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Further burials at Jeraly, via Hay

Judith Littleton
NPWS, Buronga

Introduction

A small burial ground at Jeraly, via Hay, was recorded during the 1970's (Figure 1 for location). The NSW NPWS site care (48.4.1) describes the site as an exposure of 13 skeletons located on a sandhill near a clay pan lake. A more complete recording of 15 exposed skeletons was completed by Pardoe, Johnston and Witter in April 1993 (Pardoe et al n.d.). Since then members of Hay LALC have carried out site protection works including covering burials with large mounds of soil and some revegetation. (The site has been fenced by the owners during the 1970's).

At the same time, Ian Woods and Terry Balch of the Hay LALC explored the area around the cemetery and found a further two burials eroding out of a scald to the north-west of the burialground. While visitng the site to record these two burials, two more skeletons were noticed eroding out of the main Jeraly cemetery, as well as five very small scatters of human bone exposed on mounds on Kerri East. This report is therefore a brief description of the two newly exposed skeletons at Jeraly and of the two burials at Jeraly North and a very brief description of the burials at Kerri East.

Jeraly Cemetery (48.4.1)

The lcoation of the two new exposures have been superimposed upon a sketchplan of the site completed by Pardoe (Figure 2; Pardoe et al. 1993) and are numbered accordingly as Burials 16 and 17.

Burial 16 is the burial of an adult (Figure 3). Only the upper body is visible. The skeleton is in good condition and near complete although most of the skull has already disappeared. The bone is bleached white and partly mineralized. General condition is the same as the other Jeraly burials.

The body was buried supine, in an extended position, head oriented to 54^0. The orientation of the head to an easterly direction is consistent with other burials in the Jeraly cemetery: burials where position could be determined were supine, extended with head oriented to the east (30 to 80 degrees; Pardoe et al. n.d.).

The only possible metrical observation was the clavicle mid-shaft circumference which was 35 mm. Clavicular circumference is not a good predictor of sex and this measurement falls within the ranges for both males and females (Ray 1959).

Burial 17 is location three metres to the south of Burial 16 (Figure 2). Only a smashed calvaria was present on the surface: no postcranial bones were observed (Figure 4). Condition of the bones is the same as for Burial 17 with an average fragment size of 6 cm. The burial was obviously an adult, however, no further observations could be made.

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The discovery of a further two burials in this area in less than four months indicates that any estimates of cemetery size based on current exposures of bone are uncertain. It is highly likely that burials in this location have been exposed, eroded away or re-covered and re-exposed in the past (see also Bonhomme 1990-121). Density of burials in this particular area of the burial ground appears to be very high and burial of a single individual could hardly have taken place without those doing the burial being aware of the presence of other bodies. Therefore, the notion of this small rise as an exclusive area for burials (a la Pardoe 1988) would appear to be supported.

Jeraly North

GRID REFERENCE: 231410E 6160520N (Toogimbie 1:100 000)

Approximately 1.7 km north-west of Jeraly cemetery, a further two burials were located by Ian Woods and Terry Balch. These are located on a low-lying scald to the west of the trignometric point (Figure 1). The scald consists of a low rise of red quartz sand over grey cracking clays bordering an extensive slightly lower area of lignum to the west. Edges of the sandsheet are indefinite and may be continuous with Jeraly Hill.

The scald itself is about 60 metres east-west and 80 metres north-south. Maximum height of the residual is c30 cms above currentl ground surface. Figure 5 is a sketchplan of the burial location in relation to the residuals.

Burial 1 consists of a scatter of c30 fragments of adult bone (between 3-5 cms long; Figure 6). The bone has been trampled by animals and, while some is lying within the grey clay, the position of the bone is disturbed.

The bone's condition is highly distinctive. Its is only slightly weathered, stained black on the exterior surface by manganese and with a band of rust -red staining in the cross-section of the bone. The bone has become highly mineralized with visible manganese inclusions in the cross-section. In addition, the outside of the bone is covered with a thick carbonnate crust.

It was difficult to make any inferences regarding the age or sex of this individual beyond the fact that, judging from the thickness of the skull, it was the burial of an adult.

