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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

OF THE A259 WINCHELSEA BY-PASS, EAST SUSSEX

(Project No. 1992/73)

by

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CONTENTS:

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 South Eastern Archaeological Services of University College London was commissioned by Mr. Philip Masters of Chris Blandford Associates, on behalf of the Department of Transport, to undertake an archaeological assessment of the proposed route of the A259 Winchelsea By-pass, East Sussex.

1.2 The aim of the assessment was to locate in the field any sites/features of archaeological importance which may be affected by the construction of the new by-pass.

1.3 The assessment was to include not only the Preferred By-pass Route, but also other optional routes. These consist of the Preferred Route Western Alignment; the Brede Level LAC route and the Winchelsea Hill LAC route.

1.4 The assessment was undertaken in two parts:

i) a walk-over survey to locate any archaeological earthworks, particularly in areas of pasture.

ii) a fieldwalking survey of all available arable land along the proposed by-pass routes.

This work was undertaken during November 1992.

2. THE WALK-OVER SURVEY

2.1 The walk-over survey consisted of walking the various routes of the proposed by-pass in order to locate any threatened earthworks/features which may be of archaeological importance. Particular attention was paid to areas of pasture where earthworks were expected to be less severely damaged by modern agriculture. Only land farmed by Mr. Martin of White Fox Farm was not inspected due to denial of access in a telephone conversation on 9th November.

2.2 Any earthworks located were sketch plotted onto 1:2500 maps of the area (see Figs. 1-9). A careful watch was also maintained for archaeological material in exposed ditch sections and disturbed ground.

2.3 Most earthworks noted during the survey were the result of land drainage. Although the main drainage system in the area is still open and functioning it appears that some drains and gulleys have been infilled/silted up leaving linear depressions in many places. Most of these have probably been infilled in recent times to create larger fields (some drains marked on modern maps are no longer in existence). For this reason obvious infilled drainage ditches were not sketch-plotted in the survey.

2.4 The only earthwork noted along the Brede Level LAC route was situated on a steep slope in a small pasture field centred at TQ886/169. In appearance the earthwork could either represent a terrace or quarry of some description (Fig.2.B). A little to the N.W. of this feature is a circular pond (Fig.2.A) situated on the floodplain level. During its construction a quantity of Medieval pottery was found along with a few pieces of iron slag (owner Mrs. McLean pers. comm). The pottery is said to have come from a depth of *circa* six feet, although when it was collected the pond's sides had slumped and the exact depth is therefore unsure. The pond quickly filled with water before further examination could be made.

2.5 Members of the Hastings Area Archaeological Research Group (H.A.A.R.G.) subsequently visited the site and collected more pottery from both the pond and the resulting spoilheap. No archaeological features were noted during these investigations. Part of the field around the pond was ploughed as a consequence, but little further pottery was found (Zoe Vahey pers. comm.).

2.6 The H.A.A.R.G. headquarters were visited during this assessment to inspect the pottery found from the pond. In excess of 150 sherds had been found in a variety of fabrics and forms (jugs and cooking pots were present). The sherds appear to range from the 12th to 14th centuries. Many of the sherds are small and abraided. Some, however, are larger with little sign of abrasion, suggesting that this material does not simply represent Medieval manuring on the higher ground to the south. A spring exists in the small wood in the field (see Fig.2) and it is possible a small farmstead existed in this vicinity, from which refuse was deposited downslope on the floodplain. The terrace/quarry type earthwork noted above (Fig.2.B) could be the site of a settlement, but this must remain unascertained at present.

2.7 On the slopes of the higher ground in between Winchelsea and Icklesham are a number of terraces/lynchets which survive as earthworks. One was noted in the orchard at *circa* TQ890/166 (Fig.2.C). Similar examples can be seen on the other side of the valley (close to Wickham Court), and on the western slopes of Winchelsea Hill. The date of their formation is uncertain, although they are likely to be Medieval (a thin spread of Medieval pottery was located in the orchard - see below).

2.8 To the N.W. of Winchelsea, situated on the floodplain, an enclosure was noted on the line of Winchelsea Hill LAC route (Fig.4.D). This earthwork consists of two banks running at roughly 90 degrees to each other (Plate I: large arrow marks the N-S bank, small arrows the E-W bank). The banks, which vary between 9 - 11 metres wide at the base and up to *circa* 50cm. high, appear to form an enclosure incorporating the drainage ditches to the south as the southern barrier. A one metre wide gap was noted between the banks in the N.W. angle, although this may be a later insertion. A possible entrance is situated on the eastern side where the E-W bank stops short of the drainage ditch leaving a wide gap. Within the enclosure a number of linear depressions were noted, although the most apparent feature was an oval mound some 12 x 8 metres by 60cm. high. Although the actual date and function of the enclosure are unknown it is possible it represents an animal enclosure. Without excavation/a detailed cartographic study its exact date and function cannot be ascertained.

2.9 The western slopes of Winchelsea Hill have a number of well preserved earthworks. Although not on the line of any of the proposed routes the extent of activity in the Medieval period in this area is not fully known. The town of Iham was situated in this vicinity, and a number of hollow ways extend down the hillside. A slight hollow way runs directly west towards the Winchelsea Hill LAC route from a large terrace/house platform on the slope (Fig.6.F). A similar situation is found a little further north where a well defined hollow way branches off the main N.W. - S.E. hollow way (Fig.6.G and Plate II). This hollow way (G) again runs westward towards the floodplain and the proposed Winchelsea Hill LAC route, but as it nears the floodplain it disappears (as does the hollow way at F). Whether the lower reaches of these hollow ways have been buried by alluvium, or do not exist, could not be ascertained during the walk-over survey. Likewise, whether these hollow ways simply represent access routes for animals onto the floodplain, or routeways linking up farmsteads, cannot be commented on at present.

