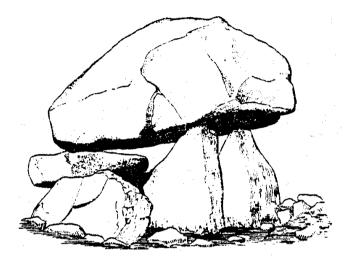
# **ULSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**



Survey Report: No. 10

Survey of Davagh Lower, Stone Circles and Alignments, County Tyrone UAS/07/04

# IAN GILLESPIE

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# 1. Summary

## 1.1 Location

A site survey was undertaken at Davagh Forest (NISMR-TYR 020:009), in the townland of Davagh Lower, Lissan Parish, Cookstown, County Tyrone, Irish Grid reference H7047 8674.

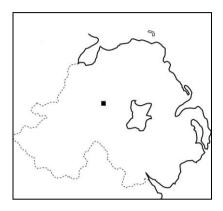


Figure 1: Location map for Davagh Lower, County Tyrone

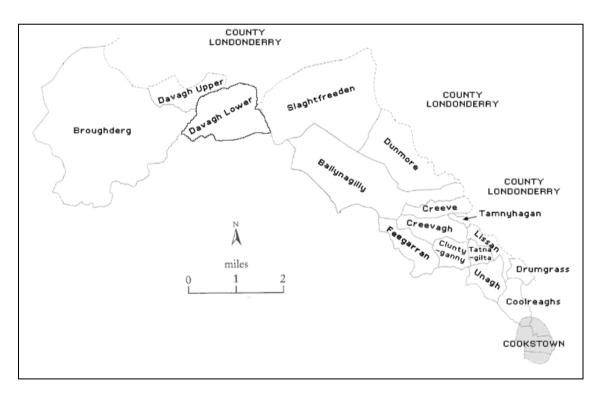


Figure 2: Townlands of Lissan Parish

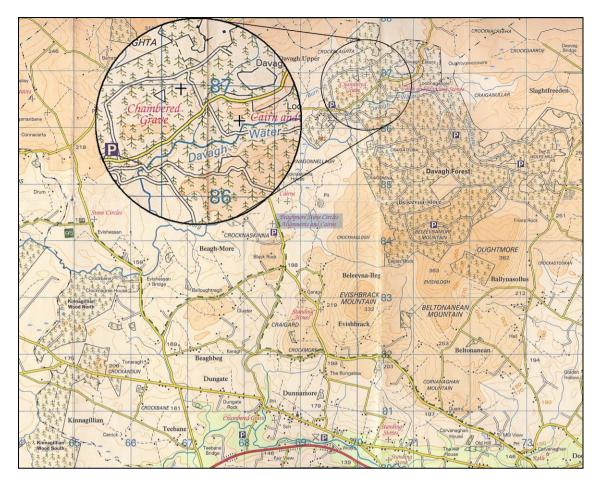


Figure 3: Ordnance Survey 1:50 000 Sheet 13 C edition. *Crown Copyright 2002* Site annotated as "Cairn and Standing Stones"

The site comprises a complex of standing stones, stone circles and other enigmatic structures which appear to have been first recorded in the 1930's (Davies 1939)

The site within Davagh Forest lies on gently sloping land at an altitude of about 208m in a small valley formed by Davagh Water, one of the headstreams of the Owenreagh River which flows westwards to the River Foyle.

The name Davagh is derived from the Irish word "Dabhach" meaning a deep vat-like hollow or cauldron. It is also said to mean "the field of the oxen" as it has always been noted as a place where cattle have been raised and fattened (Quinn).

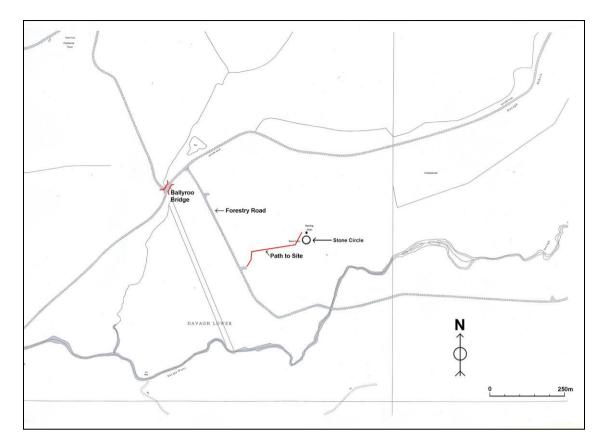


Figure 4: Site access map

# 1.2 Aims

In order to enhance the archaeological record of this site, the aims of this survey were to produce an accurate plan of the monument, carry out a photographic survey and complete a Condition and Management Survey of the Archaeological Resource (CAMSAR) record form. The current survey was organised at the request of Mr Tom Hayes, immediate past president of the Ulster Archaeological Society (UAS). Tom, along with his wife Angela and their daughter Anne, has been carrying out extensive survey work at Davagh Lower over the last twelve years. The scale of the task was such that he requested assistance from the UAS to help complete it.

