Death as Archaeology of Transition: Thoughts and Materials

Papers from the II International Conference of Transition Archaeology: Death Archaeology
29th April – 1st May 2013

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BAR International Series 2708
2015

Published by

Archaeopress
Publishers of British Archaeological Reports
Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED
England
bar@archaeopress.com
www.archaeopress.com

BAR S2708

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ISBN 978 1 4073 1359 7

Printed in England by Information Press, Oxford

All BAR titles are available from:

Hadrian Books Ltd
122 Banbury Road
Oxford
OX2 7BP
England
www.hadrianbooks.co.uk

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THE TUMULI OF SELADA DO CAVALO (SERRA VERMELHA, COUNTY OF OLEIROS, DISTRICT OF CASTELO BRANCO)

João Carlos Caninas,[1] Fernando Robles Henriques,[2] José Luis Monteiro,[2] Francisco Henriques,[2] Mário Monteiro,[2] Emanuel Carvalho[2]

ABSTRACT

Since 2002, a number of mound structures, apparently used for burial purposes, have been discovered on the final stretch of the Central Cordillera, south of Serra da Estrela, in the context of the Pinhal Interior Wind Farm Project (GENERG Group SA).

This paper presents the results of the excavations carried out in Selada do Cavalo, one of two locations in the Serra Vermelha (county of Oleiros), as part of that project's impact minimization strategy.

In Selada do Cavalo there are two tumuli separated by a fossil route, which was also revealed by the excavations. The larger mound, 9 m in diameter, was constructed out of milky quartz and metagreywacke, and consists of a central space, without an orthostatic chamber. The few archaeological remains that it yielded suggested that it was used during the Neolithic period.

The smaller mound, located 17 metres from the other, has an elongated shape (around 4 m long) and is laid out in a NE-SW direction. Despite the absence of artefacts or human remains, its structural features suggest that it may have been an individual inhumation tomb. This mound may have been built at a more recent date than the other, possible during the Early Middle Ages or before that, using clasts taken from the larger mound.

These results, concerning the existence of tumuli at high points on the Portuguese Central Cordillera, document the presence of human communities in that mountainous region from the Neolithic period.

Keywords*: Central Cordillera (Portugal), Serra Vermelha, tumuli, Neolithic, historical period, wind farm project*

INTRODUCTION

Archaeological research carried out in the county of Oleiros between 2002 and 2005 in the context of the environmental studies for the Pinhal Interior Wind Farm Project (GENERG Group) revealed the existence of circular artificial mounds made of earth and stones at high points of the Central Iberian Cordillera, in the Portuguese zone (Figure 1).

These constructions were interpreted as prehistoric tombs beneath artificial mounds (*tumuli*), and the antiquity of some of them has been confirmed through archaeological excavation (Vale de Mós, Feiteiras – Cimo dos Valeiros and Selada do Cavalo). These findings have been presented at scientific conferences in Portugal and Spain, and published in books and specialist journals (Caninas *et al.*, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009 and 2011) in Portugal and the United Kingdom.

During the course of the environmental impact assessment (EIA) in 2002, a mound structure was discovered at Selada do Cavalo (*Tumulus* 1). Then, following the great forest fire of 2003 (Figure 2A) which removed much of the scrub and undergrowth, a smaller mound (*Tumulus* 2) was discovered in the vicinity of the first.

This paper presents the results of the archaeological excavations carried out in the two *tumuli* of Selada do Cavalo, identified by F. Henriques and J. Caninas during the course of the environmental studies mentioned above. The excavations were carried out in the context of the project's environmental impact assessment (EIA) and were funded by the GENERG group through EMERITA (Portuguese archaeological company). The authors of this paper would like to thank the then executive of the Oleiros Town Council, in the persons of its mayor, José Santos Marques, and councillor Victor da Conceição Antunes, for providing accommodation at the Oleiros Student Residence and for the topographical support given by the municipal technician, Inês Fernandes.

The fieldwork took place over a period of 18 days between July and September 2006, with work occurring simultaneously on the two *tumuli*. The excavations were directed by J. Caninas, with the participation of (in addition to the other authors) a large team of archaeologists and technicians including Alexandre Correia, Idalina Medeiros, Luis Carvalho, Álvaro Batista, Mário Chambino and Alexandre Canha. F. Robles Henriques, J. L. Monteiro and E. Carvalho were responsible for the field drawings, while M. Monteiro created the surface plan (Plan 1) from photographs. André Pereira was responsible for the final editing of the plans and cross-sections presented here, and for designing the materials. The detailed topography was edited by A. Canha, and the work area was connected to the geodesic network by Inês Fernandes (Oleiros Town Council).

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[2] Archaeologists. Members or collaborators with the Upper Tagus Study Association.

F. Robles Henriques and E. Carvalho were granted leave by their employers (respectively the Almada Town Council and the Portuguese Institute for Architectural Heritage) to participate in this programme. José Eduardo Mateus, of the then Palaeobotanic Laboratory of the CIPA (Human Palaeoecology and Archaeoscience Research Centre), collected samples for subsequent palaeoenvironmental analysis.

The excavations were visited by archaeologist Carlos Banha from the Covilhã branch of the Portuguese Archaeology Institute on 26th July 2006.

This text was translated into English by Karen Bennett.

1. LOCATION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

The Central Cordillera "forms the imposing end point of Upper Portugal, as opposed to Southern Portugal. It consists of two mountain systems separated by the River Zêzere and aligned in a NE-SW direction. The system located on the NW side is the highest and is 115 km in length, while the SE one is almost 110 km" (Ribeiro, Lautensach & Daveau, 1987: 149-150). At the end of the southern system is the Alvélos Massif (Figure 1B), a cluster of uplands formed by the Serra Vermelha in the north, the Cabeço Rainho in the centre and the Serra das Corgas to the south.

These uplands are part of the vast metasedimentary rock formation known as the Beiras Group (Palaeozoic), with quartz occurrences in philonian seams that fill earlier fractures.

The Serra Vermelha, where Selada[3] do Cavalo (Figure 1C) is located, is an extensive upland area which reaches as maximum altitude of 970 m at Povoinha. It is generally oriented in a northeast-southwesterly direction and forms the watershed between the hydrographic basins of the River Zêzere to the north and the Sertã to the south.

From Selada do Cavalo there are broad views over the landscape to the north as far as Serra da Estrela, and also to the south and west. The nearest village is Cavalo, 1 km to the south of the site.

2. AIMS

The *tumuli* of Selada do Cavalo were located in the vicinity of the site planned for an aerogenerator and its respective platform (Figure 2B), and also near to a new access road and the planned line of the electric cable linking the aerogenerators to the electroproduction system.

During the preparation of the wind farm project, the *tumuli* were safeguarded by shifting the routes of the road and cables. The new access route partially coincided with an existing route but inflected to the south in the area of the aerogenerator (planned in terrain that had been profoundly altered when the soil was loosened prior to forestation). To the north of the new access road, various fossil furrows were preserved, corresponding to ancient cart tracts identified during the EIA.

As a compensatory measure, it was decided to partially excavate the two mounds in order to describe them and confirm their assumed connection with burial rites in Recent Prehistory.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE STRUCTURES

Tumuli **1 and 2 of Selada do Cavalo**[4] are located at an altitude of 892 m on a mountain pass (Figures 1 and 2) that cuts through the ridge of the Serra Vermelha between the geodesic vertex (gv) of Povoinha (970 m) to the east, and the gv Vale de Mós (904 m) in the west. Between these points are the places known as Alto do Cavalo and Alto da Coelheira. The difference in level between the gv Povoinha and Selada do Cavalo is around 80 m, for an extension of 1 km.