Eighty metres north-east of the first burial are small fragments of a second individual. These consist of part of the maxilla and mandible and a hand which, although not completely articulate, still has all the bones in association (Figure 7). The bone is stained although not as heavily as the first burial and is generally less mineralized. Very little of the body was visible, the majority had already eroded away. However, it appears that the body may have been laid on its right side, face to the west (approximately) with one hand near the face (indicative of a flexed rather than extended burial).

Very little of the teeth were visible. The surface of the molars was obviously worn flat but there was still enamel present upon the surface. This tends to suggest someone aged between 15-40 yers of age. By 40 years at least some of the teeth are often showing extreme wear.

To the north of Burial 2, c10 metres away (Figure 5), there are scattered heat retainers eroding out of the sides of a residual. This appears to have been an area of ovens. There is no sign of mounding or ashy soil, however, to suggest anything other than campsite use. Small quartz flakes (less than 20) were observed lying in between the heat retainers. Apart from these remains, there was very little evidence for occupation in this location.

The distinction between the two burials suggests that they are unrelated events, as does the difference in the degree of mineralization. Given the right environment, mineralization of bone and replacement of calcium with other mineralis may occur very quickly (John McGee pers.com.) and there is little doubt that the Hay Plain is a good environment for bone mineralization. The ground becomes soaked intermittently and particularly over the clays is slow to drain allowing minerals in solution to enter and become incorporated in the bone. Thus it is extremely difficult to attribute a possible date to these burials. Based on mineralization it is probable that Burial 2 is later than Burial 1 and that both may predate the Jeraly cemetery, but in the absence of absolute dating this is only a working hypothesis.

Kerri East

GRID REFERENCE: 233790E 6155790N (Toogimbie 1:100 000)

At the same time as the inspection of Jeraly North, a series of small mounds was visited on Kerri East. Location of this area can be seen on Figure 1. There was insufficient time to record this area fully, however, the following is a very preliminary description of five burials found within a complex of mounds.

These mounds were located in an area of undulating depressions and mounds. The area appears to consist (as at Jeraly North) of an irregular red sandsheet over clayey soil. Vegetation consists of low grasses including some lignum and occasional saltbush.

There are approximately 20 possible mounds located within an area of 500 metres north-south by 1000 metres long. They appear to surround a small shallow depression. These conglomerations of old heat retainer and sand are around 10 metres in diameter and are visible as low residuals with eroded edges or as uneroded mounds. To call them mounds, in fact, is to risk lumping toghether accumulations of hearths on sandy rises with larger accumulations or mounds of ashy earth and highly degraded heat retainers. Obviously mapping and fuller recording is essential before there can be any interpretation of the site.

Average distance between 'mounds' is between 10-50 metres but in one small area there were four mounds on which the scattered remains of five burials were found (Figure 8). Distance, lack of erosion and slope precluded any of these belonging to the same individual. Most of the bone was slightly mineralized and highly fragmentary.

Three scatters of human bone (1,2 and 4) consisted of less than five fragments each of unburnt bone. Burial 3 consisted of five fragments: three burnt grey and two unburnt. The only remains of Burial 5 were two fragments of bone burnt dark grey. There was insiffucient evidence in either Burial 3 or 5 to suggest deliberate

cremation and considering the close association of bone with heat retainer the burning may have been purely accident. All bone found appeared to belong to adults.

The pattern of bone found associated with oven remains is common in this area and this deposit would appear to be more of the same.

Conclusion

These burials appear to correspond to what is already known of burials in the Hay area. Bodies were buried in small conglomerations in occupation sites (Dry Lake), particularly ovens, or in small burial grounds on sandy rises or dunes (Jeraly, Toogimbie, Nap Nap). Isolated individual burials such as at Jeraly North are less common and at least here may be chronologically distinct. This patterning of primarily grouped burials is in contrast to what has been observed on the Murray Valley River and suggests the presence of both chronological and regional variation in mortuary practices.

Regarding management of these sites, the following actions are proposed:

1. The two new burials within the fenced area at Jeraly will be covered in a similar fashion to the other burials. There is a need at this site for rabbit control to be instituted in order to help establish the revegetation work. Hay LALC are prepared to do this once they have proper training.
2. The burials at Jeraly North are extremely degrade and scatter and have been covered by branches (Burial 1) and a small pile of heat retainers (Burial 2) Even within a short space of time sand had accumulated over Burial 2.
3. The burials at Kerri East are extremely degrade and will not be further disturbed. There is, however, a need for a full site recording of this conglomeration of mounds.