Having carried out initial and follow-up surveys it was realised that the site was, in fact, much more extensive than previously thought, with much potential archaeology overplanted by forest and therefore inaccessible. Consequently the decision was made to prepare a preliminary report which is to be submitted to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in the anticipation that the site will be rescheduled and a full survey commissioned.

# 2. Introduction

# 2.1 Background

The survey of Davagh Lower was carried out on Saturday 29 September 2007 by members of the UAS. There was a follow up survey carried out on Saturday 25 October 2008.

The decision to instigate a programme of surveys had been taken by the committee of the Society to extend an opportunity to members wishing to participate in practical surveys of archaeological monuments not previously recorded. This was facilitated by a bequest to the society from the late Dr Ann Hamlin, from which the items of survey equipment were purchased.

#### 2.2 Previous archaeological surveys

This site has previously been recorded by Oliver Davies, Claire Foley & Annie Given, Tom Hayes, and Aubrey Burl.

#### 2.2.1 Davies 1939

This complex site of standing stones, stone circles and a built structure appears to have been first recorded by Oliver Davies in the 1930's. His paper entitled "Stone Circles in Northern Ireland" (Davies 1939) was based on a paper by Mr E.E. Evans and Oliver Davies delivered to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1936. (UJA Third Series Vol 2 1939, pp. 8-9, with an amendment in UJA Vol. 4 1941, p 144). The first reference has an accompanying drawing:

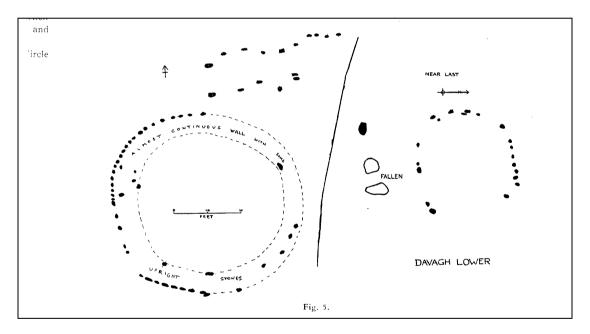


Figure 5: 1939 site map (after Davies 1939, page 9)

Davies writes:

Davagh Lower. Tyrone O.S. 27, 17.5" east, 20.8" south, altitude 600 ft. Double circle 53 ft. across, with double tangential alignment. The stones of the circle are contiguous, and the structure somewhat resembles a cashel. Close by is another circle, with three large slabs adjoining, one upright and two fallen (fig. 5)

It should be noted that Davies' account, written in the late 1930's, preceded planting of the present forest which was begun in the 1940's (Acheson, K. personal communication). There is little remaining evidence of the second circle referred to by

Davies which appears to have been destroyed by the plantation. This circle appears to have been located approximately 30 m north of the double stone circle.

Limited forest clearance was undertaken in the mid 1970s, at the request of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, to re-expose some of the archaeology.

Davies, as a member of the Ancient Monuments Advisory Council for Northern Ireland, also submitted information regarding Davagh Lower to the Preliminary Survey of the Ancient Monuments of Northern Ireland (PSAMNI 1940, page 226):

> Chamber-grave with collapsed uprights and capstone about 5ft square, with traces of a surrounding circular cairn about 20ft across. Close by is a double circle 53ft across, with double tangential alignment; the circle-stones form a continuous wall, so the area resembled rather a cashel than the usual type of circle with spaced stones; between the two rows are many stones lying about. Near by is part of another single circle, whose stones again are hardly spaced; close to it are 3 tall uprights, 2 now fallen.

Davies does not mention this 'chamber-grave' in his 1939 paper, presumably as this was a paper dealing primarily with stone circles.

Interestingly neither Davies' 1939 paper nor Burl's guide first published in 1995 mention the substantial ruins of an oval shaped enclosure or 'hut site' later referred to by Foley and Hayes. Given that this structure represents the most obvious extant remains on the site it could be inferred that neither Davies nor Burl ever visited this site before publication. It would appear that Davies must have subsequently been informed about or visited the site, as he published an amendment in UJA Vol. 4 1941, p 144 in which he records:

Just above the circles are ruins of a hut with parallel sides and apsed ends, measuring internally 23 x 13  $\frac{1}{2}$  ft. The surviving walls are  $\frac{1}{2}$  -2  $\frac{1}{2}$  ft. high and 3 ft. thick, built of loosely piled stones and incorporating some rocks.

2.2.2 Foley & Given 1977. Archaeological Survey of Northern Ireland (unpublished)

Claire Foley and Annie Given, working for the Archaeological Survey of Northern Ireland, produced a sketch map of the site (based on Davies, 1939) in 1977 shortly after limited forest clearance. This is the first comprehensive plan to show features 'missed' by Davies. They annotated each of six features with a roman numeral:

I. Megalith? The 'Chambered Grave' referred to in PSAMNI 1940, page 226.

- II. Double Stone Circle.
- III. Double Tangential Alignment.
- IV. Stone Circle. Now largely destroyed by planting.
- V. Three Stone Row, 1 upright and 2 fallen.
- VI. 'Hut Site'. Not previously described although the most visible feature of the site.