2.10 No earthworks were located, with the exception of drainage ditches, along practically the entire route of the by-pass in the floodplain. A pipe laying trench being dug by Southern Water was inspected (Fig.9.H). Beneath *circa* 30cm. of topsoil was in excess of 1.5 metres of clay/silt which gradually became blue grey towards the bottom of the trench. No archaeological material was noted in the spoil from these excavations.

3. THE FIELDWALKING SURVEY: METHODS

3.1 With the exception of land farmed by Mr. Martin of White Fox Farm, who refused access in a telephone conversation on 9th November, practically all the arable land along the proposed routes was subjected to the fieldwalking survey (the exception being two of three lines of transects in an oil seed rape field, farmed by Mr. Hacking of Cadborough Farm; the crop being too dense - Figs. 7 and 8 Transect nos. 612 - 681). All transects which were walked are marked in red numerals (see Figs.2-9); those marked in black were not possible to walk, usually because of pastoral land-use.

3.2 The length of the Preferred Route was divided up into lines of 20m. transects. One line of transects was placed down the approximate centre line of the road, with parallel flanking lines of transects at 20m. either side, thus forming a 20m. grid system along the proposed road. Further transects, again spaced at 20m. intervals, were added to cover wider stretches of road/cuttings. This procedure was carried out for all alternative routes. The only exception for this method was in the orchard (Fig.2. Transects 1 - 120), where the line of the trees dictated the direction of the transects.

3.3 The Preferred Route had each 20m. transect interval independently numbered. Where optional routes cross/come close to the preferred route the numbering system of the latter is extended to cover these areas (see Figs.2 - 9). The optional routes were then numbered separately, using a continuation of the numbering of the proposed route (i.e. starting Transect No. 911 - Preferred Route Western Alignment - Fig.2). Although many fields were not available for fieldwalking all transects were numbered to facilitate any further fieldwalking that may become available in the near future.

3.4 Finds were collected in marked bags for every 20m. before being taken for processing and recording. Fieldwalking record sheets were filled out for every field walked. These recorded the NGR, lighting, date, ground conditions etc. and form part of the Archive.

3.5 After sorting into categories (pottery, tile, bone etc.) the finds were counted, weighed and discarded, with the exception of pottery. All information on discarded finds was recorded on discard sheets which form part of the Archive.

3.6 The pottery was washed and recorded on pottery record forms by dated fabric group, sherd count and weight. Modern sherds (19th - 20th century) were then discarded. Only material pre-dating the 19th century was marked and retained.

3.7 The low densities of Medieval pottery meant the data was not loaded onto a computer for statistical analysis, as to plot this information to the standard deviation from the mean would prove extremely misleading with so little pottery involved.

4. THE FIELDWALKING SURVEY: RESULTS

4.1 The entire length of the proposed by-pass routes which were available for fieldwaking (red numerals Figs.2 - 9) produced a total of 78 sherds of Medieval pottery (summarised on Table 1). The maximum quantity of Medieval pottery from any one transect was 4 sherds (Transects 61, 100 and 113). Most transects which produced pottery of this date only contained one sherd.

4.2 These are obviously very low densities and for this reason they have not been plotted on Figs.2 -9. Practically all of the pottery came from the sandy highground between Icklesham and Winchelsea (Transect numbers 46 - 152). Conditions for fieldwalking in this area were not ideal as Transects 1 - 120 were situated in an orchard, and Transects 128 - 152 in a shallow scratch-ploughed pasture field (Fig.2). Obviously if conditions had been better more pottery would have been found in this area. Nearly all the sherds found are small and abraided. They have a date range of *circa* A.D. 1150 - 1400.

4.3 Not surprisingly the total of nine pieces of prehistoric flintwork all came from this sandy promontory area (Table 2). A single sherd of Romano-British pottery was also found in the area (Fig.2, Transect 104).

4.4 The entire floodplain area which was subjected to the fieldwalking survey, despite good visibility on the ground, produced only three sherds of Medieval pottery (Fig.5 Transects 566; Fig.9, Transects 797 and 826). This area did however produce a fairly regular spread of late 19th and 20th century earthenware and china. It is probable that any Medieval levels in the Brede Valley are well below the plough-line.

4.5 Consultation with H.A.A.R.G. members revealed that no previous finds of archaeological interest had been made by the group in the floodplain area, although members had found a sparse scatter of Medieval and later pottery, with some bloomery slag, on the high ground of White Fox Farm *circa* TQ889/170. Further

sherds of Medieval pottery had been found by members in the same field as Transects 121-157 (Fig.2): most of this pottery dated to the 13th and 14th centuries (Zoe Vahey pers. comm.).

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Nearly all of the archaeological material found during the assessment was located on the highground between Icklesham and Winchelsea. This area would obviously be more desirable for occupation than the Brede Valley due to the considerations of flooding. The presence of terraces/lynchets on the slopes in this area, as well as abraided Medieval pottery, shows the area to have been farmed from at least this period. Unfortunately a large percentage of this highground threatened by the proposed by-pass was not available for investigation due to the denial of access (see above). This land, in the vicinity of White Fox Farm, is one of the most likely areas for settlement along the entire route of the by-pass (N.B. much of this area, is however, pasture).

5.2 The only probable settlement site located during the assessment is in the vicinity of TQ886/169 (Fig.2.A see 2.3 above). However, without trial excavation and/or geophysical survey, the nature, extent and depth of this possible site cannot be ascertained.

