EACHTRA
Archaeological Projects

Archaeological Excavation Report

Garrauncreen

Co. Galway

Burnt Mounds

Date:	**October 2016**
Client:	**John Sisk and Son (Holdings) Ltd**
Project:	**N17 N18 Gort to Tuam PPP Scheme**
Ref:	**DE_MS_EAC_005_A**
Excavation No:	**E4612**
Excavation Director:	**John Tierney**
Written by:	**J Kiely & J Tierney**

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Set in 12pt Garamond

Printed in Ireland

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Summary

The excavation of the site at Garrauncreen, Co Galway comprised three burnt mounds dated to the Early Bronze Age. The mounds were each located on the side of a hollow or seasonal pond.

Road project name	**N17 N18 Gort to Tuam PPP Scheme**
Site name	Garrauncreen
E no.	E4612
Site director	John Tierney
Townland	Garrauncreen
Parish	Kilmoylan
County	Galway
Barony	Clare
OS Map Sheet No.	Galway 71
National Grid Reference	546270 738582 & 546340 738607
Elevation	50 m OD

Acknowledgements

Eacthra Archaeological Projects Ltd were appointed as archaeological consultant by the contracting Consortium Direct Route, whose members include Roadbridge Civil Engineering & Building Contractors, John Sisk & Son (Holdings) Ltd. and Lagan Construction Group Ltd. The project is funded by the Irish Government under the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

The project archaeologist was Martin Jones, Transport Infrastructure Ireland. The senior archaeologist was John Tierney and the post-excavation manager was Jacinta Kiely. Illustrations are by Robin Turk. Specialist analysis was carried out by Mary Dillon and the 14 Chrono Centre at Queen's University Belfast.

Scope of the project

The N17/N18 Gort to Tuam Road Scheme, which forms part of the Atlantic Road Corridor, consists of 57km of motorway/dual carriageway. The scheme commences at the northern extremity of the N18 Gort Crusheen scheme and extends in a northerly direction with junctions at Kiltiernan connecting to the N67, at Rathmorrissy connecting to the new M6 Dublin Galway route, at Annagh Hill connecting to N63, and at Tuam connecting to the existing N17 (**Figure 1**). The National Roads Authority has procured, by way of PPP, the design, construction, operation and financing of the scheme.

This project has been funded by the Irish Government under the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd has been appointed as archaeological consultant by the PPP Company. A design method statement for archaeological monitoring of a total of 29 untested areas on the N17/N18 was submitted to Martin Jones, Project Archaeologist, National Roads Authority and Mark Keegan, National Monuments Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the National Museum of Ireland. The Ministerial Directions Number A000045 and Registration Number E004587 were assigned to the scheme for monitoring works.

A green field site in Garrauncreen adjoining the Lands Made Available (LMA) (Chainage M17 11+300 - 11+600) to the W on the route of the N17 N18 Gort to Tuam PPP Scheme was selected by John Sisk and Son (Holdings) Ltd to store topsoil from site works associated with the construction of the new routeway. Appendix 4 to the approved Method Statement was submitted for permission to test the area of the topsoil tip site adjoining the LMA to the W. Testing of the green field site in Garrauncreen was undertaken by John Tierney on May 7th 2015. Three small levelled burnt mounds were recorded in the test trenches in the green field site and were subsequently excavated under licence E4612.

Site Location and Topography

The site is located in the townland of Garrauncreen a townland N of Laragh More, on the W side of the R347 in Co Galway (**Figure 2**). The townland of Garrauncreen is situated in the parish of Kilmoylan and the barony of Clare.

Excavation Methodology

A series of test trenches were excavated in a field on the W side of the new roadway. This was done in advance of using the field for storing topsoil. Two possible burnt mounds were recorded in the test trenches. An application was made for a licence to excavate the burnt mounds. The National Monuments Service granted the license number E4612 to excavate the site. The site was excavated in June and July 2015.

A grid was set up in the excavation area(s) and all archaeological features were sufficiently cleaned, recorded and excavated so as to enable an accurate and meaningful record of the site to be preserved. The excavation, environmental sampling, site photographs, site