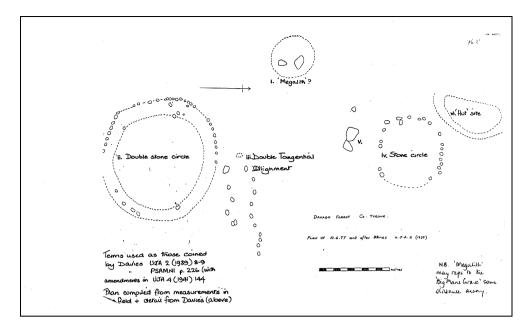


Figure 6: 1977 Plan of Davagh Lower (Foley & Given, after Davies 1939)

## 2.2.3 Hayes 1998 (unpublished)

Tom Hayes, along with his wife Angela and their daughter Anne Hayes, had 'rediscovered' this site some time ago and has carried out extensive survey work over the last twelve years. Their preliminary work remains unpublished (Hayes, A. 1998) although they have given me permission to reproduce their data in this report.

In 1990 Hayes obtained permission from the DOE Archaeologist to clear vegetation from the site and to carry out surveys although, due to various other commitments, this work did not begin until 1997.

Hayes, referring to Foley & Given's diagram (Figure 6), made the following comments with regard to the six main features:

I. Described as 'Megalith?' and shown on the plan as two large stones inside a dotted circle about 6 m in diameter. This feature does not appear in Davies 1939 but is recorded in PSAMNI 1940, page 226.

II. Double Stone Circle. This feature is the largest, though not at present the most prominently visible feature on the site. It was described by Davies in 1939 as: "Double circle 53 ft across, with double tangential alignment. The stones of the circle are contiguous, and the structure somewhat resembles a cashel". The two stone circles are concentric. This feature is at present heavily overgrown with heather and broom.

III. Double tangential alignment (following the designation given by Davies). This includes a prominent standing stone at its W end, the most immediately visible feature on the site, being about 1.83 m high. As may be seen on the plan, the lines of stones are now very sinuous, and it remains to be determined by excavation if they were originally straight. The general direction of the alignments is east-west. This may indicate

an equinoctial sunrise/sunset alignment, but as the horizon in either direction is obscured by trees, this cannot yet be determined accurately.

IV. Stone circle. This is in an area of the site which was not cleared in the 1970's, and it is difficult to see on the ground. The sketch, following Davies 1939, shows an open-ended oval horseshoe shape.

V. "*Three large slabs, one upright and two fallen*" (Davies 1939). These could be part of another east-west alignment, and it is intended to probe the area further to determine if this is so.

VI. "Hut site". This was described by Davies in 1941 as: "Just above the circles are ruins of a hut with parallel sides and apsed ends, measuring internally 23 x  $13\frac{1}{2}$  ft. The surviving walls are  $\frac{1}{2} - 2\frac{1}{2}$  ft high and 3 ft thick, built of loosely piled stones and incorporating some rocks." This is discussed in further detail below.

In 1993 Anne Hayes, using steel dowsing rods, was able to identify a distinct stone circle 5m diameter. This is the feature designated: 'I Megalith?' in Foley & Given's 1977 plan (Figure 6). This circle was adjacent to a tumbled megalith and was thought to be surrounded by cairn material. The megalith, with a smaller partner stone, was thought to represent the capstone of a cist burial in the cairn.

Further examination in 1997 revealed a second circle 7.5m in diameter. A sketch was produced:

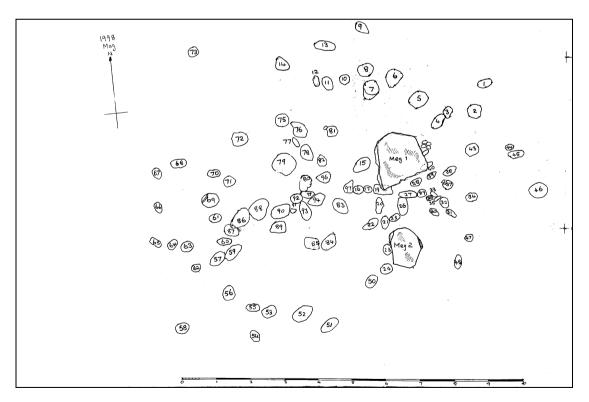


Figure 7: Plan of feature 1 from Figure 6 (Hayes, A.)



