



Helvellyn Gill, Lake District National Park,

Cumbria

Archaeological Watching Brief: Supplementary Report



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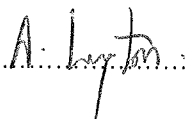
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SUMMARY

United Utilities proposed the construction of a flow transfer structure, access improvements, and a control building at Helvellyn Gill in Cumbria (NY 3162 1698; Fig 1). Following the results of desk-based research and a walkover survey (OA North 2009), recommendations were made by the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) Archaeologist for a programme of archaeological works to be undertaken. This was to comprise a watching brief during the sub-surface groundworks. Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was duly commissioned by United Utilities Ltd to undertake this work.

The study area is located in the Thirlmere valley, one of the main natural communication routes extending north from the centre of the Lake District, which would have been an important access route in both the prehistoric and subsequent periods. Site **09**, a cairn, of medieval or possibly prehistoric date, is located within the proposed development area, as is Helvellyn Gill enclosure (Site **11**). Site **03**, an area of post-medieval ridge and furrow, lies immediately to the north-east of the proposed development area.

Unfortunately, the groundworks on Site **09** progressed without the required archaeological monitoring. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were identified during the groundworks associated with Sites **11** and **3**. No recommendations are made for further work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank United Utilities Ltd for commissioning the project. Thanks are also due to Eleanor Kingston at the Lake District National Park Authority.

Becky Wegiel and Ric Buckle conducted the watching brief. Vicky Bullock and Kelly Clapperton compiled the report. Mark Tidmarsh produced the drawings, and Alison Plummer, who managed the project, also edited the report.

1. CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Following proposals by United Utilities for the construction of a flow transfer structure, access improvements, and a control building at Helvellyn Gill in Cumbria (NY 3162 1698), the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) recommended that rapid archaeological desk-based research and a walkover survey of the proposed development be undertaken. Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was subsequently commissioned by United Utilities to undertake this work, which was completed in June 2009 (OA North 2009). In light of the potential for archaeological remains, it was agreed with the Lake District National Park archaeologist, that an archaeological watching brief should be undertaken during the groundworks phase of the proposed development. United Utilities commissioned OA North to undertake the work which was completed in July 2009. The following sets out the results of the watching brief in the form of a short, supplementary report referencing LUAU (1997) and OA North (2009) surveys throughout and the site numbers used in the OA North 2009 report have been retained for ease of reference.

1.2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 The proposed development area is located at Helvellyn Gill (NY 3162 1698) on the east side of the A591, which runs approximately north/south on the east side of the Thirlmere reservoir (Fig 1). The site lies approximately 300m from Thirlmere at *c* 230m AOD (Ordnance Survey (OS) 2001). Highpark Wood is located a short distance to the south of the proposed development area, and to the east the ground rises steeply towards Red Screes and Raise to the north of Helvellyn.
- 1.2.2 The solid geology of the Thirlmere estate largely comprises igneous rocks, specifically tuffs and pyroxene andesitic lavas, with intercalations of fine-grained acid intrusive rhyolite and basalt, dating from the Llandeilo division of the Ordovician, and belonging to the Borrowdale Volcanic Group (BVG) (Geol Surv 1863; Ward 1876, 13-19; Inst Geol Sci 1980). The BVG was previously called Green Slates and Porphyries by Sedgwick (1836). Marr (1916, 19-22) assigns most of the rocks both east and west of Thirlmere to the Ullswater and Eycott group, the second oldest sub-division group in the BVG.
- 1.2.3 Glacial action in the valley has resulted in erosion, rather than accumulation or deposition (Ward 1876, 80-1). Moraine mounds occur frequently with perched and transported (ie erratic) blocks south-west of Dollywagon Pike, south of Raise; north of Raise '*where the miners' path crosses the watershedding line*'; and in Stanah Gill, west of Stybarrow Dodd to the north-east of the study area (Ward 1876, 88-9). A boulder of the Armboth and Helvellyn dyke is found above Thirlspot, at a height of 1000ft (*c* 305m), and there are many perched blocks and scattered boulders across the Wythburn and Armboth Fells, to the south and south-west of the study area (*ibid*).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 The archaeological watching brief was carried out in accordance with the relevant IFA and English Heritage guidelines (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999, *Standard and guidance for archaeological Watching Briefs*; English Heritage, 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edn, London; English Heritage 2006, *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE)).

2.2 WATCHING BRIEF

2.2.1 Prior to the development taking place, the LDNPA Archaeologist and United Utilities agreed that protective fencing should be erected around Sites **9** and **11**.

