

**MILECASTLE 38
HOTBANK
HADRIAN'S WALL
Northumberland**



Archaeological Earthwork Survey



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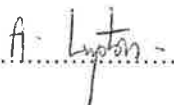
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SUMMARY

An archaeological earthwork survey was undertaken in July 2002 of Milecastle 38 at Hotbanks, Northumberland (NY 7726 6812) on Hadrian's Wall, on behalf of English Heritage. This lies within the Scheduled Monument of *Hadrian's Wall and associated features between the field boundary west of Turret 37a and the road to Steel Rigg car park, in Wall miles 37, 38 and 39* (SM26060), and as such forms part of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site. The milecastle lies on a well-walked line, forming part of the Pennine Way, as well as being an easy circular walk from Housesteads, and has been subject to degradation as a result of visitor pressure. Whilst the formal line of the Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail lies around the south side of the milecastle, the ground there is boggy, and it has been accepted that many visitors will continue to walk across the monument. The Countryside Agency has therefore agreed to play its part in the maintenance of the walked line, and it has been agreed with English Heritage that a decision should be taken about the construction of a sacrificial surface through the milecastle to prevent further erosion.

In order to assess the level of existing damage, to record the walked line, and the areas where work is necessary to prevent further deterioration, it was decided that a survey of the existing earthwork should be carried out prior to any improvement of the existing route. This revealed that, apart from the remains of the milecastle itself, there were the remains of other features, apparently post-dating it. The south entrance of the milecastle was still visible, although it and the west wall were significantly denuded by comparison with the east wall. Further low mounds along the west wall were not considered to be part of the milecastle, but were more likely to be the remains of spoil heaps left by the excavation of the site in 1935. An irregular foundation within the west side of the milecastle clearly post-dated it, and may represent a farm site pre-dating the present Hotbanks Farm to the north, using the shelter of the at least partly upstanding walls of the milecastle. Similarly, a narrow ditch on the east side of the milecastle was shown to post-date the use of Hadrian's Wall and probably represents more recent agricultural activity.

Milecastle 38 has evidently been badly eroded since 1935, partially as a result of the excavation and perhaps also due to stone robbing, and general wear from visitor pressure. The more detailed features exposed in 1935 are no longer visible, although the possible early farmstead of unknown date was exposed within the confines of the milecastle.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Paget Lazzari of the Northumberland National Park Authority for his assistance, and to Neil Rimmington of English Heritage, who commissioned the work.

The survey was carried out by Daniel Elsworth and Peter Schofield. The report was written by Daniel Elsworth and edited by Rachel Newman, who also managed the project.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 The present heavily used path forming part of the Pennine Way crosses the east and west walls of Milecastle 38 at Hotbank (NY 7726 6812), Northumberland. Whilst the legal route of the Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail follows around the south side of the milecastle, this area is subject to seasonal wetness, and it is likely that walkers will continue to take the shortest route across the monument. Visitor pressure has resulted in wear lines over both walls of the milecastle and, to some extent, through the interior. It has therefore been agreed between English Heritage and The Countryside Agency that the walked line should be maintained and that, to prevent further degradation, a sacrificial surface within the areas of wear should be considered. Prior to stabilising this walked line it was considered necessary to survey the earthworks in their present condition in order to monitor erosion, assess how best to enhance the existing surface, and make a record of the monument. English Heritage commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OAN) to undertake this exercise. The work was carried out in July 2002.
- 1.1.2 The survey area comprised the fenced area around the milecastle, and included all earthworks, not just those evidently forming part of the milecastle itself.

1.2 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.2.1 Milecastle 38 lies within the Scheduled Monument of *Hadrian's Wall and associated features between the field boundary west of Turret 37a and the road to Steel Rigg car park, in Wall miles 37, 38 and 39* (SM26060), and as such forms part of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site. It is one of the 80 original formal crossing points of the curtain wall, and was part of the original design of the frontier (Breeze and Dobson 2000). Each milecastle had wide gates through their north and south sides, suitable for wheeled traffic, the north wall being formed by Hadrian's Wall itself. These gates were later frequently either narrowed or blocked completely. Internal structures lined a cobbled road through the milecastle, presumably housing a small detachment of troops, although the size of these structures varied between milecastles (Daniels 1978, 24).
- 1.2.2 Milecastle 38 is situated on the east side of Milking Gap, overlooking one of the most obvious north-south routes in the area, formed by a glacial overflow channel, and where local settlement had taken place, although the precise relationship of this to the Hadrian's Wall frontier remains uncertain (Daniels 1978, 168). The milecastle was excavated in 1935 (Simpson *et al* 1936), and proved to be of short-axis type, with the gates reduced to posterns, presumably in the early third century. It seems to have continued in occupation until the end of the Roman period (*op cit*, 263-66). No attempt was made to excavate internal structures, although part of a building was recognised in the north-

