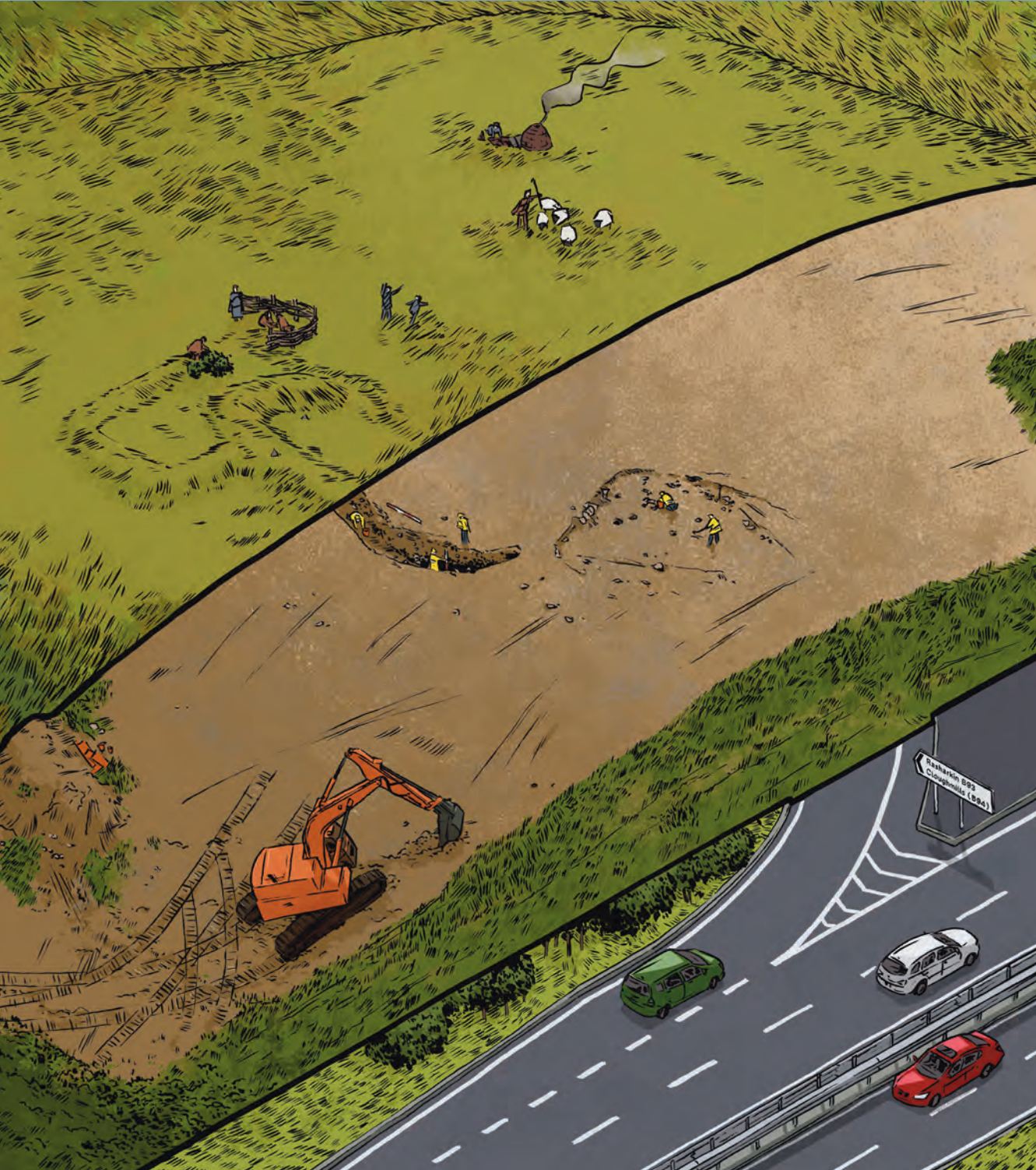


Uncovering the history below the

# A26 Dual Carriageway

*Drumadoon in the Early Medieval Period*



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The information in this book is based on excavations carried out along the A26 road improvement scheme in 2014 by Northern Archaeological Consultancy Ltd, we would like to thank the archaeological team who excavated the site and uncovered this story Drumadoon's past.

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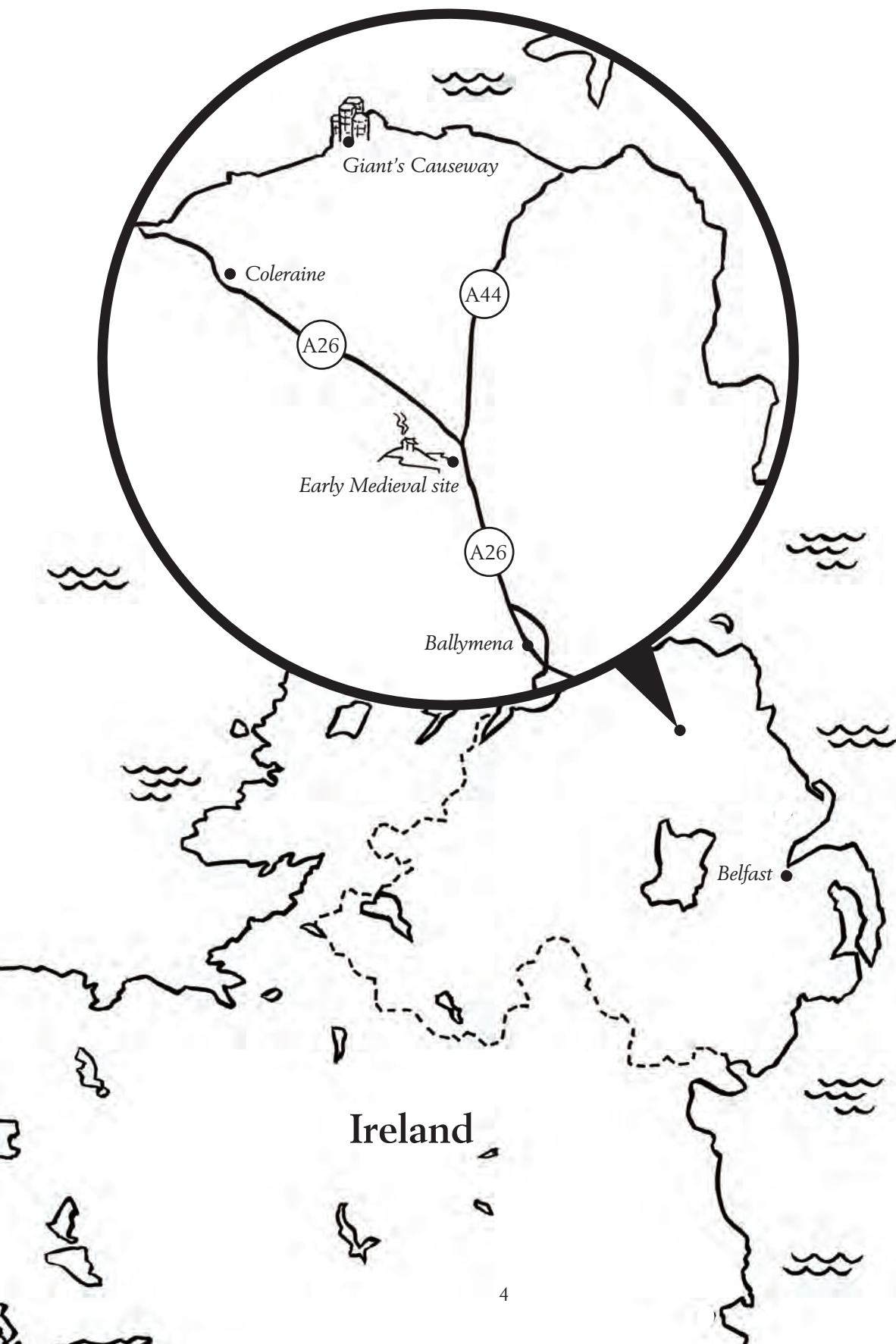
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## Introduction

Archaeologists study the past. They look at remains that people left behind in the ground to discover how they lived. Archaeology is all about questions, such as - Where did people live in the past? What did they wear? What did they eat? What tools did they use?

