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**A303 SPARKFORD TO ILCHESTER ROAD IMPROVEMENT**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

**W530.03**

May 1993

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# **A303 - SPARKFORD TO ILCHESTER ROAD IMPROVEMENT : ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION STAGE 2**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 The Project**

The field evaluation reported on within this document represents a further stage in the assessment of the archaeological implications of the proposed upgrading of the A303 trunk road between the Sparkford and Ilchester by-passes.

Previous field evaluation (WA Report No. W530.02) led to the discovery of significant archaeological deposits of Early Iron Age and Romano-British date on the north side of the present A303 road to the west of Camel Hill Farm (Fig.1, Area B; ST 5845 25550). This report deals with the results of further limited ground intervention techniques in an area on the southern side of the present road (Fig.1, Area E) in order to define the southern extent of these archaeological deposits.

### **1.2 Geology and Topography**

The area investigated lies on the southern side of a pronounced east-west aligned ridge of Middle Lias limestone which rises to a maximum height of 80 m OD. All the fields were under pasture at the time of the survey.

## **2. FIELDWORK**

### **2.1 Evaluation Methodology**

In general the evaluation methodology followed that described for the earlier field investigations along the proposed route for the upgraded A303 trunk road (WA Report No. 530.02).

T-shaped trenches were located randomly across the area to be investigated (Fig.1, Area E), with the east-west arm, 25 m long, aligned parallel to the present road. The north-south arm extended for a distance of at least 10 m downslope and could be extended to establish the southern limits of any archaeological deposits encountered. Trenching was undertaken by machine, under constant archaeological supervision, using a toothless grading bucket, although the very stoney deposits encountered in two trenches (603 and 604) necessitated the use of a toothed bucket in these trenches. Machining was halted when natural or archaeological deposits were encountered and where necessary the trenches were then cleaned by hand to reveal the archaeological deposits. Small sections (approximately 0.5 m wide) were excavated through the archaeological features encountered to establish their nature and date.

Heights have been calculated relative to ordnance datum using spot-heights along the A303, to the east of Blue Haze on Camel Hill (height 65.9 m; ST 5828 2543 ) and at the

entrance to Camel Hill Farm (height 70.5 m; ST 5858 2549) as the benchmark immediately east of Blue Haze on Camel Hill could not be located.

### **3. FIELDWORK RESULTS**

Eight trenches, totaling 259.5 m<sup>2</sup> were excavated across the three adjacent fields comprising Area E (Fig.1). Full details of all trenches excavated and the deposits encountered can be found in Appendix 1. A summary of the results will be presented here.

#### **3.1 Trench 600**

No deposits or objects of archaeological origin were encountered.

#### **3.2 Trench 601**

No deposits or objects of archaeological origin were encountered.

#### **3.3 Trench 602 (Fig.2)**

A single linear feature, 0.40 - 0.50 m wide, aligned approximately north-east to south-west and cut into the natural bedrock limestone, was located 6m from the northern end of this trench. Fragments of animal bone and sherds of shell-tempered pottery directly comparable with that of Early Iron Age date recovered on the north side of the A303 (WA Report No. W530.02, section 4.4) were recovered from the surface of this feature. However, the farmer (Mr Hewlett, pers. comm.) had pointed out the possibility of an electricity cable trench in this area, excavated during the early 1940's by Italian prisoners of war who had also found human remains, presumed to be of ancient date, during these trenching operations. Consequently, a short section (approximately 0.50 m long) was excavated by hand in order to investigate the nature and date of this feature. It was found to be approximately 0.60 m deep with steep, almost vertical sides and a flattish but irregular base. Further sherds of Early Iron Age pottery and animal bone were found but a cable was not located. This feature is therefore likely to be of Early Iron Age date, possibly representing a pallsade or boundary across the hillside, and to be a continuation of the activity recorded on the north side of the present A303 in this area. The line of this feature was followed downslope for a total length of 7 m and was found to terminate in a clear butt end. No continuation of the line of this feature occurred in the two trenches (605 and 606) that were excavated further south, and thus the butt end of the feature would appear to represent a true end to, rather than one side of an opening across the line of, this feature. However, the possibility that the butt end represents one side of an opening at right-angles to the line of the feature cannot be ruled out.

