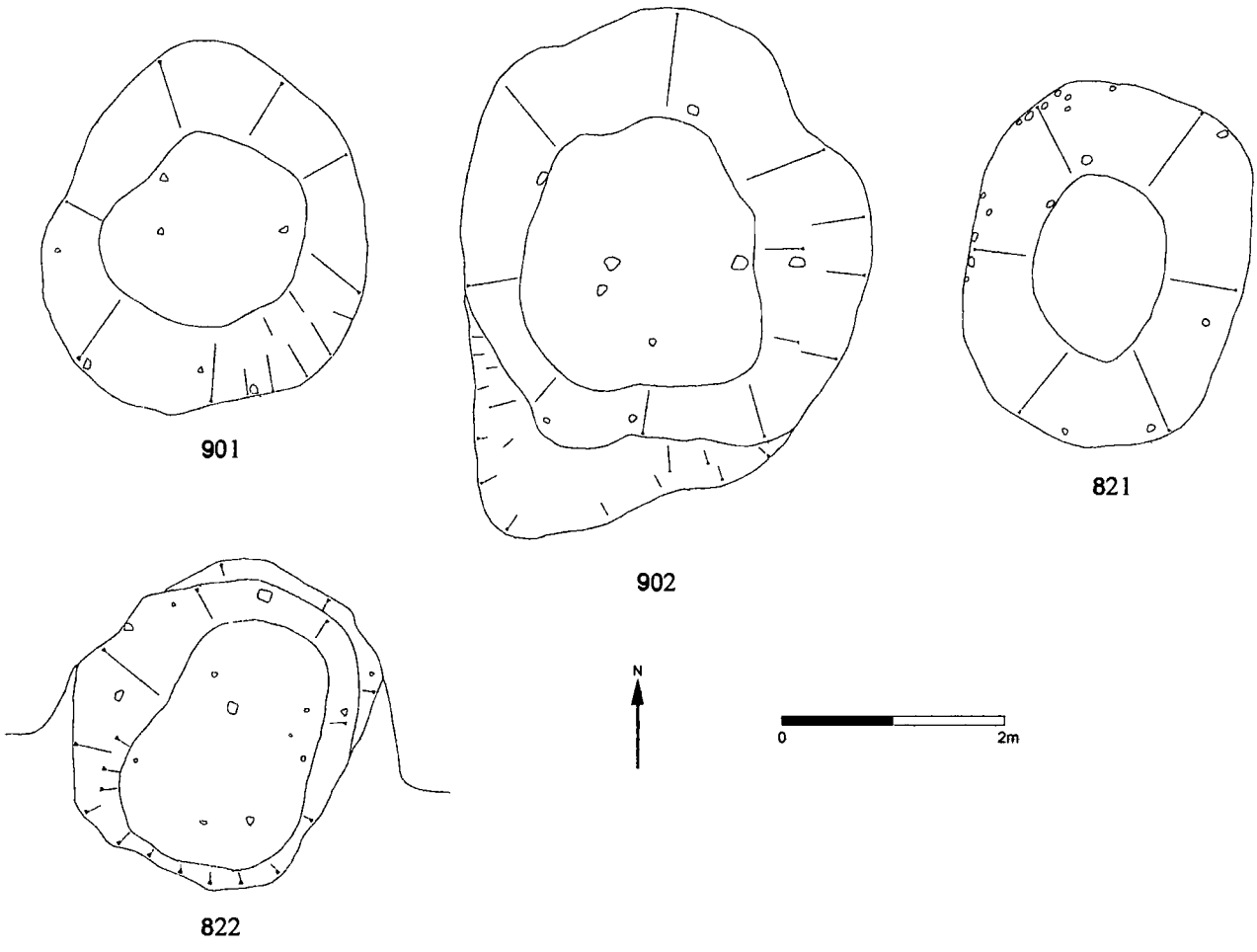
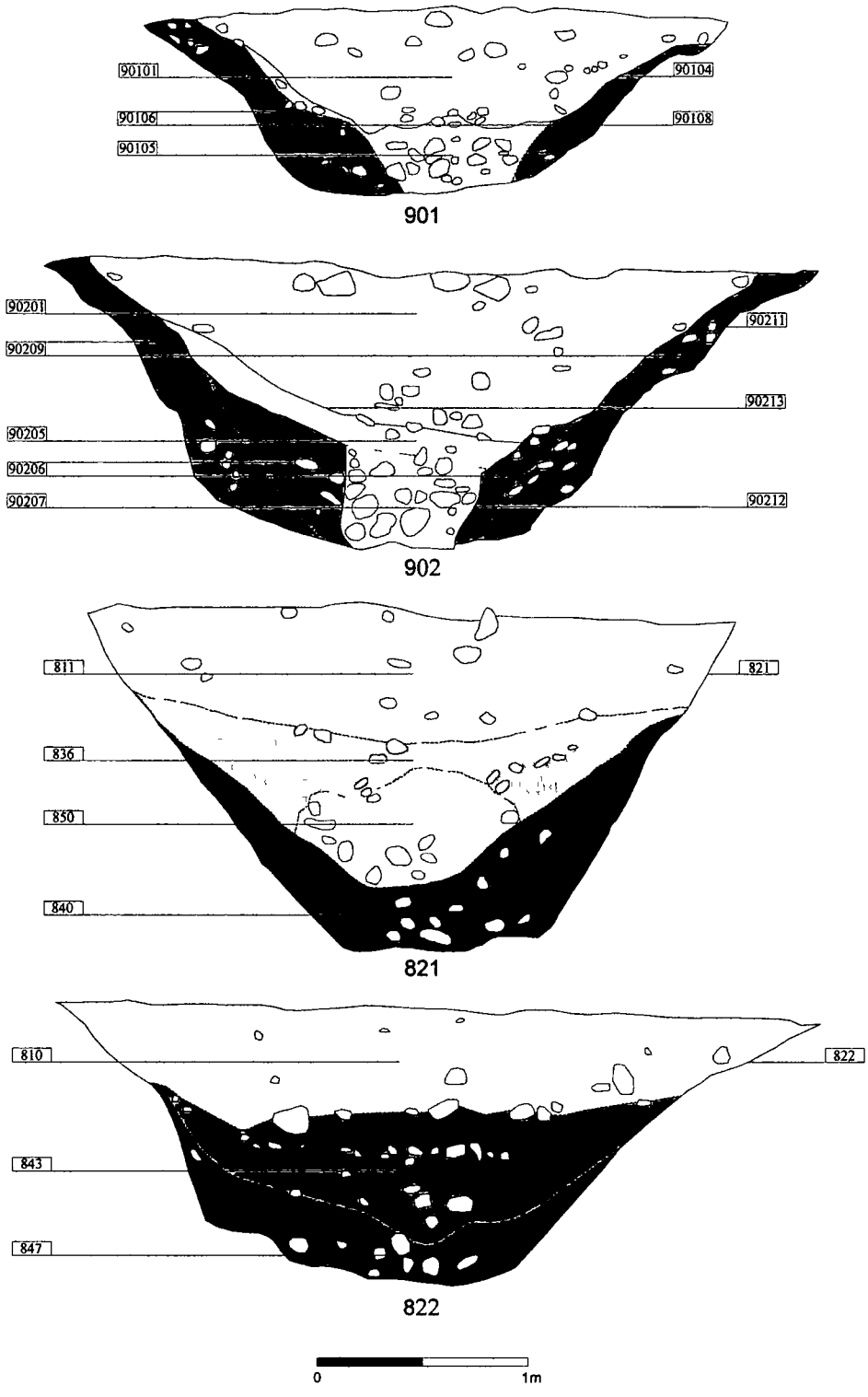


Fig 4 Plans of features 901, 902, 821 and 822



KEY:

Context numbers to the left are *deposits*, those to the right are *cuts*.