The evidence that archaeologists use to answer these questions is often found during excavations. The evidence can include objects like pottery, jewellery, building material, coins, weapons and tools. Soil samples from archaeological sites can reveal information about past environments, like what kind of plants were growing. Features like ditches, pits, postholes and the remains of walls can help archaeologists to piece together what buildings looked like and what they were made from.



In 2014 work began on building a new dual carriageway, the A26 from Glarryford to the Drones Road, near Ballymena in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. Archaeologists who were working on the road discovered an early medieval farm and souterrain (a type of underground tunnel) on top of a hill at Drumadoon, just outside Cloughmills. The farm dated to the year AD 800, making it over 1,200 years old.

My name is Emma, we are learning about the Early Medieval period in school and I have chosen to write about this site which is near my house. I visited the site and the archaeologists told me all about what they found and all about the people who lived here over a thousand years ago.



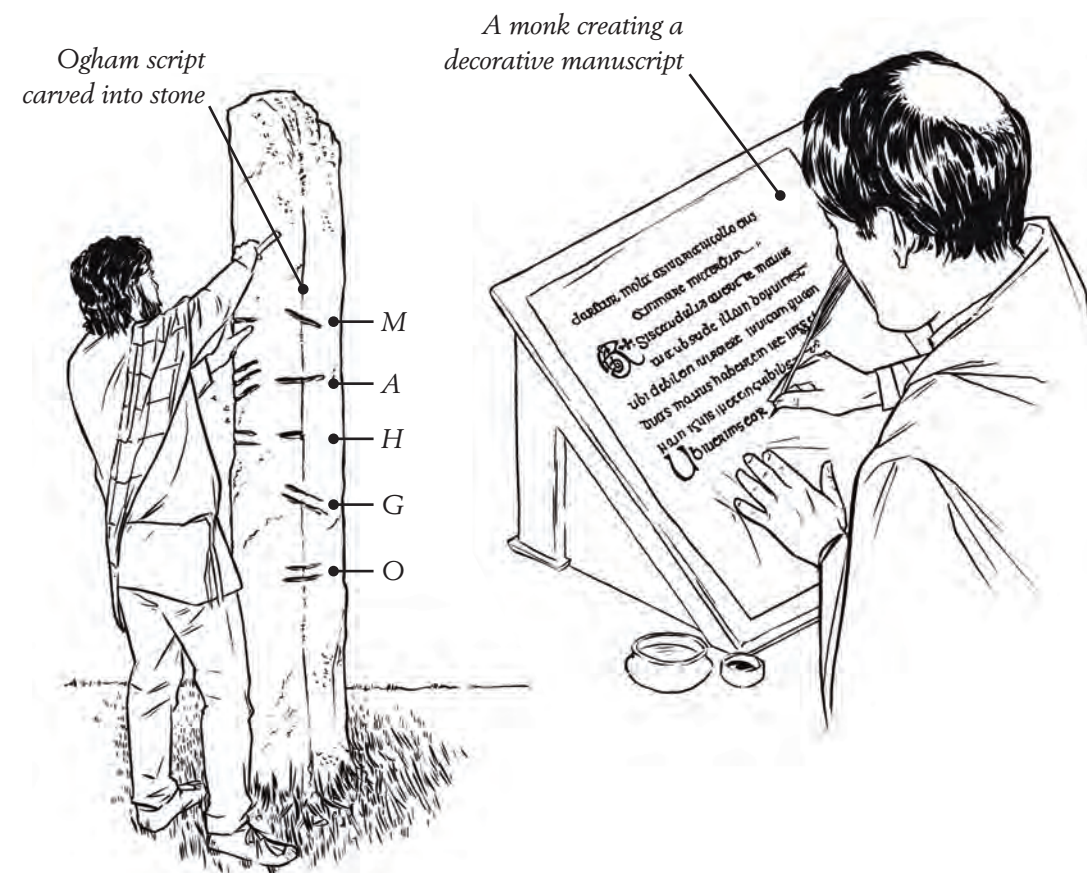
# The Early Medieval Period in Ireland

Archaeologists use special names for different periods of the past to make it easier to talk about and understand.

The medieval period began about 1,600 years ago and lasted for about 1,100 years. Medieval means 'middle age' and it is called this because it is a period that lies between the Ancient period, sometimes called the Stone Age, and the Modern period, the world we live in today.

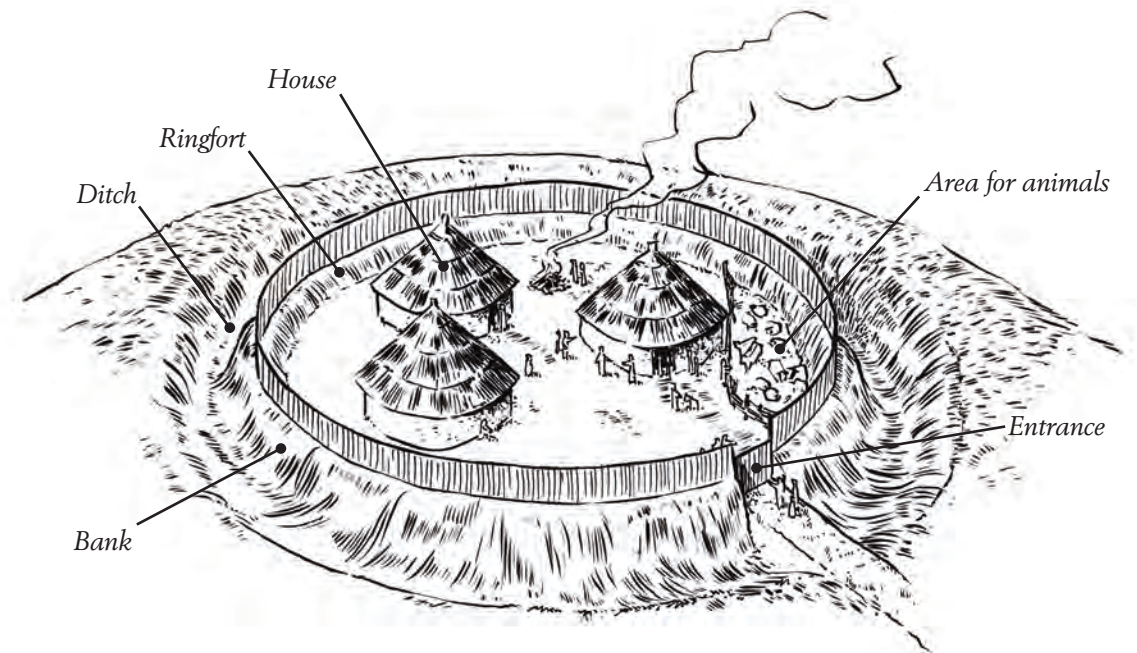
Archaeologists found that the site at Drumadon dates to the early medieval period. The name 'early medieval' is given to the start of the medieval period from AD 400 to AD 1150.

