

Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 122/91

REPORT ON AN AUGER SURVEY AT  
NORTH HILL, SAMSON, ISLES OF SCILLY

Matthew Canti and V Straker

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Summary

An auger survey was carried out near the remains of a cliff-edge hut circle on Samson. The hut circle was situated on a well defined land surface which had subsequently become buried by blown sand. The survey was extended to trace the surface inland and assess the extent of the settlement. Two holes North of the site contained possible occupation deposits and many of the remaining ten showed evidence of the buried soil.

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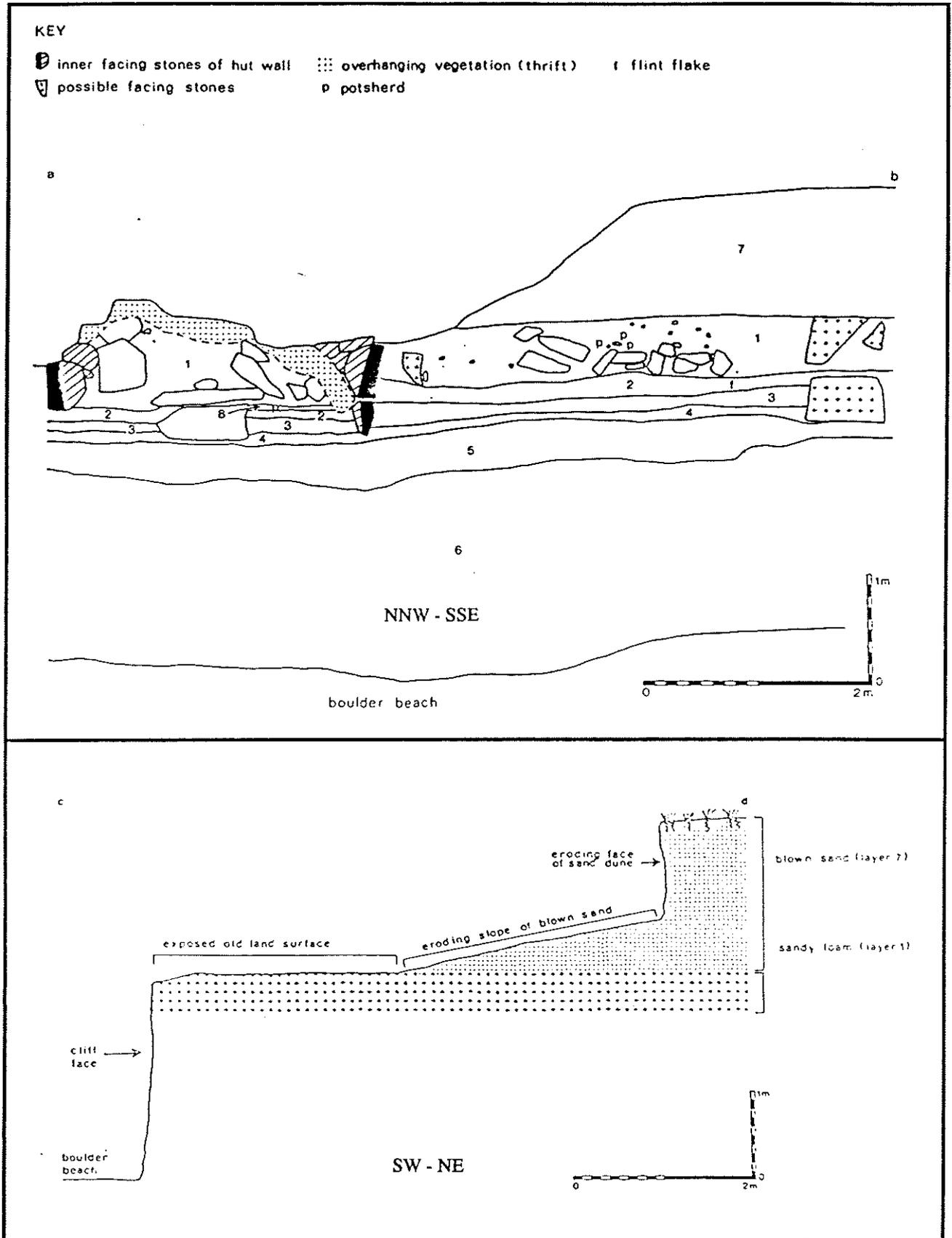
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1. Introduction

Archaeological recording was carried out on a cliff-face site threatened by erosion at North Hill, Samson in 1989. The work was done by the Cornwall Archaeological Unit and directed by Jeanette Ratcliffe and Cathy Parkes. The results (C.A.U 1989) showed one definite hut circle and the remains of a possible building set on a well-defined old land surface, subsequently buried under blown sand. Since the extent of the old surface and its archaeological potential remained unknown, an auger survey was carried out by the present authors in September 1990. This report details the results of that survey.

