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FURTHER ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT TRENCH 10,
PATTERN BANK, SEVEN CHURCHES TOWNLAND,
GLENDALOUGH, CO. WICKLOW
2015

STRATIGRAPHICAL REPORT

Ministerial Consent C536 ext. Excavation No. E4431. Metal Detection No. R310



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An Roinn
Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta
Department of
Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

November 2015

Excavations in 2015 at the Pattern Bank, Seven Churches, Glendalough, Co. Wicklow

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Abstract

This document outlines the results of small scale excavation undertaken in August 2015 on the Pattern Bank, in the immediate surrounds of the main Monastic Complex at Glendalough, Co. Wicklow (Figure 1). This excavation forms part of a long term UCD School of Archaeology research and teaching project in the Glendalough Valley. Work on the Pattern Bank was undertaken at the behest of the National Monuments Service and completes fieldwork begun in this location in 2014 (McDermott *et al.* 2014).

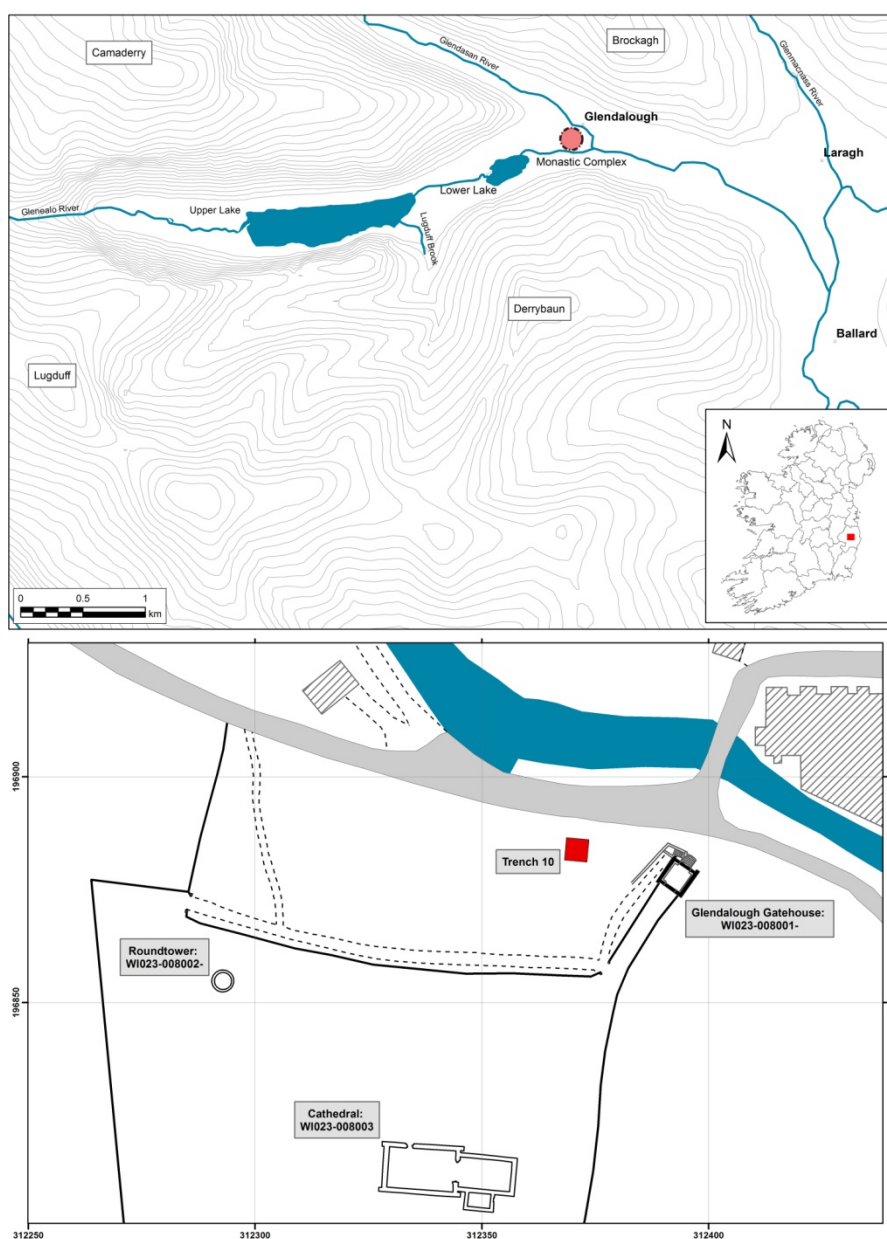


Figure 1: location of the Pattern Bank and Trench 10.

Background and Aims

The Pattern Bank is a small enclosed area located between the main Glendalough complex (WI023-008) and the modern road (R757) adjacent to the Glendasan River and demarcated from the main complex and the graveyard (WI023-008014-) by stone walls. It is characterised by a steep slope rising from the roadside to the north, and a flat, upslope area at the south, and lies immediately to the west of the gatehouse (WI023-008001-).

