

# Excavation at Khirbet Butz - 2007

## Byzantine-Early Islamic Agricultural and Other Features

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*This excavation was carried out in 2007–2008 by Y.G. Contract Archaeology Ltd. (excavation license B-321/2007). The project was directed by Yuval Ardon (2007) and Yehuda Govrin (2008), under the academic auspices of the Hebrew Union College. Site surveying and drafting were conducted by Dov Porotsky and Viatcheslav Pirsky. The artifacts were analyzed by Achia Kohn-Tavor, photographed by Vladimir Naikhin, and illustrated by Anna Dodin.*

### INTRODUCTION

The site of Khirbet Butz is located on a small hill overlooking the Elah Valley (Fig. 2). The archaeological investigation and recording of the hill began in 2007. An initial survey—carried out by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA)—identified a large number of archaeological features, probably reflecting the agricultural and industrial nature of ancient Khirbet Butz. A settlement site located on the hilltop has not yet been investigated, and this



Figure 1. Feature carved in exposed bedrock outcropping (Feature 159).

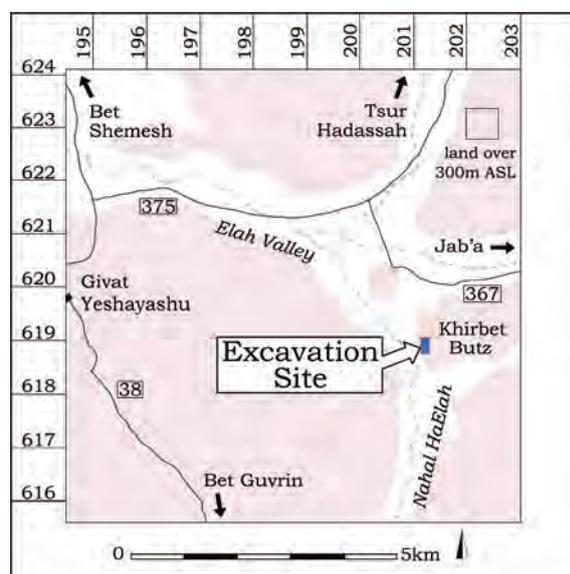


Figure 2. Location of the site (New Israel Grid: 201310–619160; 382m asl).

high ground has recently been redefined as an area of open military status. However, its periphery has been classified as available for development. This led to its purchase by Eden Hills Ltd., who contracted Y.G. Contract Archaeology Ltd. to carry out an archaeological investigation (Fig. 3).

