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**An Interrupted-Ditch Enclosure at Southmore Grove, Rendcomb,
Gloucestershire**

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By STEVE TROW

During July 1983, aerial reconnaissance by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments Air Photographic Unit of Ditches hillfort, North Cerney, and its immediate environs, revealed a hitherto unknown interrupted-ditch enclosure some 900 m to the north-east. The site (NGR SP 003099) lies within Rendcomb parish and is situated at 220 m above sea level on the gently-sloping eastern shoulder of a south-facing spur of the Great Oolite limestone (FIG. 1). Immediately to the south is the head of a narrow, steep-sided valley. That part of the site under arable cultivation and therefore visible as a cropmark comprises a roughly semicircular circuit of two concentric interrupted ditches with a maximum east-west diameter of approximately 125 m enclosing an area slightly less than one hectare (FIGS. 2–3). Due to the wooded nature of the scarp below the site it is not possible to discern whether the enclosure has a southern boundary, although the steepness of the slope suggests this is improbable.

Photographs of the site (NMR SP 0009/6/1250–1, 3/1234, 4/1235, 5/1238–40, and 7/1252–3) reveal no obvious internal detail within the enclosed area and several vague cropmarks visible externally may be of geological rather than archaeological origin. The plot of the site (based on NMR SP 0009/6/1251) indicates several well-defined causeways interrupting the ditch circuits (FIG. 3). It should be noted, however, that some of these, particularly the major discontinuity to the north, are the result of a lack of definition in the cropmark. The ditch circuits appear to be around 10 m apart and 2 m in width, with the occasionally pale colouration of the cropmarks suggesting that they contain a significant proportion of limestone rubble in their fills.

In order to confirm the identification of the site as an interrupted-ditch enclosure, the relevant area was fieldwalked during April 1985 both on an extensive and an intensive basis (see Table 1 and FIG. 3). Most fields in the vicinity produce a scatter of prehistoric worked flint but the density in the enclosure field, particularly towards the southern end, was above average. The area including and adjacent to the enclosure was systematically walked on a 50 m square grid and the results of the surface collection of artefacts quantified. Two sherds of Roman and several sherds of post-medieval pottery probably derived from manuring activities. Both rows A and B in the intensively walked area demonstrate a marked increase in the number and total weight of flints recovered in an area which corresponds closely to the plot of the enclosure. The greater flint retrieval from row B probably reflects the wet conditions in which this row was walked rather than a genuine increase in the density of struck flint.

Some 1400 m west of the site, the presence of a badly plough-damaged long barrow (North Cerney II, discovered by Alan Saville in 1977; Saville 1980, 6, no. 46) provides additional evidence of neolithic activity on the same ridge. Fieldwalking of the area within and adjacent to the iron age hillfort has led to the location of two polished stone axes and the recognition of a major concentration of worked flint situated on the top of the spur between the barrow and the interrupted-ditch enclosure (see FIG. 1, no. 2). Further fieldwork should help to define the limits of this scatter more accurately.