5.3 The earthworks noted on the western slopes of Winchelsea Hill, which once formed part of the town of Iham, suggest the possibility that archaeological material could be present in the vicinity of the Winchelsea Hill LAC route. The two hollow ways noted in the field (Fig.6. F and G) appear to run straight into the floodplain. The presence of archaeological material at this point on the by-pass route could only be proved by trial excavation/geophysical survey. It is likely that any archaeological deposits in this vicinity could be deeply buried.

5.4 The earthwork enclosure noted to the N.W. of Winchelsea (Fig.4.D: see above 2.7) is of unknown date and function. If the Winchelsea Hill LAC route option is chosen this earthwork will be destroyed. If cartographic/historical investigation cannot date this enclosure it should be investigated by trial excavations/or geophysical survey.

5.5 The Brede Valley floodplain produced virtually no finds of archaeological interest despite field conditions being good for artifact recovery. This may simply be due either to no archaeological settlement being located on the floodplain, or any archaeological deposits being deeply buried. The depth of flood deposits in the Brede Valley is such that trial excavations would probably have problems with trench stability and flooding.

5.6 The deep stratigraphy in the Brede Valley does however offer an excellent opportunity to study the palaeoenviroment of the area by taking deep core samples through the deposits Such work would greatly help the study of the complex sequence of flooding and reclamation events which occurred in the area.

5.7 The drainage ditches in the area are historic landscape features in their own right, and appear not to have been greatly altered in the last 200 years. Although these ditches may date back much earlier to the original innings of the area, it is unlikely that any excavation would shed light on their construction date as they have been repeatedly dredged up to the present day (with the dredgings spread on the adjacent fields). No reliable datable artifacts are therefore likely to be found in association with these ditches. A detailed cartographic and historical study would yield more information on the drainage pattern throughout time.

5.8 It is impossible at present to accurately assess the extent of further trial investigations needed along the by-pass route. Once the results of the geophysical survey (and perhaps also palaeoenvironmental bore hole analysis) are available it may be easier to define the areas of archaeological interest, and thus gain some idea of where, and to what degree, further work is needed.

TABLE 1

Transect No.	No. of Medieval Sherds	Transect No.	No. of Medieval Sherds
46	1	110	3
52	1	111	1
57	1	113	4
60	2	115	2
61	4	116	1
63	2	117	2
69	3	118	1
71	1	120	1
72	3	128	1
73	1	130	1
76	2	131	1
81	1	133	1
82	2	134	2
84	3	135	1
85	1	143	2
90	1	146	3
97	2	147	1
99	3	149	1
100	4	152	1
101	1	566	1
103	1	797	1
105	2	826	1
106	1		
109	2		

