

The background image is a photograph of an archaeological excavation site. In the foreground, a large, rectangular area is filled with light-colored, flat stones, likely a stone wall or foundation. A red and white measuring pole lies across the stones. To the left, a small, dark, rectangular object, possibly a bucket or a small structure, is visible. In the background, a grassy hillside rises, and a red flag is planted in the ground. The sky is overcast.

Clydesdale Project

First results from Daer 2010 – 2011

September 2011

by Tam Ward

We have been working flat out for over a year to salvage as much as possible from the Coom Rig site in Daer valley (Fig.1), where the forestry ploughing revealed an incredible and hitherto unknown archaeological landscape and one which has no parallels in the history of our work. Although we had previously surveyed many upstanding sites in the valley and excavated others under threat within the reservoir there, nothing could have prepared us for the large numbers of finds spots now recorded in the present work. (Appendix I).

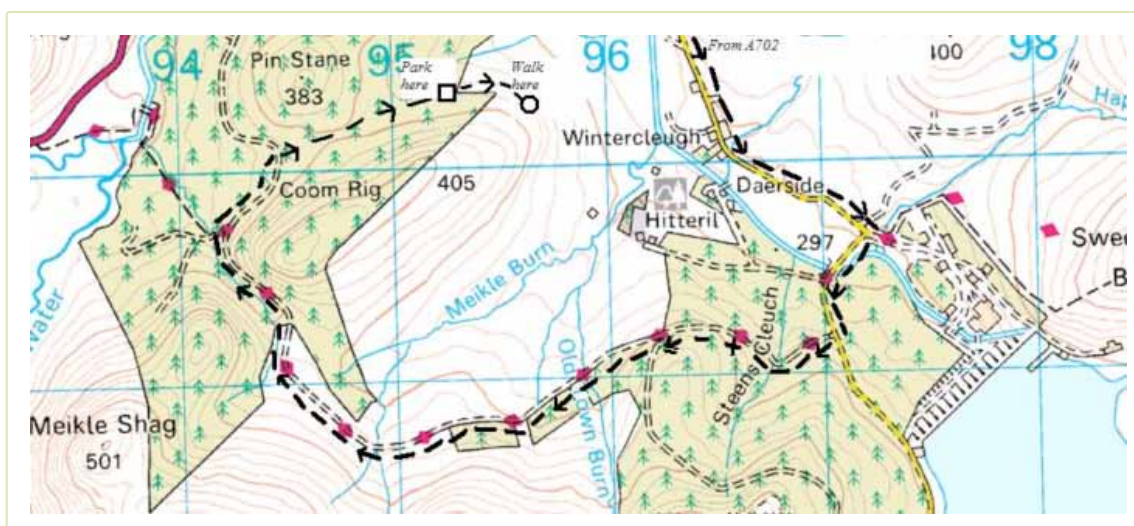


Fig.1

We had started the project optimistically hoping for about ten sites; however the total so far recorded is almost two hundred and fifty! (Figs.3, 4, 5) The sites fall into a few categories; firstly there are the locations where objects were located, mainly single or multiple pieces of the locally sourced radiolarian chert, and of exotic flint. The majority of that being debitage from knapping, although some nice tools have also been found. Pitchstone sourced from the Isle of Arran in the Firth of Clyde and occasional pieces of pre historic pottery were also found.

Features which were exposed for the first time from below the peat and which generally covers the area were small cairns, stone settings, burnt mounds and fire sites, and occasional patches of charcoal and pieces of reddened burnt rock.

The strategy which followed was to target areas which appeared to offer the best results, for example where multiple finds were made and where features were located. Most of the lithic found in the initial walkover was appreciated as belonging to the Mesolithic period (PI.1&2), but leaf arrowheads, some scrapers (PI.3) and a fine large leaf, a knife (PI.4), clearly belonged to later pre historic periods. The pottery of course also fell into the later time but its eroded state through exposure made it uncertain exactly where it fitted in.