The Pattern Bank is often shown in stylised form in Eighteenth and Nineteenth century illustrations (Harbison 2011), as for example on Ledwich's 1804 illustration of 'Glandeloch [sic] from the North' (Figure 2), and is often depicted as comparatively free of obvious archaeological features (Figure 3) (Kavanagh 2003, 34; Harbison 2011)

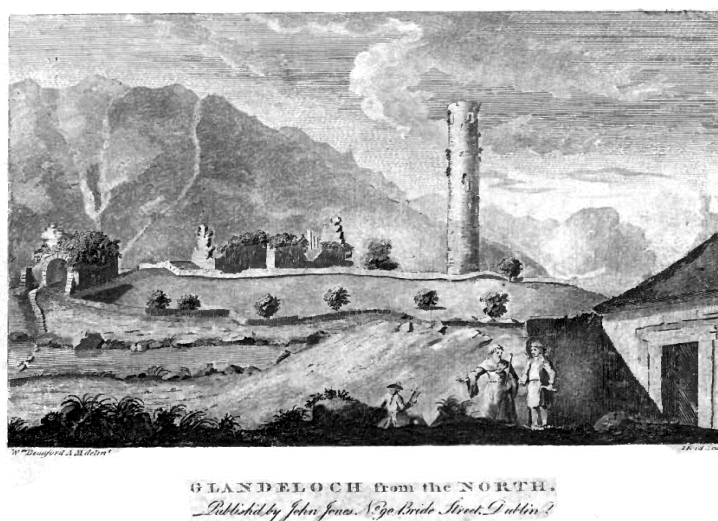


Figure 2: Pattern Bank shown clearly in Ledwich 1804.

Historical images show a variety of features on the Pattern Bank, including a path (Figure 3: right) and a recent tea room (Figure 4).

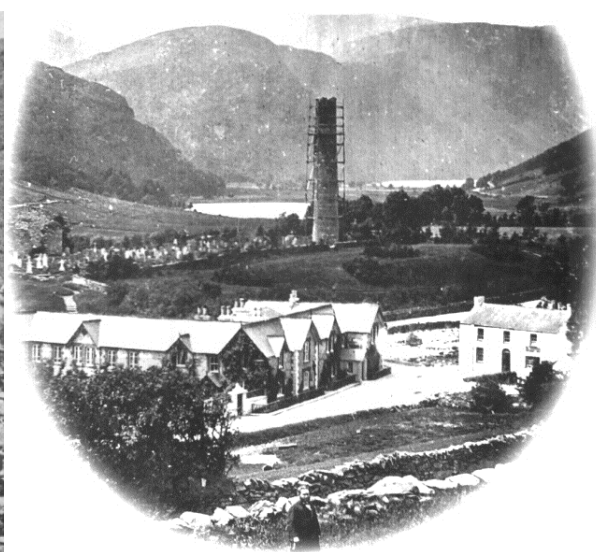


Figure 3: Left: Partial view of the Pattern Bank from the gate house c. 1850s with no trees or structures. Right: view of Glendalough in 1875-6, showing path sloping over the Pattern Bank (Kavanagh 2003, 58).



Figure 4: Left: McCoy's Tea Rooms, Pattern Bank; photograph probably from the 1940s (Kavanagh 2003, 37). Right: view of the Pattern Bank showing the pathway leading to the Tea Rooms and the relationship to the gate house (no date) (Glendalough Visitor's Centre).

In recent years the area was covered by low scrub set within mature pines. In 2012/3 a local community group cleared this scrub vegetation and this led to the uncovering of two large schist slabs at the eastern end of the steep slope of the Pattern Bank (Figure 5 & Figure 6).



Figure 5: Area of disturbance, gatehouse visible to rear. Facing East ©Con Manning.



Figure 6: Detail of possible archaeological feature in area of disturbance. Facing West ©Con Manning.

This area formed the focus for small scale excavation undertaken by UCD School of Archaeology in 2014 (McDermott *et al.* 2014). This excavation was hampered by very poor weather which made excavating on the steep slope extremely hazardous, and it was not possible to complete the proposed aims of the project. The excavation did demonstrate that the slabs were possibly set into a slight notch into the bank and had slumped into their current position from some kind of low wall or revetment (Figure 7, Figure 10). However, given the poor conditions and time constraints it was not possible to remove the stone slabs and sample underlying deposits. Therefore UCD School of Archaeology were commissioned by National Monuments Service to follow on from the 2014 season and complete excavation of the potential archaeological features exposed on the Pattern Bank. In particular to the aims for the 2015 field season were to resolve the relationship of the stone feature to the slope of the pattern bank and to find material to provide a date for this structure.

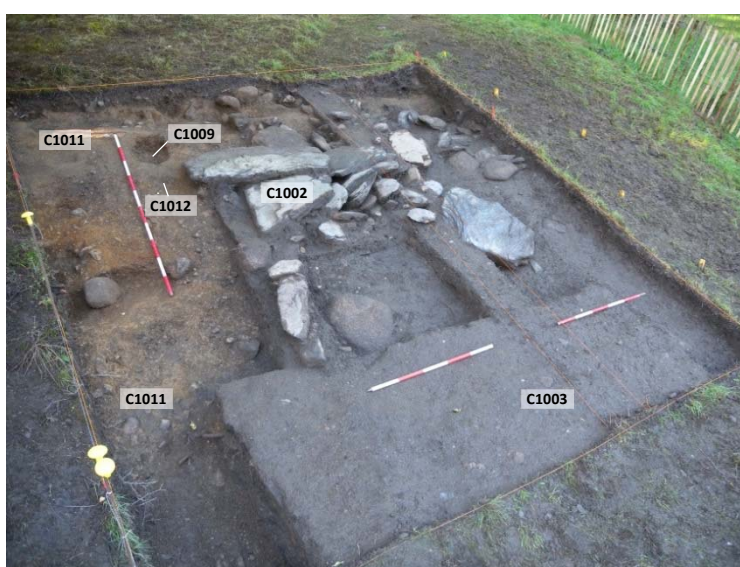


Figure 7: SVN14, Tr 10, facing southwest. Post excavation overview.

