



**SHILLA AND BOG  
HEAD BASTLES,  
KIELDER FOREST  
NORTHUMBERLAND**

**Fabric Survey Report**



**Oxford Archaeology North**

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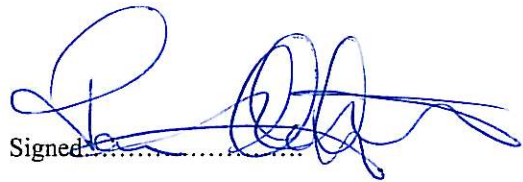
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Oxford Archaeology North would like to thank Jonathan Farries, of the Forestry Commission, for commissioning the project and for his assistance during the survey. We would also like to thank David Andrews and Sara Rushton, of English Heritage, for their advice and assistance.

The survey was undertaken by Marc Storey, assisted by Christina Robinson. The report was written and edited by Jamie Quartermaine and the illustrations were by Anne Stewardson. The project was managed by Jamie Quartermaine.

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## SUMMARY

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Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was invited by Jonathon Farries, of the Forestry Commission, to undertake an accurate fabric survey of the Shilla Hill (NY 7636 9038) and Bog Head (NY 7615 9099) bastles, Kielder Forest, Northumberland. Both structures are listed on the English Heritage (EH) Buildings at Risk register and, accordingly, English Heritage issued a brief for a programme of rectified photographic survey to be undertaken on each of the buildings (dated 23/01/07). A project design (OA North 2007) was compiled by OA North in accordance with the brief. The field survey was undertaken in March 2007.

The elevations of the bastles were recorded by rectified photography with respect to a survey control established using a total station. The images were scanned and any residual distortion within the photographic base was removed by digital correction using Photoplan software. Elevation drawings were produced within AutoCAD with respect to these images and have been submitted in accordance with the brief and project design.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was invited by Jonathon Farries of the Forestry Commission to undertake an accurate fabric survey of the Shilla Hill (NY 7636 9038) and Bog Head (NY 7615 9099) bastles, Kielder Forest, Northumberland. Both structures are listed on the English Heritage (EH) Buildings at Risk register and, accordingly, English Heritage has issued a brief for a programme of rectified photographic survey to be undertaken on each of the buildings (dated 23/01/07 (English Heritage 2007)). A project design (OA North 2007) was compiled by OA North in accordance with the brief. The programme of archaeological recording was intended to facilitate archaeological analysis of the structures and the specification of consolidation works to the standing remains of the bastles.
- 1.1.2 The field survey was undertaken in March 2007 and plans and elevation drawings were produced and have been submitted in accordance with the brief and project design.

### 1.2 SHILLA AND BOG HEAD BASTLES LOCATION

- 1.2.1 Shilla and Bog Head bastles (Plates 1 and 2) are part of a group of three bastles extending along the Tarsset Burn valley, itself a tributary of the Upper Tyne (Fig 1). The best surviving example of the group is the Black Middens bastle at NY 775898 (Plate 3). The group is only 15km from the present Scottish border and is on the gentle sloping southern foothills of the Cheviots. Presently it is an area of forestry plantation, but was formerly an area of isolated agricultural intakes amidst an expanse of moorland.
- 1.2.2 Bog Head bastle is on the flood plain at the confluence of Tarsset Burn and Highfield Burn, and the area around the bastle is generally poorly drained. Adjacent to the bastle is a group of further ruined domestic and agricultural structures, and the bastle was evidently part of a small hamlet (Plate 4).
- 1.2.3 Shilla Bastle is about 0.5km south of Bog Head bastle, and is on the summit of a gentle rise located above the valley bottom. It is now on an island of moorland that has not been planted with forestry. Surrounding the bastle are the characteristic remains of narrow ridge and furrow, which are testament to the fact that the present moorland was formerly cultivated.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1.1 A programme of fabric survey was undertaken to record the elevations of the Shilla and Bog Head Bastles (Figs 2-9) prior to any maintenance and consolidation in accordance with a project brief by English Heritage (2007) and the OA North project design (OA North 2007).

### 2.2 FABRIC SURVEY

- 2.2.1 **Instrument Survey:** a detailed survey was undertaken of all built elements within the extent of each bastle by means of total station survey. Survey control was established by closed traverse using a Leica TC407 total station around each structure and this was tied into the Ordnance Survey grid by means of a differential GPS. Two permanent survey control markers were established to enable the future enhancement of the survey maps.
- 2.2.2 Plans and elevation control points were generated by EDM tacheometry using a total station linked to a pen computer running TheoLT software. The digital data was transferred onto the pen computer for manipulation and was subsequently transferred to a PC for further enhancement. The resultant drawing files were annotated in the field and enhanced later in the CAD system. The survey output consisted of plans and elevations.
- 2.2.3 **Elevation Survey:** a record was created of the external elevations of the bastle walls (Figs 2-9) using rectified photography. This was undertaken using a medium format camera and a digital camera with 8 mega pixel resolution on elevations with surveyed photographic targets. The images were scanned and, where there was any distortion within the photographic base, the digital image was subject to digital correction using Photoplan software which fully rectified the images. The digitally-rectified images were incorporated as a raster backdrop within AutoCAD and the elevation drawings were drawn up as a vector drawing from the rectified base. The final drawings were superimposed onto the rectified photographs to show details of all individual stones and features of the exterior elevations.
- 2.2.4 **Photography:** a full, non-rectified, photographic record was also made of the fabric of each bastle and any associated earthwork features along with its local topographical context. The record was recorded in 35mm black and white print format, and digital colour photography; the digital photographs were used to accompany the present report.

### 2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full archive has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (1991) and the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long Term Storage* (UKIC 1990). The project archive represents the collation and indexing of all the data and material gathered during the course of the project. The archive is provided in the English

Heritage Centre for Archaeology format, both as a printed document and digitally. A synopsis, including the index to the archive and a copy of the report, will be placed in the Northumberland Historic Environment Record; Morpeth, and an additional copy of the report will be deposited in the County Record Office.