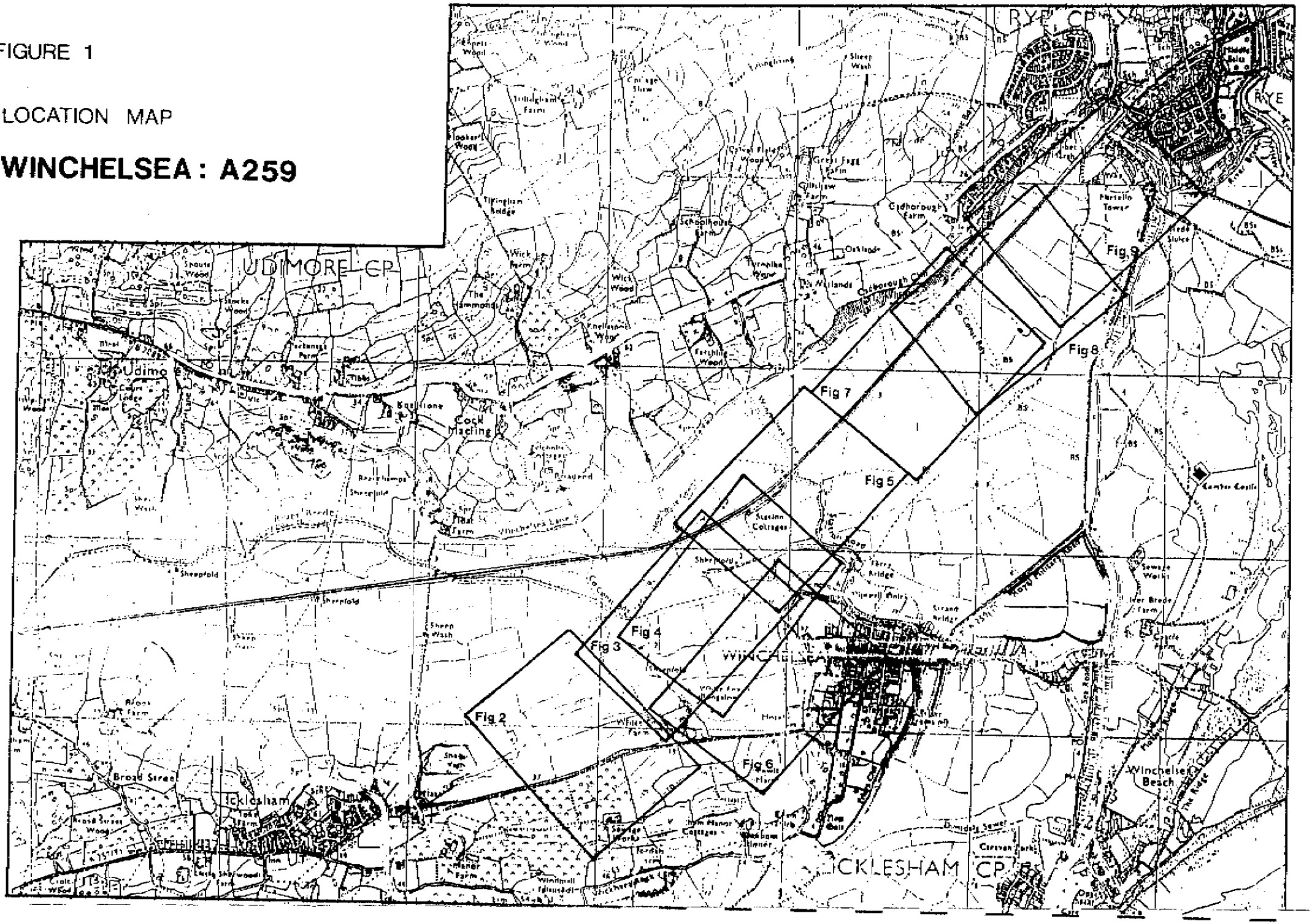
TABLE 2

Transect No.	No. of flint flakes
43	1
63	1
84	1
101	1
104	2
105	1
110	1
142	1

