THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Corndon Round Barrow VII

EXCAVATION AND SURVEY

Corndon Round Barrow VII lies at the lowe, right-hand corner of the recently-felled and replanted woodland below the peak of Corndon Hill. It is significantly sited along an ancient trackway at the highest point of the saddle between Corndon Hill and Lan Fawr from where this view is taken. *Photo CPAT 2100-147*

CPAT Report No 791

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EXCAVATION AND SURVEY

by W J Britnell

April 2006

The study was undertaken during the 2005/06 financial year (project CPAT 1320)
with funding provided by Cadw

Cadw

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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Background

LOCATION AND PREVIOUS DESCRIPTIONS

Corndon Hill Round Barrow VII (Clwyd-Powys Historic Environment Record 1080) lies at a height of about 395 metres above OD on the line of a trackway between White Grit and Old Church Stoke in a private woodland plantation known as West Spring Plantation at SO 29992 96785 (Fig. 1)

The barrow forms part of a dispersed cluster of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments across the Montgomeryshire-Shropshire border on Lan Fawr, Corndon Hill and Stapeley Hill. These include The Hoarstones and Mitchell's Fold stone circles and the former stone circle of The Whetstones which all lie to the north, and a group of distinctive upland cairns mostly to the east, on Corndon Hill itself. A number of these sites have been damaged or destroyed since the later 19th century. Disturbance to a small upland cairn about 400 metres to the south of the present barrow in 1986 led to the discovery of a Bronze Age cremation burial within a Collared Urn, for which the following radiocarbon dates were obtained (Britnell 1988): 3530±70 BP (CAR-1037) and 3330±70 BP (CAR-1038), which calibrate to 2040–1680 cal BC and 1770–1430 cal BC respectively (atmospheric data from Stuiver et al. 1998; OxCal v3.9).

The siting of the barrow at the highest point of the saddle between the peak of Corndon hill to the east and the summit of Lan Fawr to the west appears to be significant (see cover). The barrow is intervisible with the nearby peaks of Cordon Hill and Lan Fawr and more distantly to Roundton Hill to the south, Long Mountain to the north-west and Mitchell's Fold stone circle to the north.

Earlier editions of Ordnance Survey show the barrow lying in rough pasture (Fig. 2), bounded by trackways on all sides. It appears to have been first discovered by Miss Chitty in 1953 when still unplanted, and said to have probably been damaged by the construction of the adjoining road bank (OS Record Card SO 29 NE 10). It was visited by A. J. Bird some time after 1945 and noted in his *History on the Ground*, published in 1977 as follows:

> In the W. angle of the triangle of paths is an unrecorded barrow.

It was visited by the Ordnance Survey surveyors in 1973 who made the following description:

> Probable round barrow situated at SO 29999678, within a corner of a forestry plantation, upon the highest point of a saddle between hills. The barrow measures in diameter 15.0m NE-SW by 12.5m transversely and has a height of 1.5m. There are no signs of a ditch. The mound has been dug into on the SW side and cut back on the W side for a roadside wall and bank; it is under turf, and in good condition. (OS Record Card SO 29 NE 10)

SCHEDULING RECOMMENDATIONS

The site was visited as part of CPAT's Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Monuments initiative in 1998 when the following observations were recorded:

> Well defined barrow, slightly chopped by field wall on the W side. Over-planted with conifers. Also rabbit infested. About 12m diameter by 0.5-1m high. One large stone just SW of centre and a second to the SW may be cist covers or clearance. (CPAT Site Visit Form 1998).

The site was not included in an initial series of scheduling recommendations of sites in Montgomeryshire (Gibson 1998). The site was again visited by CPAT as part of the initiative in 2003 when the following description was

recorded:

> The site consists of a circular convex-profiled mound 10m in diameter and 1.2m high, situated in the corner of a forestry plantation. A few stones are visible in the surface of the mound, but it appears to be an earthwork. Possibly a little disturbance on the W side, where a revetment wall passes, forming an old forest/enclosure boundary. The wall seems to respect the curve of the W side of the mound, which supports the belief that it is an authentic barrow and was in existence prior to the construction of the barrow in the medieval/post-medieval periods. (CPAT Site Visit Form 2003).

The site was subsequently recommended for scheduling (Jones 2004, 8).