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## 3. RESULTS

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### 3.1 BACKGROUND TO BASTLES

- 3.1.1 The buildings at Shilla Hill and Bog Head (Plates 1 and 2) are classic examples of defended farmsteads, called Bastles, that are common within the Northumberland and Cumbria border country, and were typically no more than the 20 miles from the Scottish / English border (Ramm *et al* 1970, 63). They exhibit very uniform characteristics: they are two storied, have a rectangular plan, and have substantial walls that are about 1.25m thick and constructed with large stone blocks. The ground floor has a single entrance, and either has no windows or occasional slit windows and has no hearth; it is evident that this floor was intended for the accommodation of stock. The main door typically had tunnels set into the thickness of the walls to provide for a substantial drawbar to secure the door (Plate 5). The first floor accommodated people and had proper windows, albeit that they were small, and it also had a hearth. This floor was accessed from the outside rather than via an internal stair. While they now often have elaborate, and substantial external stone stairs (eg that at Black Midden (Plate 3)); these were invariably butted against the side of the bastle and were evidently not original features. It is therefore presumed that they were originally accessed by a movable ladder (*op cit*, 62). The clear defensive characteristics of the buildings are the thick walls, the slit windows or absence of ground floor windows, and the movable external stair for the first floor. While the bastles may have been occupied by freehold farmers, they were not necessarily individuals of great standing; it is interesting to note that the occupier of New Garth, in Cumbria, lived in a bastle, yet had one of the smallest holdings in the Gilsland Survey of 1603 (Graham 1934; Ramm *et al* 1970, 65).
- 3.1.2 **Dating:** the building of bastles was a response to a period of insecurity across the borderlands, when the infamous activity of the border reivers was at its height. There are a limited number of date-stones from bastles, notably one of 1594, from the Nether Denton bastle, Cumbria, and that of 1604 from the Falstone bastle, Northumberland. The Akeld Bastle appears to be referred to in an earlier survey of 1541 (Hodgson 1858; Ramm *et al* 1970, 67). Generally, they appear to occupy the period from the mid sixteenth century to the mid seventeenth century, with the end date seemingly marked by the Restoration (1660) (*ibid*).

### 3.2 SHILLA BASTLE

- 3.2.1 This is a substantially decayed bastle, which has extant walling on the northern and eastern sides (Figs 6 and 7), while the southern and western sides (Figs 8 and 9) are marked by earthworks with occasional fragments of walling exposed (Plate 2). At its highest (1.8m high), on the eastern face (Fig 7), it has only four courses of random rubble walling surviving, and the corners incorporate coarsely, squared quoins. The wall width is 1.25m thick, and the building is 10.1m x 6.9m in size. In the centre of the elevation is a small entrance with a substantial lintel on the internal face, but the equivalent lintel on the external

face is no longer extant. The substantial door jambs incorporate tunnels for a drawbar (Plate 6). The jambs have checks for two doors, one in front of the other, to afford additional security.

- 3.2.2 An engraving from the Ramm *et al* Bastles volume (1970), shows the eastern face of the bastle, and is an accurate representation, although a human figure depicted on it was evidently drawn to a deliberately small scale so as to emphasise the size of the building. The entrance is shown with a substantial relieving arch, constructed of coarsely-worked field stones, but this feature no longer survives in the present day structure. The engraving also shows a large tree in the north-east corner which has now been removed. There are no extant windows, but, given that two walls for the most part only survive as earthworks and the other two walls do not survive to the full height of the ground floor, this can not be taken as an indication that there were originally none on the ground floor. There are no surviving remains of the first floor of the structure and no evidence for an external stair.

### 3.3 BOG HEAD BASTLE

- 3.3.1 Legend has it that Bog Head Bastle was the residence of Barty Milburn, and / or Corbitt Jack, correspondingly the alternative names for the building are either Barty's Pele or Corbie's Castle (<http://homepage.mac.com/philipdavis/English%20sites/2816.html>). The four walls of the bastle (Figs 2-5) survive for the most part to just above ground floor level, but there are also the mostly-collapsed remains of a barrel vault surviving (Plates 7 and 8). It is 9.8m x 7.01m in size and has walls that are 1.24m thick. The maximum surviving height of the structure is 3.8m on the southern elevation (Fig 5). It is constructed of large, uncoarsed field stones, with crudely-dressed quoin stones; the latter are not as well squared as those of the nearby Shilla bastle. The entrance was in the west wall (Fig 2), and has substantial, but crudely-dressed jams, with an irregular shaped lintel; a relieving arch survives over the lintel. The jambs have checks for two doors, one in front of the other and two tunnels to allow for drawbars for both doors. There is a single voussoir aperture in the centre of the east elevation (Fig 4), constructed of undressed field stones. There are fragments of walling extending above the part-collapsed vault, but these are extensively covered in vegetation and internal features of the first floor elevations were not evident (Plate 7). There was no indication of an external stair.
- 3.3.2 Comparisons with photographs taken as part of the RCHM(E) survey in the late 1960s (Ramm *et al* 1970) reveal that the west elevation has not changed significantly since the earlier survey. There are a couple of stones that have gone from the top course. The most substantial difference is the loss of a patch of about six small facing stones, from near the top of the northern side of the elevation. Adjacent to this patch the present top quoin stone of the northern corner is a different stone to that on the earlier photograph. It has markedly less lichen cover than the other stones on the elevation and it was evidently a later insertion; it may be the product of limited repair works to prevent the spread of the localised collapse indicated by the loss of the patch of stones. The entrance has not deteriorated significantly since the late 1960s photography; however, looking through it, the interior of the bastle in the 1960s had more debris than

present and there was no natural light internally, which would indicate that substantial amount of clearance has been undertaken of the interior during the intervening period. In general, the comparisons of the photographs show that the bastle has survived relatively well since the late 1960s.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

