

ULSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Survey Report: No. 36

**Survey of Divis Cashel,
County Antrim
UAS/11/05**



In association with



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Cover Illustration: Aerial Photograph of the Divis Cashel

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1. Summary

1.1 Location

A site survey was undertaken at a stone enclosure known as the Divis Cashel (NISMR ANT 060:082), in the townland of Divis, County Antrim, Irish Grid Reference J 270 105, situated at an altitude of 325m above sea level.

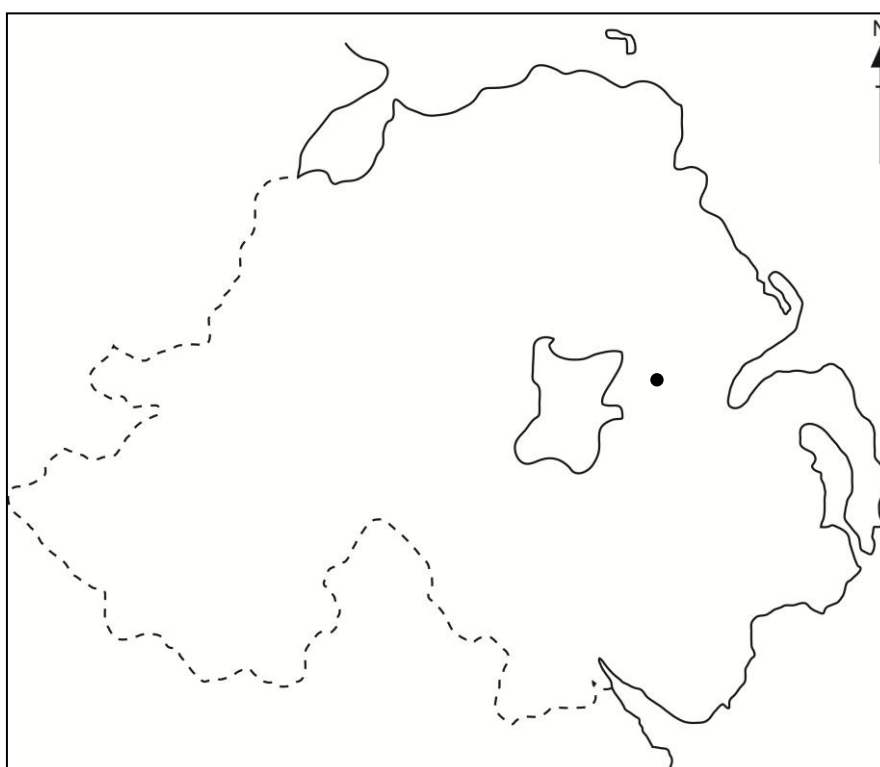


Figure 1: Location map- Divis Mountain, County Antrim

The enclosure is located within the grounds of the National Trust's Divis and Black Mountain property and the land on which it is situated is currently used for recreational purposes and access to radio and television transmitters.

The National Trust property of Divis and the Black Mountain comprises a landholding of some 599 hectares (1,480 acres) of upland grassland and heath, rich in biodiversity and archaeological interest. Divis and Black Mountain are located towards the southern end of a north-south aligned range of upland commonly referred to as the Belfast Hills. At its most northerly end this upland range begins with Carnmoney Hill and travelling southwards includes Cave Hill, Squires Hill, Divis Mountain, Black Mountain, Collin Mountain and finally Slievenacloy (Conway 2005a, 1).

The survey was the 36th in a series of planned surveys undertaken by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society during 2011.



Figure 2: View of the monument looking south-west

1.2 Aims

In order to enhance the archaeological record of this site, the aims of this survey were to produce accurate plan drawings of the monument and carry out a photographic survey. This information was compiled into a report and copies submitted to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, to the National Trust and to the archives of the Ulster Archaeological Society.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

The survey of the cashel was initially attempted on 21st May 2011 but due to adverse weather conditions, it was rescheduled and completed on 24th September 2011. It was carried out by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society, in response to a decision taken by the committee of the society to extend an opportunity to members to participate in practical surveys of archaeological monuments that had not previously been recorded. This followed a bequest to the society from the late Dr Ann Hamlin, from which the items of survey equipment were purchased. During discussions with Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist

of the National Trust in Northern Ireland, it was noted that many archaeological sites on National Trust property had not been subject to a detailed archaeological survey. It was therefore agreed that members of the society would commence a programme to survey these sites and the Divis Cashel was subsequently chosen to be the 36th of these.