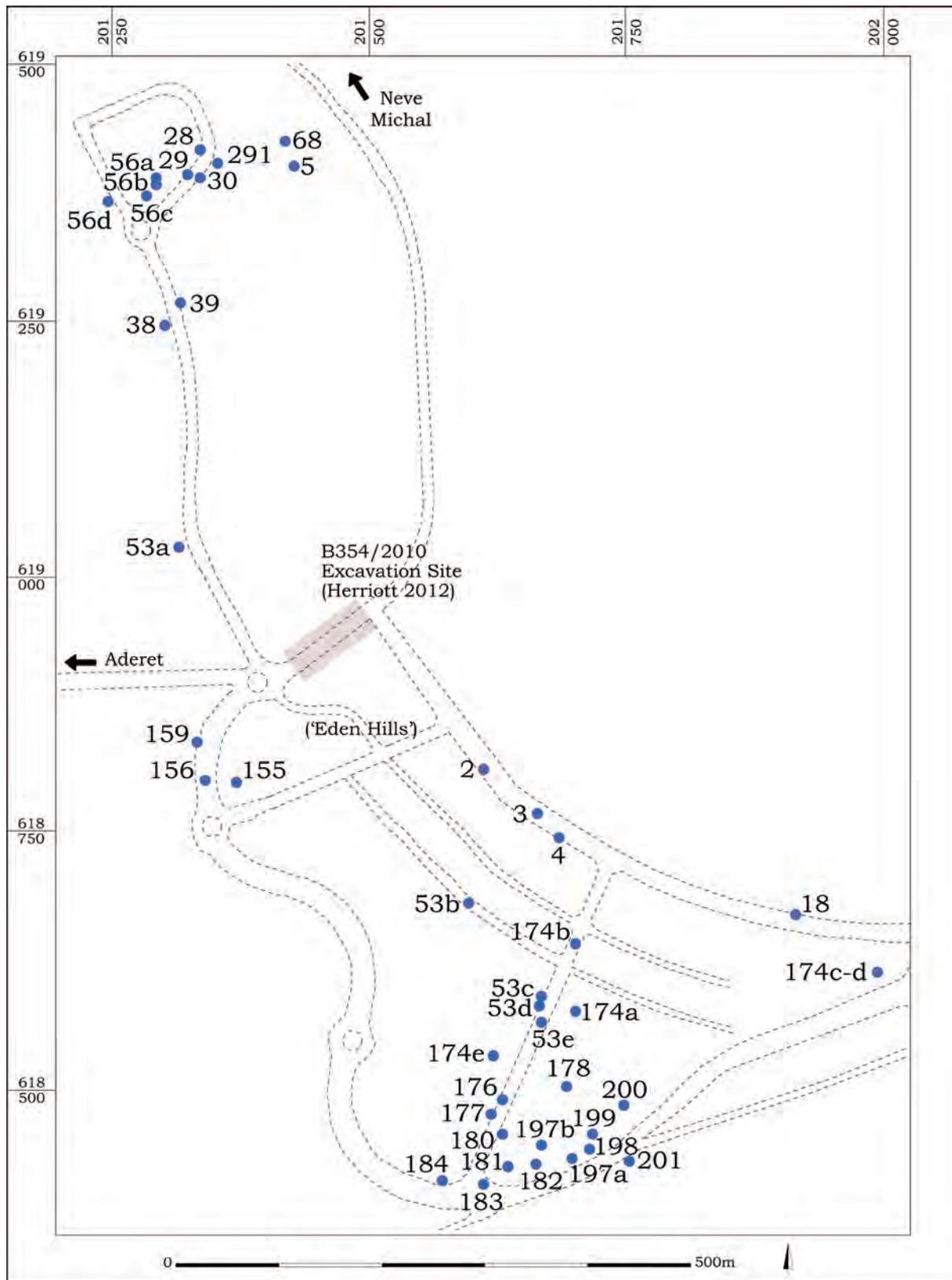


Figure 3. Feature locations within the site.

## BYZANTINE-EARLY ISLAMIC AGRICULTURAL AND OTHER FEATURES

Table 1. Catalog of features, organized by feature number.

Feature no.	Type	Description
2	Wall	Made from fieldstones
3	Cup mark	Three co-linear cup marks; 0.3 x 0.1-2m
4	Cup mark	0.5 x 0.3m
5	Structure	2.8m diameter
18	Cup mark	Basin type; 0.5 x 0.25m
29	Structure	2.7m diameter
30a	Structure	3.6m diameter
30b	Structure	3m diameter
38	Cave	5m diameter
39	Cave	8 x 4m
53a	Water cistern	4m diameter
53b	Stone mound	1.5m diameter
53c	Cup mark	0.19 x 0.12m
53d	Channel-cut rock	0.1 x 0.04m
53e	Wine press	Frankel (1999) Type T1
56a	Structure	1.3m diameter
56b	Structure	2.7m diameter
56c	Structure	2.5m diameter
56d	Structure	1.8m diameter
57	Cup mark	0.5 x 0.4m
68	Structure	2.7m diameter
155	Structure	5m diameter; included annex
156	Cup mark	Basin type; 0.5 x 0.3m
159	Quarried feature	3 x 2m
174a	Cup mark	0.17 x 0.09m
174b	Cup mark	0.6 x 0.35m
174c	Cup mark	0.6 x 0.3m
174d	Cup mark	0.62 x 0.44m
174e	Structure	2.5m diameter
176	Cup mark	0.6 x 0.35m
177	Cup mark	Three basin-type cup marks, non-linear; 0.52-65 x 0.34-54m
178	Cup mark	0.2 x 0.15m
180	Cup mark	0.6 x 0.2m
181	Cup mark, quarried feature	0.7 x 0.7m, 1.2 x 1.16 x 0.04m
182	Water cistern	Prevented from investigating by safety concerns
183	Cup mark	0.4 x 0.2m
184	Stone mound	10 x 7m
197a	Cup mark	Three co-linear cup marks; 0.2-97 x 0.2-56m
197b	Cup mark	0.7 x 0.35m
198	Clearance material	Unknown
199	Cup mark	Two cup marks; 0.19-85 x 0.1-4m
200	Cup mark	Two cup marks; 0.15-5 x 0.15-3m
201	Cup mark	Basin type; 0.65 x 0.2m
291	Structure	3m diameter