west corner of the milecastle. This had been constructed into a layer containing amphora, and was clearly not primary in the constructional phase (*op cit*, 266).

- 1.2.3 Its main claim to fame, however, is that an inscription recording building work by the *Legio II Augusta* during the Governorship of Aulus Platorius Nepos was found at the nearby farm of Bradley. Uniquely, a second and more perfectly preserved inscription, still retaining traces of red paint, was found in the area, in a 'station' on the Wall, according to an antiquarian source in 1757 (Daniels 1978, 167-8), suggesting that both north and south gates of milecastles were surmounted by matching foundation inscriptions. It is perhaps of significance that Milecastle 38 is very similar in dimensions and style of construction to Milecastles 37 and 42, which have also both produced Hadrianic inscriptions of the Second Legion (Simpson *et al* 1936, 267).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 EARTHWORK SURVEY

- 2.1.1 The survey was carried out using an Elta 4 total station. The data from the total station were captured with a portable Pen Computer and transferred directly into AutoCAD 14, which allowed the resulting drawing files to be annotated on site. The survey consisted of an outline hachure plan of the earthworks and two profile lines taken through the milecastle, together with written descriptions of each element. For the purposes of this report, the milecastle is taken as being oriented on the cardinal points, although it actually faces north-west.
- 2.1.2 A photographic record was also made of the principal features of the site using 35mm black and white prints and colour slides.

3. RESULTS

3.1 THE EARTHWORKS

- 3.1.1 The majority of the earthworks fit the general form of the outline of the milecastle, which measured 18.58m north/south, by 20.75m east/west. The narrow entrance on the south side, which was seen to be 3.35m wide, is clearly visible, although the wall to either side is expanded and apparently spread, being up to 6.36m wide; there was some slight indication of structures beneath this. The east and west walls were seen to be 2.33m and 2.48m wide, respectively. The east side survives to a greater height, up to 0.30m higher, than the west and is made up of considerably more material, with what is probably a wide area of tumble on its interior side. The north side, formed by Hadrian's Wall, is partially obscured by the present field boundary, which essentially revets the side of the milecastle, leaving only traces of the wall beneath. Within this, however, there was an apparent gap, some 12.75m wide, which may correspond to the approximate position of the north gate, although this was identified, but not excavated, in 1935 (Simpson *et al*, 1936, 265).
- 3.1.2 Several other features were also identified during the survey. To the east and west of the milecastle a low bank corresponding to the position of Hadrian's Wall itself is visible, albeit partially concealed by the present field boundary. In the north-east corner of the survey area there was a slight knoll of raised bedrock, and just beyond the south-east corner of the milecastle itself was a shallow ditch, which is possibly natural in origin. Beyond the east wall of the milecastle was another, narrower ditch, which appeared to be a drain or narrow hollow way. This truncated the line of the earthwork forming the remains of Hadrian's Wall and ran in the direction of the farm. The area between this ditch and the milecastle was noticeably levelled, although it was not clear if this was a result of deliberate action.
- 3.1.3 Within the north-west corner of the milecastle was a small stone structure, 7.38m long by 4.06m wide, with walls 0.75-1m thick. This clearly post-dates the construction of the milecastle and may be the structure recognised by Simpson *et al* (1936, 266), but not excavated, as lying above a layer containing amphora. This may indeed be post-Roman in origin, perhaps part of a farmstead sheltering within the decayed walls of the milecastle and as such it would represent a precursor to Hotbank Farm, immediately to the north of the Wall. This later farm is recorded as being under construction in 1757 (Simpson *et al* 1936, 267).
- 3.1.4 Large banks are visible to the west of milecastle, some 2.6-4m wide. These also clearly post-date the Roman structure and would best be interpreted as the spoil from the excavations of 1935.
- 3.1.5 The walked route through the milecastle is causing wear on both the east and west walls of the structure, forming a clear corridor down the slope, at its

worst through the west wall. Within the decayed walls, patches of bare earth are now visible, within trays formed by the passage of walkers. Within the interior of the milecastle, the condition of the route is better, although the greensward is distressed, but the later structure in the north-west corner is also being affected by the erosion, and this is perhaps more fragile and susceptible to wear than the milecastle itself.

