

# DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



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# A Palaeolithic mammoth bone deposit and a Late Copper Age Baden settlement and enclosure

## Preliminary report on the rescue excavation at Szurdokpüspöki – Hosszú-dűlő II–III. (M21 site No. 6–7)

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### **Abstract**

*The Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University carried out a rescue excavation at the Szurdokpüspöki – Hosszú-dűlő II–III. site, where Palaeolithic, Late Copper Age, Early Bronze Age and Roman Age features were found. This preliminary report concentrates on the Palaeolithic pit where mammoth bones were deposited and on the special features of the Late Copper Age settlement.*

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### **The site**

Within the frames of the widening of the M21 highway in Nógrád County the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University<sup>1</sup> carried out a rescue excavation at the Szurdokpüspöki turnout on the area of a future roundabout. The site itself is situated on an elevation in the Zagyva Valley, between the southernmost edge of the Cserhát Mountains and the Mátra. It lies on a geographically prominent area, at the meeting point of a north-south corridor along the Zagyva River and an east-west corridor to the Mátraalja along the Szurdok Creek (*Fig. 1.1*).

Archaeological research was conducted by Szilvia Guba and Gábor Bácsmegi in 2005 at this site connected to an earlier widening of the M21 road. Besides the Early Bronze Age and Roman Age features they found Late Copper Age Baden and Kostolac settlement traces including a timber-framed structure surrounded by a double ditch system (*Fig. 1.3*).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The excavations were supervised by Gábor Szabó (senior lecturer, Eötvös Loránd University) and Gábor Vácsi (research fellow, Eötvös Loránd University) and led by András Füzesi and Márton Szilágyi (both assistant research fellows, Eötvös Loránd University). Participants were Linda Szászvári, László Hajdú (technicians) and students from the Eötvös Loránd University (Ferenc Benus, Tamás Czuppon, Csenge Márkus and Nóra Szabó).

<sup>2</sup> BÁCSMEGI – GUBA 2007, 8–11.

The excavation carried out by the Institute of Archeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University covered an area of approximately 2.2 hectares, where altogether 352 stratigraphic units were found belonging to 290 features (*Fig. 1.2*). The overwhelming majority of the features could be connected to the Late Copper Age Baden culture. We also found a palaeolithic feature, Early Bronze Age pits and ditches as well as a Roman Age house. The latter were situated on the northernmost part of the excavation. The aim of this study is to shortly present the Palaeolithic feature and the Baden settlement.

### **The Palaeolithic feature**

Accumulated mammoth bones were located in the northwestern part of the excavation within an area of approximately 1.5-2 square metres (*Fig. 2.1*).<sup>3</sup> The bones were surrounded by a circular depression in a brown clay layer backfilled with yellowish brown sandy aleurolite (*Fig. 2.3-6*). The bones were situated in the middle of the filling, not at the bottom of the original pit.

In summary, 34 vertebrae were recovered from the locality among which two were found in isolated positions while the others represented six different anatomical rows. The longest row is built up of 11 elements (from the 6th to the 16th dorsal vertebrae based on the shape and size of the neural spines and the junction surfaces for the ribs) (*Fig. 2.7*). Two isolated vertebrae were identified as the 5th and 17th pieces of the latter row. The other rows (three of them are built up of four elements, one contains seven elements, and the shortest row is built up of only two vertebrae) represent medial and posterior sequences.

Considering the size and the position of the vertebral rows, they belonged to at least four different individuals, two older and two younger specimens, respectively. This observation is in concordance with the fact that four left and two right scapulae were also found in the same feature. Shoulder heights were estimated based on the overall length of the scapulae based on the data published in several studies.<sup>4</sup> The larger animals were approximately 250 cm, whereas the smaller ones 230 cm high (*Fig. 2.2*). The vertebral plates are fused to the centra only in the middle part of the vertebral column, which indicates an age around 15–20 years (in units of African-equivalent years) for each individual.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, three flattened anterior ribs and a typical dorsal one, a diaphyseal fragment of a fibula and a distal epiphyseal fragment of a limb bone (most plausibly a femur) were also found in the same feature.

A similar bone assemblage with mammoth remains of similar size was recovered from a locality near Feldebrő (Northeastern Hungary) during 2011–2012.<sup>6</sup> In the latter case, not only bones but gravettian stone nuclei and flakes (unfortunately not the splinters and tools) were found as well. However, the position of the bones in the middle of a partly backfilled depression, and the fact that only certain parts of the animals (mostly scapulae, vertebrae, and ribs) were found, suggests human contribution in the accumulation of the remains in the case of the Szurdokpüspöki material as well.