100% silt

50% sand / 50% silt

100% sand

100% clay

Fig 5 Sections of features 901, 902, 821 and 822

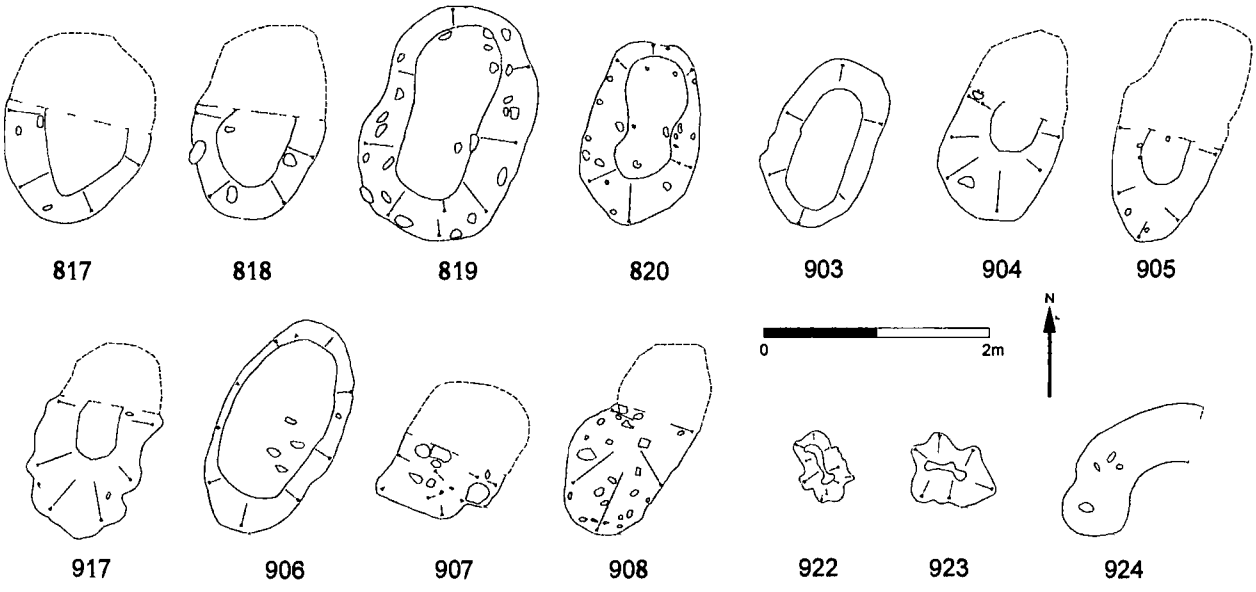


Fig 6 Plans of features 817, 818, 819, 820, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 917 and 923

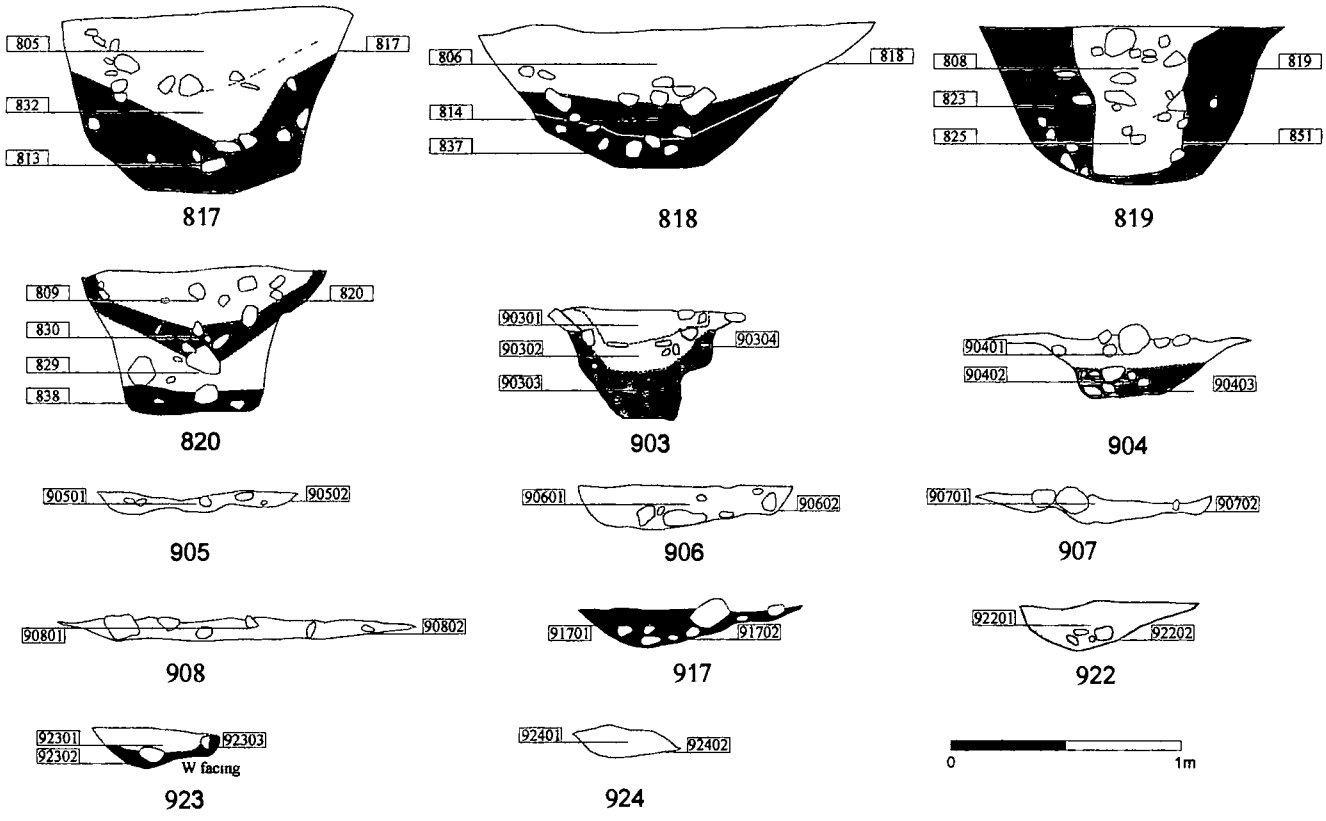


Fig 7 Sections of features 817, 818, 819, 820, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 917 and 923

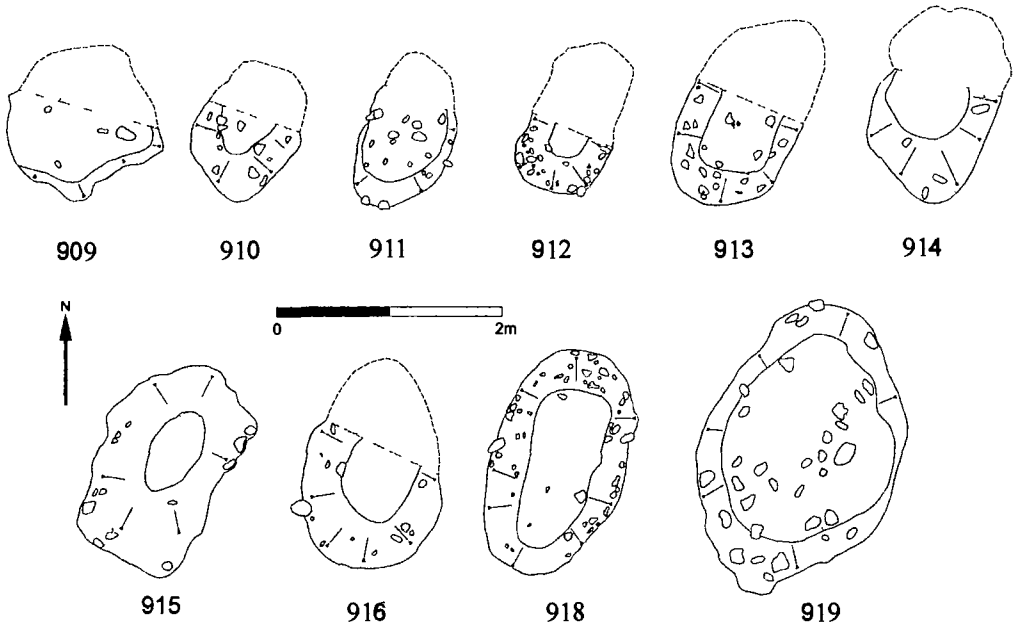


Fig 8 Plans of features 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 918 and 919