The archaeological features investigated as part of this project are summarized in Table 1. It should be noted at the outset that our work was not completed—the excavation of Feature 38 being a particularly important lack—due to the Eden Hills construction project’s suspension in 2008.

## THE EXCAVATION

### *Feature 2. Wall*

Location: 201600-618800

A wall built from field clearance stones and located at the north perimeter of the field.

### *Feature 3. Cup Marks (Fig. 4)*

Location: 201650-618775



Figure 4. Feature 3 cup mark group (facing west).

Three cup marks on a north-south axis:

Southern – 0.3m diameter and 0.2m deep.

Middle – 0.3m diameter and 0.2m deep.

Northern – 0.3m diameter and 0.1m deep.

### *Feature 4. Cup Mark (Fig. 5)*

Location: 201675-618750

A cup mark – 0.5m diameter and 0.3m deep.

### *Feature 5. Structure (Fig. 6)*

Location: 201383-619412

This structure was not recorded on our survey map of the area. It was ovoid in shape, built of roughly dressed stones and with an inner diameter of 2.8m, walls ca. 0.5m thick and preserved to a height of 0.7m. The entrance was on the southeast side. We interpreted



Figure 6. Feature 5 structure (facing north).



Figure 5. Feature 4 cup mark.



Figure 7. Feature 18 basin-type cup mark.

such structures at the site—and we found 11 of them (see Table 1)—as having been built to provide shelter and storage for those working this land (sometimes termed a ‘guard house’ or ‘watchman’s hut’).

**Feature 18. Cup Mark (basin type) (Fig. 7)**

Location: 201910-618700

A cup mark of basin type – 0.5m diameter and 0.25m deep.

**Feature 29. Structure (Figs. 8, 11)**

Location: 201300-619400

This structure had an internal diameter of 2.7m and 0.5m-thick walls surviving to a height of ca. 1.0m. The southeast quarter was founded directly on bedrock. The entrance was on the north side. Opposite the entrance was a wall ca. 1.0m wide and 1.7m long,



Figure 8. Feature 29 structure (facing north).



Figure 9. Feature 30a structure (facing north).

north of which was another structure measuring 2.6 x 1.3m, depth 0.2-0.3m, and cut into bedrock. We interpreted it as having a shelter and storage function for those working the land here (see Feature 5 above).

**Feature 30a. Structure (Figs. 9, 11)**

Location: 201305-619404

This structure had an internal diameter of 3.6m, walls 0.9m wide and preserved to an average height of 0.95m. The entrance was on the southeast side. Projecting from the northeast side of the structure was a 0.55m-wide wall, preserved to a height of 0.6m. This curved south to meet a boulder east of the structure, creating a small enclosure (1.65 x 0.75m).

**Feature 30b. Structure (Figs. 10, 11)**

Location: 201308-619397

This structure does not appear in our survey map. Its internal diameter was 3.0m, its walls were 0.3m wide and were preserved to a height of only 0.2m. The southern side of the structure was carved from bedrock, and being therefore stronger survived to 0.6m in height. Due to the bad preservation of the other walls we can only speculate as to the entrance location (if any): this is tentatively offered as on the north side.



