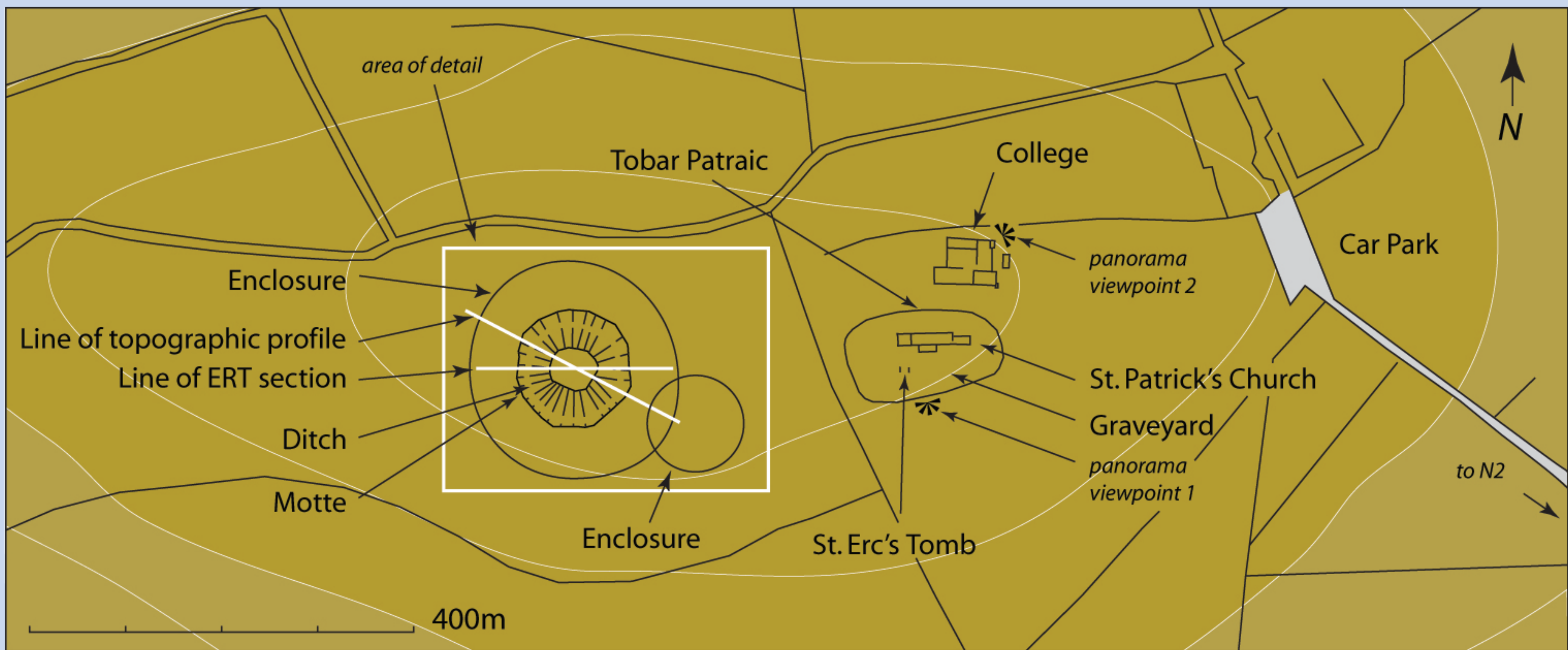




# THE HILL OF SLANE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

*Making heritage work for the local community*



## The Hill of Slane Archaeological Project (HoSAP)

The **HoSAP** was established in 2010 to explore the rich archaeology of the Hill of Slane. A comprehensive systematic examination of the site using modern archaeological survey techniques could add considerably to our understanding of this iconic site which has a heritage spanning from prehistory to modern times. The outputs from the project will be used by the Slane community and in the development of the presentation the site and the enhancement of the visitor experience.

### The College

The earliest building in the College is a three-storey structure - the stonework of the W end of the south range abuts it with a straight joint. This building, referred to as the rectory in medieval sources, was the centre of parish business.

A chantry college was attached to this in the later C.15th with three ranges of residential, dining, kitchen and storage buildings around a courtyard. It was rebuilt in the C.16th following a bequest by Christopher Fleming. Sculpted gutters in human and animal forms and window surrounds with Tudor rose motifs emphasise family patronage and piety. It accommodated priests and choirboys who sang mass daily for the souls of the family. A free-standing gate-house to the E is the only remnant of a surrounding bawn.



### The Monastery

Traditionally regarded as the place where St. Patrick lit the first Paschal fire in defiance of the King of Tara, the Annals document the presence of an important monastic foundation at Slane from the C.6th. Later references describe an oratory, the first mentioned round tower (*cloigteach*) burnt in 948 and a wooden church (*dairthech*) which collapsed in 1028. The Monastery is recorded as being an important legal centre from the C.8th.

