

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

**Site AR54, Knockanean, Co. Clare**

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

**Licence No: 04E0192**

**by Kate Taylor**

**Job J04/01**

**(NGR 136945 178800)**

**1<sup>st</sup> August 2006**

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## Summary

**Site name:** N18 Ennis Bypass and N85 Western Relief Road, Site AR54, Knockanean, Co. Clare

**Townland:** Knockanean

**Parish:** Doora

**Barony:** Bunratty Upper

**County:** Clare

**SMR/RMP Number:** N/A

**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:** 136945 178800 (OSI Discovery Series 1:50,000, Sheet 58. OS 6" Clare Sheet 34)

**Naturally occurring geology:** Limestone bedrock

**TVAS Ireland Job No:** J04/01

**Licence No:** 04E0192

**Licence Holder:** Kate Taylor

**Report author:** Kate Taylor

**Site activity:** Excavation

**Site area:** 1000m<sup>2</sup>

**Sample percentage:** 100%

**Date of fieldwork:** 6<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> February 2004

**Date of report:** 1<sup>st</sup> August 2006

**Summary of results:** An undated circular stone-built enclosure was excavated. No cut features were present.

**Monuments identified:** Undated circular stone-built enclosure

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

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*Report edited/checked by: Graham Hull ✓/01.08.2006*

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**Report J04/01x**

**Introduction**

This report documents the final results of an archaeological excavation of an undated circular stone-built enclosure (Site AR54) on the route of the N18 Ennis Bypass and N85 Western Relief Road at Knockanean, Co. Clare (NGR 136945 178800) (Fig. 1). The excavation forms part of the Ennis Bypass Archaeological Contract 6.

A preliminary archaeological report for this site was produced in May 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 Claureen (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 was located in the townland of Knockanean, parish of Doora, barony of Bunratty Upper, approximately 3.5km north-east of Ennis town centre (the O'Connell Monument) and was centred on NGR 136945 178800 (Figs 1 and 2).

The site was in an area of dense hazel that grew on very thin topsoil overlying limestone bedrock. The site lay at approximately 22m above Ordnance Datum.

### **Archaeological 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 AR54 was highlighted as being of archaeological potential in the Environmental Statement (Babtie Pettit 2000). The stone enclosure was cleared of vegetation in winter 2002 and was examined by test trenching in May 2003 (03E0848 Connolly 2003). Seven test trenches were dug in and around the monument and did not find artefactual material or cut features. The walls of the enclosure were shown to be simply constructed from limestone boulders, described a circuit of 23m diameter and stood up to 1.5m high.

### **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 04E0192.

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 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> February 2004 and was directed by Kate Taylor, supervised by Graham Hull and assisted by Tim Dean.

The excavation area was rectangular, centred on the stone enclosure and examined 1000m<sup>2</sup>. Topsoil was removed by a 15 tonne, 360°, tracked machine, operated under direct and continuous archaeological supervision. The digger was fitted with a 5 foot toothless bucket.

A GPS survey of the monument was made prior to the excavation of slots across the wall of the enclosure. All topsoil and stone was removed from the site and confirmed the findings from the testing that the enclosure was built onto bedrock and did not have associated cut features.

A full written, drawn and photographic record was made following procedures outlined in the TVAS Ireland Field Recording Manual (First Edition 2003).

### **Excavation results** (Fig. 3 and Plates 1-3)

A near circular stone enclosure was the only feature recognised. The enclosure had a top-of-wall to top-of-wall diameter of 23m and enclosed an area of approximately 350m<sup>2</sup>.

The enclosure was built directly onto the outcropping limestone bedrock and was constructed from large unworked limestone boulders typically 0.3m to 0.4m across. No complexity of build was seen in the circular wall.

The wall stood, in places, to 1.5m high but was generally lower. Tumble from the wall was evident both inside and outside the enclosure. The wall had a typical width of 0.95m.

The circular enclosure seemingly pre-dated two linear walls that met the monument at the east and south-west. The construction of the two walls was, however, identical to the enclosure and all the walls seem to be part of a system of small fields.

A narrow entrance was recognised at the south-south-west of the walled circuit. This 'entrance' was little more than a narrow gap in the stonework and had a maximum width of 0.5m.

No cut features were present either internally or externally and no artefacts were recovered from the site.

### **Finds**

No finds were recovered.

### **Samples**

No soil samples were taken.

### **Discussion**

The testing, survey and full excavation of Site AR54, Knockanean, Co. Clare has produced no evidence for function or dating. In the absence of such data only speculation is possible.