3 Mihály Gasparik (chief museologist, Hungarian Natural History Museum) and Attila Virág (assistant museologist, Hungarian Natural History Museum) participated in the fieldworks related to the mammoth remains. Maija Bereczki, Melinda Fialowski and Piroska Kálmán assisted during the laboratory works.

4 GARUTT 1964; RIHMER 1935; KRETZOI 1941.

5 According to HAYNES 1991.

6 GASPARIK 2012.



## **The Late Copper Age settlement**

The Late Copper Age settlement consists of 314 stratigraphic units. With the exception of the northernmost part only Baden features were found in the excavated area. According to the pottery – bipartite bowls with decorated handles, dippers with rounded bottom, etc. – the settlement can be dated to the younger phases of the classical Baden period (Baden III–IV).<sup>7</sup> Among the pits we found numerous cattle deposits, settlement burials, kilns with stone and pebble foundation and sacrificial pits. Such phenomena as a double ditch system and post-structured buildings are considered to be rarities in the Late Copper Age.

### ***Settlement structure***

We could observe Late Copper Age features on the whole of the excavated surface, although the distribution was far from homogeneous. On the area surrounded by the enclosure the features are sparsely distributed, in some cases in small groups with empty spaces inbetween. Outside the ditch, to the east there is a dense area where a little less than half of the excavated features were situated. Pits with a great number of finds, most part of the cattle deposits, the burials and the sacrificial pits were located here (*Fig. 3*). However, only one kiln was found here, this type of feature was brought to light in greater number inside the enclosed area than elsewhere.

### ***The ditch system***

The most spectacular feature of the Baden settlement is an enclosure consisting of two parallel ditches (*Fig. 1.2*). The enclosed area is 51 600 m<sup>2</sup>, of which 14 630 m<sup>2</sup> was excavated. The estimated length of the outer ditch is 950 m, the inner ditch is approximately 850 m long. The average width of both ditches is 3,8–4 m, the average depth of the inner and outer ditch is 2,7 and 2,5 m calculated from the recent surface. We cut 11 and 10 sections of different sizes into the ditches. According to the profiles, the ditches were presumably cleaned and renewed several times. After the two ditches were completely filled, a third narrower and shallower ditch was constructed. Based on the process of filling up observed on the profiles we can presume the existence of a rampart between the two ditches. We should draw attention on seven pits that were found between the ditches. Their stratigraphic position is yet unclear.

### ***Buildings with post-structures***

We found two post-structures at the site. Both were situated in the close vicinity of the enclosure system, on the outer side. Feature No. 79. is a rectangular building, a post was added to the south to both longer sides. These could have been parts of an opened esplanade or forefront. The length of the walls were 8,1 m on the east and the west, 5,9 m on the north and 6,2 m on the south. On the eastern side there was a 3 m wide gap without any traces of posts. The renewal of the northern wall was clearly observable, the inner post-line is younger. Feature No. 160 is the second post-structure, which consists walls of double post-lines. We were able to observe three sides, the northern side verged the outer ditch and the excavation border. The eastern side is 13 m long, the northern and southern walls could be observed 12,1 m long. The gaps between the post-lines are 1,3–1,9 m (*Fig. 1.5*).

<sup>7</sup> NEUSTUPNY 1974, 322–325; NĚMEJCOVÁ-PAVÚKOVÁ 1981, Obr. 5; ENDRŮDY 1997; BONDÁR 2009, 276, 286.

According to our observations the stratigraphic position of these features is unclear, therefore there are two possibilities. Firstly, the post-structure No. 160 may be contemporaneous with the enclosure and is somehow adjacent to it. The second possibility, according to the post-structure found in 2005 at the site, is that the building was cut by the ditch system, and is therefore older.

### ***Cattle and animal deposits***

We found 10 cattle deposits or burials in pits at the Szurdokpüspöki site. The majority of these were full skeletons in anatomical position. In some cases their neck was broken or their head was cut off and placed under the torso. In other cases the cattle remains were put into the pits only partially but also in anatomical order. As a third type of animal deposits in some pits there were piles of bone of smaller ruminants.

### ***Human remains***

A special assemblage was found in Feature No. 86, four vessels (two amphorae, a mug and a bipartite bowl with ornamented handles) were laid upside down onto the bottom of the pit. On the vessels a human skull was also found. We found vessels upside down on the bottom of pits in two other cases as well, one was a large bowl, the other was a pot.