REPORTED DAMAGE TO THE SITE

CPAT was informed of damage to the site by Mathew Ritchie of Cadw in 2005 who was visiting the site for the purpose of assessing it as part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument enhancement programme. The northern side of the mound had been dug into by machine, apparently in a search for suitable material for the building trackways constructed during tree-felling operations (Fig. 5).

PROJECT PROPOSAL

A project proposal with an application for funding for emergency recording and subsequent reinstatement work (Project CPAT 1320) was submitted to Cadw on 9 November 2006, and was approved for funding on 30 October 2006. Arrangements were consequently made with the agents of the owners of the site to undertake this work.

The parcel in which the barrow lies was replanted with a mixture of native broadleaved species grant-aided by the Forestry Commission as part of the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme during the winter of 2005/06.

OWNERS AND AGENTS

The ownership of the monument has changed from that given in Jones 2004, and is now:

Owner
A. R. Heygate (Joint Managing Director)
Litchborough
Towcester
Northamptonshire
NN12 8JF
Tel. 01327 830240

Agent
Joe Fielding
Red Rock Forestry
Felin Hen Farm
Felin Hen
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 4BB
Tel. 01248 364362

Details of recording and conservation work in 2006

TIMETABLE

Due to poor weather and the larger scale of work than anticipated, recording was spread out over a period of 7 days between 9–27 March 2006, mostly with a team of two. Reinstatement and landscaping of the site was carried out on 18 April 2006.

EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE

Clearance of recently disturbed material showed that an area of 5-6 metres across on the north-west side of the barrow had been disturbed to a depth of 1 metre or more which extended in places through the barrow mound down to the surface of a buried soil horizon below the mound (Fig. 6).

RECORDING STRATEGY

The decision was made to make a record of barrow structure within the area that had already been damaged, by squaring up the disturbed area and recording a partial cross-section through the mound. A divorced EDM survey was also made of the site and its immediate environs (Fig. 7) in order to define the extent of damage, which was subsequently located by best-fit to OS LandLine vector data (Fig. 3).

A walk-over survey was also undertaken within the adjacent areas of the recently-felled and replanted forestry plantation which revealed a previously unrecorded trial level (PRN 97029) about 180 metres to the north-east, but no structures or finds contemporary with the round barrow were identified within the adjacent areas of plantation and the recently created trackways.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BARROW STRUCTURE

Recording work has shown that the round barrow is about 15 metres in diameter and up to about 1.8 metres high (Figs 4, 9). This is significantly larger than recent field observations, which is partly due to the fact that the eastern side of the mound has become obscured by a build up of soil and stone. Despite the recent damage the round barrow remains remarkably intact and it even seems likely that now dilapidated and largely obscured field wall to the west has only had a superficial impact upon its structure.

The barrow overlay a thin, gleyed buried soil layer (8) which contained a scattering of charcoal throughout the soil profile and two flint fragments. A slightly greater concentration of charcoal was noted at the surface of the buried soil in one small area. No evidence of stake settings or other structures were identified.

The barrow had a core of alternating bands of loam and subsoil (5) which became more homogeneous towards the upper profile of the mound possibly due to animal and root disturbance. The more earthy layers contained a distinct scatter of charcoal fragments, together with some fragments of unworked burnt stone, flint and pottery fragments which seemed to represent artefacts incidentally incorporated in the mound from turf and topsoil stripped from surrounding areas. The presence of fairly large chunks of charcoal suggested an intensive vegetation clearance phase prior to barrow construction, without a prolonged intervening period of cultivation which might be expected to have fragmented the charcoal.

The barrow core was bounded on the north by stone deposits (6,7, Fig. 8), possibly derived from local field clearance, which lay directly on the surface of the buried soil and appeared to mark a phase of construction. The stone deposits

were directly overlain by distinct bands of material (4) which had the appearance of fossil turfs with iron panning which may have capped the barrow mound.

This was in turn capped by a layer of stone (3) which had the appearance of a deliberate capping to the mound rather than simply representing casual field clearance. This was overlain by loose loamy soil and then by recent forest soil and rootmat.

A strategy for palaeoenvironmental sampling was developed during the course of the project with advice from Astrid Caseldine, Department of Archaeology, University of Wales, Lampeter. Bulk soil samples and charcoal samples were collected from the buried soil and from the redeposited soil within the barrow mound and a pollen core was taken through the base of the mound, through the buried soil into the subsoil (Fig. 10).