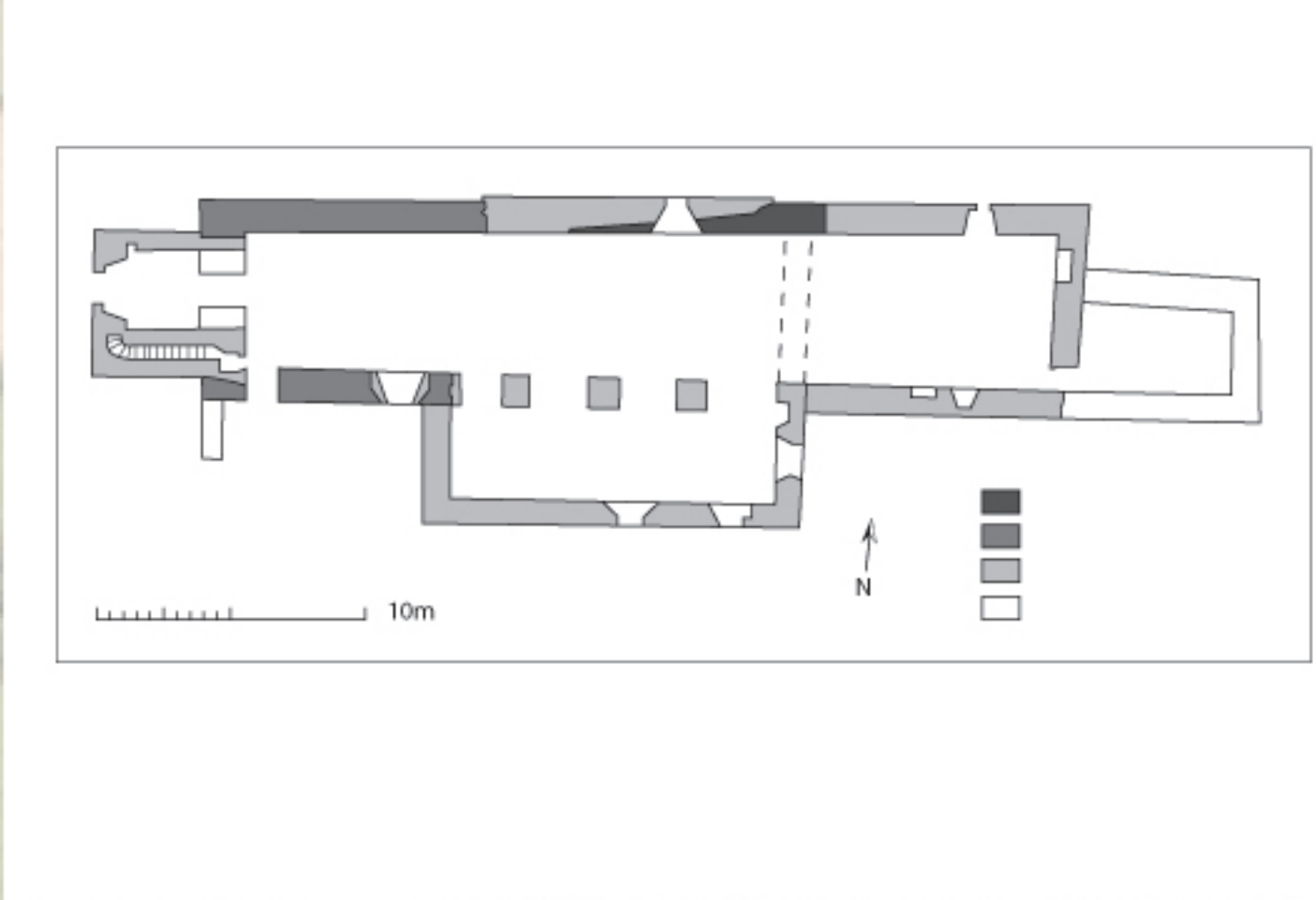
Few remains of this flourishing centre remain. Probably the earliest ecclesiastical feature recognisable on the site is that known as the Bishop's or St. Erc's Tomb, to the south of the church doorway in the graveyard. It is comprised of two triangular stones, each c. 1.5m high, set c. 2m apart which would have supported two closing slabs, giving the structure a tent-like appearance.

Additionally, a number of fragments of high crosses are recorded as having been found on the Hill of Slane. In a fanciful twelfth century story the high cross of Slane was miraculously shattered into pieces. A fragment was found in 1994, built into stonework in the church. The head of a high cross was found at the medieval church at Fennor, now housed in St Patrick's Church in Slane. Westropp noted other fragments within a house in the village, whose location is no longer known.