FIGURE 1

LOCATION MAP

WINCHELSEA : A259



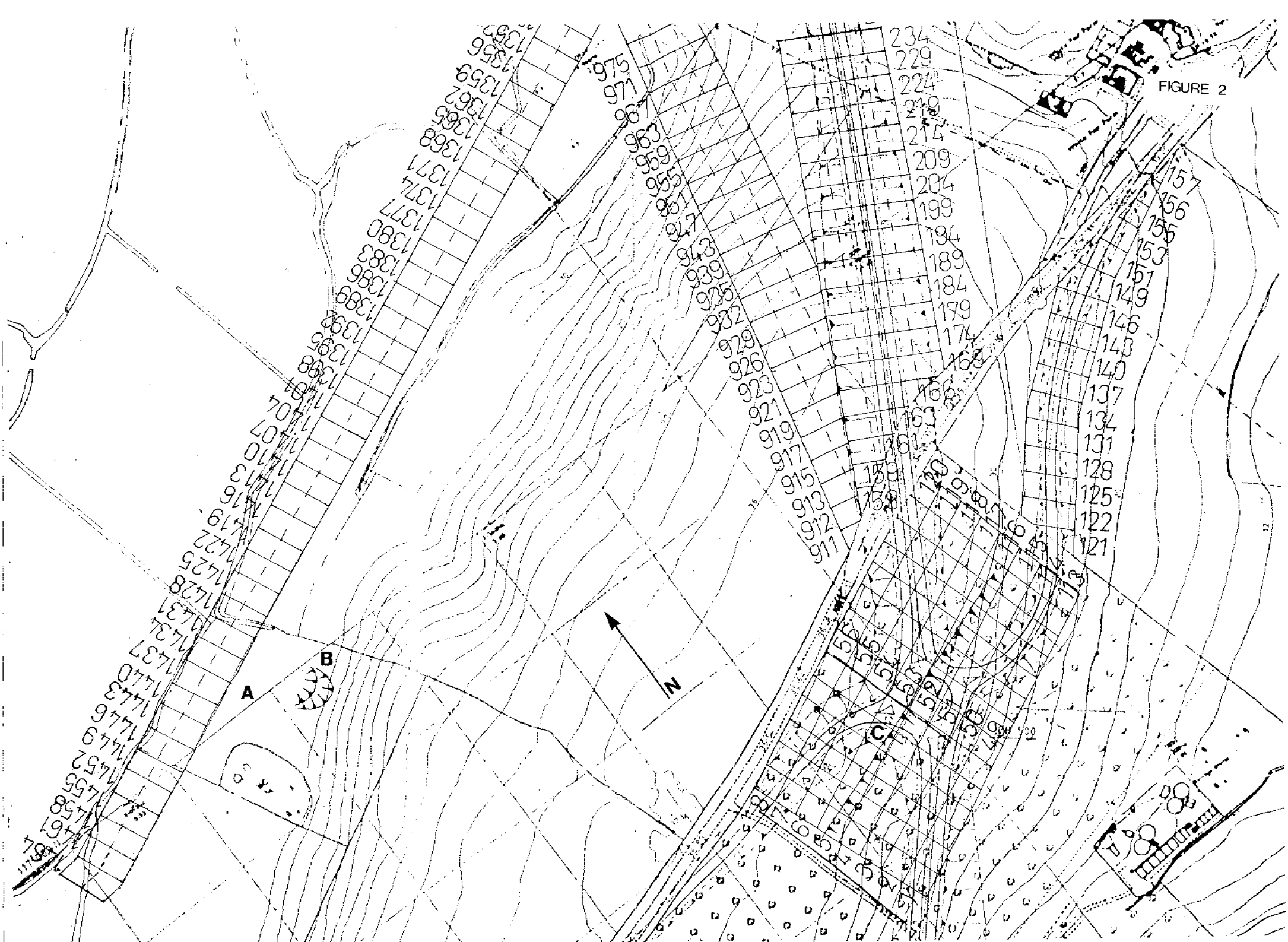
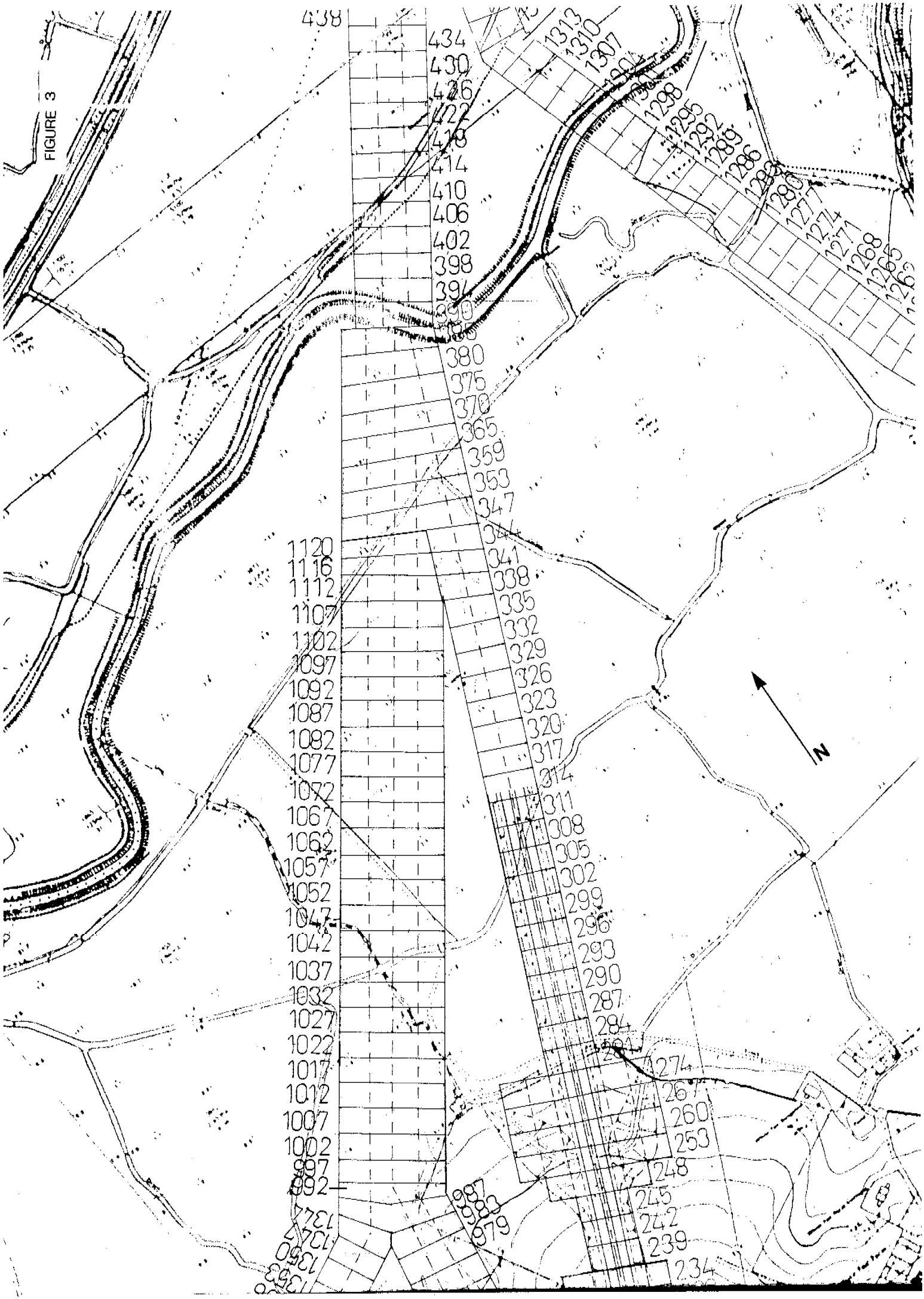


