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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT
WOODBIDGE FARM, MILFIELD,
NORTHUMBERLAND**

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1992

CLIENT: TARMAC ROADSTONE LTD.

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Summary

Sixteen trenches were excavated at the Woodbridge Farm evaluation site in accordance with the brief prepared by the County Archaeologist. Of these, ten contained no significant archaeological remains. The other six contained significant pre-modern archaeological features, and these fell into two areas. The first area is a settlement focus of the Roman Iron Age (A.D. 150-A.D. 400) around trenches 3 (fig. 2) and 4 (fig. 3). The evidence includes a gully with twenty six shards of pottery in its charcoal fill (trench 3), and a ditch with a number of post-hole foundations (trench 4).

The second area centres around trenches 12, 13, 15, and 16. Trench 12 (fig. 4) contained foundations for a rectangular building with a gully on its western side that has architectural affinities with the Early Medieval Period (A.D. 400-A.D. 700). Trench 16 (fig. 6) contained a great density of postholes, some of which are clearly part of a rectangular building with similar affinities to that in trench 12; the other features are likely to be associated with the same period. Trench 13 (fig. 5) contained an isolated Bronze Age cremation burial in a decorated ceramic vessel probably dating from 2100 B.C. to 800 B.C.. Trench 15 (fig 2) contained a gully feature of unknown date at its south end, which indicates that there are features of archaeological interest in this area.

Archaeological Importance and Recommendations

- 1) It would be possible to record the plans of buildings and of settlement in both settlement foci if the area around these trenches were excavated.
- 2) The first area is of great importance for understanding the Roman Iron Age in this region, providing a much needed comparison with upland sites where work has concentrated in the past.
- 3) The second area is of great importance in understanding the settlement of the region in the Early Medieval Period, and of particular relevance because of the Anglo-Saxon palace site immediately north of the Airfield.
- 4) Both areas should be excavated in advance of further quarrying.
- 5) In the remaining trenches, no evidence was discovered that would suggest further excavation is necessary.

Introduction

The Woodbridge Farm archaeological evaluation was carried out by the Archaeology Department of the University of Durham in accordance with the guidelines set by TARMAC and the Northumberland County Archaeologist. The evaluation is part of a planning application condition resulting from the desire to develop the area for gravel extraction.

The brief of the evaluation stated that at least 16 trenches, 35 m. by 3.5 m. should be placed in the area of desired extraction in order to assess the level of survival of any archaeological remains. A trench was to be placed in each adjacent 100 m. square area aligned alternately on north-south and east-west alignments. Plans of trench locations have been provided, along with plans and photographs of archaeological remains.

In the event seventeen trenches were opened and their positions surveyed using a triangulation system, as the position of buildings made it impossible to use a square grid. The trenches were machine-stripped of topsoil and the underlying natural subsoil cleaned by hand to reveal archaeological features. A selected sample of features were excavated, and all features were recorded. In accordance with the brief, the trenches sampled runways and roads, but it was not possible to site trench 5. This was because it was to cut the main runway which is still extensively used in the working of the quarry, and the thickness of the concrete would have entailed a long delay in acquiring a different excavating machine. The road going around the airfield buildings was also left as it is still used by the Ministry of Defence for access to their storage buildings. Trench 6 was also unexcavated as it was positioned where gravel had previously been extracted and any archaeological remains would have been destroyed.

Trench Descriptions

The location of all trenches is given on fig. 1. All trenches were aligned on the National Grid. Co-ordinates are given of the 100m. square within which the trench is located. Numbers in brackets are the context numbers assigned to each feature. Trenches 1 and 2 are on the quarry site and described in the companion report. Unless otherwise stated, topsoil was in all trenches about 0.30 m. deep, and lay directly above the natural subsoil, which was a combination of sand and gravel.

Trench 3:

NT 943 325. Alignment West-East. Fig.2.

Significant archaeological features were found in this trench. The trench cut a Second World War secondary runway; this runway had no effect on archaeological features underneath it. A drainage channel (0321) ran along the side of the runway.

A shallow gully (0305) heading west from the east edge of the trench terminated in a small pit (0303) that contained numerous shards of pottery. This pottery, from at least 3 different vessels and 3 different wares, is similar to 'native' material recovered at Yeavinger by Hope-Taylor and dates from the Pre-Roman Iron Age to the Roman Iron Age. Two undatable post-holes (0310 and 0316) were recorded in the west end of the trench, and a further undatable post-hole (0318) towards the middle. A fourth (0314), further towards the East end, was cut by a pit (0312) with a loose gravel fill that is probably fairly modern. An undatable posthole (0324) was also found in this area. Plough furrows were visible cutting the natural (0302).

Trench 4:

NT 945 325. Alignment North-South. Fig. 3.

Significant archaeological features were found in this trench. No dating evidence was recovered from any features. A ditch (0405) ran east-west across the middle of the trench. Five small and very similar postholes (0417, 0419, 0421, 0423, 0425) were recorded in the south of the trench after extensive weathering. Four other features were recorded in the north of the trench, one of which may represent the butt-end of a gully (0411), the others being potential post-holes (0407, 0409, 0413, 0415). Plough furrows were visible cutting the natural (0402).

Trench 5:

NT 945 325.

This trench was not excavated due to the thickness of the concrete and the position of large piles of gravel and sand across this area.

Trench 6:

NT 946 325.

This trench was not excavated as this area had already been quarried and rendered sterile for archaeological purposes.

Trench 7:

NT 947 325. Alignment North-South.

No significant archaeological features were recorded in this area. A post-hole (0706) was excavated and was proved to be a post-pit for a telegraph pole (rotting wood was still *in situ*). Other areas that were felt to have potential (0703, 0704) proved to be lenses of topsoil sunk into shallow depressions in the natural. Plough furrows were visible cutting the natural (0702).

Trench 8:

NT 948 325. Alignment West-East.

One archaeological feature was recorded, a small circular pit (0804) with a grey-brown fill containing charcoal and stones (0803). The natural subsoil (0802) shelved down sharply at the eastern end of this trench.

Trench 9:

NT 949 325. Alignment North-South.

No significant archaeological features were recorded in this trench. An old water-pipe trench (0904) ran north-south. The natural subsoil (0902) slopes away at the south end of the trench, where there is also a build-up of hill-wash (0905, 0906) between the topsoil and the natural.

Trench 10:

NT 949 326. Alignment West-East.

One archaeological feature was recorded; this was a post-pit (1007). A large 2 m. wide break in the natural (1002) proved on excavation to be vertically sided to a depth of 2 m., and is probably an ice break (1002).

Trench 11:

NT 950 326. Alignment North-South.

No archaeological features were recorded in this trench. Plough furrows were visible cutting the natural (1102).

Trench 12:

NT 950 327. Alignment West-East. Fig. 4.