References

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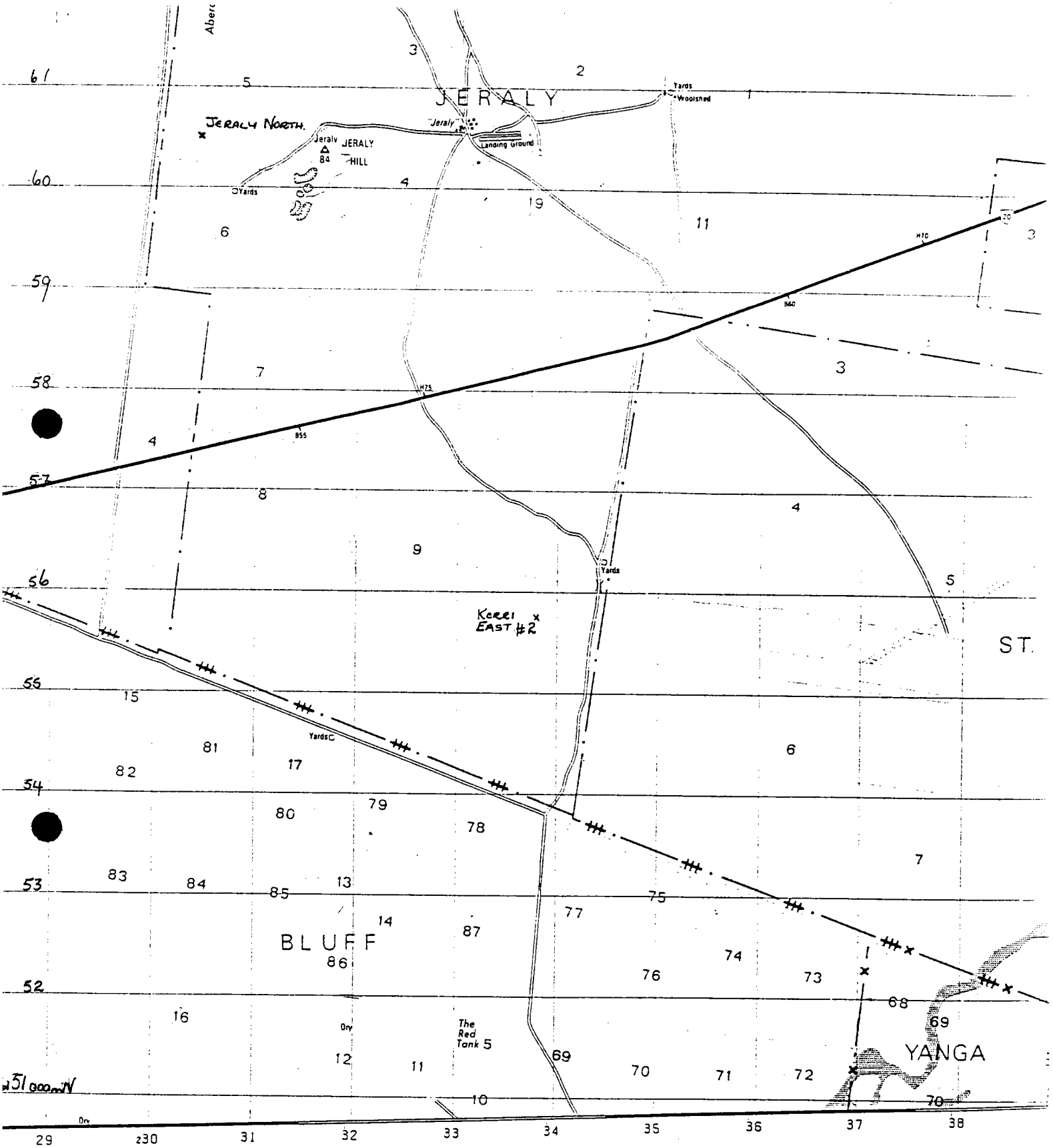

Figure 1:
Site Location (Toogimbie 1:100 000)

Figure 2:
Sketchplan of Jeraly cemtery (Pardoe et al n.d.)