FIGURE 2
A
B
C
N

FIGURE 3


438
434
430
426
422
418
414
410
406
402
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344
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1072
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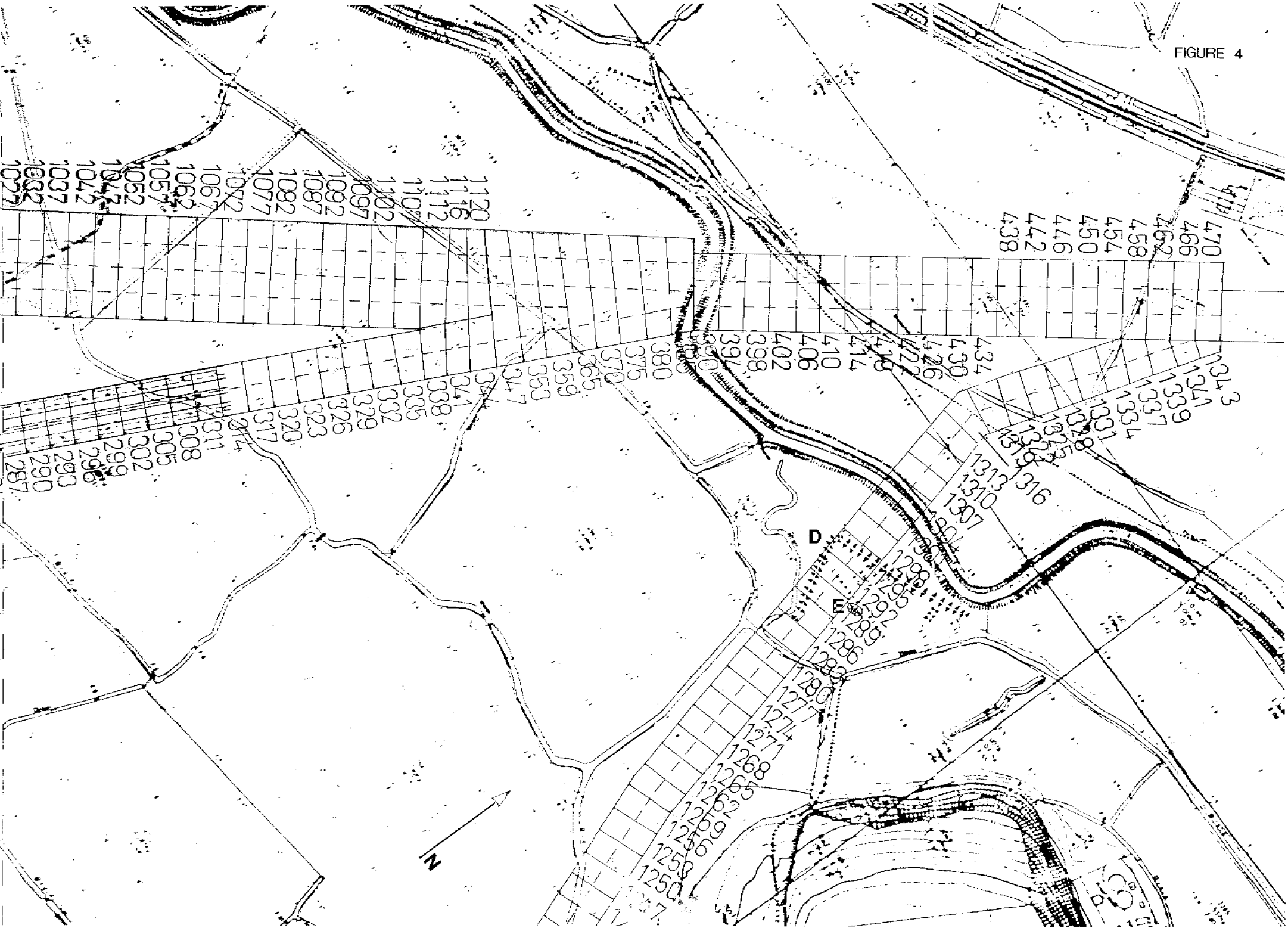
1062
1057
1052
1047
1042
1037
1032
1027
1022
1017
1012
1007
1002
997
992
987
983
979
1274
267
260
253
248
245
242
239
234
N