Figure 8: Feature 1 viewed from the north

Hayes description of the 'Hut Site', feature VI (Hayes, 1998):

Site VI, the "hut", has been largely cleared of vegetation. Its original purpose remains enigmatic. It consists of a dry stone walled structure built of fairly well rolled boulders from the boulder clay, but incorporating at least one large glacial erratic at the north end which seems to be in its original position embedded in the foot of the esker. The structure measures 8.85 m by an average of 5.10 m internally and 11.60 m by roughly 6.80 m externally. This is slightly longer than Davies' measurements, which reflects the very tumbled nature of the walls. Its shape is as described by Davies, roughly parallel sides and two apsidal ends. However, it should be remembered that the whole construction is far from precise. It appears too wide in its minor dimension to be a hut of the historic period. Internal clearance of the site may reveal internal post holes and possibly a hearth, typical of a Neolithic house, but it could just as easily be an 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> century sheepfold. Whatever it is, there is no apparent entrance opening in the walls, although the tumbling of the stones could be concealing one."



Figure 9: Hut Site viewed from the north

## 2.2.4 Burl 1995

In his "Guide to the Stone Circles of Britain, Ireland and Brittany" (Burl, A. 1995) Aubrey Burl gives the following description of the site:

A. It is an *oval ring* 53 ft (16.2m) across, but with its almost contiguous stones, 1ft 6ins to 2ft 6ins (0.5 - 0.8m) high, encircling what may have been a 6ft (2m) wide bank lined with inner slabs. There are many slabs missing at the north and east.

On its north side is a short tangential avenue, ENE-WSW, the south side of six stones in a 30ft (9m) long line, the west[sic] a meandering 44ft (13.4m) of ten stones.

B. 75ft (23m) to the north is a *ruined oval* about 33ft by 30ft (10 x 9m) which now appears to be a horseshoe open to the east.Alongside it is a collapsed Three-Stone row.

C. 40ft (12m) north-west of the possible ring cairn is a collapsed *chambered tomb* with a 5ft (1.5m) square capstone. It stood in a circular cairn 20ft (6m) across.



Figures 10a & 10b: Tangential alignment viewed from west (April 08 & July 07)



Figure 11: Double stone circle viewed from north

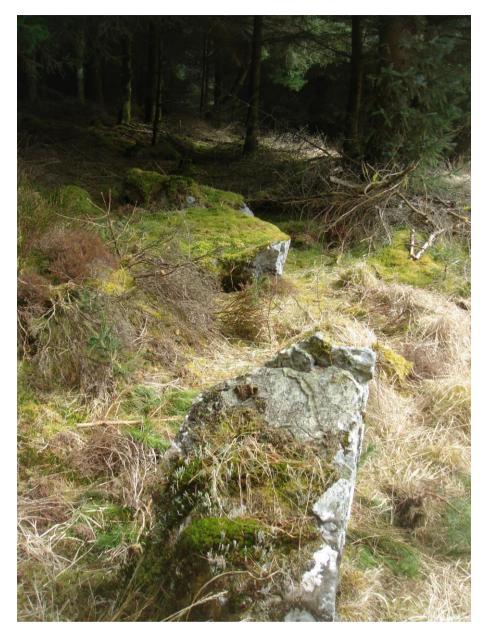
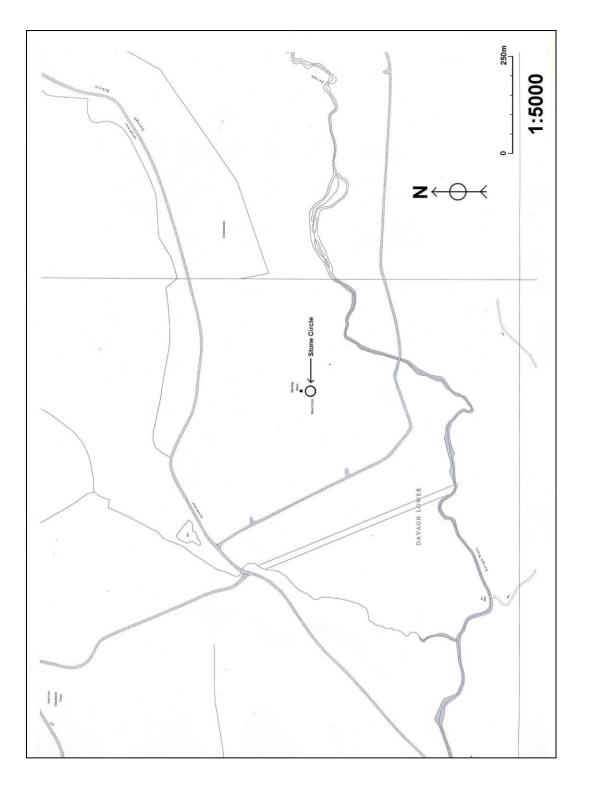


Figure 12: Three stone row - one upright & two fallen - viewed from west

# 2.3 Cartographic evidence

A search of the Ordnance Survey collection failed to show any mention of this site as far back as the first 6 inch series of the 1830's (Hayes, T 1998). The following digital maps record a 'Stone Circle and Standing Stone', as well as the 'Giant's Grave' approximately 500m north west of the site.