2.2 Previous archaeological surveys

After the National Trust purchased the land in November 2004, Malachy Conway carried out a preliminary survey in order to identify any archaeological sites and record their position in the landscape accurately.

By far the most prominent early settlement sites in this landscape are remains of two stone walled enclosures. One, visible from the road contains the footings of a rectangular building, which probably dates to the later first millennium AD and is an upland version of the familiar lowland ringfort of the Early Christian period. The mountains would have been used seasonally for cattle grazing particularly during the Medieval and Post-medieval periods, though the occasional patch of ground cultivated with ridge and furrow or lazybeds, visible to the south of the road, probably date from the time of the great famine. During the 18th and 19th century the growing demand for water power to run Belfast's mills led to the construction of a mill dam to the south of Divis Lodge (Conway 2005b)

This initial survey was then updated and more information on the walled enclosures noted.

The results of this initial survey has already revealed some very interesting new discoveries, prompting a re-evaluation of the nature and significance of several sites within the property, not previously categorised in archaeological terms. Firstly there is what we knew or thought we knew through two stone walled enclosure sites, which have been marked as 'sheepfolds' on all editions of the Ordnance Survey maps from 1833. Close inspection of both sites revealed two separate and quite different circular enclosures. The first enclosure displayed opposing entranceways, was surrounded by a double stone wall and contained the foundation remains of a rectangular house, which typologically suggested that the site could date from between the later Early Christian period (700 AD – 1100AD) to the end of later medieval period (c.1550 AD) (Conway 2005a).

A 3D High Definition Laser Scanning Survey of the cellular enclosure was carried out by Gridpoint Solutions Ltd. on behalf of the National Trust in March 2006.