The early medieval period was a time of change. St Patrick arrived in Ireland at the start of the period and began to create churches and monasteries and spread the word of Christianity. It was also during this time that people began to write, something that had never happened before in Ireland. The earliest form of writing is known as Ogham and is very different from writing today. It's a simple form of writing made up of different straight lines. By the end of the early medieval period writing had advanced and some of the very decorative manuscripts, like the Book of Kells, were being written.



Iron was being used to create tools and bronze to make cloak pins and items of jewellery. Although people still made a lot of what they needed, archaeologists know that trade was important during the early medieval period. Ireland was exporting leather and butter and importing wine, spices and salt.

The way in which people were organised also began to change during the early medieval period. People were divided into different classes and were ruled over by kings. During this time some of the first laws were created and written down.



In the early medieval period the people didn't have money (coins didn't arrive in Ireland until the Vikings), instead the richer you were the more cattle you owned. Raiders would attack farms to try and steal the farmers' cows. To try and stop this a lot of people lived in defended farms called raths (or ringforts). These were big circular ditches with a large bank. Inside would have been houses and the cattle would have been brought in so raiders couldn't steal them.

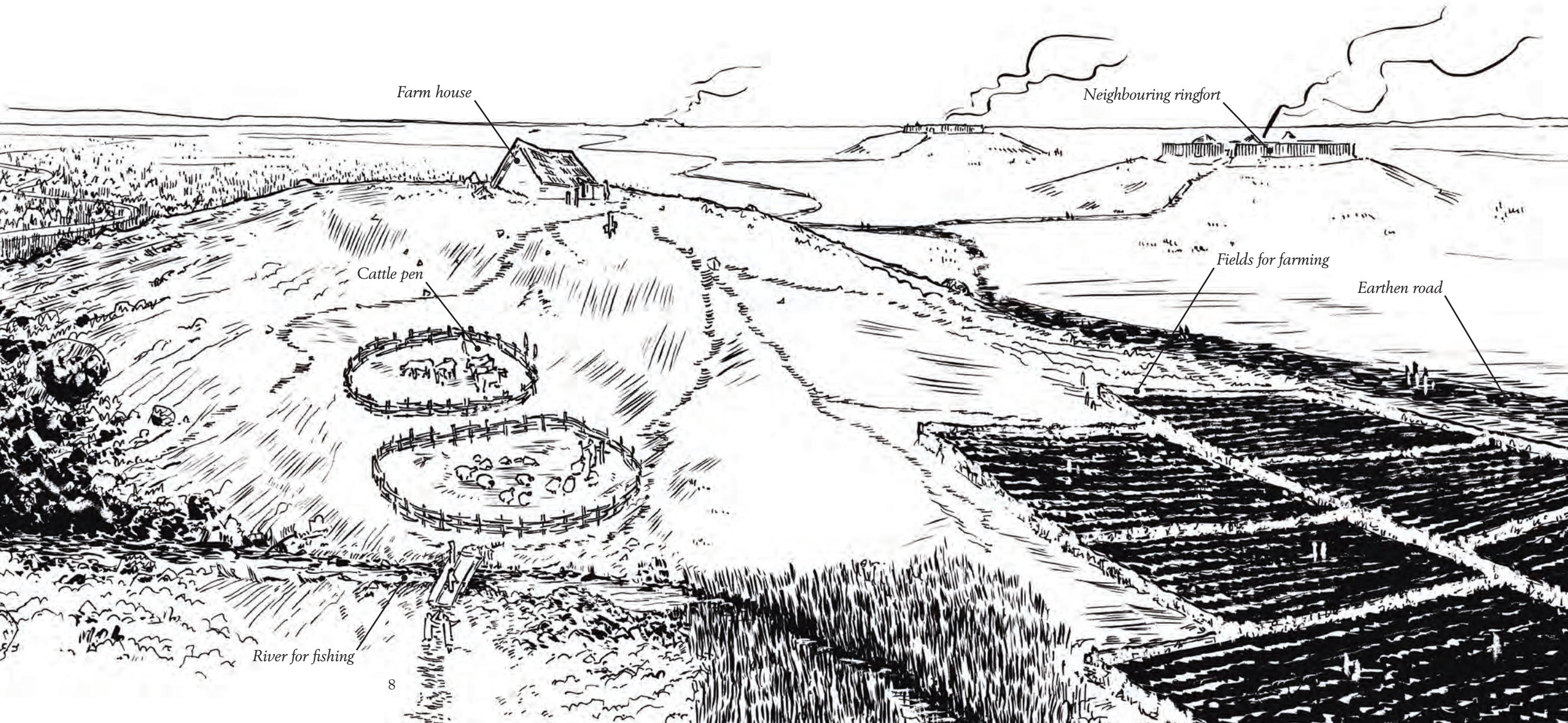
It was the end of this period that the Vikings arrived. Although they started by attacking early church sites they eventually settled and created some of Ireland's first towns, such as Dublin and Waterford.



## Where is the site?

During the Early Medieval period the area around the excavation site would have looked very different to how it looks today. If you were standing at the farm on top of the hill at Drumadoon 1,300 years ago none of the roads nor buildings you see today would have existed. Looking east towards the Antrim plateau would have been green grass, fields and trees. To the west, towards the Long Mountain, you would be looking over the bog, crossed by streams and with small trees. Wherever you looked you would be able to see smoke rising from the hearths of the houses of your friends and neighbours who had also built their farms on the tops of nearby hills.

The people living here at that time put a lot of thought into where they built their houses. By building their home on top of the hill at Drumadoon they had good views in all directions; this meant that if raiders were coming to steal their cattle they could see them easily. Archaeologists also believe that the hill would have been easily defended, as the inhabitants didn't need to create a rath to live in. A rath or ringfort has a circular ditch dug around the house and the soil taken from the ditch is then used to build up a tall embankment at the top of the ditch, making it very difficult to climb over, it would have only one entrance/exit. A small river runs past the site at the foot of the hill. This would have provided the people with plenty of fresh water and they probably also caught fish in the river.