### The Medieval Church

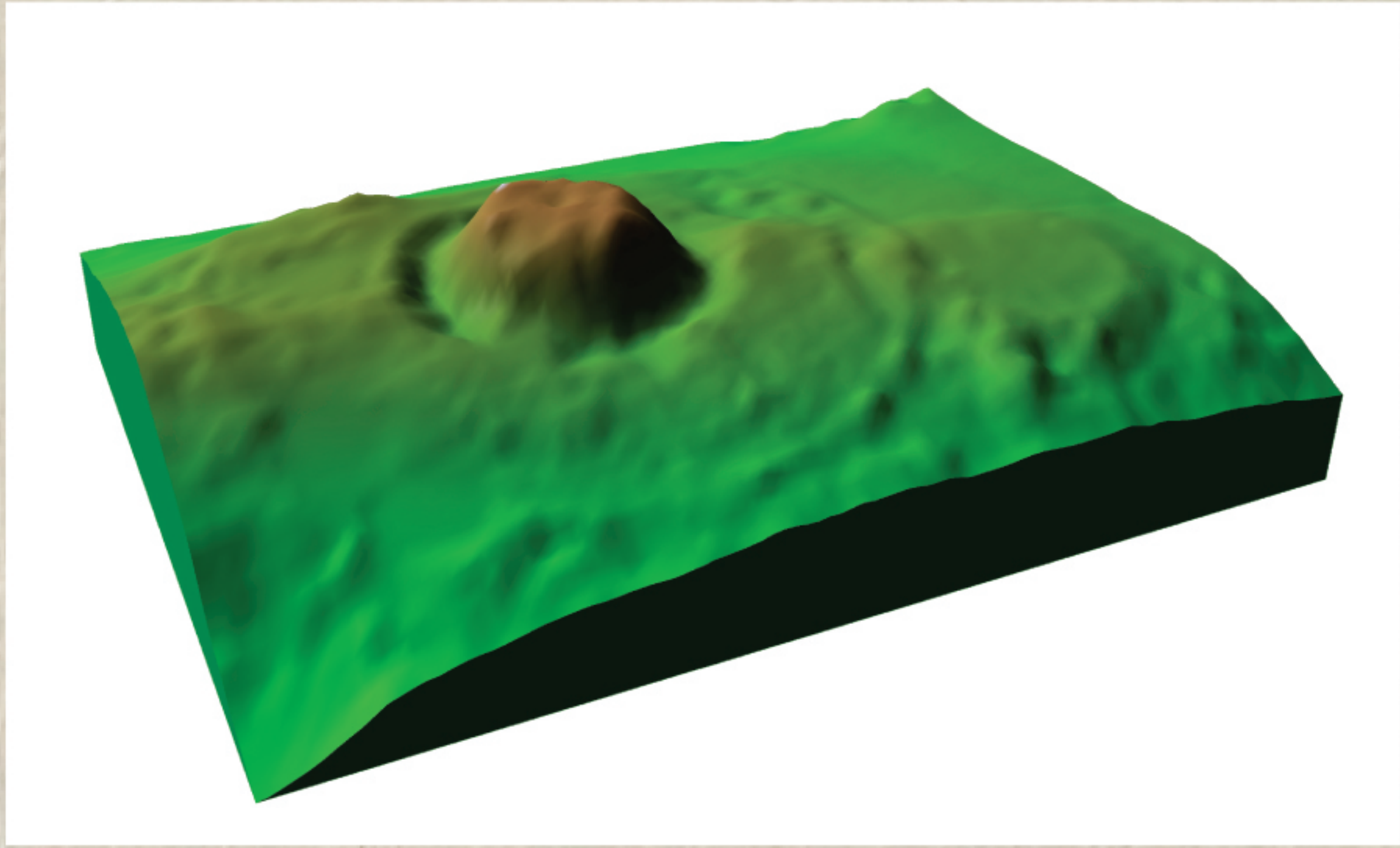
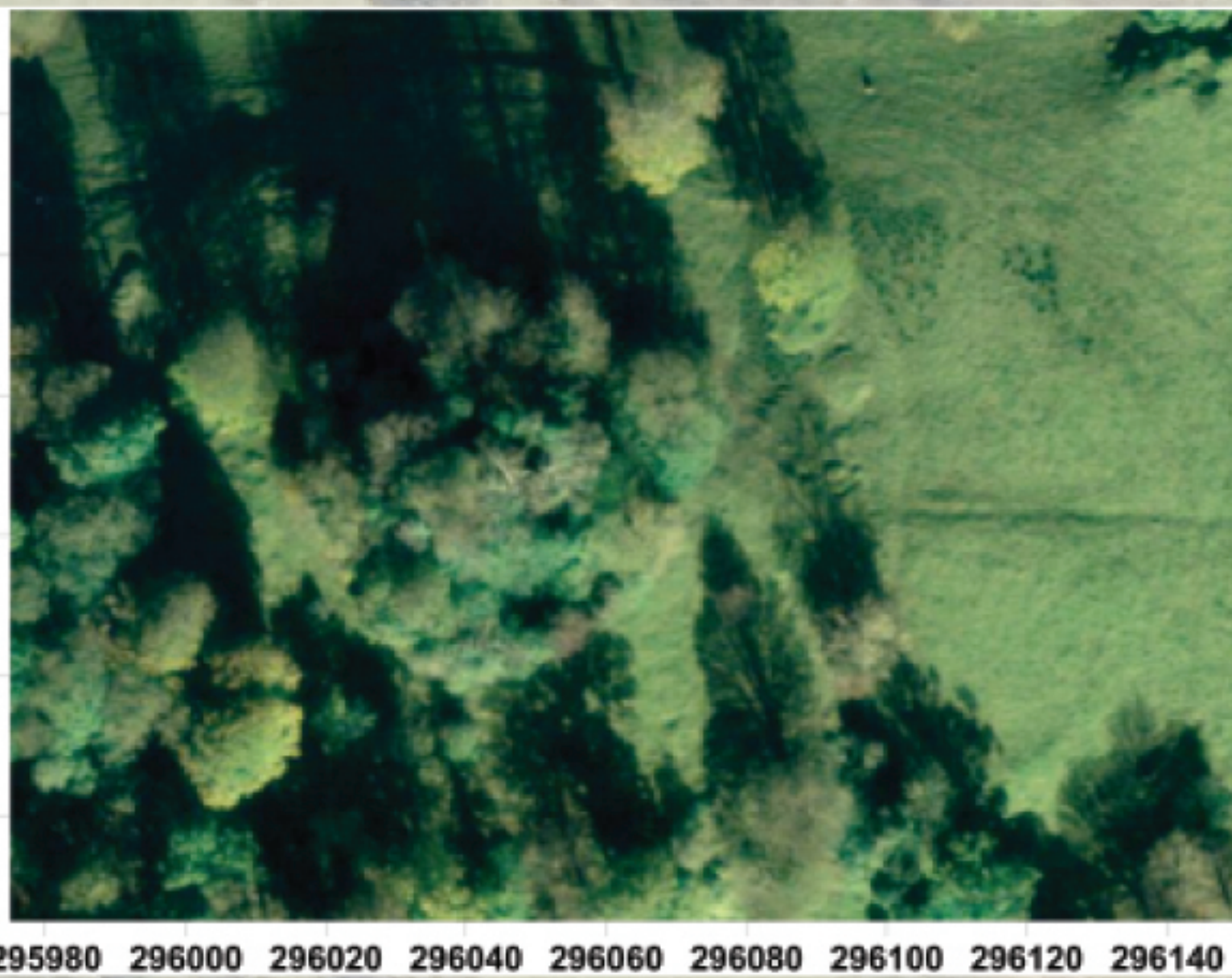