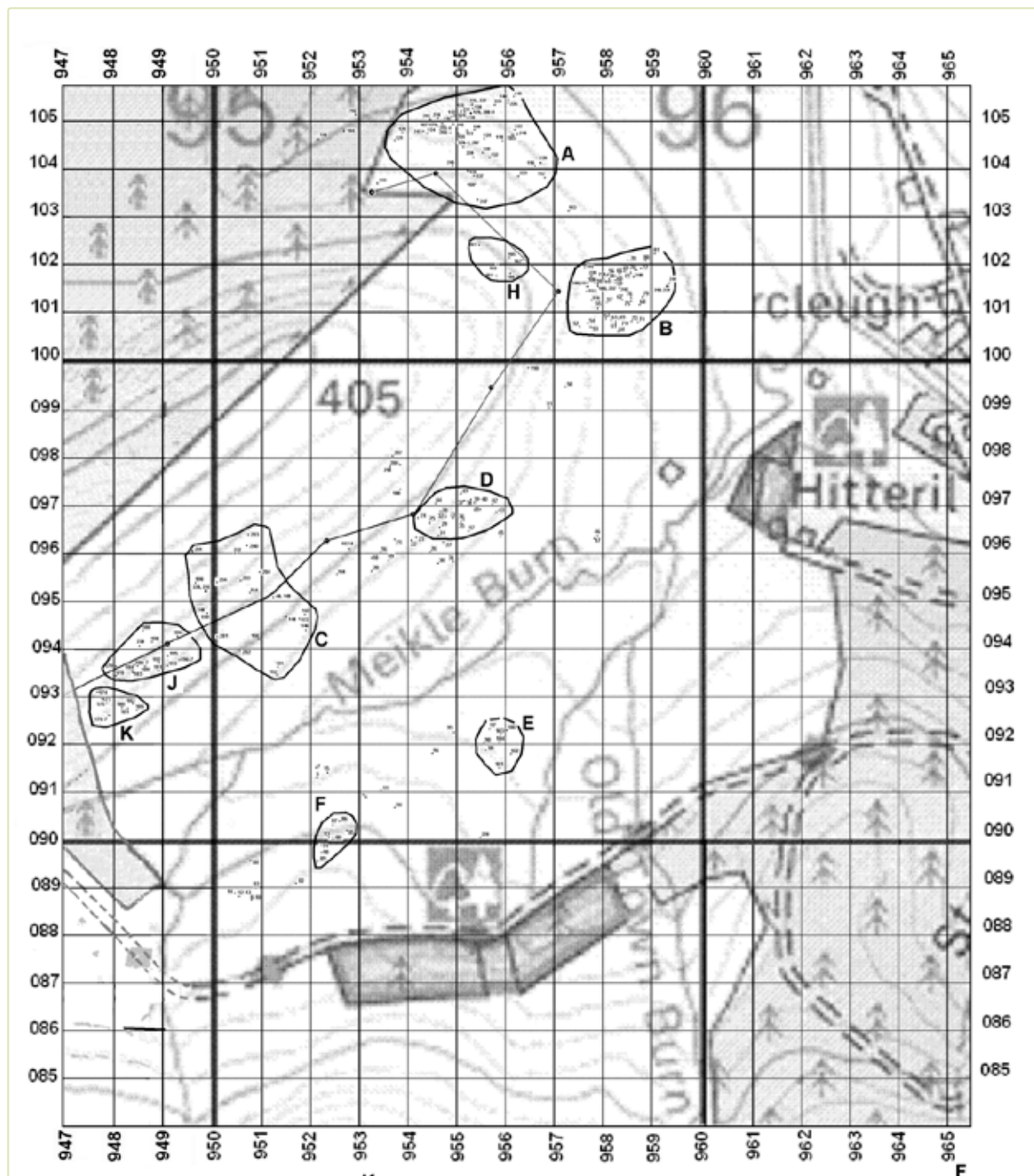


Fig. 2 Daer 2010-11
Fieldwalking sites

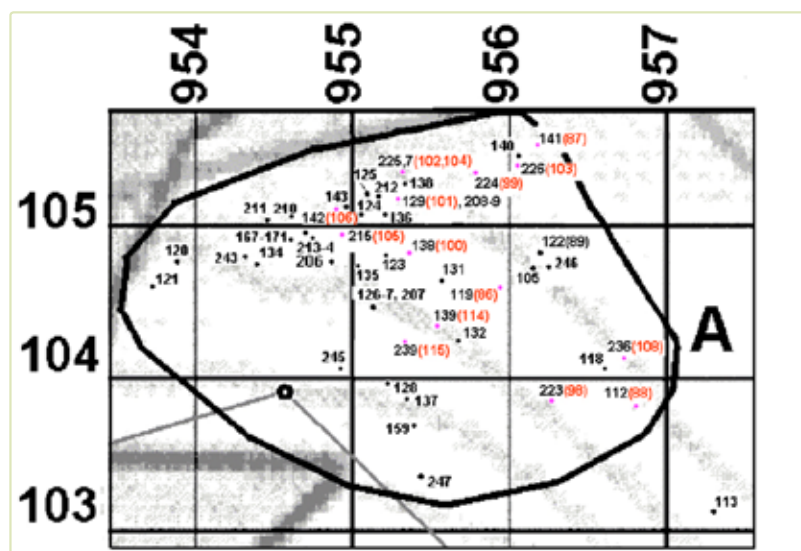


Fig. 3 Daer 2010-11. Group A fieldwalking findplaces and the sites of