REINSTATEMENT

Reinstatement and landscaping was carried out with mechanical assistance on 18 April 2006. With advice from Ian Bapty of CPAT vegetation was left to regenerate naturally.

FURTHER WORK

Specialist study of the finds and palaeoenvironmental samples is warranted in view of the general land use information these may provide relating to the cluster of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments that are known in the area. Radiocarbon dating of charcoal may also be worthwhile in order to provide an outline chronology. It is anticipated that this will provide the basis of a note to be published in an appropriate journal in due course.

Finds and records are to be placed in a suitable repository in due course.

REFERENCES

Bird, A. J., 1977. *History on the Ground*, University of Wales Press.

Britnell, W. J., 1988. 'A collared urn and cremation burial from a small upland cairn near Llan Fawr, Churchstoke, Powys', *Montgomeryshire Collections* 76, 13–16.

Gibson, A. M., 1998 , Prehistoric Funerary & Ritual Sites: Upper Severn Valley , CPAT Report 277.

Jones, N. W., 2004. Prehistoric Funerary & Ritual Sites: Montgomeryshire. Scheduling Recommendations. CPAT Report 608.

Appendix 1: Context Descriptions

1. **Turf and topsoil**. Turf, leaf mould and dark humic soil, 150-200mm thick.
2. **Soil layer**. Loose humic dark yellowish brown (10 YR 3/4) soil, above and within matrix of stone deposit 3. Probably accumulated naturally in situ.
3. **Stone layer**. Irregular stone deposit 0.1-0.4m thick, appearently covering mound core, mostly composed of irregular boulders of ?local dolerite between about 0.15-0.5m across. Though appearing fairly random in the recorded section the stones gave the impression that they were a deliberate deposit or capping rather than simply representing later, casual field clearance.
4. **?Fossil turf layer**. Bands of gleyed soil, 0.05-0.2m thick, yellowish brown in colour (10 YR 5/4) with iron-panned bands, identified below stone context 3 and around the margins of the barrow, having the appearance of redeposited turves. Possibly representing a heightening and broadening of the original barrow core, though this appeared to represent a stage in construction rather than a different period of construction. The layer may originally covered the barrow mound but lost in clarity due to animal and root disturbance in the upper barrow profile.
5. **Mound core**. Loamy soil with only occasional stones, generally < 0.15m across, yellowish brown to dark yellowish brown (10 YR 4.5/4) in colour, and up to 1.25m thick in the excavated section. The layer became more homogenous towards the upper profile of the barrow, possibly due to animal and root disturbance, becoming banded towards the base of the mound, with browner, more loamy bands alternating with distinct bands of yellower, redeposited topsoil. The bands were between 0.05-0.1m thick and suggested the build up of turf, topsoil and subsoil from adjacent area. The material included scattered fragments and chunks of charcoal throughout, some (exceptionally) up to 40mm across, together with scattered lithic and ceramic fragments.
6. **Stone deposit**. Deposit of irregular stones between 0.05-0.5m across largely composed of ?local dolerite, lying on the eastern side of the barrow mound and probably representing the same context as 7. The stones lay directly on the surface of the buried soil (9) and were in a deposit up to 0.25m thick composed of several layers of stone which butted the core mound material (5) and was directly overlain by the ?fossil turf layer (4). Together with context 7 the stones were roughly concentric with the edge of the barrow and appear to represent a temporary stage in construction rather than representing an earlier phase of construction.
7. **Stone deposit**. Single line of stones in an identical stratigraphic position to context 6 and probably part of the same deposit.
8. **Buried soil**. Thin layer of gleyed soil, 50-80mm thick, with a reasonably distinct upper surface, strong brown (7.5 YR 5/6) to yellowish brown (10YR 5/4) in colour. Charcoal fragments and occasional lithics scattered throughout the soil profile, with one slightly more concentrated area of charcoal towards the surface of the buried soil, towards the eastern side of the excavated area.
9. **Subsoil**. Stony and in places gravelly subsoil in a silty clay matrix varying in colour from a light olive brown (2.5 YR 5/4) to yellowish brown (10 YR 5/6).