Four burials and a double burial were found in Szurdokpüspöki-Hosszú-dűlő II–III. The bodies were in contracted position in the single graves. With the exception of a single amphora, there were no grave goods. In the double burial the skeleton of a child was found in a twisted, unnatural position, a handled cup was placed next to the left shoulder. Above the child we found a skeleton of an adult in a contracted position, without grave goods.

### **Summary**

The unique features of the Baden settlement are of a great importance *per se*. However, the evaluation of the great amount of finds, as well as further field research such as field survey, geomagnetic prospection, archaeobotanical analysis and statistical evaluation of the pottery finds may provide a great opportunity for a complex analysis on site- and microregional level, which has been very rare in Late Copper Age research in Hungary.

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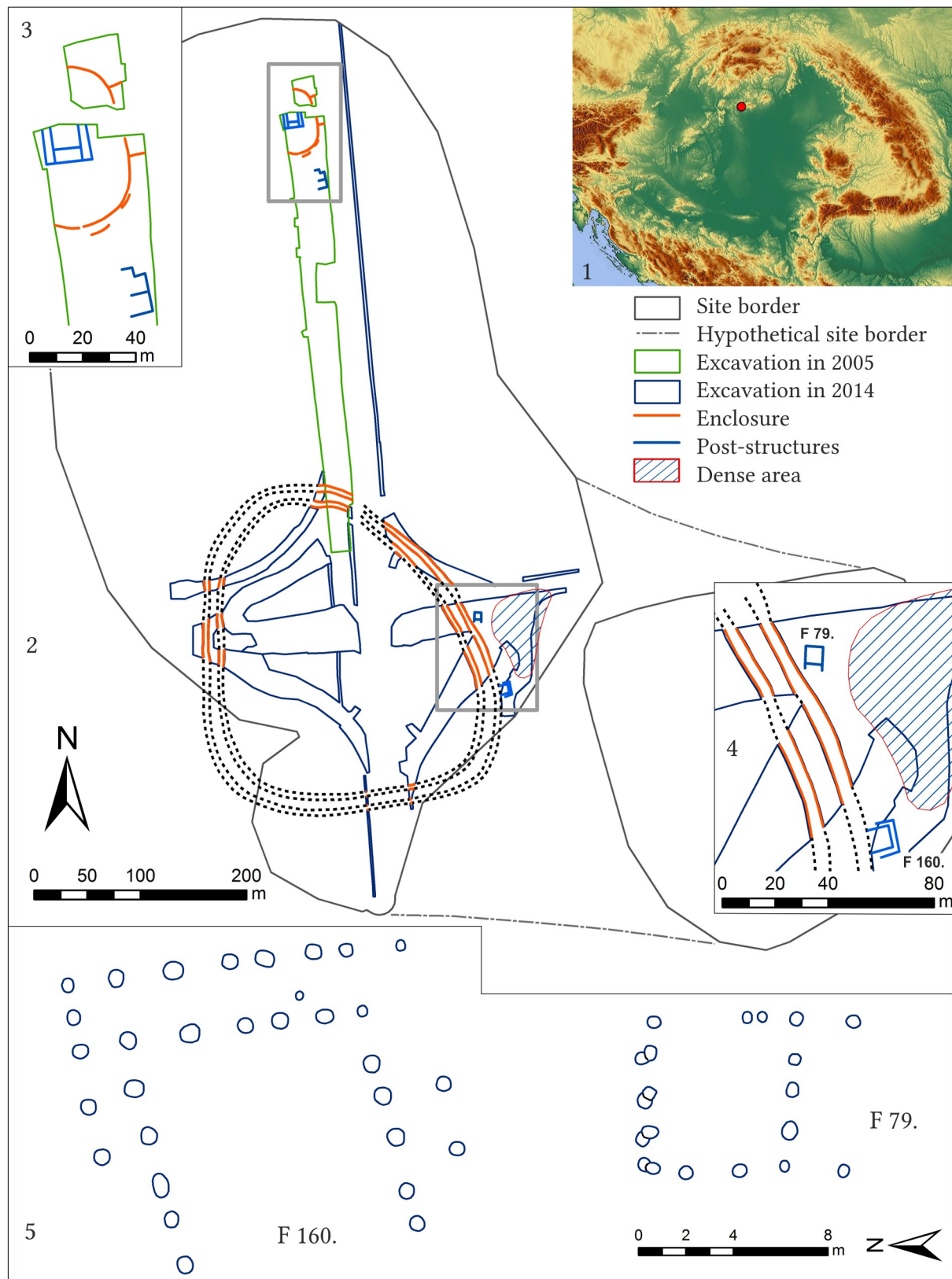


Fig. 1. 1. The location of Szurdokpüspöki. 2. The Szurdokpüspöki – Hosszú-dűlő sites and the excavated areas. 3. The excavation of 2005. 4. The dense area of Late Copper Age features. 5. Late Copper Age buildings with post-structures.