4. INTERPRETATION

4.1 THE EARTHWORKS

- 4.1.1 Milecastle 38 was partially excavated in 1935 (Simpson *et al* 1936). Although precise details are not given as to the size of the excavation trenches, it is clear that little of the interior was excavated, and that excavation concentrated on the south gate. The present state of the earthworks would suggest that the south and west walls were most comprehensively excavated, while the north and east sides were left relatively untouched. The mounds on the west side of the milecastle are most likely to be the remains of the spoil heaps from the 1935 excavation, as they do not have any noticeable structural elements.
- 4.1.2 The present condition of the monument makes it difficult to compare with the account of the 1935 excavation (*ibid*). In this brief account, some details of features were noted, such as the partial blocking of the south entrance (*op cit*, 264), which are not now easily discernible, but the south wall seems to be much wider than that shown on the 1936 plan (*op cit*, fig 3; Fig 4 in this report). The nature of the 1936 report, which examines several milecastles at once, would suggest that the plans are quite stylised, rather than particularly accurate in every detail.
- 4.1.3 Although no definite reference is made of the irregular wall foundation within the confines of the milecastle as being post-Roman, or of the Wall ditch to the north, a 'large field-dyke' is recorded in the vicinity of the north gate (*op cit*, 265). No other references are made to any feature that might not form part of the Roman structure.
- 4.1.4 The other features identified by the present survey do not appear to relate to the milecastle itself. The small, sub-rectangular enclosure to the east of the milecastle appears to be later, butting on to the ruined milecastle. As such, it may have been associated with the structure in the north-west corner of the monument, which has all the hallmarks of a farmstead predating the construction of Hotbank Farm to the north. The wide, shallow ditch beyond the south wall is probably a natural feature, but the narrower ditch beyond the east wall must post-date the active use of Hadrian's Wall because it cuts through it. The most likely explanation for this feature is as a result of some sort of agricultural use, either an attempt to drain the land or a small hollow way connecting to Hotbank Farm to the north.
- 4.1.5 The fabric of the milecastle has been subject to considerable damage since 1935. Some of this was probably caused by the excavation itself, producing the spoil heaps to the south-west for example, as well as the differences evident in the south wall. Some stone robbing may have also taken place, as there is considerably less standing masonry in the present structure than there was in 1935 (Fig 4).

- 4.1.6 The walked line forming a zone of erosion is also clearly a relatively recent phenomenon, caused by the increasing popularity of the Hadrian's Wall area for recreation, and the easy accessibility of Milecastle 38 from both Steel Rigg car park and Housesteads.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURES

Figure 1: Location Map

Figure 2: Site Location Plan

Figure 3: Profiles Across Milecastle 38

Figure 4: Plan of the 1935 Excavation (after Simpson *et al* 1936)