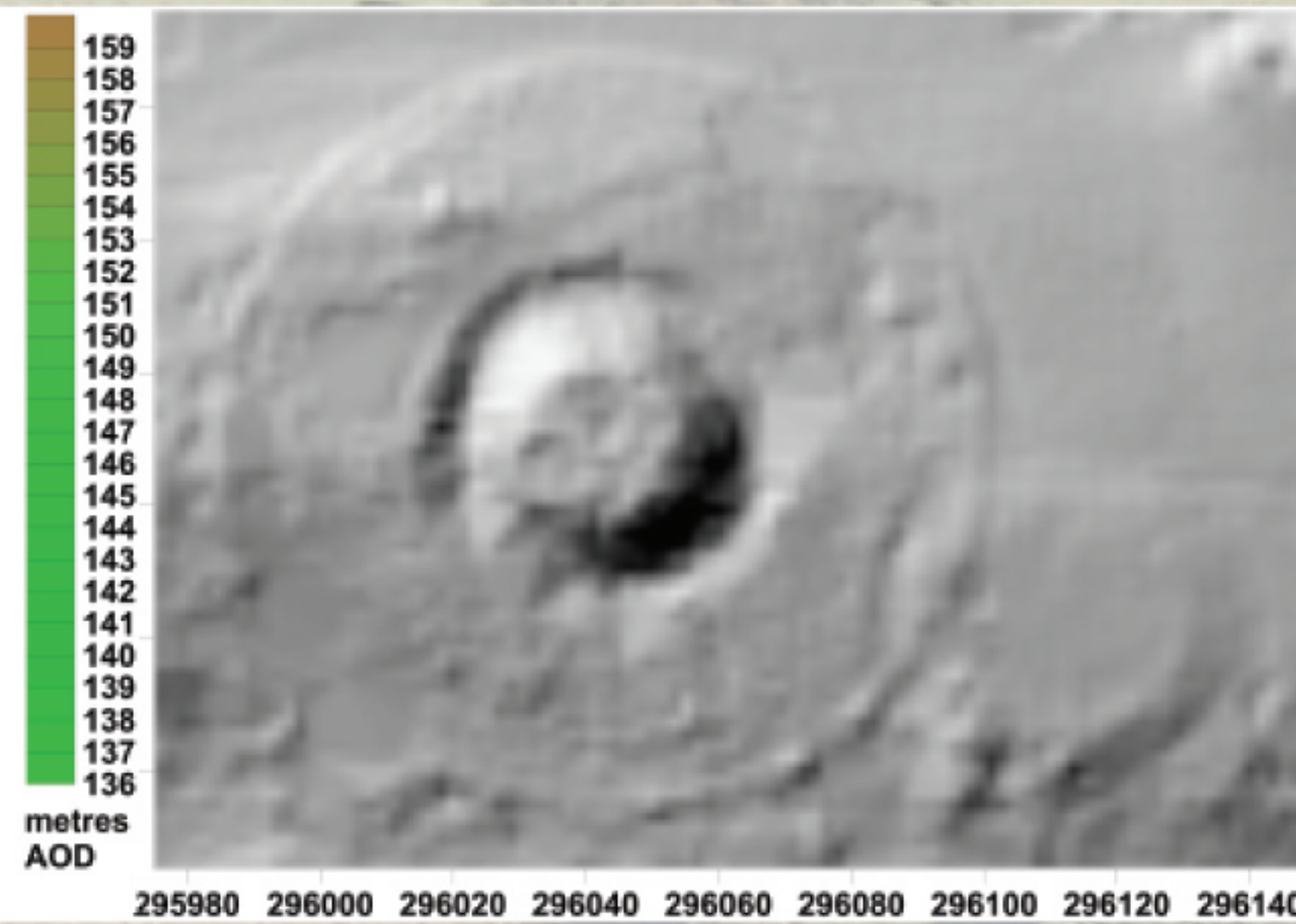
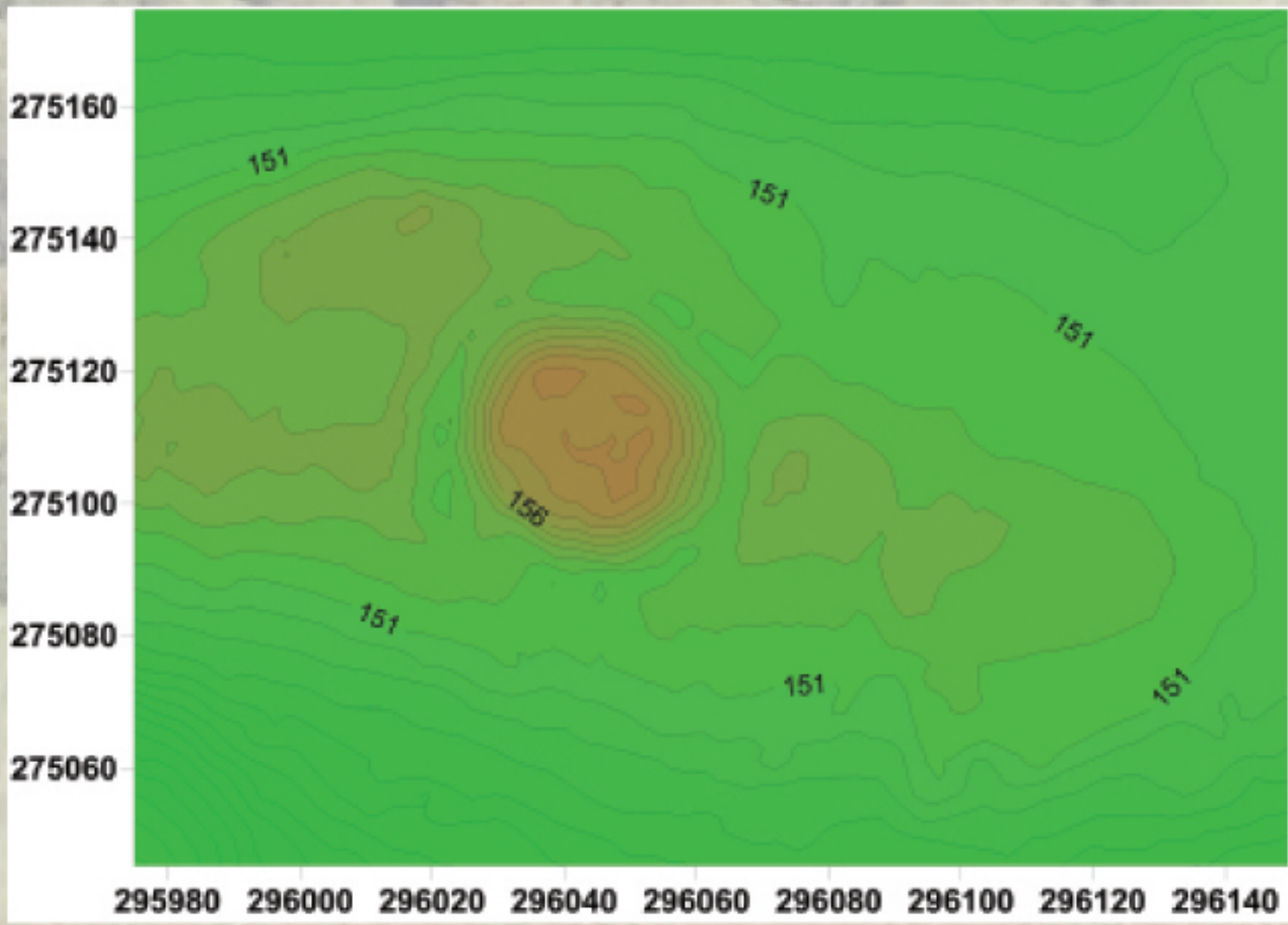
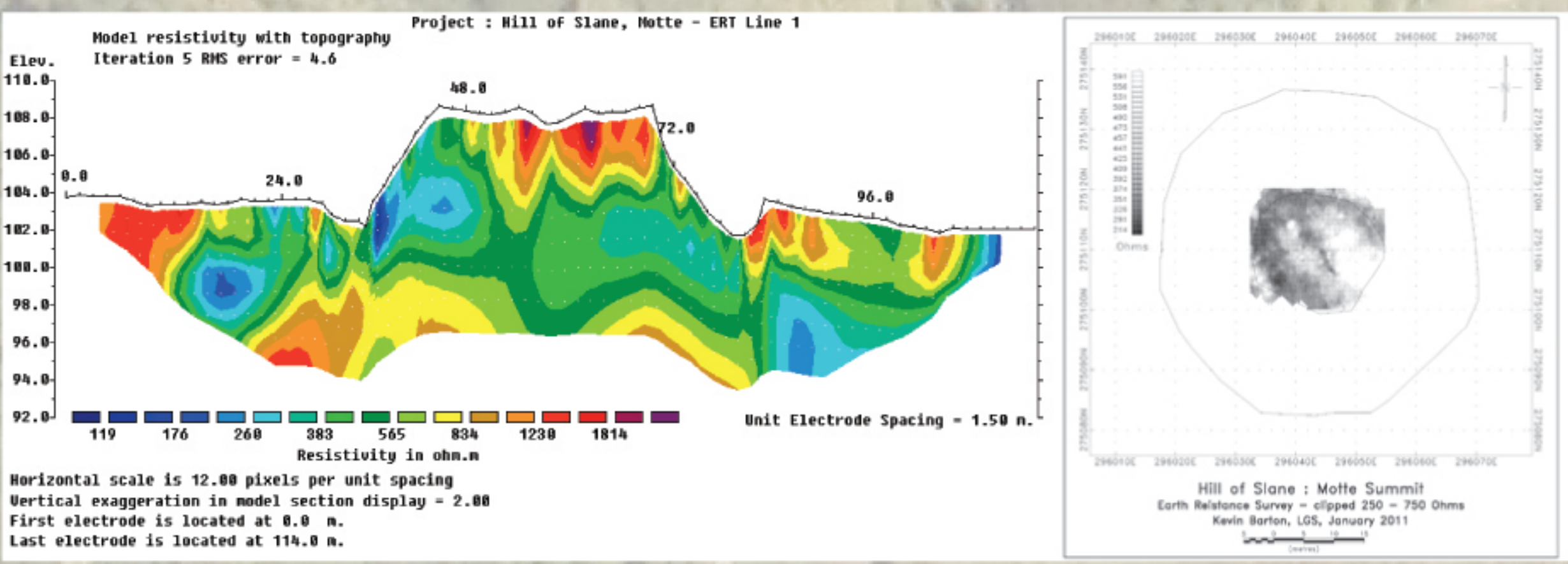
Dedicated to St Patrick, this served as the parish church for Slane until the 18th century. The long rectangular nave was probably rebuilt in the thirteenth century. Manning recently argued for pre-Romanesque (C.12th) date for an earlier phase.