2.2.2 The programme of field observation recorded accurately the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features and/or deposits exposed during the course of the groundworks. The work comprised the systematic examination of any subsoil horizons exposed during the course of the groundworks, for potential archaeological remains.

2.2.3 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded on OA North's *pro-forma* sheets, using a system based on that of the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology. A monochrome and colour slide photographic record was maintained throughout and, where appropriate, scaled plans and sections were produced to locate the presence of archaeological features and deposits as accurately as possible.

2.3 ARCHIVE

2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design (*Appendix I*), and in accordance with current IFA and English Heritage guidelines. The paper and digital archive will be deposited with the Lake District National Park Authority.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 A detailed archaeological and historical background has been provided in the Rapid Desk-based Research and Walkover Survey (OA North 2009), and therefore, it is not necessary to repeat the information in this supplementary report. However, given the archaeological potential of the study area a brief summary of those sites potentially affected by the proposed scheme has been included in order to place the results of the watching brief in an archaeological context.

3.2 HELVELLYN GILL ENCLOSURE (SITE 11; LUAU 141)

3.2.1 The Helvellyn Gill Enclosure (Site 11/ LUAU Site 141) lies over a small hummock on an area of relatively flat land just north of Highpark Wood and adjacent to Helvellyn Gill. The main feature of the site is an irregularly-shaped field-plot, which is entirely contained within a later field system. The boundaries of the later system were established by the publication of the first edition 1:2500 OS map (1880). The enclosure is defined by a now ruined drystone wall, and there is evidence for different phases of walling, suggesting that the site has been in use for a considerable period and may have medieval origins. The latest phase of field system comprises the modern field walls, which are a product of parliamentary enclosure, and are shown on the time of the first edition 1:2500 OS map, as enclosing unimproved land.

3.2.2 The site comprises a large, irregular, sub-circular drystone-walled enclosure 95m by 70m, just north-east of the car park at the bottom of Helvellyn Gill. The enclosure walls are poorly-preserved and stand to a maximum height of 0.5m, and in many places they survive merely as a rubble spread. The interior of the enclosure has been cultivated and is now virtually covered by ridge and furrow. There are also a few clearance cairns on the inside; one is roughly 10m in diameter and stands to a height of 0.8m, whilst another measures 5m in diameter and stands to a height of 0.3m. There are two similar cairns to the north of the enclosure.

3.2.3 A survey carried out by LUAU in 1997 of the Thirlmere estate concluded that, from the surface evidence, the earliest medieval exploitation of the area was of a sporadic and potentially transhumant nature. Across the fells a considerable number of small, usually single-celled rectangular huts have been identified. They are generally much-decayed and do not relate to modern field systems. Their form, isolation and character are not dissimilar from documented shielings; however, they could also be shepherds huts (LUAU 1997). 'Bields' are located to the north-east of the study area in the Barwick House area (NY 31909 17356). Dickson (1879, 21) defines a bield as 'a place of shelter; a fox den; a shelter of loose stones to protect sheep from storms on the fells'.

3.2.4 The survey found that there was relatively little evidence for more established medieval farming settlements and field systems in the Thirlmere Estate (with

the notable exception of Helvellyn Gill Enclosure (Site **11**). This either suggests that evidence for early settlement has been destroyed by subsequent ploughing, or that the development of settled communities was less intensive, and of a later date by comparison with other Lakeland valleys. Even by the time of the flooding of the valley in the late nineteenth century, the agricultural community was still of a relatively low density (*ibid*).

3.3 HELVELLYN GILL CAIRN (SITE 09; LUAU 143)

3.3.1 Helvellyn Gill Cairn comprises a large, prominent earthfast cairn or large mound, 15m in diameter and 0.8m high. The mound has well-defined edges and is clearly artificial. There are stones protruding throughout and a hollow in the middle, with one block of stone protruding from the top. It has no direct relationship with the enclosure to the east (Site **11**), and it cannot be established from the surface evidence, if it was contemporary with the enclosure system. The possibility that it was a funerary monument cannot be excluded.

3.4 POST-MEDIEVAL RIDGE AND FURROW (SITE 03)

3.4.1 There are a number of post-medieval and modern sites in close proximity to the study area. The nearest is Site **03**, an area of post-medieval ridge and furrow, 0.2m in height, trough to crest, and 3.5m in width crest to crest. It stretches for 100m and forms a 35m wide strip running from north/south. It is cut by a drainage leat, and possibly bounded on its eastern edge by a dried-up stream. Its western side is marked by a field wall and a stream.

4. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

4.1 RESULTS

- 4.1.1 A programme of archaeological works, in the form of a watching brief, was conducted in July 2009. Unfortunately, the contractor undertook the groundworks to the north of Site **09** without informing the archaeologist. Therefore, no features or deposits of archaeological significance were observed.
- 4.1.2 The archaeological watching brief of the topsoil strip across the remainder of the site was also undertaken in July 2009. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were identified during the groundworks.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

- 5.1.1 The known archaeological sites within the development area span the pre-historic period through to the post-medieval period. However, despite the rich archaeological resource of the area, no further sites or features of archaeological interest were observed during the watching brief. This is in part due to the absence of an archaeologist during some of the groundworks, and also the fencing-off of sensitive sites.
- 5.1.2 It is understood that the ground works for the development have been completed, and therefore no further works are recommended.

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7. ILLUSTRATIONS

7.1 LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Site Location

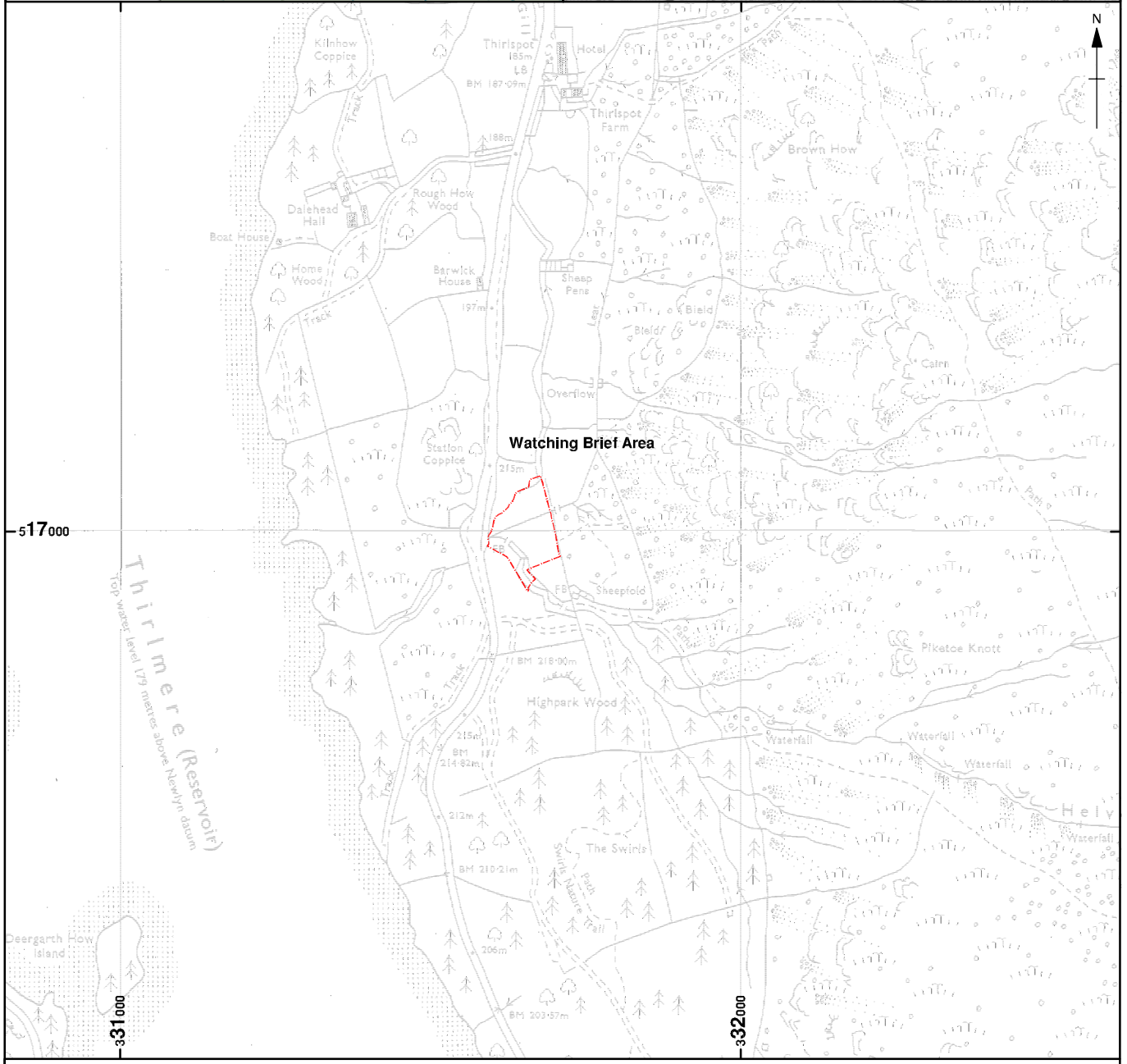
Figure 2: Watching Brief Location

7.2 LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: Site **03**, looking south-west

Plate 2: Site **10**, looking south

Plate 3: Leat (Site **07**) with cairn (Site **09**) to the south, looking west



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Figure 1: Site location

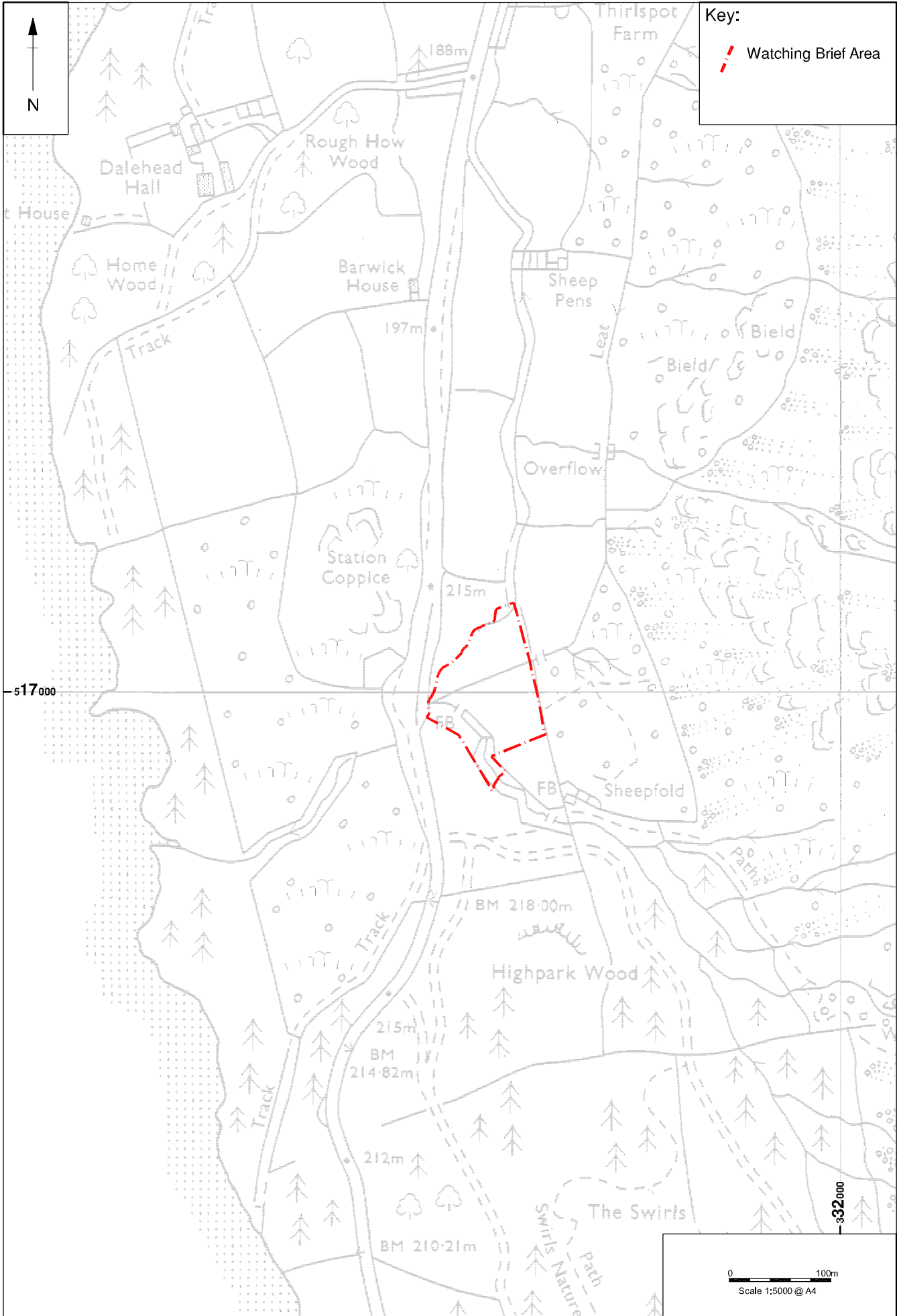


Figure 2: Plan of Watching Brief Area



Plate 1: Site 03, looking south-west



Plate 2: Site 10, looking south



Plate 3: Leat (Site 07) with cairn (Site 09) to the south, looking west