Appendix 2: Catalogue of Site Archive

Finds

2 flint fragments from mound core (8)
18 flint fragments from mound core (5), including possible arrowhead fragment
2 prehistric pottery sherds from mound core (5)

Palaeoenvironmental samples

0.3m pollen tin from base of mound core (5), buried soil (8), and subsoil (9)
Charcoal sample from buried soil (8)
Charcoal sample from slight concentration on surface of buried soil (8)
Bulk soil sample from buried soil (8)
Charcoal sample from mound core (5)
Bulk soil sample from loamy layer in lower mound core (5)

Written Records

Correspondence
Miscellaneous notes
Context Record sheets

Drawn Records

A1 plan and section

Survey Archive

PenMap data files and printouts

Photographic Records

Digital photos 2100-01 to 20, 2100-24 to 42, 2100-49 to 111
Photographic catalogue

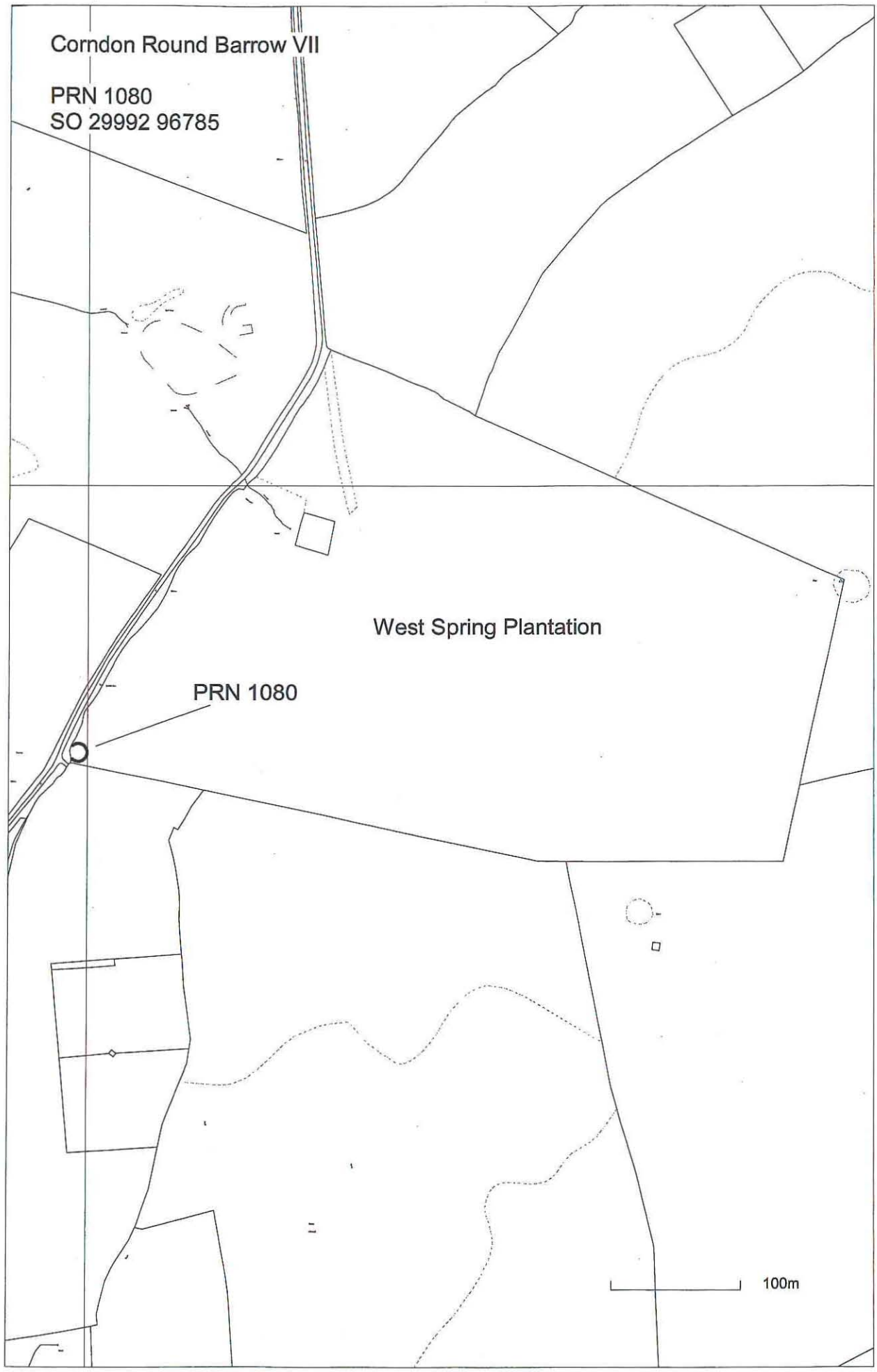

Fig. 1. Location of barrow on modern map base.

