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Contractor Exeter museums.	
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✓

**A30 OKEHAMPTON BYPASS TO LAUNCESTON
BYPASS ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
PART 3: EVALUATION EXCAVATIONS
AT LIFTONDOWN**

by

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Preface

This report is the third in a series of six describing the results of an archaeological assessment of the proposed route of the A30 Trunk Road Okehampton Bypass to Launceston Bypass in West Devon. The assessment has been prepared by Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit at the request of Devon County Council as agents for the Department of Transport. The assessment has incorporated documentary research, field survey and excavation. This report describes the detailed results of trial excavations carried out on two sites at Lifforddown. An archive report on these excavations is also currently held by EMAFU. Part 1 of this assessment contains a summary of the results of the whole project and presents a series of recommendations for further archaeological recording and for the preservation of certain monuments and archaeological deposits.

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1. **Location** (No. 19 on Fig. 1)

Liftondown is situated at the very western end of the proposed A30 new road corridor. It lies just inside the Devon/Cornwall boundary which is only 1.5km to the east. It is 1.5km to the west of the village of Lifton and is now a separate settlement with some 20-30 houses. The houses are grouped around the junction of the main A30 road into Cornwall with the old Tavistock to Holsworthy road. The Down from which the settlement took its name forms a level plateau at a height of about 120m OD just to the north-west. The village itself lies at a height of between 100-115m OD on gently sloping ground above the River Tamar at its confluence with the River Lyd.

2. **Historical background** (Figs 2-4)

Lifton itself was a place of some importance in late Saxon times. It was the head of a large royal estate and is mentioned in King Aldred's will of 880-85. It was probably also of considerable military significance as it lies within a short distance of the River Tamar and the Cornish frontier to the west. The earliest documentary references to Liftondown, however, date from the mid 16th century. At this time it was also known as Hethfeldowne or Hethfilde (sometimes Heifild). Although the majority of the land may have been owned by the Harris family (of Hayne in Lifton), parcels were undoubtedly leased out for pasture or dwelling purposes. The area appears to have developed rapidly in the 19th century. The first edition OS map of 1809 gives no indication of what essentially was the hamlet or village of Liftondown by the mid 19th century. In c. 1840 the Down was entirely the property of William Harris Arundell, but was sublet to numerous tenants most of whom were in possession of houses and other buildings clustered mainly to the west (the area north of Cawdron) at the junction of the main road, referred to by W.G. Hoskins as 'that lonely road', from Okehampton to Cornwall (the present A30) and the road from Tavistock to Holsworthy. The 1841 Census Return lists over 40 families living there. There was also a Wesleyan chapel, at the western end of the settlement. Two of the properties, now abandoned as settlement sites (Nos 641 and 646 on the Lifton Tithe Map c. 1840), lie within the construction corridor (Fig. 3). Their exact date of origin is not known, nor is there any evidence for when Liftondown evolved as a separate holding. It is possible that No. 646, which belonged to the medieval settlement of Wooladon (to the south) is an example of what may have been a handful of small tenements scattered throughout the area of Liftondown in the 15th and 16th centuries.

3. **The excavations**

Two areas were investigated: Site 1, to the east is No. 646 on the Lifton Tithe Map; Site 2 to the west adjoining derelict farm buildings is No. 641 (Fig. 5). The two sites are shown in Figs 6-7 which also indicate the exact positions of the excavation trenches.

The evaluation excavations were carried out in order to ascertain the nature, date and preservation of any archaeological deposits here. More specifically it was intended to establish the existence of medieval settlement within the vicinity of these sites. At present there is no documentary evidence to indicate the presence of buildings here before the 19th century. It may therefore be possible to draw some conclusions about

the character and date of settlement at Liftondown as a whole.

All the trenches were excavated by hand.

Site 1 (Fig. 6; Pl. 1)

The excavations here concentrated on the area of the shallow terrace which represents the site of the house and garden as shown on the Tithe Map and the 1888 OS 25" map. Four trenches were excavated.

Trench 1 (Fig. 9). This was excavated across the projected line of the west end of the house which stood on the site until the end of the 19th century. It was aligned at right-angles to the terrace feature and was 9.75m long by 1m wide. There was some evidence for the existence of a plough soil (502-3) here which pre-dated the cutting of the terrace for the house. No finds came from this material. No evidence for the building survived within this trench. Two layers (501, 504) infilled the hollow of the terrace. These must have been deposited after the building was abandoned. The finds from these layers were of mid- to late 19th-century date.