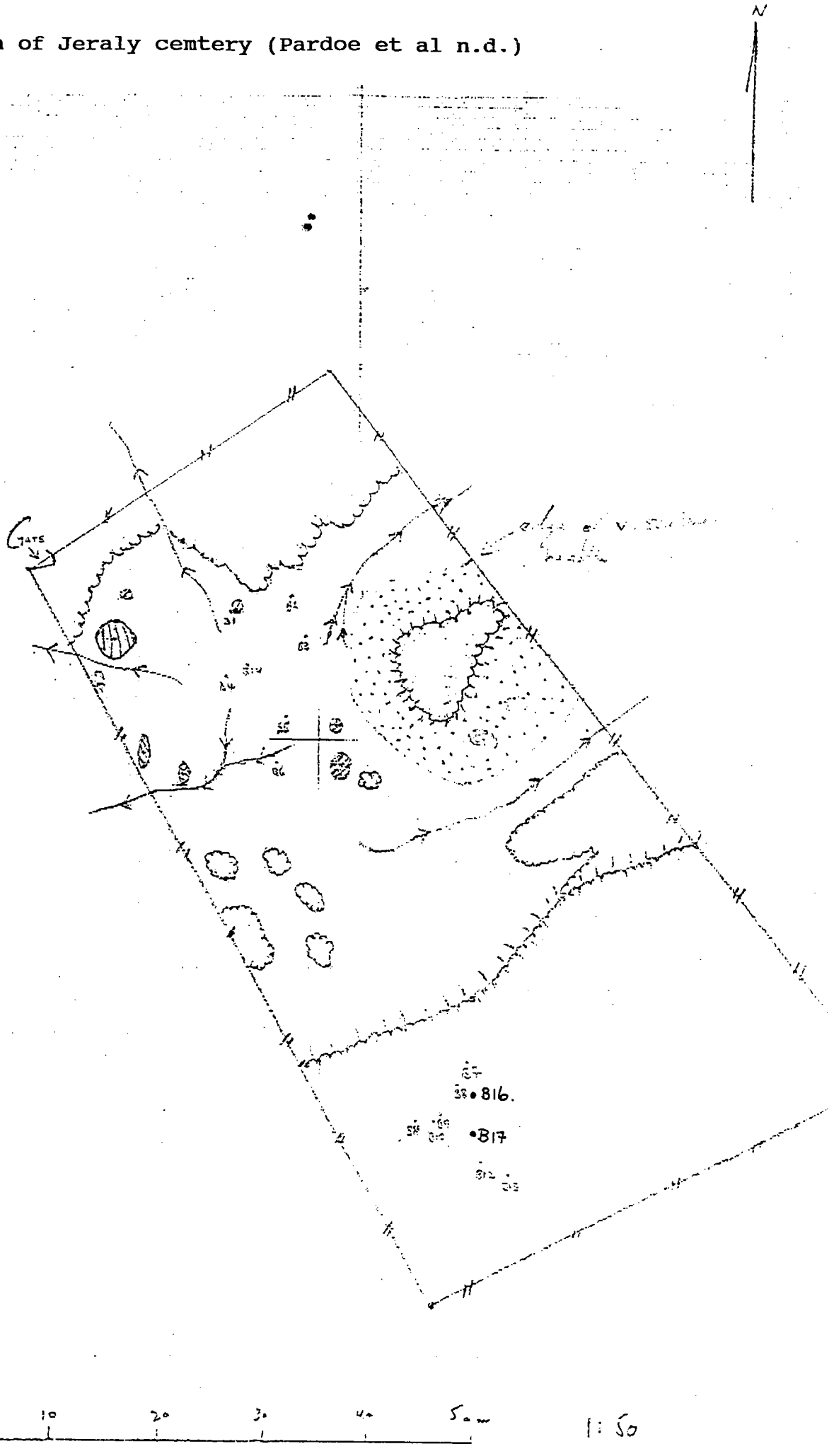

Figure 3:
Jeraly Burial 16

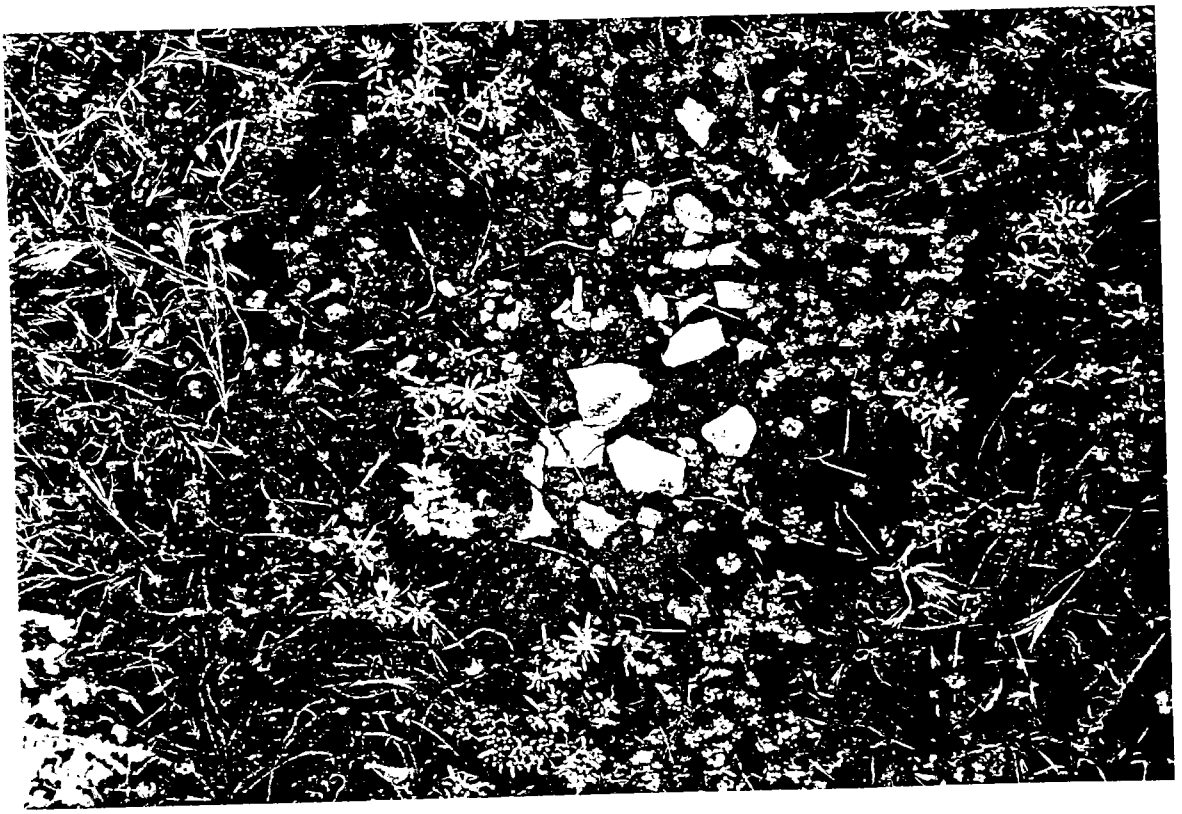