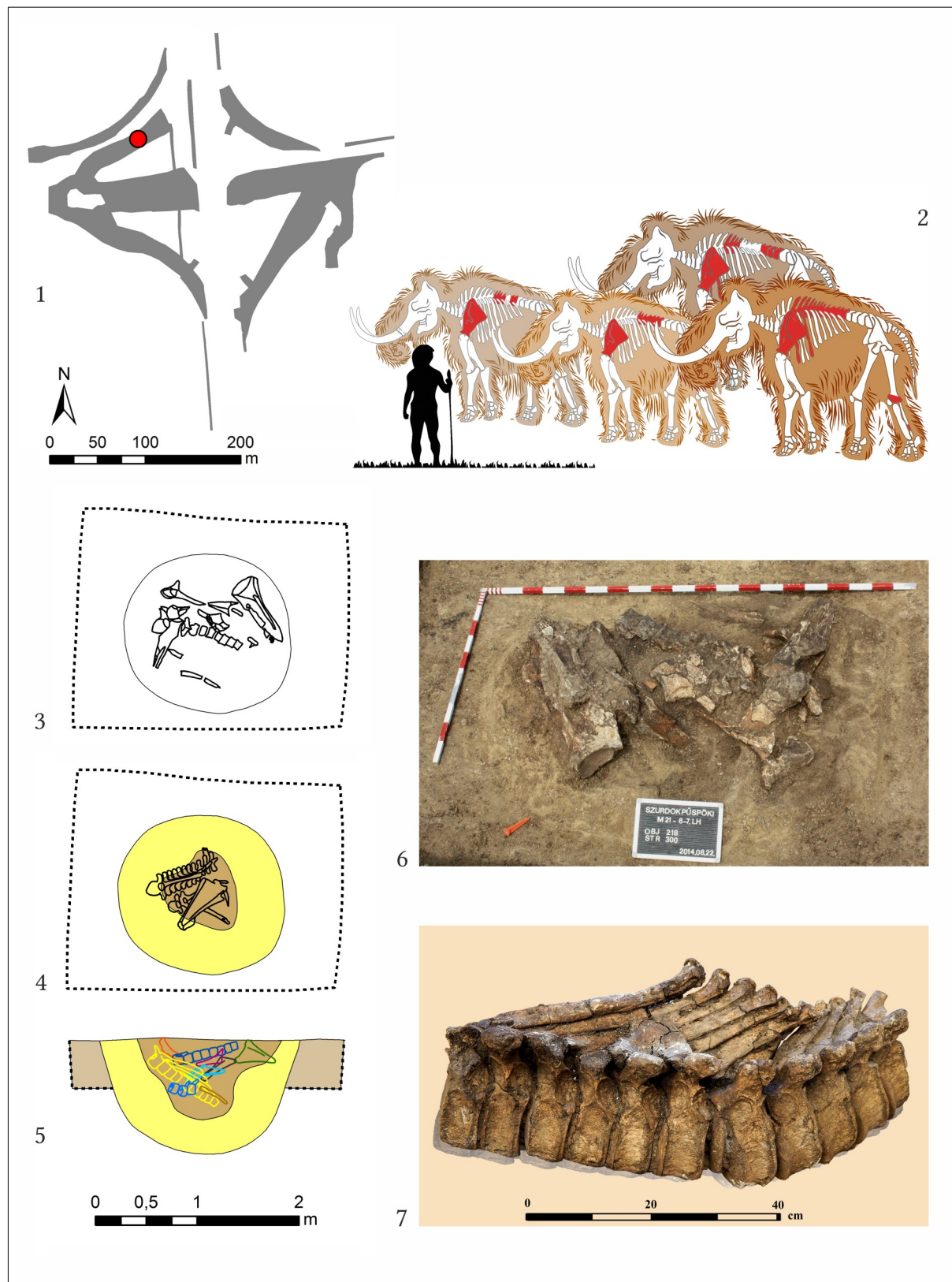


Fig. 2. 1. The location of the palaeolithic feature. 2. The anatomical position of mammoth bones. 3. The upper layer of the mammoth bones (Drawing: M. Szilágyi). 4. The lower layer of the mammoth bones (Drawing: A. Füzesi). 5. The cross-sectional view of the palaeolithic pit. 6. The upper layer of the mammoth bones (Photo: L. Hajdú). 7. The longest row of mammoth vertebrae (Photo: M. Gasparik and A. Virág).