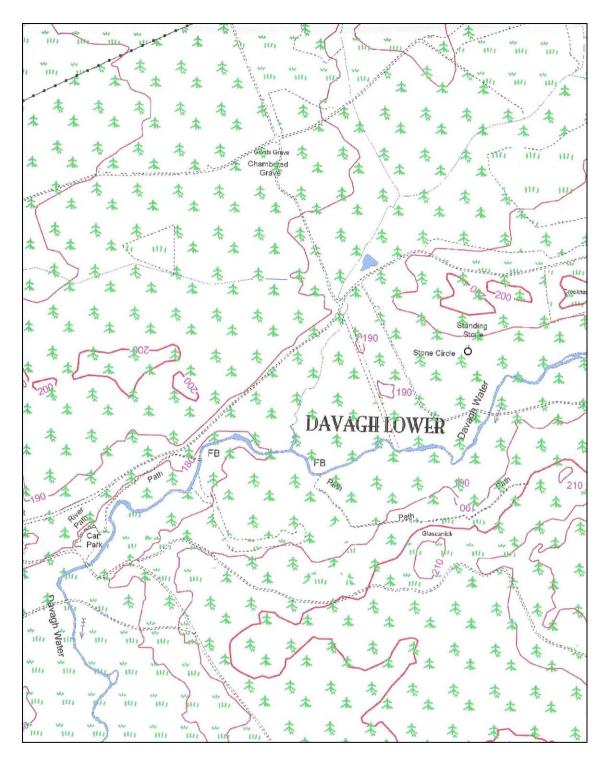


Figure 14: Ordnance Survey Electronic Topographical Map Crown Copyright

## 2.4 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. All site records are temporarily archived with the Honorary Archivist of the Ulster Archaeological Society.

# 2.5 Credits and Acknowledgements

The survey was led by Harry Welsh and other members of the survey team were: Michael Catney, Billy Dunlop, June Welsh, Tom Fairly, Ian Gillespie, Yvonne Griffiths, Ian Macauley, Anne MacDermott, Roisin McCaughan, Peter McCready, Ken Pullin and George Rutherford. Tom, Angela and Anne Hayes kindly facilitated our visit and shared their accumulated data from earlier surveys.

The Ulster Archaeological Society is particularly grateful to Mr Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist of the National Trust, who has worked closely with the survey team and assisted with the production of GPS survey data.

# 3. Survey

## 3.1 Methodology

It was decided that this preliminary survey would take the form of the production of plan drawings, accompanied by a photographic survey and the completion of a Condition and Management Survey of the Archaeological Resource (CAMSAR) form. A 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 a 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. Field plans were later transferred to a computer-based format for printing.

Further data was obtained using a Lecia Geosystems GS20 Professional Data Mapper. The GIS (Geographical Information Systems) output (map overlay onto aerial photo showing points for stone locations) was created by downloading the observation data collected in the field by the GS20 and overlaying this data into GIS software (ArcGIS) with some OSNI ortho imagery as background layers.

GIS Software is used to create, manage, analyze and visualise geographic data, i.e. data with a reference to a place on earth.

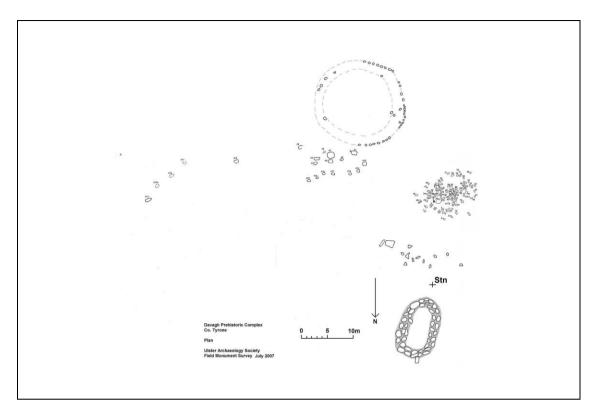


Figure 15: Composite site plan combining UAS survey results with Davies'(1939) & Hayes'(1997) surveys

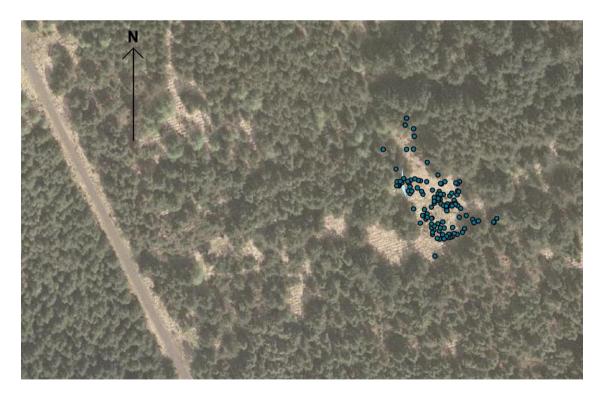


Figure 16: GIS image showing individual stone locations (Conway)

## 3.3 Factors adversely affecting completion of the survey.

There were a number of factors pertinent to this site which made surveying difficult. Firstly, the sheer area of the site, much of it covered with planted forest, made it too big to be accurately surveyed with the equipment available. The site runs steeply down hill from north to south. Secondly, conditions underfoot are treacherous with many small recumbent stones covered with mosses and tussock grass, often hidden from view. This posed significant risk to injury from tripping or slipping. The presence of tree cover made acquisition of GPS data difficult and often impossible.