2. Site Information

Two views of the site are shown overpage on Figure 1. The cliff profile (lower diagram) consisted of a face above the beach formed largely of solifluction deposits (rab). This material is the commonest substrate for soil development at slope-base and collection sites throughout the islands and appears to be largely of periglacial origin (Scourse 1986). The definite and possible hut circles were both found at the top of this face (upper diagram). Going inland, there was a shelf exposure of the old surface followed by a face of blown sand with eroded material at its foot. The sand face contained dark humic bands perhaps representing brief stillstand phases in the accretion of the aeolian material.

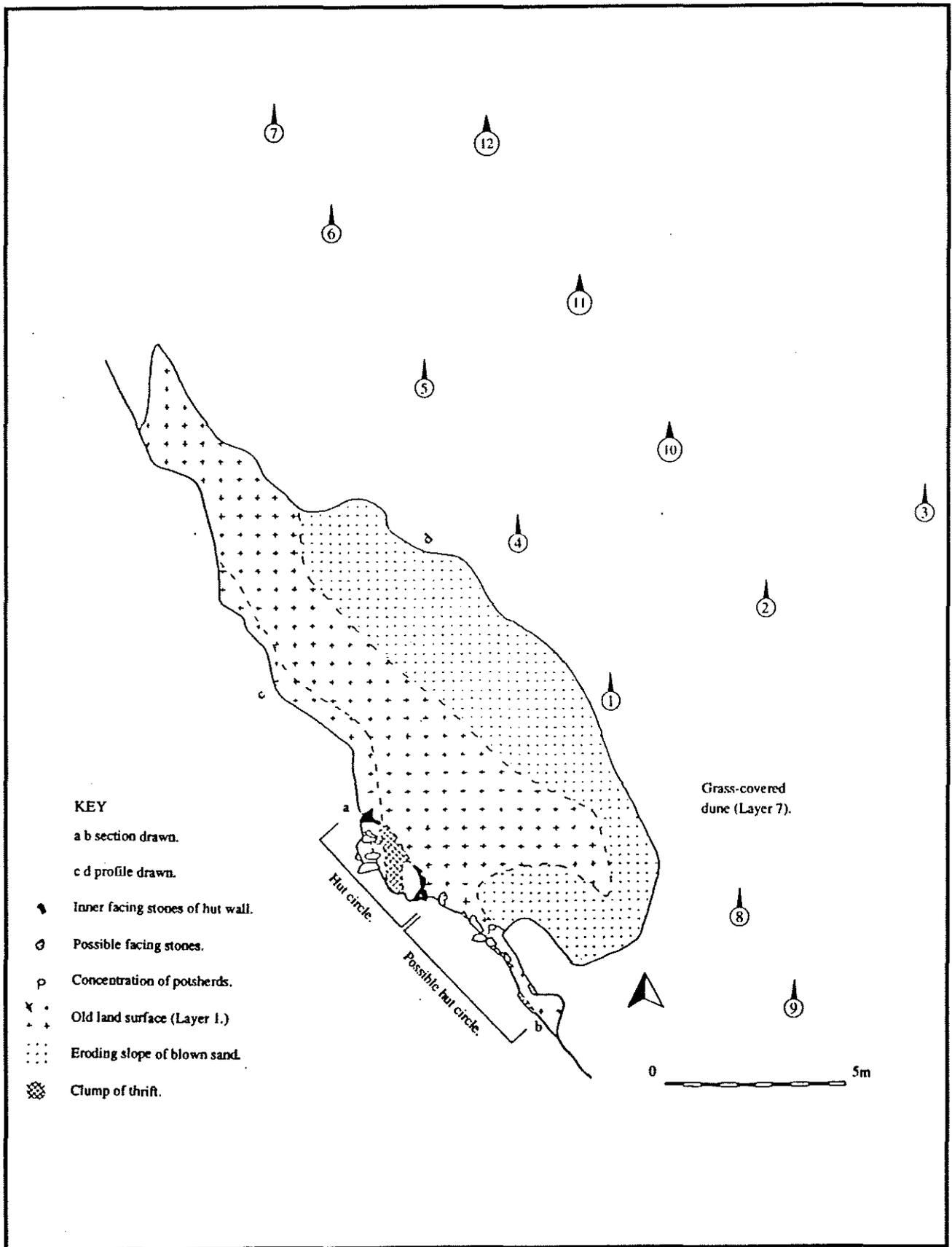


**Figure 1**  
 Cliff-section and profile showing the hut circle(s), old land surface, and blown sand. Adapted from C.A.U.(1989).

### 3. Survey Details

12 auger holes were drilled into the blown sand area inland using a Dutch-auger head. The positions of the holes are shown on Figure 2 and the results were as follows :-

<u>No.</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Comments</u>
1	0 - 196 Blown sand 196 - 223 Brown loamy sand with stones (10yr 5/3) 223 - 234 Dark Yellowish Brown silt loam. (10yr 4/6).	
2	0 - 162 Blown sand. 162 - 187 Dark reddish brown silt loam (5yr 3/2). 187 - 197 Dark brown silt loam (7.5yr 3/4).	Browner towards base. Possible buried topsoil.
3	0 - 100 Blown sand. 100 - 133 Dark reddish brown silt loam grading to dark brown silt loam.	Contained a humic layer. Stopped by rab at 133cm.
4	0 - 192 Blown sand. 192 - 199 Dark occupation type deposits (5yr 3/2). 199 - 205 Brown silt loam. (7.5yr 4/2).	Increasing chroma after 205cm towards rab top.
5	0 - 185 Blown sand. 185 - 193 Dark occupation type deposits (5yr 3/2). 193 - 199 Brown silt loam (7.5yr 4/2).	Contained 10 cm humic layer Increasing chroma after 199 cm towards rab top.
6	0 - 160 Blown sand 160 - 170 Dark brown silt loam (7.5yr 3/2).	More granite sand than previous holes. Stopped by stone at 170 cm.
7	0 - 164 Blown sand.	Contained humic layer. Stopped by stone at 164 cm