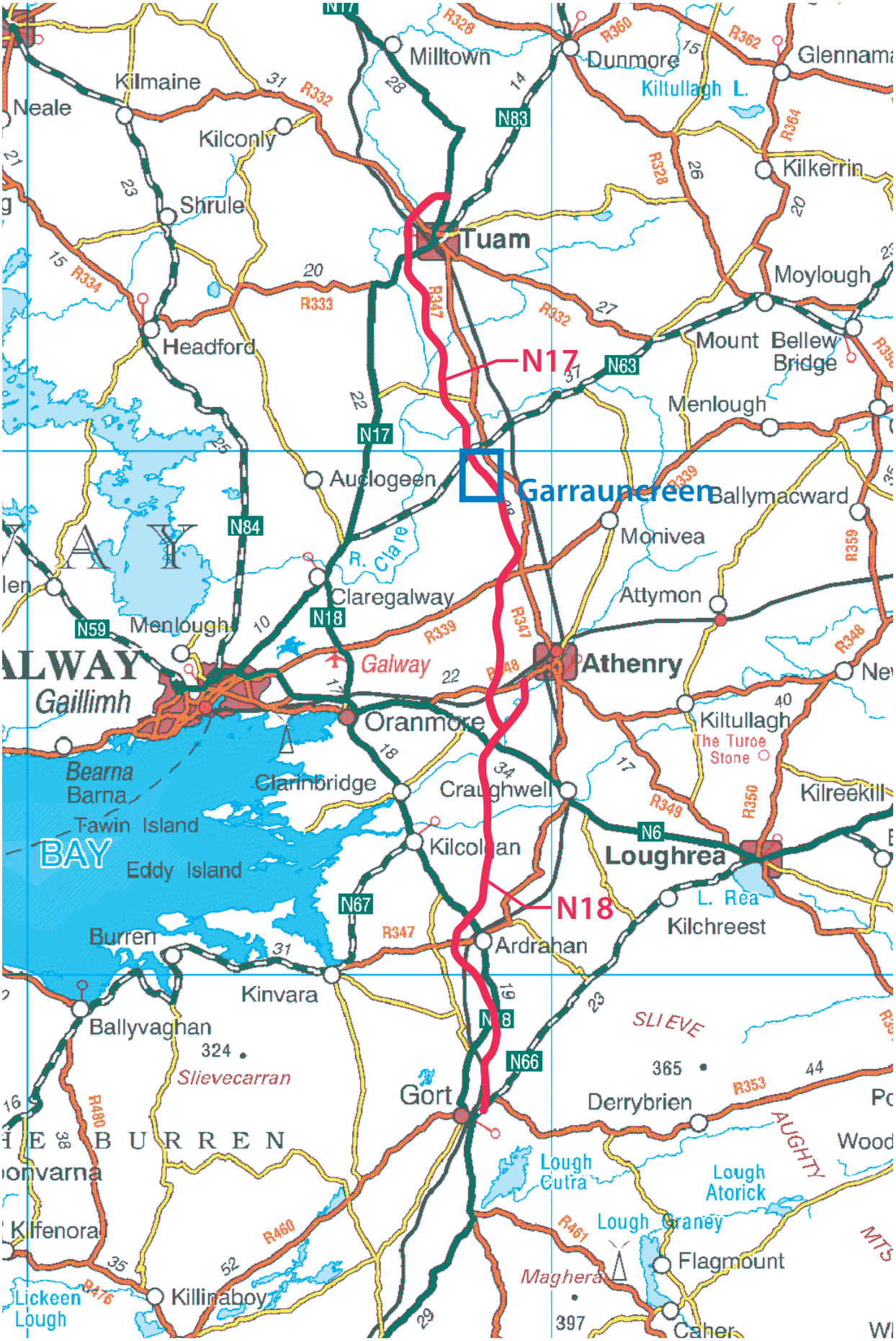

Figure 1: Portion of discovery map of Ireland showing the route of the N17 N18 Gort to Tuam PPP Scheme and the location of Garrauncreen townland.

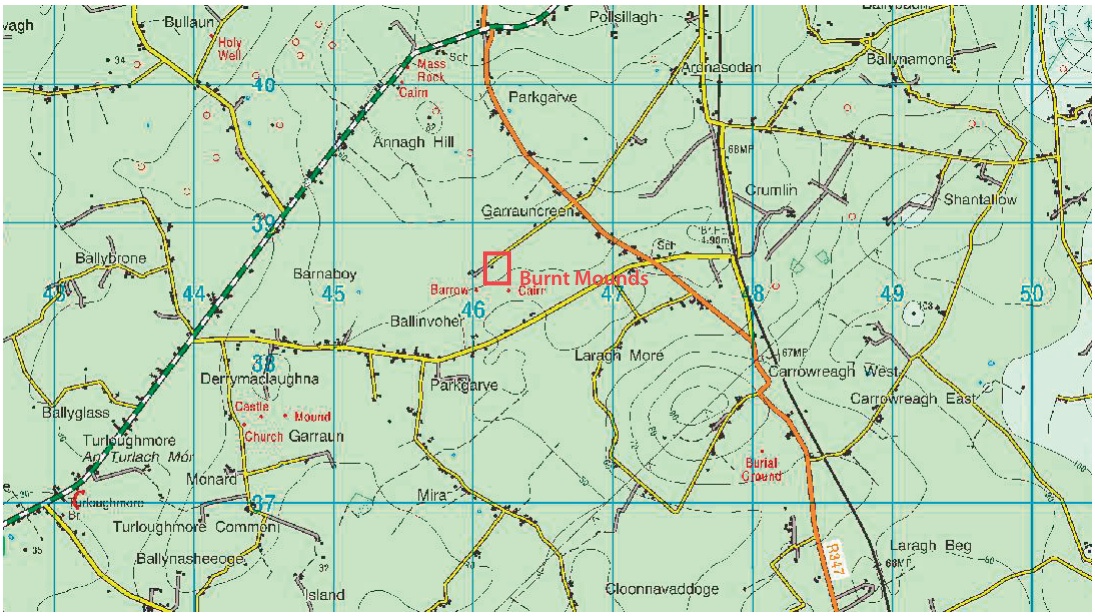

Figure 2: Portion of discovery map showing the location of Garrauncreen townland and the burnt mound sites.

drawings, on-site recording and site archive was as per the Procedures for Archaeological works as attached to the licence method statements for excavation licences.

The full record of excavated contexts is recorded in the context register (**Appendix 1**).

Excavation Results

Three small burnt mounds were excavated in a field adjacent and to the immediate W of the new N17 N18 Gort to Tuam road (**Figure 3**). Burnt mound 1 was located c. 120 m E of burnt mound 2 (**Plate 1**). A third and smaller site was located between the two sites but closer to BM2. The mounds very small and very shallow and had been truncated in the past and during testing. The cut features associated with burnt mound 1, included a double trough C.12, a pit C.7, three postholes C.6, C,13 & C.16 and a linear C.9, were located on the slope or edge of a seasonal pond and were cut into a compact white clay subsoil.

The cut features associated with burnt mound 2 were similarly located on the edge of a seasonal pond. The mound itself was shallow and was probably truncated in the past. The deepest section survived on the lower E edge of the seasonal pond. Three troughs, a pit, two postholes and two linear features were grouped on the edge of the seasonal pond.

A single trough on the NW edge of a third seasonal pond was located 25 m E of burnt mound 2.

The subsoil in the area of the excavations (and on the edge of the seasonal pond) was a mix of white compact clay and a yellow brown glacial till with iron pan visible on the edges of the white clay. The white clay in particular was suitable for retaining water and was greyer in colour where it had mixed with the remnants of the burnt mound layers.

Plate 1: View of area of burnt mound 1 and burnt mound 2 in Garrauncreeen from south.