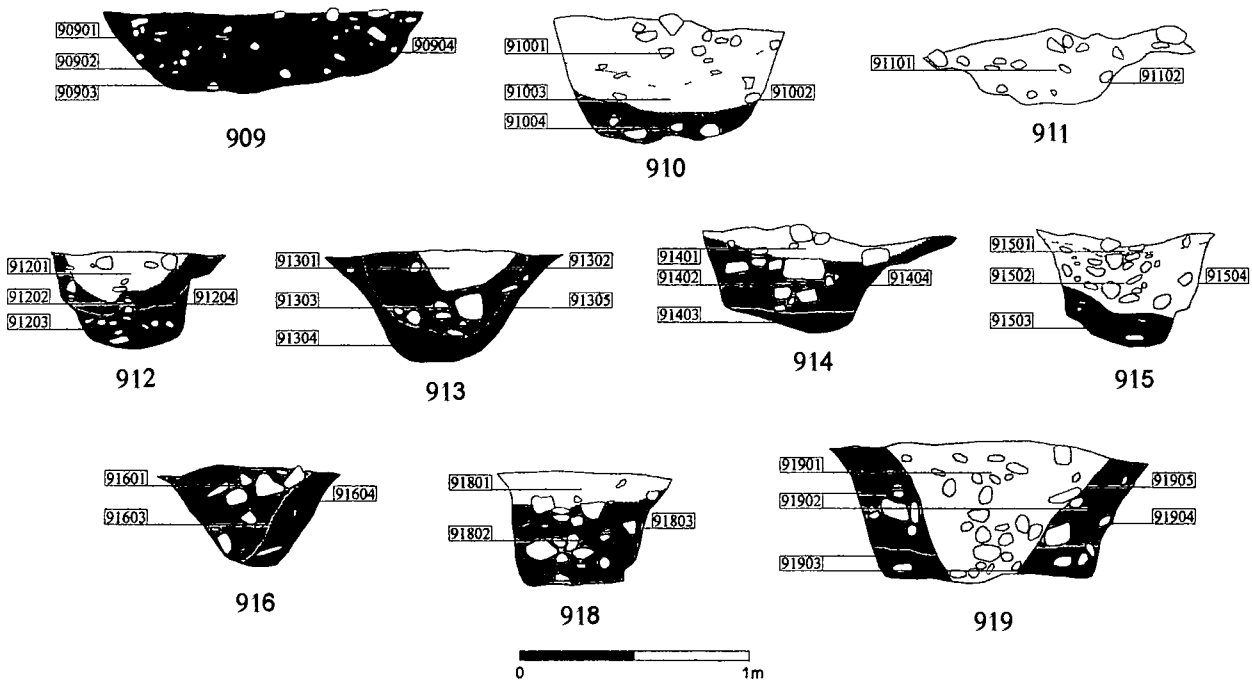


Fig 9 Sections of features 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 918 and 919

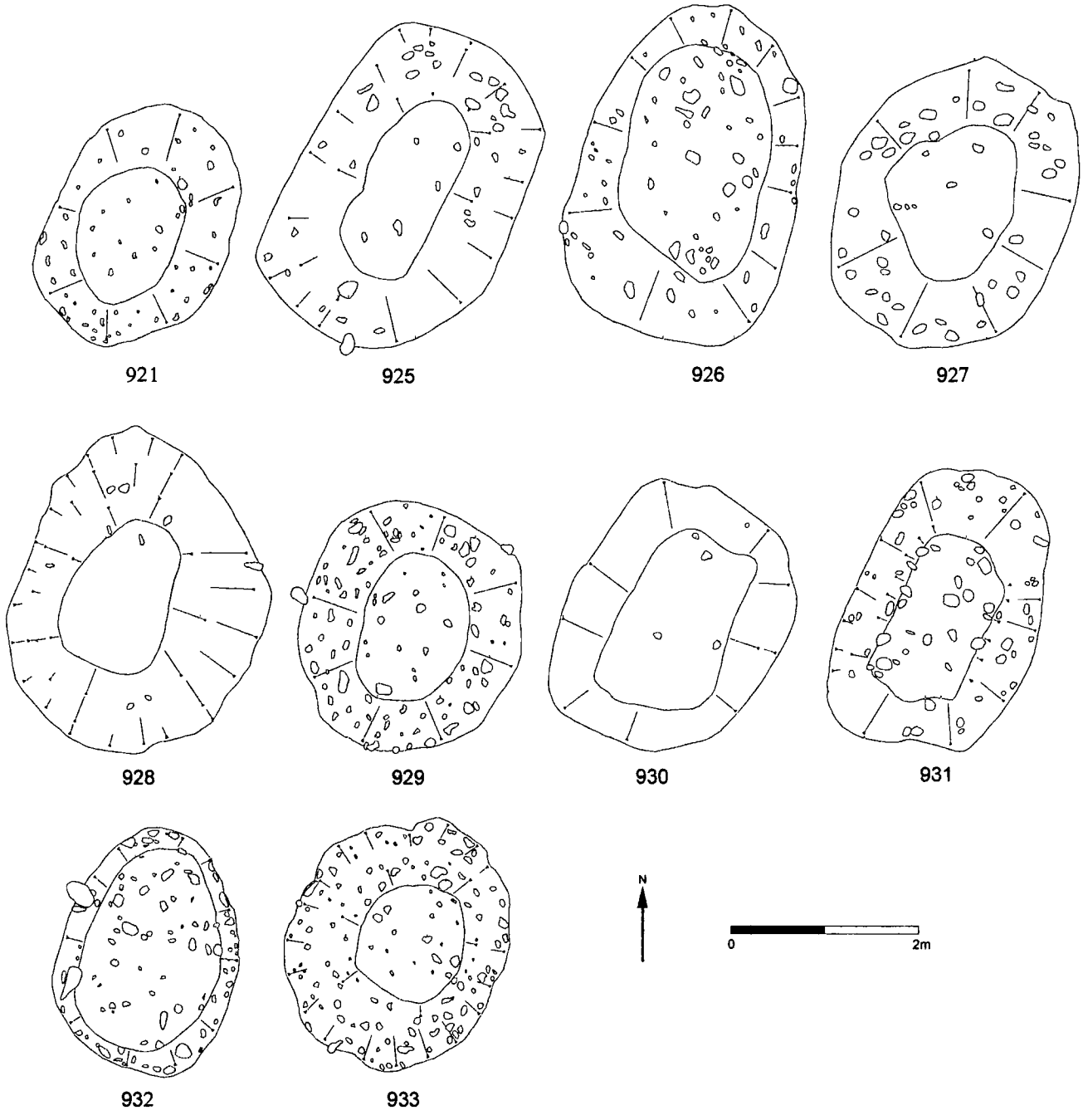


Fig 10 Plans of features 921, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932 and 933