Trench 2 (Fig. 8-9). This trench was located at the western end of the terrace and again was intended to locate any evidence for buildings which may have occupied the site. It was 12.5m long by 1m wide. The actual terrace cut here was an elaborate series of steep steps incorporating a hedgebank (532) and a wooden fence (534-5). At the southern end of the trench close to the hedgebank evidence was found for a wall running roughly parallel to the main road. The foundation of this wall had been robbed out (519, Fig. 8) after the terrace had been infilled. To the north of the wall were the remains of what appeared to be an external surface containing slate, ash and charcoal. This indicated that the building itself lay to the south under the present hedgebank and grass verge of the A30.

Trench 3 (Fig. 9; Pl. 3). This was cut across the line of what appeared to be a gully or watercourse. This could be observed running downslope from the northern part of the field as a slight hollow. The trench was 4.5m long by 1m wide at right-angles to the gully. The feature was of rounded profile 3.2m wide and 0.6m deep. A contemporary soil (504) overlay the natural subsoil and partially infilled the gully. The bottom of the feature showed signs of having been enlarged either by the passage of water or through regular cleaning out. The feature appears to have been deliberately filled in at the end of its life by successive layers of soil and stones (514, 516, 513). These were sealed by the homogeneous layer (501) which also infilled the terrace to the south.

Trench 4 (Fig. 10; Pl. 2). This was excavated at the western end of the terrace in order to define the possible limits of the settlement in this direction. It was c. 12m long by 1m wide. The western edge of the terrace (539) was located but no evidence was recovered of any buildings here. A rough trodden surface (521), a continuation of that found in Trench 2, was recorded.

Conclusions. The excavations have identified part of one building which lay towards the western end of the terrace. It probably fronted onto the main road, the A30. The majority of the building lies to the south and has probably been disturbed by the construction of the existing hedgebank and the modern pavement. The building to the east did not survive. The general state of preservation of the archaeological deposits was poor.

Site 2. (Fig. 7)

Located to the west of Site 1 the excavation here were concentrated on the site of Tithe No. 641 which included a house and garden. A group of four small agricultural buildings lies in the north-west corner of a small enclosure (these are outside the scheme corridor). The house shown on the Tithe Map does not survive. The siting of this group of buildings in what appeared to be the remains of a roughly rectangular enclosure suggests that there may have been additional buildings here. Due to disturbance by a modern sewer trench the western part of the site was not examined.

Trench 5 (Fig. 8). This trench 1.2m long by 1m wide was excavated at a point where the adjoining hedgerow turned northwards at right-angles, suggesting that it may have been laid out around an existing building. The excavations located a ditch (527) which seems to indicate a former continuation of the hedgeline across this area. No evidence for buildings was recorded.

Trench 6 (Fig. 10). This was located to the south of Trench 5 and was positioned to avoid the pipeline disturbance just to the west. It also extended across the line of the eastern side of the projected enclosure. No building evidence was recovered. A sequence of soils which represent garden cultivation from the late 18th century were recorded. Although the subsoil sloped down fairly steeply to the east there was no evidence for a ditch or boundary feature here.

Conclusions. It is unlikely that there have been any buildings on this site other than those depicted on the Tithe Map, and the existing derelict farm buildings. The latter are of 19th-century or later date. There are no finds to indicate occupation here before c. 1780. The east-west hedge line preceded these structures as it can be traced, with some certainty, across the site.

4. Overall conclusions

The evaluation excavations have demonstrated that the two settlement sites examined here are of 18th- or 19th-century origin. Of the finds recovered from all the trenches none of the pottery was earlier than the 18th century. The majority was dated to after 1800. This probably reflects the nature of settlement at Liftondown generally. Although there may have been one or two 16th-century tenements here, the focus of medieval settlement was possibly at Higher Cawdron (SX368851). This lies alongside an ancient trackway from Bratton Clovelly (described in Part 5) which actually crosses the line of the A30 through Lifton Down. This trackway is heading towards a crossing of the Tamar to the east of Polson Bridge which carried the main road into Cornwall. The crossing at Polson is at least as early as the 14th century since Polson Bridge is recorded in 1338. The trackway could be of considerably earlier date.