There are at least seven similarly sized circular enclosures within 1.5km of AR54 and, of these, some are evidently ringforts or cashels likely to date to the second half of the first millennium AD. It would be simple then to suggest that AR54 was part of an Early Medieval landscape. A similarly sized circular enclosure was excavated nearby as part of the road project by the author and has been radiocarbon dated to Cal AD 530 to 650 (AR25 03E1442 Taylor 2006, 4km to the north). There were

a number of significant differences between AR54 and AR25. The enclosure at AR25 was similarly sized (26m diameter) but was built to a more complex design with walls 2.5m thick made from two faces of limestone blocks with a rubble core of smaller stones. The wall itself was built on a stone and earth bank. The AR54 enclosure was a much less substantial structure made from large limestone boulders sitting on bedrock and was identical in build to surrounding field walls.

The enclosure at Site AR54 is recorded on the 1840 Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition map (not illustrated). Perhaps significantly, the walls are shown as a small sub-circular field within a patchwork of small fields. Nearby ringforts/cashels are illustrated on the 1840 map with hachures and are double lined. While, of course, not definitive it seems that the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century survey did not recognise AR54 as an archaeological monument.

On balance, it can be suggested that AR54 was not a classic Early Medieval cashel but was a circular field, pre-dating 1840, that may have served as a cattle pen until relatively recent times.

### **Archaeological potential off the road CPO**

The stone walled enclosure was excavated within its entirety within the road CPO and taking into account the very shallow soil overlying bedrock, associated features are not likely to be present off the CPO.

### **Publication plan**

A summary of the findings of the excavation have been submitted to *Excavations 2004*.

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 component of a monograph dedicated to the archaeology of the Ennis Bypass. Publication is expected to take place in 2006/7 at the latest.

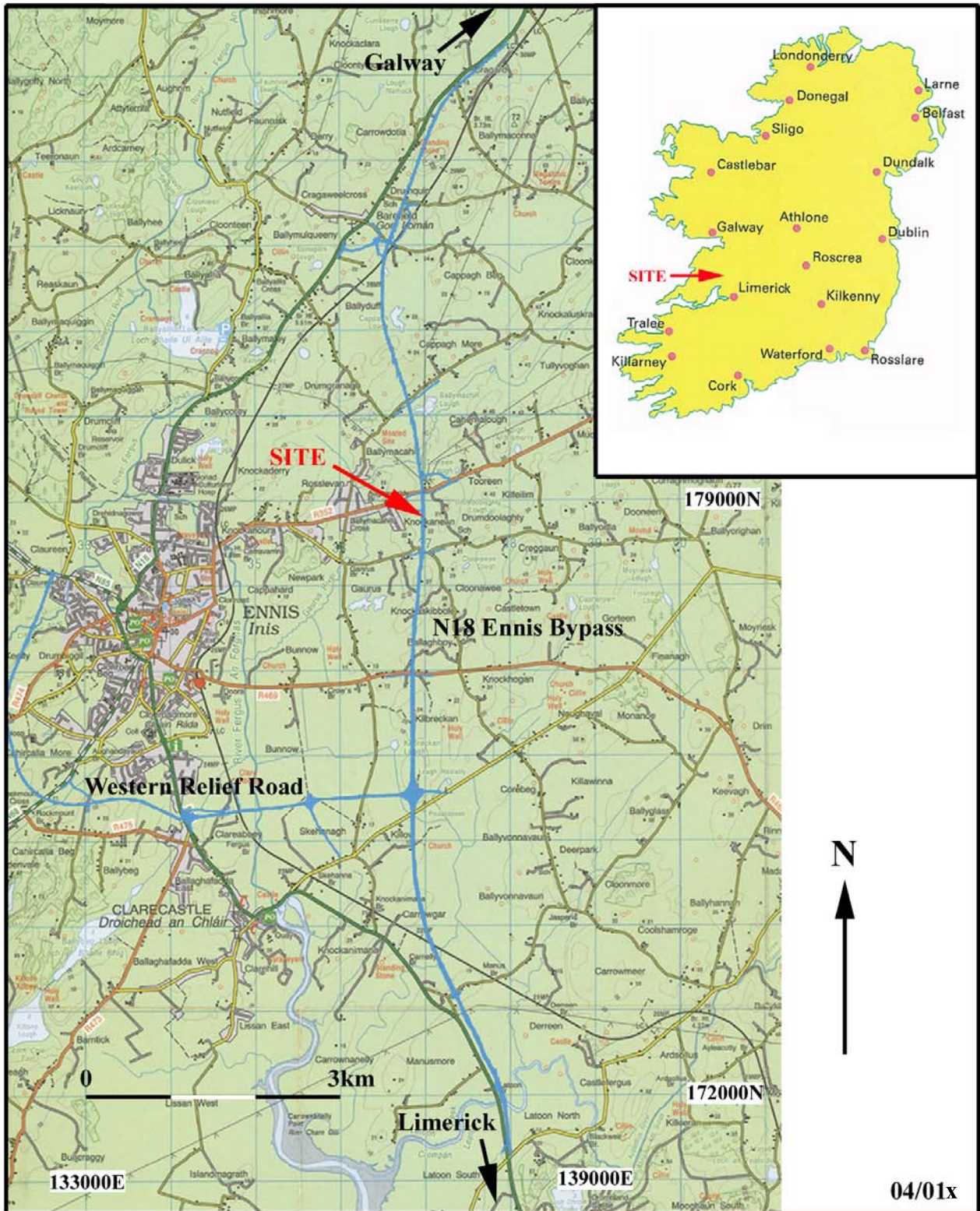
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**N18 Ennis Bypass, Site AR54,  
Knockanean, Co. Clare  
04E0192**