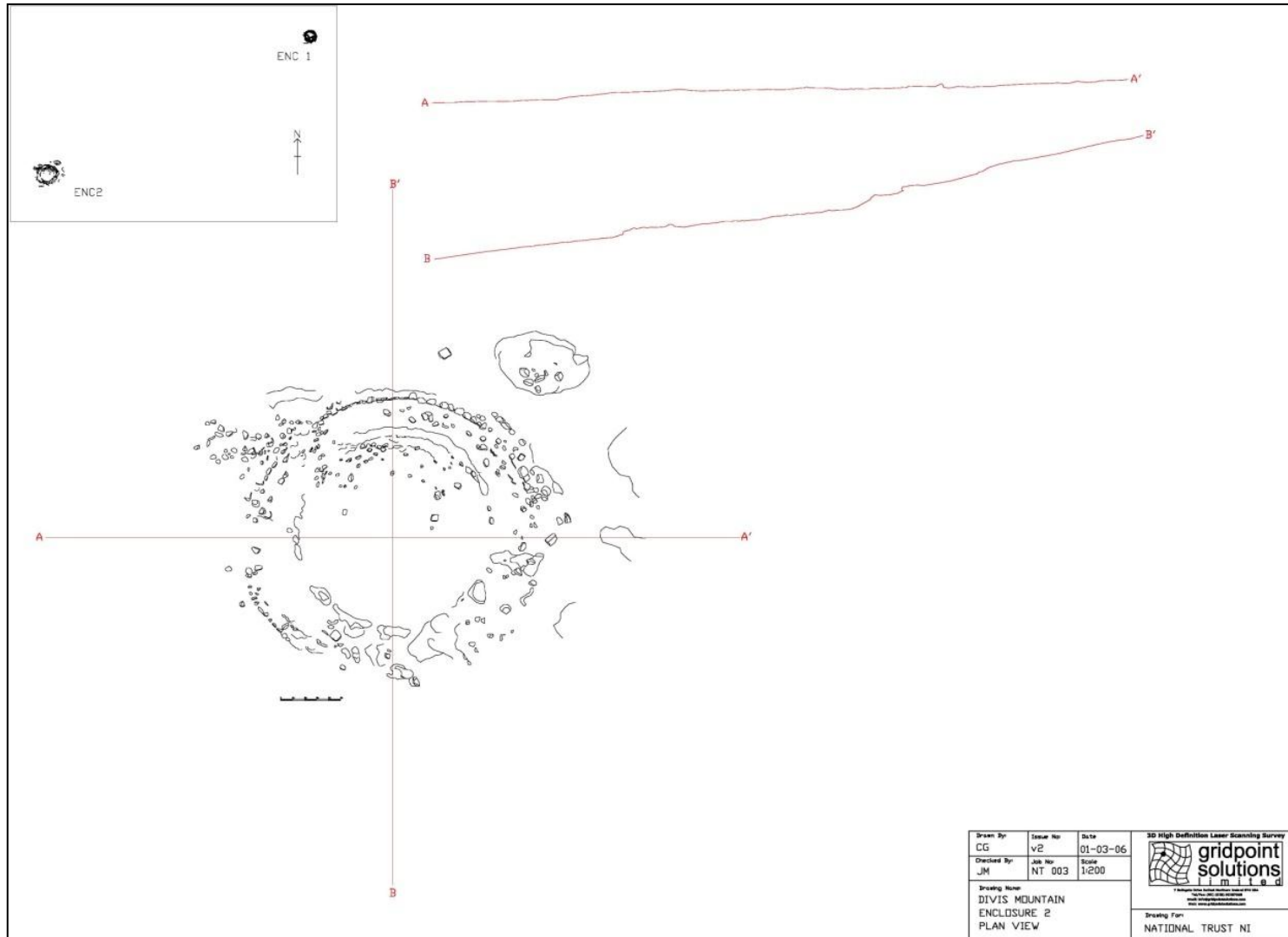


Fig 3: Laser scan and profile of Divis Cashel (Gridpoint solutions Ltd.)

2.3 Cartographic Evidence

The cashel does not appear on the 1832 1st Edition 6 inch County Ordnance Survey map; however it does appear on subsequent editions, where it is referred to as a “Sheepfold”. The associated linear walls which radiate from the structure to the west-north-west and south-east are also recorded in the 2nd Edition 6 inch County Ordnance Survey map and subsequent editions.



Figure 4: OS County Series Antrim Sheet 5 (part of) 1st edition 1832

In the 2nd edition map the opening to the south-east of the structure is shown, however the other editions appear to show no opening or gap in the cashel wall.