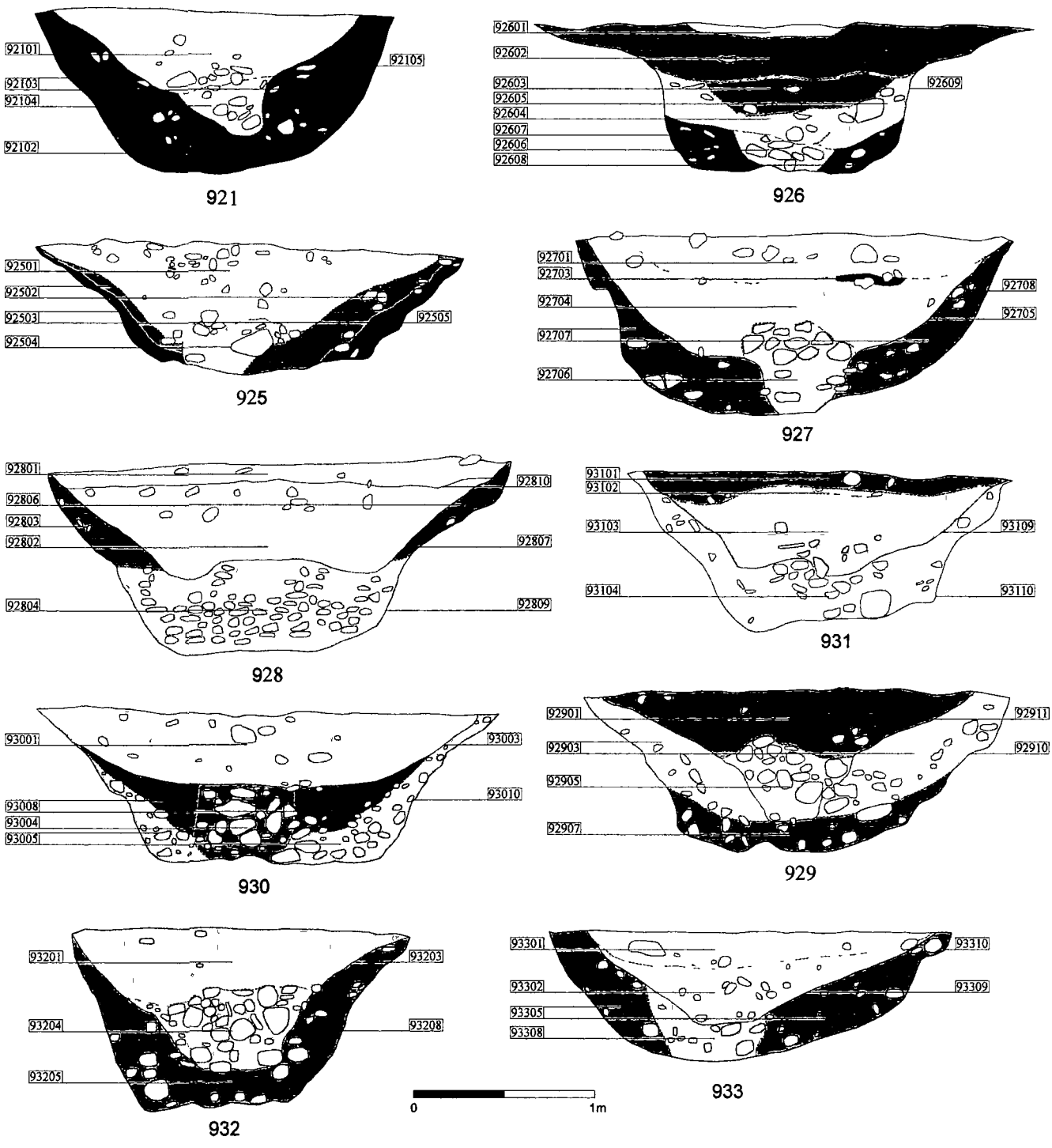


Fig 11 Sections of features 921, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932 and 933

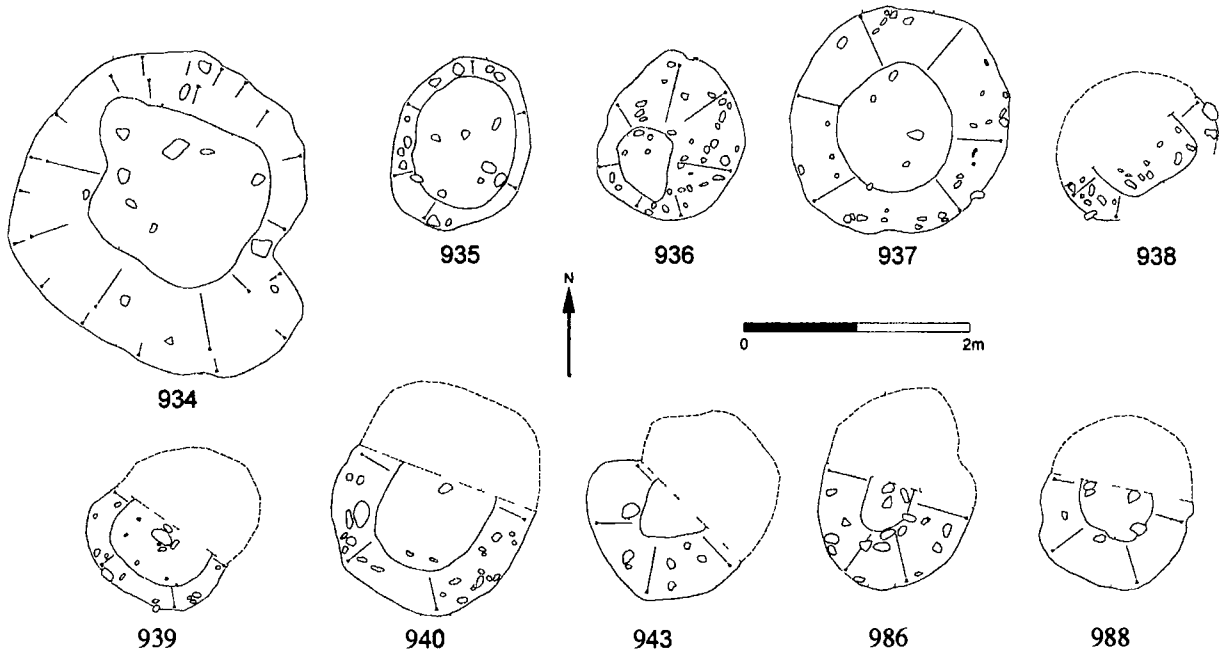


Fig 12 Plans of features 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 943, 986 and 988

