

**N18 Ennis Bypass
and N85 Western Relief Road**

Site AR27

Carrowdotia, Co. Clare

**Final Archaeological Excavation Report
for Clare County Council**

Licence No: 03E1443

(NGR 137110 183590)

Kate Taylor

J03/15

1st July 2006

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**by Kate Taylor
TVAS Ireland Ltd**

Job J03/15

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Summary

Site name: N18 Ennis Bypass and N85 Western Relief Road, Site AR27, Carrowdotia, Co. Clare

Townland: Carrowdotia

Parish: Kilraghtis

Barony: Bunratty Upper

County: Clare

SMR/RMP Number: CL026:036 01 and 02

Planning Ref. No: N/A

Client: Clare County Council, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare

Landowner: Clare County Council, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare

Grid reference: 137110 183590 (OSI Discovery Series 1:50,000, Sheet 58. OS 6" Clare Sheet 26)

Naturally occurring geology: Limestone bedrock terraces outcropping through clayey sand

TVAS Ireland Job No: J03/15

Licence No: 03E1443

Licence Holder: Kate Taylor

Report author: Kate Taylor

Site activity: Excavation

Site area: 4150m²

Sample percentage: 95%

Date of fieldwork: 22nd to 24th September 2003

Date of report: 1st July 2006

Summary of results: The 1840 Ordnance Survey map shows two enclosures, at least one of which was thought to be an Early Christian cashel or stone fort, however no surface expression of the monuments survive. The location of one of the enclosures was excavated in advance of road construction. No evidence of any structure was seen although several clearance cairns were recorded. It is possible that the enclosure was completely destroyed or that outcropping bedrock terraces had been mistaken for the foundations of a fort at the time of the 19th century survey.

Monuments identified: Undated field clearance cairns

Location and reference of archive: The primary records (written, drawn and photographic) are currently held at TVAS Ireland Ltd, Ahish, Ballinruan, Crusheen, Co. Clare.

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Report edited/checked by: Graham Hull ✓01.03.07

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Report J03/15f

Introduction

This report documents the final results of an archaeological excavation of a presumed cashel (Site AR27) on the route of the N18 Ennis Bypass and N85 Western Relief Road at Carrowdotia, Co. Clare (NGR 137110 183590) (Fig. 1). The excavation forms part of the Ennis Bypass Archaeological Contract 5.

A preliminary archaeological report for this site was produced in January 2004 (Taylor 2004).

The National Monuments Act 1930 (as amended) provides the legislative framework within which archaeological excavation can take place and the following government publications set out many of the procedures relating to planning/development and archaeology:

Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (DAHGI 1999a)

Policy and Guidelines on Archaeological Excavation (DAHGI 1999b)

Code of Practice between the National Roads Authority and the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (NRA/MAHGI 2001)

Project background

As part of the National Roads Authority scheme for upgrading the N18 Limerick to Galway Road, Clare County Council, in consultation with NRA Project Archaeologist Sébastien Joubert, requested a series of archaeological investigations along the route of the proposed Ennis Bypass and a Western Relief Road. The proposed scheme has an overall length of 21km and involves the construction of a 13.8km eastern bypass of Ennis from Latoon, north of Newmarket-on-Fergus, to Cragard, north of Barefield. The Western Relief Road is 7.1km long and is to link Killow and Claireen (Fig. 1).

A number of sites of archaeological interest were known to lie on the route of the new roads and the mitigation strategy agreed by the Project Archaeologist and the national licensing authorities for these sites was preservation by record, i.e. full archaeological excavation. Further sites, without surface expression, were located as the result of intensive test trenching along the course of the road (03E1291 Hull 2003 and 03E1293 Roger 2004). As preservation in situ was not a reasonable option, the resolution strategy for these new sites was also preservation by record.