This mountain pass would have been very important for traffic crossing the Serra Vermelha as it connected the Sertã valley in the south with the Zêzere valley in the north (there may have been a ferry barge here to take passengers to the fields of Pampilhosa das Serra).

From this pass, heading southwards over the slopes or across the hilltops, it is possible to reach the village of Cavalo, the mines of Cavalo and, in the neighbourhood of River Sertã, the villages of Mosteiro, Cavalinho and Vale do Souto. To the north, aligned with Povoinha, there is a long slope marked by gv Mouro (where an earthen mound was detected), which reaches the banks of the Zêzere and gives access to other small villages such as Sarnadas, Portela and Frazumeira.

The largest mound, which is subcircular in shape and around 9 m in diameter, is well defined above ground, though low, and capped with small pieces of milky quartz and blocks of greywacke, some of which are rounded[5] and have perhaps come from a nearby stream. It has a slight central depression with few stones. The old path ran some 13 m north of the centre of the monument. The smaller mound, located 17 m west of the other one (distance between centres), was slightly raised in relation to the surrounding land and elongated in shape (4 m long). It was made of sediment, blocks of metagreywacke and some blocks of milky quartz.

[3] The word "selada", which means a saddle-shaped hollow in a watershed, is synonymous with "mountain pass".

[4] These have been attributed the national site codes (CNS) 19667 and 19668 in the DCPC (Directorate General for Cultural Heritage) database of archaeological sites.

[5] The presence of rounded clasts, brought from further afield, may have some specific significance, as there is no shortage of raw material near the *tumulus* for building. Rounded pieces have also been found in other monuments.

The two *tumuli* were circumvented in the north by deep furrows in the rocky substrate, corresponding to an ancient cart trail. This may correspond to the Roman road mentioned in medieval documents (C. Batata) that is supposed to have connected Covilhã to Pedrogão Pequeno. The furrows continued for a distance of around 1 km and correspond to a cart with an axis 1.4 m wide.

4. FIELD WORK

Work was carried out on the two structures at the same time. However, for methodological reasons, we will analyse each of them separately, first *Tumulus 1* and then *Tumulus* 2.

Considering the topography of the terrain, which was favourably flat, and the proximity between the two structures, a 48 m long alignment was drawn, passing through the geometric centres of the mounds. From this, a rectangular work area (WA) was established, oriented in an east-west direction and with a breadth of 16 m (Figure 3A). Then, the square-shaped excavation areas (EA) were marked out, proportional to the diameter of the mounds (hence, 10 m x 10 m in the case of *Tumulus* 1 and 6 m x 6 m for *Tumulus* 2).

The usual procedure was then followed, involving the manual clearing of the scrub vegetation and undergrowth, a detailed topographic survey (with a mesh of 2 m for the WA and 0.5 m for the EA) and the preparation of a photographic record (by sector and 1 m^2grid cells).

All sediments removed from the EA were dry-sifted.

4.1. TUMULUS *1*

Before beginning the processes of surface sediment removal and excavation, a vertical photograph was taken of each grid cell. The final montage of these photographs in mosaic served as the basis for the surface plan of the whole mound (Plan 1: Figures 3A and 3B).

Given the geometry of the structure in question, the area was explored in quadrants. For the purpose of planimetric referencing, each of the 100 1 m^2 cells of the EA was identified with a letter on the X axis and a number on the Y axis. The EA of this *tumulus* was represented by a sequence of cells identified with the letters R to AA and the numbers 2 to 11.

The surface image indicated a denser distribution of the large metagreywacke clasts at the top of the mound, around the central depression. Moreover, most of the milky quartz, particularly concentrations of small fragments (pebbles), was found on that top part.

On the surface, the mound seemed to have been built of elongated pieces of metagreywacke that were larger than the other stone materials used, and milky quartz, smaller in calibre than the clasts of metasedimentary rocks. The geological substrate formed an outcrop to the northeast of the EA.

The excavation work began with the removal of successive layers of surface sediment in the northwest quadrant (qNW). In a second phase, in an attempt to delimit the burial container, the excavation reached the central cells of the grid (V6, W6 and W7) covered by the southwest, northeast and southeast quadrants (qSW, qNE and qSE). In a third phase, the mound was sectioned in depth with the dismantling of the stone structure following a radial trench covering cells V7, V8, V9, V10 and V11. The results obtained at the end of the archaeological intervention are documented in Figures 2D, 2E, 3B and 3C.

The excavation of qNW revealed clear-cut data for the characterization of the mound structure. The excavation work consisted of extracting fine sediments and small clasts, while keeping the large stones *in situ*, as evidence of the structure.

In depth, the mound was formed of abundant large clasts encased in fine sediments, which incorporated more organic matter than at surface levels. The most marked characteristic of the construction, evident in the plan and cross-section, was the use of clasts of various sizes (though with a predominance of *cobbles* and *boulders*[6]) of metagreywackes and milky quartz, organized in a regular fashion to occupy most of the volume of the mound from the periphery to the central space. The centre of the mound was devoid of clasts, suggesting that this was the position of the burial container.

The larger metagreywacke and milky quartz clasts were mostly unconnected, and formed two concentric rings with some interpenetration at the edges, with the milky quartz apparently overlapping the metagreywacke. This arrangement allows some insight into the building sequence.

This structure had a discontinuity at the centre of the mound where the stone “void” was filled with sediment and small loose clasts. This fact, along with the centrality of the “void”, suggests that the space could have corresponded to the burial container. The excavation of this central space, which extended into cells V6, V7, W6 and W7, did not reveal any containment structure of the orthostatic, chamber or cist types, nor alveoli where these may have been implanted. However, at the centre of this space, there was a small depression which could have been used for a funerary deposition ritual. In keeping with the depression observed on the surface, this lack of structure in the central area of the monument may be explained by violations at various points in the past, through the removal of earth and loose or structured stones. One of these episodes

[6] According to the Wentworth scale: boulder > 26 cm; 26 cm > cobble > 6 cm; 6 cm > pebble > 4 mm; 4 mm > gravel granule > 2 mm; 2 mm > very coarse sand >1 mm; 1 mm > sand, silt and clay.

of material extraction could have been related to the construction of *Tumulus* 2.

There are similar monuments in other regions of mainland Portugal that have also reported an absence of any central structure or clues to its configuration (such as alveoli from the embedding of slabs). For example, the burial space in the mound of Monte Maninho (Cruz, 1985) in Baião had also been much disturbed by successive removals of stones and sediment, and in its chamber only "an in situ slab, probably set on the base soil, and made firm with small stones" was documented.

A radial trench[7], 5 m long and 1 m wide, leading northwards from the centre of the mound, confirmed the layout and extension of the metagreywacke and milky quartz clasts incorporated into the mound structure from top to base (as shown in Figure 3C), making contact with the fine layer of earth lying over the geological substrate.

During the course of the area excavation, and in particular with the digging of this trench, various layers of milky quartz pebbles were found. One of these occurred at the surface and was visible from the outset, on the top of the mound, while another was at the base, detected at the edge (in V11) and in V8 and V9 under the crown of milky quartz blocks. Similarly sized pebbles of milky quartz were also found scattered over the surface.