Many significant archaeological features were recorded in this trench. The eastern half of this trench contains the remains of an earth-fast timber building, consisting of a gully (1218), with two parallel large post-holes (1210, 1212), a small foundation trench (1208) forming the northern corner of the building and a series of associated post-holes (1204, 1206, 1214, 1216). A series of other postholes (1220, 1222, 1224, 1226, 1228) were found in the western half of the trench which have similar fills and may be of similar date but formed no recognisable pattern. Plough furrows were visible cutting the natural (1202).

Trench 13:

NT 951 327. Alignment North-South. Fig. 5.

One archaeological feature was identified in this trench. This was a Bronze Age cremation burial (1305) in the south west of the trench, consisting of a small pit containing a

probable Collared cremation Urn (similar to those found at Yeavinger) with associated charcoal/possible burnt bone. Plough furrows were visible cutting the natural (1302).

Trench 14:

NT 951 328. Alignment West-East.

One possible archaeological feature was identified in this trench, a possible pit (1404) with a convincing shape but with a fill accountable by variations in the natural. An electric cable trench (1405) traversed the trench. Plough furrows were visible cutting the natural (1402).

Trench 15:

NT 952 328. Alignment North-South. Fig. 2.

Significant archaeological features were found at the south end of the trench, particularly a curving gully (1520) which contained two fills (1518,1519); three possible post-settings were found cut into the bottom of the gully. A shallow post-hole (1517) and possible pit (1515) were also identified.

The middle section of the trench was largely destroyed by the foundations of a R.A.F. building (1510, 1511, 1513), whilst the northern end of the trench included an electric cable trench (1504), a water-pipe trench (1508), and a modern pit (1506).

Trench 16:

NT 950 328. Alignment North-South. Fig. 6.

Many significant archaeological features were found in this trench. These included a series of associated post-holes at the southern end that represent the wall supports (1610, 1616, 1618, 1624, 1628) and roof supports (1612, 1614, 1620, 1622, 1626, 1630) for one side of a building. The northern end of the trench included a series of post-holes (1632, 1634, 1636, 1638, 1640, 1642, 1648, 1655, 1657), a charcoal-filled pit (1644) and two shallow gulleys (1646, 1651). Other postholes lay to the south of the wall supports (1604, 1606, 1608).

Trench 17:

NT 949 328. Alignment West -East.

No archaeological features were recorded in this trench.

Trench 18:

NT 949 327. Alignment North-South.

One possible feature was found in this trench (1505), a pit filled with orange-brown sand, but this fill is not consistent with other archaeological features in the area. Plough furrows were visible cutting the natural (1802).

Trench 19:

NT 948 327. Alignment West-East.

No significant archaeological features were identified. A post-hole at the east end was aligned with telegraph post-holes and is likely to be modern. Other post-hole possibilities (1906, 1904, 1912) are similar in fill and disturbed by animal action. A pipe-trench (1908) crossed the east end of the trench.

Trench 20:

NT 948 326. Alignment North-South.

No archaeological features were present. The southern end of the trench cut through concrete (2003).

Discussion of Archaeological Features

Archaeological remains were discovered in six trenches within the evaluation area. From the location of these trenches two broad areas of past activity can be identified. Both areas provide indications of domestic occupation and not cemetery use.

The first area of activity is indicated by archaeological features discovered in the Milfield Quarry evaluation area. Due to the close proximity of the Milfield Quarry evaluation trenches and the first two Woodbridge Farm evaluation trenches (trenches 3 and 4) a discussion of the latter has been included in the Milfield Quarry report. Trenches 3 and 4 contained a number of features. The only datable remains came from the fill of a gully in the eastern end of trench 3 (fig. 2), the terminal of which contained 26 shards of pottery (representing at least 3 vessels) mingled in a charcoal fill. Parallels to one of the vessels (a chaff tempered clay vessel with brown clay slurry decoration) were found by Hope-Taylor at nearby Yeavinger in the 1950' s.

From the rim forms a provisional date range for the date of manufacture of the pottery and date of use of the structural evidence can be produced. The rim forms are best placed in the Roman Iron Age- from 150 A.D. to 400 A.D. in this region. This is hard to prove at the present time, Northumberland being an understudied area with regard to pottery because of the pottery's poor quality and consequent lack of survival.

The gully that contained the pot is best interpreted either as a boundary marker within a settlement or as a foundation trench for a structure. In both these situations rubbish such as broken pots and charcoal would accumulate either as gradual accumulation in an open ditch, or be intentionally disposed to fill the foundations of a demolished building. The gully is shallow, and may have been truncated by pre-war ploughing and levelling for the airfield.

Other post-holes in trench 3 had loose fills and may only indicate the position of old telegraph poles (there are many such near the road by the trench) or the position of wartime runway lights, although some may be associated with the gully.

Features in trench 4 (fig. 3) comprised a ditch running east-west across the trench and a series of post-pits and post-holes to its north and south. All features were beneath the plough furrows, and therefore predate the end of ploughing on the site before the Second World War. The features represent building structures in the area. The ditch is not of a constructional technique used after the Medieval period. Bearing in mind the proximity of trench 3, it is likely there was a settlement in this location in the Roman Iron Age.

The second area of activity is in the north-east corner of the evaluation area, where all but one trench yielded archaeological features, particularly trenches 12, 13 and 16. Trench 12 (fig. 4) contained post-holes and post-pits forming part of a foundation plan for a rectangular

... little essential change in contexts ranging from pre-Rom. I to be early medieval period. although slightly different composition all from the same context. The slurry coated ware is class II - e.g. from 4th or 5th c. later context at Yeavinger from earliest palisade plot

building with a foundation trench in the north-west corner. A shallow ditch running north-south down the side of the building would have acted as a boundary for the building's plot of land and as a drainage gully.

Two different dates can be suggested from its style. It may be Early Medieval (400 A.D. -700 A.D.), as it has parallels with a building of this date excavated at Doon Hill, Dunbar which was built with the same techniques. The presence of the Early Medieval Anglo-Saxon palace site at Milfield in the fields to the north, and the Anglo-Saxon cemetery and settlement at Galewood and Thirlings to the south may provide circumstantial evidence for a similar date for the trench 12 building. The building may alternatively be Neolithic in date (3400 to 2200 B.C.) as building plans are similar in both periods. A building foundation excavated at Balbridie in Grampian was thought to be Early Medieval but radiocarbon dating indicated a Neolithic age.

Trench 13 (fig 5) contained only one feature, a probable Bronze Age cremation burial within a pottery 'Collared Urn' or 'Food Vessel' buried in a small shallow pit. The pot was broken but its thick poorly fired fabric with incised decoration indicate a Bronze Age date (2100-800 B.C.). It is very similar to the pot found in burial 19 at Yeavinger by Hope-Taylor. The fill in the pot was retained for environmental study. The pit may have been truncated by plough damage. The apparent isolated nature of the burial is not unusual.