The archaeological excavation and post excavation work were funded by Clare County Council through the National Roads Authority and part-financed by the European Union under the National Development Plan 2000-2006.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in the townland of Carrowdotia, in the parish of Kilraghtis, Bunratty Upper barony, north of Barefield village (NGR 137110 183590) (Figs 1 and 2). The current N18 Limerick to Galway road is immediately to the west of the site and the Ennis to Galway railway line runs 400m to the east. The surrounding landscape is characterised by drumlins, outcrops of limestone bedrock and low boggy

areas, with the field to the north-east being rocky scrub and the field to the west of the N18 being low-lying bog.

The underlying geology observed during the excavation was outcropping limestone bedrock ridges with clayey sand between. The site has an uneven surface: the land at the north lies at approximately 21.4m above Ordnance Datum (OD) rising to 24.0m OD in the centre and dropping to 22.8m OD at the south.

Prior to the excavation, the land was part of a haggard associated with a 20th century house. This land was typically used as pasture for cattle and the householders stated that, within their experience, this had always been the case.

Archaeological and historical background

As part of the environmental assessment process for the road scheme, Clare County Council commissioned desk-based and walkover surveys that formed part of an Environmental Statement (Babtie Pettit 2000) and an archaeological study for the Environmental Impact Statement (Doyle 1999). A total of 36 sites of known or potential cultural heritage significance were identified along the entire route of the proposed Ennis Bypass and Western Relief Road.

Earthwork and geophysical survey were undertaken on potential archaeological sites and invasive testing and excavation took place in 2002 and 2003 on some of the above ground sites affected by the proposed road (Aegis 2002, IAC 2003, Geoquest 2002, Earthsound 2003).

A systematic programme of testing along the new road route, involving the mechanical excavation of a central linear trench with offsets, took place in Summer/Autumn 2003. Twenty-two previously unknown sites, including cremation cemeteries, burnt stone spreads, enclosures and brick clamps were found (03E1291 Hull 2003 and 03E1293 Roger 2004). Monuments dating from the Bronze Age to the modern period were found.

Earlier phases of archaeological intervention on newly constructed stretches of the N18 (Dromoland to Carrigoran), to the immediate south of this road project, have demonstrated that the locality has a rich range of prehistoric and later monuments (99E0350 Hull and Tarbett-Buckley 2001).

Recent archaeological work on the BGE Gas Pipeline to the West in the neighbourhood of the new road route has tended to support the picture of continuous human activity in Co. Clare from the Neolithic and even becoming intensive from the Bronze Age. A number of burnt stone spreads and burnt mounds were excavated near the route of the new road in the summer of 2002 (MGL 2002).

Site AR27 (SMR CL026:036 01 and 02) appears on the 1840 OS 1st Edition Map as two adjacent enclosures (Fig. 4). No above ground manifestation of these features was visible prior to excavation. The 1914 survey for the OS 2nd Edition Map does not show the two enclosures so it is reasonable to assume that these monuments were at the very least severely damaged between 1840 and 1914. The excavation area clearly covers the location of the larger of the two enclosures (CL026-03601) and may include the edge of the smaller example (CL026-03602).

A number of other enclosures are known in the townland and surrounding area and, in the absence of any definitive evidence, these are considered likely to be examples of Early Christian ringforts or cashels. Two other examples have been investigated within Carrowdotia as part of the road project (Taylor 2006a and 2006b).

Earlier test excavations

Site AR27 was examined by test trenching in the winter of 2002 (02E1490, Collins and Coyne 2002, 13-18). Five test trenches were mechanically opened and a number of clearance cairns were investigated. The cairns seem to have been produced as a result of construction of a nearby house and roadway. It was also considered possible that these clearance cairns were formed by the destruction of a stone cashel. No negative archaeological features were recorded.

A geophysical survey across AR27 by was commissioned (Geoquest 2002) but did not indicate any potential archaeological features.

Excavation aims and methodology

A licence to excavate was granted to Kate Taylor by the National Monuments Section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, in consultation with the National Museum of Ireland, on behalf of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The licence number is 03E1443.

The aims of the excavation were to:

- 1) Preserve by record all archaeological deposits and features within the excavation area
- 2) Produce a high quality report of the findings

The fieldwork took place between 22nd and 24th September 2003 and was directed by Kate Taylor, assisted by Graham Hull, Roy Krakowicz and Sean Wallis.

