

# Back Bay, Monreith

*Topographic survey*



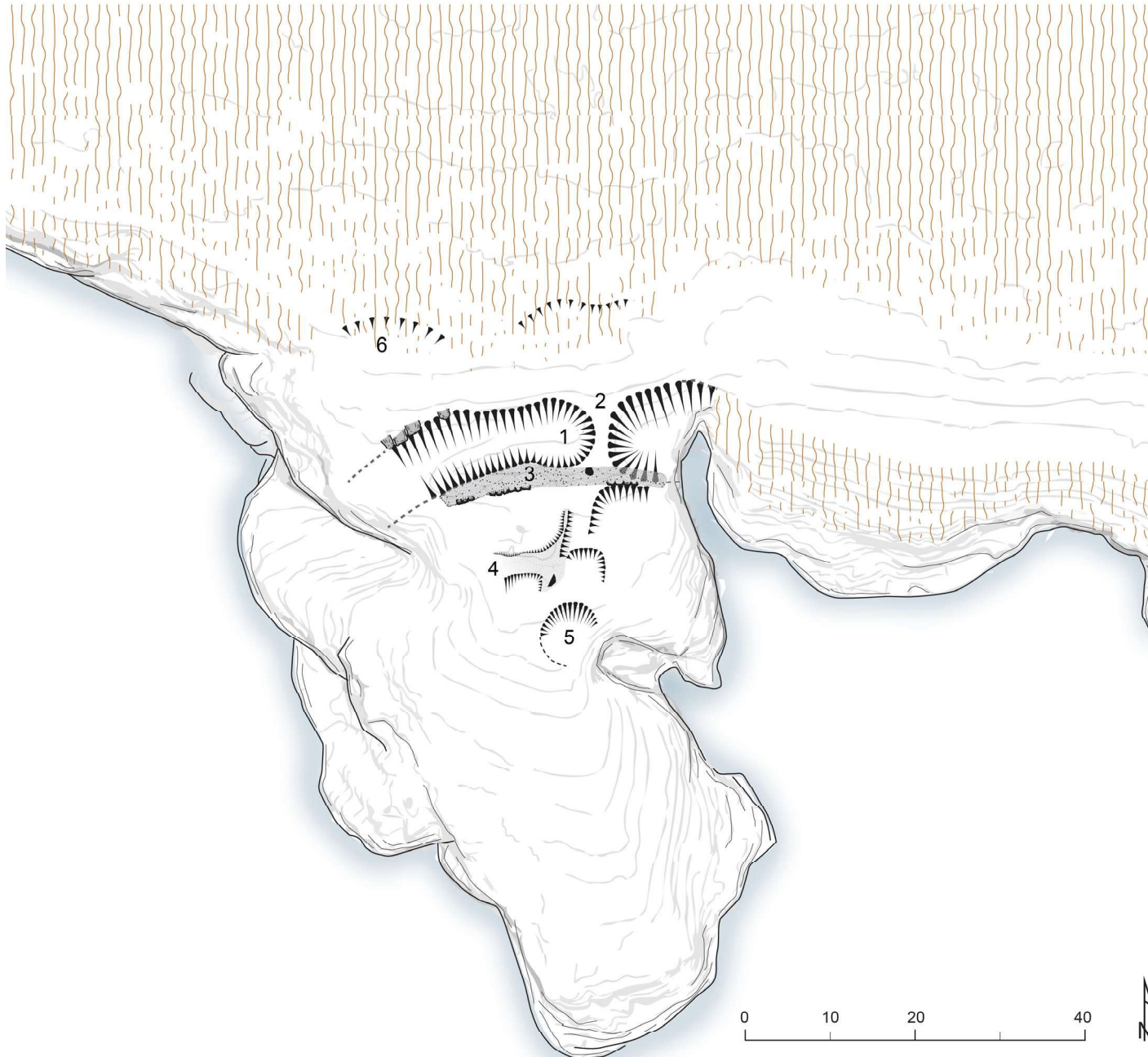
**WHITHORN**  
**MAP**

Machars Archaeology Project



## Back Bay promontory fort

National Grid Reference: NX 3696 3932

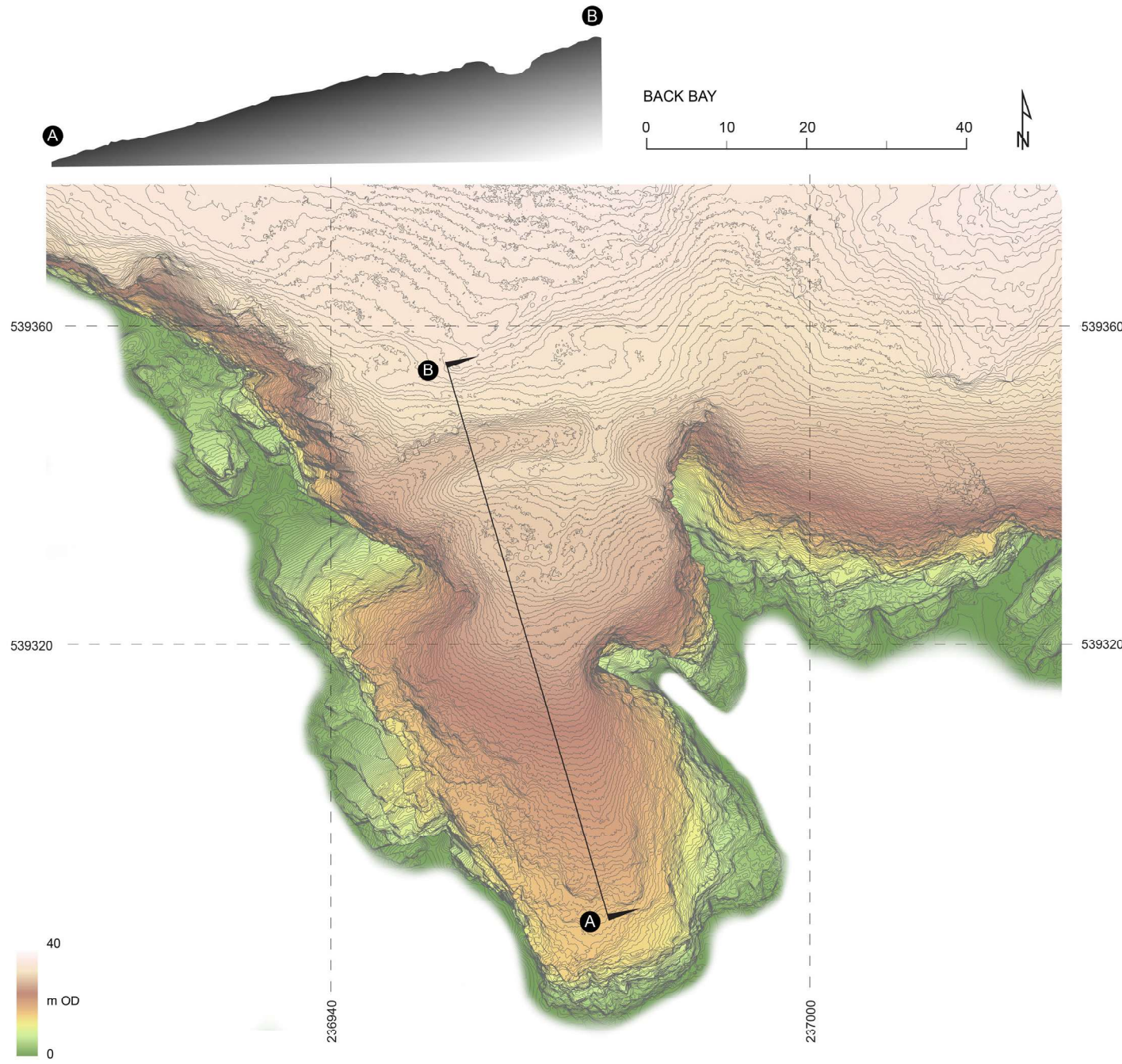


*In October 2025, participants on the Whithorn-MAP project undertook a new topographic survey of the promontory fort at Back Bay, Monreith.*

Around 250m SE of Back Bay, Monreith, a conspicuous promontory has been occupied by a later prehistoric fort. The promontory comprises a thin spur of land c. 70m by 20m, steeply sloping to the south and surrounded by near-vertical cliffs. The promontory narrows to only c.13m wide near its central point, eroded on either side by sharp inlets, to the south of which the terrain slopes steeply. Consequently, although the promontory comprises an area of c.1500 m<sup>2</sup>, perhaps only around 400 m<sup>2</sup> is realistically usable. The site has been defended by a single large rock-cut ditch (1), some 8m in width and over 2.5m deep, curving to meet the cliff edges on the E and W. A stone causeway (2) provides access into the fort interior, around 6m from the E end of the ditch. This position is notably off-centre and prompts the question of whether the E side of the fort has suffered from erosion and sections of the ditch have been lost. A single rampart (3) has been constructed on the interior of the ditch, surviving to c. 26m in length and forming a wall 2.5m in width. Sections of exposed wallface on both the interior and exterior sides indicate that it is faced with quarried greywacke blocks averaging 0.4 to 0.6m across.