FIGURE 4



Farm access
474
477
480
483
486
489
492
495
498
501
504
507
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513
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531
534
537
540
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573
576
579
582
585
588
N
Drainage ditch Diverted
Drainage ditch Diverted
Level Crossing Retained
HIGH PRESSURE GAS PIPELINE

FIGURE 5

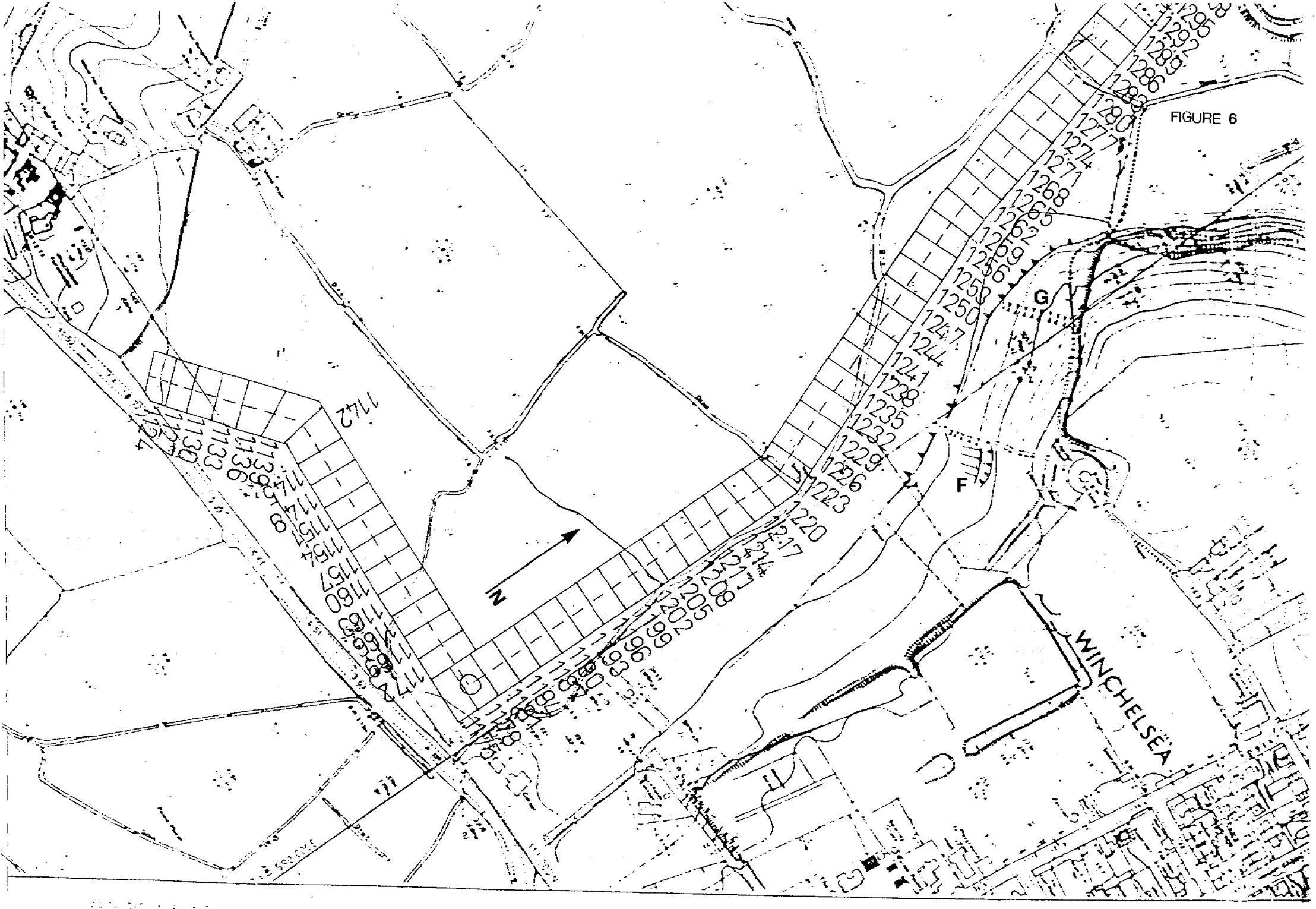
FIGURE 6
G
F
N
WINCHELSEA

N
CH 3500
CH 3600
CH 3700
CH 3800
591
594
597
600
603
606
609
612
615
618
621
624
627
630
633
636
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642
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668
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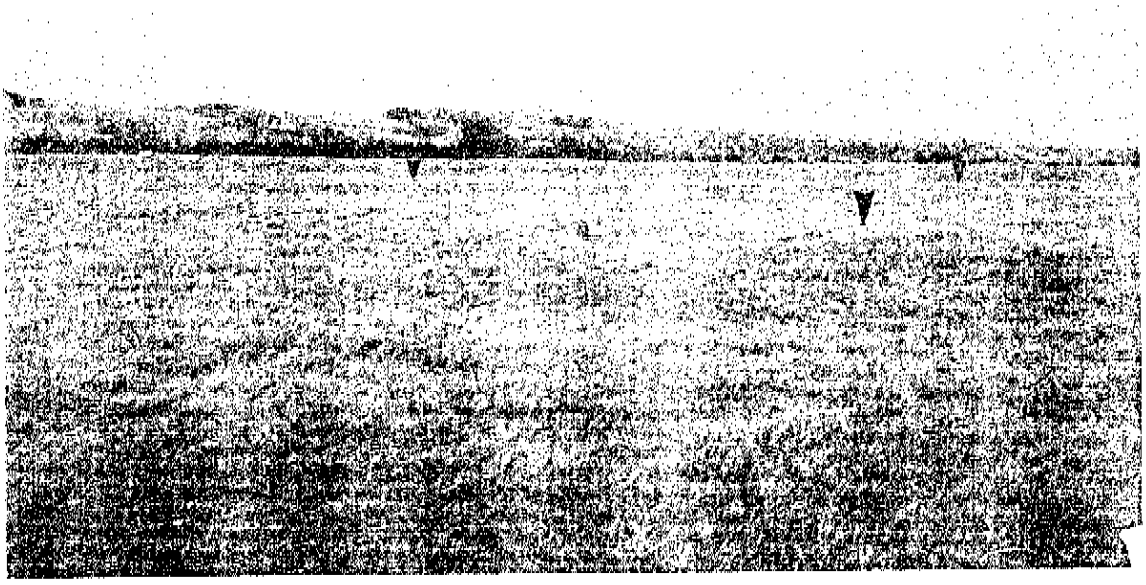
647
644
641
638
635
632
629
626
623
620
617
614

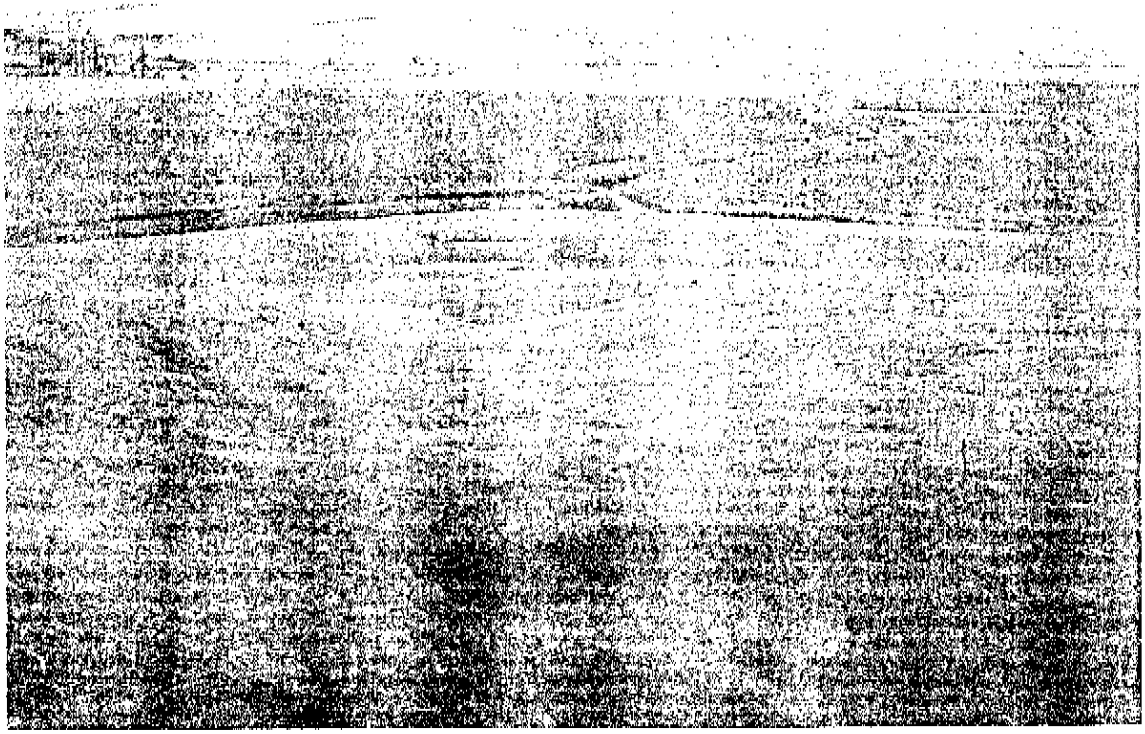
FIGURE 7

FIGURE 8

N
High Pressure Gas Pipeline
Drainage ditch Diverted
EP16(Rye) Diverted
Drainage Diverted
EP16(Rye)
EP16(Bat)