The site encompassed an irregular rectangular area measuring approximately 148m by 28m (4150m²). A tarmac driveway and water pipe that served the adjacent house crossed the site and this strip (approximately 6m wide) was not excavated. Two tracked machines fitted with toothless grading buckets and operated under direct and continuous archaeological supervision removed topsoil and overburden. The spoil was, where possible, visually scanned for artefacts. The surface of the bedrock was seen to be broken and mixed with soil and this layer was also removed mechanically to reveal undisturbed natural deposits below.

Where heaps of stones were visible as upstanding mounds, these were stripped of topsoil and recorded. As these mounds were seen to represent field clearance cairns they were subsequently half-sectioned mechanically and the material spread to allow potential artefacts to be recovered. Following additional recording, the mounds were fully excavated mechanically.

A full written, drawn and photographic record was made, largely according to the TVAS Ireland Field Recording Manual (First Edition 2003). The site was digitally planned using a Global Positioning System (GPS) unit, tied into the N18 surveying base station in order to provide millimetre accurate readings.

Excavation Results (Fig.3 and Plates 1 and 2)

The excavations revealed six undated features, each being a small clearance cairn. All features and contexts are listed in Appendix 1.

The site was bisected by a tarmac driveway. On both sides of this driveway, the site was covered by a layer of topsoil that varied in thickness from 0.02m to 0.10m. In places this material was simply a thin layer of mossy material covering outcropping bedrock.

Beneath the topsoil was a layer of broken rock intermixed with soil. It was not entirely clear whether this layer represented the naturally degraded surface of the bedrock or deliberately broken rock produced by, for example, bulldozing of the land to create a level field. The rocky material was removed mechanically, revealing ridges of outcropping limestone bedrock, between which were natural deposits of clayey sand. At the southern end of the site the upper surface of the bedrock appeared damaged, suggesting previous mechanical intervention, however at the northern end the bedrock was undisturbed, suggesting that the broken rock layer was a natural phenomenon. During the mechanical stripping it became clear that the bedrock was extremely easily fractured and could have been quarried by hand, or damaged by natural weathering and frost. Additionally, local people testified that dynamite was used in the area to level rocky fields.

The six cairns (deposits 53-58) were composed of small pieces of limestone that appeared to be broken bedrock. The stones were loosely heaped up to form irregular oval mounds that measured from 2m to over 6m across. No artefacts were recovered from any of these deposits. All six mounds were located to the north of the driveway and overlay the broken rock layer described above.

Finds

No artefacts were recovered during the excavations, however a number of 19th and 20th century objects were observed within the topsoil. These items included glass and pottery fragments and a coin dating to 1944.

Samples

No soil samples were taken as it was considered that there was little potential for the recovery of useful information.

Discussion

The excavation at site AR27 did not reveal any evidence of the enclosures marked on the 1840 OS map (Fig. 4). The smaller of the two enclosures may lie outside the excavation site but the cartographic location of the larger monument is clearly within the area that was investigated. The six mounds of stone recorded on the site remain undated but are very probably 19th or 20th century field clearance cairns. Whilst it is possible that the stone pieces that formed the cairns originated within the rubble core of a cashel wall, this cannot be proven and there is no archaeological evidence to suggest that a stone fort ever existed on the site.

Two interpretations of the evidence are possible. Either the structure shown on the 1840 map was completely destroyed, or a monument was erroneously marked on the 1840 survey. Both monuments appear on the map as circular banked enclosures and the larger of the two was thought likely to represent an Early Christian stone cashel.

