longer a complete island and at times, can be reached more or less dry shod. It was built by laying down in the water a great ring of boulders, the enclosed space being filled with brushwood and earth. This was revealed when a trial section was cut there in 1938. There were no finds and it remains unpublished.

The Spectacles

Shortly after viewing the last site one regains the mainland and the car-park area and proceeds NE along the road skirting this part of the lake. About half-way along, some hut sites are situated on a little rocky plateau on the lower slope of the hill. When surveyed for the OS map they were given the name of The Spectacles because surface appearances showed two circular structures side by side. In actual fact, when excavations took place, it was found that three huts, an animal shelter and some ancient fields were present and that one of the circular

structures was merely a fortuitous arrangement of rock outcrop but the other was a well built hut, House A.

This was approx. circular with an internal diam. of 4.5m and a wall about a metre thick. Postholes inside and outside the wall suggested that the upper part of the house was of mud or turves and that the thatched roof was borne on the posts rather than on the walls. The doorway had a protecting porch outside it and a paved path led from it to a series of rough steps at the plateau edge leading to the lake. There were two hearths within the house.

Beyond the field wall adjacent to House A, were two further structures, House B, oval in plan and marked mainly by postholes, and House C, a long narrow structure, probably an animal shelter. In the next ancient field to the south was House D, rectangular in plan and measuring 4m by 3.6m internally. Between House D and the western edge of the plateau there were fragmentary remains of other structures, perhaps animal shelters also.

The finds are similar to those from the Carraig Aille forts and houses - fragments of bronze ring-pins, iron knives, bone combs, spindle whorls, whetstones, jet bracelets, glass beads, querns, etc. On the evidence of these, the excavator (Ó Ríordáin 1949) suggested that the period of occupation was probably the same as for the Carraig Aille sites, that is, 8th to 10th or possibly 11th century AD.

GROUP VI

The hill of Knockfennell dominates the lake to the north. At its eastern end it rises to 162m OD and there are steep slopes and cliffs on this side. A good view can be obtained from the top when the air is clear; the Clare hills to the north, those of west Co. Limerick to the west, the Slievefelim and Keeper hills to the north-east, and the Galtees to the south-east. The quickest way to reach the summit is over the low ridge into the base of which flows the original underground stream running out of the lake. It is best to go straight up the steep face of the hill.

Red Cellar Cave

On the way up the steep face of Knockfennell, notice on the right a clump of scrub. This hides the entrance to a small limestone cave, little more than a narrow solution crevice. This is the Red Cellar cave. Excavation of the floor deposit produced, amongst other extinct animals, the bones of brown bear (*Ursus Arctos*). Unpublished.

Ring-cairn

This is on the summit of the hill and consists of a ring-cairn of stones about 15m in diam. The centre is a hollow bowl shape. There is no entrance. It was excavated but remains unpublished. The results were inconclusive as there were no finds and no evidence of date. Among the stones of the ring, pockets of burnt human bones were found.

Walking westwards over the saddle, a system of ancient field fences and several hut-foundations can be seen.

Stone fort

On the western high shoulder of the hill is this stone-built ring-fort (unexcavated), very similar to those on Carraig Aille. It is oval in plan, 38 by 30m, and the interior is very rough. It is not possible to locate the entrance as the fort is in a very collapsed state.

It is in the centre of an extensive system of ancient field fences of earth and stone which run all over the hill.

Ring-fort

As one descends from the previous site towards the lake, there is a ring-fort of platform type which has been partly scarped out of the slope of the ground. It is steepest on the north side where there is a

bank and ditch and the ground falls away to the south, where a certain amount of building up had had to be done. It measures 23m in average diam. It was excavated but is unpublished. The finds - ring-pins, etc, - implied an early Christian period date.

The ring-fort is at the centre of another system of ancient fields.

Circle T (WIN)

If this were ever intended as a stone circle it is a poor example. It is situated about 50m to the west of the last site and only a short distance from the lake. It is oval rather than circular, average diam. 11m. There are large spaces between the stones which are low, none of them more than 75cm in height. There is no bank. Unexcavated.

There is part of what may have been another ring of stones between the ring-fort (above) and the edge of the lake. Only 7 or 8 boulders are now present but if the circle was ever complete, or indeed if it ever was a circle, it would have run beneath the ring-fort and thus have been earlier.

Crock Island

This is at the NW corner of the lake. Like Bolin Island it is a crannog and was built in the same way but it is no longer surrounded by water. A narrow neck of the lake ran outwards at this point but after the drainage the crannog became surrounded by dry land. It is 27m in diam. and now about 2m above the level of the surrounding terrain.

A complete circuit of the lake has now been made and were one to turn the corner, as it were, one would find oneself once again at Ardaghlooda hill and the Grange Stone Circle.



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