The limited interior space seems unlikely to have ever accommodated more than two or three buildings. A somewhat amorphous collection of mounds and banks (4) may represent the remains of a rectilinear stone structure, which prompted previous surveyors to suggest that the site may have been reoccupied in the medieval or later centuries. The possible 'passageway' between these stone structures noted by OS surveyors in 1911 is aligned with the access causeway but, as they conceded, this and the structures to either side are too poorly defined to allow confident interpretation. To the S, a scooped hollow c.9m across forms a circular platform (5), itself partially eroded on the E side, may be the best candidate for a prehistoric building stance relating to the primary use of the monument.

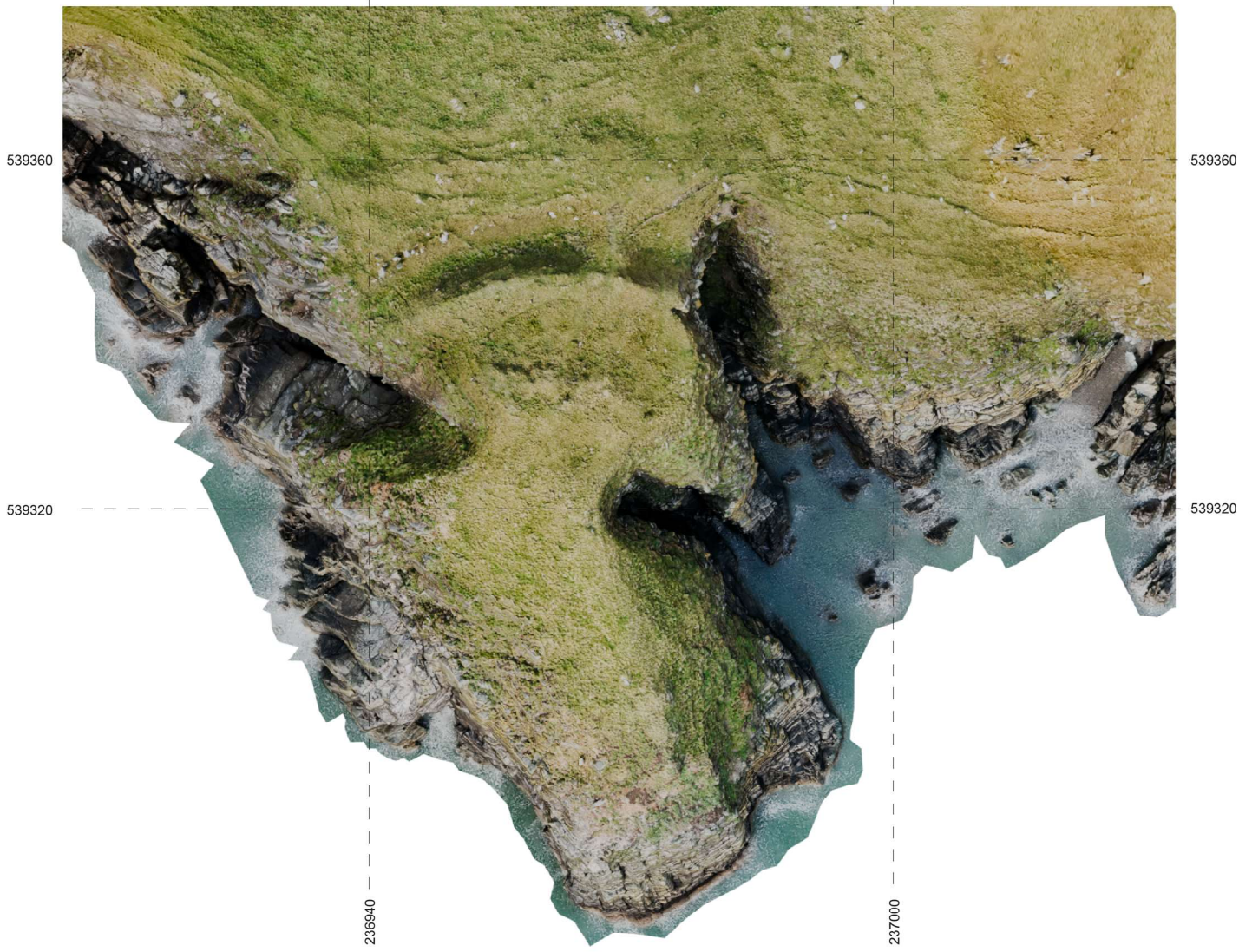
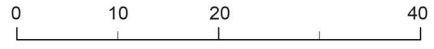
To the north of the fort, there are two shallow rectilinear terraces (6) which may represent further building stances; if so, it would seem likely that these relate to the reoccupation of the site.