The majority of the houses which are recorded in the 19th century at Liftondown probably appeared during the 18th and 19th century when improvements were made to the road after the Turnpike Acts of the later 18th century.

For a discussion of the possible Roman road into Cornwall see Part 2 of this assessment concerning Sourton Down.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavations at Liftondown were carried out with the kind permission of the landowner Mrs J.M.R. Seward through the offices of her agent Mr G. Stanbury of Kittows. The work was supervised by M. Knight, who was assisted by P. Stead, M. Hall, A. Stead, E. Jones, T. Dixon, S. Reed and N. Goodwin. The drawings for this report were produced by M. Gardner, R. Mortimer and T. Dixon. The documentary research was undertaken by R. Goodyer and S.D. Turton.

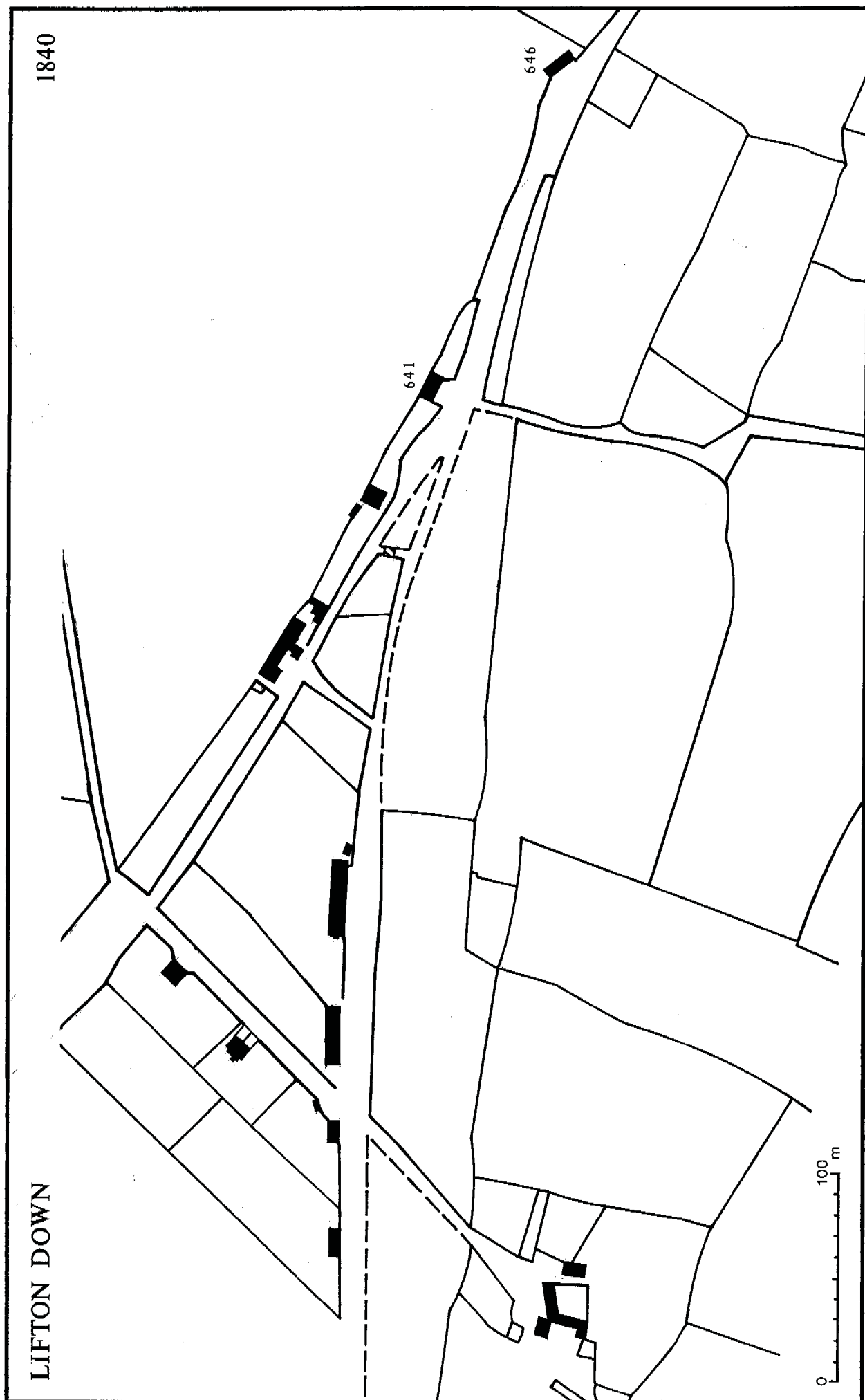


Fig. 3 Liftondown (then Lifton Down) in 1840 showing the two sites Nos 641/646 (Lifton Tithe Map).

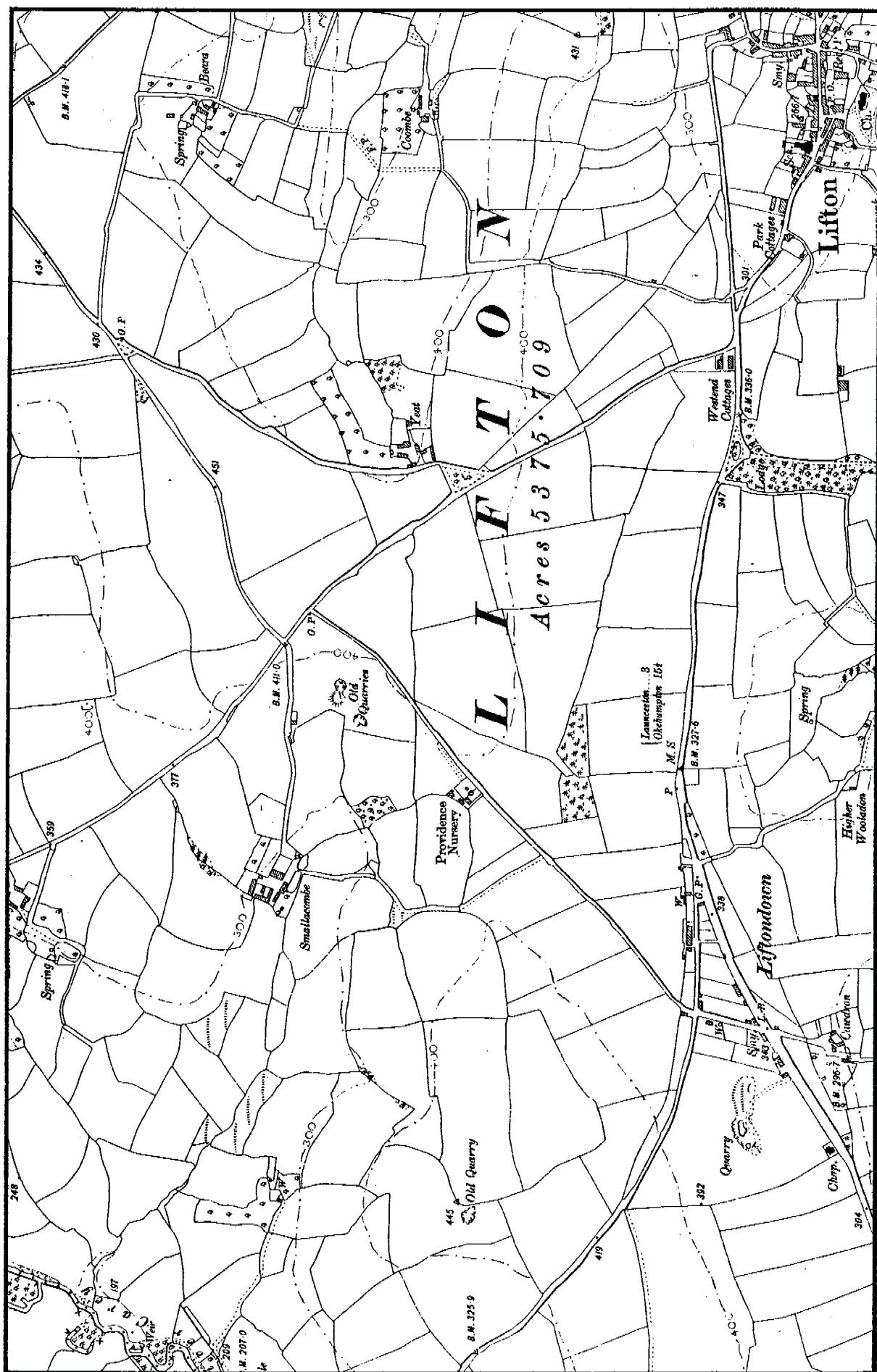


Fig. 4 Liftdown in 1904; the two sites have been deserted by this time.