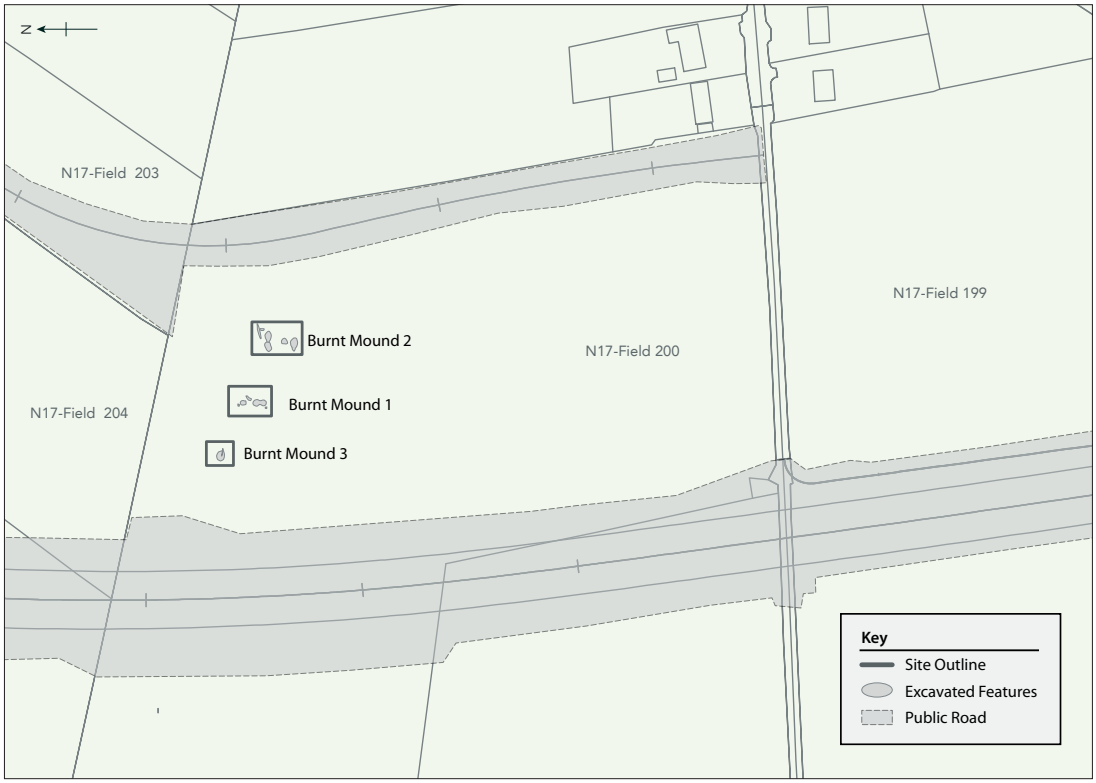

Figure 3: Portion of N17 N18 Gort to Tuam PPP Scheme showing the route of the new road and the location of the three burnt mound sites in Garrauncreen.

Plate 2: From S pre-excavation view of area of burnt mound 1 in Garrauncreeen.

Burnt Mound 1

There was no actual mound of burnt material recorded at the site, the burnt mound material had survived as a shallow discontinuous spread (C.2) across the area of the excavation and in the fills of the features (**Plate 2**). It measured at least 7 m x 3.5 m (minimum dimensions). A total of six features were cut into the white clay subsoil on the side of a hollow which acted as a seasonal pond (**Figures 4 and 5**). The fills of the features were all derived from layers of burnt mound material.

The cut features, included a large double trough C.11, a pit C.7, three postholes C.6, C.13 & C.15 and a linear C.9 (**Plate 3**).

Context No.	No. of fills	Dimensions m
Pit C.7	1	1.1 x 0.8 x 0.12
Trough C.11	1	2.6 x 1.3 x 0.1
Posthole C.6	2	0.4 x 0.4 x 0.12
Posthole C.13	1	0.3 x 0.2 x 0.05
Posthole C.15	1	0.35 x 0.35 x 0.4
Linear C.9	1	0.9 x 0.22 x 0.15

Table 1: Dimensions of cut features

The features were closely grouped in a linear arrangement, on the side of the seasonal pond. The pond comprised a hollow which held ground water due to the nature of the underlying clay subsoil. It measured at least 8 m in length and the width was not fully