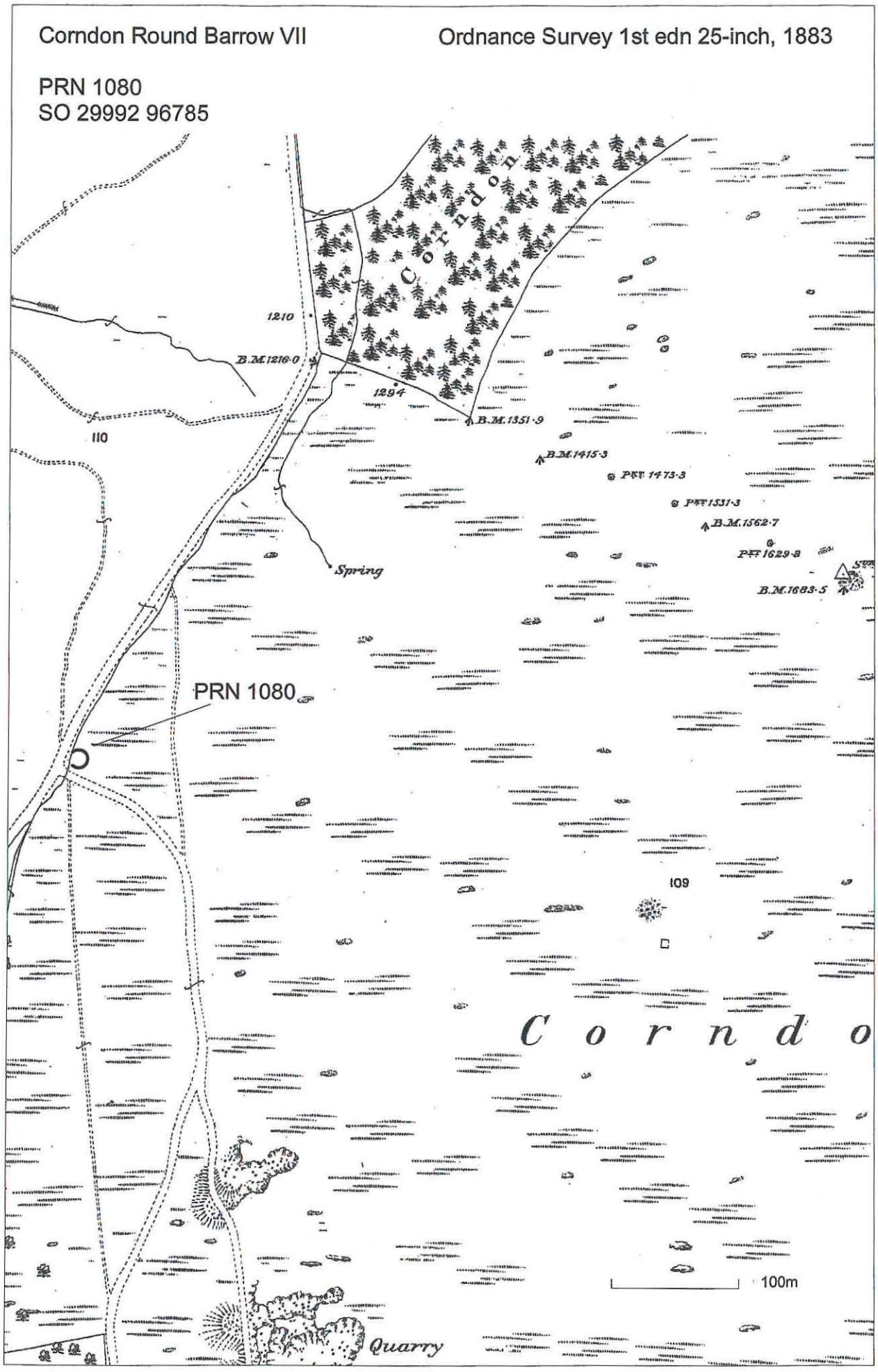

Fig. 2. Location of barrow on 1883 map base.