Were these concentrations of quartz pebbles anthropogenic, intentionally collected and laid during the construction of the monument? Or were they rather thermoclasts, formed in a post-depositional context, as a result of the fragmentation of the quartz blocks on the top of the mound, made possible through successive episodes of vegetal combustion or accentuated thermal amplitudes? This last hypothesis may explain the genesis of the surface unit. In the case of the base unit, these small clasts may have formed prior to the construction of the mound. It is also possible that the distribution of the small clasts at the base-periphery level marked the edge of the burial monument during the building process[8].

The excavation of the qNW on the outer side of the mound revealed other interesting aspects. One of those aspects was the discovery of a pair of furrows in the geological substrate from an ancient road, worn by the circulation of carts. The most interesting aspect is that these furrows were totally covered over with a natural deposit, which meant that they were not visible on the surface. This may indicate that this part is older than the furrows and wheel marks that exist further to the north, though those are deeper.

The southern furrow seems to have been faceted on the edge of the mound, given the parallelism between the distribution of clasts and the direction of the furrow. In fact, it is possible that the passage of wheels produced the faceting observed in Figure 3B. More difficult to explain is the fact that there is more faceting at the edge of the pavement, between squares S7 – S8 and T7 – T8, revealing a polygonal contour, already suggested by the surface topographical survey.

A second aspect, revealed by the excavation in qNW, is a variation in the orientation of the schist plaques present in the fine layer that covers the top of the geological substrate. Under and around the paved area as far as the wheel furrows, the schist plaques (pebbles) resulting from the disintegration of the geological substrate are generally loose and in a horizontal position, as if they have been crushed (shaped outcrop: Figure 3B).

Outside this zone, the outcrop has some small vertical protrusions (marked in light grey in Figure 3B). The explanation suggested for this variation is that the first zone, which underlies the mound more directly, documents a stage of preparation of the terrain, involving the regularization of the rock through the crushing of protuberances in the natural state of vertical stratification. This stage may have been preceded by the removal of vegetation and soil. There are no indications that the operation was accompanied by any burning.

The results obtained during the course of this archaeological intervention suggest the following possible building sequence. The ritual would have begun (1) with the removal of vegetation and sediments in the area destined for the *tumulus*. Then, (2) the land was levelled with the crushing of any rocky protuberances. The subsequent actions (3 and 4) may have involved (in an order that we cannot determine) marking the periphery of the mound with a surrounding strip of small milky quartz clasts, and the lowering of the geological substrate in the central zone to form a depression (container).

If the monument was built at the same time as the funerary deposition, and as the container was not constructed with orthostats, the next operation could have corresponded to the enclosure of the mortal remains in the central space, which was then covered over in some way. The absence of a stone cover over the container does not support this hypothesis. But the cover could have been altered by violation or the extraction of earth and stones. In any case, we should not exclude the possibility (not proved in excavation) that there may have been a container delimited by small slabs that were removed at a later date. It should be noted that no direct evidence of its use for the purpose

[7] On 6th August 2006, José Eduardo Mateus collected sediments for pollen analysis from under the metagreywacke slabs of the lower levels of the stone structure, revealed when the trench was made in squares V9 and V10. Due to budgetary restrictions, it has not been possible to analyse and study these samples.

[8] Sedimentological analysis would shed light on this, as would the digging of further trenches to confirm the radial distribution. It is perhaps possible that the antiquity of the construction could be confirmed through the OSL dating of the periods when these base level pebbles were covered, hypothetically related to the construction of the mound.

of burial were found; that was inferred indirectly from the archaeological context[9].

In any of the hypotheses that have been raised to explain the characteristics of the container, the construction of the mound may have continued with the following operations, from the periphery to the centre: (5) construction of a marginal embankment with sediments and clasts of milky quartz; (6) construction of an external ring, consisting mostly of metagreywacke; (7) construction of an inner ring mostly composed of milky quartz, and the covering of the central space.

During the archaeological excavation, few artefacts were recovered. Besides the pieces drawn (Figure 4F, Nos 1, 2 and 3), some fragments of pottery and charcoal were collected.

The remains collected suggest that this monument was used in the Neolithic period. They included a cluster of blades in white silex, collected in cell P8, on the surface at the edge of the mound, and a schist adze from cell V6, in the space corresponding to the burial container. The denticulated piece in milky quartz, collected from cell U7, in the stone structure of the mound, suggests it may have been part of a wooden sickle, though the piece seems too big to fit properly. This type suggests a later chronology.

In fact, these so-called "sickle blades" predominantly in silex, are generally mentioned in Bronze-Age residential contexts (Cardoso *et al*., 1981; Cardoso & Carreira, 1996: 339; Cardoso & Cardoso, 1996: 357; Gutiérrez Saez, 1993), but they also occur in Chalcolithic settlements. For example, there are examples from blade and, less frequently, from flake at Loma del Lomo, in the Meseta (Valiente Malla, 1997: 504), and Upper Extremadura in Valdecañas (González Cordero, 1997: 479) and, for levels between the Final Chalcolithic and Middle Bronze Age, the habitat sites of Los Barruecos, Navaluenga, Cerro del Castillo and Monfrague in connection with schematic art (González Cordero, 1999).

But, as with Selada do Cavalo, these pieces may have had a ritualistic character, given their presence in prehistoric tombs, as the cases of Caeira 5 in Évora (Leisner & Leisner, 1959: print 30), and Cabeço da Forca in Idanha-a-Nova (Cardoso, Caninas & Henriques, 2003), which both have clearly differentiated chamber and corridor. However, in this second monument, the sickle blade was attributed to a later moment in the Final Neolithic-Chalcolithic.

The presence of blades in white silex is very interesting because the raw flint may have come from a secondary deposit on the terrace of the River Tagus, located in the region of Ródão or downstream from there. This would indicate the existence of a regional exchange network for raw materials. It should be pointed out that, for an older period, the Upper Palaeolithic, it has been shown that sites in the Côa Valley may have been supplied with silex from beds located over 200 km away (Aubry *et al.*, 2004; Aubry & Mangado, 2006).

On Portuguese territory, the discovery of small hoards of tools of polished geometric stones, sometimes accompanied by pottery, has been attributed to an older period of ritual burials in the Recent Prehistory, as is the case of the low *tumulus* with the small subcircular chamber, apparently without schist orthostats, in Eira da Vinha, Vila Velha de Ródão (Santos & Figueira, 2011).

4.2. TUMULUS *2*

The EA of this second structure initially corresponded to the sequence of cells labelled with the letters C to H and the numbers 4 to 9. However, it later extended into cells B4, E3 and F3, covering a total area of 39 m^2.

The detailed topography (Figure 5A) documented a low mound, around 10 cm in height, as perceived in the visual assessment of the surface, though elongated in a NE-SW direction along the route of the ancient cart track, revealed by the work undertaken on *Tumulus* 1. No central depression was observed.

Before starting intrusive actions, such as surface sediment removal and excavation, vertical photographs were taken of each cell. The subsequent montage of these photographs in mosaic was then used as the basis for drawing the surface plan (Plan 1: Figure 5A).

The surface image indicated that the metagreywacke and milky quartz clasts were distributed irregularly and less densely than in *Tumulus* 1, and showed up no relevant substructures (such as a container, peripheral ring, etc). Given these characteristics and the size of the mound, the decision was taken to begin the excavation by removing the successive layers of surface sediment and clasts from around the EA.