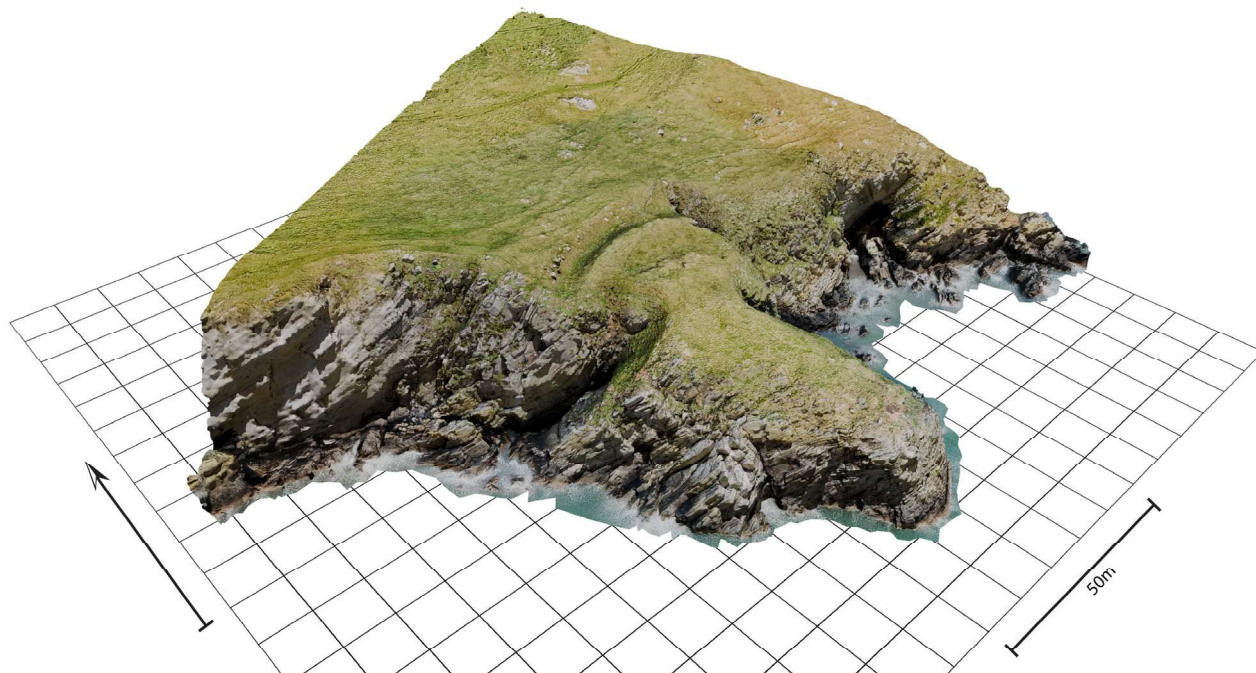
No excavation has been carried out at Back Bay and so the interpretation of the visible features remains tentative. In its general layout and character, the site is typical of the Galloway promontory forts, which often enclose a seemingly disproportionately small area for the scale of the defence. The nearby site at Carghidown, excavated in the early 2000s, contained two stances for timber ring-groove roundhouses, behind a ditch and bank of similar proportions to Back Bay. At Carghidown, the rampart was composed primarily of dumped soils and gravels, retained by a rough stone revetment. It is impossible to say whether the rather more substantial stone facing at Back Bay indicates a more formal construction from a similar chronological horizon, or whether the stone facing relates to a refurbishment in later centuries when the site was reoccupied. In any case, the original date of occupation of Back Bay seems most likely to align with that of Carghidown: radiocarbon dates from that site span the last two centuries BC.