The complete destruction of the larger enclosure is not an implausible suggestion, although the hypothesis is dependent on the original method of construction. No negative features such as ditches were revealed during the excavation; therefore the enclosure can only have existed as an upstanding monument such as an earthen bank or stone wall. Given the rocky local geology, stone seems the more likely construction material. Parallels can be sought with other enclosures nearby, although it is not possible to demonstrate contemporaneity between the examples. Observations of two surviving monuments within the same townland (M27 and AR25, Taylor 2006a and 2006b – Fig. 2) suggest that the local style of building, at least at some point in the past, was of thick stone walls constructed with rough facing blocks surrounding a rubble core of small stones. This building style lends itself to destruction as, if the facing stones are robbed out to be used elsewhere, the rubble core collapses,

leaving a roughly circular bank of small stones. In the case of site AR27 such a bank of stones could have been largely removed to be used as hardcore, for example in the construction of the adjacent road, leaving the few small heaps recorded in the excavation. As no associated features or artefacts were recorded on the site, any destroyed enclosure must have been fairly barren, however this phenomenon has been demonstrated elsewhere, for example by the almost complete lack of features or artefacts from the excavation of the nearby stone enclosure at site AR25 (800m to the south) (Taylor 2006b).

The observed bedrock formations provide an alternative explanation for the larger circular enclosure marked on the 1840 map. A natural bowl-shaped depression had been formed by the seriated bedrock terraces in a location that correlates with the mapped monument. It is possible that these terraces, perhaps enhanced by clearance cairns, were erroneously interpreted in the mid 19th century as the remains of a stone fort.

It is, unfortunately, not possible to determine which of the alternative explanations is correct.

Archaeological potential off the road CPO

No archaeological deposits were found at Site AR27 within the road CPO. It is not certain, however if the smaller of the two enclosures (CL026-03602) marked on the 1840 OS map is archaeological and there is no surface expression of this possible monument.

Publication plan

A summary of the findings of the excavation has been submitted to *Excavations 2003*.

Copies of this final excavation report will be deposited with the Clare County Museum and the Local Studies Library, Ennis, Co. Clare

A summary article, describing the findings of this road project has been published in the local journal *The Other Clare* (Hull and Taylor 2005).

An illustrated information brochure describing the findings of this road project has been published by Clare County Council.

The stated aim of the National Roads Authority with regard to archaeological publication is clear, (O'Sullivan 2003) and it is anticipated that the results of this excavation will be disseminated as a minor component of a monograph dedicated to the archaeology of the Ennis Bypass. Publication is expected to take place in 2006/7 at the latest.