After the first layer had been removed, it was found that the stone components became denser in depth and included clasts of milky quartz and metagreywacke (the latter were larger and more numerous). However, the only regularity that could configure a substructure was a sequence of small metagreywacke slabs lying side by side in the area of cells E5, F6 and G6. Later, the EA was extended to cell B4 in order to delimit an isolated slab that had appeared at the limit of C4, and to squares E3 and F3, in order to try to complete the route of the ancient cart track[10], revealed during the course of this excavation.

During the surface sediment removal phase, particular attention was given to the sector corresponding to the

[9] Given the manifest absence of human remains, we should not exclude the possibility that this might have been a cenotaph.

[10] On 6th August 2006, José Eduardo Mateus collected a sample of a very fine grey-coloured sediment that filled the bottom of the two cart furrows located to the southeast of the tomb.

sequence of slabs mentioned above, and dispersed clasts were removed in the area around the mound. The contour obtained revealed that the structure had an irregular periphery.

The results (Figures 4C, 4D, 4F and 5B) are very interesting indeed. The excavation, in the area covered by the parallel slabs, revealed what seemed to be an inhumation tomb, given its elongated format and dimensions compatible with an outstretched body (around 190 cm in length and 60 cm at its widest point). The contour, though irregular, could be considered anthropomorphic, given the greater width of the burial cavity in the mesial zone. On the ground plan, it could be described as having the shape of two trapezoid bodies, one tapering towards the head and the other towards the feet.

We have deduced that this substructure was a burial container due to: (a) the horizontal position and regularity of the parallel slabs, which seem designed to pave the floor[11] upon which the body would have been laid; (b) the fact that most of the clasts used to delimit this cavity slope inwards towards the interior of the tomb; (c) the presence inside the tomb of sediments and clasts that are smaller than those that delimit it; and (d) the configuration and dimensions of the cavity, compatible with placement of an outstretched body. In addition to the container, the tomb would probably have been overlain with a stone and earth mound, which would have covered the cavity and the body buried in it.

Parallels may be found as far back as the Bronze Age of burial containers designed to take an outstretched body: for example, there is the case of the cist necropolis of Agra de Antas in Esposende, dated to between the beginning of the 14th and 11th centuries BC (Cardoso, 2002: 390). In later periods, such parallels multiple.

On the other hand, comparisons should also be made with the burial practices of the Early Middle Ages, given the much greater abundance of regional data concerning that period. Firstly, the configuration of the tomb at Selada do Cavalo has no direct parallels in the range of rock-carved tombs that have been studied in the area of Serra da Estrela (Tente, 2007). However, the topographic context of Selada do Cavalo should be taken into account, as it would have been hard work and time-consuming to have created such a tomb at that site.

The northeasterly orientation (of the feet) may have been conditioned by the orientation of the ditch that seems to have been associated to the line of the abandoned road. Taking as reference a study area located on the northwest slope of Serra da Estrela, this orientation is the fourth most represented in the cluster of early medieval tombs found in that region (Tente, 2007: 96). Indeed geological restrictions are usually invoked to explain the range of orientations of individual tombs that are not included in necropolises or subordinated to temples: “the fact that there are diverse options with regard to tomb orientation may be explained by geology, suggesting that the orientation of the rocky outcrops may have had as much weight or more than certain canonical rules in determining the orientation of tombs” (Tente, 2007: 97).

Amongst the isolated tombs of Alto Paiva, the distancing in relation to the canonical layout is also explained by natural constraints (Vieira, 2004: 75). Quoting Mário Barroca, this researcher also discusses the significance of the presence of tombs near roads (Vieira, 2004: 76 and Note 53), a convergence that would have been more likely in the Roman period, when the dead were kept away from the space of the living on condition that their “memory were not consigned to total oblivion” (Vieira, 2004: 86). This second condition was fulfilled by positioning the tomb near a road, a practice that could have persisted until the 8th or 9th centuries, gradually coming to an end when it became customary for burials to take place in churches.

The presence of this small tomb in Selada do Cavalo, which is considered to be more recent than *Tumulus* 1, may be interpreted as follows. Between the Bronze Age and the Middle Ages[12], there existed a cart track that passed through Selada do Cavalo, and which could be a fossil route that today can be seen immediately to the north. It is possible that a traveller, who was not resident of the nearby villages, may have died in the vicinity of this site and been buried by his companions or fellow travellers at Selada do Cavalo, near to a pass and a prehistoric mound.

Assuming that the ground was hard and bare, and there was neither the time nor the tools to make a grave in the rock, it is possible that advantage was taken of a small depression in the terrain, perhaps the trench of an old road. This depression may have been slightly widened and then lined with slabs so that the body could be deposited in it. Stones would have been placed around the body, forming a cist. Given the difficulties of making a negative tomb to hide the body, it would instead have been covered with a mound of stones and fine sediments that had been taken from the prehistoric mound nearby.

In the Roman era, it was common for individual tombs to be located near roads. In modern times, they were usually marked with crosses, and the bodies taken to cemeteries. The reuse of older necropolises by addition, or of older tombs by intrusion, is also documented archaeologically. For example, there is the case of the Roman incineration tomb in a rectangular cist, which was placed in the mound at Portela da Anta (Silva, 2004: 289) in Serra da Freita (Arouca). This too was located near a “traditional road” and at a high altitude (1009 m).

[11] A piece of charcoal was found under one of the slabs that lined the floor of the tomb.

[12] This broad timeframe reflects the lack of more concrete data.

The supposed tomb of Fontão in Oliveira do Hospital (Lourenço, 2007: 164, 210) also deserves mention as a possible case of an expeditious heterodox burial, despite its indeterminate chronology and unproven function. It is an open trapezoidal cavity in a pile of debris at the top of the hill in front of the Roman camp of Lomba do Canho.

The second aspect revealed by the excavation of *Tumulus* 2 was the extension of the route of a pair of cart furrows (Figures 4C and 5B) detected near *Tumulus* 1. These two furrows are located immediately southeast of this tomb in cells G5, H5, E4, F4. G4. H4 and F3.

To the northwest of this pair of furrows, and parallel to them, is another ditch, a little broader, with which *Tumulus* 2 is aligned. However, this alignment has no obvious continuation in B4 and C4, a fact that could invalidate its interpretation as a cart furrow. In B4 and C4 there was only a slight depression in the geological substrate, under a metagreywacke slab in the shape of a subsquare.

Does the old road, fossilized in the pair of furrows that align with the pair detected near *Tumulus* 1, date from before or after *Tumulus* 2? We might assume that the tomb is unlikely to have been built next to an active road in which case the road will either have been abandoned already and covered over with sediments, or been built after the tomb, which may have already been forgotten.

A third episode, of anthropic origin, was detected in the area covered by cells E3, E4, F3 and F4. This is a regular depression or crater (Figure 5B) with coals at the bottom, which has been interpreted as a charcoal pit. This episode may have been more recent, perhaps even contemporary[13], given that it took place over the furrows of the ancient cart track at a time when this would have been abandoned.

If *Tumulus* 2 had contained a tomb, the circumstances of death, at a place far removed from the defunct's community of origin, may explain the lack of burial remains, in addition to other reasons of a cultural order. Given the acidity of the soil, there is no hope of finding osteological remains. But neither should we exclude the hypothesis that the body may have been profaned by scavengers or that it was later exhumed and taken to the community of origin, if this were indeed an early medieval chronology.

Of the archaeological remains collected in the EA of *Tumulus* 2, but outside the tomb, on the surface, in cell H9, a fragment of a disk in greywacke is worthy of mention (Figure 4F, No. 4). Given the position where it was found, its relationship with *Tumulus* 2 is not obvious. However, from the typological point of view, we could perhaps associate it with *Tumulus* 1, given the presence of artefacts of this type in prehistoric tombs.