Figure 4:
Jeraly Burial 17

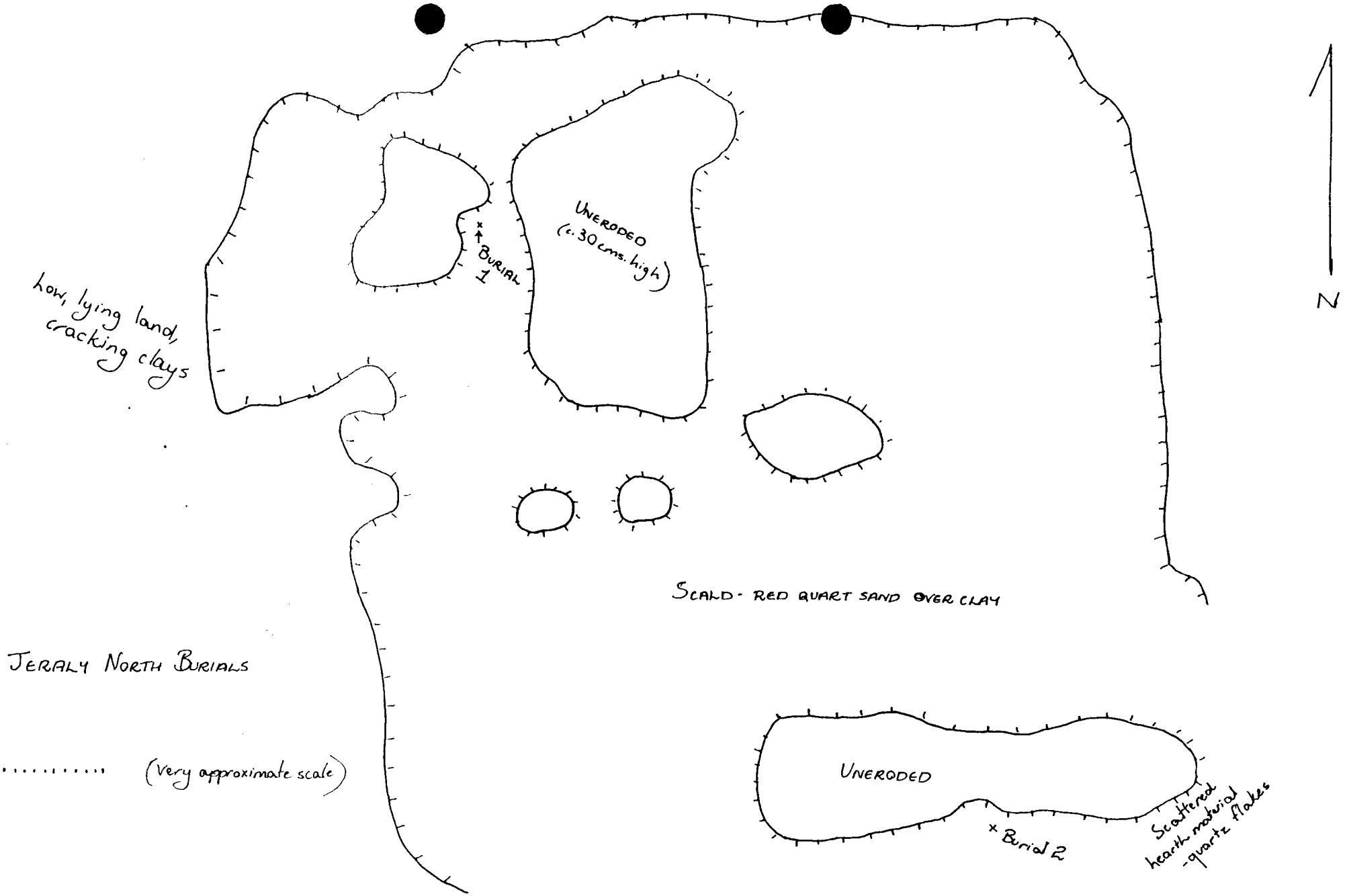

Figure 5:
Sketchplan of Jeraly North