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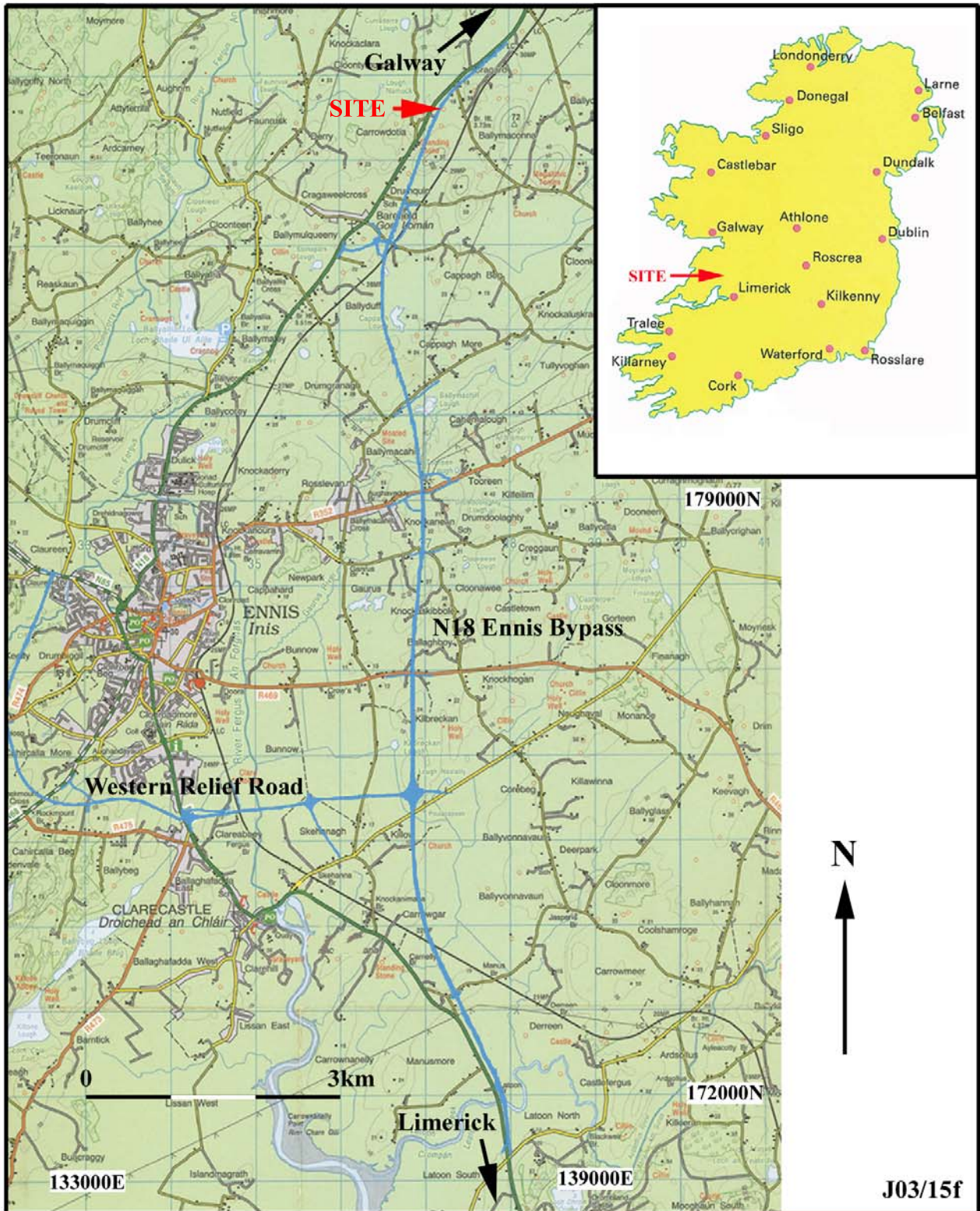
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Appendix 1: Catalogue of features and deposits

Cut	Deposit	Group Number	Description
-	50	-	Topsoil
-	51	-	Broken bedrock layer at southern end of site
-	52	-	Broken bedrock layer at northern end of site
-	53	-	Clearance cairn
-	54	-	Clearance cairn
-	55	-	Clearance cairn
-	56	-	Clearance cairn
-	57	-	Clearance cairn
-	58	-	Clearance cairn

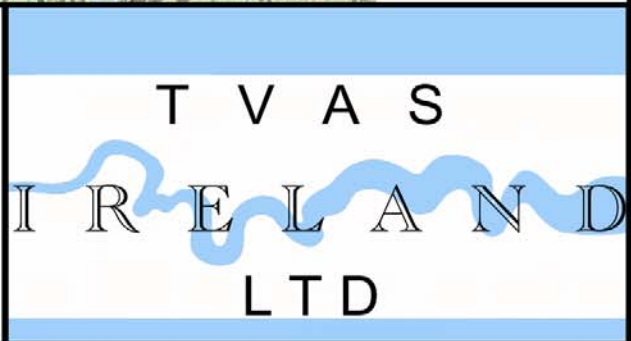


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Carrowdotia, Co. Clare
03E1443