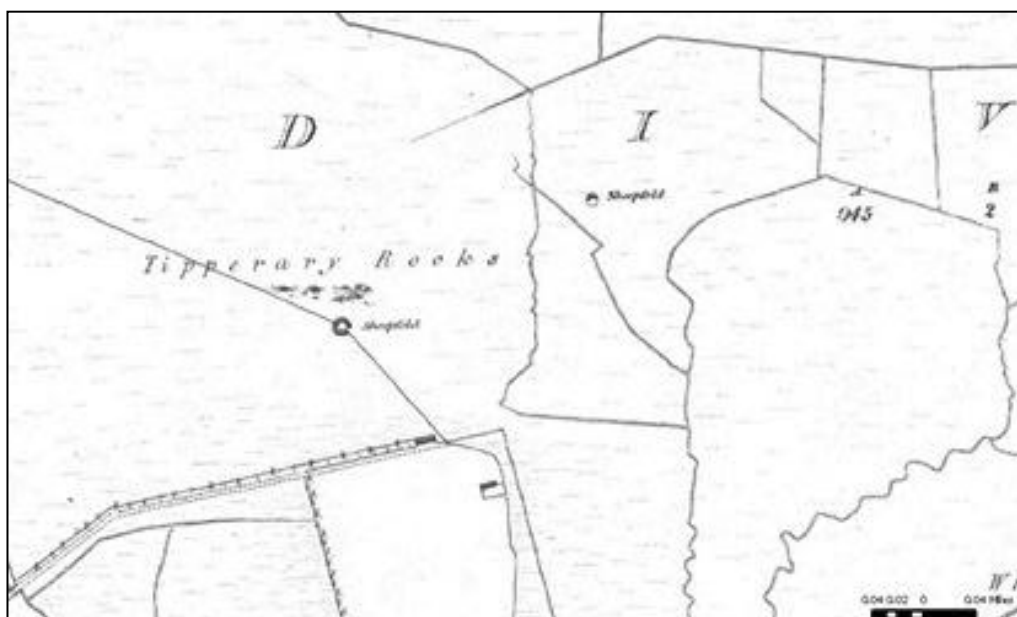


Figure 5: OS County Series Antrim Sheet 5 (part of) 2nd edition 1857

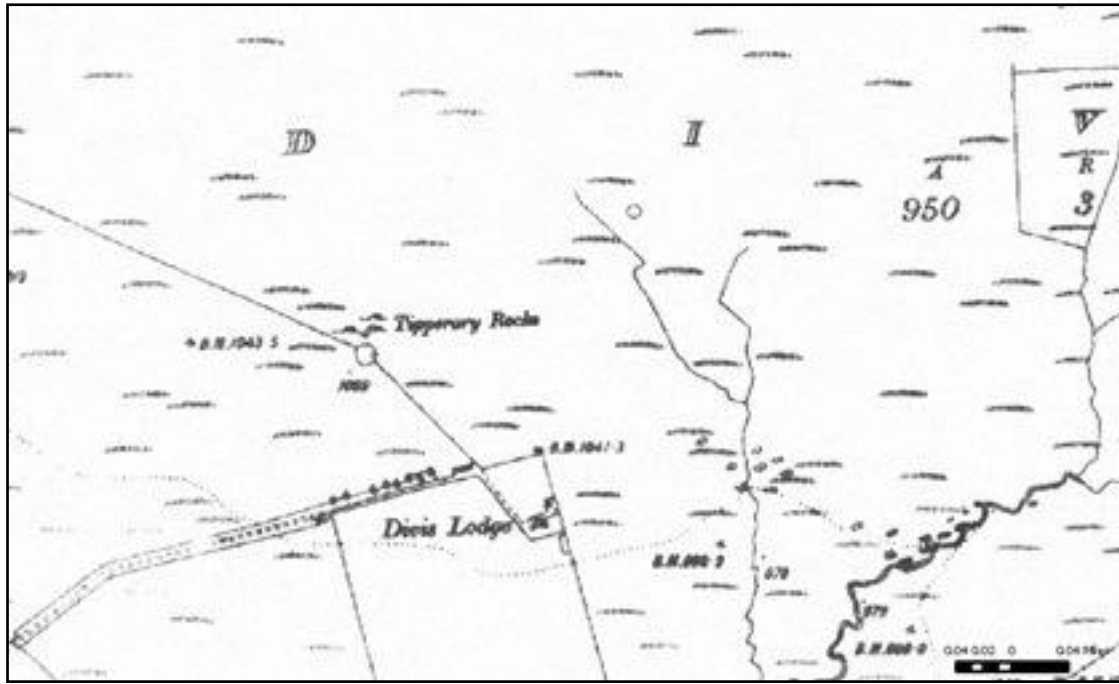


Figure 6: OS County Series Antrim Sheet 5 (part of) 3rd edition 1901

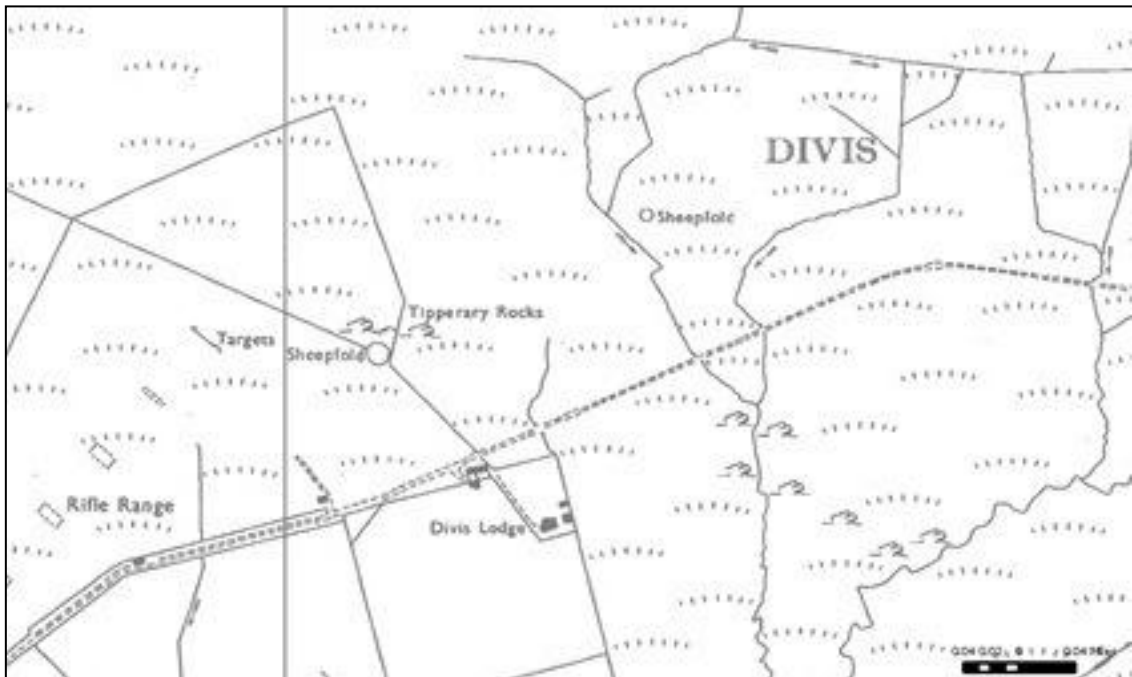


Figure 7: OS County Series Antrim Sheet 5 (part of) 6th edition 1938

2.4 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the National Trust and the Ulster Archaeological Society. All site records have been archived by the National Trust at Rowallane, Saintfield, County Down. A copy is also available on the UAS website.

2.5 Credits and Acknowledgements

The survey was led by Grace McAlister, Chris Ayers, Colin Boyd, Hilary Boyd, Duncan Berryman, Michael Catney, Malachy Conway, Anne McDermott, Janna McDonald, SapphireMussen, Pat O'Neill, Ken Pullin, Randal Scott, Gary Reid, George Rutherford, Harry Welsh and June Welsh. The Ulster Archaeological Society is particularly grateful to Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist of the National Trust, who worked closely with the survey team in choosing the site and facilitating access.

3. UAS Survey 24th September 2011

3.1 Methodology

It was decided that the survey would take the form of the production of plan drawings, accompanied by a photographic survey. This report was compiled using the information obtained from these sources, in addition to background documentary material.

3.2 Production of plan drawings

Plan drawings were completed using data obtained from the field survey. Measurements were obtained by using the society's *Leica Sprinter 100* electronic measuring device. Sketch plans at 1:100 scale were completed on site by recording these measurements on drafting film secured to a plane table and backing up the data on a field notebook for subsequent reference. It was decided to include the 2006 high definition laser scan for the current report as this shows the detail of the stonework on site.