It should be pointed out that stone disks of this type (i.e. flat circular pieces) are present in post-palaeolithic macrolithic industries (Raposo & Silva, 1984: 113). Pieces of this type[14] were also occasionally found in in prehistoric tombs.

In southern Portugal this type has been found in the archaeological remains of various megalithic burial monuments, such as Anta 1 of Brissos (chamber and corridor clearly differentiated in the ground plan, Leisner & Leisner, 1959; Print 21); in Anta 1 at Entreáguas (chamber and corridor clearly differentiated in both ground plan and elevation, Leisner & Leisner, 1959; Print 23); in Mora, at the Anta of Cabeças (chamber and corridor undifferentiated on the plan, Leisner & Leisner, 1959; Print 37) in Arraiolos.

Northeast of the Alentejo region, the presence of quartzite or schist disks in archaeological sites in the region of Alcântara is valued by Spanish researchers and well documented "*in settlements from the Neolithic/Chalcolithic transition, particularly in some burial monuments*" (Bueno Ramírez *et al.*, 1998:179).

East of Alcântara, a complete piece was found in the chamber of Anta 2 at Couto da Espanhola (Cardoso, Caninas & Henriques, 1997) at Idanha-a-Nova. This is a tomb with a subcircular chamber and long corridor, clearly differentiated in the ground plan, attributable to the Final Neolithic/Chalcolithic, with evidence of reuse in the Bronze Age.

This is not the place to give a more detailed description of these types of pieces. However, in Galician they seem, to be less common, as only three occurrences are cited (Eguileta Franco, 1999:129). In the *tumulus* of Cist 10 of the necropolis of Alfarrobeira (Gomes, 1994: 50 and 51) in Silves, a schist disk was also found, though it has been interpreted as a lid (of a pottery vessel).

5. FINAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The excavations carried out on *Tumuli* 1and 2 of Selada do Cavalo have yielded very interesting results about the remote human presence in the mountains of the Central Iberian Cordillera, in Portuguese territory.

The findings support the hypothesis that *Tumulus* 1 is prehistoric. However, due to the limited nature of the data (structure or artefacts), and the absence of absolute datings, it is not possible to establish a precise chronology for the construction / use of this monument beyond a provisional location in the 4th millennium BC. Amongst the artefacts associated to it, we might highlight an adze and a bladelet core in white silex (the raw material for this may have come from the terraces of the Tagus in Ródão).

[13] Information obtained from residents indicates that there were charcoal pits (holes in the ground of around 1m in diameter) active in the 20th century.

[14] Discoid pieces have been found in other contexts and periods and seem to have had a variety of functions: quoits; lids for pottery vessels; striker - anvil.

The second mound, which is smaller than the other, revealed a structure that was interpreted as an inhumation tomb, more recent than *Tumulus* 1. Despite the limitations resulting from the absence of associated artefacts and datings, *Tumulus* 2 is attributed to a period between the Bronze Age and Early Middle Ages.

The presence of an unsuspected fossil route next to the two mounds raises very interesting questions about the antiquity of the road network in this region. We know that this dates back at least to the Roman period when it served the metal mining industries (Batata, 2006). But the possibility that it is much older, maybe even megalithic, has also been discussed, particularly in various regions in the north of the Iberian Peninsula, from Galicia to the Basque Country. This debate has also taken place with regard to the county of Oleiros (Caninas *et al*, 2008).

One hypothesis put forward, though with reservations, to explain this convergence is the existence of prehistoric (i.e. megalithic) roads associated to mound structures (Bello Diéguez, Criado Boado & Vázquez Varela, 1987; Gómez Vila, 2005; Galilea Martinez, 2010), though the explanations given vary from region to region.

The spatial correlation of mounds with ancient historic roads or in optimal transit zones (such as mountain passes or ridges, or at crossroads) has been much debated in Galicia, where there are concentrations of monuments of this type (Criado Boado, Fábregas Valcarce & Vaquero Lastres, 1990/91), giving statistical importance to these correlations. A paradigmatic case is that of the 87 mounds aligned on either side of the Caminho Real ("Royal Route") which crosses the Serra de Faladoira mountains for around 40 km at an altitude of between 100 m and 600 m (Rodríguez Casal, 1990). Near the source of the River Minho there is also evidence of a concentration of monuments at transversal transit zones, such as points of crossing between hydographic basins (Criado Boado, Fábregas Valcarce & Vaquero Lastres, 1990/91), as we found in Selada do Cavalo.

In the case of the province of Araba in the Basque Country (Galilea Martinez, 2010), the distribution of so-called *mountain dolmens*[15] has been related to the annual migrations of grazing herds (on a small or local scale) in mountainous areas where it is difficult to access the highland pastures. The monuments are located along these routes, generally at high points, on plateaux, in mountain passes (giving access to the plateaux) and along the upland herding routes.

The possibility that there may have existed a prehistoric cart track cannot be excluded, as research has indicated that the wheel existed since the Late Neolithic: there are graphic representations of carts coupled to oxen, in the outer sanctuary of Escoural, for example (Gomes, 2002: 167) or, more recently, on votive pieces of bronze (Silva & Gomes, 1992) as in Baiões (São Pedro do Sul) and Vilela (Paredes), and even in the iconography of the so-called warrier stele (Vilaça, 2011)[16], for example, at Solana de Cabañas (Cáceres), Majada Honda (Badajoz) and Atégua (Córdova).

But there are other possible explanations, as we can see from the following excerpts from a novel set in Shqiperia in modern Albania.[17]

"Here's a *murane*, a tomb," he said, stretching his hand out towards the side of the road"… (p. 64)

"I've seen all kinds of tombs and necropolises with the most varied marks and symbols," he continued, "but I don't think there's any more authentic grave than the humble mound that our mountainfolk built at the very site where the man died."… (p. 65)

"Were there arguments or killings about those demarcation lines?" Bessian asked the innkeeper.

Of course, sir. That's a strip of land that is greedy for death, studded with *muranes* since time immemorial."… (p. 86)

"The placement of boundary markers is a solemn act," he said, with his eyes fixed on the horizon. "I don't know if we'll have the chance of watching one of those rituals today. Oh, look, there's a *murane*…". "Where?" "There behind that bush, to your right.." "And here's another. "Yes, yes. I can see it. And another, over there."

"They're those *muranes* the innkeeper was talking about", said Bessian.

"They sometimes serve as boundary markers between the fields belonging to different properties".

"And here's another!" exclaimed Diane.

"That's what Kanun says," Bessian went on. "When someone gets killed in a quarrel about land demarcation, it's the location of the tomb that marks the boundary." … (p. 88-89)

"I think I've seen *muranes* on both sides of the road."… (p. 90)

"Exactly, madam. There's been a disagreement going on between the two villages about these pasture lands for some two years, and there seems no way to resolve it." (p. 91)

Excerpts from *Broken April*, a novel by Ismail Kadaré (2000) located on the Mirdites plateau in northern Albania.

[15] In contrast with the so-called "valley dolmens, characterised by their location in valleys, by their monumentality and typology, and by their rich furnishings" (Galilea Martinez, 2010:435). The "so-called mountain dolmens are characterized by their location on plateaux, their small size and a typology that mostly consists of small cists" (Galilea Martinez, 2010:435).

[16] Quoted by various authors in this work.