Figure 10. Feature 30b structure (facing northeast).

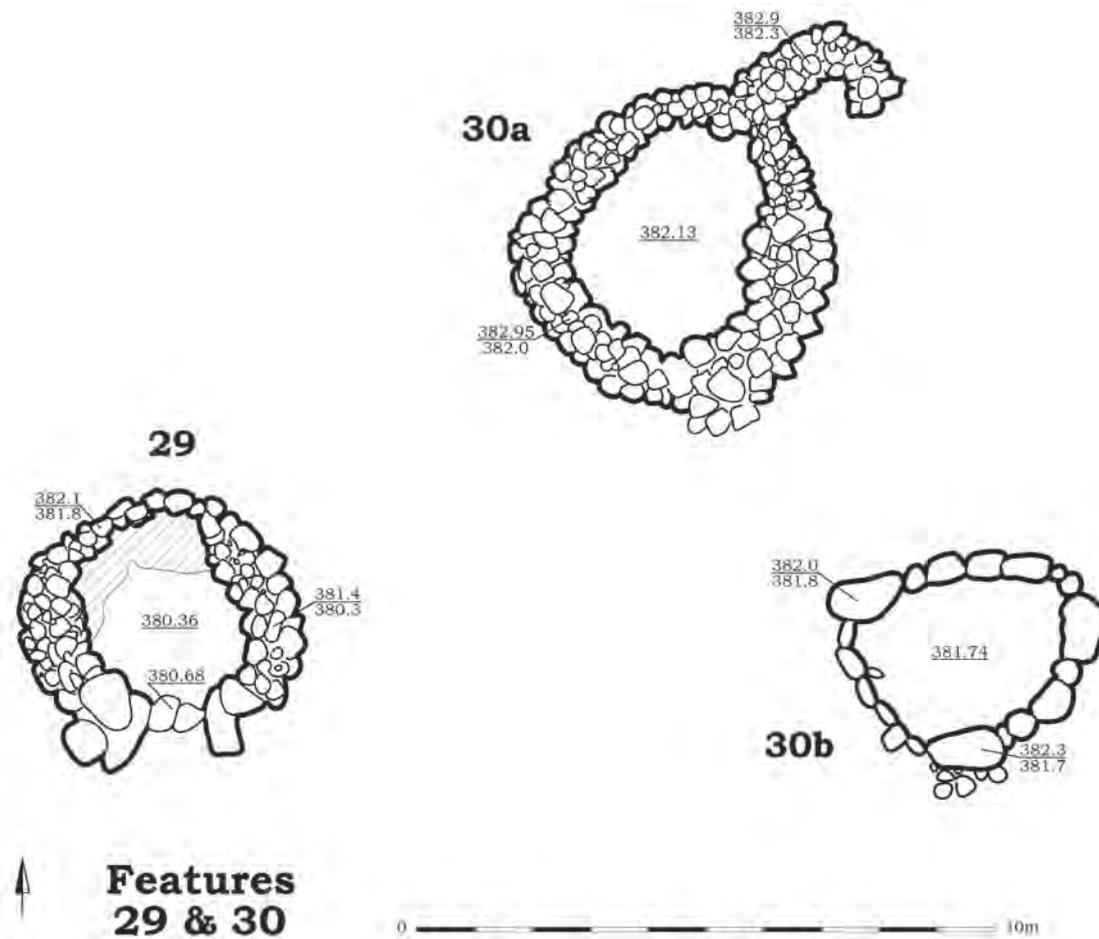


Figure 11. Plan of Feature 29, 30a and 30b structures.

**Feature 38. Cave (Figs. 12, 13)**

Location: 201280-619251

This cave was roughly circular in floor plan, measuring ca. 5.0 x 5.0m, ca. 1.9m high and with multiple openings (Fig. 13). For safety reasons we did not enter. From a central opening in the ceiling a fig tree grew. In addition to this opening others were located on the south (L3), north (L2) and west (L1) sides. These were roughly quarried, but had become blocked by rocks, bushes and—in the case of the north opening—0.1m of soil. Partial collapse of the cave's east wall had opened two further apertures.