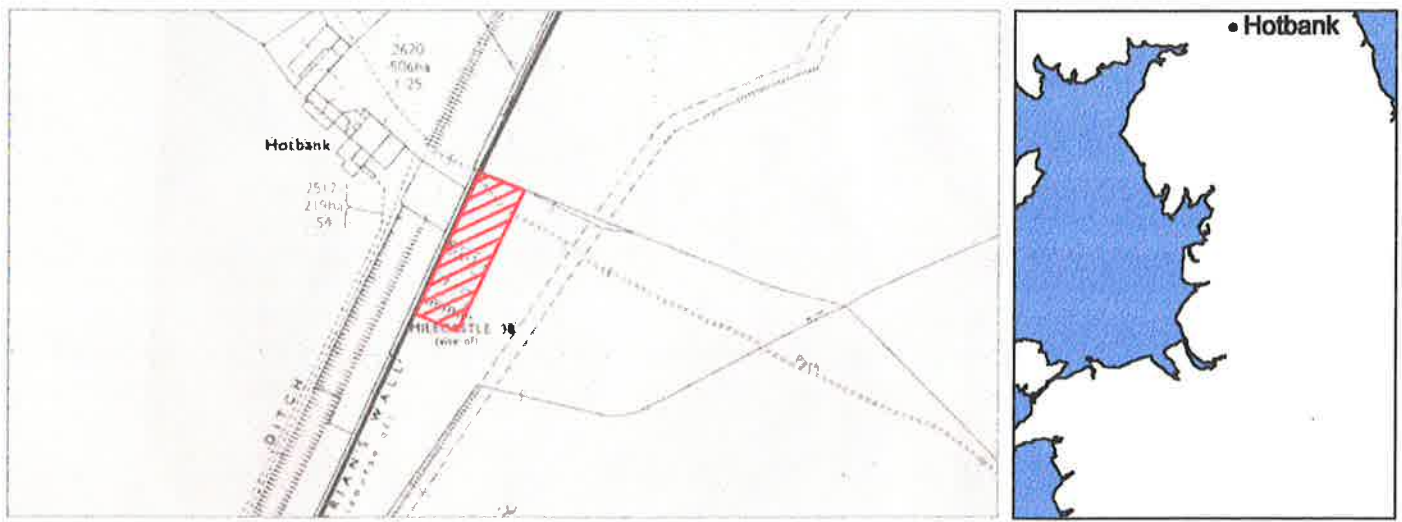
PLATES

Plate 1: Ditch North of Milecastle 38, Looking North-West

Plate 2: Remains of South Gate in foreground, Looking North-East

Plate 3: Possible Spoil Heaps to South-West, Looking South-West

Plate 4: West Side of the Milecastle Showing line of Erosion, Looking North-East

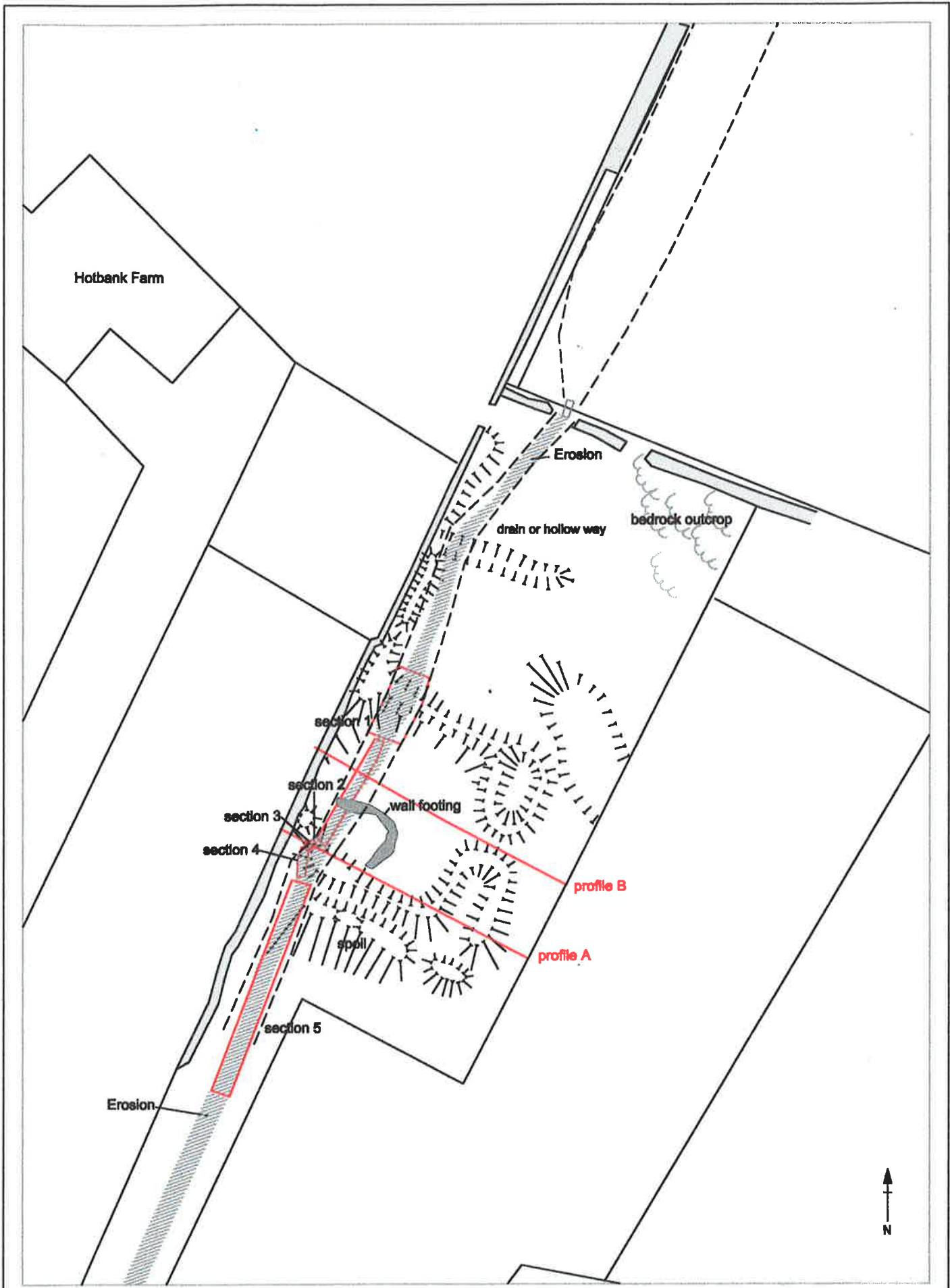


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0 500 1000
metres

Figure 1: Location Map



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Scale 1:500 at A4



Figure 2 : Site Location Plan



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PROJECT:

**Milecastle 38,
 Hotbank**

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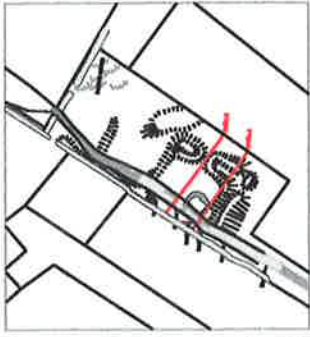


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DATE: September 2002

LOCATION:



KEY

TITLE

Profiles across Milecastle 38

COMMISSIONED BY:

English Heritage

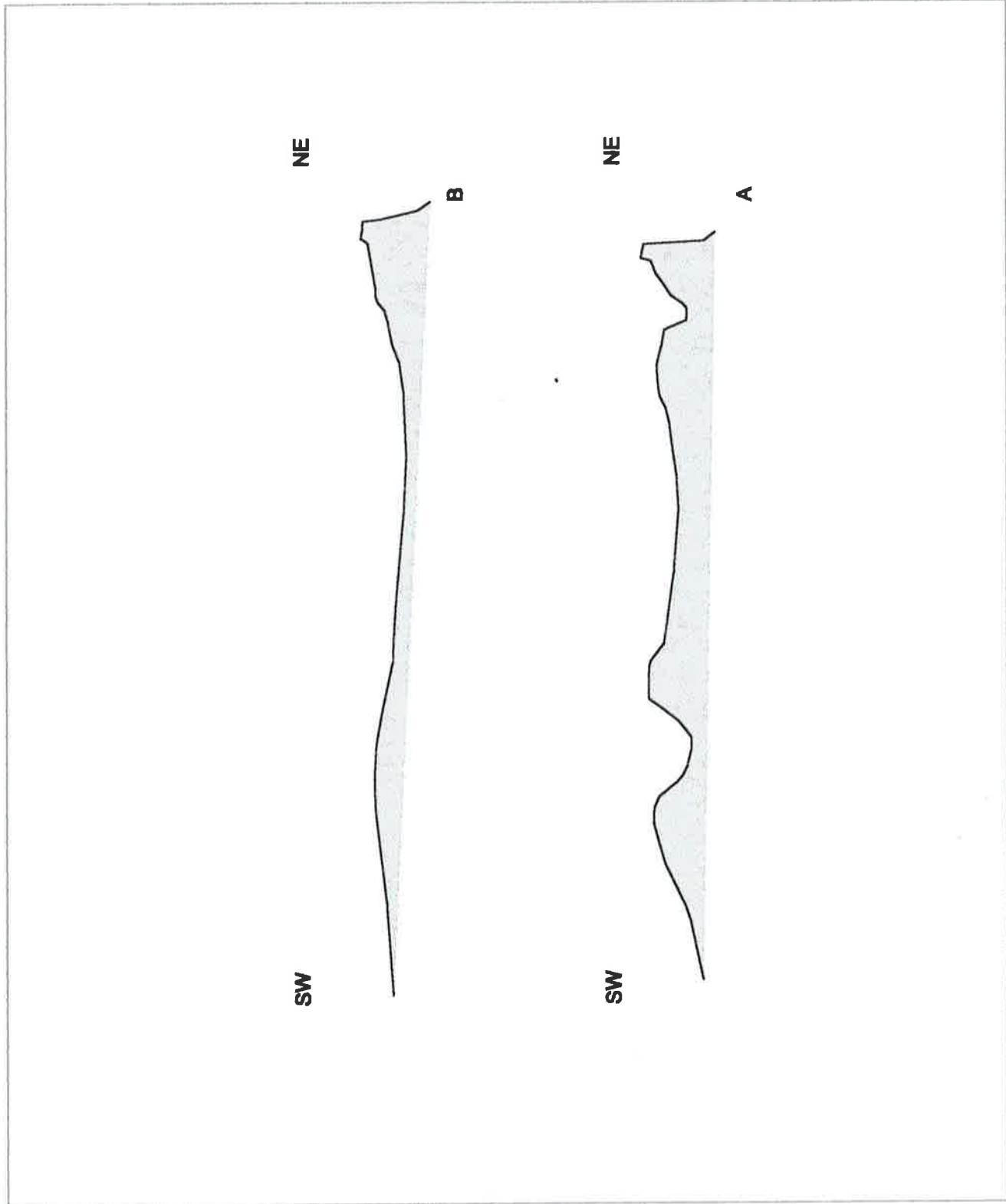


Figure 3 : Profiles Across Milecastle 38

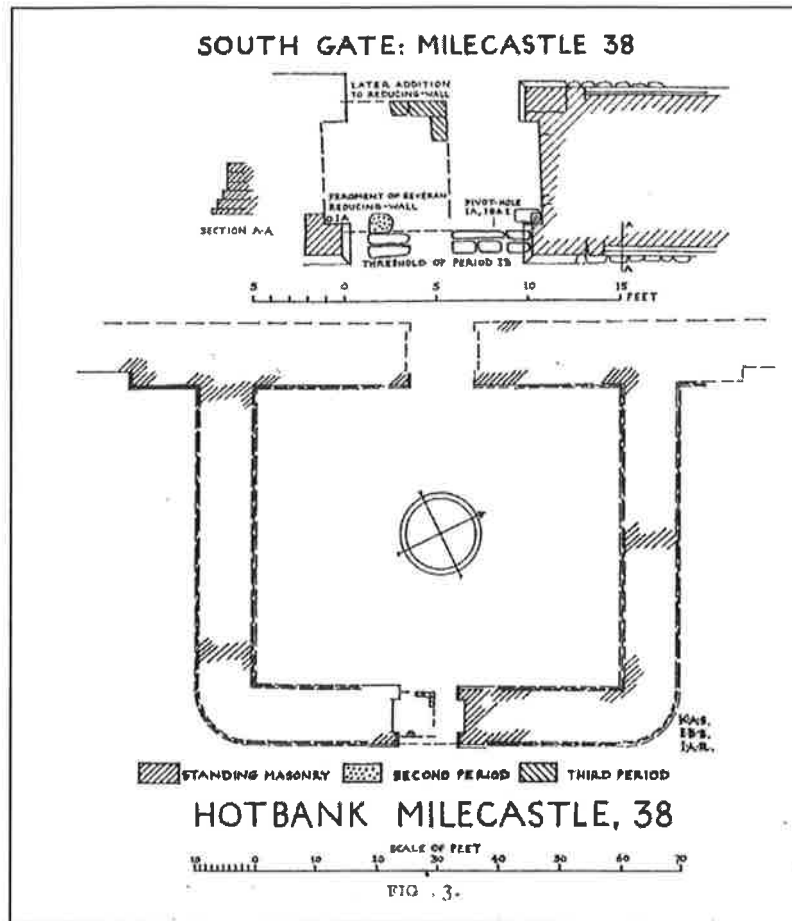


Figure 4: Plan of the 1935 Excavation (after Simpson *et al* 1936)



Plate 1: Ditch North of Milecastle 38, Looking North-West



Plate 2: Remains of South Gate in foreground, Looking North-East



Plate 3: Possible Spoil Heaps to South-West, Looking South-West



Plate 4: South-West Bank of the Milecastle Showing line of Erosion, Looking North-East



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