Excavation Methodology

Excavations took place 17–28th August as part of the UCD School of Archaeology Field School.

- Excavations were by hand. All spoil was placed on plastic sheeting and the sites were reinstated following excavation. Routine sampling strategies were utilised
- Finds retrieval was by excavation by trowel and where appropriate by sieving of excavated soils on site and flotation of samples during the post-excitation phase. A licenced metal detector was used as part of the excavation strategy in order to maximise the possibility of retrieval of any archaeological objects that may be present in the ditch or in any other excavated soils.
- All archaeological contexts were individually recorded by written description, drawing and photography.
- The locations and extents of all trenches and key features/finds were surveyed using differential GPS which was also used to provide control within the excavated areas.

Results

A 3 x 2.20m trench was placed over the main concentration of stones identified in 2014 (Figure 11). The excavation and the backfilling of the trench were done by hand by a small number of people. This was due to the trench's location on the steep northern facing slope and its small size both of which made working conditions difficult, especially during wetter weather. Removing the stone slabs was done by hand using nets and levers (Figure 9). The previous year's back fill was removed and contexts **C1002**, **C1003**, **C1005**, and **C1011** exposed to their post excavation point from 2014.



Figure 8: SVN15, Tr 10, facing S. Mid excavation showing stone slabs (C.1002) before removal.



Figure 9: SVN15, Tr 10, Removal of stone slabs.

Post-excitation Trench 10, Sevenchurches, Glendalough, Co. Wicklow (E4431, 2014)