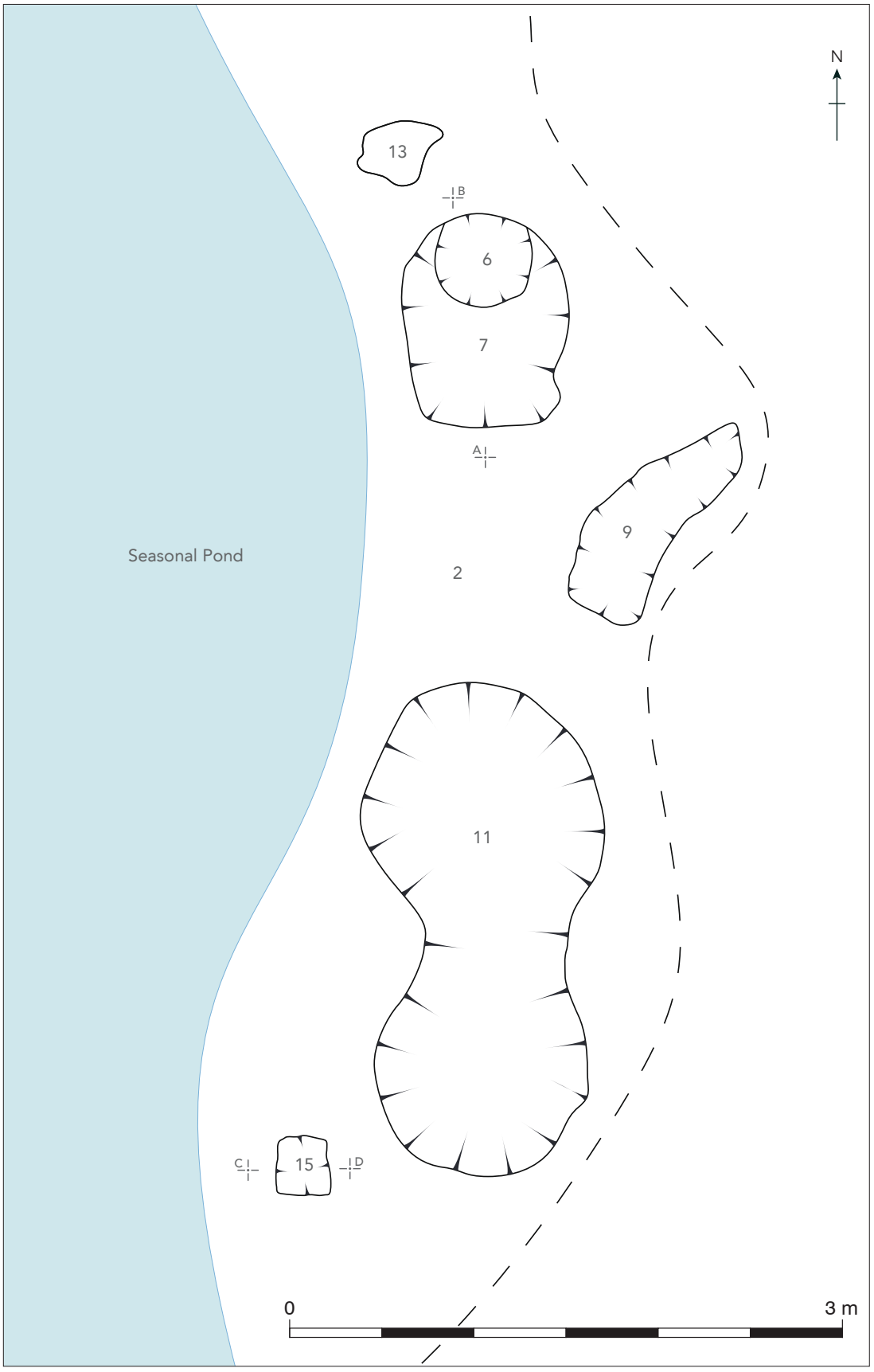

Figure 4: Post-excavation plan of burnt mound 1 at Garrauncreen, Co. Galway.

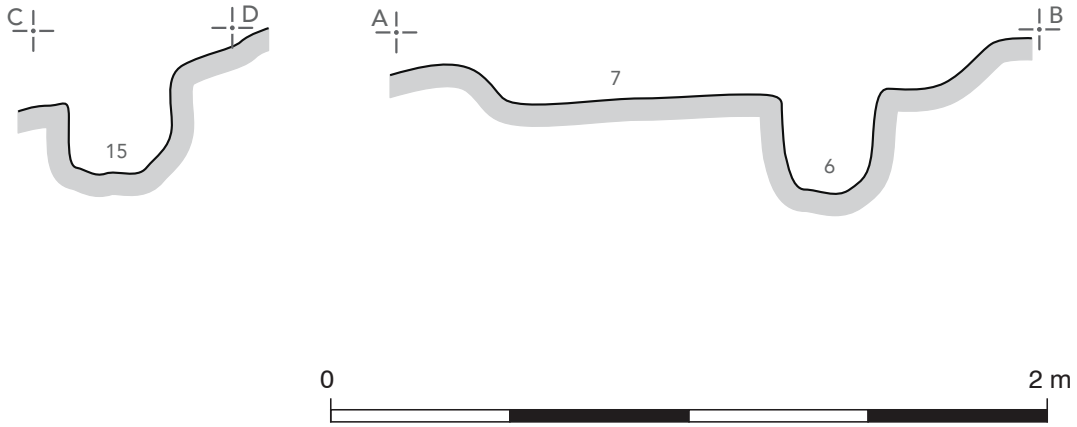

Figure 5: Sections of post-hole C.15 and pit C.7 at burnt mound 1 Garrauncreen, Co. Galway.

Plate 3: From S view of pit C.7 and posthole C.6 in burnt mound 1 in Garrauncreeen.

exposed. The double trough was the largest of the cut features thought it was shallow in depth (**Plate 4**). It was located parallel to the seasonal pond on the same alignment as the pit C.7. A large square posthole C.15 was located 0.26 m downslope of the trough. It may have functioned as a support post for activities associated with the trough.

An Early Bronze Age date of cal BC 1878-1692 (UB-30581) was returned from hazel charcoal from the fill of posthole C.6 and pit C.7.

Burnt Mound 2

There was no actual mound of burnt material recorded at this site, the layer of burnt mound material had survived as a shallow discontinuous spread (C.1 & C.27) across the area of the excavation and in the fills of the features. A total of six features were cut into

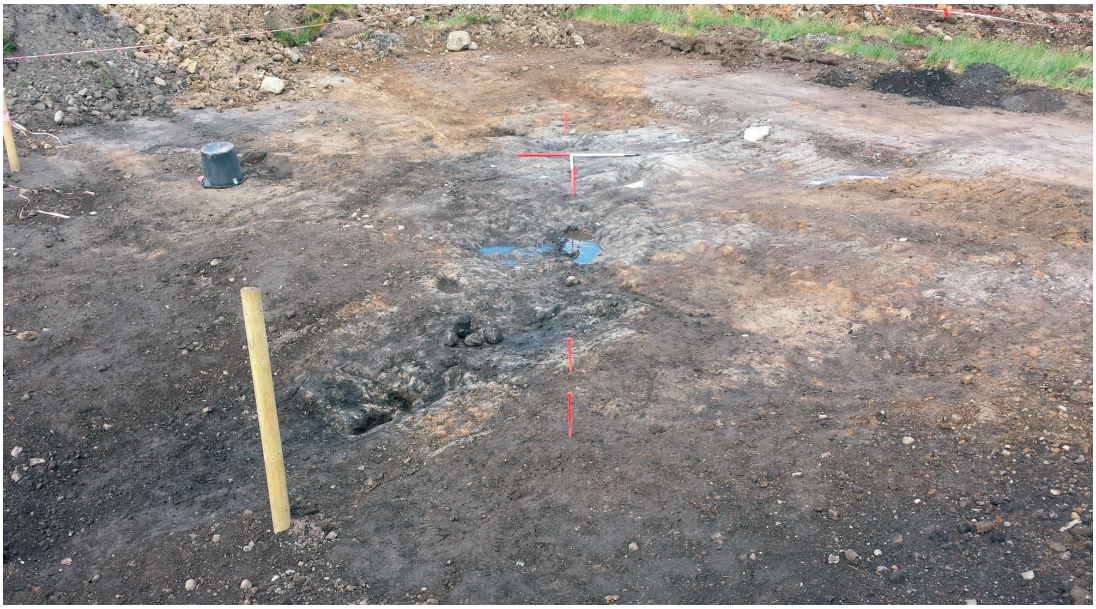

Plate 4: From S post-excavation view of area of burnt mound 1 in Garrauncreeen.

the white clay subsoil on the side of a seasonal pond (**Figures 6 and 7**). The fills of the features were all derived from layers of burnt mound material.