[17] These extracts have been translated into English from the Portuguese version of the novel (Kadaré, 2000).

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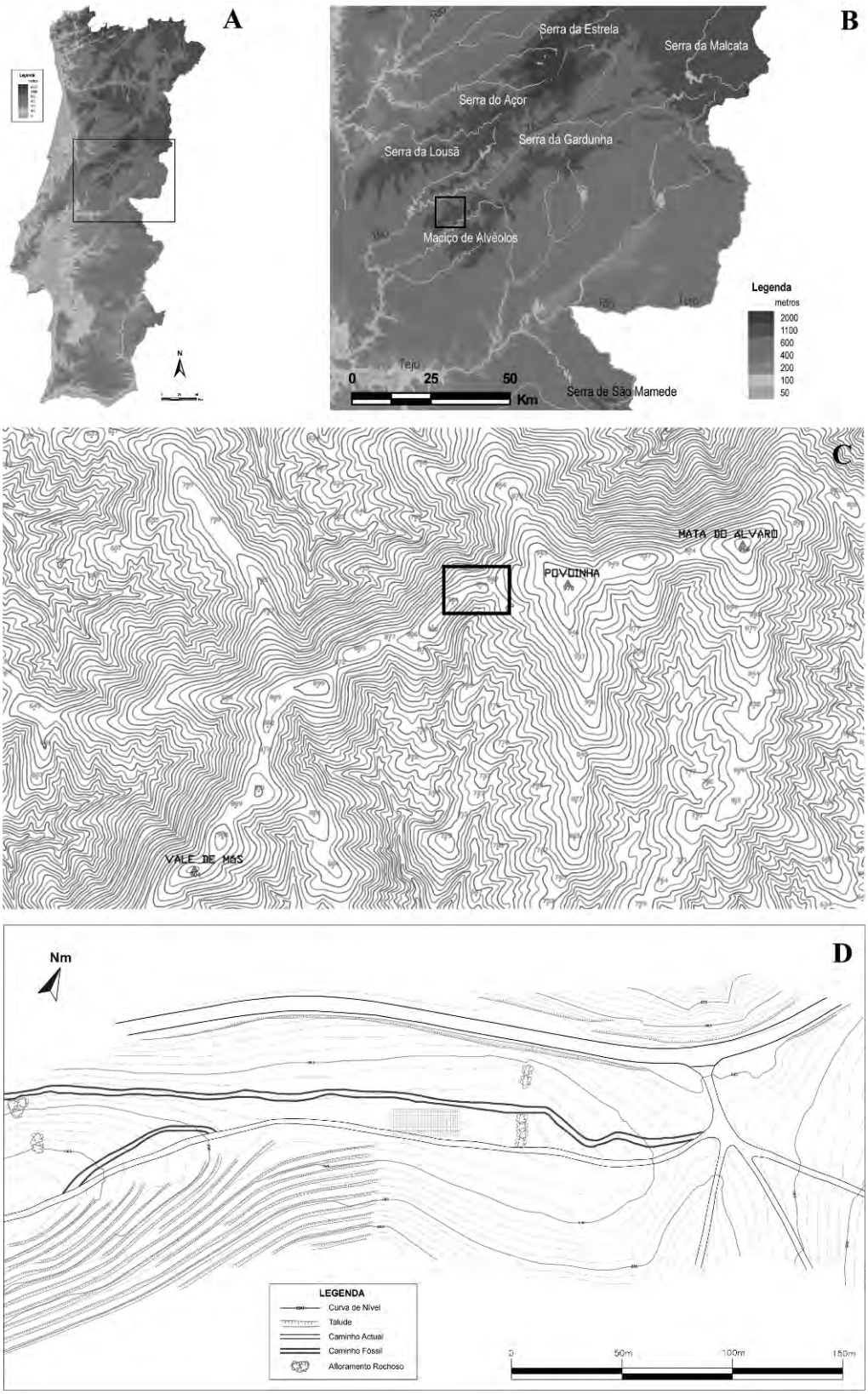

FIGURE 1. (A) CENTRAL INLAND REGION OF PORTUGAL BETWEEN THE CENTRAL CORDILLERA AND THE RIVER TAGUS (ADAPTED FROM THEMATIC MAPS AVAILABLE AT: WWW.GUIADEPORTUGAL.PT). (B) ENLARGEMENT OF PREVOUS MAP. THE SQUARE MARKS THE STRETCH OF THE SERRA VERMELHA WHERE THE TUMULI OF SELADA DO CAVALO ARE LOCATED. (C) POSITION OF THE SITE OF SELADA DO CAVALO ON THE ALTIMETRIC MAP OF THE COUNTY OF OLEIROS (SOURCE: OLEIROS TOWN COUNCIL). (D) POSITION OF THE EXCAVATION AREA OF THE TUMULI OF SELADA DO CAVALO (RECTANGULAR GRID) ON THE TOPOGRAPHIC PLAN DRAWN UP PRIOR TO THE EXECUTION OF THE ALVÉLOS WIND FARM PROJECT (SOURCE: GENERG).