excavations (site numbers in parenthesis)

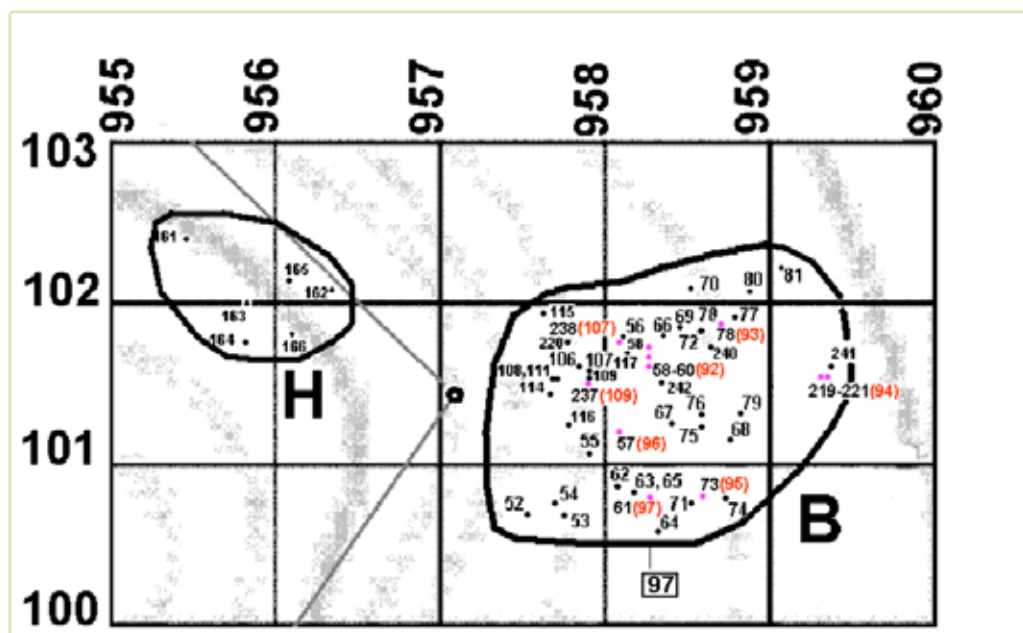


Fig. 4 Daer 2010-11. Group B and H fieldwalking findplaces and the sites of excavations (site numbers in parenthesis)