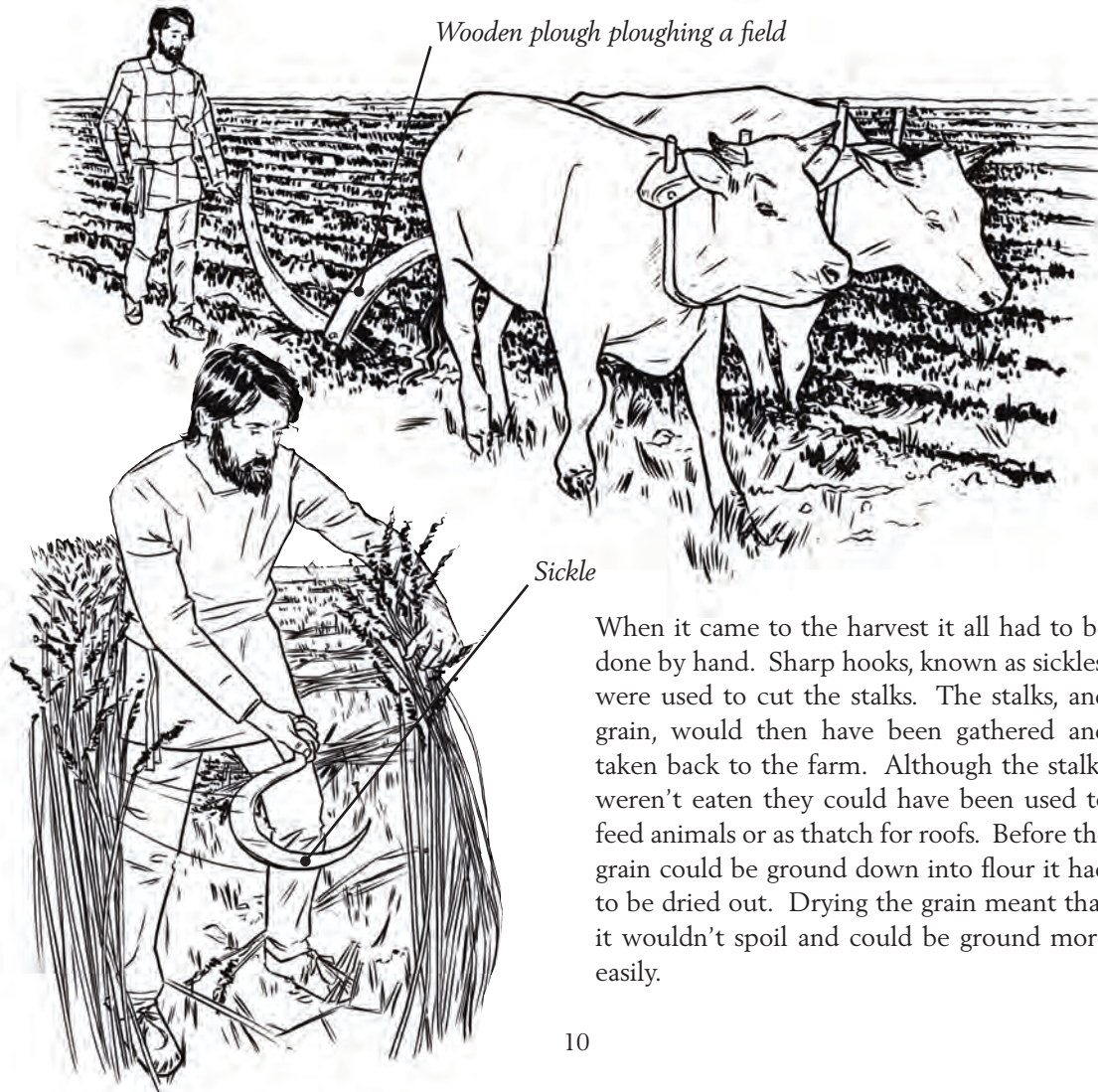


# Life on the farm

Life on an early medieval farm would have been quite different to how we know it today. Although the archaeologists found the site of the early medieval house there was no evidence for barns. We know that the people would have kept some animals, with pigs, sheep and cattle the most common, they would also have kept goats, horses and chickens.

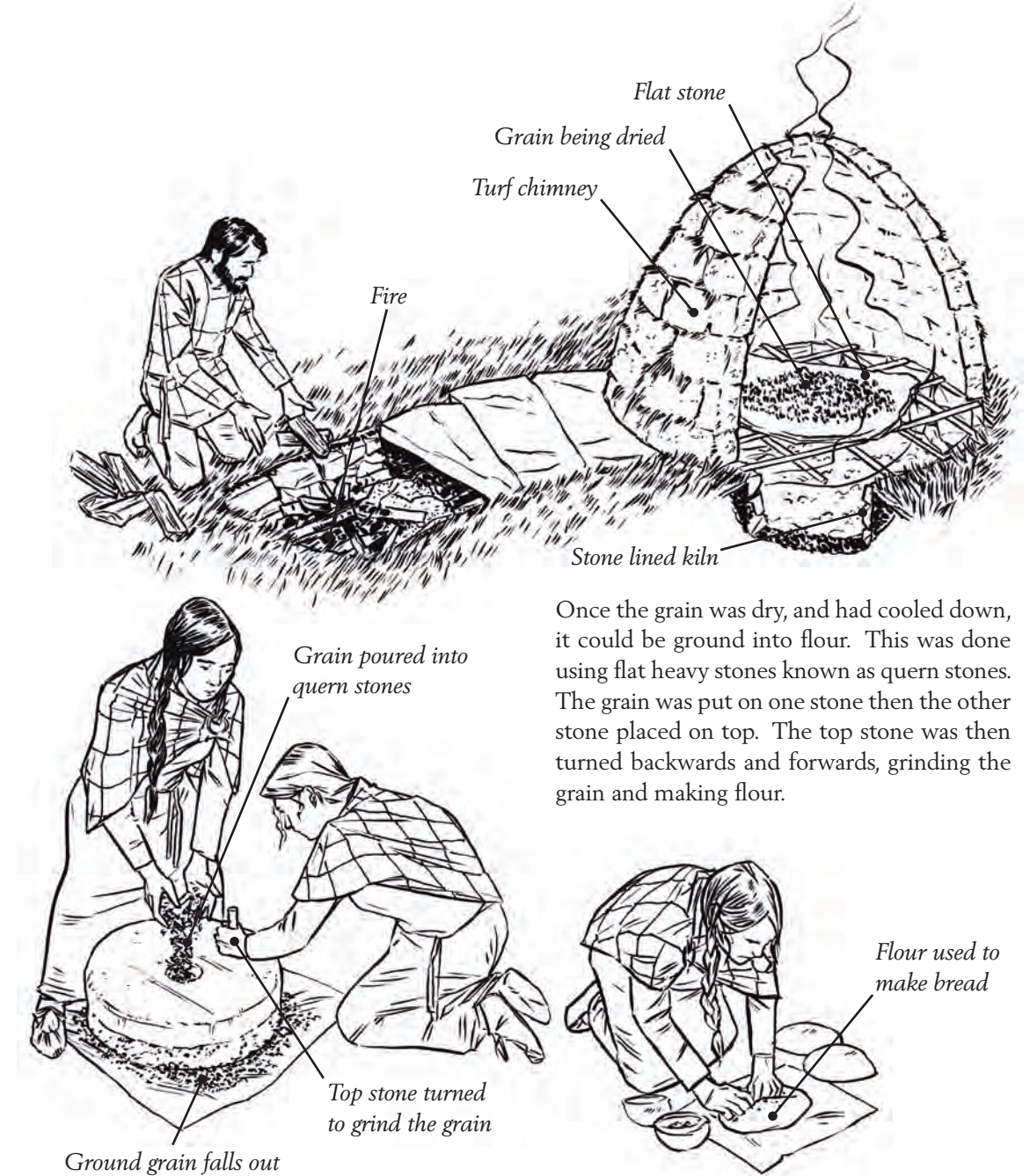
The land surrounding the farm would have been divided up into fields. The fields would have been enclosed using banks and ditches or wooden fences, a bit like fields today. It was important for the early medieval people to put up fences so the animals couldn't get in and eat their crops.