The survey revealed that there appears to be a significant extension of the tangential stone alignment for up to 30 m in an easterly direction within the forest. The forest clearance of 1977 only served to expose the most obvious archaeology, leaving the smaller stone circle, as described by Davies, and the possible continuation of the stone alignment covered and therefore very difficult to survey (see fig 17 below).

Another feature of potential archaeological significance was uncovered during clearance of surface vegetation approximately 5 m south of the Hut site. This structure is adjacent to Hayes' feature V - "Three large slabs, one upright and two fallen" and consists of a cist-like structure approximately  $3m \log by 2 m$  wide. It was constructed by positioning a number of large flat-faced stones, partially buried, to form a sub-rectangular box or cist. This structure was not formally surveyed.



Figure 17: 'Cist' adjacent to three stone row

At a follow-up survey in October 2008, hampered by storm force winds and rain, further evidence was discovered of a number of large recumbent stones stretching into the forest in a westerly direction from feature VI. It was not possible to determine if these had formed part of a stone alignment or, as seems more likely, if they were in-situ erratics.

Given the limitations outlined above, and the potential importance of this site, a decision was made not to proceed any further with the survey. It was proposed that a preliminary report be prepared and submitted to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in anticipation that the site may be rescheduled and protected from any further damage from forestry activity.

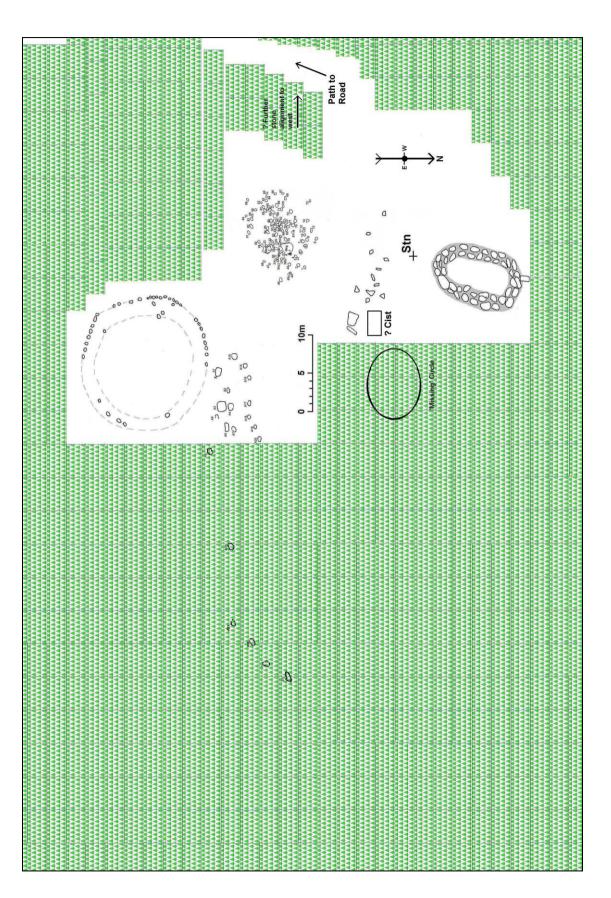


Figure 18: To show the current extent of forest coverage

The double stone circle, arguably the largest and most important feature of this site, is almost impossible to see in its current overgrown state. It was not formally surveyed, however a photograph was obtained with members of the survey team standing on the perimeter of the outer circle to give an idea of its size:



Figure 19: Team members demonstrating the extent of the double circle

## 3.3 Photographic archive

A photographic record of the site was taken by using a *Nikon Coolpix S1* 5.1 megapixel digital camera and a photograph record sheet was employed, corresponding to photographs taken during the site survey on 29 September 2007.

The archive has been compiled in jpeg format and saved to compact disc.

3.4 Completion of CAMSAR form

A Condition and Management Survey of the Archaeological Resource (CAMSAR) form was completed by the survey team on 29 September 2007 and is given in appendix 1 below. As far as is known, this is the first occasion on which this type of record form has been completed for the monument.

## 4. Discussion

4.1 Geography and Geology (Hayes, A. 1998)

Davagh Lower lies on gently sloping land at an altitude of about 208 m in a small valley formed by the Davagh Water, one of the headstreams of the Owenreagh River which flows westwards to the Foyle. It is sited at the southern foot of the Davagh Esker near the western end of this feature, and it is about 50m NNE of the Davagh Water. It is in an area of hard volcanic, plutonic and metamorphic rocks, the North Tyrone Volcanic Process, the lower levels of which are thickly overlaid by glacial deposits of boulder clays, sands and gravels, with varying depths of more recent peat. Drumlins and eskers are a common feature of the immediate district, with the igneous rock appearing at the upper levels of Beleevnamore Mountain to the south of the site. Soils are predominantly moorland peat or podzolic in nature, with a typical pH of 6.3. Peat has been hand-cut in the area for centuries. The impermeable nature of the ground has minimised drainage capability, resulting in a fairly waterlogged environment with numerous lichens and mosses, principally *Sphagnum* spp. and tussock forming grasses.