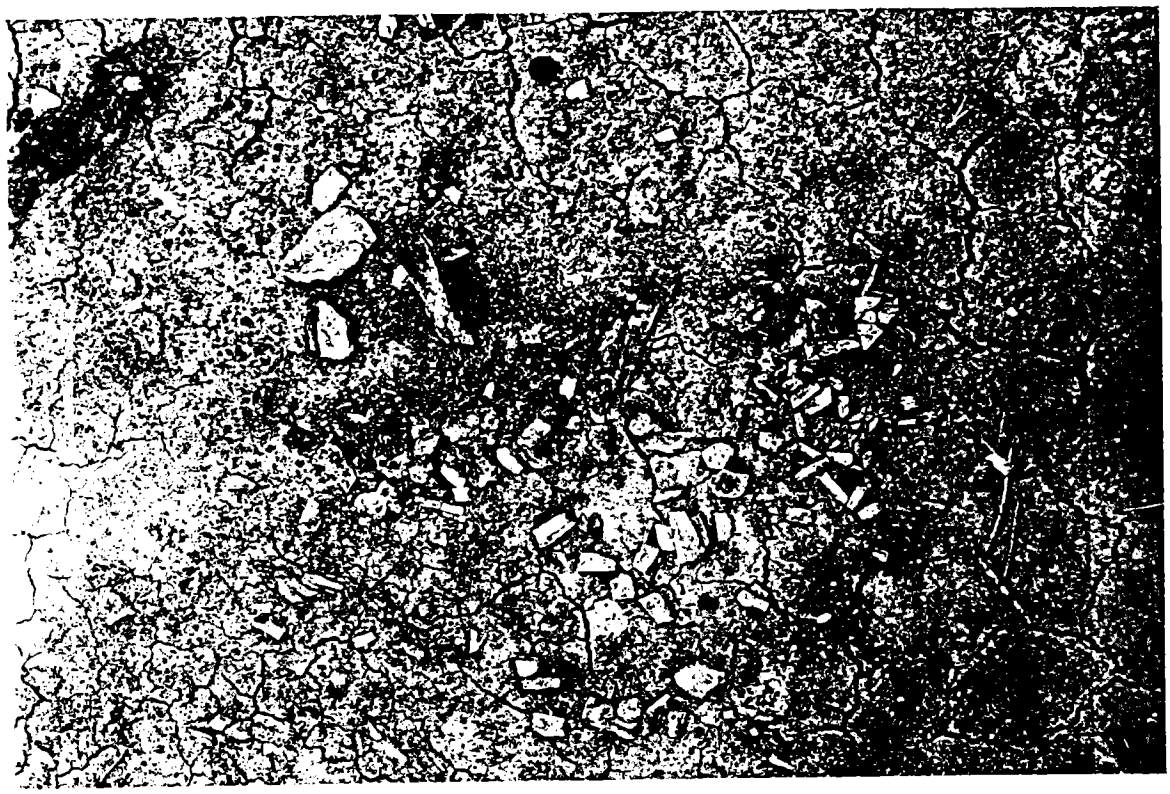

Figure 6:
Jeraly North Burial 1

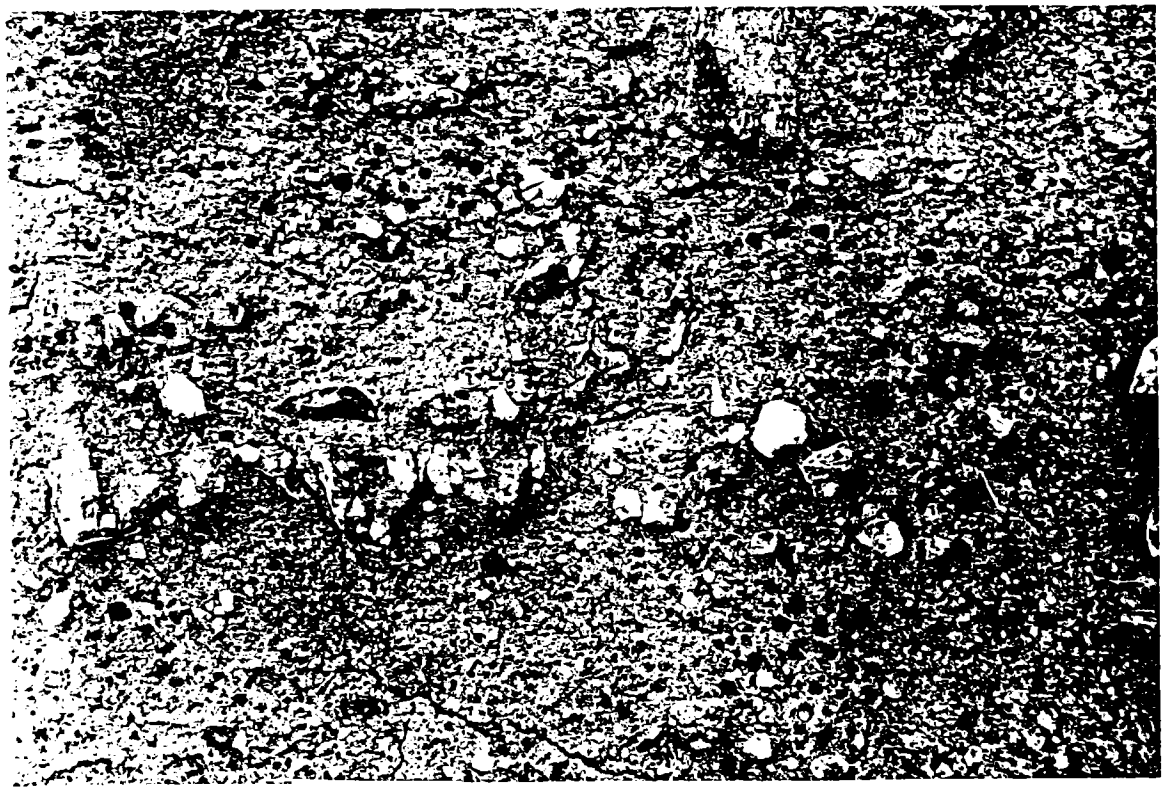