There were no tractors or machines to help out and most of the work would have had to have been done by hand. Fields still needed to be ploughed before sowing could take place. Instead of the machines used today, pairs of oxen would have pulled a wooden plough. Once the field had been ploughed it was time to plant the crop. These people would have grown cereal crops- barley, oats and wheat were all grown during the early medieval period and potatoes wouldn't arrive in the country for at least another 600 years.



When it came to the harvest it all had to be done by hand. Sharp hooks, known as sickles, were used to cut the stalks. The stalks, and grain, would then have been gathered and taken back to the farm. Although the stalks weren't eaten they could have been used to feed animals or as thatch for roofs. Before the grain could be ground down into flour it had to be dried out. Drying the grain meant that it wouldn't spoil and could be ground more easily.

At Drumadoon the grain was dried in a cereal drying kiln. The kiln worked by putting the grain on a flat stone at one end and lighting a fire at the other end. The heat from the fire would travel down the kiln and dry out the grain. Cereal drying kilns were dangerous and sometimes the grain would catch fire. Archaeologists discovered that this happened at Drumadoon; the whole kiln caught fire and the people had to build a second one. Because of this cereal drying kilns were built away from houses, so your house couldn't catch fire if your kiln did.



Once the grain was dry, and had cooled down, it could be ground into flour. This was done using flat heavy stones known as quern stones. The grain was put on one stone then the other stone placed on top. The top stone was then turned backwards and forwards, grinding the grain and making flour.

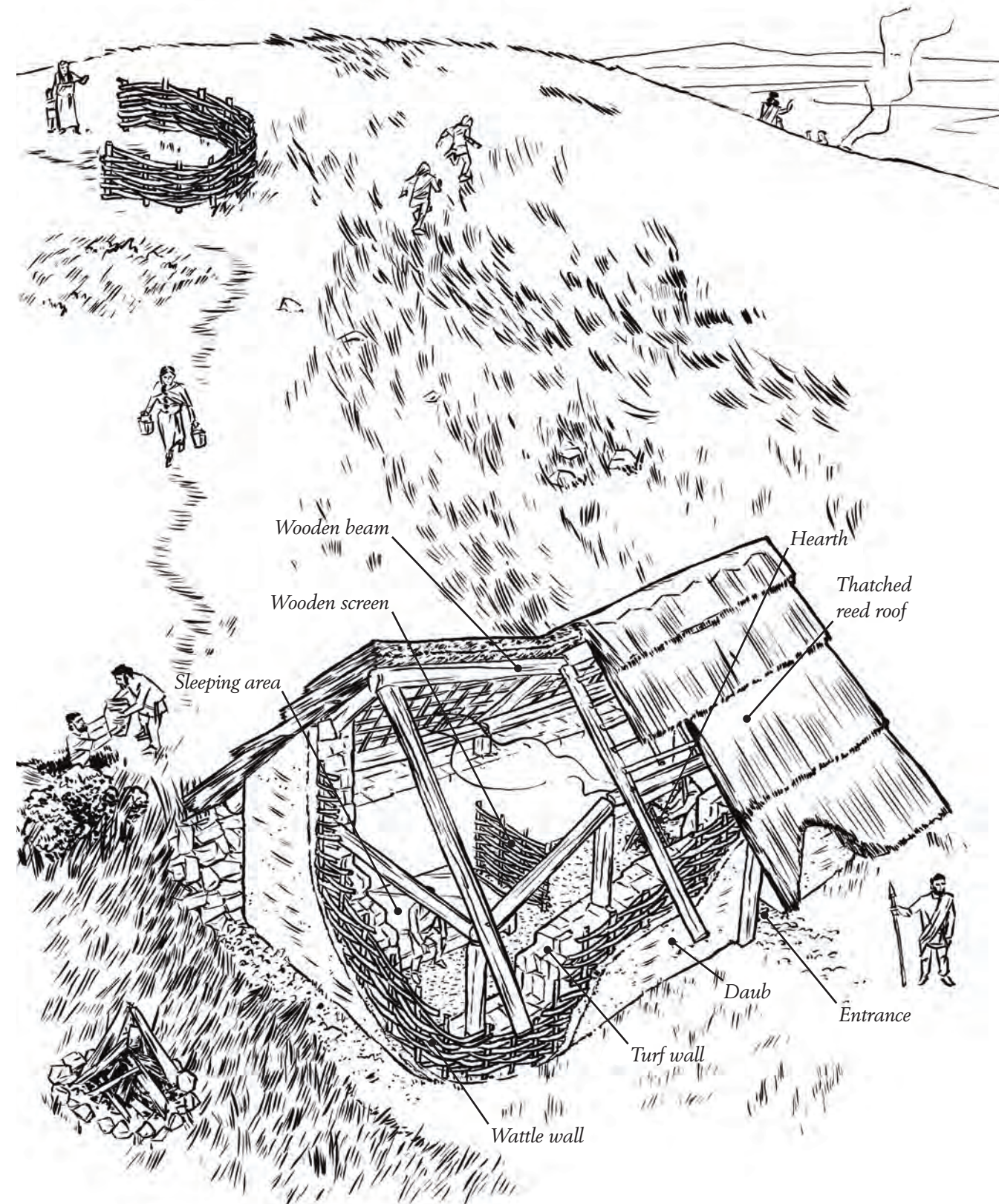


# How to build an Early Medieval farm house

The house that was excavated on this site would have looked quite different from the house that you live in today. The archaeologists discovered that before the house was built the people had to dig into the side of the hill to create a level place to build their house. They then put stones around the edge so the soil wouldn't collapse into the house. Next they had to build the house itself. Large holes in the centre of the house would have held large wooden posts which held up the roof. The archaeologists didn't find any postholes around the outside of the house. This means that the walls were probably built using pieces of turf or stones, which were piled up to make a wall. These walls would then have been covered with daub, a mix of mud, straw, hair and animal poo. Once the daub had dried it would have helped keep the rain and wind out. The roof was built using wooden beams, which would have been balanced on the posts that were in the centre of the house and on the newly built walls. Once the beams were up the roof was then covered in more turfs or reeds. There would have been plenty of reeds available to use for this purpose in the nearby bog.

This house only had one door and probably would not have had any windows. Light, and heat, would have come from the hearth which had been made in the centre of the house on the floor. The house wouldn't have had a chimney so it would have been quite smoky inside. Archaeologists found some small postholes within the house. These would probably have helped to hold wooden screens which would have allowed the people to divide the house up.