The extensively rebuilt chancel at the E end has no window but includes a reused sandstone window head. A C.15th bell tower was added at the W end with a fine gothic window above the doorway and an anthropomorphic corbel at the top of its south face. Around this time the S aisle was added containing a chantry chapel. This involved rebuilding the S wall with a new door, twin light windows and a reused sandstone window. This chapel, separated from the nave by an arched arcade contains a piscina (liturgical drain) and aumbry (cupboard).



### The Motte

Although hidden and overgrown this monument is impressive and was surveyed in 2010 by the **HoSAP** funded by Meath County Council. It is 7.8m high with a summit 20m N-S by 23m E-W. Low stone walling surrounds the summit edge, especially on the N side. The motte is c.45m wide at the base and is surrounded by a 4-5m wide ditch up to 2m deep, partly rock cut, especially along the SE side. The motte stands centrally within a circular enclosure c.163m in diameter. Low earthworks lie within the enclosure on the E side of the motte. The 2010 geophysical survey on the motte suggests a buried stone structure.



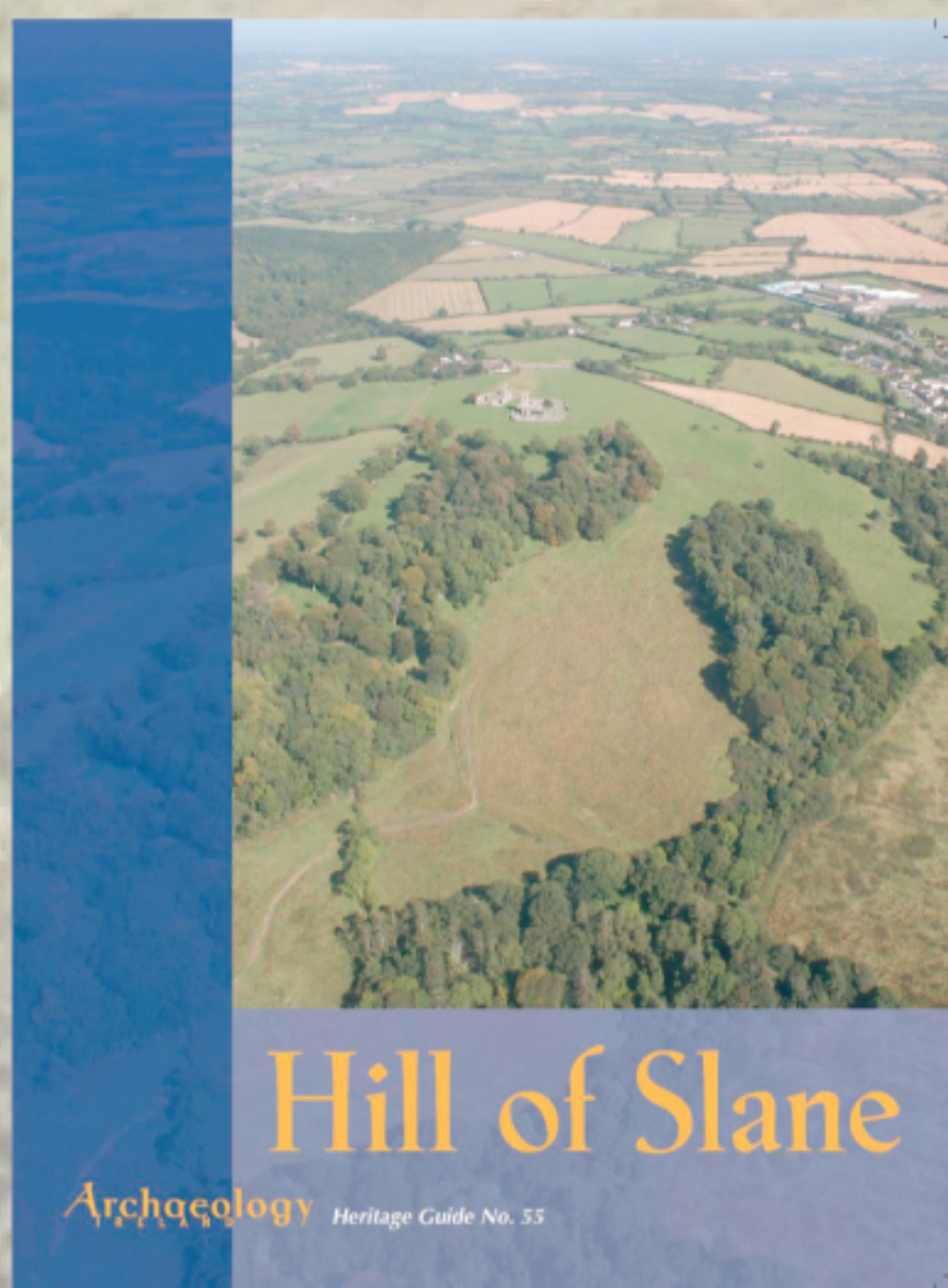
### The Hill of Slane in Prehistory

The Hill of Slane is a very prominent landmark dominating the lower reaches of the valley of the River Boyne. It is visible over a wide area of east County Meath and people have used places like these for ritual and ceremonial activities for millennia. Located just 4km from the Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site, overlooking an important fording point on the River Boyne and within sight of an important barrow cemetery at Slieve Breagh, it is highly likely that there was significant activity on the Hill of Slane in prehistoric times.

Some features suggest this possibility. The motte, nominally a C.12th Anglo-Norman construction, built by Richard de Fleming, may have been built at or on top of a pre-existing mound, referred to in literary sources as *Dumhach Sláine* or 'the burial mound of Slane'. The surrounding circular enclosure is not a feature of motte castles and looks much more like a prehistoric monument like that at Mount Fortescue, 6km to the NW. There is also a low circular feature, 25m in diameter, to the SE of the motte which is clearly overlain by the 163m diameter enclosure, and therefore earlier. This could be the remains of a prehistoric barrow.