#### **3.4 Trench 603 (Fig. 2)**

A layer of random, disarticulated limestone rubble was located above the natural limestone bedrock along the entire east-west arm and extended approximately 2.5 m southwards into the north-south arm of the trench. To the south of this was an irregularly-shaped deposit containing small fragments of 18th - 19th century pottery, glass and ceramic building material. A small section of this deposit was excavated by

hand to an arbitrary depth of 0.6 m. The bottom was not encountered but it seems likely that it fills a number of conjoining rectilinear holes with steep, almost vertical sides cut into natural limestone bedrock. It is likely that this feature represents an infilled stone quarry, probably of post-medieval or modern date, with debris from these workings or leveling material spread out to the north.

### **3.5 Trench 604**

The field in which this trench was located had been a stone quarry within living memory (Mr. Hewlett, pers. comm.). A layer of limestone fragments, many burned, from 0.05 m deep in the east to 0.2 m in the west, was located immediately beneath the topsoil and overlying a buried subsoil layer. Fragments of 20th century pottery were found, although not collected, in the buried subsoil. It is likely that the layer of limestone fragments represents levelling material spread over the area within the last 50 years.

### **3.6 Trench 605**

Excavated to pursue line of the feature recorded in Trench 602. No archaeological deposits were encountered.

### **3.7 Trench 606**

Excavated to pursue line of the feature recorded in Trench 602. No archaeological deposits were encountered.

### **3.8 Trench 607 (Fig.2)**

15 m from the eastern end of this trench, a terrace, with a maximum width of 6 m and cut to a depth of 0.35 m through the natural limestone bedrock, was encountered. A narrow section (0.5 m wide) excavated by hand through this feature indicates that its eastern edge is almost vertical but it becomes shallower to the west finally disappearing with the downhill slope. The line of this feature was followed for approximately 50 m downslope from which point a visible break in the slope of the field indicates that it continues southwards for a further 50 m before turning at right-angles to the east and running for approximately 90 m to meet up with the existing field boundary. It is likely then that this feature represents an old field boundary, presumably removed since the introduction of modern farming methods increasing field sizes over the last 30 years.

## **4. FINDS**

Very small quantities of artefacts were recovered. A total of 32 sherds of Early Iron Age shell-tempered pottery comparable with that found on the north side of the present A303 (WA Report No. W530.02, section 4.4), together with 17 fragments of animal bone and one piece of flint were found in the linear feature in Trench 602. Eight pieces of 18th - 19th century red earthenware pottery, one piece of bottle glass and a piece of ceramic building material were recovered from the quarry feature in Trench 603.