Figure 12. Feature 38 cave.

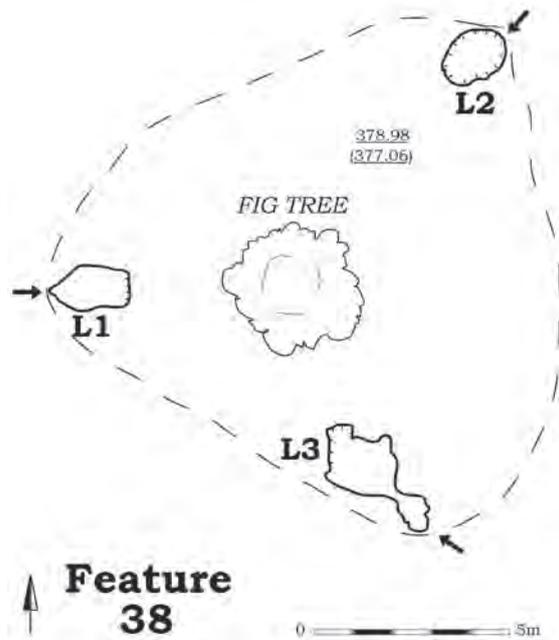


Figure 13. Plan of Feature 38 cave exterior.

### ***Feature 39. Cave (Fig. 14)***

Location: 201291-619276

This cave was of rectangular shape, covering an area of ca. 8.0 x 4.0m. In a ca. 4.0 x 2.0m space on the south side of the cave the ceiling had completely collapsed. South of this roofless area was a shaft (L5) in the ceiling, which was cut into the natural rock and led to the surface 2.0m above. Northwest of the roofless area was an additional anthropogenic opening (L4). North of the roofless area a depression visible on the surface betrayed another aperture (probably natural).

Where the cave's ceiling was intact, immediately north of the roofless area, a small fieldstone wall was built (L7). This was one course high, and ran east-west for 6.0m before turning north for 3.0m. West of this wall the cave floor was filled with dirt and fieldstones. Here we found a rounded shaft that appeared to have been created by natural means (i.e. another collapse of the ceiling in this area). A complete Byzantine ceramic lamp was found in our excavation nearby (Fig. 21:2).

At the east end of this area the bedrock collapsed and created a sort of 'channel' extending from the built wall to the natural shaft on the north side of the cave. This channel was filled with large stones.

On the east side of the cave was found an additional rectangular shaft (L6), 1.9m deep, leading to another cave, and rectangular in plan with rounded corners and a maximum width of ca. 3.0m. As in the first cave, the shaft here was blocked.

Our excavation in the southern part of the roofless area of the first cave exposed a layer including finds from the Byzantine period (Fig. 20:19-21; Fig. 21:2,4; ca. 330-638 CE) through Ottoman (Fig. 21:3; 1517-1917 CE) and modern times, all stratigraphically above the rock collapse. At the same level as and beneath the collapse were sherds of Iron Age date (Fig. 20:11,12; ca. 1200-586 BCE).

It therefore appears that this cave saw three archaeological phases. The first was during the Iron Age, within the cave with its roof intact and an entrance probably from a shaft on the west side of the ceiling.

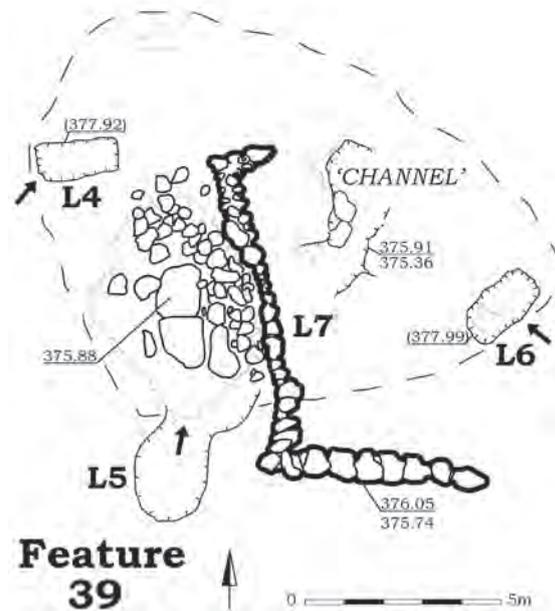


Figure 14. Plan of Feature 39 cave interior.