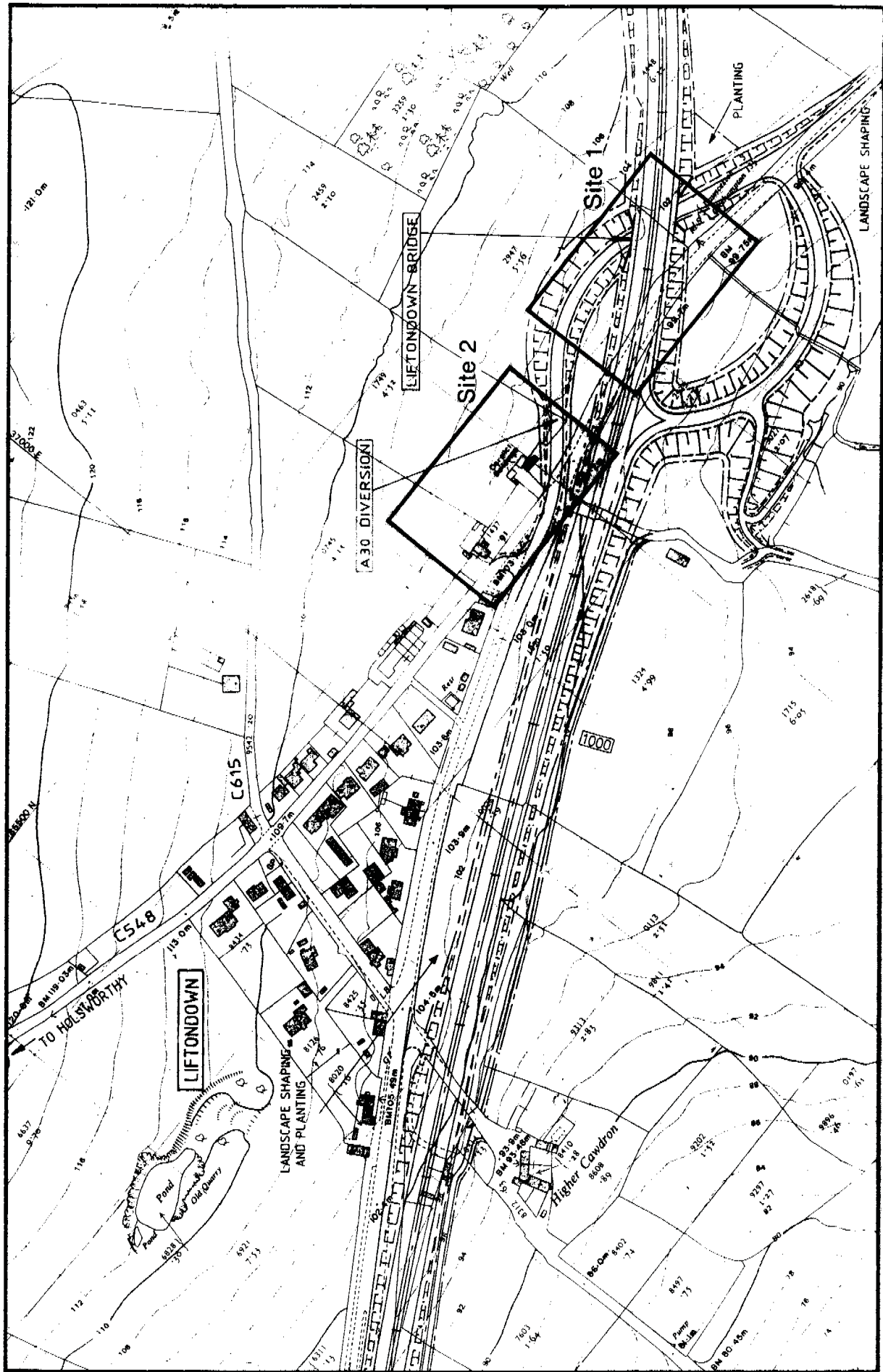


Fig 5 The location of Sites 1 and 2 in relation to the new road corridor.