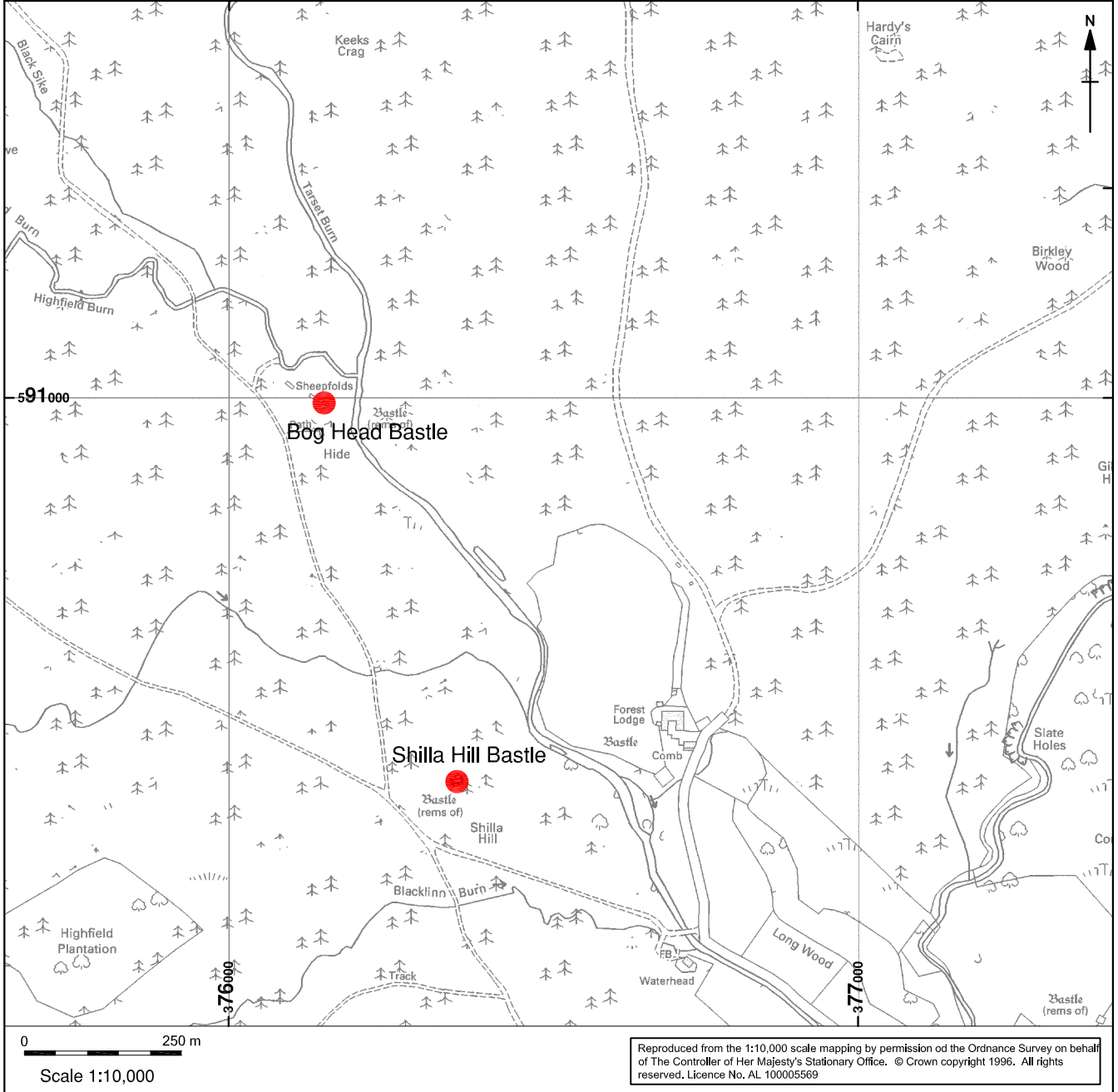
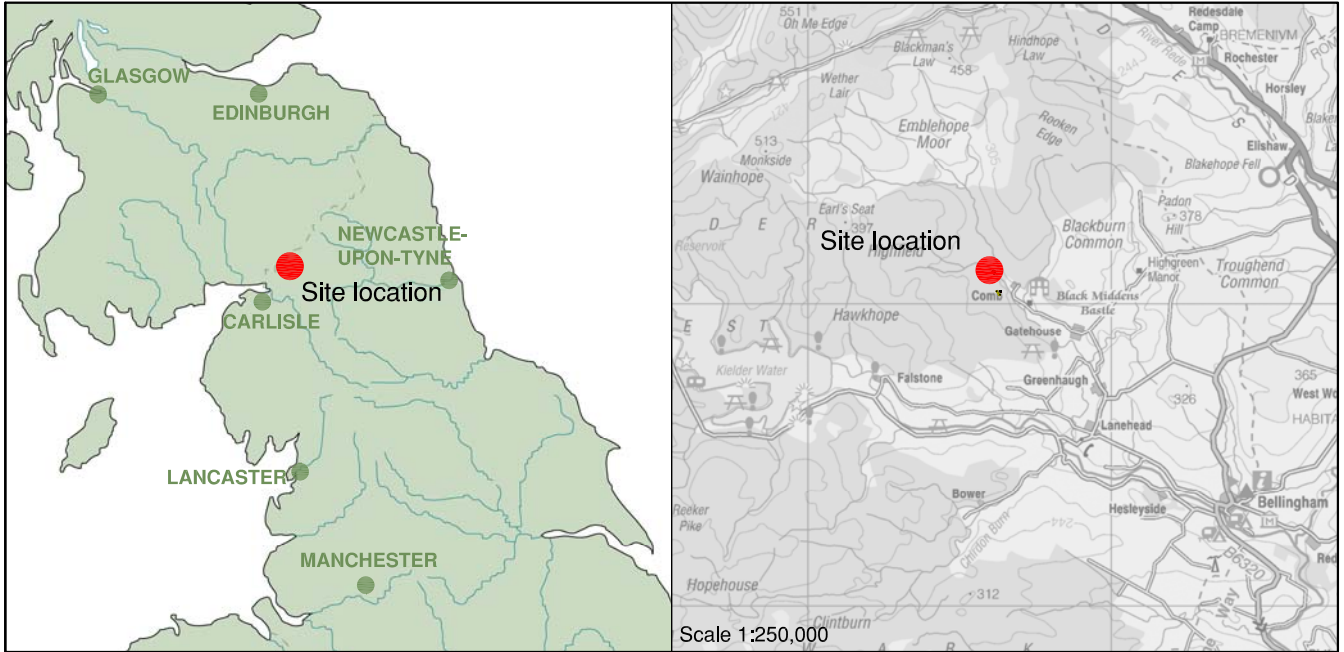
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- Plate 4: Overgrown foundations and standing remains of buildings to the immediate west of Bog Head bastle
- Plate 5: Principal entrance of Bog Head bastle showing the checks for two doors and the tunnels for drawbars
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- Plate 7: Interior of Bog Head bastle looking west
- Plate 8: Remains of the barrel vault in the western corner of Bog Head bastle



L:\Projects\9830s\hillabastle\cad\Figures\L9830\_Fig001.dwg\*Shilla Bastle House'AMS\*26.04.07