FIGURE 9





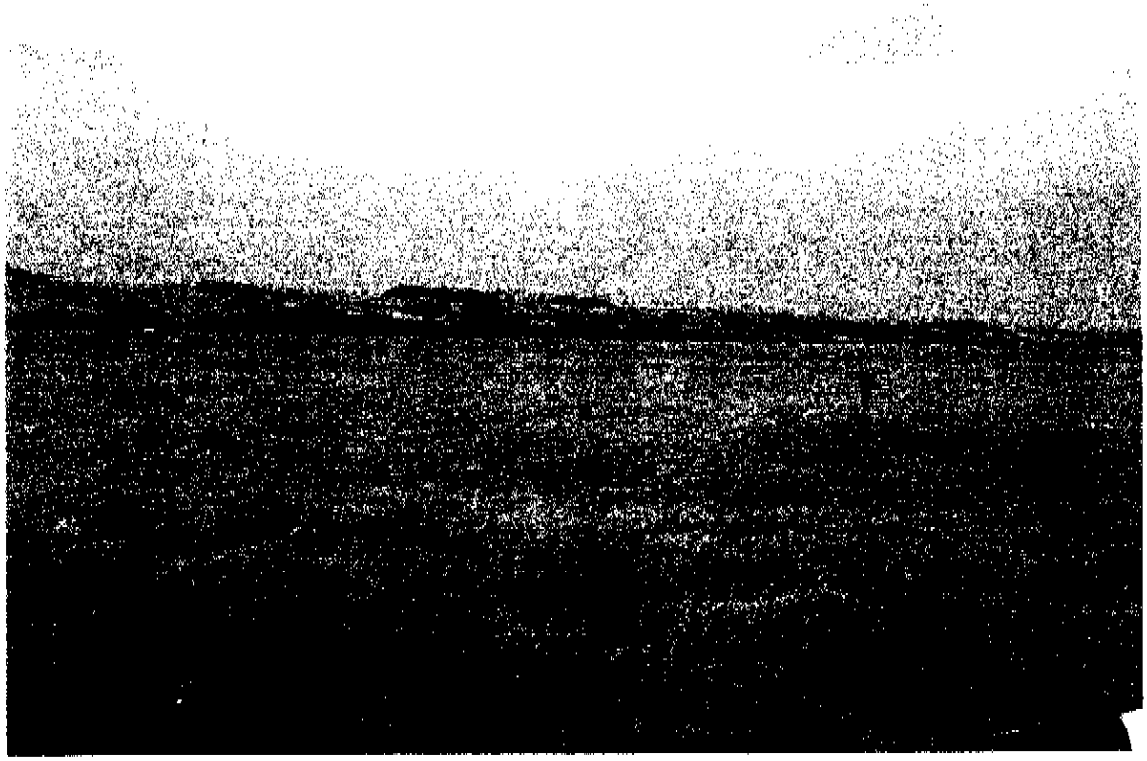


PLATE I

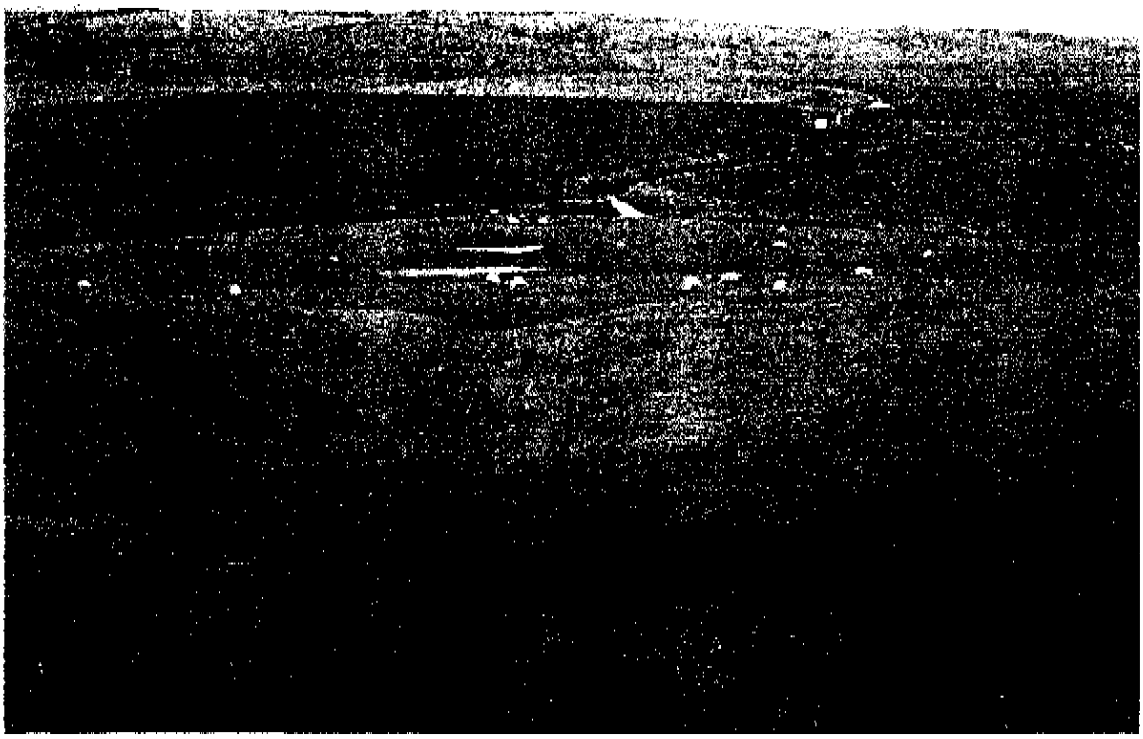


PLATE II