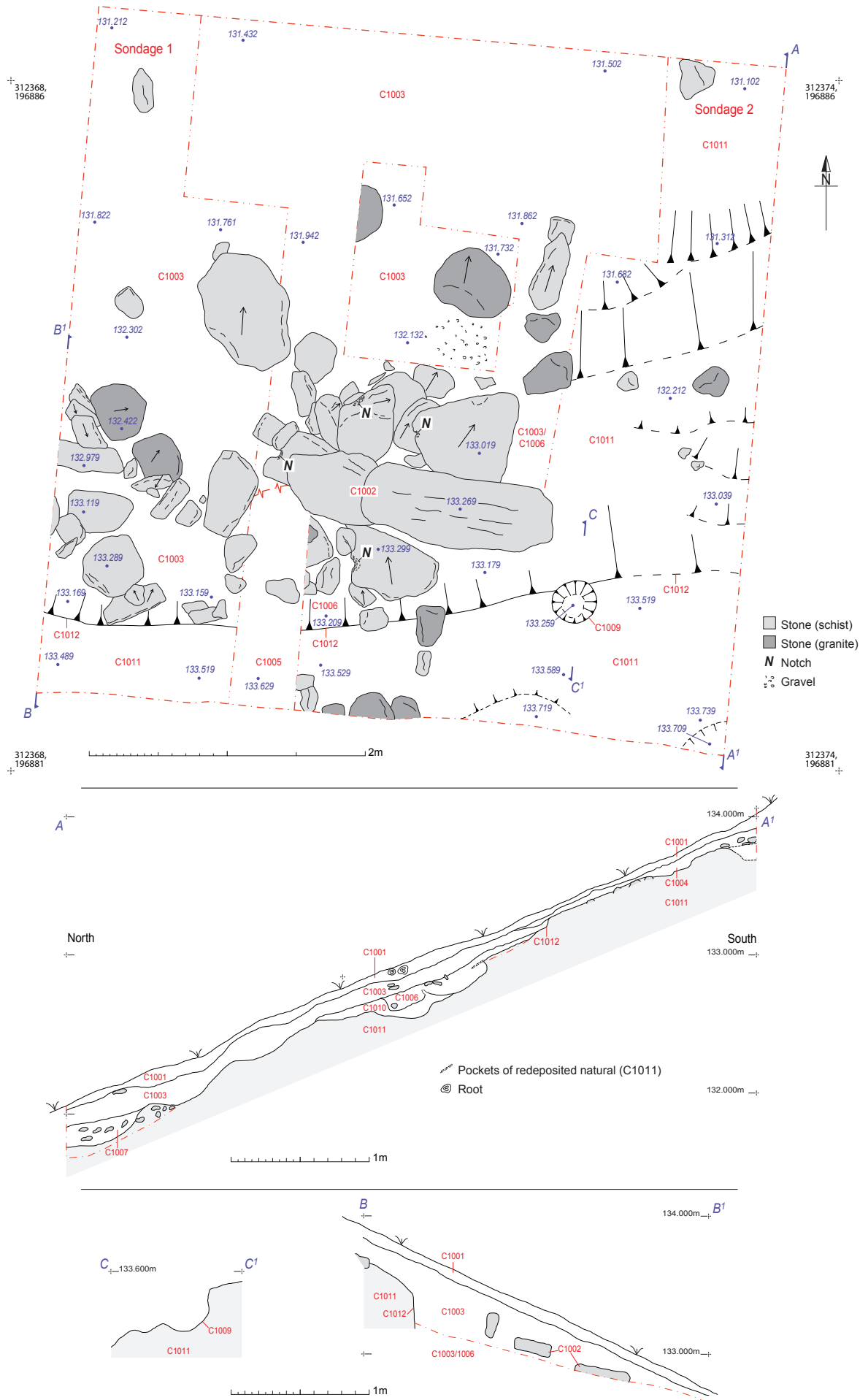
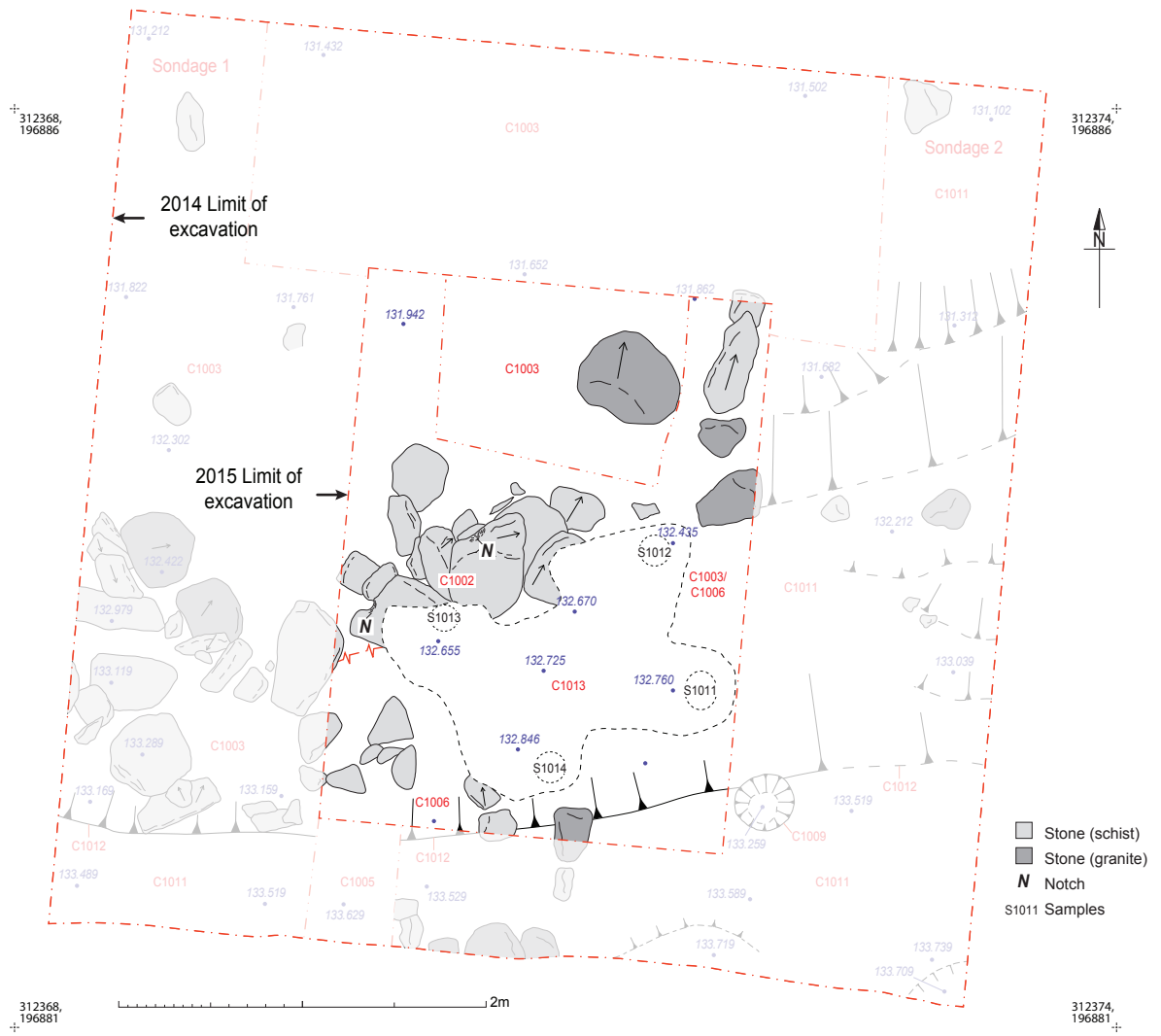


Figure 10: Post-excitation plan and sections of Trench 10 excavations 2014

Mid-excavation Trench 10, Sevenchurches, Glendalough, Co. Wicklow (E4431, 2014 & 2015)



Trench 10 Context Matrix (2014 & 2015)