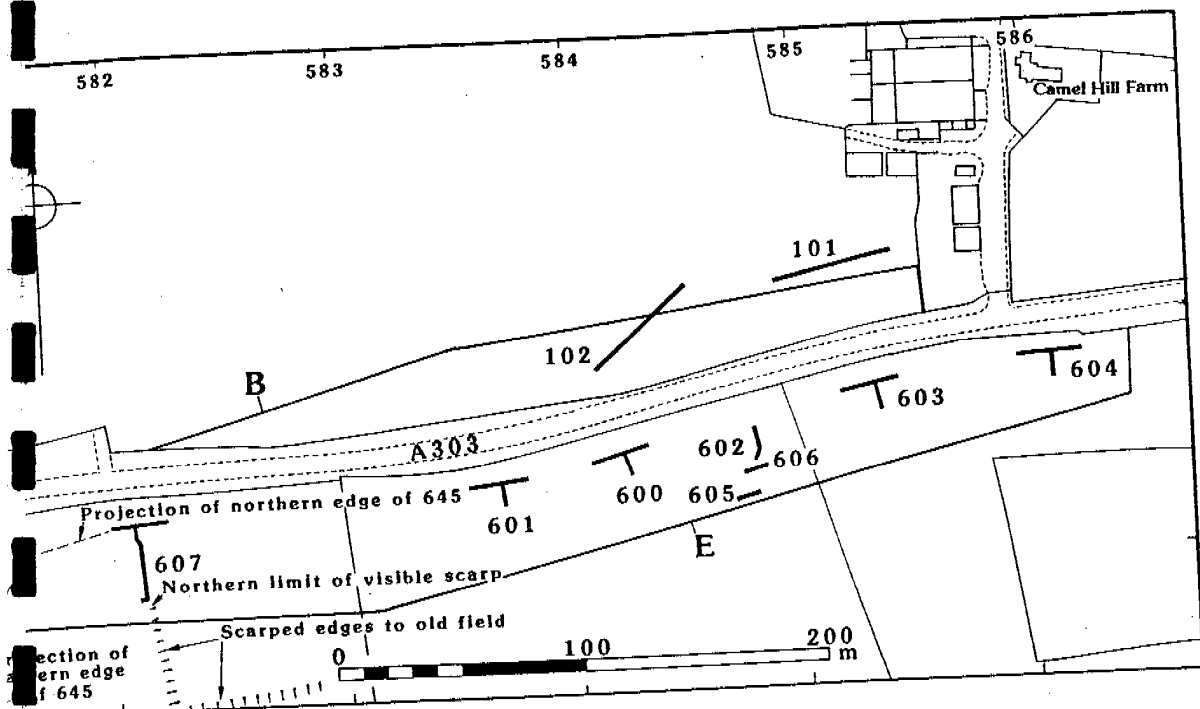
## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The evaluation of Area E has produced little evidence for activity of archaeological interest.

Quarrying has severely affected the potential for the preservation of archaeological deposits in the area of Trenches 603 and 604 immediately opposite the entrance to Camel Hill Farm, while no archaeological deposits were encountered in Trenches 600 and 601. The field boundary located in Trench 607 is probably of medieval or later date and removed in recent years.

Only in the area of Trench 602 is there any sign of the Early Iron Age activity noted on Camel Hill (WA Report No. W530.02, section 3.2.2). The low density of features and absence of scattered finds of this date in the area suggests a tailing off of activity on the south side of the present A303 road with the main center of occupation lying on the north side of the road.

No finds or deposits of Romano-British date were encountered in Area E, indicating that the substantial settlement located on the north side of the road is unlikely to extend across the line of the present road. However, as stated in the previous report (WA Report No. W530.02) the cremation burial found on the north side of the road, is likely to have formed part of a wider cemetery and the possibility that the human burials rumoured to have been found in the vicinity of Trench 602 were of Romano-British date and also formed part of this cemetery cannot be ruled out.