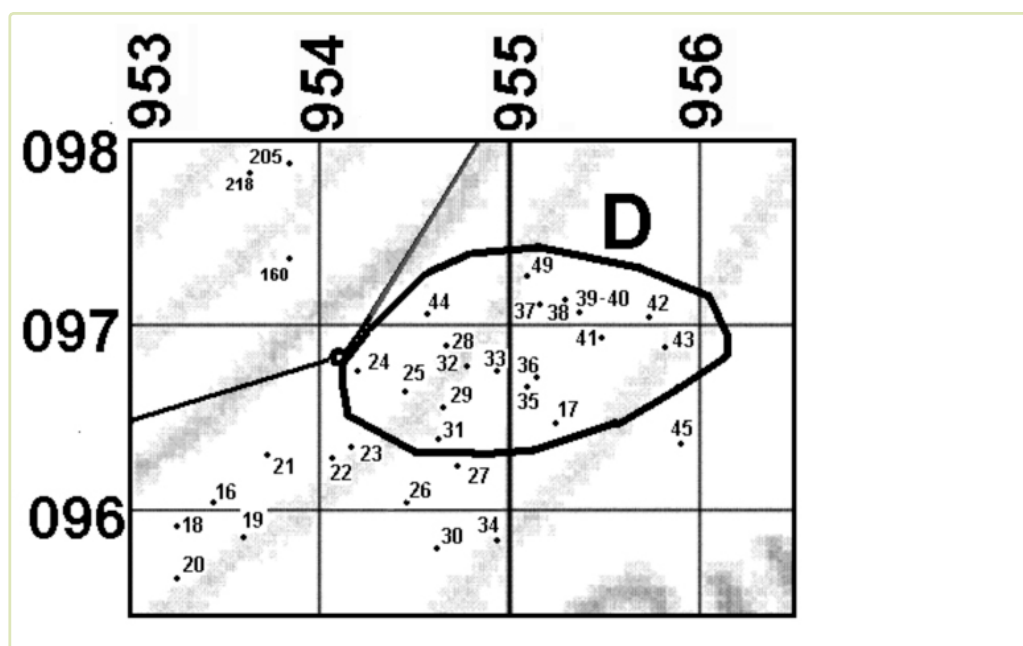


Fig. 5 Daer 2010-11. Plot showing distribution of fieldwalking finds Group D



Pl.1 Microliths



Pl.2 Small scrapers



Pl.3 Neolithic scrapers & arrows



Pl.4 Bronze Age? Leaf knife

However, it has been Mesolithic sites which appear to be most numerous; this is especially true for the northern end of the hill where sites are a stones throw from each other. The lithic assemblages from most of these sites are clearly distinctive in lithology and therefore show that different episodes of activity are represented. All sites have produced microliths of differing character and these now require specialist study to comment further, however, all assemblages will have the possibility of radio carbon dating, so that the locations may be fitted into a chronology.

The Mesolithic and Bronze Ages in the valley were previously represented by numerous sites identified by our group, from survey, excavation and radio carbon

dating. A single chert leaf arrow head and a few pieces of pitchstone found within the reservoir hinted that the Neolithic period may also be present. This is now certainly confirmed since we have found several sites with Early Neolithic carinated bowl pottery with one location in particular; Site 94 producing a variety of pot sherds (Pl.5 & Fig.6), lying within pits which we shall be able to C14 date in due course. This site was also interesting because it contained a good assemblage of Mesolithic debitage, microliths and scrapers and it is on this location that we believe we have found the best evidence for the Mesolithic/Neolithic Transition. The current speculation, without the advantage of C14 dates is that we have either very early pottery or very late microliths.



Pl.5 Carinated bowl rim sherd



Fig.6 Carinated bowl rim sherd



Pl.6

The discovery on several locations of pieces of maroon coloured soft haematite (Pl.6) which has facets and striae caused by rubbing, and almost certainly used as a colouring agent, caused some excitement as we believe this is another important first discovery in Scotland for such evidence. A problem of date existed in the fact that it was discovered sometimes by furrow walking or on sites with both Mesolithic and Neolithic artefacts. However, at Site 114, which incidentally will appear on the BBC T/V series Digging for Britain, we can be fairly confident the haematite is of Mesolithic date as only material from that period was found, apart from a single flake of pitchstone, which may simply be residual by being dropped there at a later date.

Burnt mound deposits and fire places have been sampled for charcoal and while the burnt mound areas are probably Bronze Age the small fire sites could be Mesolithic, C14 dating should be able to prove these one way or another.

Beneath one small cairn we have found a charcoal pit which is probably a token cremation deposit (Pl.8), although we found no bone, other small cairns have produced nothing, indicating they were likely field clearance piles.

Site 112 which was discovered by the cut of the new access road has produced sherds of Bronze Age 'bucket urn' which is typically domestic pottery and has been found on most excavations of Bronze Age houses in southern Scotland. The location appears to have been almost completely truncated by the formation of the new road, and although no features have been found in the remnant of the site, further work here is anticipated.

Locations where we found disturbed stones in the furrows and which were initially assumed to be small cairns which have been found (Pl. 7), have given surprising if somewhat inconclusive results. At Site 107 we found the stones were a flat setting on the ground (Pl.9), of no particular shape and which produced no significant finds above or below the stones.