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Figure 1: Site Location

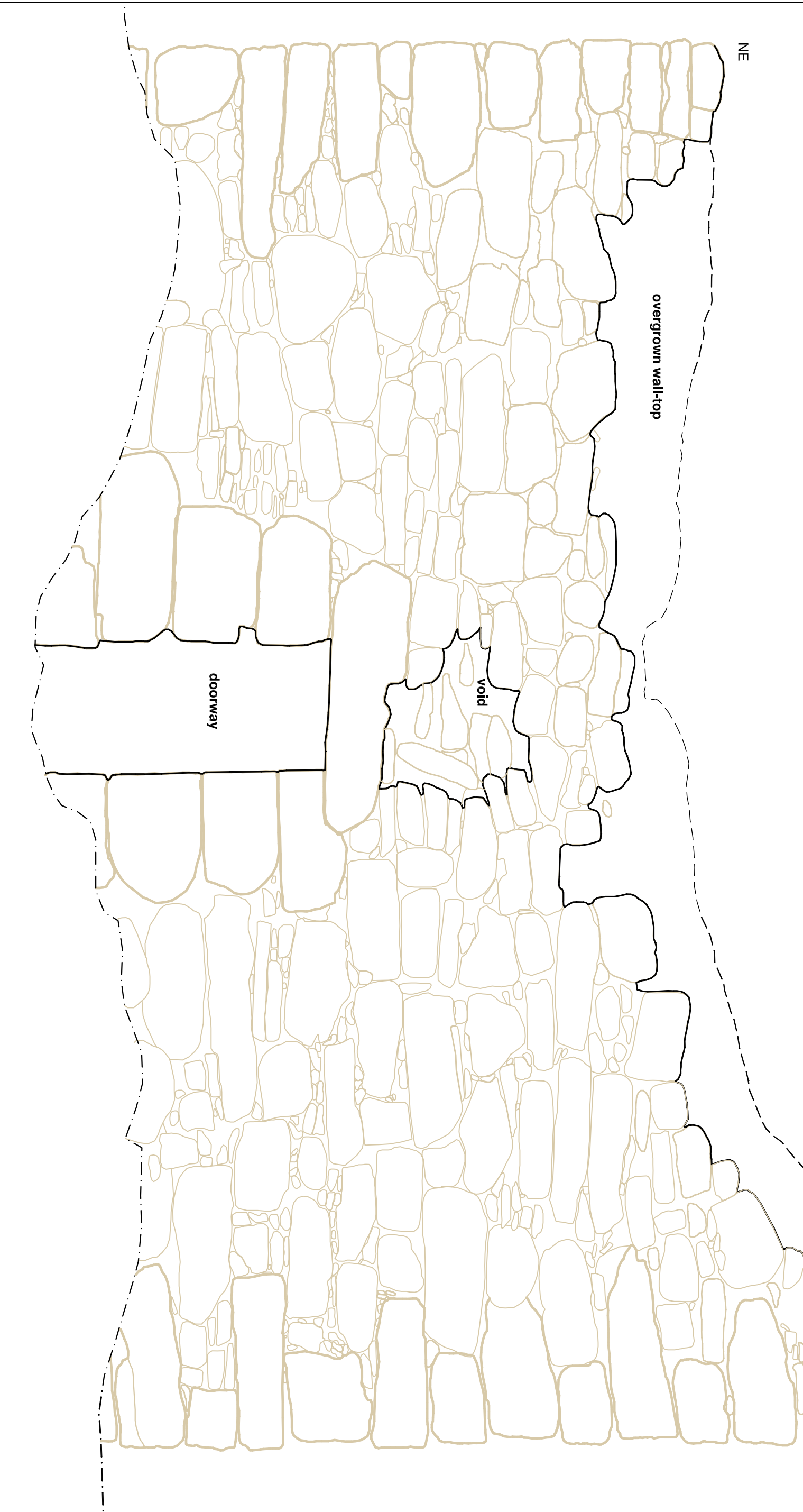
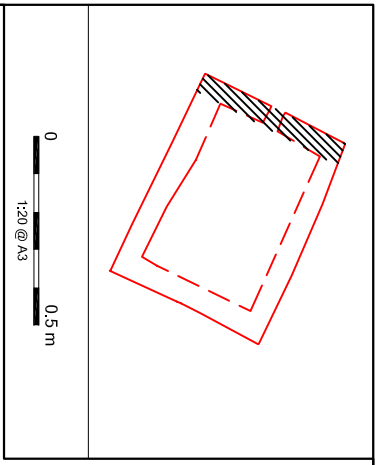