**Figure 2**  
 Diagram of the 12 auger points overlaid onto the original site plan. Drawings of a-b and c-d correspond with Figure 1. Adapted from C.A.U. (1989).

8	0 - 264	Blown sand grading to Brown silt loam.	Maximum silt content around 220 cm.
9	0 - 157	Blown sand grading to Brown silt loam.	Stopped by stone at 157 cm.
10	0 - 164 164 -	Blown sand. Dark reddish brown silt loam (5yr 3/2).	Browner towards base. Buried topsoil.
11	0 - 140	Blown sand.	Stopped by stone in the sand layer.
12	0 - 140	Blown sand.	Stopped by stone.

#### 4. Discussion

The thickness of the blown sand varies between 1 to 2 metres but is usually greater than 1.5 metres. Lines of dark humic sand were often encountered before reaching the base of the blown material. Beneath it at many holes there were some remains of the old buried topsoil, typically represented by a dark reddish brown or dark brown silt loam. This was not easily distinguished from possible occupation material in a disturbed auger-head sample. The field assessment was that occupation horizons were only present at holes 4 and 5, while the other dark deposits found were more-or-less natural buried topsoils. No finds were recorded in any of the holes.

The siltiness of the natural buried topsoil suggests a loess influenced layer above the rab - typical of many areas in the Scillies (Scourse 1986). It was frequently observed that the silty layer beneath the buried soil showed gradually increasing chroma (in these cases red/yellow) with depth as the top of the rab was approached. This provided the quickest assessment of having reached the "natural".

The difficulty of providing anything more than generalised interpretations from screw-auger surveys like this must be emphasised in assessing the archaeological potential at North Hill. However, if further digging is anticipated, the area due north of the main hut circle would seem the most likely possibility.

#### REFERENCES

- C.A.U. (1989) "Archaeological recording work at two cliff-face sites in the Isles of Scilly." Cornwall County Council.
- Scourse J.D. (1986) "The Isles of Scilly." Field Guide. Quaternary Research Association, Coventry.