The surrounding region is rich in Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments, comprising chambered tombs and court cairns, standing stones, cairns, alignments, cist graves and stone circles, of which the best known are the Beaghmore and Copney stone circle complexes. Beaghmore is about 3.25 km SW of the present site, the Ballynagilly Neolithic habitation site is about 4.25 km to the SE, and there is a chambered grave, known locally as Big Man's Grave, lying 500m NW at H 7013 8708 (NISMR-TYR 020:001).

The area of the site has been moorland since the growth of peat in the Late Bronze Age, the only probable economic activity being sheep grazing. It has remained undisturbed by agriculture, as far as can be determined. At some time shortly after 1952 the site was overplanted by the Forestry department with coniferous trees. At the request of the DOENI in the mid-1970s, the trees were cleared from most of the site and a winding footpath some 200 m long was constructed from the adjacent forestry road, which debouches on to the Davagh Road just east of the bridge known locally as Ballyroo Bridge.

#### 4.2 Stone Circles in Ireland

Stone circles in Ireland are found in two main clusters, south west Munster and Tyrone, as can be seen from Burl's diagram:

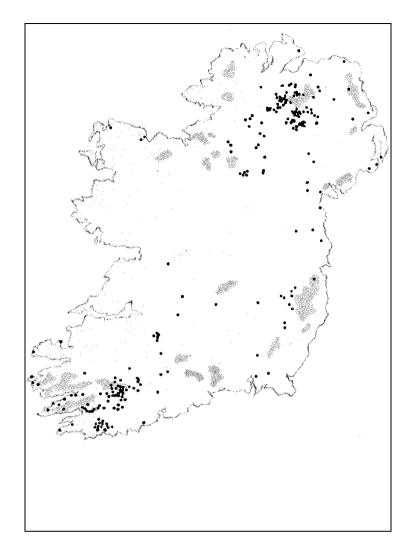


Figure 20: Distribution of stone circles in Ireland (Burl 1979)

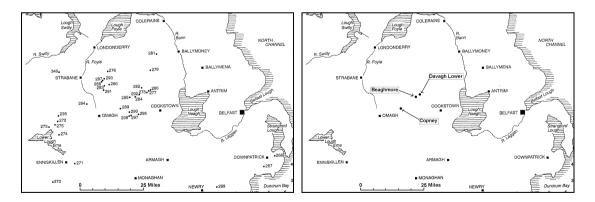


Figure 21: Ulster stone circle distribution (Burl 1995)

Figure 22: Location of Davagh, Beaghmore & Copney (Burl 1995)

As has been previously noted, Davagh Lower is in close proximity to two other complex sites which share similar features. Beaghmore and Copney complexes both have multiple stone circles with associated stone alignments. Beaghmore has seven rings of which six are paired, Copney has nine of which only two have been uncovered. All are associated with cairns or cists. It may be that the double circle identified by Hayes at Davagh morphologically resembles Beaghmore circles A & B or C & D as shown in the following diagram:

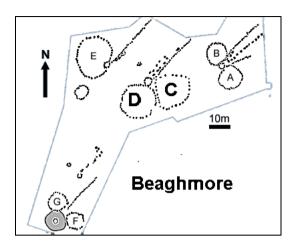


Figure 23: Beaghmore stone circles (www.megalithics.com after Burl 1979)

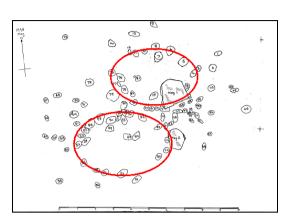


Figure 24: Hayes' double circle for comparison

The stone circles of Tyrone are characteristically composed of small, low rings of many stones. They were sometimes laid out next to older chambered tombs suggesting continuity of use by families or clans (Burl 1979).

Opinion is divided regarding the function of stone circles. Theories include that they were burial places, temples for ritual activities, places of assembly, or even astronomical instruments. A further theory is that these small circles were built in an attempt to preserve the fertility of the land which was being lost to the encroaching bogs