Figure 2: Bog Head Bastle, Northumberland; Elevation 1

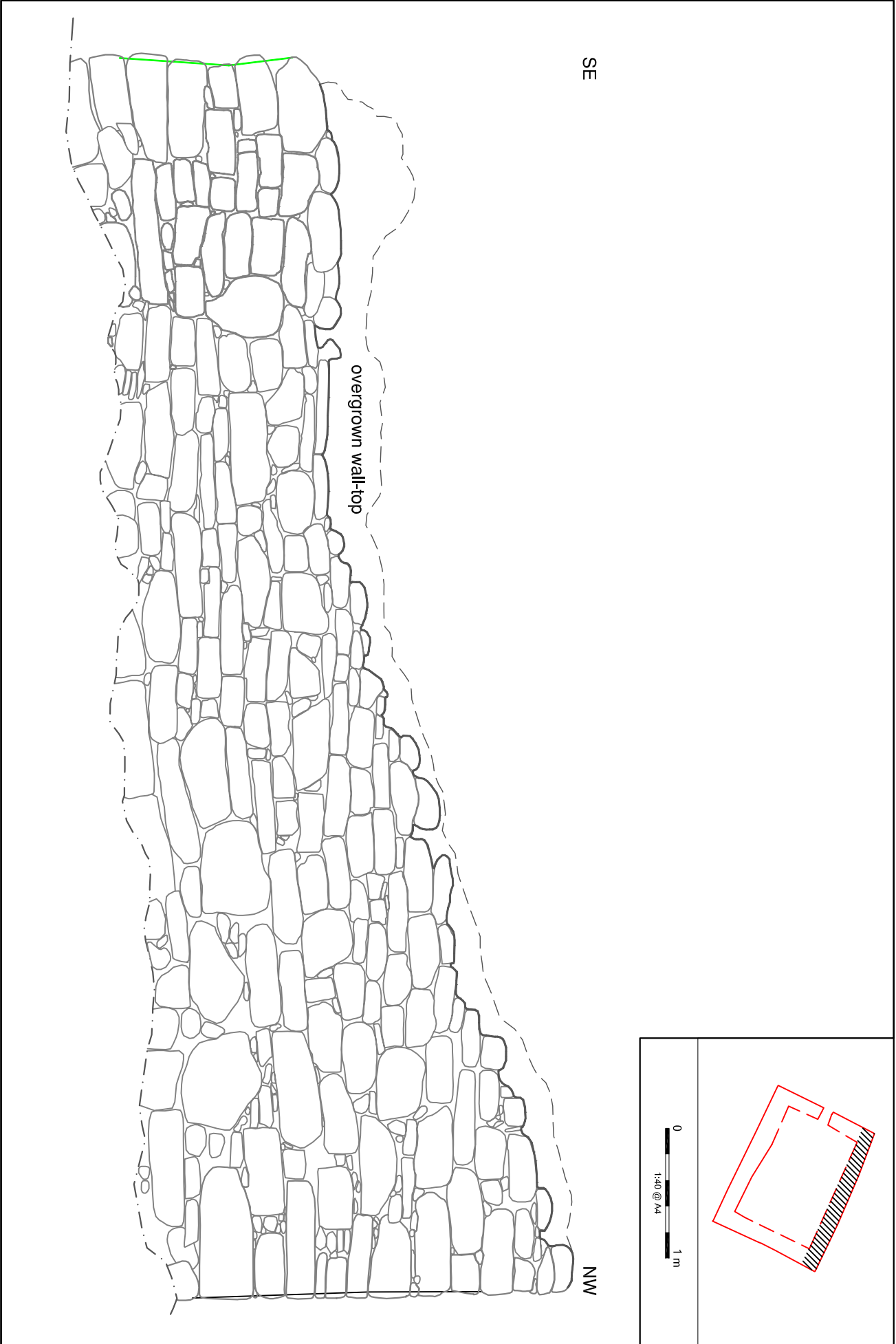


Figure 3: Bog Head Bastle, Northumberland; Elevation 2



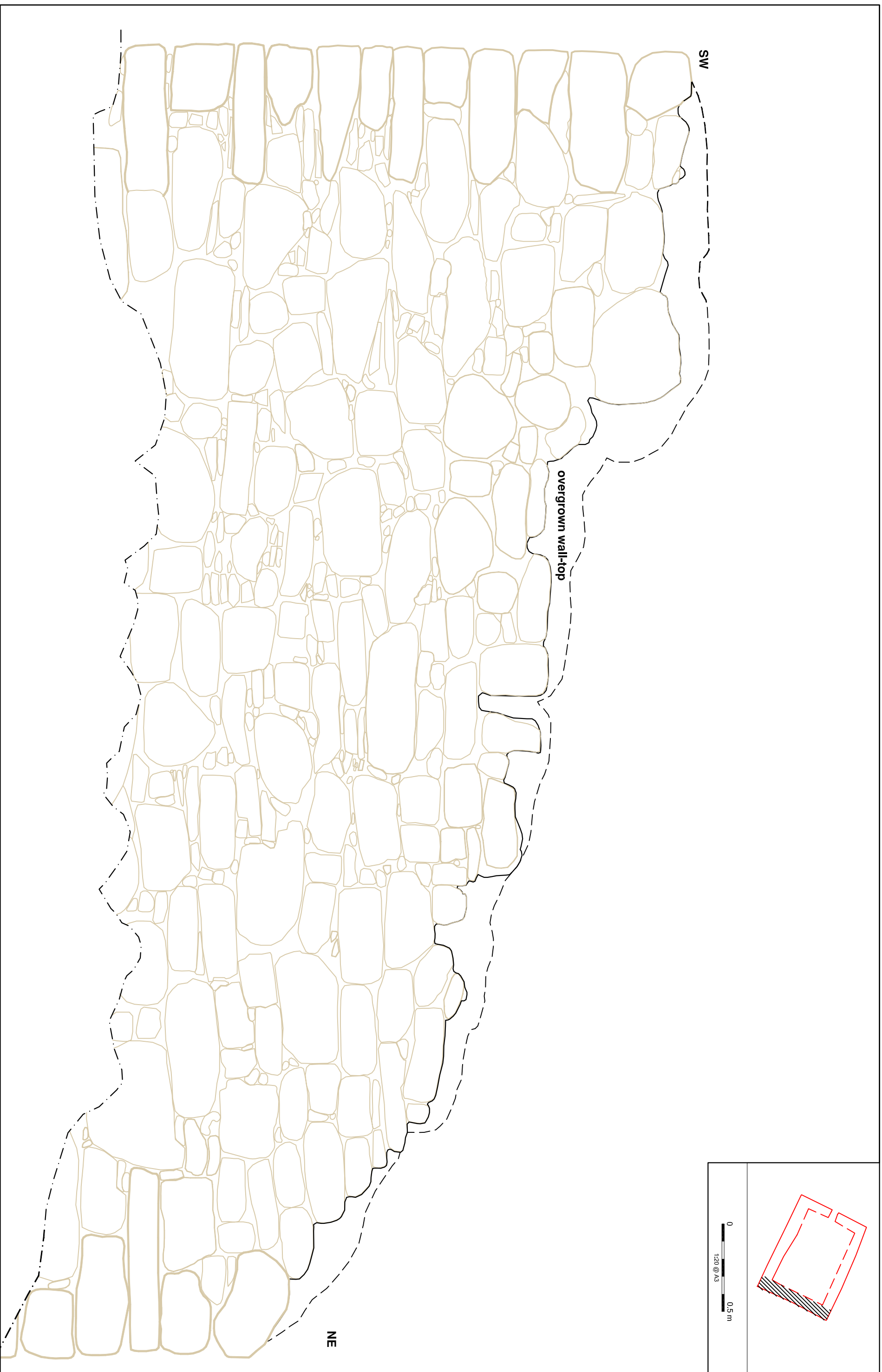


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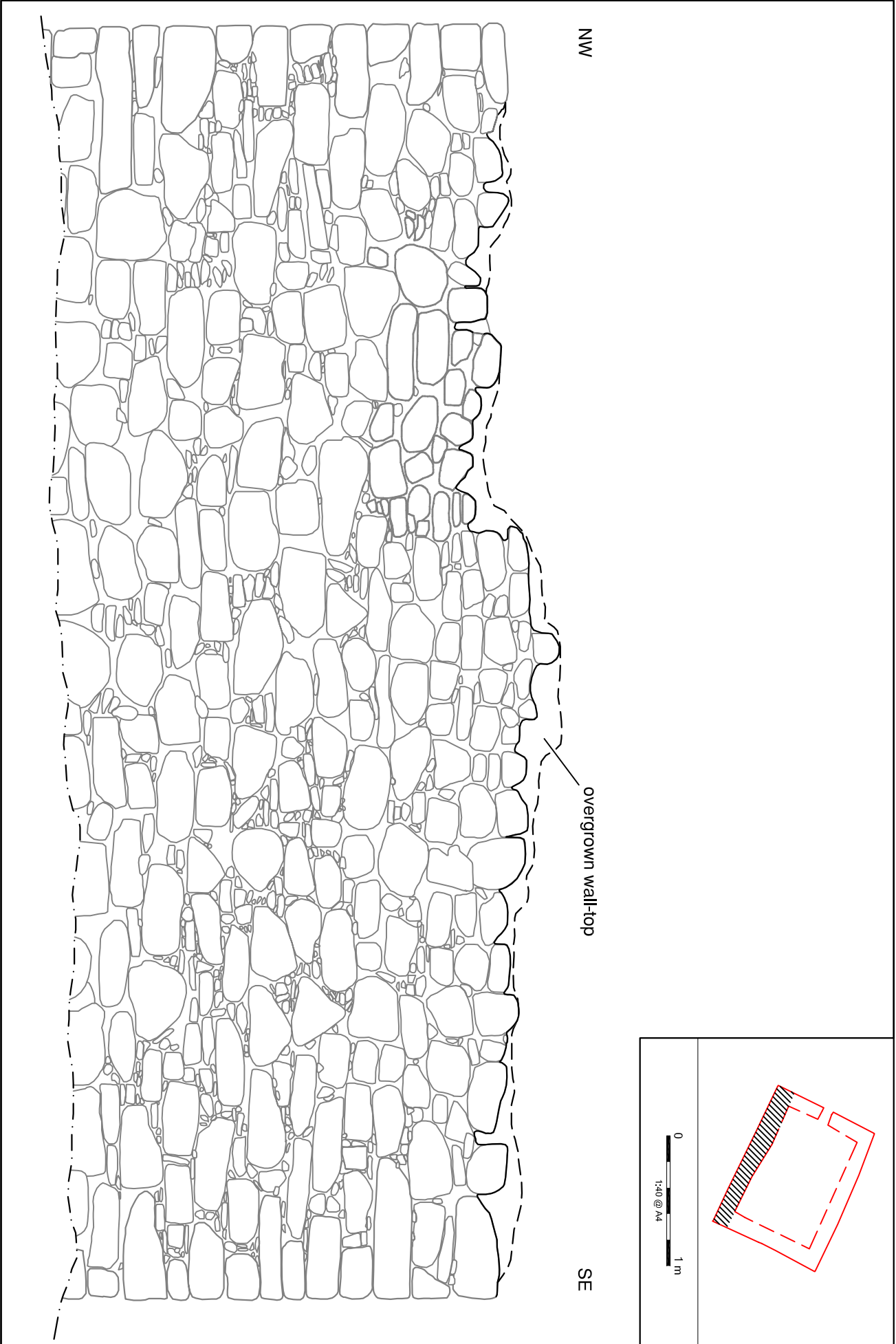