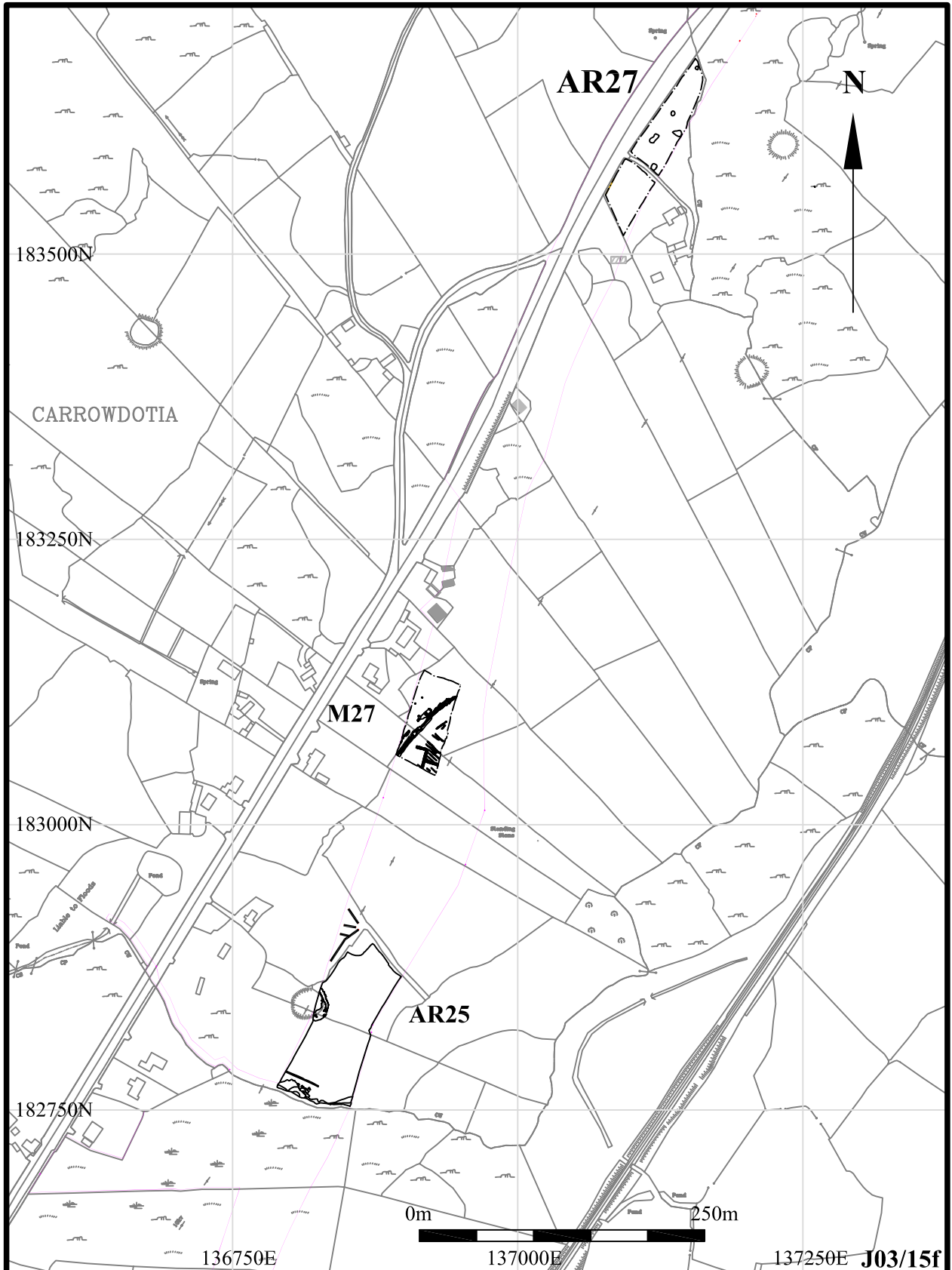
Figure 1: Site location

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