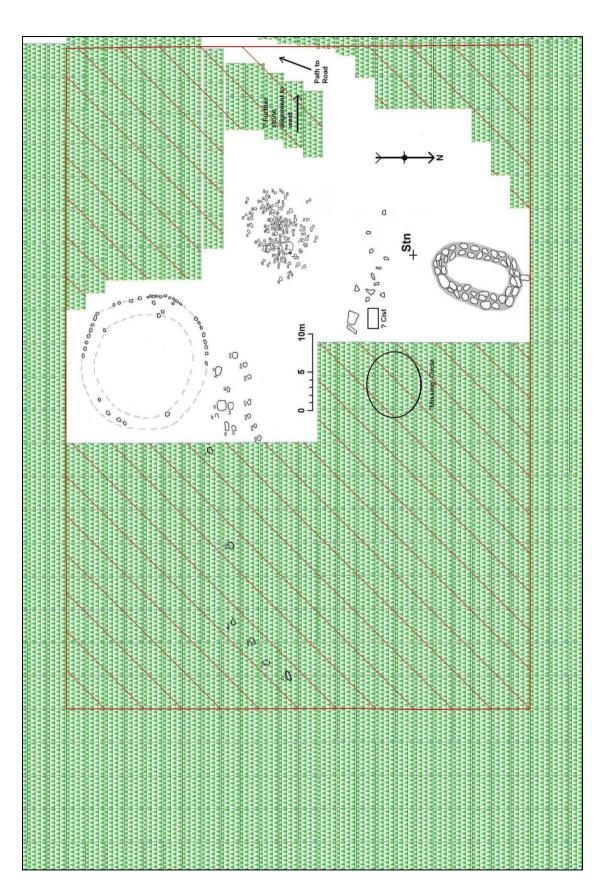
With regard to dating, radiocarbon dates from Beaghmore's F/G row and cairn average 1930 BC, suggesting that they were constructed at a time when peat was already inexorably beginning to reclaim the land which had been cleared by the circle builders (Burl 1979). It seems likely that Davagh Lower was constructed around the same time by neighbours of those who constructed Beaghmore.

#### 5. Recommendations for further work

The most pressing need is for the monument to be rescheduled and an area of the existing forest to be cut back where practical. Trees present within the interior of the monument are of substantial size and are liable to damage the site by root activity. The area cleared in 1977 is currently at risk of replanting by self propagation of the surrounding trees, and new saplings must not be allowed to become established. The area of forest which should be cleared is indicated by the red line in figure 17. It is approximately 100 m E-W by 70 m N-S

The monument is not protected from access by grazing wild animals although risk of damage from this source is minimal. There are no grazing cattle and the Sika deer which live in the forest are not heavy enough to do damage, and their grazing keeps the vegetation under control. The biggest risk to the site is the presence of 'Quad' bikers





whose illegal activity elsewhere in Davagh Forest is causing significant damage. The site's greatest protection is its current unobtrusiveness, with the inconspicuous access path protected by a fallen tree. It would be important that this would not change, or be reinstated following forest clearance.

Archaeological excavation would be required to determine whether or not there are a complex series of circles and alignments, similar to Beaghmore, at Davagh Lower.

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# Appendix 1: CAMSAR form

		rence H7062867		OWER
	Structural Cat.	Site Type	Protection Scheduled Altitude	208m
Field Boundaries (e. No	g. contemporary/intrusive late	r/owners attitude towards mon	ument i.e. dis/regard)	
Site description/no This is a com cairns and v tomb is situa	plex of megalithic what has been d	c monuments, inc escribed as a h west of complex	luding stone circles, alignmer ut foundation. A passible	ts, possible wedge
Landuse				
On Site Previous 19 10 10	% site  Around Si    100%  19    20%	Present 10 conifeto	This atea was planted us trees in applox. 1952, y Commission. The site was of trees in the 1970s.	by the
Condition Type of fe	ed? YN (e.g. recent/broken) ence of fence from edge of m	onument	· · · ·	
Remains	Is the site visible?	Archaeological s		ondition 34 5 6
Comments (e.g. human interference and management) The site is very overgrown and not being maintained. The forest is encreaching on the complex.				
Surface Problems (e.g. ploughing, trampling, planting, scrub growth: localized/widespread) Widespread Coverage with Scrub growth. Sub-Surface Problems (e.g. rabbits, badgers, subsidance: localized/widespread) Damage Caused by tree roots is widespread.				
Damage Sustained Past Category Extent 16 60%	RecentCategoryExtent29100%285%		Observations	
Photographs Digital phot were take	õs care.	endations The Site	e should be takeh into	State
Map Evidence 1st Ed	2nd Ed	matriked as 3rd Ed glant's <u>grave</u> <u>1952</u> and stone circles	Last Visit Date of last visit Deteriorated since last visit?	
Recorder H·W·/;	J.E. Date 29	19/2007		

# Appendix 2: Photographic Record

# PHOTOGRAPH RECORD FORM

Site: Davagh Lower

**Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> September 2007

Film no.	B/W Print	Colour print	Colour slide	Digital image (m.pixels)
				5.1

# Make and model of camera: Nikon Coolpix S1

Frame no	Direction viewed from	Details
10	S	N wall of hut inc orthostat
11	SE	N/W corner of hut
12	S	Interior of hut
13	SE	Orthostat at SE entrance to hut
14	N	Team at work
15	W	View of new cist
16	N	View of new cist + ortho of E/W alignment
17	W	Cist + E/W alignment
18	W	Large recumbent stone in E/W alignment
19	N	Hayes' stone circles and megalith
20	W	Tangential alignment
21	Е	Three stone row two collapsed, one standing
22	Ν	Double stone circle