Location of Area E Trenches 600-606

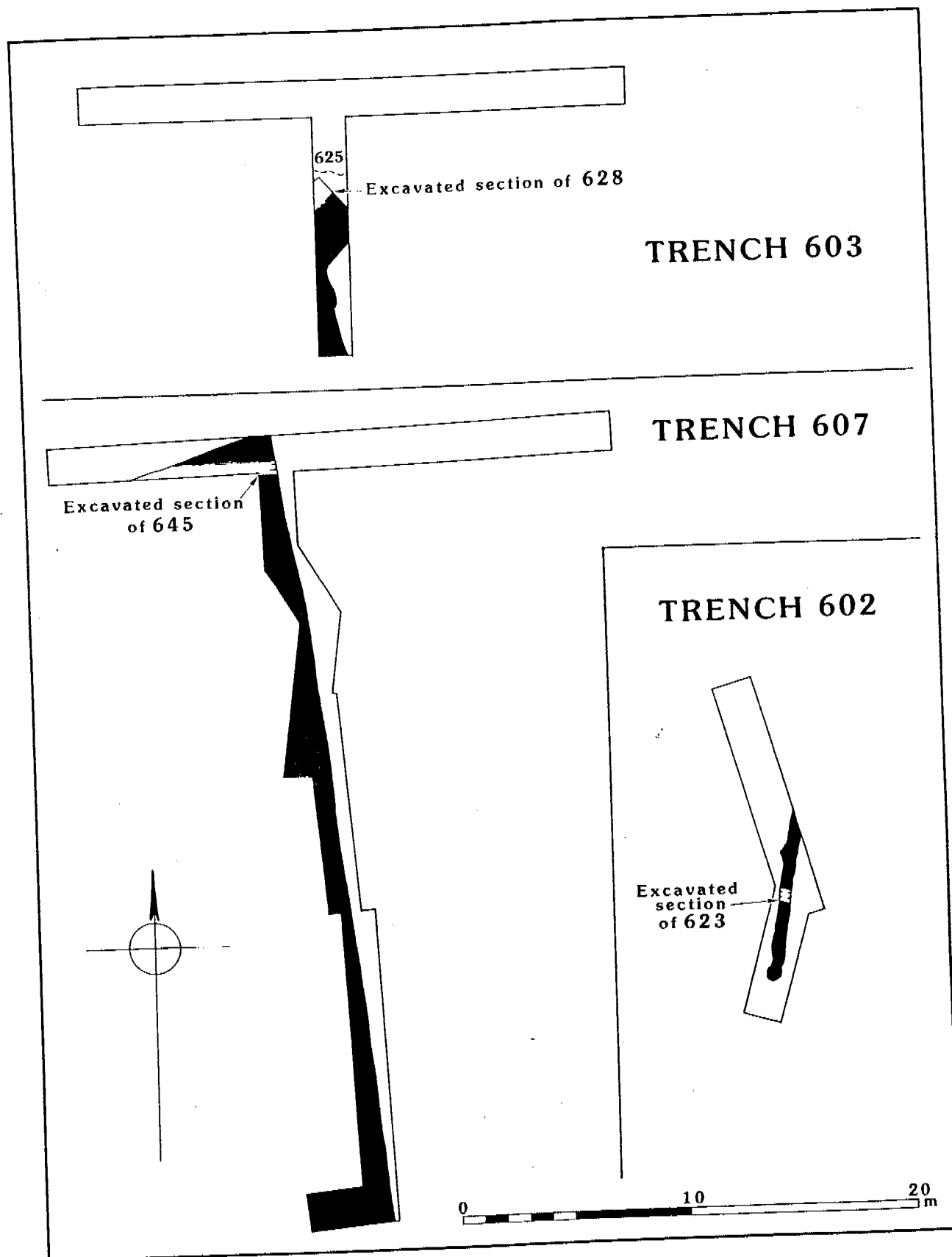


Fig. 2: Plan of features in Trenches 602, 603 and 607



# AREA 'E'

<b>Trench 600.</b> Ground level: 69.94 m OD (E); 68.54 m OD (S); 69.46 m OD (W); T-shaped 25 m and 10 m long, 1.5 m wide; maximum depth 0.50 m.		
610	0-0.17 m	Topsoil, brown clayey loam, occasional small limestone fragments.
611	0.17-0.27 m	Subsoil, yellowish brown, fine compact clayey loam, high proportion of white limestone flecks as well as frequent angular weathered limestone fragments up to 0.10 m across. Base very irregular where it overlies 612.
612	0.27-0.37 m	Natural limestone bedrock, a single strata forming an articulated pavement of angular blocks up to 0.25 m across and 0.10 m deep. Surface uneven - 611 penetrates the cracks and fissures. In the western part of the trench it overlies 613.
613	0.37- 0.50 m	Pale brown clayey silt/loam forming an irregular band across western part of trench, extends eastwards beneath 612 and fades out to the west above 614.
614	0.50 m+	Natural limestone bedrock - articulated pavement of angular blocks of a similar size to those of 612.