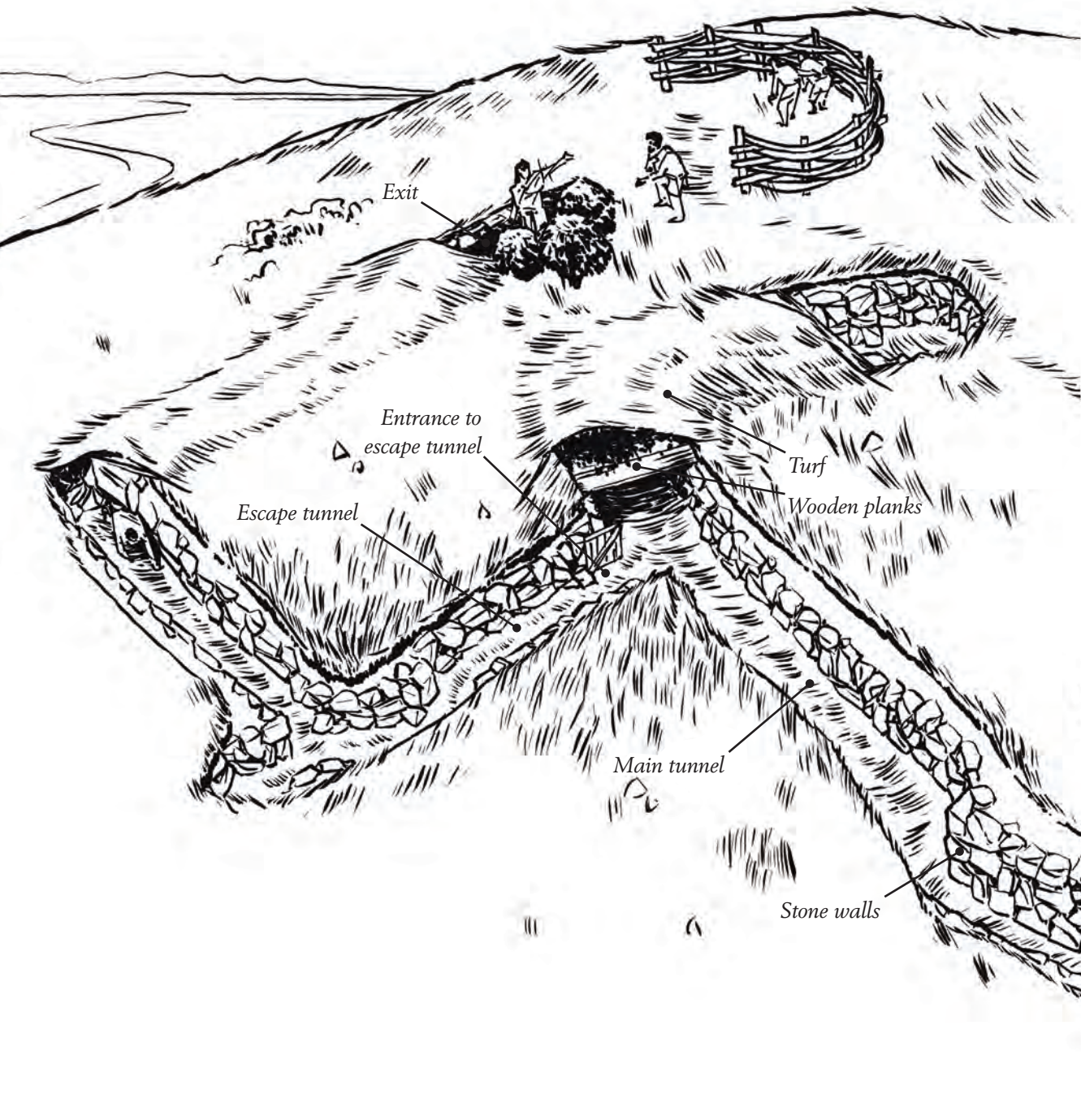
There was no electricity so there wouldn't have been all the gadgets and gizmos we have today, no television, computers or stereos. No electricity also means no electric lights. As well as no electricity the house had no plumbing, so no toilet or running water. Water would have to be carried up from the river and you would have to dig a hole in the ground outside when you wanted to go to the toilet.





# What is a Souterrain?

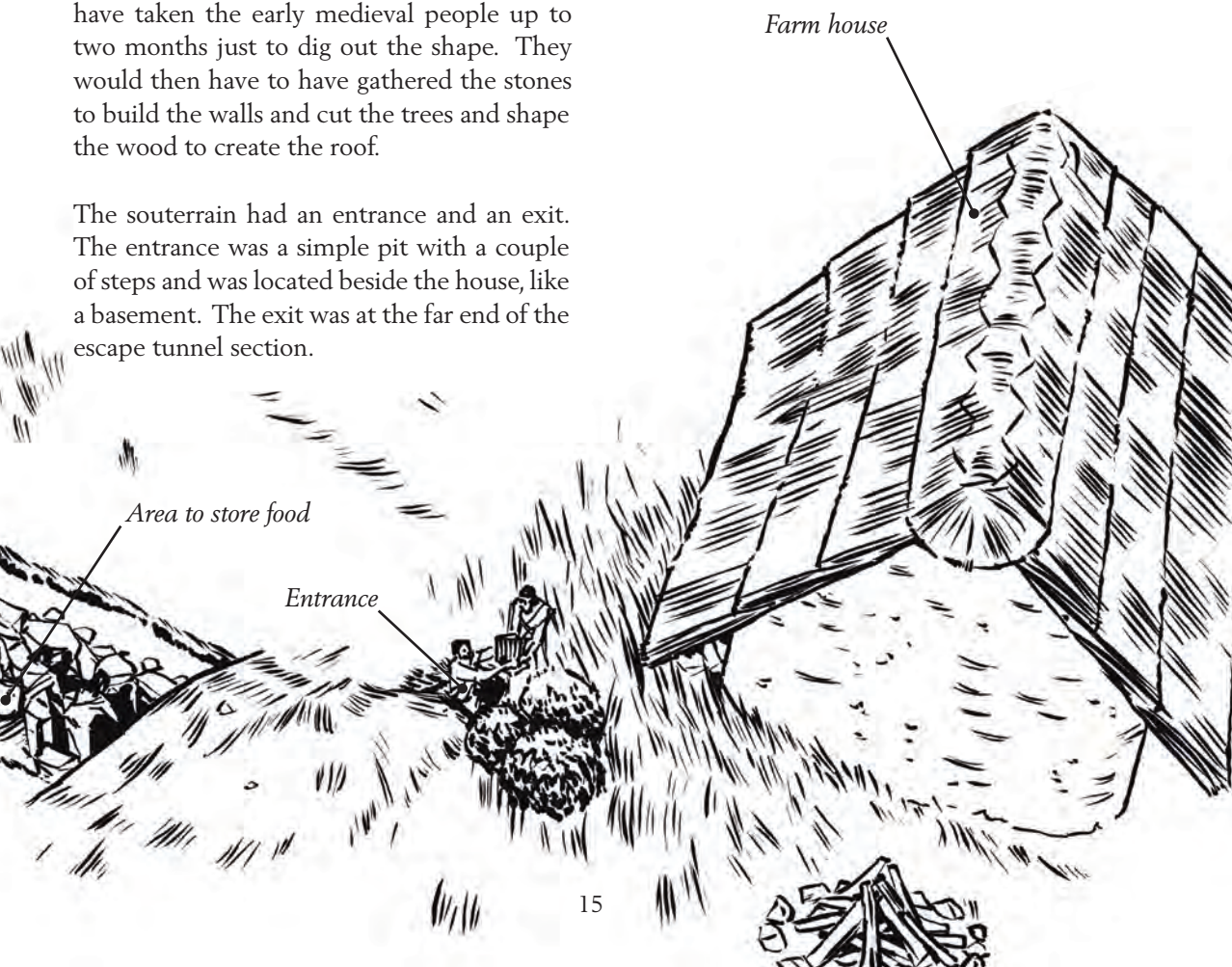
One of the biggest features that the archaeologists excavated was the souterrain. A souterrain is a type of man-made tunnel, dug underground. In the early medieval period people used these to store things in as it was cooler underground like a fridge. They could also use them to hide in and even as a means of escape if their home was being attacked.