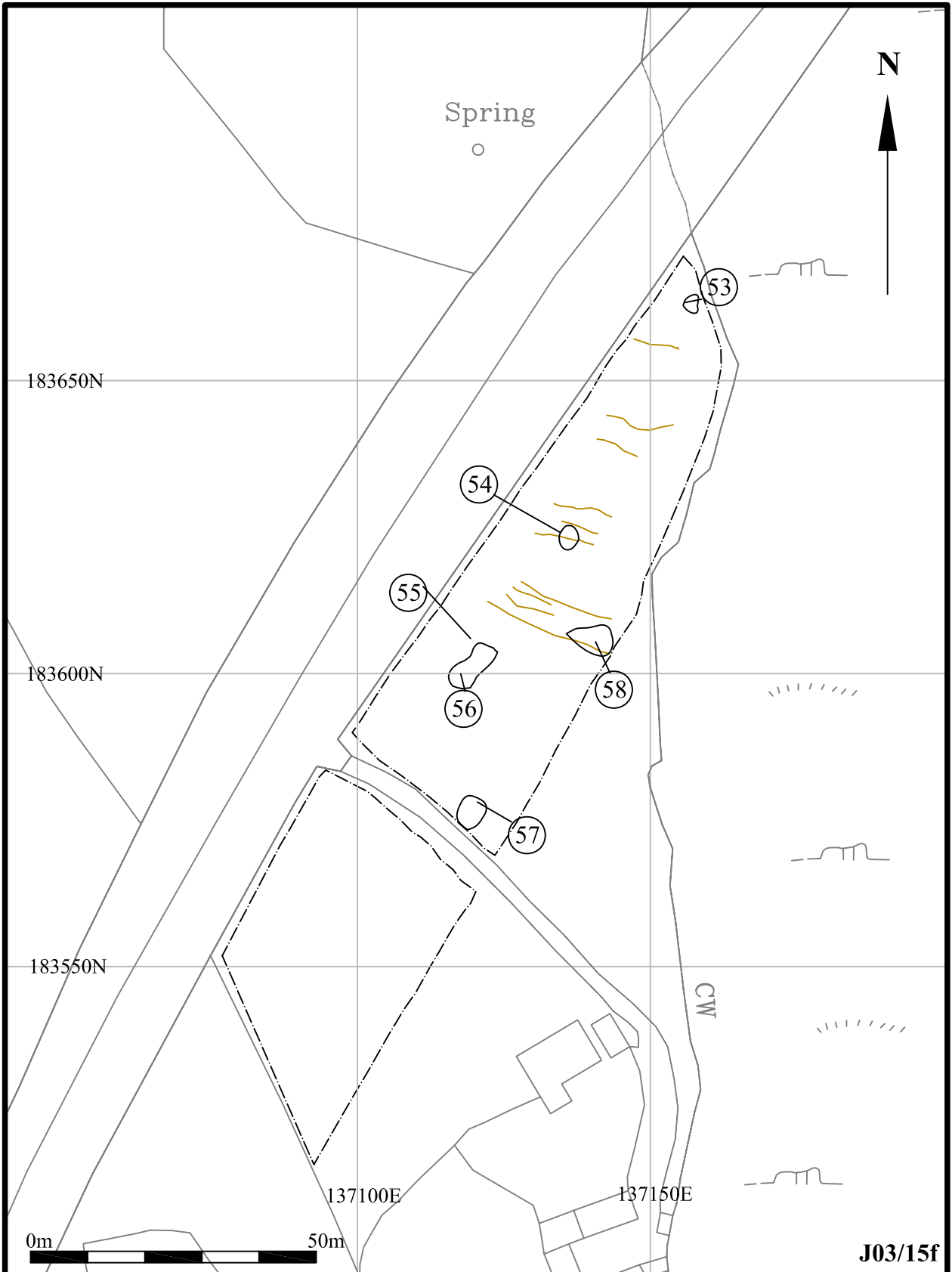
N18 Ennis Bypass AR27, Carrowdotia, Co. Clare