Figure 5: Bog Head Bastle, Northumberland; Elevation 4

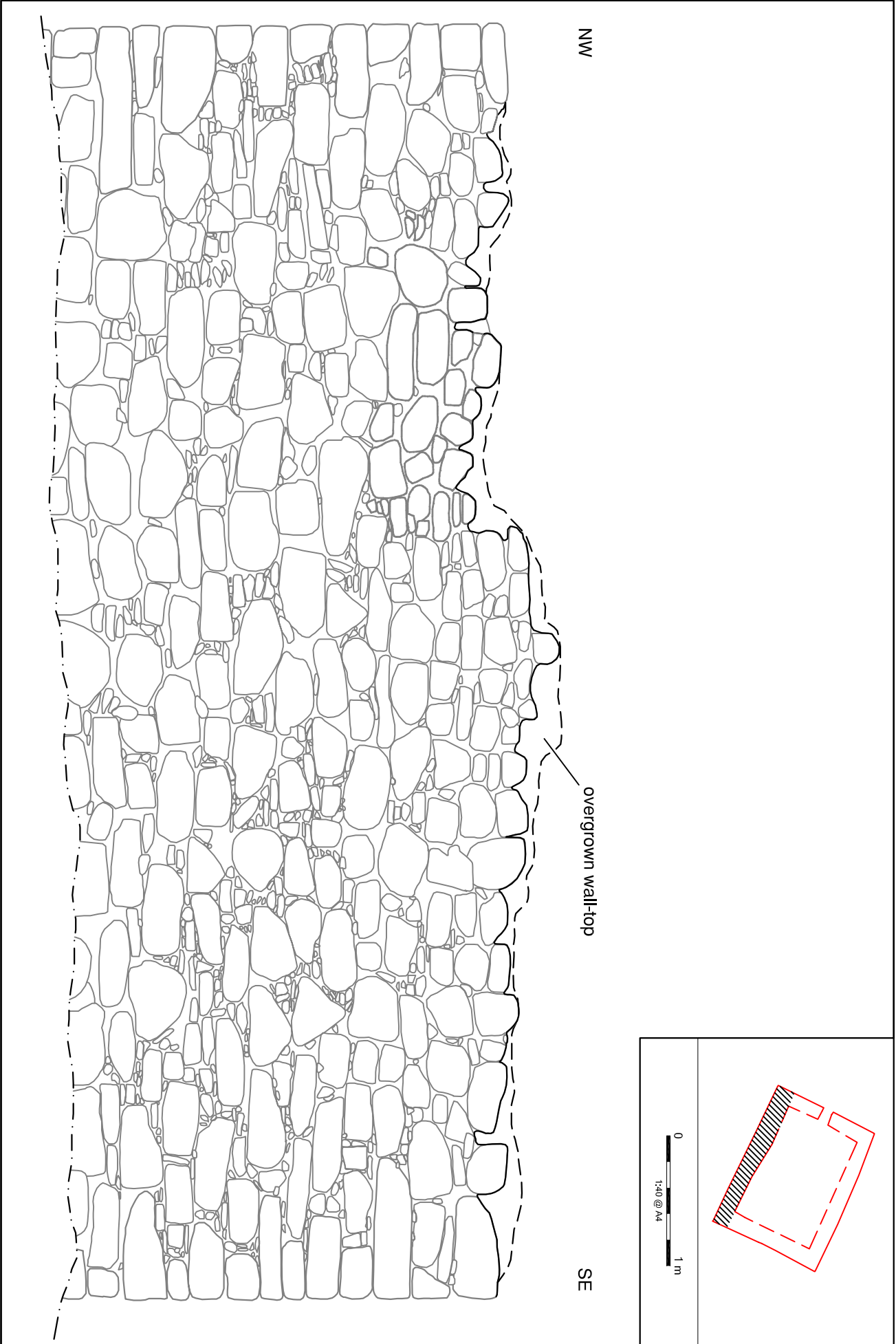


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