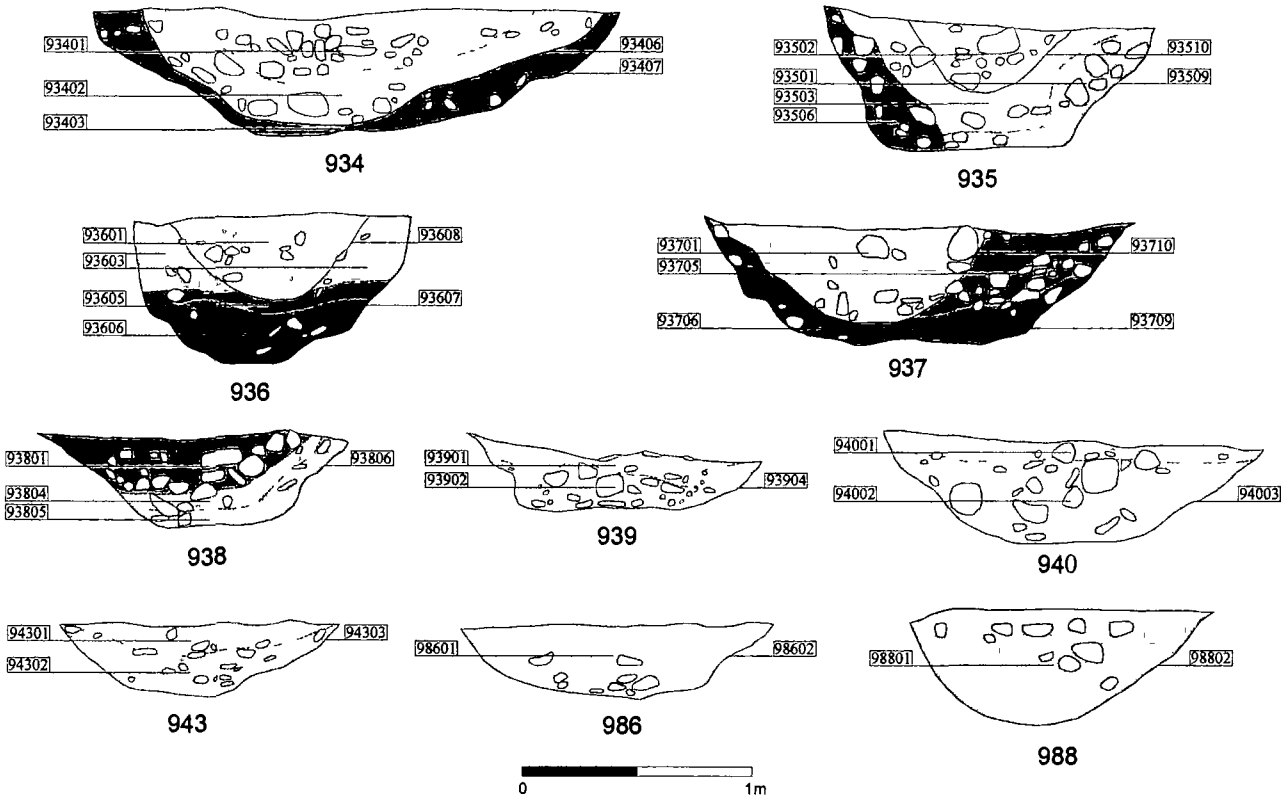


Fig 13 Sections of features 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 943, 986 and 988

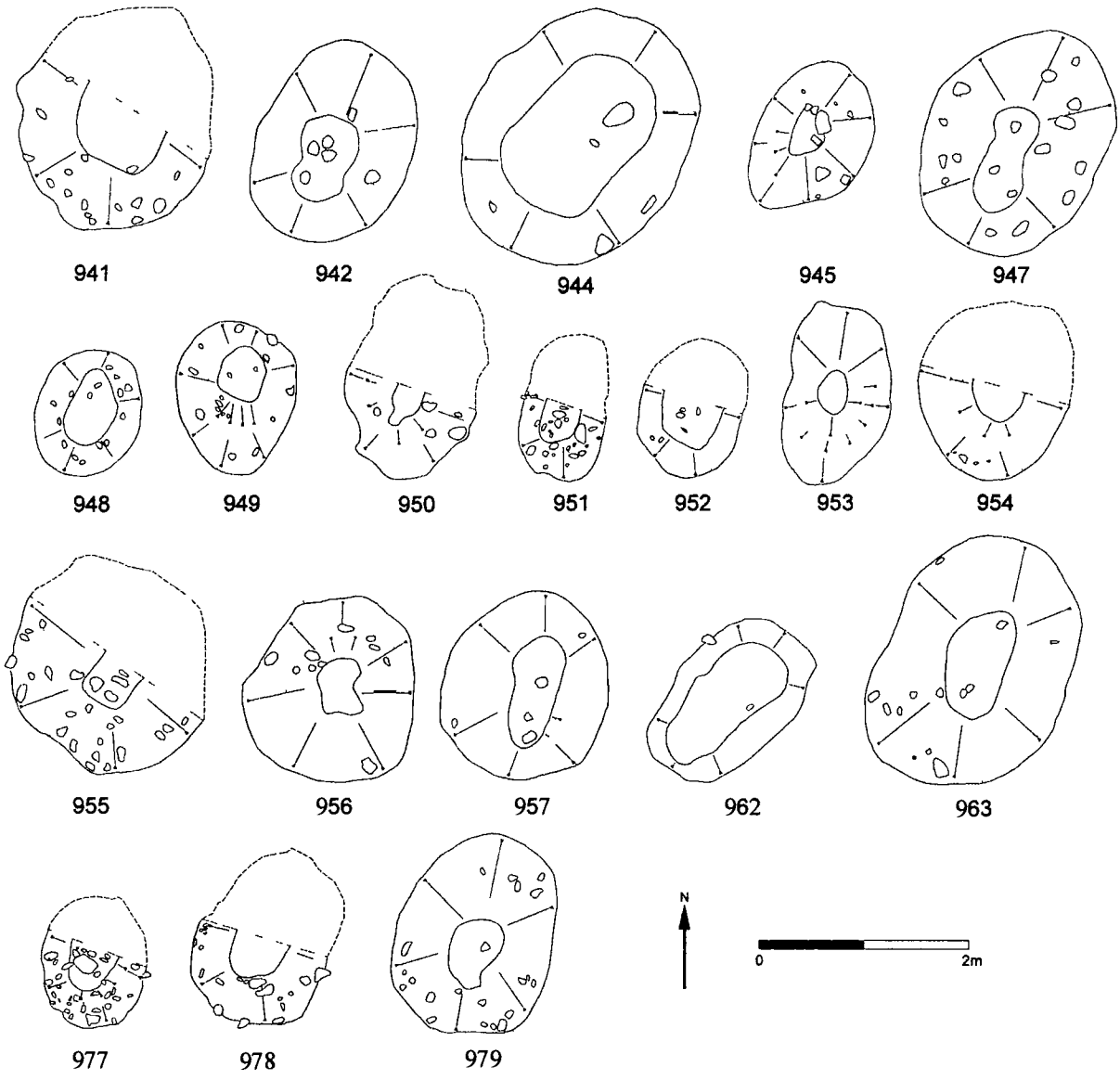


Fig 14 Plans of features 941, 942, 944, 945, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 962, 963, 977, 978 and 979