The souterrain at Drumadoon was large, over 18m long, 2.50m wide and as much as 1.50m deep. It had two sections, the main large tunnel and a second narrower tunnel which was designed specifically for escape. When they were building the souterrain the first thing the people had to do was dig out the shape that they wanted. Once it was dug they had to decide whether they wanted stone or wood lining the sides of their souterrain and how they were going to create a roof. In the main passage the archaeologists found some stones which show that it might have had stone walls. As the souterrain was very wide the archaeologists think that the people cut down trees and used long wooden planks to create the roof. When they were digging the escape passage the archaeologists discovered that the people had built stone walls along the sides of the passage. We don't know why they used stone walls in this section and not in the main part of the souterrain. Once the souterrain had been dug, the walls built and the roof put on then soil was put back on top and then covered in grass and bushes to hide it. You didn't want people to know that you had a souterrain!

The souterrain would have been dug by the family that live on the farm, and helped by some of their friends and neighbours. It took four archaeologists six weeks, using modern tools, to dig out the souterrain. It could have taken the early medieval people up to two months just to dig out the shape. They would then have to have gathered the stones to build the walls and cut the trees and shape the wood to create the roof.

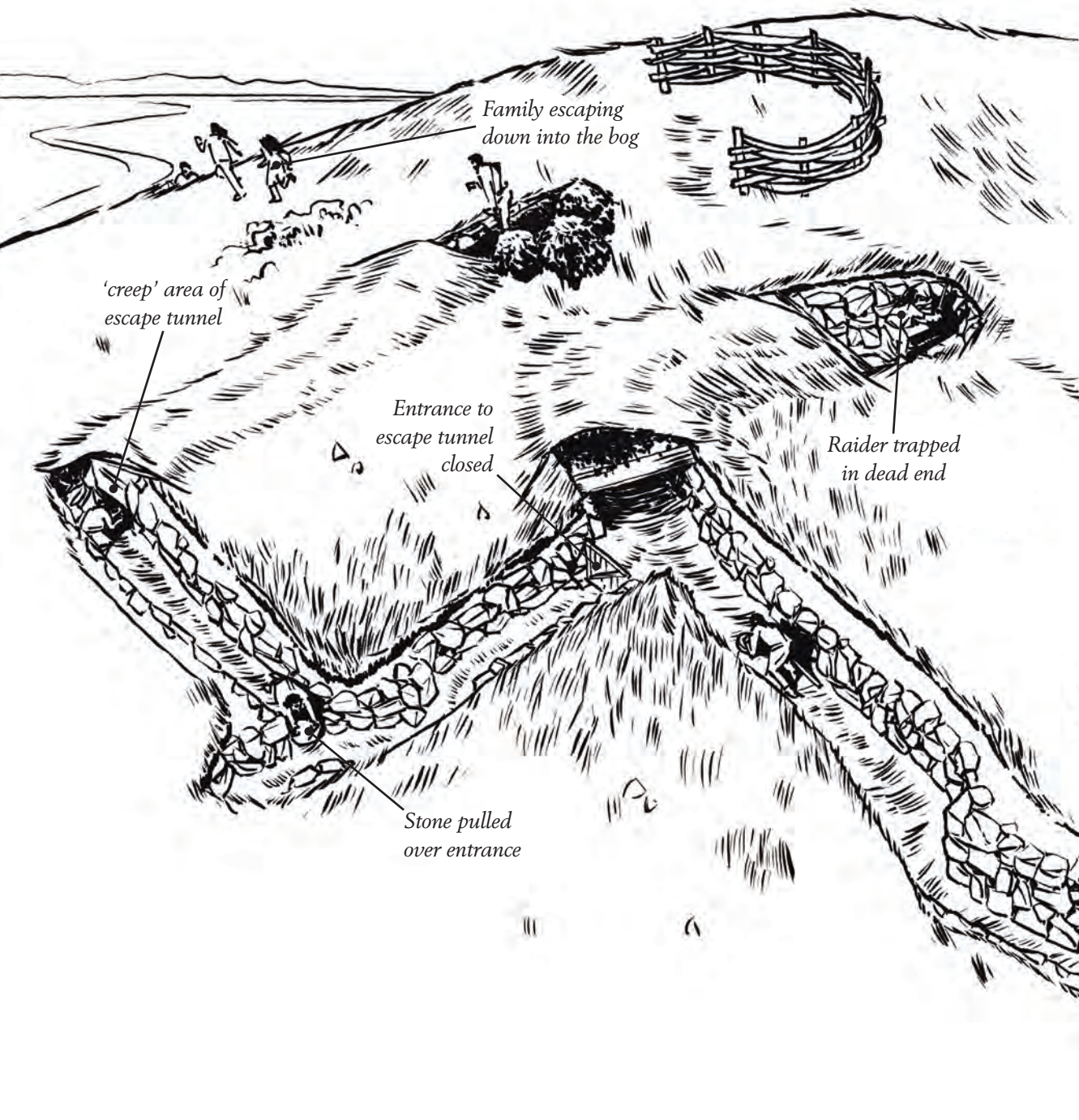
The souterrain had an entrance and an exit. The entrance was a simple pit with a couple of steps and was located beside the house, like a basement. The exit was at the far end of the escape tunnel section.