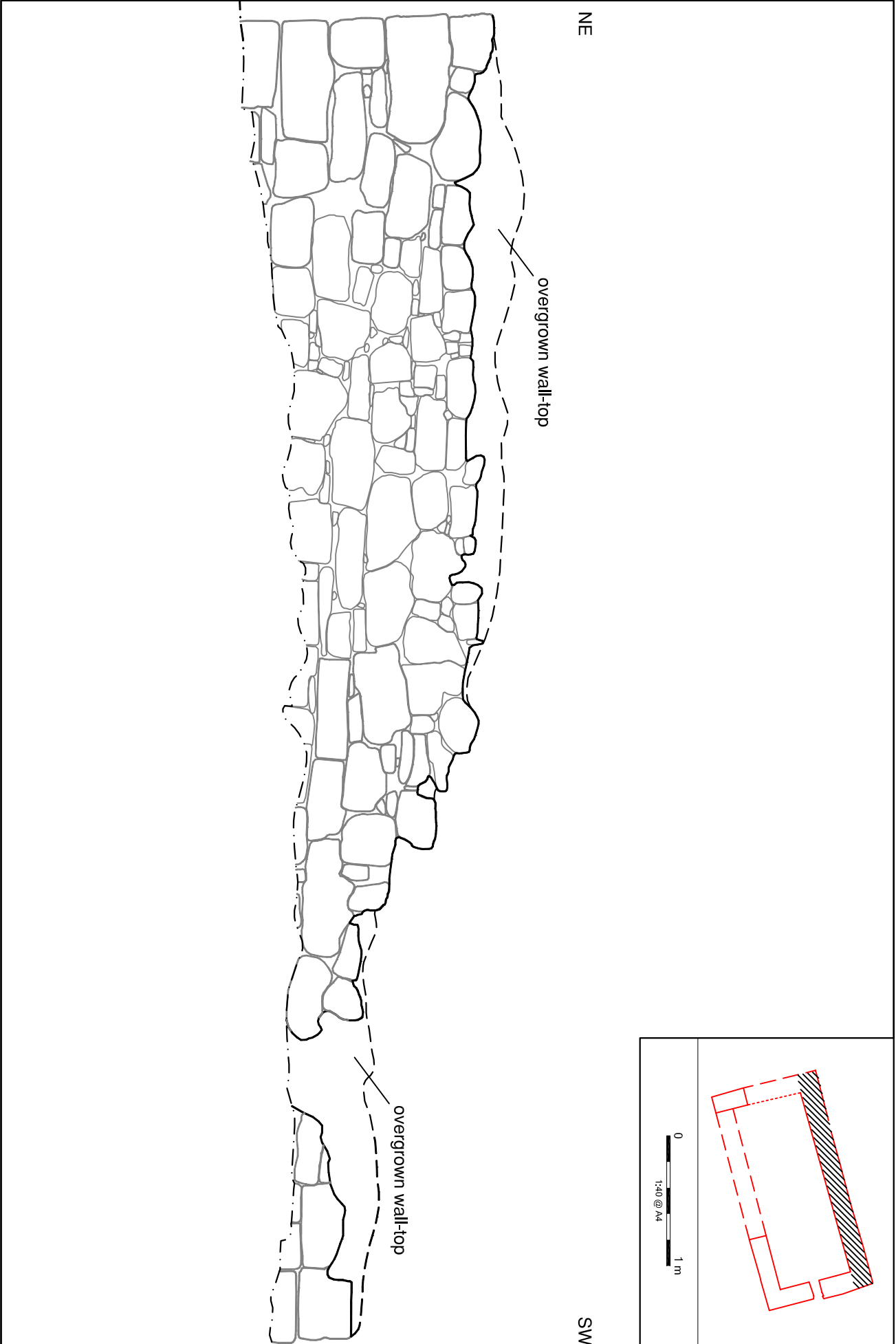


Figure 6: Shilla Hill Bastle, Northumberland; Elevation 1

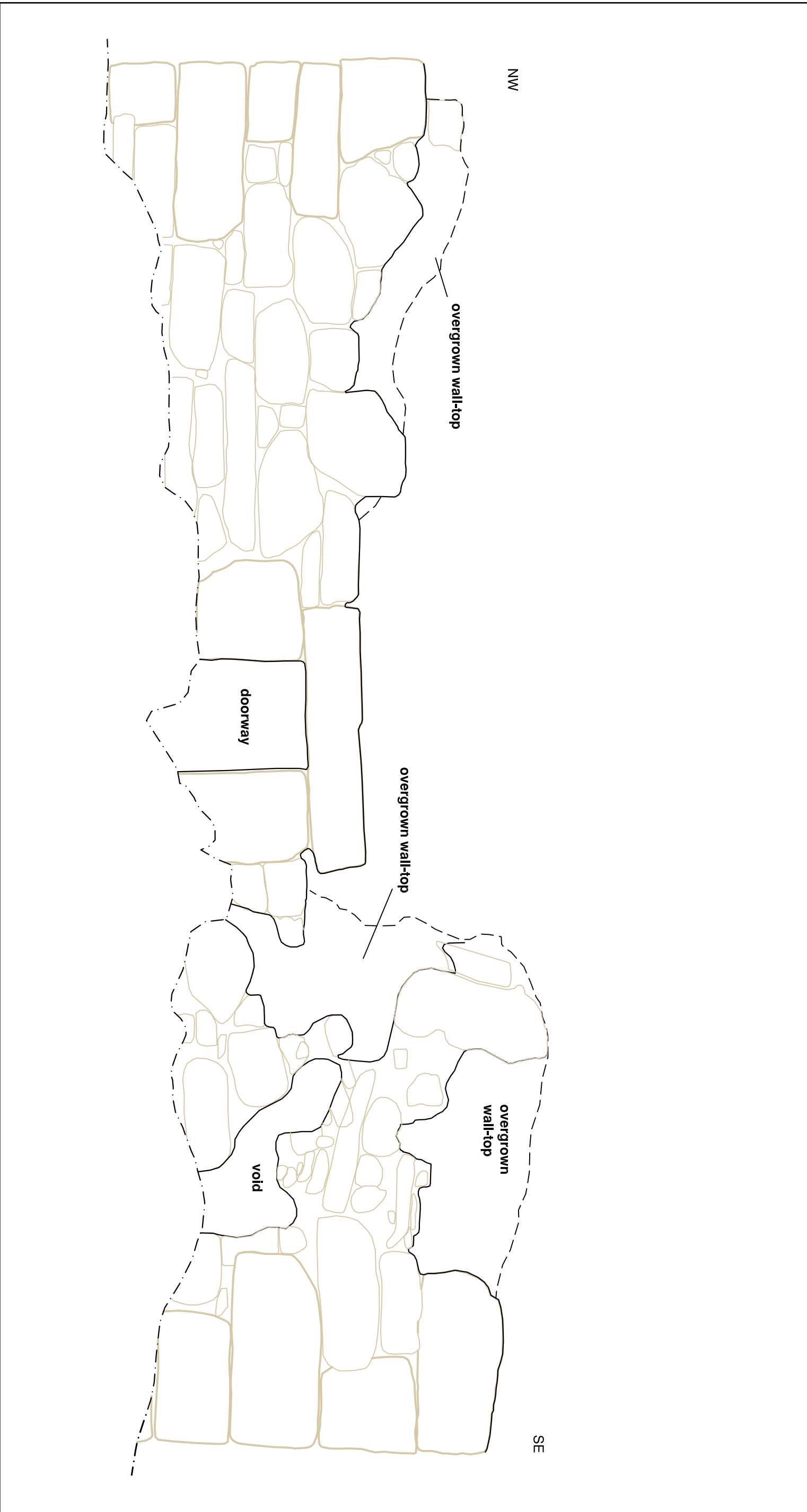
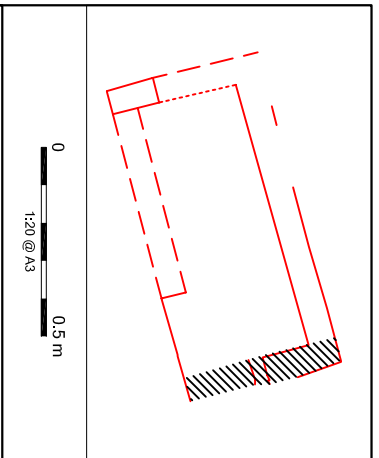