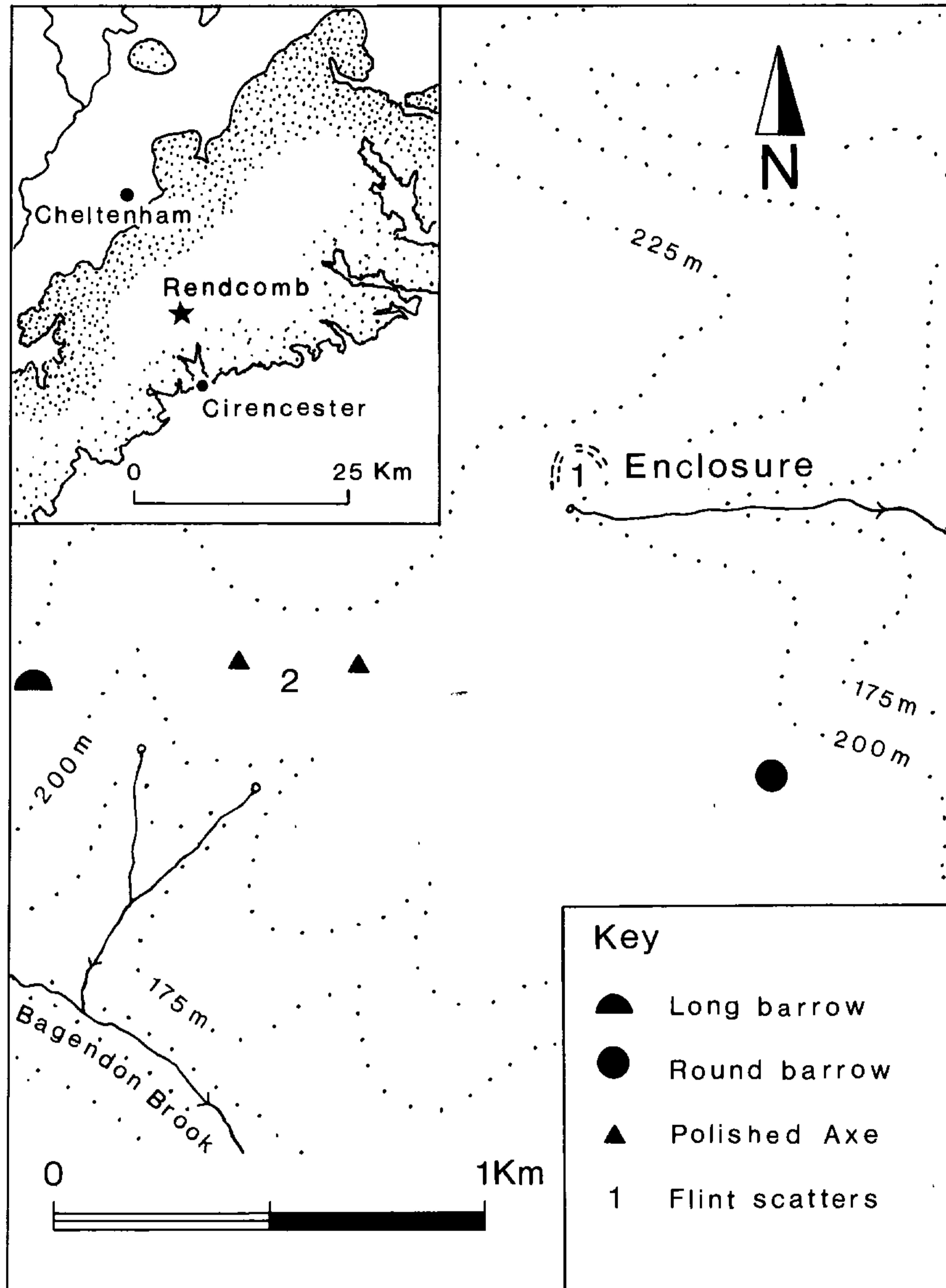


FIG. 1 Location map showing position of the Southmore Grove, Rendcomb, interrupted-ditch enclosure and other neolithic/bronze age occupation evidence in the immediate vicinity.

Interrupted-ditch enclosures are distributed over most of southern England and the Midlands (Wilson 1975, fig. 2). Those excavated suggest that, as a class, these monuments belong to the early and middle neolithic periods, although opinion is still divided regarding their function or range of functions (Drewett 1977, 222–226). The maximum enclosed area of the Rendcomb example is at the lower end of the known range for related sites (Palmer 1976, 174–175 and 180–186). Morphologically and topographically, the best parallels for the site are found on the chalk downs of Sussex at Offham Hill (Drewett 1977) and Combe Hill (Musson 1950). Both of

Table 1 Rendcomb interrupted-ditch enclosure: quantification of flintwork recovered during fieldwalking (see FIG. 3).