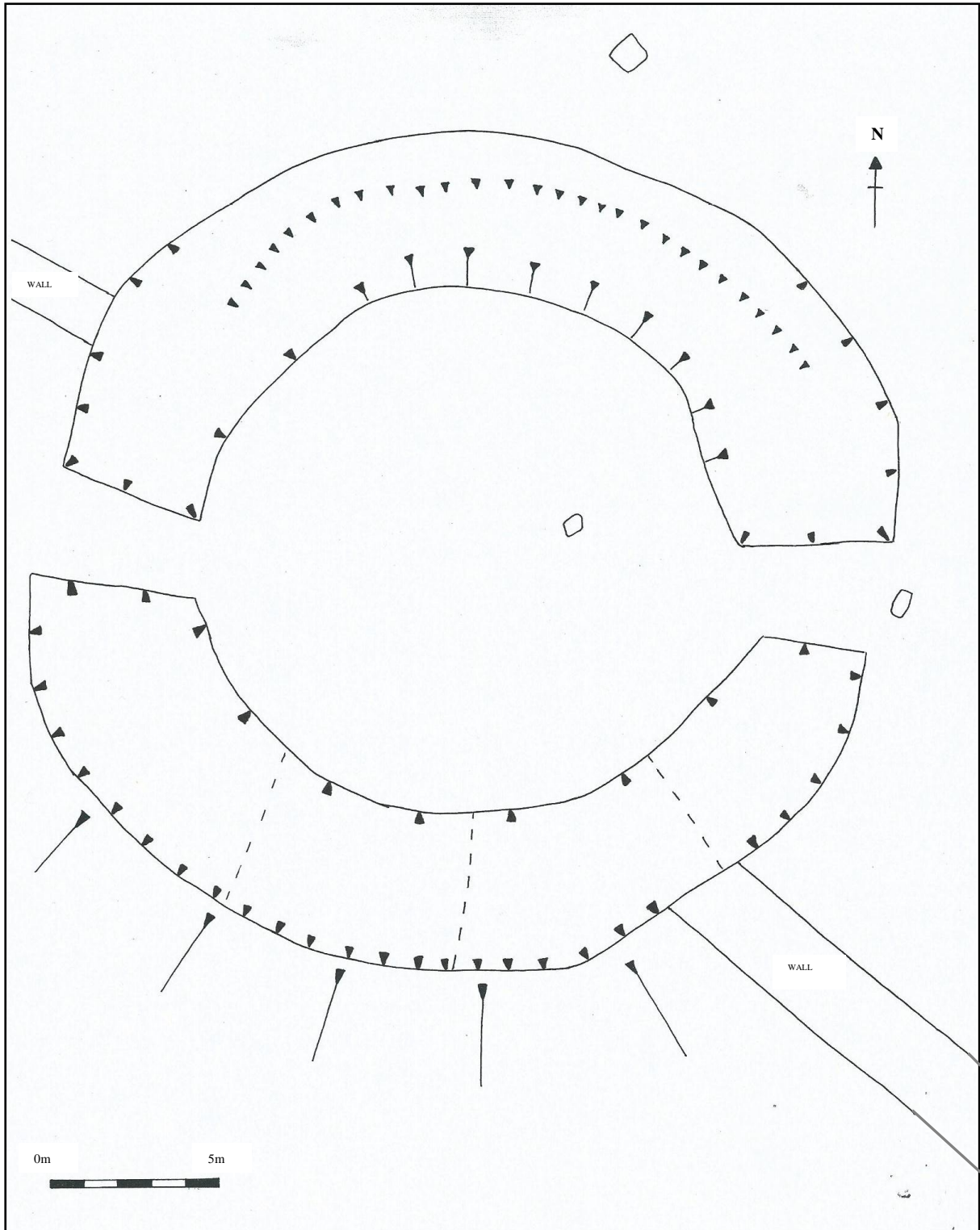


Figure 8: Plan of Divis Cashel

3.3 Photographic archive

A photographic record of the site was taken by using a *Nikon D700* 12 megapixel digital camera and a photographic record sheet was employed, corresponding to photographs taken during the site survey on 21st May and 24th September 2011. The archive has been compiled in jpeg format and saved to compact disc.



Figure 9: West-north-west entrance of the cashel looking SSE



Figure 10: UAS survey team members at work

4. Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The cashel is situated in an archaeologically rich landscape. To the north and uphill is Yellow Jacks Cairn – SMR ANT 060:015 (UAS Survey Report No. 9). Located 350m NE of the cashel is a Cell-bay structure (UAS Survey Report No. 12) and a settlement site with possible hut circles is located 300m to the west (UAS Survey Report No. 16). Across the hillside the remnants of lazy beds can be seen on the ground surface. This shows intensive agriculture in the area, most likely during the 18th and 19th centuries prior to the acquisition of the land by the Ministry of Defence.

4.2 Site Description

The site is comprised of a circular stone structure approximately 25m in diameter with an internal diameter of approximately 15.5m. It is difficult to ascertain the original thickness of the enclosure walls due to damage and fallen stonework, but in places the stone remains are up to 4.6m thick. Similarly it is not clear whether the stone tumble on the site is the remains of one thick wall or two thinner concentric walls. Within the southern side of the cashel wall there appears to be four possible compartments or cells, these have only been identified as a few overgrown stones on the ground surface.

The structure is positioned on a slope and appears to be built into the south side of the small hill known as Tipperary Rocks. The stones that comprise the wall are roughly square cut and

large in size. It is likely that they have been quarried close to the site. This is noted by the stronger more intact nature of the wall to the northern side. Two boundary walls radiate from the cashel wall. One runs in a south-easterly direction and the second in a west-north-westerly direction. The south-easterly running wall appears to have been constructed using smaller, rounded stones. Both walls are drystone constructed and are largely overgrown.

The enclosure has two possible entrances. The first is to the east side of the wall and has an internal width of 2m. The second is in the west/north-west section of the structure and is also approximately 2m internally; however it is not as well defined as the other entrance and is comprised of smaller set stones.