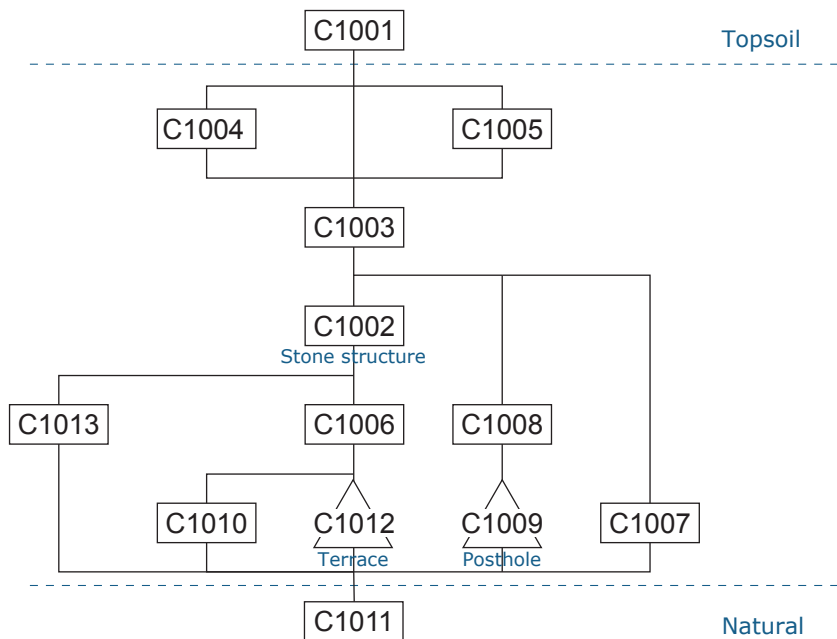


Figure 11: Mid-excavation plan and matrix of Trench 10 excavations 2015.

Post-excitation Trench 10, Sevenchurches, Glendalough, Co. Wicklow (E4431, 2014 & 2015)

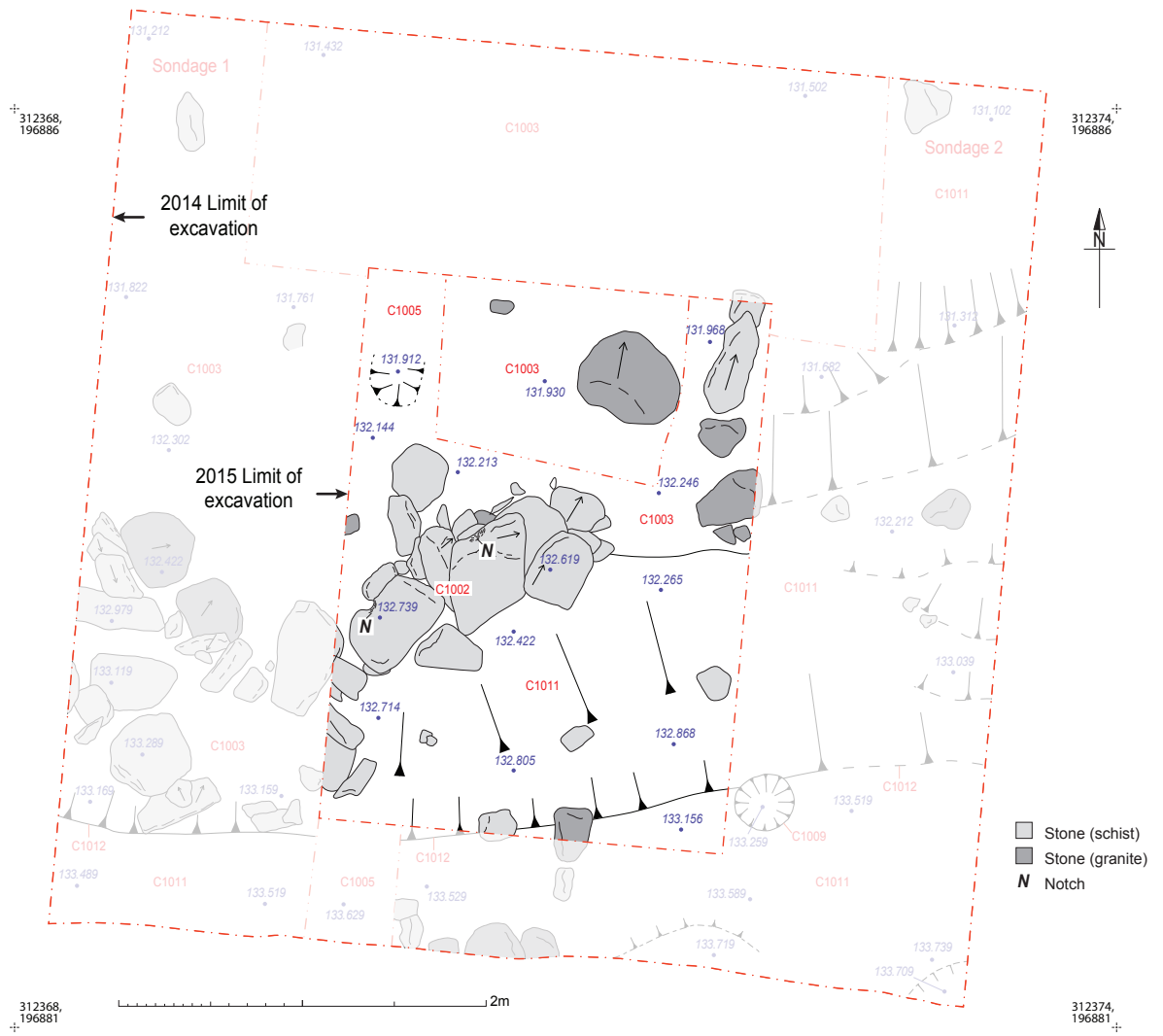


Figure 12: Post-excitation plan of Trench 10 excavations 2015

Stratigraphic Sequence

The stratigraphic sequence remains largely the same as at the end of the 2014 field season:

C1006 which was previously thought to possibly run under some of the stones is localised around the edges of **C1002** but does not run underneath it.

C1005 which was originally thought to be a sterile deposit, was found to contain at least some material culture with the retrieval of a single undiagnostic worked flint (SF.1020) during the removal of a remaining baulk in the south west corner of the trench (Figure 13). This was the only artefact recovered from Trench 10 during the 2015 field season.