During the second phase, probably in the Byzantine period, the southern section of the ceiling collapsed and the roofless area was used as a sort of courtyard, while the entrance to the cave was repositioned on the northwest side (L4). According to the ceramic evidence, the second cave to the northeast was excavated during this phase.

In the third stage of activity, probably not earlier than the end of the Byzantine period, another ceiling collapse occurred which opened the north shaft. The occupants repaired the damage but left the shaft itself open. They also covered the area between the southern collapse and the new shaft with dirt and stones (in which was found the aforementioned Byzantine lamp). A wall was built at the southern perimeter of this leveled area to prevent the new floor material from washing into the roofless 'courtyard'.

#### ***Feature 53a. Water Cistern***

Location: 201282-618787

This was a water cistern, ca. 4.0m in diameter. The shaft leading from the surface measured 1.3m across and ca. 0.4m deep. The cistern's depth could not be determined as its floor was covered with dirt and fallen stones, which for safety reasons we desisted from excavating. On the surface, east of the cistern was a circular socket in the bedrock, 0.8m in diameter and ca. 0.3m deep. No datable finds were recovered in the vicinity.

#### ***Feature 53b. Stone Mound***

Location: 201589-618705

This was a stone cluster resulting from clearance of large stones from the southern section of an open field. The mound reached a height of ca. 1.7m and ca. 1.5m across. At the center of the pile lay a boulder with a cup mark, 0.36m in diameter and 0.3m deep.

#### ***Feature 53c. Cup Mark***

Location: 201663-618606

A cup mark – 0.19m in diameter and 0.12m deep.

#### ***Feature 53d. Rock-Cut Channel***

Location: 201668-618600

A rock with a channel cut into it, ca. 0.1m long and 0.04m wide.

#### ***Feature 53e. Wine Press***

Location: 201668-618586

This installation was comprised of a treading floor and several features cut into an outcropping of exposed bedrock. On the south side of the quadrilateral treading floor (Frankel's Type T1 [Frankel 1999: 51-56]) was a hole for draining fluids and another feature cut into the bedrock. East of the treading floor was a third quarried feature, rounded and 1.3m in diameter. From this feature a channel (0.25m long and 0.1m wide) ran southwest, leading to a basin-type cup mark (0.55m in diameter and 0.4m deep). North of the wine press was an additional cup mark, 0.18m in both diameter and depth.

#### ***Feature 56a. Structure***

Location: 201278-619390

The interior diameter of this structure was 1.3m, its walls were 0.4m wide and preserved to a height of 0.5m. On the southwest side were many stones piled in a disorderly manner and not integral with the wall. The entrance was probably at this point.

#### ***Feature 56b. Structure***

Location: 201273-619387

This structure's interior diameter was 2.7m, with walls 0.4-0.6m thick and preserved in one course of boulders to a height of 1.2m. The entrance was on the southeast side.

#### ***Feature 56c. Structure***

Location: 201263-619377

This structure's interior diameter was 2.5m, its walls were ca. 0.6m thick and preserved to a height of ca. 0.4m. The north wall leaned on a bedrock outcropping, west of which was a pile of fieldstones. This undoubtedly was collapse, perhaps the remains of an additional wall that continued westward. The entrance to the structure was on the southeast side.

#### ***Feature 56d. Structure***

Location: 201243-619361

This structure had an interior diameter of 1.8m and walls ca. 0.4m wide. These were built of fieldstones and boulders, preserved to a height of one course (0.3-1.0m). The entrance was from the southeast.