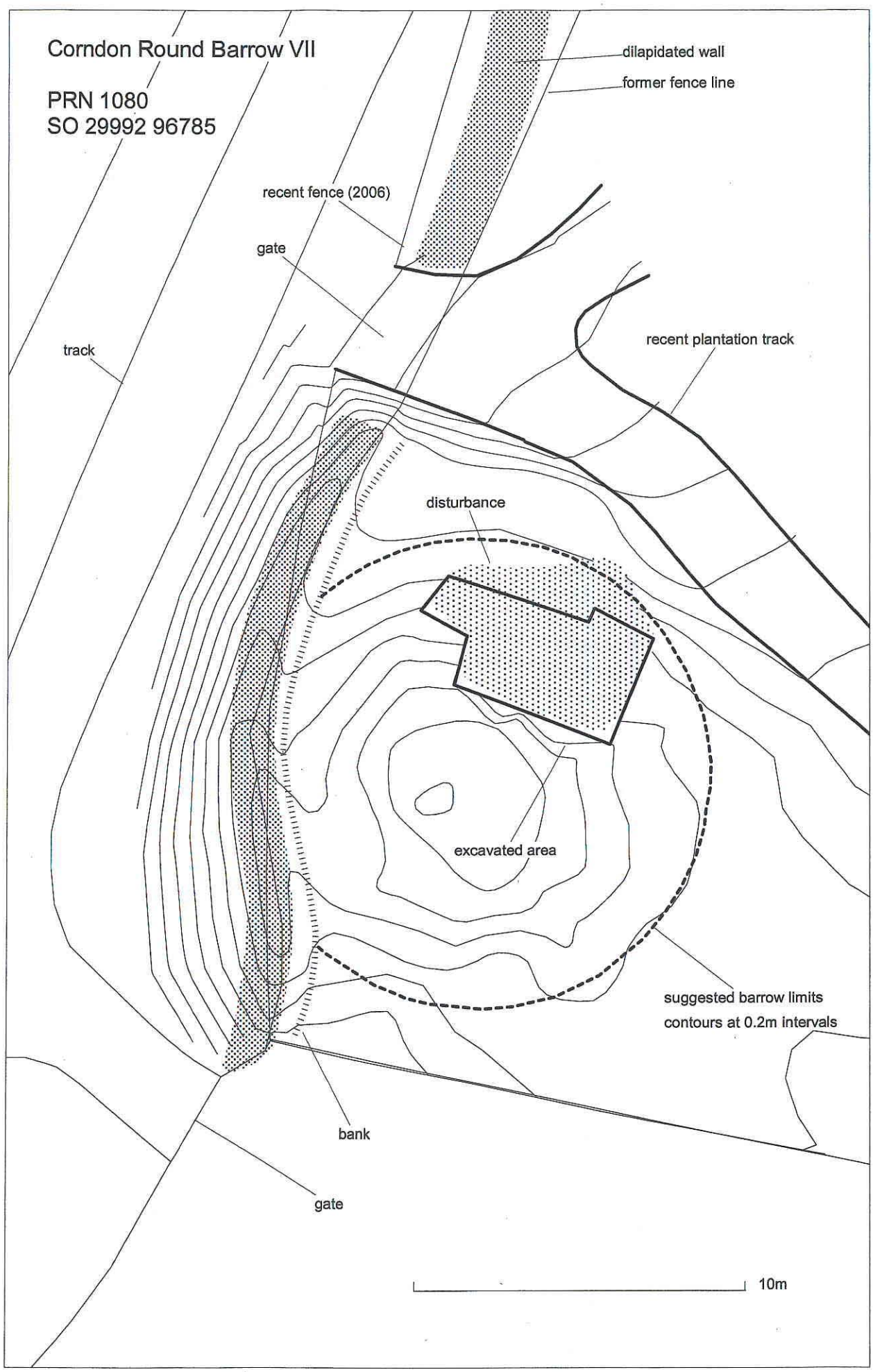

Fig. 3. Plan showing extent of disturbance and excavated area on north side of mound.