Figure 7:
Jeraly North Burial 2

KERRI EAST #2

AREA OF UNDULATING DEPRESSIONS AND MOUNDS, RED SAND SHEETS OVER CLAYEY SOIL.

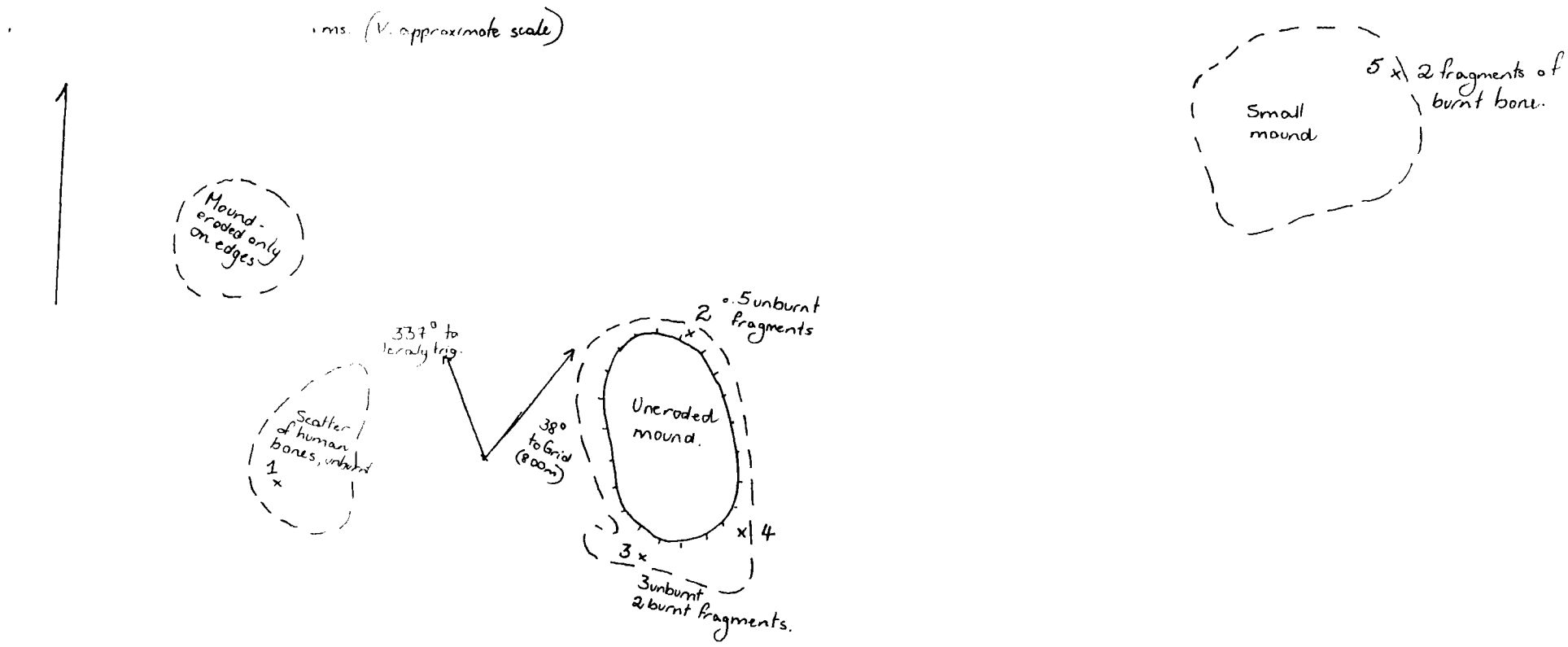

Figure 8:
Burials at Kerri East