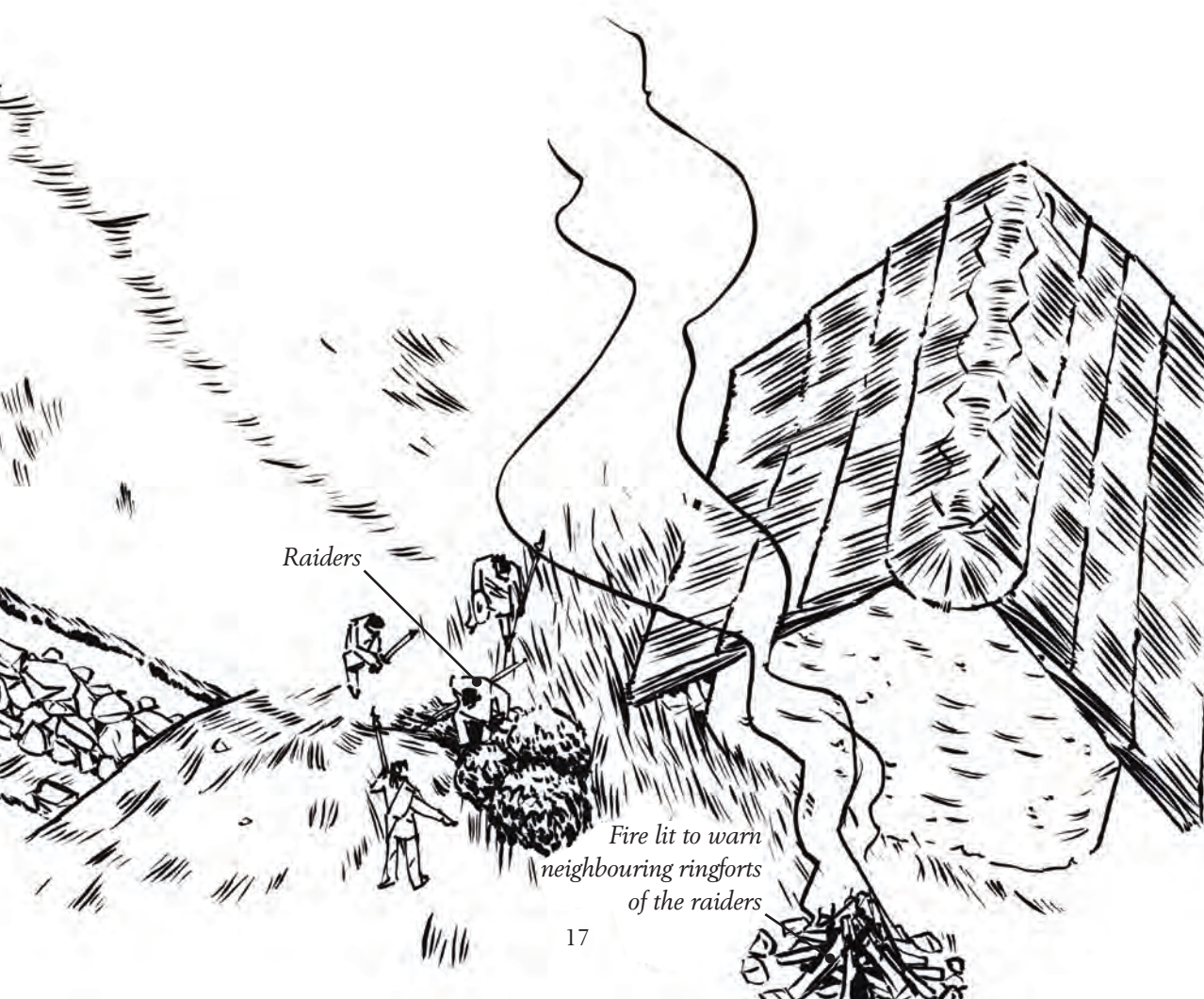


## Why did they need a Souterrain?

Most of the time the souterrain would have been used as a store. In the early medieval period people didn't have electricity or fridges like we do today. Instead they would have kept their meat, milk and butter underground, where it was dark and cold. But souterrains were also used if cattle raiders attacked.



If there was an attack this was when everything came together, the reason you picked the spot on top of the hill and the souterrain. Being up high you could see people coming to try and steal your cattle. Instead of trying to fight them you run out of your house and jump down into your souterrain. It's very dark, there's no light; but you don't need to worry, you've been in it many times before and know the way. If the raiders don't notice the souterrain then you could probably just hide until they go away. They might steal your cattle but at least you'll be alive. If they notice you jumping down into the souterrain and follow you then you'll have to use the escape tunnel. You feel along the side of the souterrain until you find the entrance to the escape tunnel. It's not very high so you'll have to crawl. Once you reach the end you know there's another tunnel on the right. It's very narrow so you'll have to squeeze through. You pull a stone in front of the narrow entrance into the tunnel. If somebody followed you this far it might be enough to make them think it's a dead end. As you go down this section of the escape passage it starts to get deeper, and by the end you can nearly stand up. Although it looks like another dead end you built this 'creep' just for this purpose. You lie down on your stomach and the tunnel continues on your right. Once you get into this section of the tunnel you're nearly there. The tunnel starts to rise and then you are outside, but over 20m away from your house. You're at the opposite side of the hill and can now run down and into the bog and escape.





## Back to the future...

Nearly everything we know about Ireland during the early medieval period comes from archaeological excavation. Although the written word and books were beginning to develop, the documents from that period that have survived are mainly copies of books of the bible or laws on how people were supposed to treat one another. These don't really tell us how people lived or what their homes were like.

Imagine you had to live on an early medieval farm. You wouldn't have to go to school but you would have to help. You might have to go out and tend to the animals, or help plough the fields or harvest the crops when they are ready.

In your house you wouldn't have had your own bedroom, everybody would have lived and slept in the one room. You would be expected to carry water up from the river and you had no inside toilet.

Life could be dangerous as well. Raiders may have tried to steal your animals. At least you would have had a large souterrain which you could hide in, or use as a way to escape.

Life would have been hard, but you weren't alone. This part of County Antrim would have had quite a lot of families just like yours living there.





# Glossary

## *Archaeologist*

Someone who studies archaeology

## *Archaeology*

The study of long ago remains of people, their buildings, possessions and tools

## *Artefact*

Things from the past found and studied by people today

## *Ditch*

A circular or linear depression, often dug by hand around or near houses to keep animals and unwanted visitors from getting in or out.

## *Daub*

A mixture of mud, animal poo, animal hair and straw, used to cover the walls of a house to keep it dry and warm

## *Evidence*

Proof that something is real or that something has happened

## *Kiln*

A hot oven used to dry the cereal grains so they could be ground into flour

## *Hearth*

The fire used to heat the home and cook the food, usually found inside house, but they can also be found outside the houses

## *Posthole*

A hole, larger than 10cm in diameter, left in the ground by a wooden post

## *Ogham*

The first writing in Ireland, made up of horizontal and diagonal lines carved on the corners of standing stones

## *Raiders*

A group of people who attack homes and farms to steal the cattle

## *Rath / Ringfort*

A circular ditch was dug around a house and the soil from the ditch was used to build up a tall embankment at the top of the ditch with one gap, to make it difficult for unwanted people to get into the house – an early type of security system

## *Settlement*

A group of houses

## *Sickle*

A sharp crescent shaped tool used to cut wheat and other crops

## *Stakehole*

A small hole, less than 10cm in diameter, left in the ground by a wooden post

## *Souterrain*

A type of underground tunnel beside a house, sometimes lined with wooden planks or stone. It can be used to store food as it would have been very cool under the ground, like an early type of fridge or it could be used to hide in or as an escape tunnel if your house was attacked

## *Thatched roof*

A roof made from reeds or straw

## *Wattle*

A wall made from thin interwoven branches that are placed between the large wooden posts of a house and covered in daub



## *Early Medieval: AD 400 to AD 1150*

This was the start of the medieval period in Ireland, a time of great change. Christianity was a new religion and was brought to Ireland at this time by Saint Patrick, churches and monasteries were set up and they became the first schools, colleges and hospitals. The currency and item of value was cattle, as they could provide meat, milk and clothing. People set up farms to rear animals and grow crops and this led to a lot of cattle raiding as groups from different areas tried to steal each other's cattle. Farmers began to dig ditches around their homes to keep their family and animals safe and dig underground tunnels to hide in and as escape tunnels.

## Archaeological Timeline