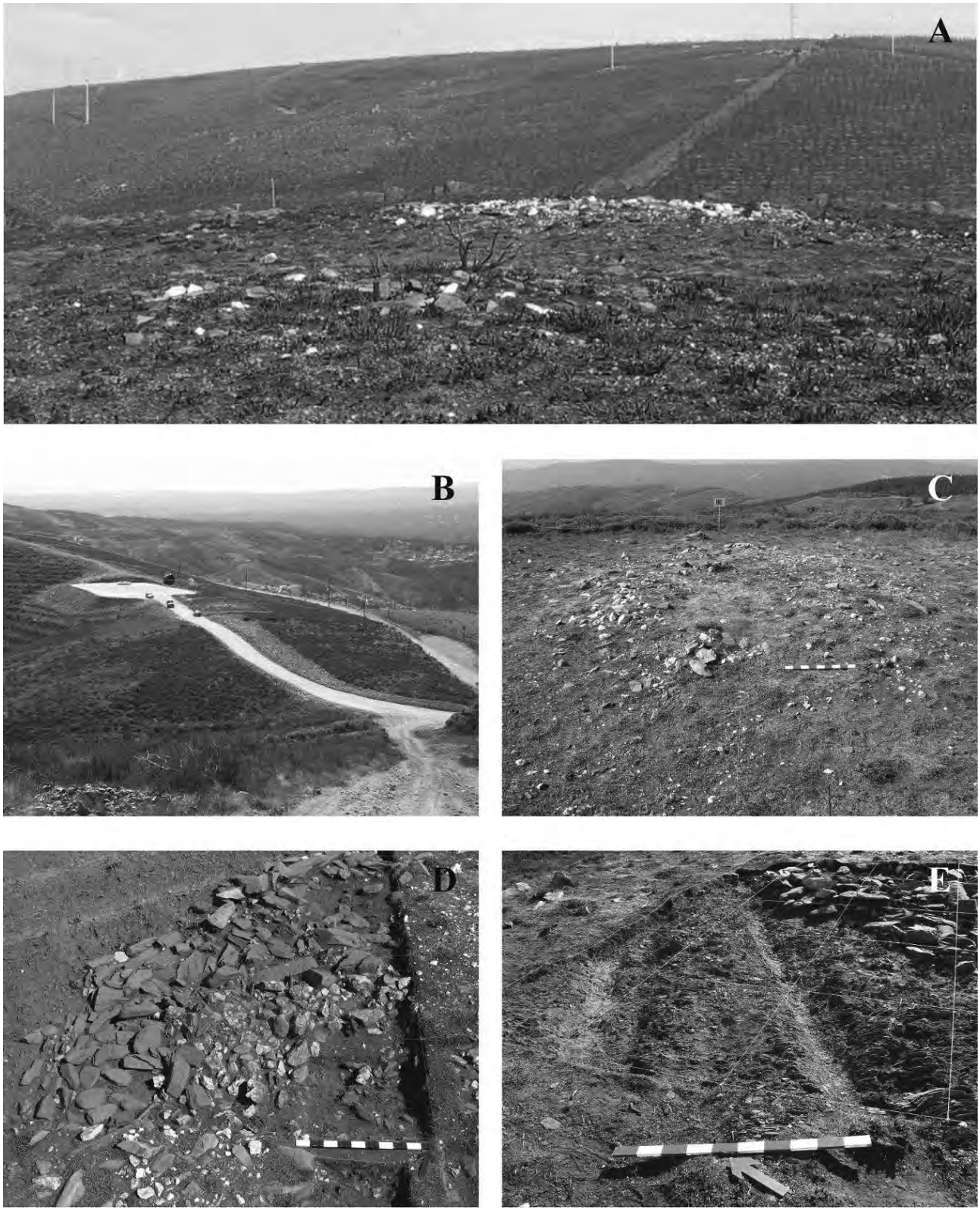

Figure 2. (A) View of the tumuli of Selada do Cavalo, from west to east, after the fire of 2003. (B) View of the aerogenerator platform and the excavation area to the right of the road. (C) View of tumulus 1 after the cleaning of the terrain. (D) View of the northwest quadrant of Tumulus 1 during the removal of the lithic structure. (E) Cart tracks detected during the excavation of the northwest quadrant of Tumulus 1.

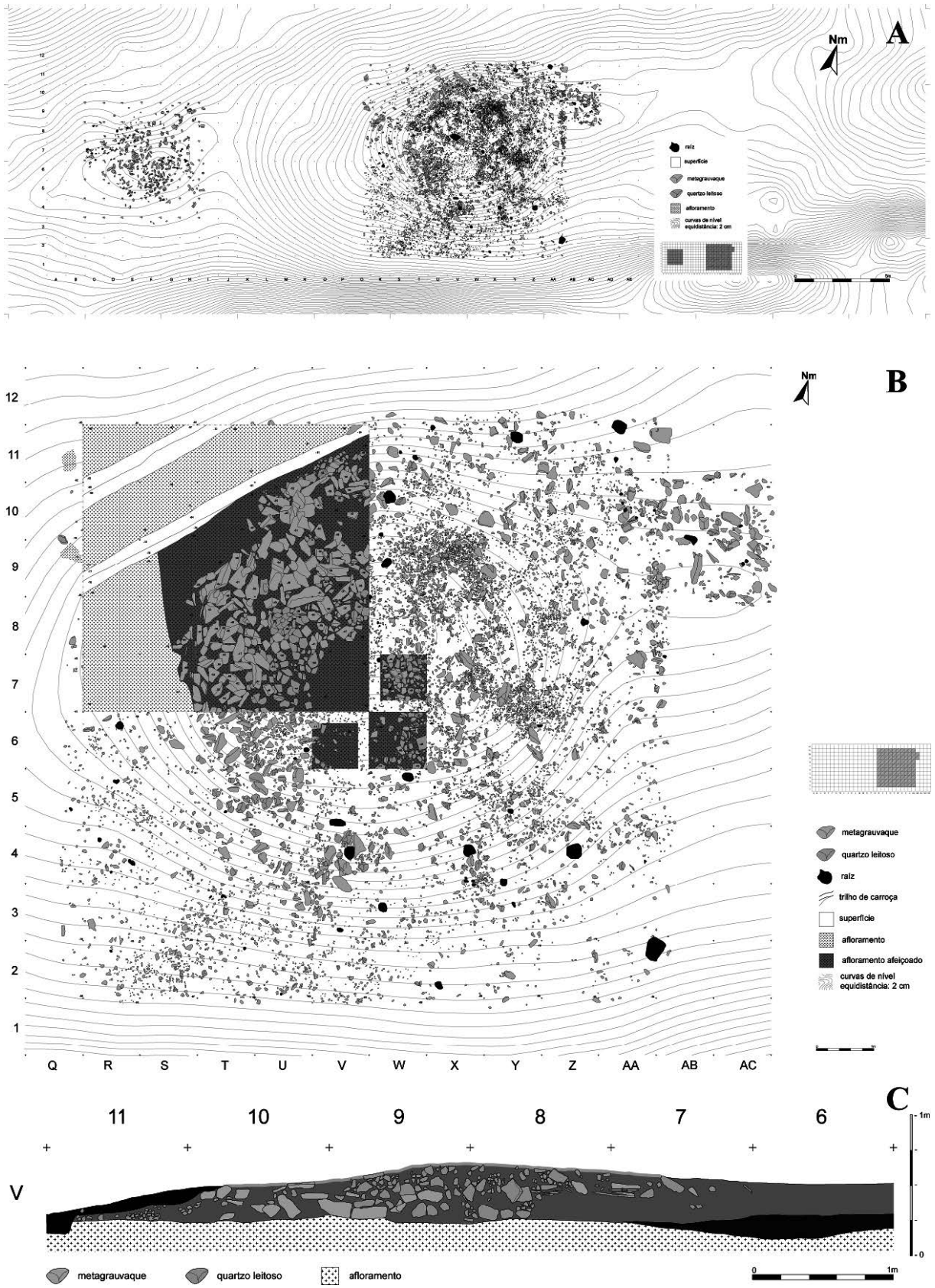

FIGURE 3. (A) TOPOGRAPHY OF THE EXCAVATION AREA OF TUMULI 1 (ON THE RIGHT) AND 2 (ON THE LEFT) SHOWING THE CLASTS ON THE SURFACE PLAN (PLAN 1). (B) REPRESENTATION OF PLANS 1 AND 2 (EXCAVATION OF THE NORTHWEST QUADRANT AND CENTRAL ZONE) OF TUMULUS 1. (C) STRATEGIC NORTH-SOUTH CROSS-SECTION CORRESPONDING TO THE DITCH CUT BETWEEN THE PERIPHERY AND THE CENTRE OF TUMULUS 1.