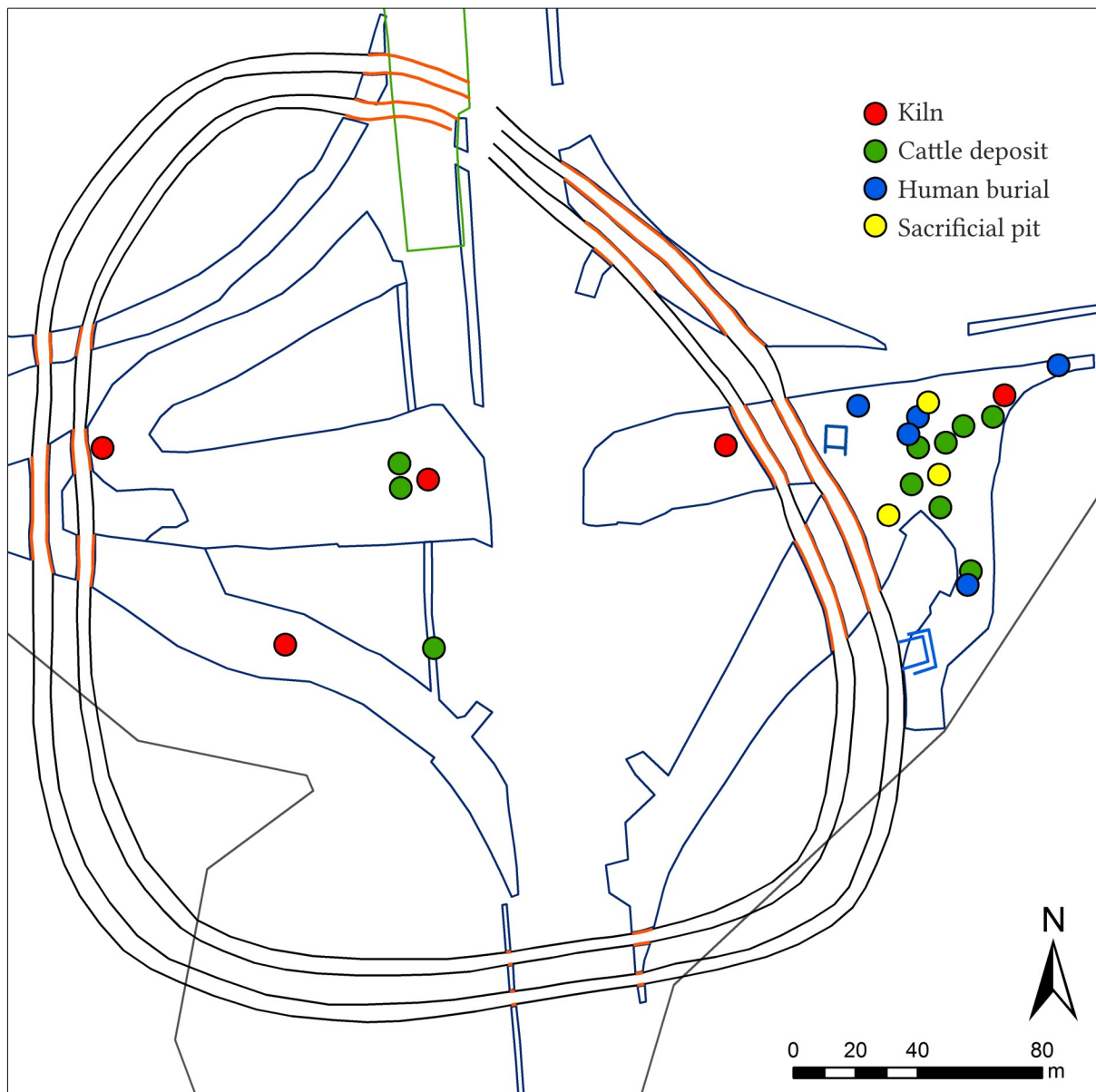


Fig. 3. The overview of special Late Copper Age features.