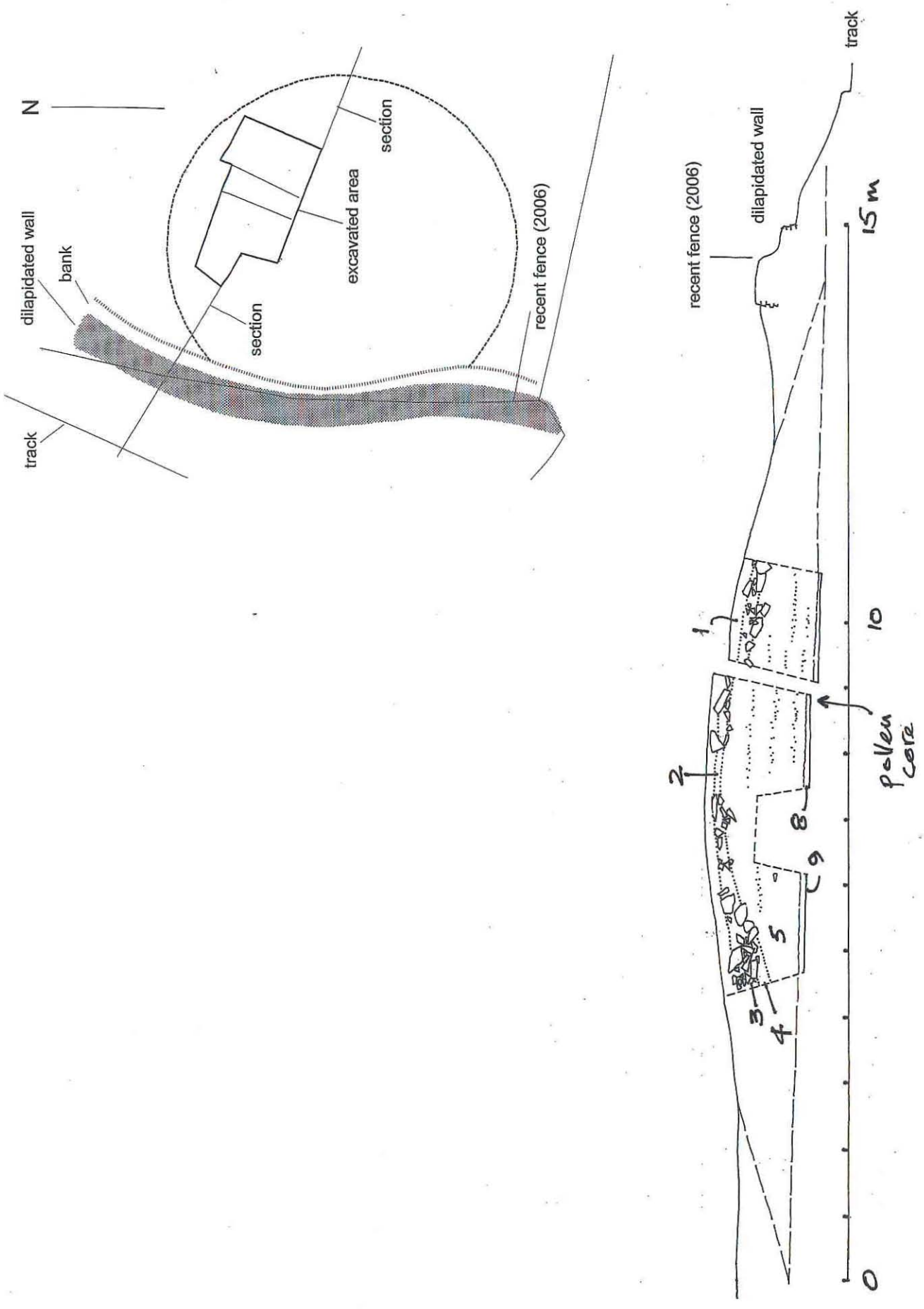

Fig. 4. Sketch section through the barrow mound.

Fig. 5. Disturbance to the northern side of the barrow, before clearance.

Fig. 6. Disturbance to the northern side of the barrow, after clearance.

Fig. 7. Survey work in progress in March 2006.

Fig. 8. Stone deposits lying on the buried soil and roughly concentric with the base of the barrow mound (context 6 on near side of baulk and context 7 on far side of baulk).

Fig. 9. Section though the barrow mound. The peak of Roundton Hill is just visible in the background. The pollen core shown in Fig. 10 lies near the foot of the ranging rod.

Fig. 10. Location of pollen core from the lower mound, buried soil and subsoil.