<b>Trench 601.</b> Ground level: 68.90 m OD (E); 67.06 m OD (S); 68.25 m OD (W); T-shaped 25 m and 10 m long, 1.5 m wide; maximum depth 0.35 m		
615	0-0.20 m	Topsoil, brown clayey loam, occasional flecks of limestone and small limestone fragments up to 0.10 m across. Deepest along northern edge of trench close to the hedge.
616	0.20-0.30 m	Subsoil, yellowish-brown fine clayey loam, characterised by up to 40% of finely broken-up weathered limestone fragments. Forms general layer across the trench overlying and filling shallow, linear hollows (c. 0.35 m wide and up to 0.08 m deep) in the underlying limestone bedrock (617). These linear hollows are probably comparatively recent ploughmarks roughly following the contours of the slope and aligned approximately E-W at a slight angle to the trench.
617	0.30 m+	Natural limestone bedrock - surface irregular and scarred by the possible ploughmarks but generally slopes down to the SW. Possibly a very slight negative lynchet parallel to the edge of the present A303 road at this point.

<b>Trench 602.</b> Ground level: 69.81 m OD (N); 68.95 m OD (SW); 17m long, 1.5m wide; maximum depth 0.25 m		
618	0-0.10 m	Topsoil, brown clayey loam, with occasional small limestone fragments.
619	0.10-0.15 m	Subsoil, yellowish-brown fine clayey loam with up to 30% weathered limestone fragments, 0.01- 0.10 m across. Forms a very thin band above the limestone bedrock 620.
620	0.15 m+	Natural limestone bedrock, horizontally-bedded, well-articulated angular slabs. Cut by a linear feature (623) across the southern end of the trench.
621	0.15- 0.35 m	Upper filling of 623. Dark grey clayey loam with up to 75% angular limestone rubble (up to 0.25 m across). Contains shell-tempered Early Iron Age pottery and animal bone fragments.

622	0.35- 0.60 m	Lower filling of 623. Yellowish-brown clayey loam with large, randomly-angled, angular limestone blocks up to 0.25 m across.
623		Linear feature. Steep, almost vertically-sided with a flattish but irregular base. 0.60 m deep and 0.40-0.50 m wide. Aligned approximately NE-SW. Followed for a distance of 7m before terminating in a clear butt end. ? pallisade/boundary trench across the hillside. Line of this feature not continued in the two trenches (605 and 606) excavated further south.

**Trench 603.** Ground level: 69.22 m OD (E); 68.64 m OD (S); 69.75 m OD (W); T-shaped 25 m and 10 m long, 1.5 m wide; maximum depth 0.60 m

624	0-0.20 m	Topsoil, brown clay loam, with scatter of small limestone fragments. Overlies 625 with an uneven profile.
625	0.20-0.65 m	Subsoil, yellowish-brown fine clayey loam with many fragments of limestone and patches of decayed white limestone. Up to 75% of this deposit is composed of angular, weathered limestone rubble, up to 0.35 m across. Rubble is randomly-organised and disarticulated. Extends as a consistent band across the whole of the E-W arm of the trench and continues southwards for c. 2.5 m into the N-S arm; beyond this point it is possibly cut-away. Overlies natural limestone bedrock (626).
626	0.65 m+	Natural limestone bedrock. A laminated pavement with strata of fine, off-white silt filling the fissures in the rock. Surface solid but uneven. Extends over whole trench with horizontal surface both E-W and N-S. Cut by 628.
627	0.50 m+	Fill of 628. Located in an irregular, angular area in the western side of the N-S arm of the trench. Yellowish-brown clayey loam with up to 40% finely broken, angular limestone rubble (0.05-0.30 m across). Post-medieval (18th-19th century) pottery, glass and ceramic building material fragments. Excavated to an arbitrary depth of 0.50 m - bottom of deposit not encountered.
628		Vertically-sided feature, irregular and angular in plan. Excavated to arbitrary depth of 0.50 m - base not encountered. Cut through the natural limestone bedrock (626) and filled with 627. Probably a number of conjoining, rectilinear holes - ? quarry feature. Relationship to 625 is unclear - 625 lies to the north of 628 and cannot be said to be cut by 628 although 625 does not seal the filling (627) of feature 628 either.