Figure 13: Flint flake found during 2015

One new context has been identified, **C1013**, which was a loose-moderately compacted brown/dark brown silty clay immediately underlying the large schist slabs (**C1002**). This deposit is difficult to interpret: it probably represents soils disturbed by the movement of the large slabs, possibly in part being deposits into which the slabs were set, but also incorporates slope-wash. Given that the slabs themselves are slightly displaced and that much material has moved down the slope, this deposit is not considered to provide strong evidence for the antiquity of the structure. Nevertheless, a soil sample was taken from **C.1013** directly under each of the four moved schist slabs (S1011-S1014) and a piece of unburnt bone (S1010) also came from this context (Figure 13, Figure 14). One of the key aims of the 2015 field season was to retrieve material that could provide a radiocarbon date for the stone revetment. While this bone is fairly well sealed by the slabs and is certainly large enough for C14 dating, as it is residual in its current context, it would at best be a *terminus post quem*.



Figure 14: SVN15, Tr 10, Facing S. Mid-excavation Detail of C.1013 following removal of one large schist slab (C.1002)



Figure 15: SVN15, Tr 10, Facing S. Post-excavation overview.



Figure 16: SVN15, Tr 10, Facing N. Post excavation overview.

During the 2014 excavation a number of the larger schist slabs were observed to have notches or angular areas removed from them. However it was unclear what the function of these notches/ removals were. Additional examples of these notches were also observed during the 2015 field season (Figure 17). In tandem to the excavations at Trench 10 an extensive graveyard survey was undertaken by John Tierney (*Historic Graves*), UCD undergraduate students and local volunteers (Tierney *et al.* 2015). During this survey a number of similar slabs were observed in the graveyard, acting as grave-markers (Figure 17). Like the schist slabs found in Trench 10 these grave markers had no marks or inscriptions on the faces of the stones however they did have similar notches and removals around their edges. Following consultation with John Tierney it was established that in some communities in Ireland there was a tradition of using locally available stones (often taken from near a families homestead) as grave-markers. In lieu of inscriptions these markers will have a notch cut into the stones edge, with location of these notches corresponding to particular families. While this tradition is largely attributed to the 19th century, the use of these headstones in some locations remains in living memory (Tierney 2015, pers comm. August 25th). These slabs in the low wall or revetment in Tr. 10 are therefore interpreted as reused grave-markers, which were possibly removed from the graveyard when the marker was replaced with a more modern headstone or due to clearing works (e.g. during the laying of paths through the graveyard). This would imply that the wall is comparatively recent in date.

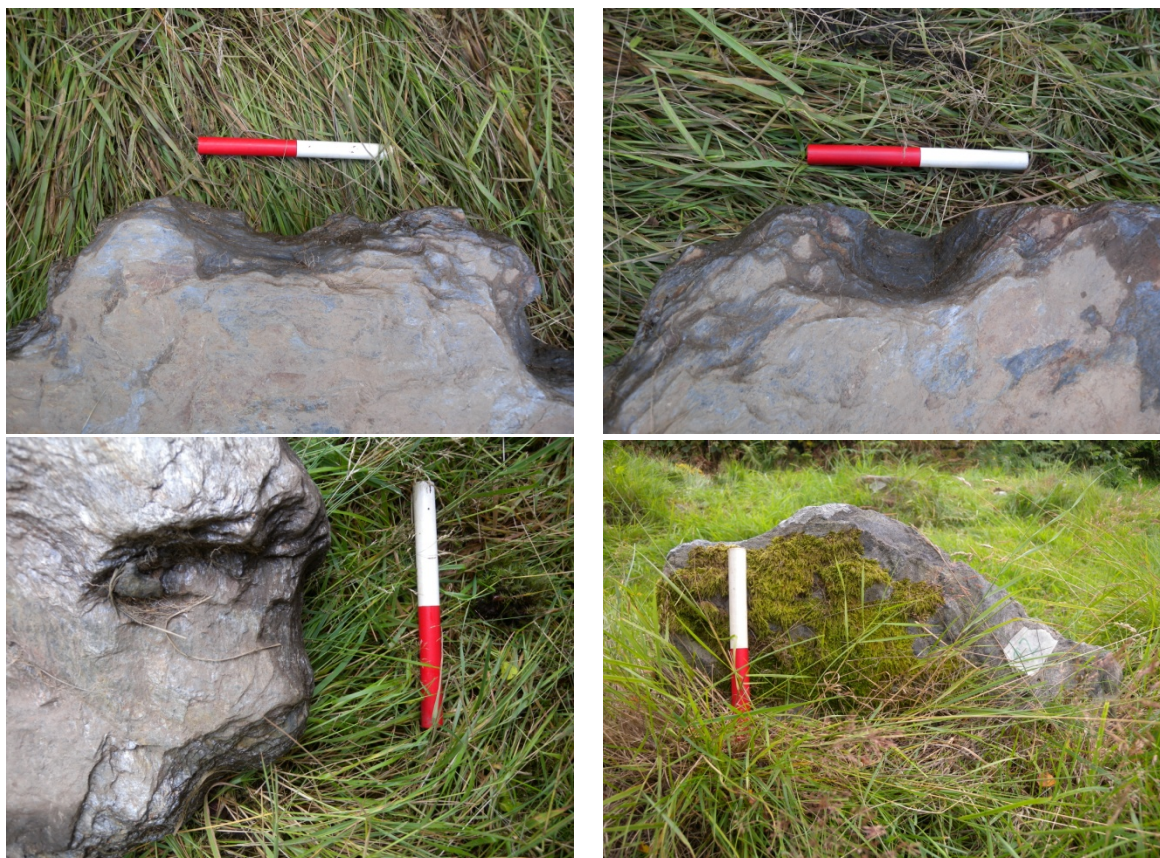


Figure 17: SVN15, Tr 10. Detailed views of the notched schist slabs after removal (top row, bottom left). Grave-marker from the main graveyard (bottom right) with notch within cemetery (Grave 92).