The cut features, included a double trough C.10 & C.21, a third trough C.22, two pits C.7 and C.16 and a linear feature C.14.

Context No.	No. of fills	Dimensions m
Pit C.7	2	1.1 x 1.1 x 0.5
Pit C.16	1	0.6 x 0.4 x 0.1
Trough C.10	2	2 x 1.2 x 0.5
Trough C.21	2	2 x 1.4 x 0.4
Trough C.22	1	2 x 1.5 x 0.5
Linear C.14	1	3 x 0.4 x 0.1

Table 2: Dimensions of cut features

The double and single troughs were located 4 m apart, parallel to one another and perpendicular to the seasonal pond (**Plates 5 and 6**). This arrangement was different to the main features in Area 1 where the features were set parallel to the seasonal pond. All three troughs were similar in size and had survived to a greater depth than the trough recorded in Burnt Mound 1. The double trough C.10 and C.21 were overlain by burnt mound layers C.17 and C.18. The double trough may have been designed to suit varying water levels as C.21 was located further downslope. Two fills, C.19 and C.20 were recorded in trough C.21. The fill C.19 was the remnants of a boiling layer and fill C.20 comprised a stone and clay fill which was packed at the E end of the trough to control the flow of water between the two troughs.

Trough C.22 which was located further S had been recut. The initial cut C.24 (which measured 0.6 x 0.5 x 0.5 m) survived on the SW end of the trough. Fill C.23, which was similar to burnt mound layer C.17, was the clay fill of the initial trough C.24.

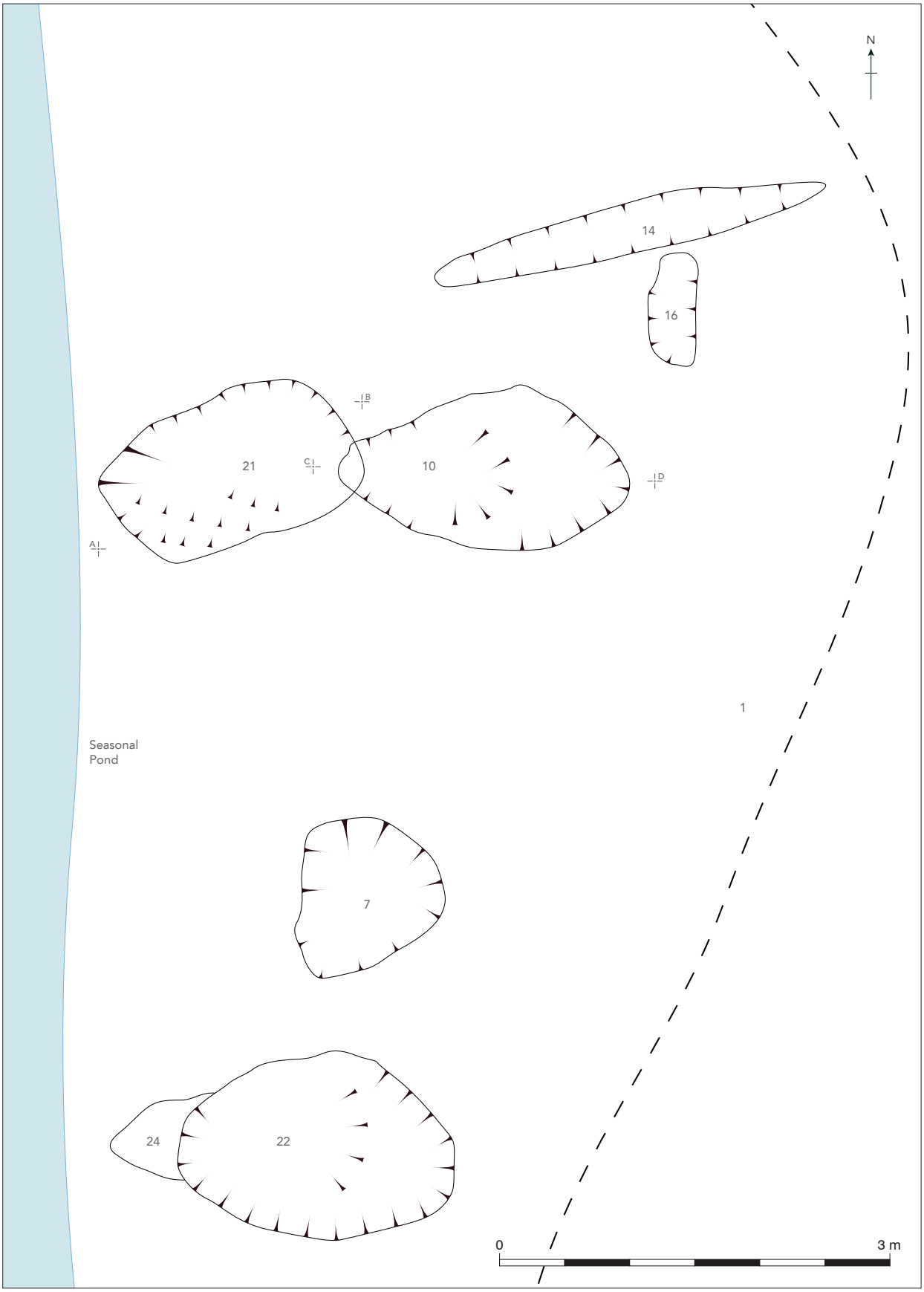

Figure 6: Post-excavation plan of burnt mound 2 at Garrauncreen, Co. Galway.