Trench 15 was much disturbed by modern remains, but a pit, a post-hole and a curving gully survived at the south end. There was no dating evidence and due to the limited area it was not possible to identify any building types of any particular period.

Trench 16 (fig. 6) at the boundary of the evaluation area contained the densest concentration of features. In one line of large post-holes, each post-hole was associated with a smaller one immediately adjacent. This indicates a rectangular building of probable Early Medieval date. A complete building plan could be obtained if a larger area was opened up. A large number of other gulleys (probably truncated) and post-holes were found that indicate further structural evidence. An environmental sample was taken from a charcoal-filled pit that may be able to provide a radiocarbon date.

Most other features in other trenches proved either to be modern or rather ephemeral. The only convincing features were one shallow post-pit in trench 8, and one in trench 10, where what was previously considered a possible ditch has now been interpreted as a geological ice break.

Two areas of archaeological interest have been noted. Despite partial truncation of deposits by ploughing and levelling for the airfield, and some interference from R.A.F. building foundations, they survive up to a depth of 0.40 m. and it would be possible to uncover building plans and settlement plans in these areas. The Woodbridge Farm area in particular could, if fully excavated, greatly enhance our understanding of the nature and density of settlement

pattern in this region when placed within the context of the nearby contemporary Early Medieval sites.

The Bronze Age and Roman Iron Age finds are also important in helping to balance our view of settlement in this region: most investigation of the prehistory of the region has concentrated on upland settlement, notably by George Jobey in the 1950's and 1960's and by Colin Burgess in the 1980's. The discovery of the twenty six shards of pottery is itself most unusual as upland sites have yielded very little such material over much larger excavated areas.

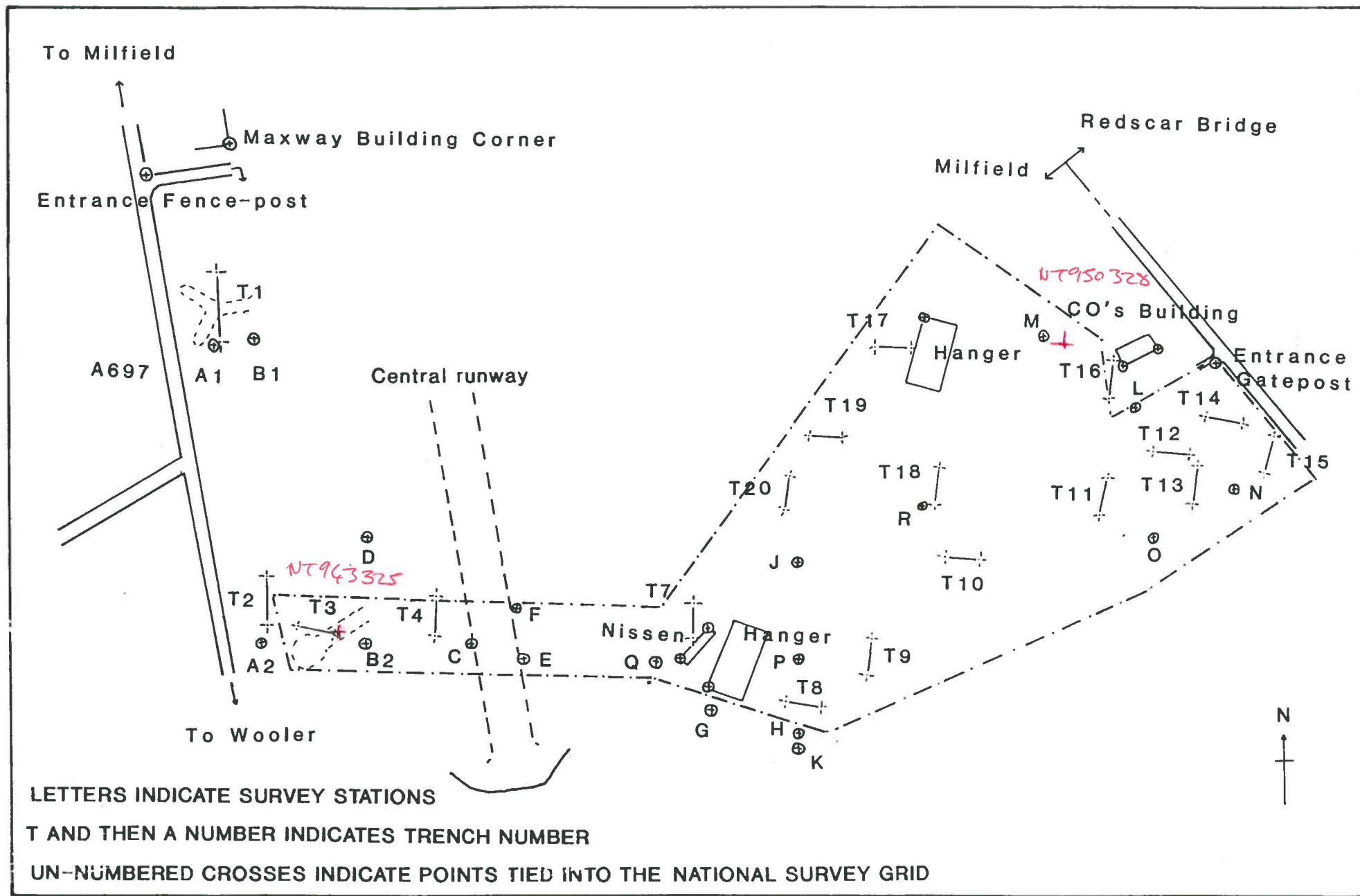
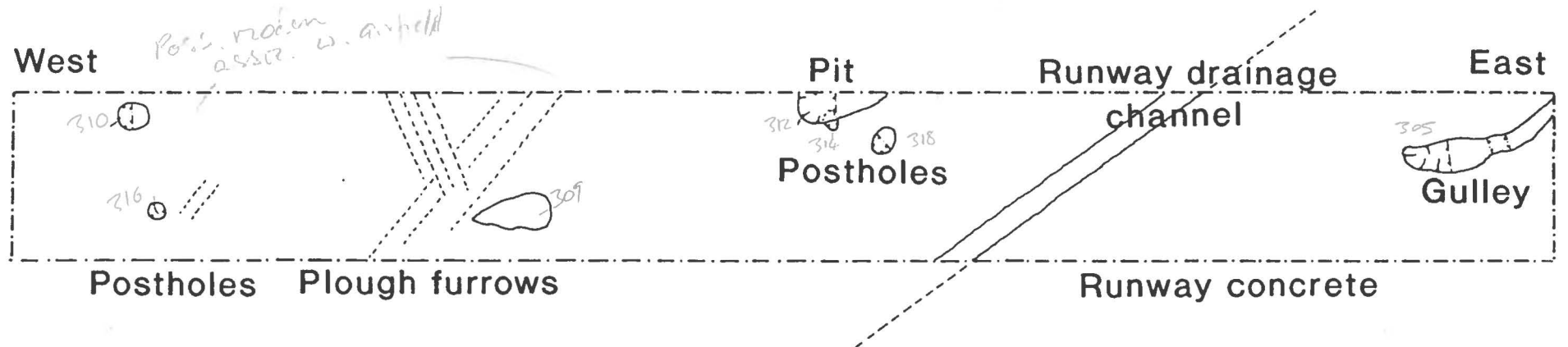
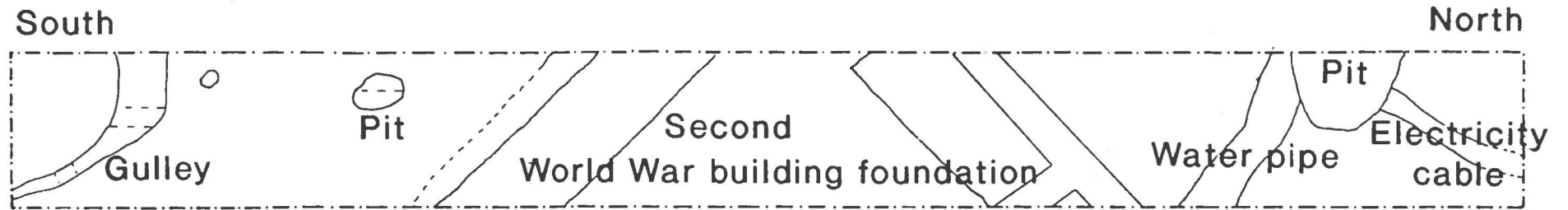