The next site; No 110 (Pl.10) which we investigated was even more perplexing, here we got a similar setting of stones but lying immediately beside them was a round timber structure of c6m in diameter and with a possible porch, excellent pits (Pl.11) with stone packing showed that posts had been inserted, but again, there were no finds. However in this case an abundance of charcoal will date the site and may show that the structure had burned down. We found no evidence for a habitation or burial and we are speculating that the monument was used as a mortuary site.



Pl.7 Disturbed small cairn



Pl.8 Cremation? pit below cairn



Pl.9 Stone setting



Pl.10 Timber round building



Pl.11 Post hole with packing stones



Pl.12 Latest site stone enclosure

The current site; No 111 (Pl.12) being worked on is equally enigmatic despite the excellent archaeology present. Here we have yet again a similar setting of stone possibly forming an sub rectangular enclosure about 15m in internal length, some parts of the inside of the bank of stone appears to have been kerbed and, at the time of writing, a gully has been found with a layer of stone within it and which appears to transect the area. No finds have been made so far, nor has any charcoal or burnt stone been seen.

Charcoal and burnt stone

Charcoal has been in evidence over much of the area where furrows were exposed enough to allow investigation. Burnt mound deposits and fire places are easy to identify and these have all been sampled. However, apparently random charcoal is more difficult to interpret, similarly burnt stone which is also easy to identify, has been found in many locations in the furrows. We can only assume that the reason for these materials lying about the hill can be explained by features and sites which still lie mostly undisturbed beneath the baulks of turf and peat.

Nearly every excavation location has produced features with charcoal fills or spreads, these of course will allow for a fantastic interpretation of the environment throughout the early pre history of the valley, when the charcoal is identified for species. Rather oddly, although numerous Mesolithic sites have been explored, hardly any hazel nut shell has been found, and this may imply that the hunter gatherer camp sites were occupied early in the year. No cereal has been noted in the samples which are now prepared for further work.

One comment may be made with a fair amount of certainty and that is the sites discovered are an unknown quantity of many more which remain undetected. The depth of peat over much of the area has meant that the forest plough did not reach the ogs in an estimated 90% of the 1m wide furrows, and

there are 3m broad baulks of undisturbed ground between the furrows. There fore we have only seen the ogs in c 10% of 25% of the landscape. The extent of undiscovered archaeology based on this statistic, and what has been found in the relatively small area of visible ogs must be staggering.

We hope to secure funding from the nearby Windfarm grants scheme to pay for charcoal identification, radio carbon dating and specialists work on finds, all of which will lead to the completion of the project by publication of the entire fieldwork by BAG in the Daer valley.

We have been operating in the Daer valley forestry areas in close co operation with Tilhill Forestry for a number of years now. Forestry is just one of many major developments of the landscape where previously unknown archaeological sites and monuments can be discovered. We are grateful to Tilhill Forestry for their permission to investigate Coom Rig by excavation. Without the goodwill by forestry companies and other developers and the sterling work done by the BAG volunteers, an important part of Scotland's story would be lost forever.

Appendix I

Daer Valley forestry sites and finds spots 2010

Location Number is the sequence of find spots

Finds Number is the sequence of 'object' find spots

Site No is the sequence of excavations, these numbers run on from the previous excavations in Daer Valley

Inspection of clear felled forest at Hitteril and new ploughed ground at Coom Rig has produced the following finds spots and features/sites:

From the work already achieved within the Daer reservoir and the forestry areas, and where disturbed ground

Location Number	Finds Number if appropriate	Excavation Site Number if appropriate	Type of find	NGR(All NS)
1	1		Chert core + 2of chert	96907 09171
2	2		Flint flake	96873 09213
3	3		Chert core + 4of flakes	96899 09208
4	4		Quantity cannal + ordinary coal	96905 09307
5	5		Flint	95210 09130
6	6		Chert	95304 09096
7	7		Chert	95210 09151
8	8		Chert 7of +spall	95084 08874
9	9		Flint flake (end scraper?)	ditto
10	10		Chert retouched tip (micro?)	ditto
11	11		Chert 14of + spall	95342 09106
12	12		Chert	95054 08884
13	--		Burnt stone (from Burnt mound?)	ditto
14	--		Burnt deposit c2m diameter	95035 08891
15	Sample No 1		Charcoal sample	95236 09141
16	Sample No 2		Charcoal from fireplace?	95341 09603
17	Sample No 3		Charcoal from fireplace?	95522 09650
18	--		Cairn (to be dug)	95323 09594
19	--		Cairn	95360 09587
20	13		Chert 3of	95325 09565
21	14		Chert 3of	95369 09630
22	15		Chert 5of	95403 09628
23	16		Chert 1of	95414 09634
24	17		Chert 1of	95422 09678