**Figure 1: Site location**

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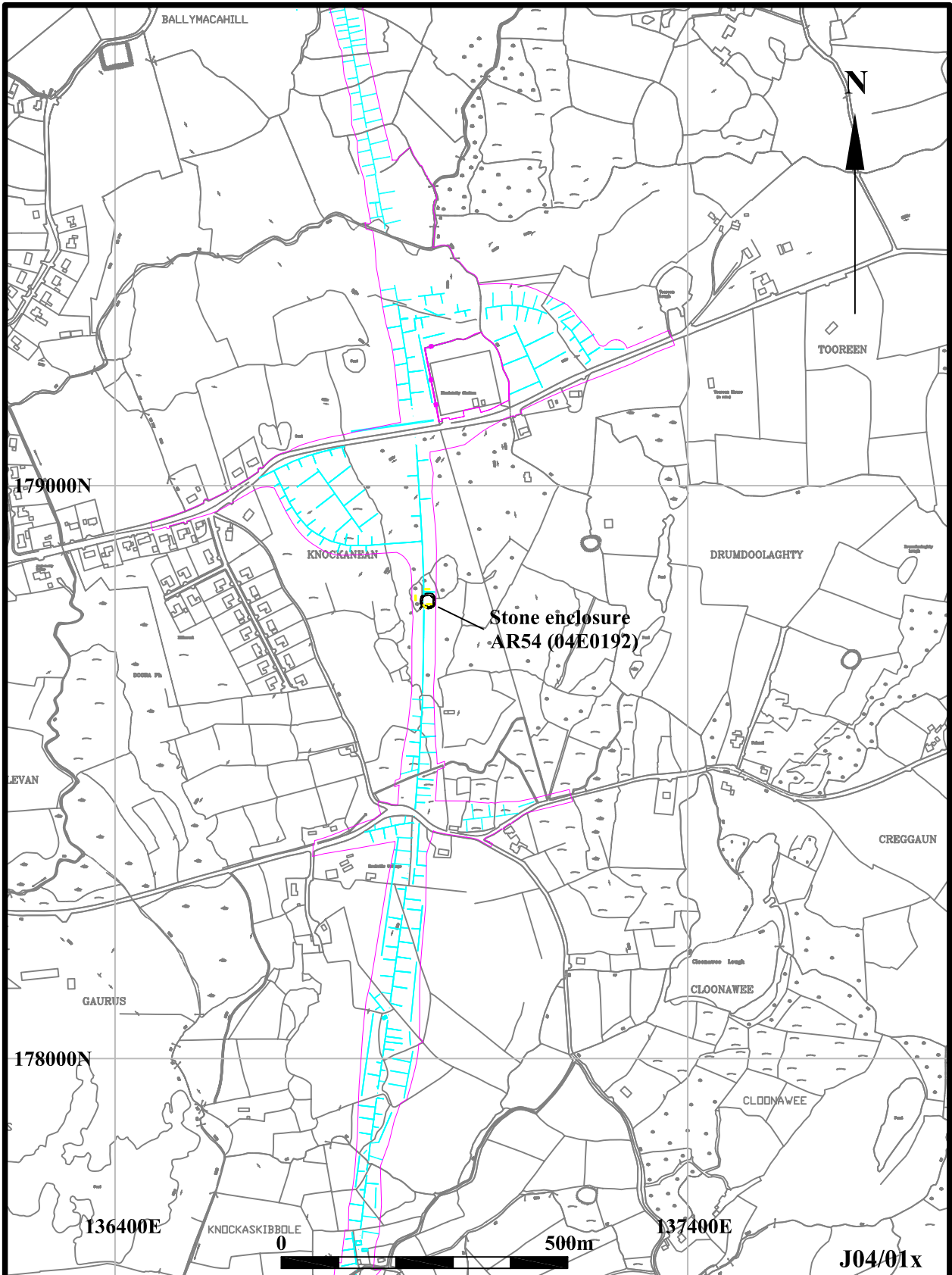
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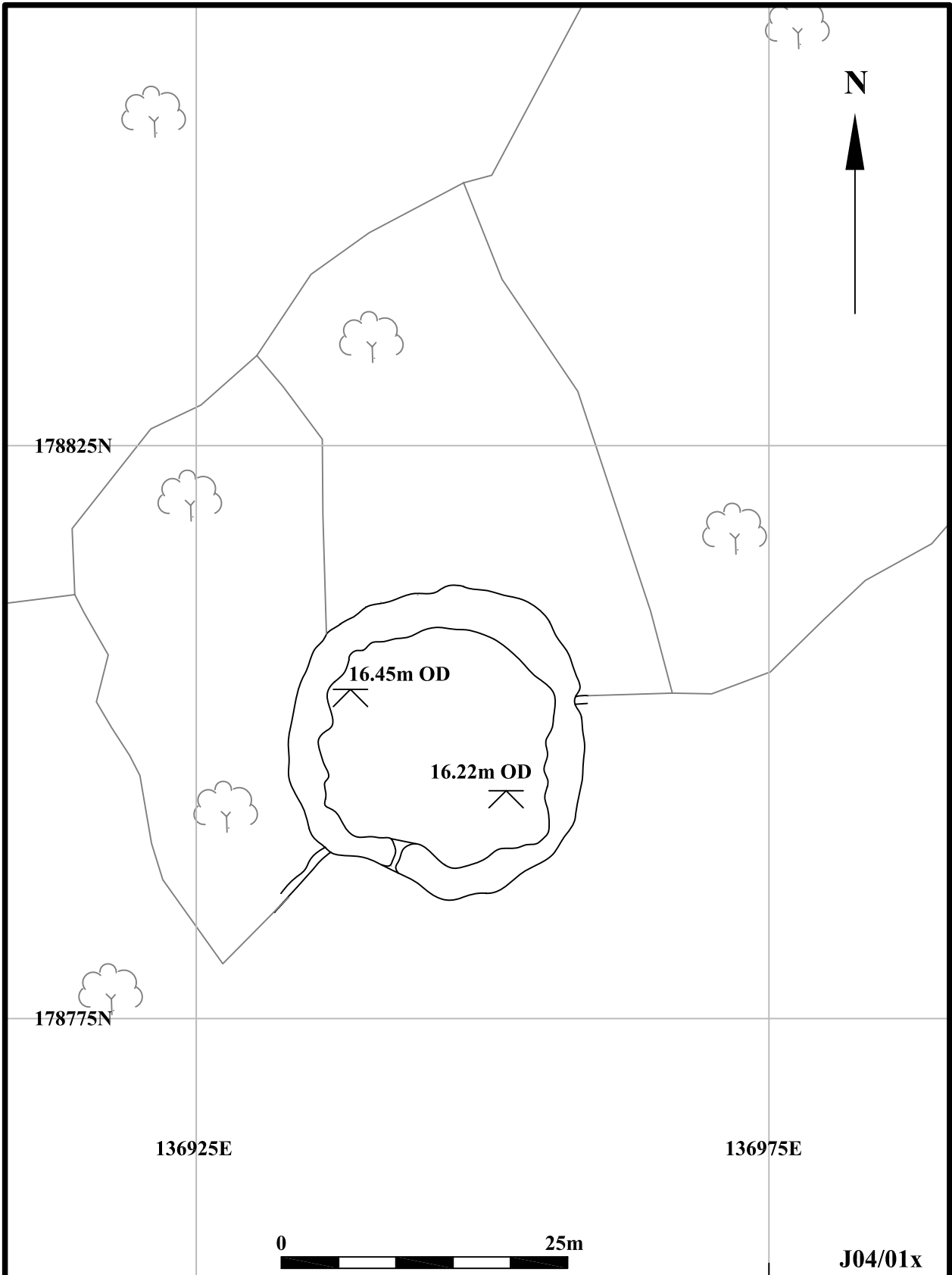


N18 Ennis Bypass, Site AR54, Knockanean, Co. Clare

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Figure 2: Stone enclosure within local landscape  
 Showing test trenches (03E0848 and 03E1293)  
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N18 Ennis Bypass, Site AR54, Knockanean, Co. Clare

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Figure 3: Stone enclosure

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Plate 1. Stone enclosure AR54. Looking east



**Plate 2. Profile across stone enclosure. Looking east. Scale 1m**



**Plate 3. Profile across stone enclosure. Looking north. Scale 1m**