03E1443

Figure 2: Location of site relative to nearby excavations

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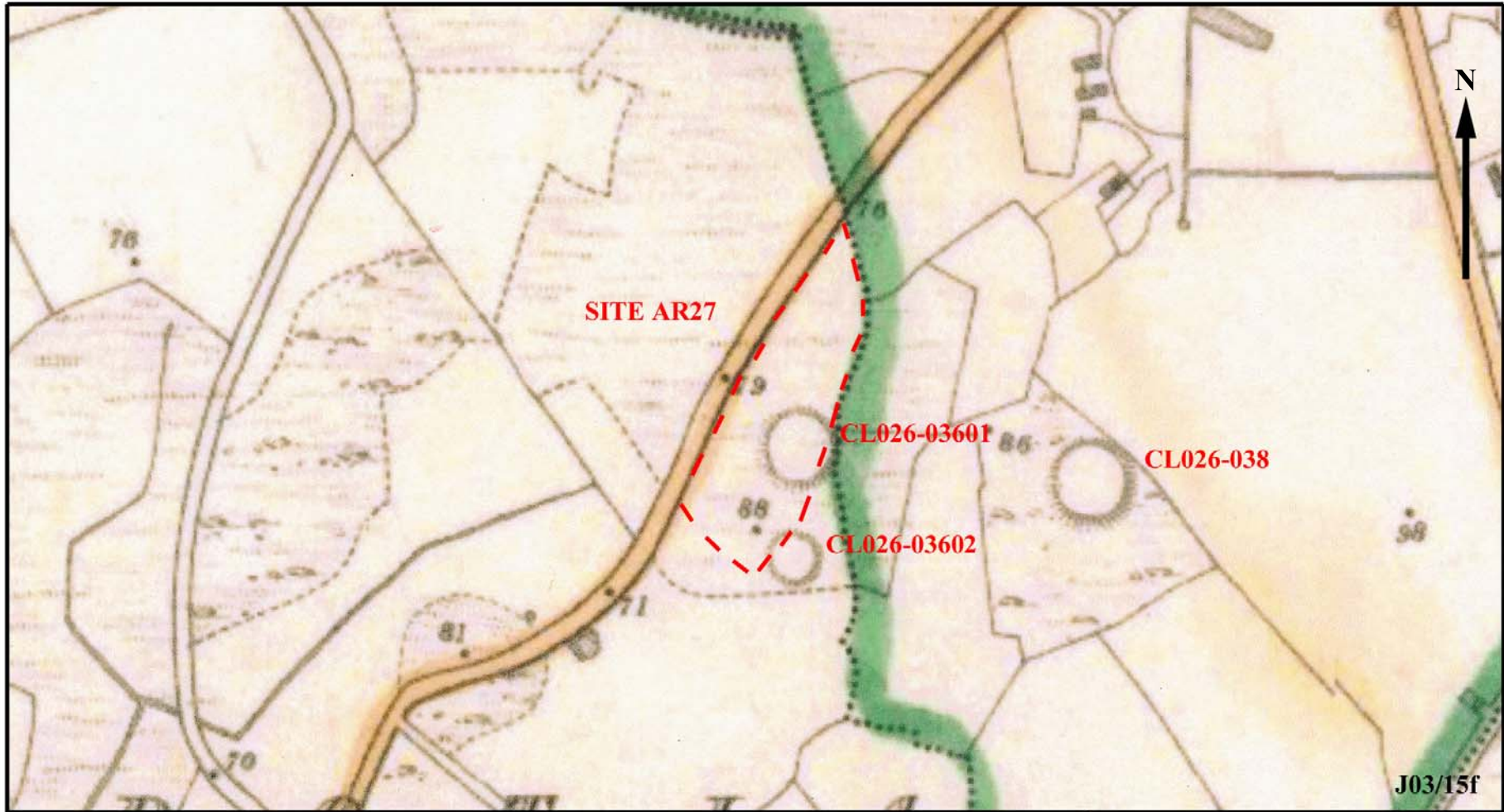
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Figure 3: Site Plan

Scale 1:1000

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T V A S
I R E L A N D
L T D



N18 Ennis Bypass, Site AR27, Carrowdotia, Co. Clare, 03E1443

Figure 4: Ordnance Survey 1st Edition Map 1840

Based on OS 6" to mile, surveyed 1840. Digital version from Clare County Library
Not to scale





**Plate 1 Clearance cairn 54 in centre of natural 'bowl' in bedrock.
Looking north. Scales 1m and 0.5m**



**Plate 2 Clearance cairn 57 during digital planning.
Looking north. Scales 1m and 0.5m**