Fig.1 Trench location and survey map



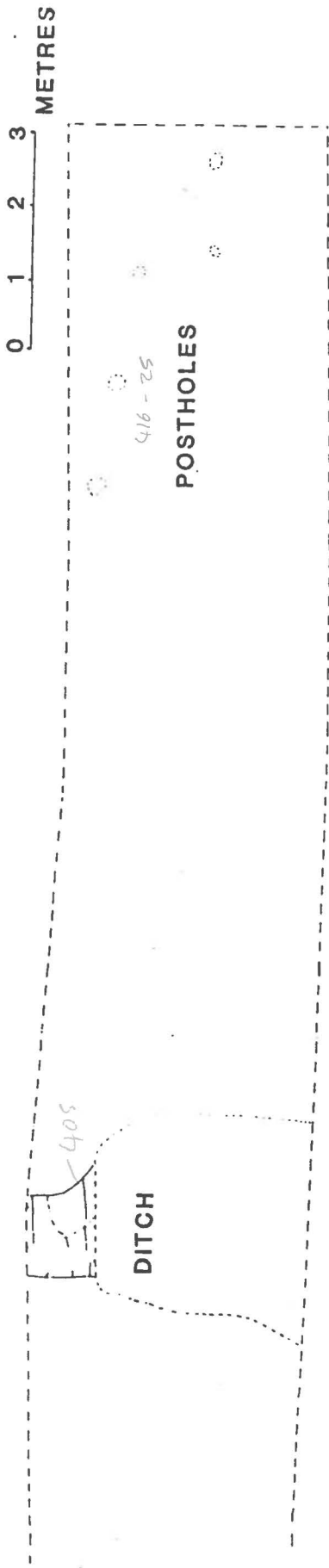
Trench 3



Trench 15



FIG2



TRENCH 4

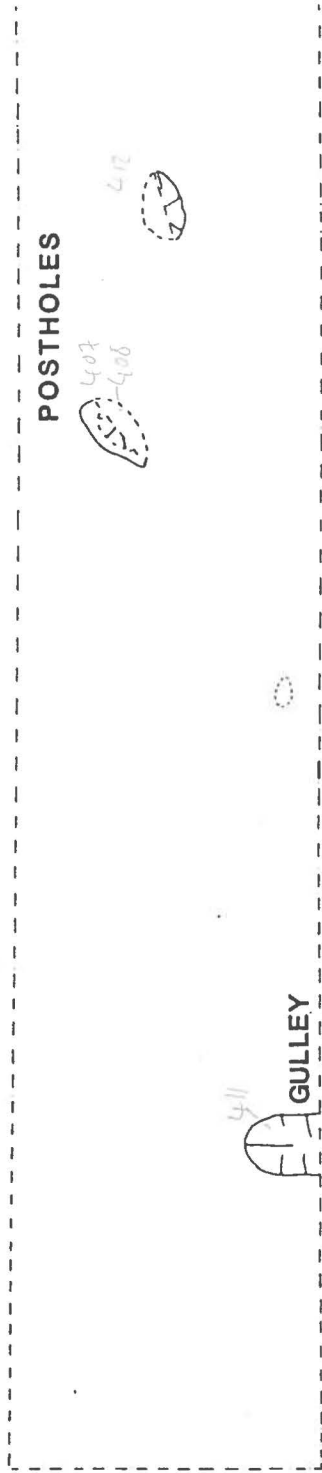
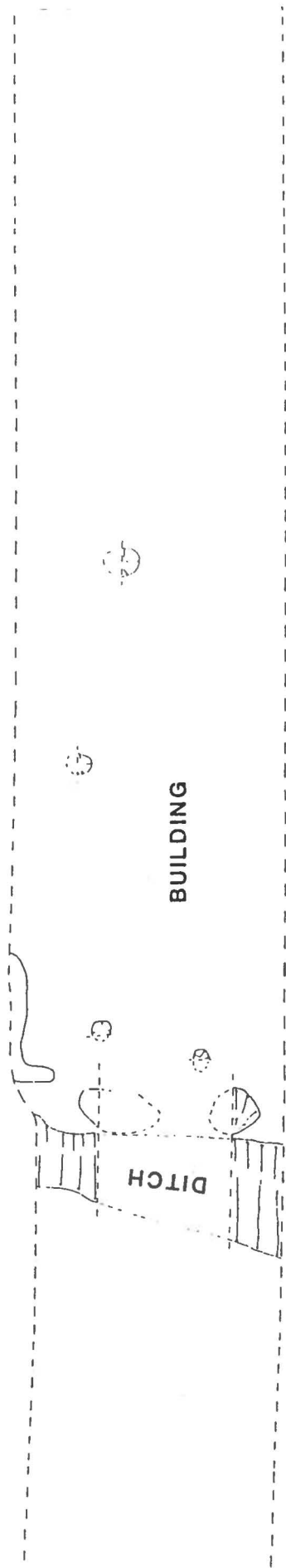