Conclusions

The 2015 field season has been successful and has resolved the outstanding questions relating to the low stone wall/ revetment (C1202) and its relationship to the Pattern Bank. In its current location it is not directly associated with any cut or step into the natural subsoil, therefore it is probable that the material constituting the wall has slipped down slope and was originally associated with the cut C1012 some 0.40m above it. The large schist slabs forming the core of this wall have been interpreted as reused grave-markers from the nearby graveyard. Their size, geology and notching match similar examples currently still in situ in the graveyard. The piece of bone recovered from underneath the schist slabs could be used to help date the wall however given that the context it was recovered from is very mixed and that the reuse of 18th/ 19th century grave-makers in wall provides an indication of recent date, this is probably unnecessary.

The overall orientation and character of this structure remains ambiguous. A number of small test pits running along the length of the pattern bank would help map the extent and orientation of this feature. Assuming that the wall is of comparatively recent date might suggest that further analysis of historic photographs would be useful. These already demonstrate rapid changes to this area. UCD fieldwork elsewhere in the Glendalough valley has demonstrated the significance of modern tourism, industry and agriculture activity in shaping the survival of archaeological features. The wall on the Pattern Bank is another example of the complex histories of this landscape.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1: Feature register

Context No.	Feature	Dimensions	Trench
C1001	<i>Topsoil</i>	L 5m, Wth 5m, D 0.14m	Tr.10
Description: Moderately compact dark-brown clayey-silt with high humic content frequent roots and occasional small stones. Interpretation: Topsoil.			
C1002	<i>Stone structure</i>	L 3.6m, Wth 1.85m, D ---m	Tr.10
Description: Deposit of large mica schist slabs and occasional medium and large granite boulders set into possible step (C1012) cut into natural bank. The concentration of stones is oriented E-W. Some of the stones may have slipped forward (to the north) as there is a considerable amount of soil (C1006) under the stones. Interpretation: Possible stone revetment.			
C1003	<i>Archaeological soil</i>	L 5m, Wth 5m, D 0.07m	Tr.10
Description: Moderately compact mid grey-brown, clayey-silt found throughout trench, immediately underneath the topsoil C1001. It covered the stone deposit (C1002), and was very similar to C1006, which was underneath the stones. It contained glazed and unglazed pottery, including two possible sherds of Leinster Cooking Ware, a possible quartz blade and a flint flake. C1003 was one of the main deposits, and appeared to represent material that had been washed down the bank. Interpretation: Main deposit of wash material that accumulated on a natural bank.			
C1004	<i>Redeposited natural</i>	L 1.5m, Wth 0.7m, D 0.05m	Tr.10
Description: Compact mid yellow-brown, sandy-silt with very occasional charcoal inclusions, localised in southeast corner of trench. Very similar to natural (C1010), but the charcoal inclusions and the presence of a corroded iron fragment (SF1004) suggest that it is redeposited natural. Interpretation: Redeposited natural.			
C1005	<i>Archaeological soil</i>	L 1.60m, Wth 1mm, D 0.03m	Tr.10
Description: Compact mottled mid-grey, sandy-silt with brown flecks. Thin localised fill in SW part of trench, associated with the stone deposit (C1002). In places it is directly above natural (C1001), while elsewhere some of the stones extend beneath it. Mottled grey gritty deposit in SW part of trench. Interpretation: Thin sterile fill beneath and partially covering stone deposit (C1002).			
C1006	<i>Archaeological soil</i>	L 3m, Wth 0.9m, D 0.15m	Tr.10
Description: Moderately compact, dark grey-brown clayey-silt with moderately frequent charcoal inclusions and occasional small (<10cm) sub-angular stones. Localised fill in the step containing main concentration of stones (C1002). Very similar to C1003 which covers the stones, but has more charcoal inclusions. Interpretation: Deposit with charcoal inclusions under stone deposit C1002.			
C1007	<i>Sterile fill</i>	L 1m, Wth 0.84m, D 0.17m	Tr.10
Description: Loose grey coarse-sand at bottom of slope of bank. The fill is quite sterile and appears to be material that has washed down/accumulated at the bottom of the bank. It was identified during excavation of a sondage along the eastern edge of the trench. Interpretation: Sterile deposit at bottom of bank.			
C1008	<i>Fill of posthole</i>	L 0.4m, Wth 0.34m, D 0.25m	Tr.10
Description: Loose mid-brown, silty-clay with frequent small roots and pebbles. Fill of possible posthole. Interpretation: Fill of possible posthole C1009.			
C1009	<i>Posthole</i>	L 0.4m, Wth 0.34m, D 0.25m	Tr.10
Description: Cut of possible sub-circular posthole with concave base. Sides were gently sloped (north), moderately sloped (east and west), and vertical (south). Interpretation: Possible posthole C1008.			
C1010	<i>Sterile fill</i>	L 0.92m, Wth 0.5m, D 0.06m	Tr.10
Description: Loose mid yellow-brown sandy-silt with high gravel content and very occasional charcoal flecks. Relatively sterile fill, localised in eastern part of trench in area of possible small step cut into the bank. Abutting C1006. Interpretation: Sterile deposit in possible small step cut into the bank.			