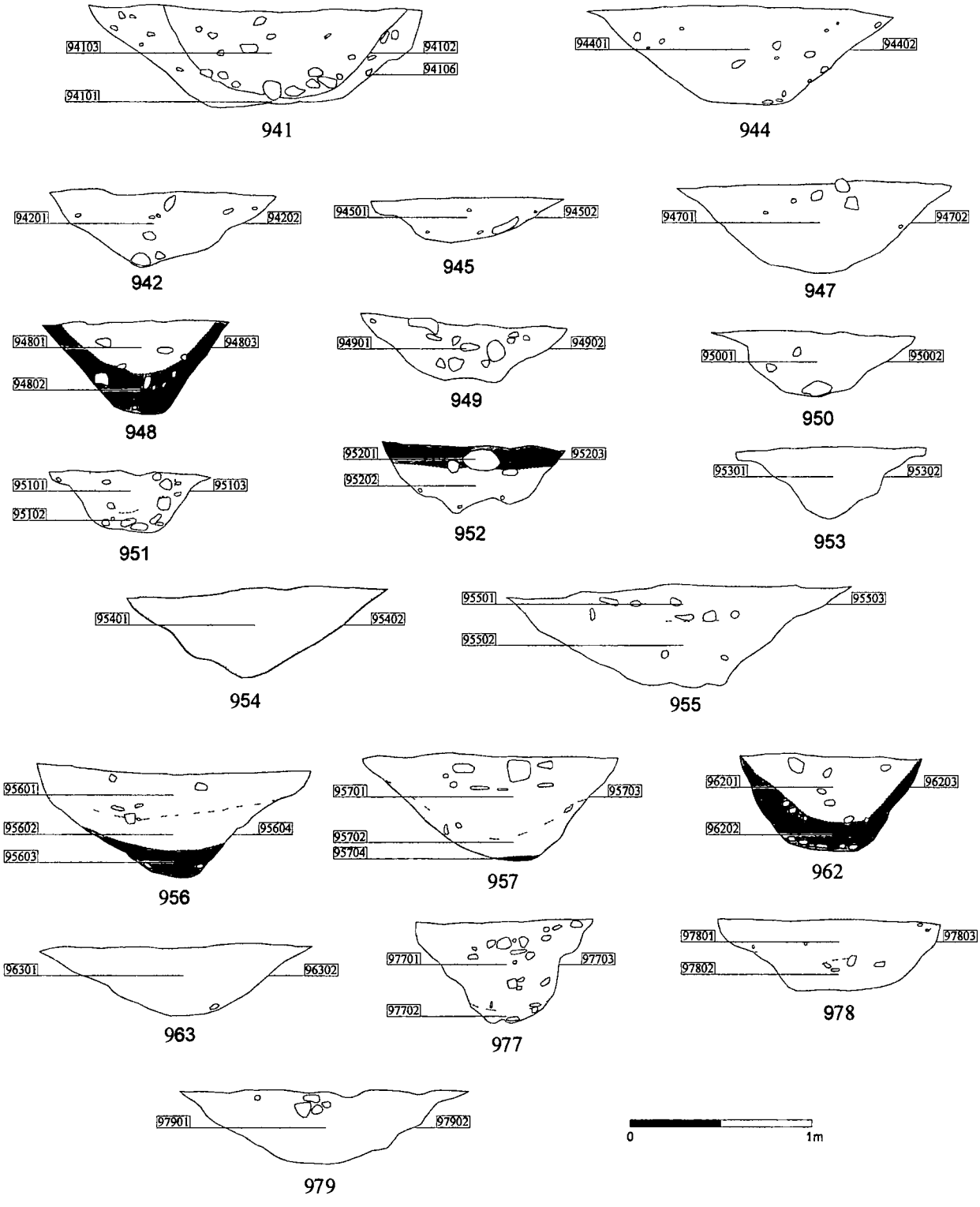


Fig 15 Sections of features 941, 942, 944, 945, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 962, 963, 977, 978 and 979

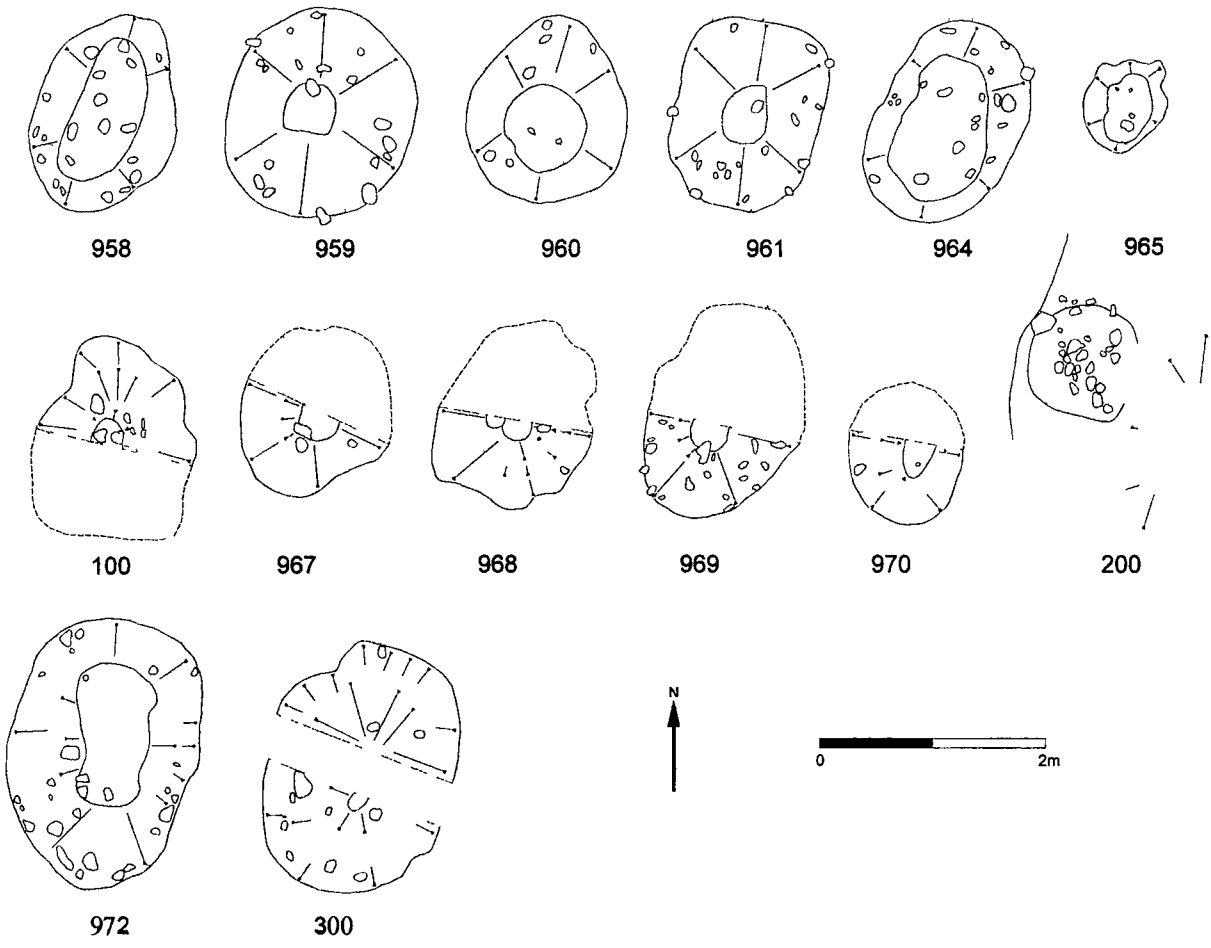


Fig 16 Plans of features 958, 959, 960, 961, 964, 965, 100, 967, 968, 969, 970, 200, 972 and 300