FIG.3

TRENCH 12

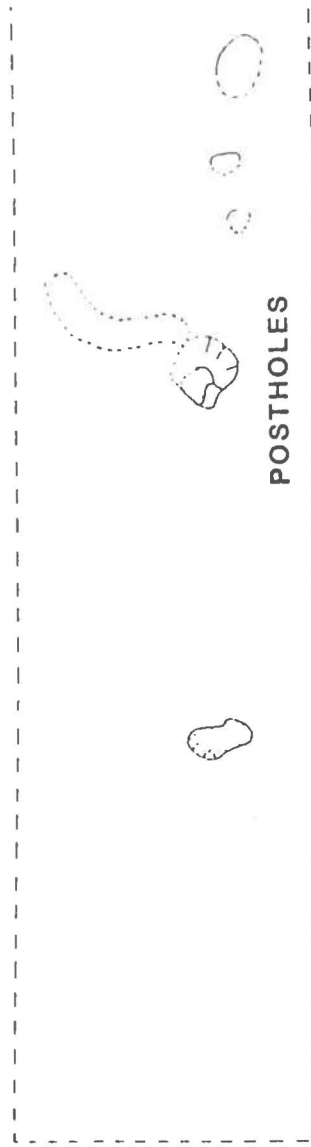
EAST



0 1 2 3

METRES

WEST



POSTHOLES

FIG.4

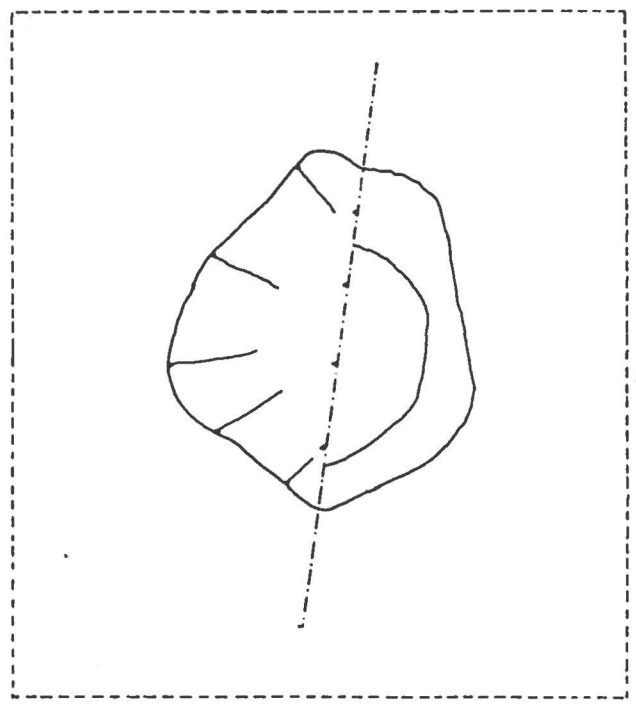
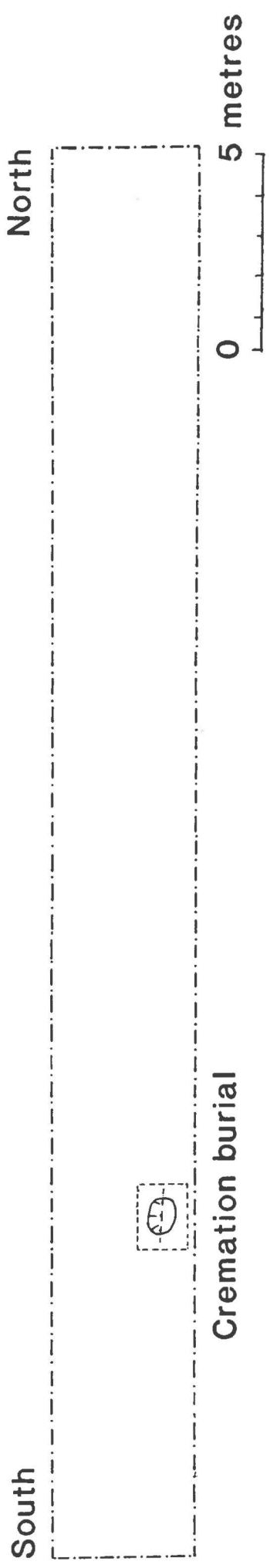
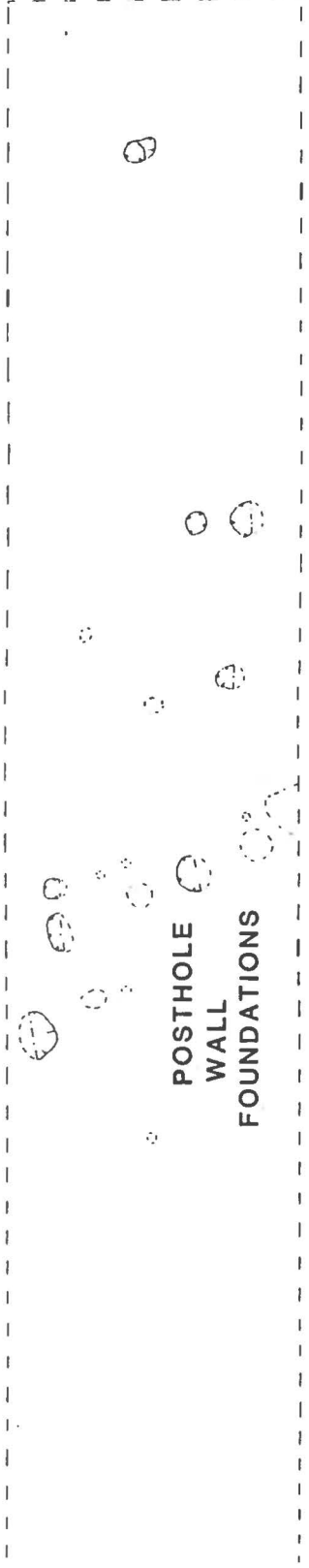