Location Number	Finds Number if appropriate	Excavation Site Number if appropriate	Type of find	NGR(All NS)
25	18		Flint 1of	95446 09665
26	19		Chert 6of, Flint 1of	95446 09604
27	--		Fire?	95472 09624
28	20		18th C Bottle neck	95466 09690
			Chert 5of	circa ditto
29	--		Burnt mound	95460 09658
30	21		Chert 1of	95462 09583
31	--		Burnt mound	95461 09641
			C10m dia. Undeveloped	
32	22		Chert 1of	95477 09680
33	23		Chert 1of	95495 09682
34	24		Flint 1of	95495 09584
35	25		Chert 1of, flake	95507 09669
36	26		Chert 1of, flake	95513 09673
37	27		Chert 1of, scraper	95515 09710
38	28		Chert 4of	95529 09713
39	29		Chert 2of, flakes	95535 09704
40	30		Pot frags 3 of	ditto
41	--		Burnt mound?	95547 09694
42	31		Chert 2of, + charcoal	95572 09702
43	32		Chert 1of, flake + charcoal	95579 09689
44	33		Chert 1of	95558 09705
45	34		Chert 1of	95591 09636
46	35		Chert 1of	95792 09638
47	--		Cairn	95782 09631
48	--	Site No 91	Cairn	95122 09512
49	36		Chert 1of	95611 09726
50	--		Fire?	95721 09954
51	--		Burnt mound	95692 09907
52	37		Chert 1of	95750 10073
53	--		Charcoal patch, 1of 4m up	95773 10073
54	38		Chert 1of	95769 10079
55	39		Chert 1of	95789 10112
56	--		Cairn	95808 10180
57	40	Site No 96	Chert 1of + fireplace	95811 10120
58	41	Site No 92	Pot frags 6 of + cairn	95825 10175
59	42	"	Chert 1of	95827 10161
60	--	"	Cairn, burnt stone + charcoal	95827 10170
61	43	Site No 97	Flint 3of (1 core), Chert 2of + burnt stone	95828 10083
62	44		Chert 1of	95806 10092
63	45		Chert 2of	95816 10087
64	46		Chert 1of	95833 10062
65	--		Burnt stone c30m dia.+	95815 10086

Location Number	Finds Number if appropriate	Excavation Site Number if appropriate	Type of find	NGR(All NS)
			Charcoal	
66	47		Chert 1of	95835 10180
67	48		Chert 1of	95841 10125
68	--		Fireplace	95874 10117
69	49		Chert 1of	95844 10189
70	50		Chert 2of	95850 10211
71	51		Chert 1of	95851 10078
72	52		Flint 1of	95856 10185
73	53	Site No 95	Chert 11of, flint 2of, 1 tool?	95857 10083
74	54		Chert 1of	95873 10080
75	55		Galena	95857 10125
76	--		Cairn	95859 10131
77	56		Chert 4of	95881 10193
78	--	Site No 93	Cairn, 3 furrow	95867 10191
79	57		Chert, poss. cairn	95882 10131
80	58		Chert 2of	95887 10210
81	59		Chert 1of	95906 10221
82	60		Chert 1of	95167 08907
83	61		Chert 4of plus charcoal	95078 08900
84	--		Charcoal	95081 08958
85	--		Cairn?	95273 09023
86	--		Cairn?	95258 09040
87	--		Cairn?	95244 09032
88	--		Cairn?	95242 09002
89	--		Cairn?	95213 08955
90	--		Cairn?	95221 08978
91	--		Cairn?	95218 08995
93	--		Cairn?	95236 09014
94	--		Burnt stone	95372 09067
95	62		Pot frags 4 of	95497 09225
96	63		Chert 1 of	95451 09186
97	--		Cairn?	95566 09233
98	64		Chert 3of	95552 09204
99	65		Chert 2 of	95560 09192
100	66		Chert 1 of	95601 09230
101	67		Chert 2 of	95586 09152
102	--		Ring structure? at fold	95609 09183
103	68		Flint 3 of	95593 09223
104	--		Burnt rock	95591 09202
105	69		Chert 15 of, 1 amorphous core	95616 10473
106	70		Chert 1 of	95783 10162
			Within spread of S7 + charcoal	
107	--		Cairn “ “ “	95791 10160
108	71		Chert 1 of “ “ “	95770 10155