Context No.	Feature	Dimensions	Trench
C1011	<i>Natural</i>	L 5m, Wth 5m, D ----m	Tr.10
<p>Description: Yellow-orange sandy-silt with high gravel content. Loose and friable on the slope of the bank.</p> <p>Interpretation: Natural subsoil.</p>			
C1012	<i>Cut feature</i>	L 5m, Wth m, D 0.2m	Tr.10
<p>Description: Possible stepping of natural bank. E-W oriented linear cut with moderately steep southern side (no northern side due to fall in slope). May have been deliberately dug in order to accommodate the stone deposit/revetment C1002. Extends across width of the trench, but is most pronounced in the area of the stones. Minimum depth of 0.20m - stones would have to be removed to ascertain its maximum depth.</p> <p>Interpretation: Possible stepping of bank.</p>			
C1013	<i>Archaeological soil</i>	L 1.90mm, Wth 0.70mm, D 0.15mm	Tr. 10
<p>Description: A silty clay with sub angular and platy stone (local lithology) inclusions 1-2cm in size and 8-12cm in size. Some charcoal flecking throughout. The soil is poorly sorted. It is brown in colour and loosely to moderately compacted with a blocky structure. It had a sharp upper and lower boundary.</p> <p>Interpretation: Soil directly under C1002 with its limits dictated by the overlying stones. Though the soil was free of finds it was mixed and aerated.</p>			

Appendix 2 : SVN14 & SVN15, Tr. 10. Combined 2014-15 Finds register

Context Number:	Small Find Number:	Date	Material	Description
C1001	SF1001	19/08/14	Modern	Three-pence coin from topsoil. Date obscured by corrosion.
C1003	SF1002	21/08/14	Ceramic	Small rectangular fragment of pottery. Red interior, grey fabric, traces of light green-yellow glaze on exterior. Possibly Dublin-type ware
C1003	SF1003	21/08/14	Ceramic	Small fragmented of abraded, unglazed pottery. Fully fired - red throughout.
C1003	SF1005	21/08/14	Ceramic	Black/Brown glazed rim sherd.
C1003	SF1006	22/08/14	Ceramic	Multiple fragments of unglazed medieval pottery rim sherd (Leinster Cooking Ware). Very friable, mica inclusions, red on side, blackened on other. Found close to one of the stones of C.1002.
C1003	SF1007	26/08/14	Ceramic	Well-made medieval pottery (Leinster Cooking Ware) body sherd. Blackened exterior, mid grey-brown fabric with mica inclusions, light orange interior. Found during digging of sondage in eastern part of trench.
C1003	SF1008	26/08/14	Flint	Round, thick flint flake. Cortex still present on most of its edges.
C1003	SF1009	27/08/14	Quartz	Possible quartz blade, found in slight depression in the southeast corner of the trench.
C1003	SF1010	27/08/14	Flint	Small patinated flint flake .
C1003	SF1011	27/08/14	Ceramic	Small sherd of fully-fired pottery. Red fabric throughout. Light brown glaze on exterior covers a raised area and possible herringbone/leaf design.
C1003	SF1012	27/08/14	Ceramic	Small, thin sherd of unglazed pottery (Leinster Cooking Ware). Frequent mica inclusions, one side blackened, other side a light buff colour.
C1003	SF1013	21/08/14	Clay	Fragment of clay pipe bowl. Sondage 1.
C1003	SF1014	21/08/14	Ceramic	Fragment of creamware with pale blue decoration. Sondage 1.
C1004	SF1004	21/08/14	Iron	Small corroded iron fragment.
C1005	SF1020	24/08/15	Flint	One small piece of worked flint with outside cortex still visible

Appendix 3: SVN14 & SVN15, Tr. 10. Combined 2014-15 Sample register

Sample_No.	Trench/Area	Context	Description	Initials	Date
S1001	Tr.10	C1003	Small fragment of burnt bone.	CNL	26/08/14
S1002	Tr.10	C1007	Soil sample from northern end of sondage in eastern part of the trench.	CNL	26/08/14
S1003	Tr.10	C1003	Two fragments of burnt bone found in the sondage in the western part of the trench.	CNL	27/08/14
S1004	Tr.10	C1003	Burnt bone fragments found to the east of the sondage in the western part of the trench.	CNL	28/08/14
S1005	Tr.10	C1003	Soil sample	CNL	28/08/14
S1006	Tr.10	C1008	Soil sample of fill of posthole (C.1009)	EA	29/08/14
S1007	Tr.10	C1006	Soil sample from deposit beneath concentration of stones (C.1002).	CNL	29/08/14
S1010	Tr.10	C1013	Bone Sample	NK	21/08/15
S1011	Tr.10	C1013	Soil Sample, Under slab 1	TM	21/08/15
S1012	Tr.10	C1013	Soil Sample, Under slab 2	TM	21/08/15
S1013	Tr.10	C1013	Soil Sample, Under slab 3	TM	21/08/15
S1014	Tr.10	C1013	Soil Sample, Under slab 4	TM	21/08/15



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