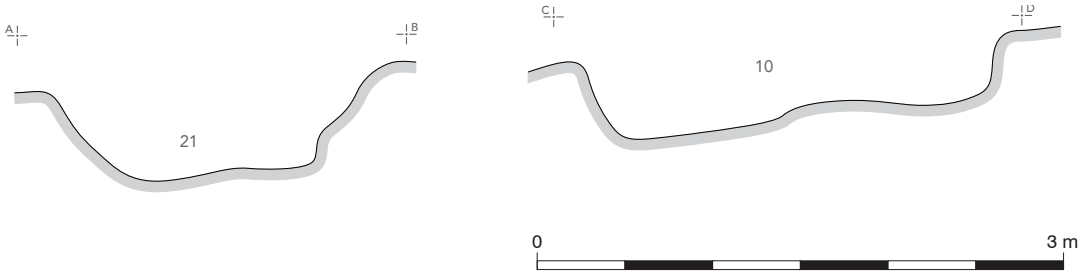

Figure 7: Sections of troughs C.21 and C.10 at burnt mound 2 Garrauncreen, Co. Galway.

Plate 5: Mid Excavation of burnt mound 2 in Garrauncreeen.

Plate 6: Mid Excavation of burnt mound 2 in Garrauncreeen with seasonal pond on right hand side.

The linear gully C.14 was cut into orange clay 0.6 m N of trough C.10. It may have been functionally related to the trough C.10.

Pit C.16 was located 0.9 m NE of the trough C.10 and immediately S of linear gully C.14.The uneven base and sides made this less of a deliberate cut feature. Alternatively it could be a pit in which an oval basket or rectangular timber box sat

Wet weather conditions experienced during the excavation of the site proved that all features, but trough C.21 and pit C.7 in particular, were adept at holding water.

Two radiocarbon dates were obtained from burnt mound 2. An Early Bronze Age date of cal BC 2028-1901 (UB-30582) was returned from hazel charcoal from the basal fill of trough C.10. A second Early Bronze Age date of cal BC 2464-2294 (UB-30583) was returned from hazel charcoal from the basal fill of trough C.21.

Burnt Mound 3

A single trough C.26 and a small shallow layer of burnt mound material had survived on the NW edge of a third hollow or seasonal pond (**Figure 8**). It was located c. 25 m E of burnt mound 2 (**Plate 7**). The trough measured 2 m x 1.5 m x 0.5 m in depth. It was filled a compact black silty clay (**Plate 8**).

Radiocarbon dates

Radiocarbon analysis was carried out by the 14 Chrono Centre in Queen's University Belfast. Dates were calibrated using Calib Rev5.0.2 (©1986-2005 M.Stuiver & P.J. Reimer) and in conjunction with Stuiver & Reimer 1993 and Reimer et al. 2004.

Lab code	Context	Material	Un-calibrated date	δ 13 C	1 sigma calibration	2 sigma calibration
UB-30581	3	Hazel charcoal from posthole C.6 and pit C.7 Mound 1	3456 +- 25	+- 25	Cal BC 1871- 1845 1811-1803 1776-1738 1713-1697	Cal BC 1878-1838 1830-1790 1785-1692
UB-30582	9	Hazel charcoal from basal layer Trough C.10 Mound 2	3608 +- 24	+- 24	Cal BC 2017-1995 1981-1931	Cal BC 2028-1901
UB-30583	19	Hazel charcoal from main fill Trough C.21 Mound 2	3885 +-26	+- 26	Cal BC 2456-2415 2410-2341	Cal BC 2464-2294