**Trench 604.** Ground level: 70.55 m OD (E); 70.12 m OD (S); 69.92 m OD (W); T-shaped 25 m and 10 m long, 1.5 m wide; maximum depth 0.80 m

629	0-0.10 m	Topsoil, dark brown clayey loam, very occasional small limestone fragments. Only 0.01-0.05 m deep at eastern end of trench; depth increases to the west.
630	0.10-0.30 m	Dark reddish-brown clayey loam with many charcoal and ash flecks filling spaces between stone fragments. Layer composed almost entirely of angular, weathered limestone fragments, many of which are burned. Average depth of layer is 0.20 m but at extreme eastern end of trench this layer is only 0.05 m thick. Quarry dump/levelling deposit.

631	0.30-0.60 m	Buried subsoil. Dark yellowish-brown clayey loam. Very compact, with small (up to 0.07 m across) angular limestone fragments and occasional flecks of charcoal. 20th century pottery noted but not collected. Depth of deposit increases according to the slope of the natural bedrock (632) which it overlies - 0.05 m at east of trench, 0.20 m in the N-S arm of trench, only reaches full depth of 0.30 m in west of trench.
632	0.60-0.80 m	Natural limestone bedrock. Articulated "pavement" but surface laminated and easily dislodged. Slopes down from E to W and from N to S. For a distance of c. 8 m in the E-W arm, immediately west of the N-S branch, the machine broke through this layer indicating that its depth is 0.20 m and that it overlies 633.
633	0.80 m+	Mid brownish-yellow, slightly mottled clayey loam with many flat fragments of limestone up to 0.10 m across. Natural deposit.

**Trench 605.** Ground level: 66.96 m OD (W); 10 m long, 1.5 m wide; maximum depth 0.30 m. Excavated to pursue line of feature 623.

634	0-0.20 m	Topsoil, brown clayey loam, very occasional small limestone fragments.
635	0.20-0.30 m	Subsoil, yellowish-brown clayey loam with limestone fragments forming an uneven band above limestone bedrock (636).
636	0.30 m+	Natural limestone bedrock. Uneven but roughly level surface, highly fissured, fragments easily dislodged.

**Trench 606.** Ground level: 68.69 m OD (W); 8 m long, 1.5 m wide; maximum depth 0.30 m. Excavated to pursue line of feature 623.

637	0-0.20 m	Topsoil, brown clayey loam, very occasional small limestone fragments.
638	0.20-0.30 m	Subsoil, yellowish-brown clayey loam with limestone fragments forming an uneven band above limestone bedrock (639).
639	0.30 m+	Natural limestone bedrock. Uneven but roughly level surface, highly fissured, fragments easily dislodged.

**Trench 607.** Ground level: 63.93 m OD (E); 59.63 m OD (S); 63.05 m OD (W); T-shaped 25m and 50 m long, 1.5 m wide; maximum depth 0.60 m.

640	0-0.20 m	Topsoil, brown clayey loam, scattered limestone fragments and pieces up to 0.30 m across. Of fairly consistent depth across whole of trench..
641	0.20-0.30 m	Subsoil, yellowish-brown clayey loam with limestone fragments up to 0.05 m across. Variable in thickness - in places only 0.05 m thick over limestone bedrock (642).
642	0.30 m+	Natural limestone bedrock. Surface very uneven and highly laminated but fragments which are angular in shape are still articulated. Fine clayey loam fills the fissures.
643	0.30-0.65 m	Yellowish-brown clayey loam with scattered limestone pieces up to 0.10 m across. Forms an amorphous area in the western part of the trench. Upper fill of 644. Sealed only by 640.

644		Cut through the limestone bedrock (642). Eastern edge is angled across the trench with a steep, but irregular side cut into the limestone. The northern side is similarly steep but becomes shallower to the west and finally disappears with the downhill slope. The eastern edge was followed for a distance of c. 50 m downhill from which point it could be seen to be on the same alignment as a visible old field boundary. This continued for another 50 m downhill before turning east at right-angles and continuing on, across the slope, to meet the current field boundary.
645	0.65-0.85 m	Lowest fill of 644. Very compact, yellowish-brown clayey loam with moderate amounts of limestone fragments. Forms an irregular band up to 0.20 m thick along the base of fracture 644 with the greatest concentration of limestone fragments along its eastern edge.