FIG.5 TRENCH 13

0 1 2 3 METRES



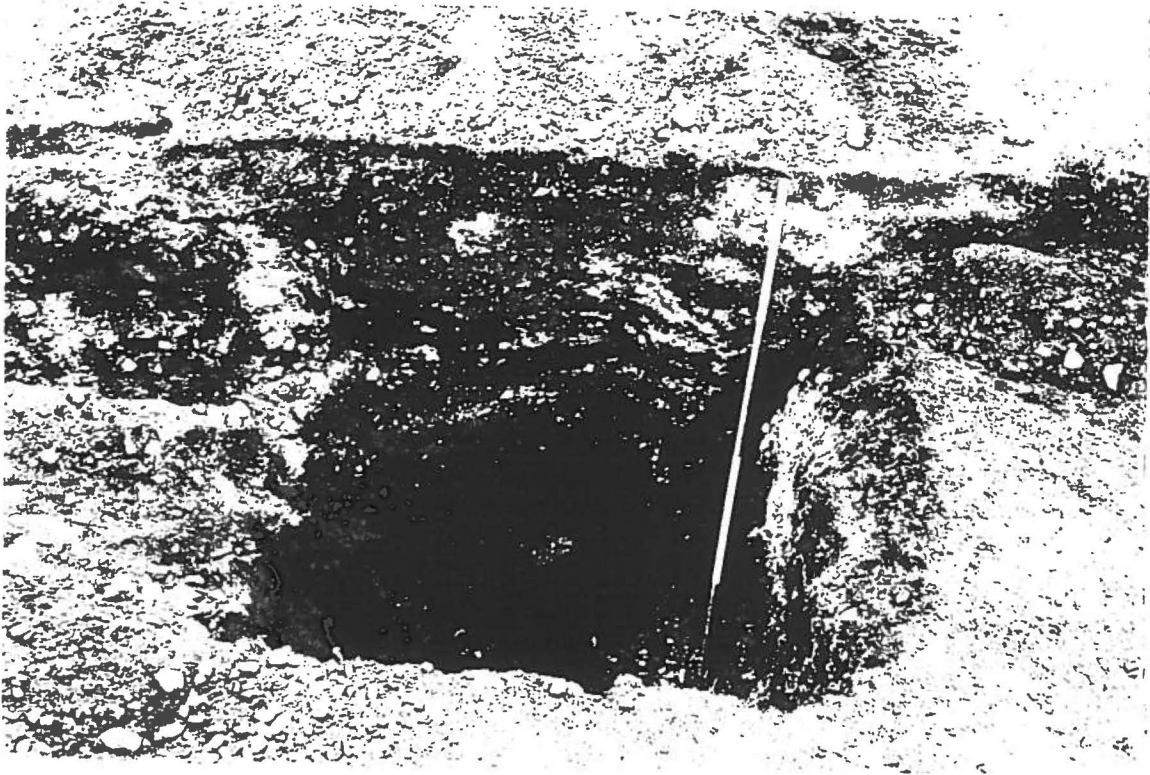
SOUTH

TRENCH 16

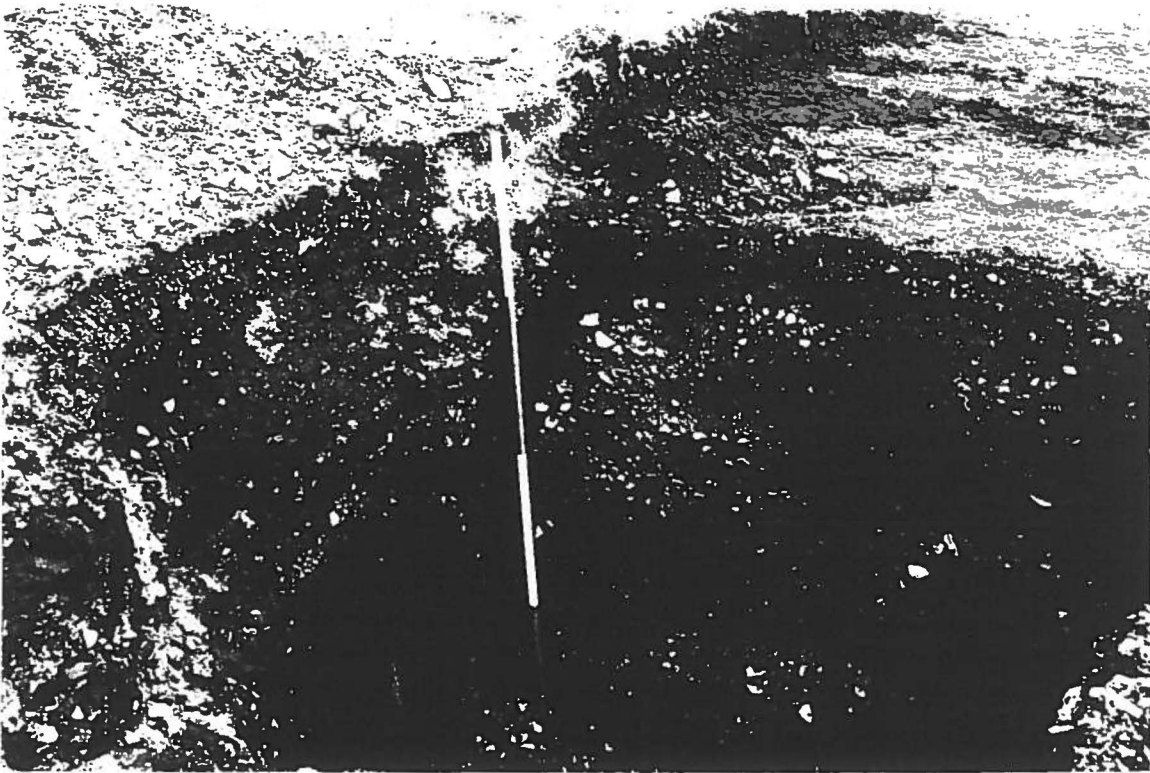


NORTH

FIG.6



Photograph 1: Trench 10, ice break, facing north



Photograph 2: Trench 10, ice break, facing northeast



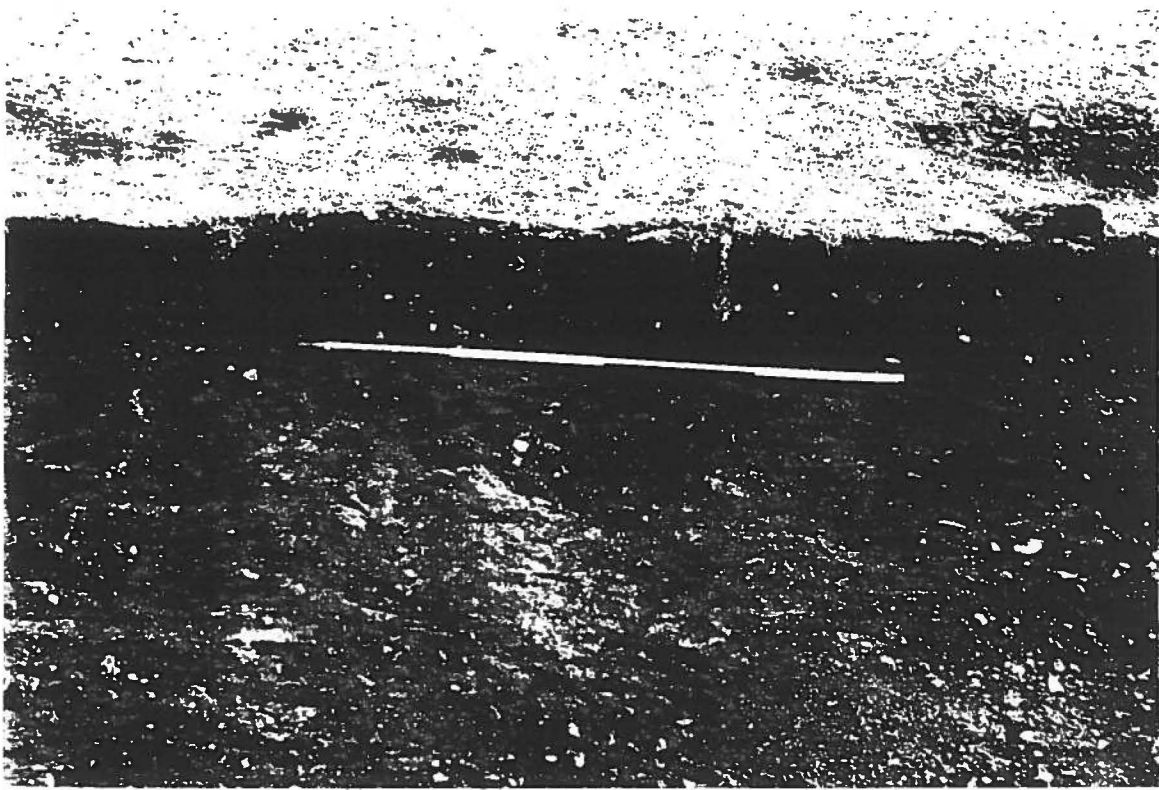
Photograph 3:

Trench 12, possible building alignment, facing west northwest

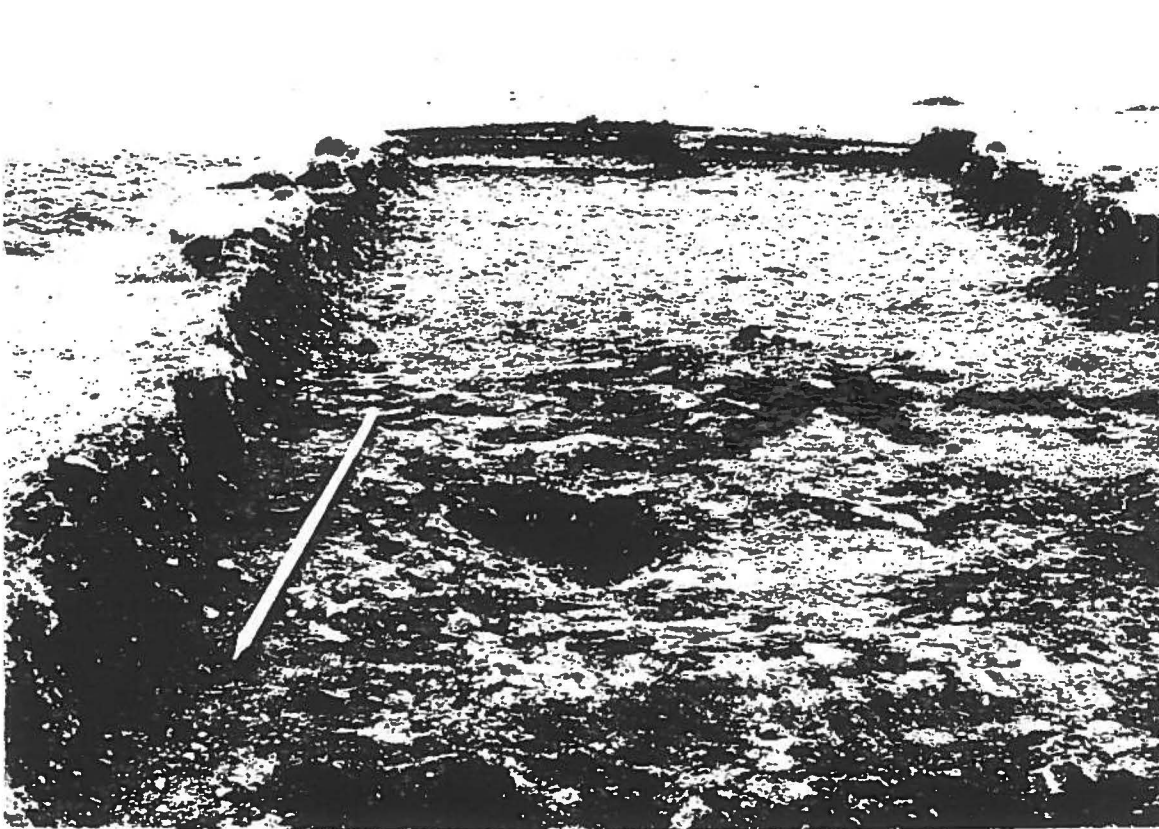


Photograph 4:

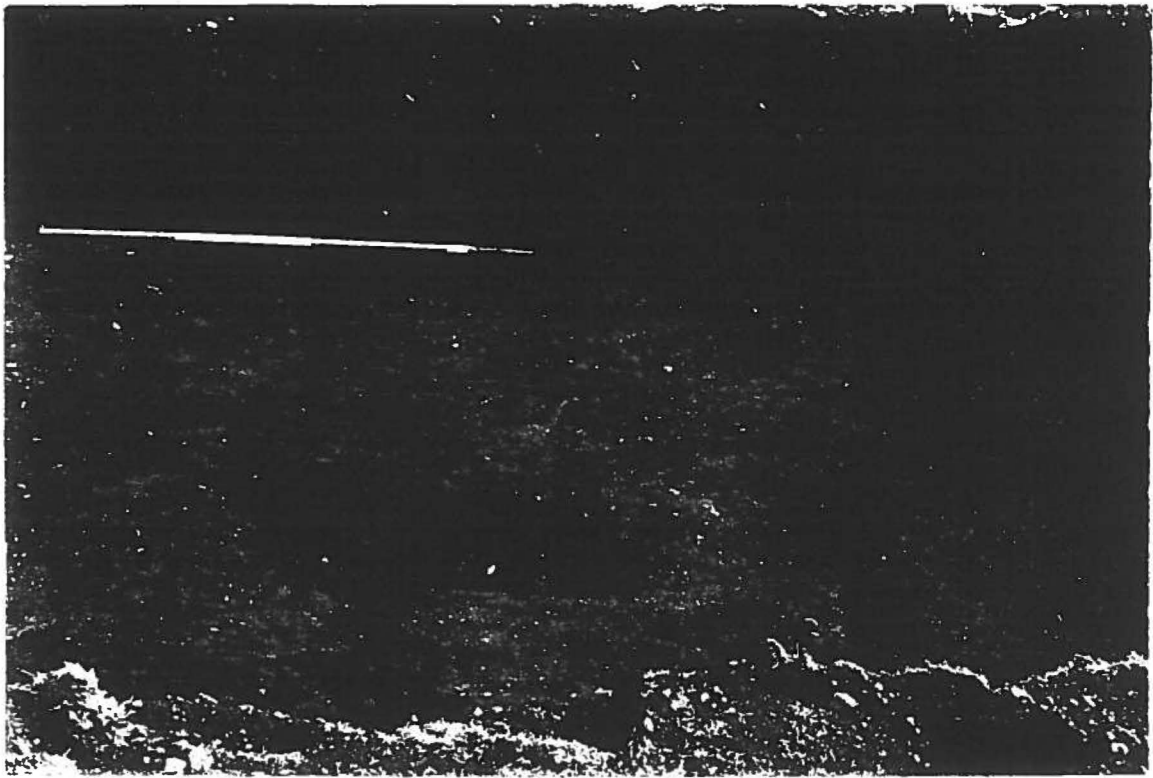
Trench 12, detail of ditch and corner of post building, facing north