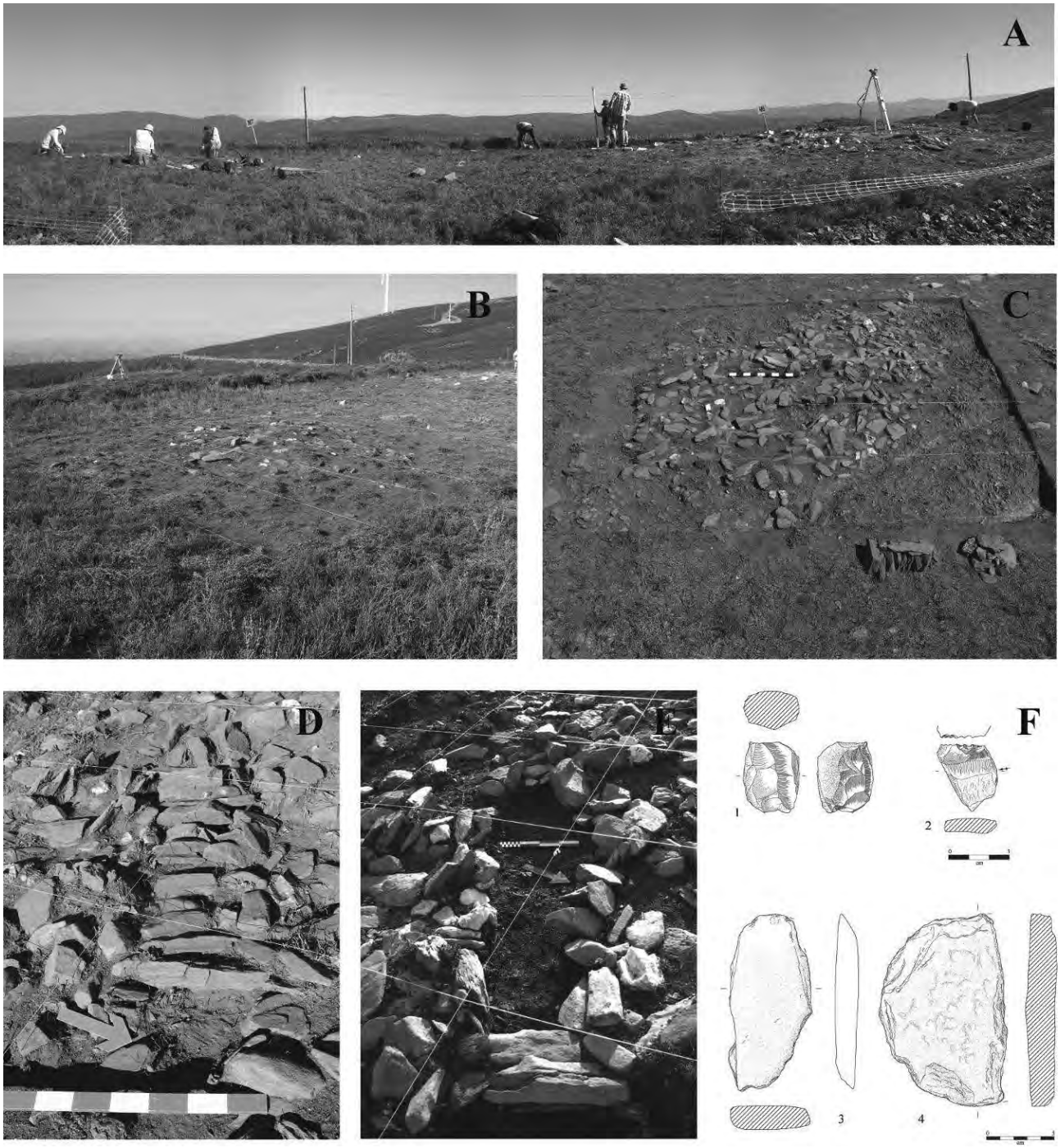

Figure 4. (A) View of the excavation area of Tumuli 1 (on the right) and 2 (on the left). (B) Tumulus 2 after clearing of the terrain. (C) Tumulus 2 at an advanced phase of excavation, with the cart tracks visible in the lower right-hand corner. (D) Sequence of parallel slabs in Tumulus 2. (E) Cavity corresponding to the inhumation tomb inside Tumulus 2. (F) Archaeological remains collected from the excavation area of Tumuli 1 (1, 2 and 3 (4): bladelet core, white silex (1); denticulated piece, milky quartz (2); adze, schist (3); fragment of disk, greywacke (4).

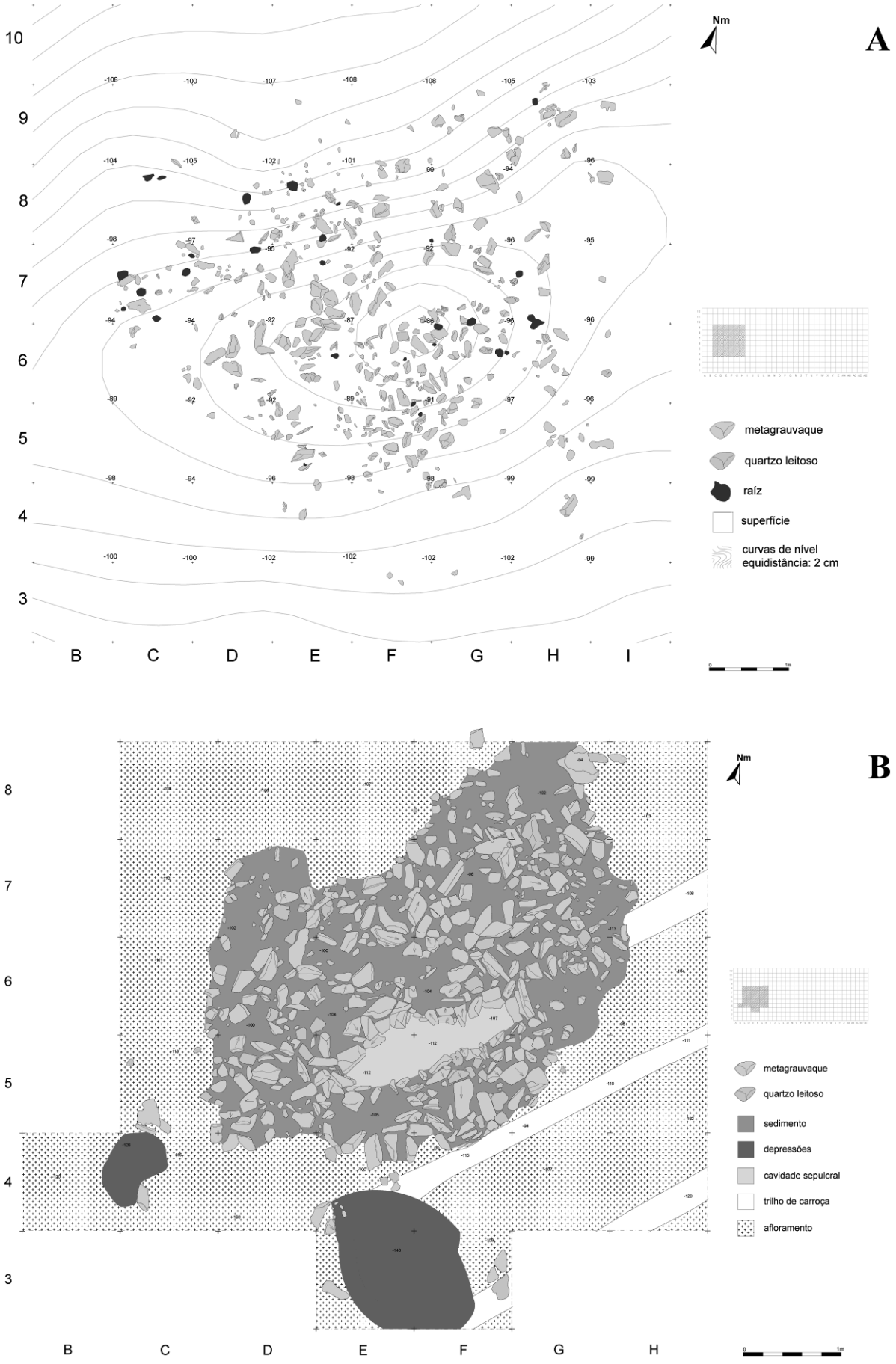

FIGURE 5. TUMULUS 2. (A) SURFACE PLAN. (B) PLAN OF EXCAVATION PHASE, SHOWING TOMB, CART TRACKS AND CHARCOAL PIT (DEPRESSION AT THE BOTTOM).