Location Number	Finds Number if appropriate	Excavation Site Number if appropriate	Type of find	NGR(All NS)
109	72		Pot frag 1 of, + stone	95791 10155
110	--		Cairn?	95646 09991
111	--		Cairn?	95769 10157
112	73 Site No 88	Chert 18 of, flint 3of	95679 10386	
			Haematite 2 of	
113	--		Cairn? tiny	95727 10313
114	74		Chert 1 of, burnt stone + Charcoal, c10 Dia.	95766 10145
115	75		Chert 1 of	95761 10198
116	76		Chert scraper 1 of	95776 10124
117	--		Cairn?	95809 10173
118	77		Chert 5 of, plus charcoal	95661 10404
119	78 Site No 86		Chert 74 of, 3 of red, 5 flint	95595 10461
			Flint microlith 1 of	" "
			Chert microlith 1 of	" "
			Chert end scraper	" "
			Flint end scraper	" "
			Flint round scraper	" "
120	79		Chert 12of	95386 10478
121	80		Flint end scraper	95372 10458
122	81		Chert 44of, Flint 3of	95412 10483
			C30 dia. Corner between	
123	82		Chert 4of	95501 10454
124	83		Chert 4of	95505 10506
125	84		Chert 10of	95509 10519
126	85		Chert 4of, 1of core	95515 10446
127	86		Chert 9of	95516 10446
128	87		Chert 1of	95523 10398
129	88		Chert 5of	95528 10517
130	89		Chert 1of, + stones	95534 10484
131	90		Chert 1of, Flint 1of	95555 10463
132	91		Chert 6of, 1 of brown knife	95567 10424
133	92		Chert 12of	95337 10370
134	93		Chert 54of, 10 furrow	95439 10474
135	94		Chert 16 of 1 side scraper?	95501 10477
136	95		Chert 2 of	95518 10508
137	96		Chert chunk 1 of, road	95534 10387
138	97		Chert 15 of Flint 5 of	95535 10527
			Pitchstone grey 1 of	
139	98		Chert 72 of Flint 5 of	95551 10435
140	99		Chert 33 of 1 of brown	
			Flint 3 of	95606 10551
141	100	Site No 87	Chert 55 of Flint 1 of	95620 10554

Location Number	Finds Number if appropriate	Excavation Site Number if appropriate	Type of find	NGR(All NS)
142	--		Fire place?	95494 10512
143	--		Fire place?	95499 10513
144	101		Chert 1 of + burnt stone	95267 09481
145	--		Cairn	95218 09468
146	102		Chert 2 of	95188 09440
147	--		Cairn	95187 09474
148	103		Chert 2 of	95148 09469
149	--		Cairn	95121 09510
150	--		Burnt stone	95094 09419
151	--		Burnt stone	95131 09364
152	--		Burnt stone	95127 09345
153	104		Chert 16 of	Random
154	--		Cairn above new road	95070 09518
155	105		Chert 1 of	Above road
156	--		Cairn @ saved cairn	95256 09559
157	--		Cairn	95277 09610
158	--		Cairn	95277 09609
159	106		Chert 1 of	95338 10370
160	107		Chert 1 of	95382 09738
161	--		Cairn	95540 10239
162	--		Burnt stone c15m	95631 10208
163	108		Chert 1 of	95581 10200
164	109		Chert 1 of	95581 10174
165	110		Chert 1 of	95608 10215
166	111		Flint 1 of	95610 10182
167	112		Chert 207 of	95463 10495
168	113		Chert? 1 of	95463 10495
169	114		unidentified mineral	95463 10495
170	115		Pitchstone 4 of	95463 10495
171	116		Flint 10 of	95463 10495
172	117		Flint knife	95175 09465
173	118		Chert	94778 09297
174	--		Cairn	94770 09309
175	119		Flint flake	94788 09290
176	120		Chert 2 of	94795 09262
177	121		Chert	94797 09361
178	--		Cairn	94805 09343
179	122		Chert 3 of	94802 09362
180	123		Chert + burnt stone	94817 09281
181	124		Chert + pot frag	94827 09278
182	125		Chert 3 of Cannal coal Curved fragment	94837 09287
183	126		Chert	94838 09356
184	127		Chert 2 of, Flint 1 of	94841 09368