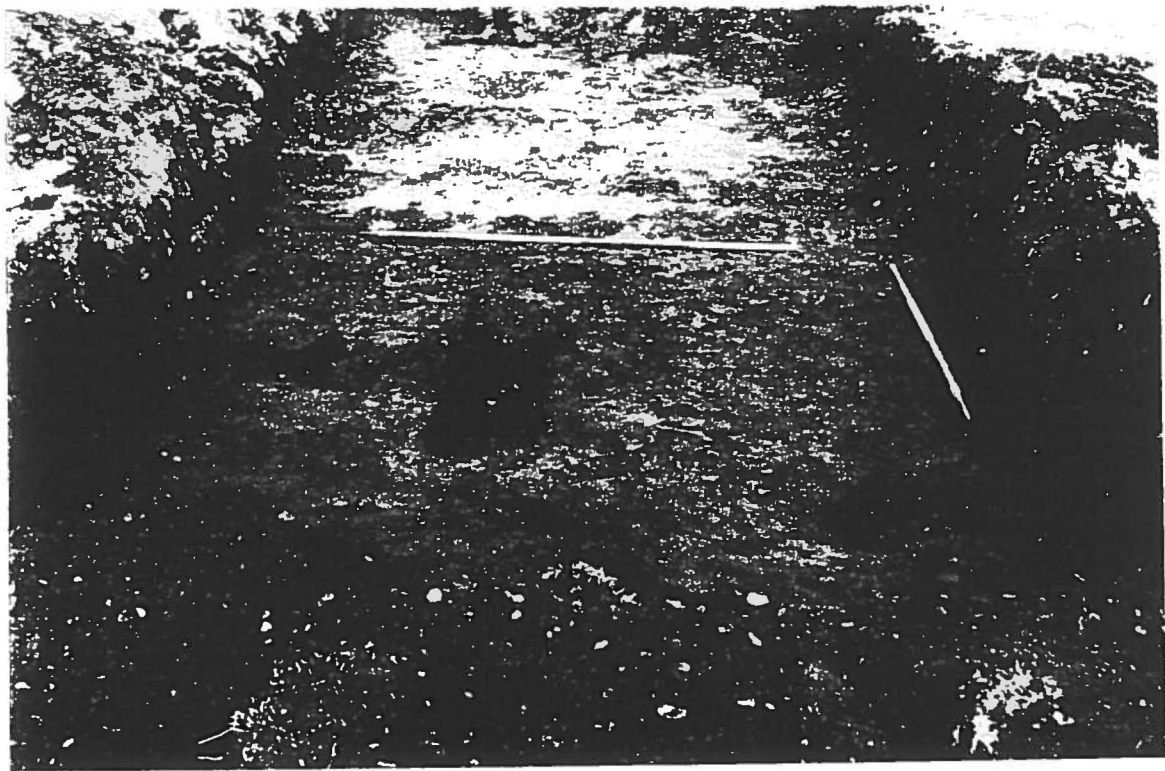
**Photograph 5: Trench 13,
detail of cremation burial facing west**



**Photograph 6:
Trench 13, detail of cremation burial, facing south**



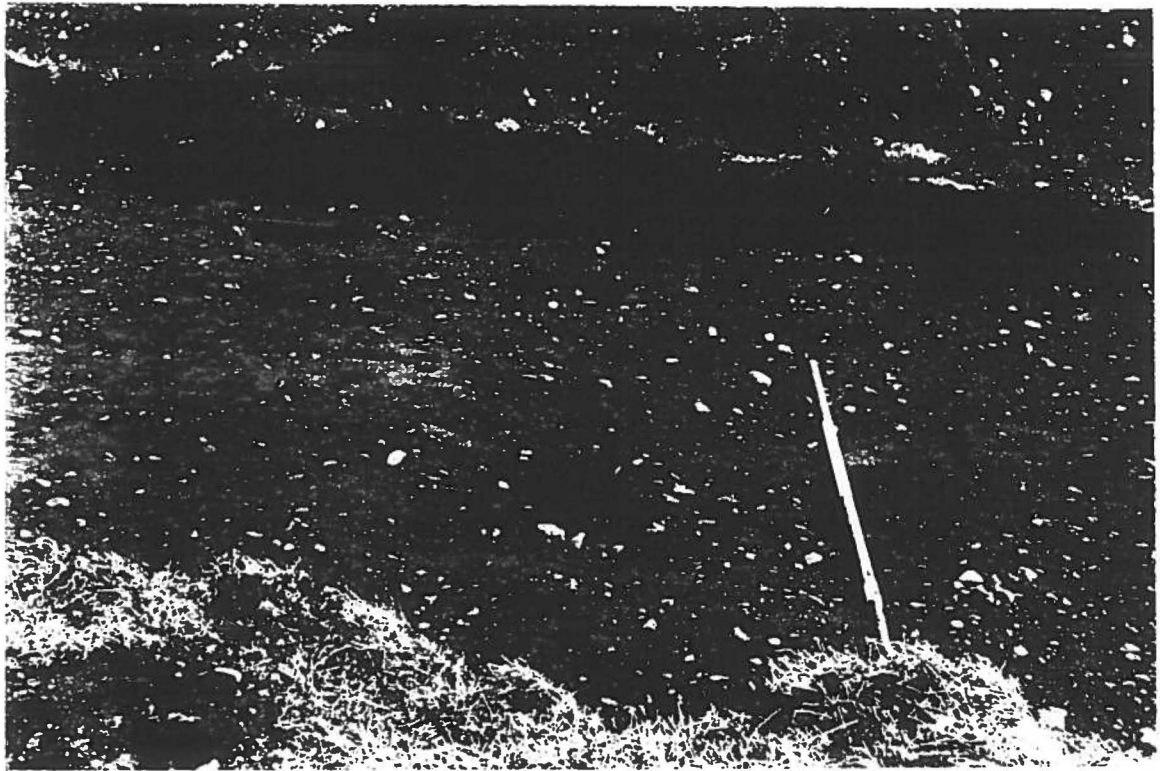
Photograph 7: Trench 15, curving gulley facing east



Photograph 8: Trench 15, curving gulley facing north



Photograph 9: Trench 16, general shot, facing south



Photograph 10:

Trench 16, detail of posthole alignment of post building