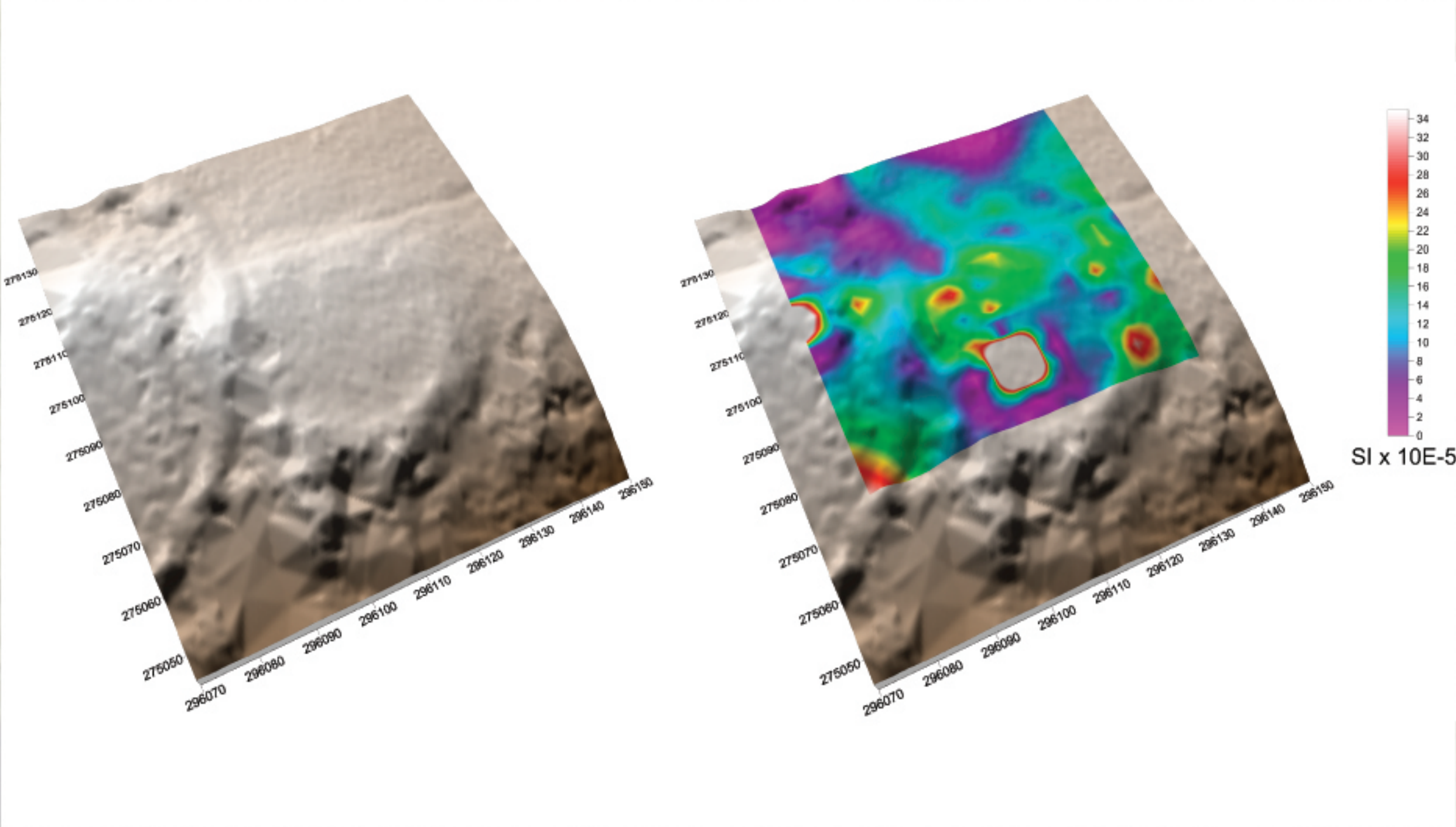
### The Hill of Slane Heritage Guide

As part of the **HoSAP**, a guide to the Hill of Slane has just been published, No. 55 in the *Archaeology Ireland Heritage Guide* series. This is one of the first measures which we hope will draw attention to the Hill of Slane as a heritage attraction and will enhance the experience of visitors, both locals and tourists, to the site. Publication of the guide was very generously supported by Meath County Council Heritage Office as an action of the Meath Heritage Plan.



### Archaeological Survey Techniques

With funding from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Environment Fund for the 2011-12 survey season, the **HoSAP** is making use of the latest available technologies to explore the Hill of Slane complex. Lidar (light detection and ranging) data from OSi allows us to construct highly detailed terrain models revealing some of the low-level topography, often invisible to the casual observer, that might be related to archaeology. Aerial photographs and historical maps have also been acquired and consulted. A range of non-invasive geophysical techniques allows us to look beneath the ground surface to see whether archaeological remains survive. Techniques being used include magnetic gradiometry (MG), earth resistance (ER), magnetic susceptibility (MS), electrical resistivity tomography (ERT) and ground-penetrating radar (GPR). Used in combination, these techniques can often provide a comprehensive picture of past activity on an archaeological site.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT US ON FACEBOOK OR VISIT OUR PROJECT WEBSITE <http://hillofslane.wordpress.com>**

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