Location Number	Finds Number if appropriate	Excavation Site Number if appropriate	Type of find	NGR(All NS)
185	--		Burnt stone + stones	94845 09274
186	128		Chert 3 of	94849 09368
187	129		Chert 3 of, 1 of modified	94853 09370
188	--		Cairn?	94859 09439
189	130		Chert	94862 09365
190	131		Chert + Charcoal + Cairn?	94877 09418
191	132		Chert 2 of	94892 09358
192	133		Chert, edge damaged?	94897 09373
193	134		Chert	94909 09369
194	135		Chert + Charcoal	94927 09427
195	136		Chert, snapped point?	94910 09389
196	137		Chert 2 of	94932 09379
197	--		Burnt stone + Charcoal, Burnt mound?	94936 09378
198	--		Cairn group? Scatter?	94965 09540
199	--		Cairn group	94990 09476
200	--		Cairn + Charcoal	95069 09517
201	--		Fireplace + Charcoal	95025 09404
202	138		Chert 2 of	95054 09397
203	--		Cairns 2 of	95073 09631
204	--		Cairn	95096 09564
205	--	Site No 90	Cairn + Capstone?	95379 09790
206	139		Flint leaf arrow head	95486 10480
207	140		Pitchstone	95516 10450
208	141		Chert 3of	95513 10528
209	142		Chert c20of Pitchstone	95521 10521
210	143		Chert 16of (+brown)	95457 10509
211	144		Chert 6of	95445 10505
212	145		Chert 9of	95515 10520
213	146		Chert (brown)	95469 10498
214	147		Chert 2of	95476 10494
215	148		Chert 10of	95494 10496
216	--		Stone slab (1x0.75x0.15m)	95295 09516
217	--	Site 90/1	Fireplace	95366 09807
218	--	Site 90/2	Stone slab	95365 09783
219	149		Chert 1of	95928 10156
220	150		Chert scatter	95933 10166
221	151	Site No 94	Chert, flint, pitchstone, Mudstone, pottery	95930 10167
222	152		Flint 1 of	95776 10172
223	---	Site No 98	Burnt mound deposit	95628 10391
224	153	Site No 99	Chert, flint	95578 10535

Location Number	Finds Number if appropriate	Excavation Site Number if appropriate	Type of find	NGR(All NS)
225	154	Site No 102	Chert	95530 10533
226	155	Site No 103	Chert 10of	95604 10540
227	156	Site No 104	Flint 3 of	95531 10538
Note: Site 104 in close proximity to Site 100				
228	157		Chert 12of	95548 09010
229	158		Pitchstone (large flake)	94987 09524
			Chert	(near Site 110)
230	159	Site No 112	Chert	94852 09408
			Pottery, 3of (bucket urn type)	
			Charcoal + burnt stone	
Site 112 is at the forest trackside				
231	160	Site No 113	Flint, 2 of scrapers	94950 09603
			Also tiny beaker (?) sherd from nearby furrow and haematite	
232	---		Cairn	95034 09599
233	---		Cairn	95052 09545
234---			Cairn	95002 09541
235	---		Cairn	94989 09523
236	161	Site No 108	Chert	95691 10412
237	---	Site No 109	Cairn	95789 10161
238	---	Site No 107	Stone setting	95813 10176
239	162	Site No 115	Chert and flint	95532 10423
240	163		Haematite	95863 10178
241	164		Pitchstone	95939 10162
242	165		Pitchstone	95834 10154
243	166		Chert core	95431 10480
244	167		Chert	
			+ Napkin ring fragment	?? Near Site 110
245	168		Chert 35of (two furrows)	95494 10404
246	169		Chert 4of (nr Site 89)	95624 10473
247	170		Chert 12 of	95541 10334
248	171		Chert 5 of + flint microlith	94987 09488

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