Table 3: Radiocarbon dates from the burnt mound sites in Garrauncreeen

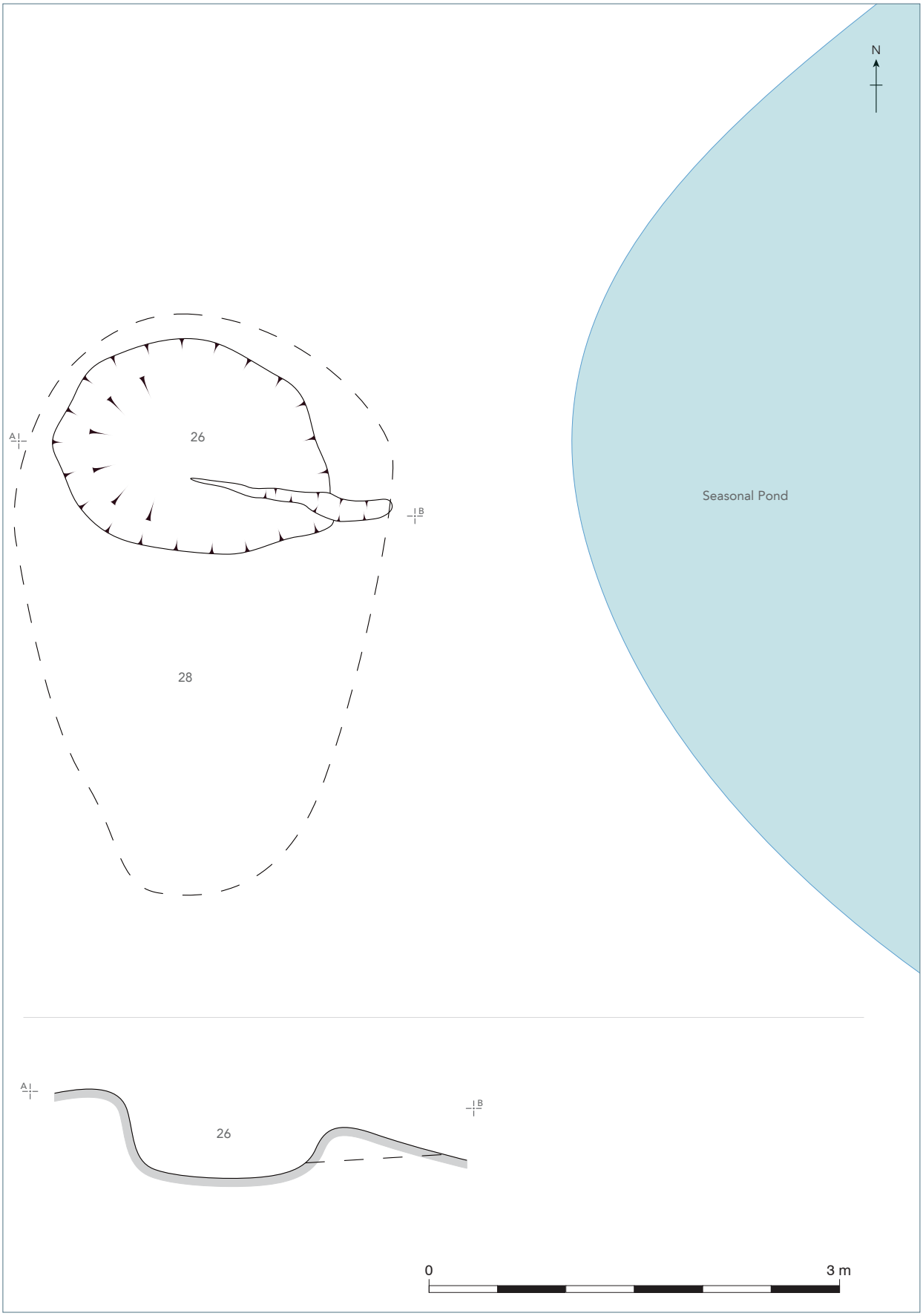

Figure 8: Post-excavation plan and section of burnt mound 3 at Garrauncreen, Co. Galway.

Plate 7: View of burnt mound 3 in foreground and burnt mound 1 in background in Garrauncreen.

Plate 8: Mid excavation of trough C.26 at burnt mound 3 in Garrauncreen.

Discussion

Three separate small burnt mounds were recorded in close proximity to one another on low ground in Garrauncreen at an elevation of c. 50 m OD.

A total of 12 burnt mounds were excavated on the M17 Galway to Tuam and N17 Tuam Bypass Schemes with a concentration of ten sites in the townland of Cloondarone, c. 10 km N of Garrauncreen (Bolger 2015). A further 12 burnt mounds were excavated on the route of the N18 Oranmore to Gort (Delaney 2011). The sites were located in the townlands of Coldwood, Moyveela, Ballinillaun, Roevehagh, Caherweelder and Ballyglass West.

A further three sites, which are the subject of this report, were excavated, adjoining the Lands Made Available (LMA) on the W side of the new road in Garrauncreen townland. A fourth site was recorded and preserved in situ while monitoring topsoil stripping adjoining the LMA on the E side of the new road in Cloondarone townland.

Most dated burnt mound sites have a focus of activity in the Middle to Late Bronze Age (Brindley and Lanting 1990; and see graph of dates in Ó Néill 2003/2004). The archaeological work undertaken on the route of the N17 N18 has produced an interesting corpus of 35 new radiocarbon dates for burnt mound sites. A total of ten radiocarbon dates were obtained from the burnt mound sites on the route of the M17 Galway to Tuam and N17 Tuam Bypass Schemes and a total of 22 radiocarbon dates were obtained from

the 12 burnt mound sites on the route of the N18 Oranmore to Gort (Delaney 2011). Three radiocarbon dates were obtained from the three burnt mound sites in Garrauncreen. The sites in Co Galway have a focus of activity in the Early to Middle Bronze Age.

Road Scheme	Nos of burnt mound sites	Early Bronze age RC dates	Middle Bronze Age RC dates	Later Bronze Age RC dates	Iron Age RC dates
M17 Galway to Tuam	10	3	6	1	0
N18 Oranmore to Gort	22	7	7	6	2
Garrauncreen	3	3	0	0	0

Table 4: Number of radiocarbon dates and associated prehistoric time periods of burnt mound sites on N17 N18 Gort to Tuam road schemes

Many theories speculate as to the actual use of burnt mound/fulacht fiadh sites (e.g. O'Kelly 1954; Ó Drisceoil 1988). We recognise the sites archaeologically by the remains of charcoal and heat shattered stones but as Ó Néill (2004) points out, these are the remains of a technology (the use of hot stones known as 'pyrolithic technology'), rather than specific indications of the aims of the process. The large trough and smaller pits indicate that there was extensive use of hot stone technology at this site and that it was probably used for heating water.

Burnt mounds are the most common Bronze Age sites found in Ireland. Estimates suggest that at least 4,500 examples are known. The characteristic site-type is found in low-lying and damp ground and consists of a mound of charcoal-rich black sediment that is packed with heat shattered stones and forms a horse-shoe shape around a pit or trough that filled with water. In many cases all that survives to the present day are black charcoal rich deposits with fragments of shattered stones visible in ploughed fields.

These sites are associated with the process of roasting stones to heat water. The remains of these 'pyrolithic technologies' (terminology follows Ó Néill 2004) produce the tell-tale deposits rich in charcoal and heat-affected stone. Debate continues about their use, as hot water is required for many processes including cooking, brewing, washing, dyeing and, most recently it has been argued that some burnt mounds were primarily used to boil and cure meat for long term storage (Roycroft 2006).

Traditionally these sites have been interpreted as ancient cooking places, where large stones were heated in fires and then added to the water filled trough the extreme heat of the stones eventually heating the water in the trough until it reached boiling point. Experimental cooking at reconstructed sites such as Ballyvourney (O'Kelly 1954) has demonstrated that meat wrapped in straw and placed into a boiling trough can be cooked quite effectively. The perceived lack of any animal bones from these excavated sites has been used as an argument against this theory. More recently however there is a growing corpus of sites which have produced animal bone (Tourunen 2008) including, though the amounts are small, three of the burnt mound sites on the M17 Galway to Tuam (Bolger et al 2015, 24).

The traditional perception of the burnt mound site is that they are isolated features on the landscape situated on marginal ground away from settlement. Recent studies however are requiring a re-evaluation of this perception. It can be regarded as certain that the settlement sites and associated burnt mounds are only one part of a wider prehistoric landscape which also includes lithic production and metalworking sites as well as burial sites (Sternke 2009).