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 Introduction

Although this enclosure is referred to as a cashel, this survey has raised some questions as to the suitability of this description.

4.3.2 Comparison to Cashels

Cashels fall into the broader category of ringforts, an Early Christian homestead with the majority dating from AD 650-900. Ringforts are the most common field monument in Ireland, with numbers estimated around 40,000. They can exist in a variety of forms but the most common are a circular plan earthwork or a drystone enclosure (Lynn 2005). Specifically, cashels are of drystone construction and in general range from 15-35m in diameter. The construction technique is a due to the altitude at which they occur – usually between 150-300m. At this altitude the ground is usually rocky and therefore facilitates wall construction rather than ditch digging. In the area of the Belfast Hills, raths are a frequent presence in the archaeological landscape up to an altitude of 180m above sea level. Above this altitude cashels become more prevalent (Ó'Baoill, 2011). There is usually only one entrance which lies between the North-east and south-east of the enclosure.

In regards to shape and construction materials the term “cashel” seems an accurate description for this monument. Likewise the diameter of the structure, although within the lower range, fits into the assumed definition of a ringfort structure. However, if the structure is indeed double walled this is largely unheard of in cashels, also, the thickness of the enclosing wall/walls greatly reduce the inner diameter to 15.5m. This is perhaps quite small for habitation or domestic use. The enclosing walls of cashels were designed to limit access and the presence of two opposing entrances may have compromised this function.

4.3.3 Comparison to Atlantic Roundhouses

Compared to the Cell-bay enclosure (UAS Survey Report No.12) close by, the Divis Cashel is slightly larger. However the compartments within the double walled structure of the Cell-bay enclosure may be present in the Divis Cashel, in particular within the southern wall (Figure 8) The presence of these compartments have been compared to the architecture of Atlantic roundhouses by both Gillespie and Conway (Gillespie, 2011). A defining feature of Atlantic roundhouses found on the Atlantic coast of Scotland is their hollow walls. Two concentric walls were built which were then subdivided with intra-mural cells. This made for

a sturdy upstanding dry-stone structure designed to withstand the high winds of the area (Armit 1990).

The close proximity of the cashel to the cell-bay enclosure combined with the definite similarities between the two enclosures perhaps indicates that these structures are contemporary.

4.3.4 Recent reuse

Although many ringforts have been destroyed, they still survive in large numbers. This suggests that despite the intensification of agriculture over the past 1400 years, farmers accommodated these changes and made the ringforts functional for their needs. The survival of ringforts has probably been helped considerably by superstitions associated with the structures, (NíCheallaigh, 2006, 112). This could explain that although the enclosure is not completely intact, it is not entirely destroyed either. The associated field boundary walls to the South-east and West-north-west do not continue through the enclosure but radiate from the sides, allowing the enclosure to remain functional. It has also been noted that stone enclosures, similar to cashels were being built up until the 20th century as a method of keeping livestock secure in upland stony areas (Donnelly 1997, 70), highlighting that they were considered functional structures until relatively recent times.

More recent use may explain the presence of two entrances with one having been knocked through at a later date to provide access to both fields and machinery. This may explain the reference to the enclosure as a “Sheepfold” in the 2nd and 4th edition of the six inch County Ordnance Survey maps (Figures 5 and 7)

4.4 Conclusion

The Divis Cashel appears to be a cashel in the most general sense of the term, but some of the architectural features mean we need to consider other interpretations. The small size of the structure and additional structural evidence such as the possible cellular walls and the double entrance challenge the cashel interpretation. Without the material culture we have to use the building style to form a date and function for the site. It is likely that the site began as a habitation structure but over time has been utilised for other functions, such as farming with the second entrance perhaps added at a later date to allow access by machinery.

5. Recommendations for further work

The site has thrown up a number of peculiarities that would make further investigation worthwhile. Geophysical survey would be an appropriate way to investigate the site non-intrusively. More could be determined about the internal structure of the cashel through a resistivity survey but the presence of a large amount of stone on site could potentially mask some of features.

Excavation could be carried out on various areas of the site. For example to confirm the relationship between the boundary walls and the cashel wall and the construction of the cashel wall itself and the legitimacy of the “cells/compartments”. No finds have been found

in association with this site which makes working out the chronology of the site difficult. Excavation which yielded material culture would be invaluable in helping to date the site.

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