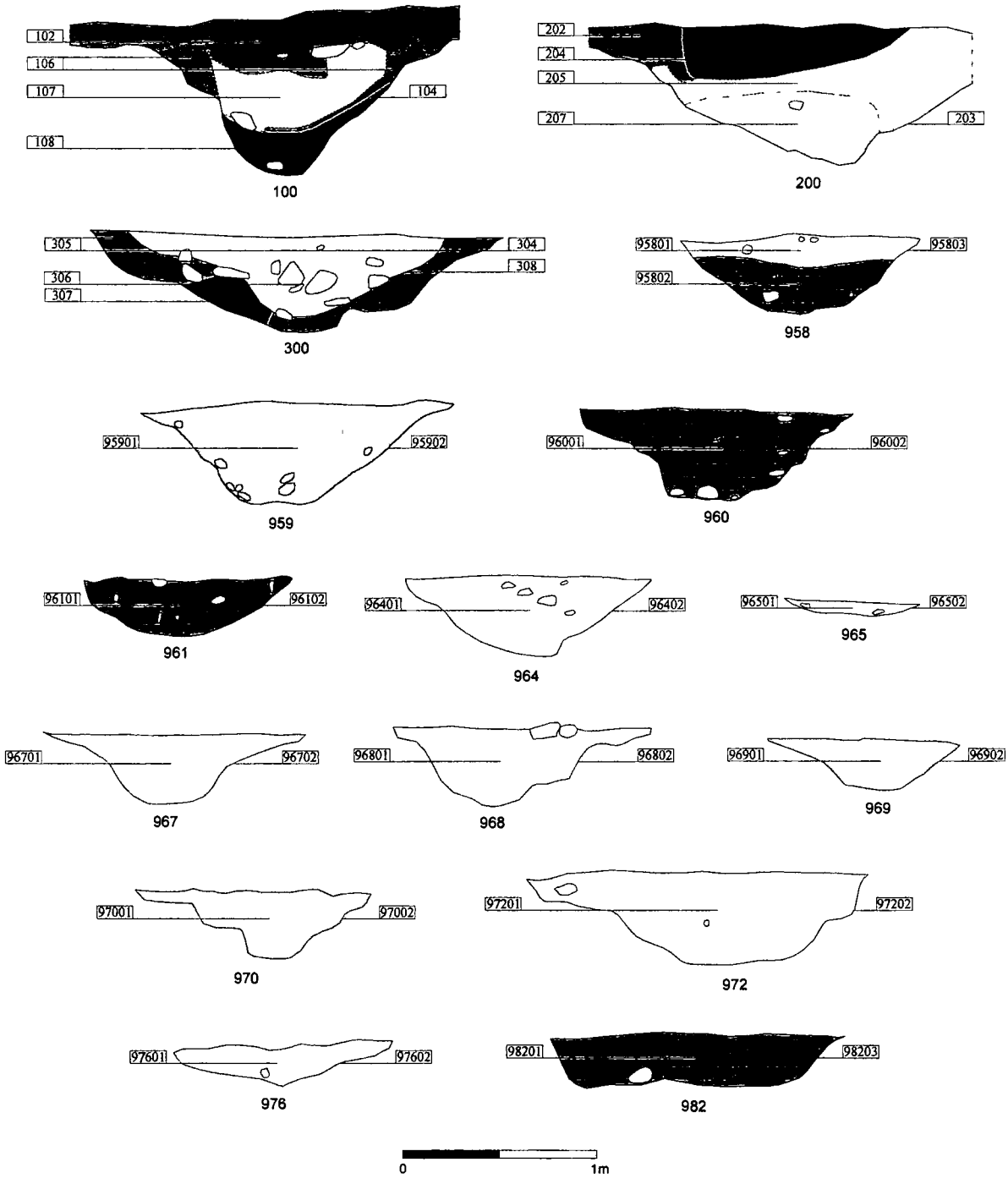


Fig 17 Sections of features 958, 959, 960, 961, 964, 965, 100, 967, 968, 969, 970, 200, 972 and 300

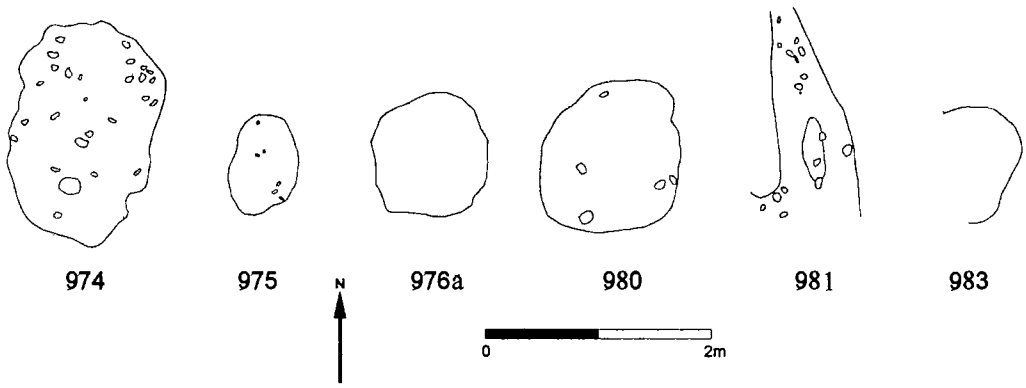


Fig 18 Plans of features 974, 975, 976a, 980, 981 and 982

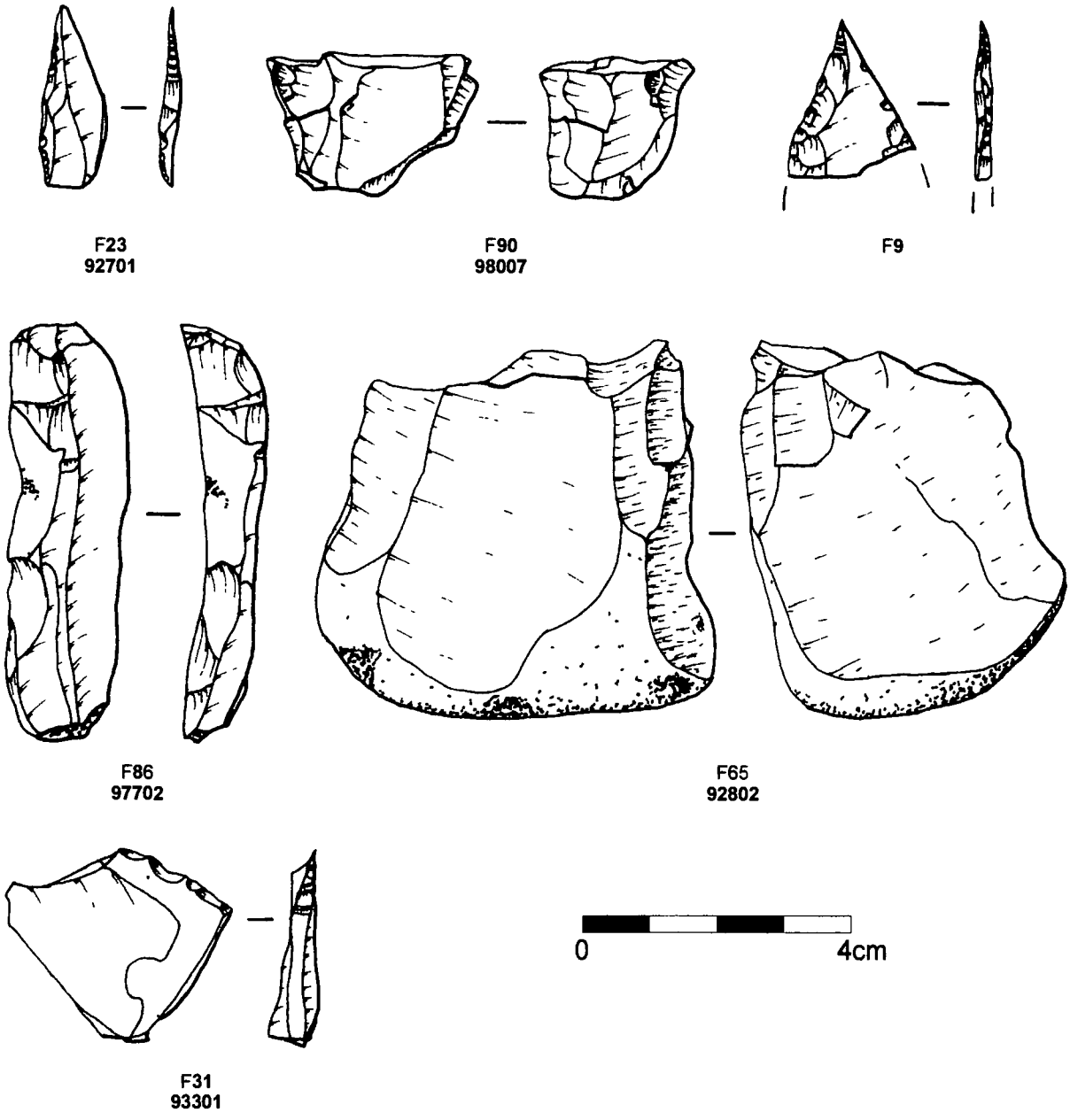


Fig 19 Selected lithics

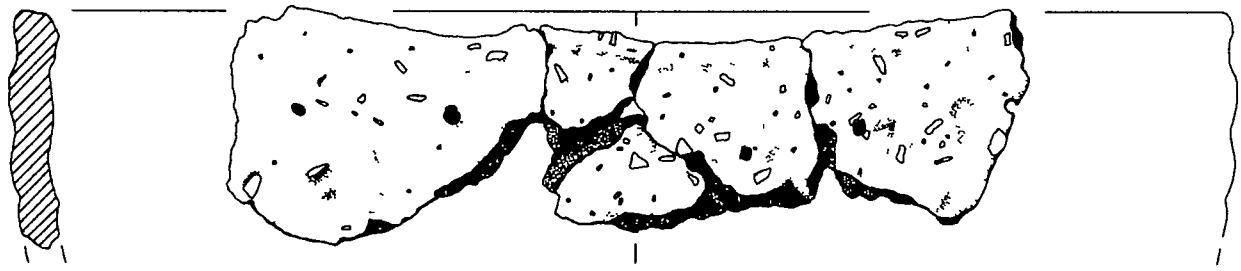


Fig 20 Rim sherds from the Deverel-Rimbury vessel found in feature 918 (1 2)

evidence for posts, although most had steep sides and a flat base Only four of these features showed evidence of recuts (934, 935, 936 and 937, all close to section 4, and amongst the larger pits within this section)