Figure 7: Shilla Hill Bastle, Northumberland; Elevation 2

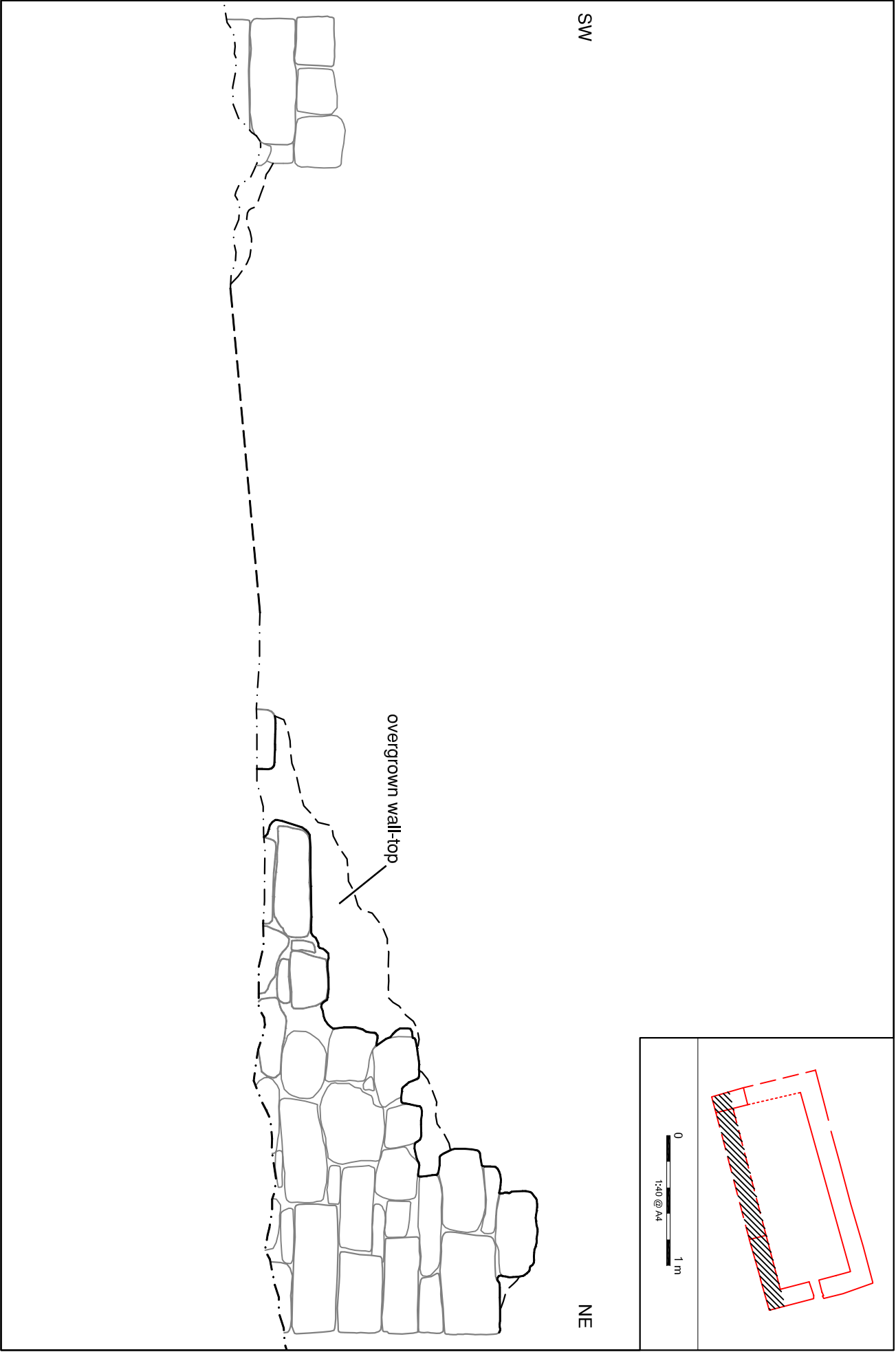


Figure 8: Shilla Hill Bastle, Northumberland; Elevation 3

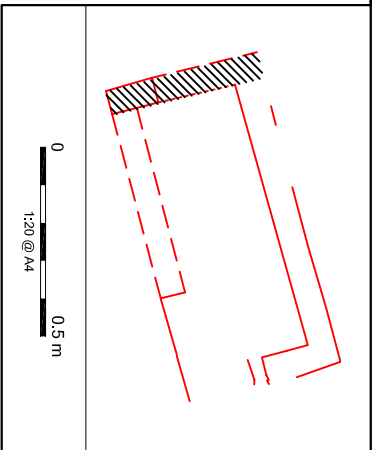
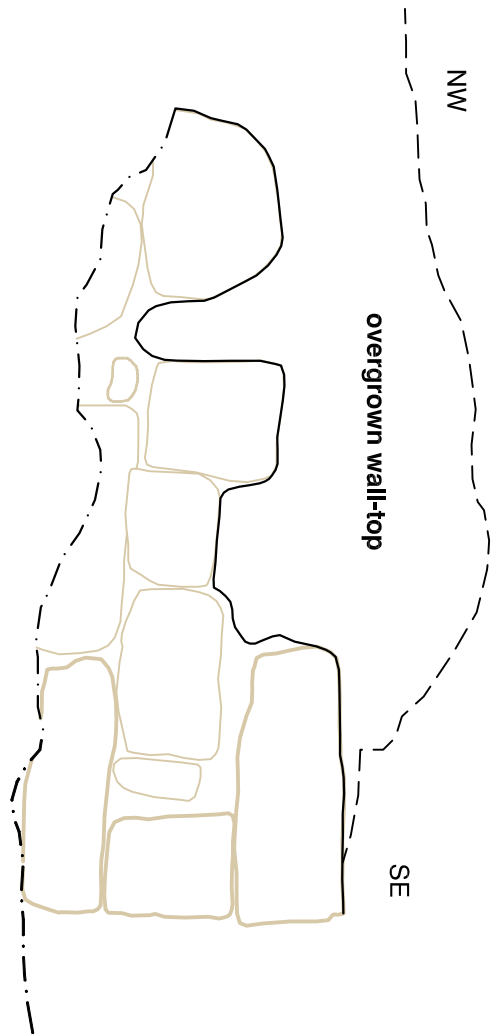


Figure 9: Shilla Hill Bastle, Northumberland; Elevation 4





Plate 1: General view of Bog Head bastle looking south-east



Plate 2: The principal façade of Shilla Bastle looking north-east





Plate 3: Nearby Black Middens bastle



Plate 4: Overgrown foundations and standing remains of buildings to the immediate west of Bog Head bastle



Plate 5: Principal entrance of Bog Head bastle showing the checks for two doors and the tunnels for drawbars



Plate 6: Entrance to Shilla bastle showing the tunnel for the drawbar





Plate 7: Interior of Bog Head bastle looking west



Plate 8: Remains of the barrel vault in the western corner of Bog Head bastle