*Terrain model of the Back Bay fort derived from drone-based photogrammetry.*

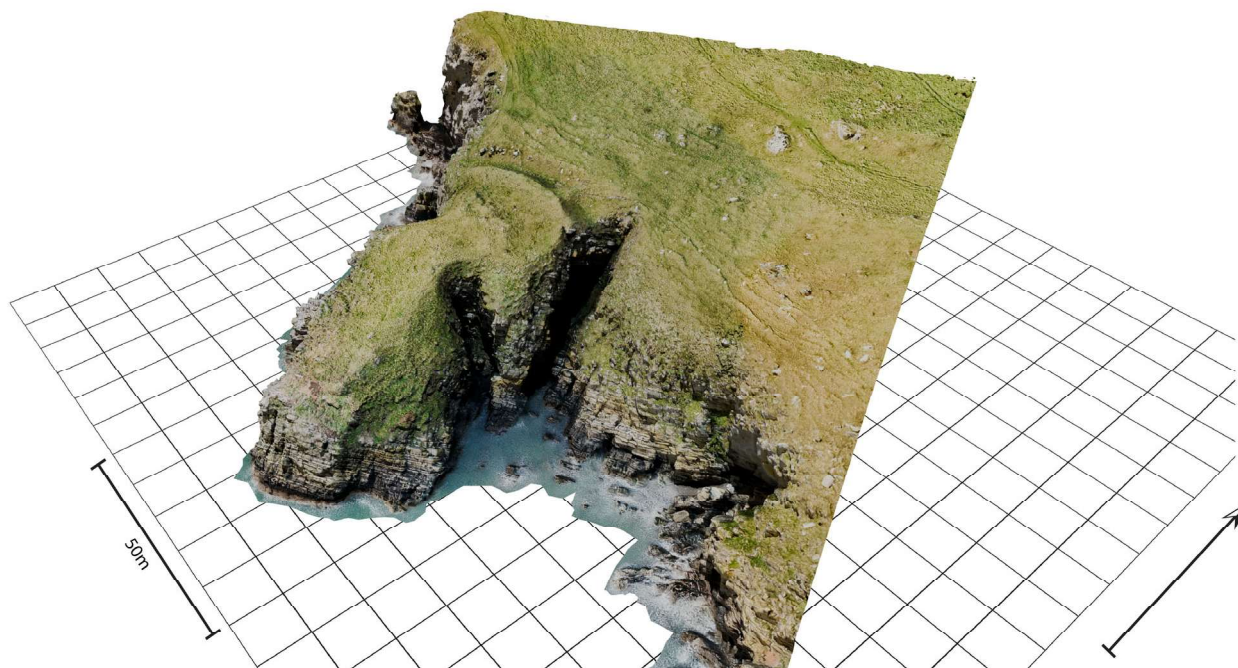
BACK BAY

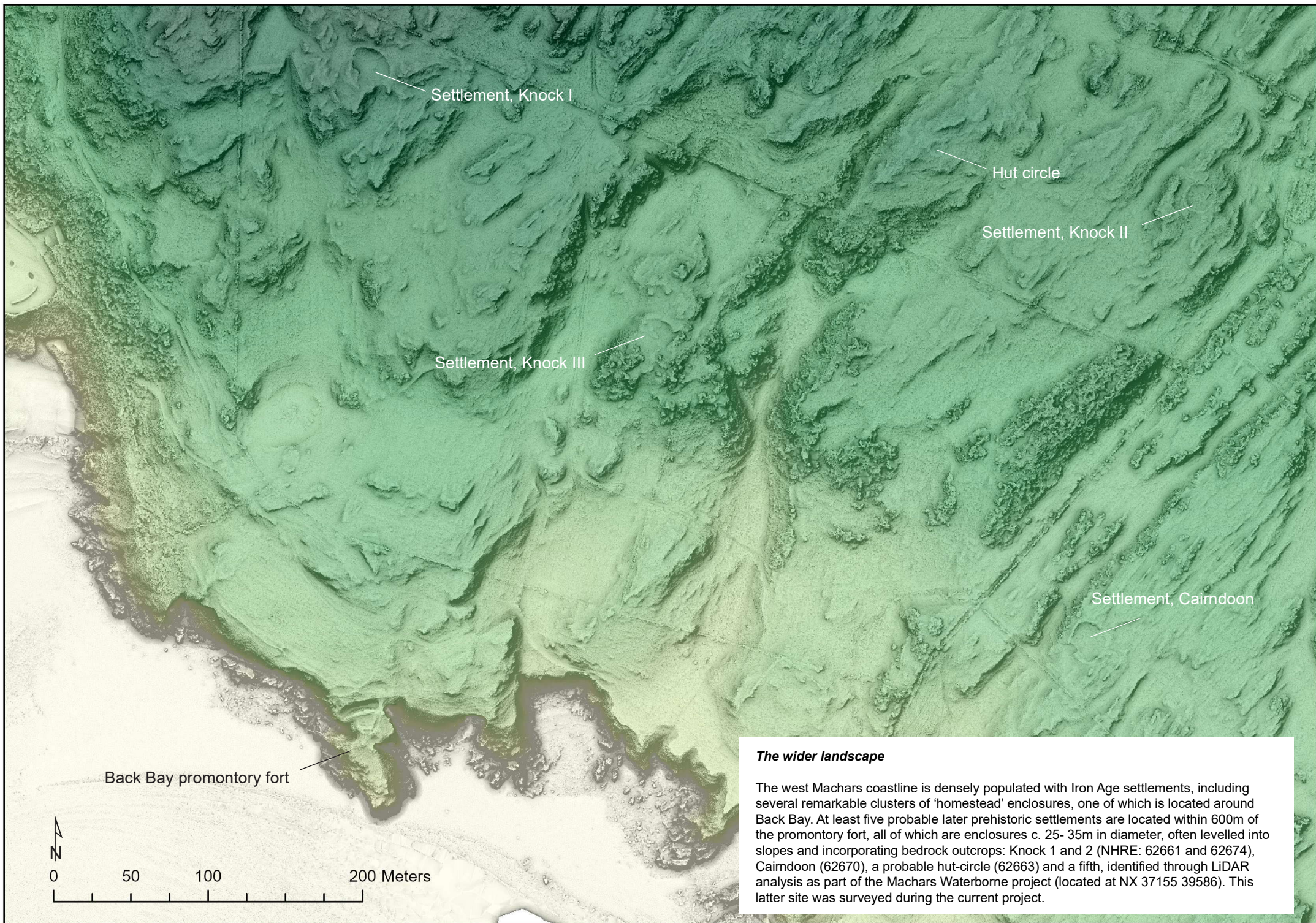


*Orthographic plan view of the Back Bay fort derived from drone photogrammetry.*



*Axonometric views of the Back Bay promontory fort, derived from drone-based photogrammetry, viewed from the SW (above) and SE (below).*





Settlement, Knock I

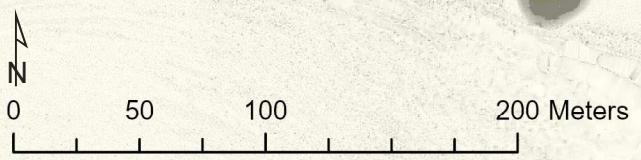
Hut circle

Settlement, Knock II

Settlement, Knock III

Settlement, Cairndoon

Back Bay promontory fort



***The wider landscape***

The west Machars coastline is densely populated with Iron Age settlements, including several remarkable clusters of 'homestead' enclosures, one of which is located around Back Bay. At least five probable later prehistoric settlements are located within 600m of the promontory fort, all of which are enclosures c. 25- 35m in diameter, often levelled into slopes and incorporating bedrock outcrops: Knock 1 and 2 (NHRE: 62661 and 62674), Cairndoon (62670), a probable hut-circle (62663) and a fifth, identified through LiDAR analysis as part of the Machars Waterborne project (located at NX 37155 39586). This latter site was surveyed during the current project.



0 10m



**Knock III, Settlement**  
NX 37155 39586

The newly-identified settlement at Knock follows a similar format to the others in the nearby area. The site may only be partially preserved, comprising a low curvilinear bank enclosing the northern extent of a level terrace situated on one of the many elevated bedrock ridges. The bank stands to c. 0.6m in height and is spread to c.4m in width. At the NE of the enclosure, the bank terminates in a rocky bedrock outcrop, which may indicate the position of the original entrance. Nothing survives on the S and E sides of the site, but several large bedrock outcrops were probably incorporated into the original enclosure in the same manner as several other settlements nearby. In the interior, two low mounds of rubble incorporate some large earthfast stones, one particularly large boulder is located close to the inside face of the bank in the N. It is unclear whether these features indicate the footings of interior buildings.



### Survey training

Survey under way by Whithorn-MAP participants at Back Bay and Knock, using plane table, total station and dGPS survey techniques.

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