Square	Number of flints	Weight in g
A1	25	123.9
A2	43	164.9
A3	43	56.8
A4	94	408.5
A5	53	267.2
A6	22	50.4
B1	46	257.4
B2	85	340.0
B3	82	320.3
B4	103	618.5
B5	76	340.2
B6	36	207.3
Totals	708	3155.4

these sites are similar in size to Rendcomb and both are only partially enclosed due to the proximity of a steep scarp. In the modern county of Gloucestershire the recognition of the Rendcomb enclosure brings the total number of similar sites to six (Darvill 1984, 88–91; Darvill and Hingley forthcoming), two of which, The Peak Camp and Crickley Hill, have been excavated (Darvill 1981 and 1982; Dixon 1979). The sites occupy a variety of locations and may be positioned in order to exploit several differing environmental zones (Barker and Webley 1978, 174–175). The two excavated enclosures are situated on west-facing promontories on the Cotswold scarp while Down Ampney and Eastleach are part of a larger group of sites scattered across the floor of the Upper Thames valley. Among the Gloucestershire examples, the topographic setting of the Rendcomb enclosure has most in common with that of Icomb Hill. Both sites are in elevated positions on the Cotswold dip-slope and both are in close proximity to a river valley – that of the Churn and the Evenlode respectively.

The fortuitous discovery of this site emphasizes the importance of aerial reconnaissance for the Cotswolds, an area largely neglected in the past. However, the recognition of the enclosure from the air is a direct result of the damage inflicted on the site by ploughing. The seriousness of such damage for this type of monument has already been noted (Saville 1980, 27) and it is to be hoped, therefore, that the Rendcomb enclosure can be afforded some measure of protection in the near future.

The Flints by Alan Saville

In addition to the 708 flints from controlled fieldwalking, a further 304 flints (weighing 1560.8 g) were recovered from casual walking of the field in which the enclosure lies. All these flints were examined and have been subdivided typologically as in Table 2.

The most diagnostic forms present are the microliths, the leaf-shaped and barbed-and-tanged arrowheads, and the flake from a polished flint axehead, pointing to activity in the vicinity from the mesolithic to the early bronze age. However, the single barbed-and-tanged arrowhead is not complemented by any other bronze age types and is probably just a stray, since the assemblage as a whole is predominantly of mesolithic and early/middle neolithic character.

To the microliths can be added at least two of the scrapers and at least 30 of the cores as being of distinctively mesolithic type. Matching the bladelet-producing form of the cores, the unretouched flakes include a high proportion of blades and bladelets, which are also likely to be mesolithic. Most of the microliths are fragmentary, but they do include examples of small obliquely-blunted points. The leaf-shaped arrowheads, which are also fragmentary, can be set alongside the polished axehead flake and several of the scrapers as being of early/middle neolithic type. Further subdivision of this mixed mesolithic and neolithic surface collection would not be appropriate, though continued fieldwork might be able to identify more specific concentrations relating to each period.

The Rendcomb flints thus add another location to the growing list of mesolithic findspots in the Gloucestershire



FIG 2. Southmore Grove, Rendcomb, interrupted-ditch enclosure from the air in July 1983. North is to the top. (National Monuments Record SP 0009/6/1251; Crown Copyright Reserved.)

Table 2 Typology of the Rendcomb flintwork

	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	UNLOCATED TOTALS TO SQUARE	
Unretouched flakes	19	32	37	66	43	17	34	57	59	67	49	26	227	733
Cores	2	2	1	3	2	1	4	3	6	6	6	2	12	50
Core fragments				3	1		1	4	3	1			7	20
Flaked lumps					1		1			3	4		3	12
Scrapers		1	1		2		2	3	1	3		2	5	20
Microliths			1	1				1		2			3	8
Leaf-shaped arrow-heads								1	1		1	1		4
Barbed-and-tanged arrowhead										1				1
'Fabricator'											1			1
Flake from polished axehead													1	1
Misc. retouched pieces	2					1		6		4	1	1	10	25
Unclassified burnt fragments	2	8	3	21	4	3	4	10	12	16	14	4	36	137
Totals	25	43	43	94	53	22	46	85	82	103	76	36	304	1012