The largest features, such as 822 and 902, may have held posts at least 1 5 metres in diameter, whilst those in section 3 may have been around 1 metre in diameter The majority of the posts, where good evidence for posts is present, may have held posts around 0 5 metres in diameter Gauging their height is more problematic Generally it is thought that for free-standing posts between a quarter and a third of each post would be buried This would make the largest posts stand between two and three metres above ground and the smaller posts around 1 3 metres above ground Given the considerable diameter to each post, however, the posts may have stood considerably taller than this

The reasons for the above differences can perhaps be ascribed to variations in the exact function of the timber uprights, but also to the natural topography and the nearby southern henge Starting at the monument's northern end, the increasingly larger posts, combined with the narrowing of the alignment in Section 1 and associated linear features, may have served as an impressive entrance or facade Along Section 2 the gap in the eastern row corresponds with features that are probably not post-holes but merely shallow pits This would form an effective break in the alignment, forming a clear separation of around 30 metres between the 'facade' to the north and the rest of the alignment to the south, perhaps denoting to those processing along the alignment that they should move to the west at this juncture The ten post holes in Section 3 are very similar to those in Section 5, although it is clear that these did hold posts, a factor which cannot be definitely ascribed to all those pits in Section 5 To their south, and separated by a slightly larger gap of 9 metres, rather than the average 7 metres or so, is a group of ten much larger, more closely spaced posts These characterise Section 4 and stand immediately north of a slight natural ridge of around 2 metres, a feature which would have further emphasised the size of these posts Again there is a slightly larger gap between the southernmost pair of pits in this section and those to the south forming Section 5, and as the alignment travels down the ridge there is a slight shift in direction to the west, and then to the south, before it continues in a straight line across the gentle north-south downward slope beyond

Interpreting the recuts is somewhat problematic Only fifteen pits were definitely recut, and all are situated towards the northern end of the alignment They are all interpreted as the deliberate removal of surviving timber uprights, but as to why only these features were selected for deliberate destruction is unclear One possible interpretation is that the posts had rotted and collapsed in all the other pits that held uprights, with only those features which held very substantial uprights, still having surviving posts

Three radiocarbon dates are available from the monument The date of 3385±38 BP (OxA-11009) was from a small fragment of *Quercus* charcoal in the post 'void' of a large pit (90207) to the north of the double timber avenue It indicates that the primary construction of the monument, or the deliberate extraction of this particular upright, dates to the latter part of the early Bronze Age This is supported by the small pottery assemblage from the site The dates of 2716±37 BP (OxA-11010) and 2761±35 BP (OxA-11033) were from a small fragment of *Corylus* charcoal in the top of a pit's recut fill (92703) It is assumed that the recut was dug to facilitate the removal of the timber post originally inserted into the feature The early first millennium BC date thereby provides a *terminus post quem* for an event which must have occurred some centuries earlier It is likely that the recut was left open to infill naturally

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The significance of the archaeology

The potential significance of double pit alignments has only recently been recognised (Waddington 1997), thanks largely to the increase in aerial photographic coverage — and unfortunately, very few of these monuments have been investigated Notable exceptions outside the Vale of Mowbray include Ogden Down, Dorset (Green 1994), Mdfield North, Northumberland (Harding 1981), and Heslerton, Yorkshire (Powlesland 1986) Yet a total of five such monuments are known from the Ure-Swale river catchment, suggesting they played an important role in the ceremonial life of Neolithic or Bronze Age peoples in at least this part of the British Isles The monument adjacent to the southern Thornborough henge is believed to be the longest known in the British Isles and its excavation represents the single most important contribution to an understanding of this monument category

The excavations add to the impression that the building and use of double pit alignments was a phenomenon of the final Neolithic and early Bronze Age The Thornborough monument, like the smaller alignment at Ogden Down (Green 1994, 222-4), appears to have had a very close association with presumably contemporary burial monuments, raising the possibility that it represents a formal procession-way for both the living and the dead The distinctive feature at the site's northern end — which, interestingly, has been recently paralleled by the discovery of a very similar arrangement immediately to the north of the Central Henge (Biggins unpub 2003, 10-14, figs 13-8) — could have orchestrated the living's experience of the procession One could say the same about the Thornborough monument's exacting use of local topography By erecting the largest posts on the highest parts of the alignment's course, the builders were physically emphasising parts of the monument and its setting It may even be a possibility that the timber avenue's role and symbolism changed along its course, akin perhaps to the narrative of story-telling It also provides information about the monument's end-use It appears likely that the avenue was deliberately destroyed before the posts had rotted in-situ One can speculate whether the deliberate removal of the uprights, or what can perhaps be described as the 'killing' of the monument, was connected to the use of the round barrows

4.3 Recommendations

Whilst the excavations at Thornborough have produced valuable information, there are still notable weaknesses in what we currently know about this monument Perhaps the most important of these are the failure to locate the monument's southern extent and the absence of evidence about the original appearance and function of the slot features at its northern end More intensive geophysical prospection may provide some answers akhough the depth of overburden at the site's southern extent could restrict its success The excavations also highlight the potential importance of the Northern Double Pit Alignment Very little is known about this monument and geophysical prospection here would probably be greatly beneficial This work would undoubtedly be better understood if complemented by a detailed national overview of these sites

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Mr Robert Staveley, the landowner and finder of the 1998 and 1999 excavations, and the hard-working undergraduate students

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Biggins, J A , unpub 2003, *Thornborough Prehistoric project, North Yorkshire Geophysical Survey Report July-August 2003*

Green, M , 1994, Down Farm, *Current Archaeology* 138, 216-25

Harding, A F , 1981, Excavations in the prehistoric ritual complex near Milfield, Northumberland *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 47, 87-135

Harding J *et al*, unpub 1999, *Geophysical Survey at the Thornborough Henge Complex, North Yorkshire, 1994-1996*

Harding, J & Johnson, B , unpub 2003, *The Neolithic and Bronze Age monument complex of Thornborough, North Yorkshire, and its landscape context Desk Top Assessment*

Powlesland, D , 1986, Excavations at Heslerton, North Yorkshire, 1978-82, *Archaeological Journal* 143, 53-173

St Joseph, J K , 1977, Aerial reconnaissance recent results, *Antiquity* 51, 143-45

Tavener N, 1996, Evidence of Neolithic activity near Marton-le-Moor, North Yorkshire, in P Frodsham (eds) Neolithic Studies in No-Man's Land Papers on the Neolithic of Northern England from the Trent to the Tweed *Northern Archaeology* 13/14, 183-8

Waddington, C , 1997, A review of 'pit alignments' and a tentative interpretation of the Milfield complex, *Durham Archaeological Journal* 13, 21-33