There are six main types of archaeological features encountered at burnt mound sites; wells/springs, layers/deposits, hearths, trough/boiling pits, smaller pits, and stakeholes/postholes. Four of the six feature types were recorded at Garraurcreen. The remnants of mounds, seasonal ponds, troughs, smaller pits and postholes. There is no water course in proximity to the site but the all the mounds were located on the edges of hollows which contained seasonal ponds.

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Appendix 1 Context Register

Burnt Mound 1

Context No	Sample No	Feature type	Description	Dimensions (LxWxD m)
1		Topsoil		
2		Burnt mound layer	Black silty sandy clay with inclusions of small stones, coarse pebbles and occasional flecks of charcoal.	
3	2	Upper fill of post hole C.6 and pit C.7	Black silty sandy clay with inclusions of angular small stones and coarse pebble. Occasional inclusions of charcoal.	1.1 x 0.8 x 0.12
4	1	Fill of post pipe C.5	Very similar to C.3 but less inclusions of stone and more silt towards the base.	
5		Cut of post pipe	Circular in plan with steep sides and rounded base.	0.1 x 0.1 x 0.1
6		Cut of post hole	Circular in plan with steep sides . The postpipe cut was located in the centre.	0.4 x 0.4 x 0.12
7		Cut of pit	Sub-rectangular in plan with sloping sides and concave base. The subsoil was a which	1.1 x 0.8 x 0.12
8		Fill of linear C.9	Black silty sandy clay with inclusions of coarse pebbles and occasional charcoal.	
9		Cut of linear	The linear is irregular in plan with gradually sloping sides and an irregular base. It peters out at the S end.	0.9 x 0.22 x 0.15
10	3 & 4	Fill of double trough C.11	Filled with burnt mound material similar to C.2. A thin lens of sand was recorded in the central section of the trough.	
11		Cut of double trough	Figure-of-8 in plan. Sloping sides and irregular sloping base. The bridge between the two troughs is narrower and shallower that the two troughs.	2.6 x 1.3 x 0.1
12		Fill of post hole C.13	Black silty clay.	
13		Cut of post hole	Truncated post hole.	0.3 x 0.2 x 0.05
14		Fill of post hole C.15	Filled with burnt mound material similar to C.2.	
15		Cut of post hole	Square in plan with steep sides and flat base.	0.35 x 0.35 x 0.4

Burnt Mound 2

Context No	Sample No	Feature type	Description	Dimensions
1		Burnt mound layer	Black sandy silt. Frequent heat shattered stone .	
2		Fill of C.4 and C.5	cancelled	
3		cancelled	cancelled	
4		Cut of possible post	Oval in plan with steep sides and rounded base.	0.15 x 0.2 x 0.3
5		Cut of possible post	Oval in plan with steep sides and irregular base.	0.2 x 0.2 x 0.25
6		Primary fill of C.7	Dark grey silty clay with inclusion of large limestone rock.	
7		Cut of pit	Oval in plan with steeply sloping sides and narrown base. N and NE sides almost vertical.	1.1 x 1.1 x 0.5
8		Upper fill of trough C.10	Black sandy silt. Frequent heat shattered stone .	
9	1	Basal burnt layer of trough C.10	Black silty clay with frequent charcoal.	
10		Cut of trough	Oval in plan with steep sidesand fairly regularly base sloping to trough C.21.	2 x 1.2 x 0.5
11		Fill of trough C.22	Black sandy silt. Frequent heat shattered stone .	
12		Basal sand layer of trough C.22	Silty sand.	
13		Fill of linear gully C.14	Dark brown moderately compact silty clay with frequent heat shattered stone inclusions. Stone concentrate d at W end.	
14		Cut of linear gully	EW orientated gully adjacent to trough C.10. V-shaped in plan, deeper in the mid section. Wider (0.6m) at W end.	3 x 0.4 x 0.1
15		Fill of pit C.16	Dark brown silty clay moderately compact. Occasional heat shatterred stone and flecks of charcoal.	
16		Pit cut	The pit was rectangular in plan. Orientated NNE x SSW. Abrupt break of slope at N, E & W. Shallower at S. Uneven base.	0.6 x 0.4 x 0.1
17		Mid brown clay layer	Mid grey brown silty clay compact layer. NW-SE orientation, roughly linear. Frequent charcoal inclusions, occasional heat shattered stone.	1.7 x 0.4 x 0.6
18		Mottled layer above trough C.10	Mottled brown and black silty clay at E end of trough. Frequent burnt stones and flecks of charcoal.	0.7 x 0.7 x 0.05
19	2	Main fill trough C.21	Black sandy silt. Frequent heat shattered stone . A lighter lens at E end was sandy gritty.	

20		Fill of trough C.21	Stone and clay fill packed at E end of trough B. The stones were 0.15-0.2 m in diameter. Few charcoal inclusions.	0.4 x 0.3 x 0.3
21		Cut of trough	Oval shaped trough. Broaded at E end, pointed at W end. Abrupt break of slope at E where it meets trough C.10.	2 x 1.4 x 0.4
22		Cut of trough	Oval shaped trough. Abrupt break of slope at N, S & W. Gradually sloping sides at E. Very uneven base at E end. Rounded base at W end.	2 x 1.5 x 0.5
23		Clay fill primary trough C.24	Mid brown silty clay with yellow clay inclusions. Similar to C.17.	
24		Primary cut trough (W end)	Primary cut of trough filled with 23.	0.6 x 0.5 x 0.5
27		Layer of mound material at waterhole 2	Black silty clay with moderate traces of charcoal	

Burnt Mound 3

Context No	Sample No	Feature type	Description	Dimensions
25	3	Fill of trough C.26	Black highly compact silty clay fill. Moderate traces of charcoal.	2 x 1 x 0.5
26		Cut of trough	Oval in plan with steep sides and irregular sloping base.	2 x 1.5 x 0.5
28		Layer of mound material at waterhole 3	Black highly compact silty clay fill. Moderate traces of charcoal.	