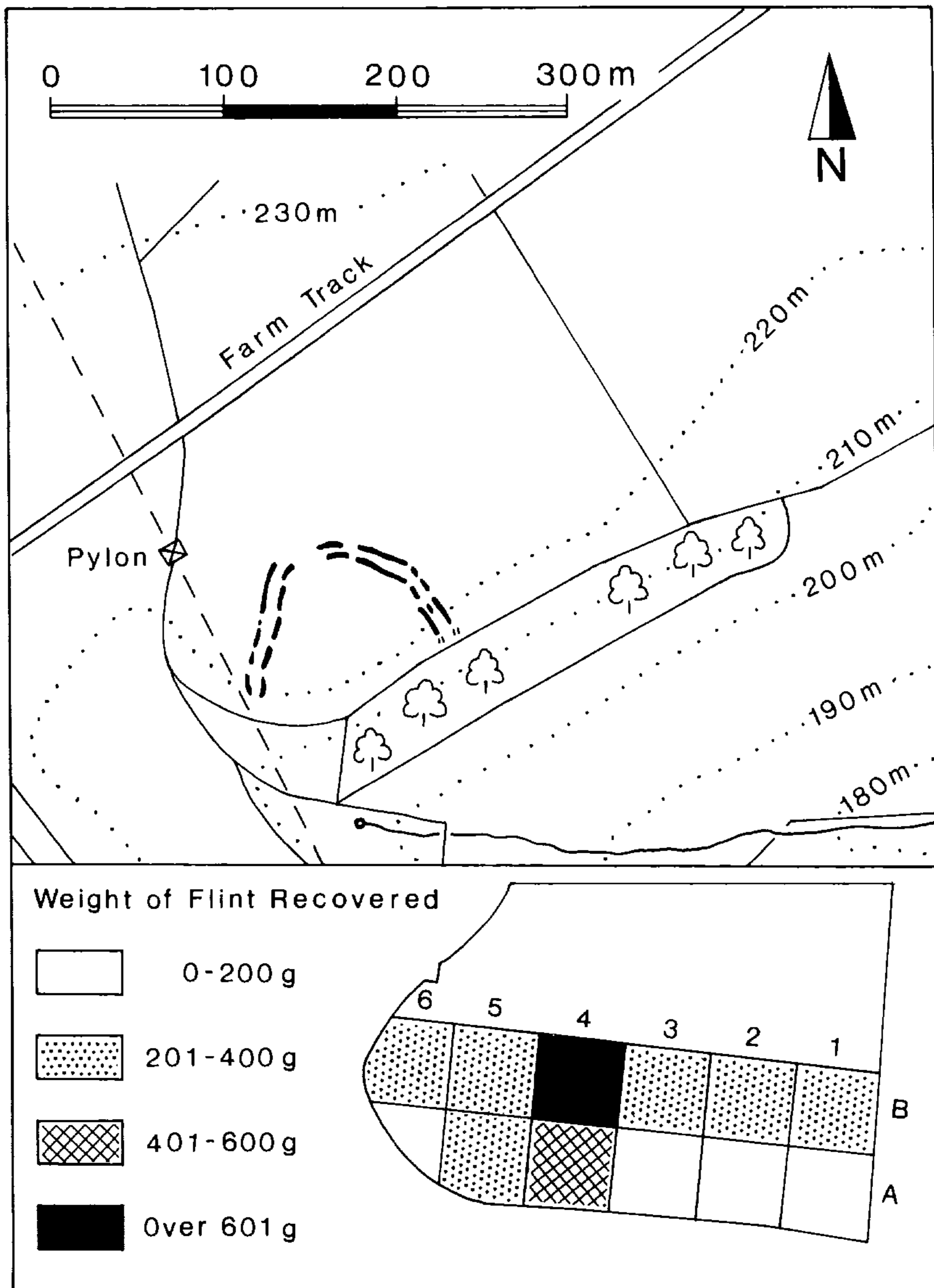


FIG. 3. Plot of the Southmore Grove enclosure (based on NMR SP 0009/6/1251) showing local topography and quantification of worked flint recovered during surface collection.

Cotswolds (Saville 1984a), and also demonstrate neolithic activity which can be linked circumstantially to the interrupted-ditch enclosure. The mesolithic pieces, particularly the cores, suggest a knapping site of some importance. The site appears, therefore, to represent a further Cotswold example of mesolithic occupation being followed on the same spot by neolithic settlement (Saville 1984b, 23), an aspect which considerably enhances its archaeological significance, and increases the need for its preservation or further investigation.

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