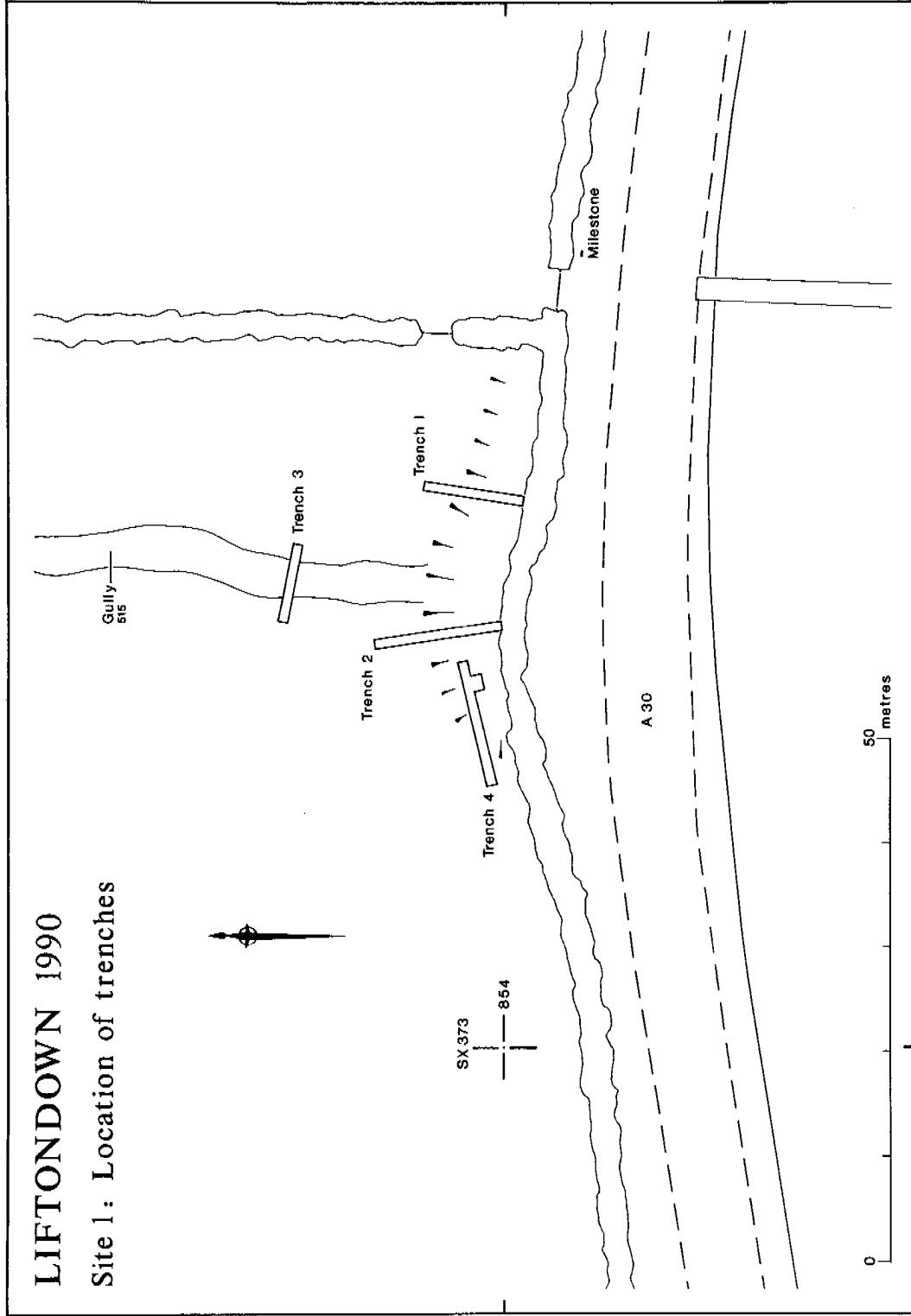


Fig. 6 The location of trenches in Site 1.

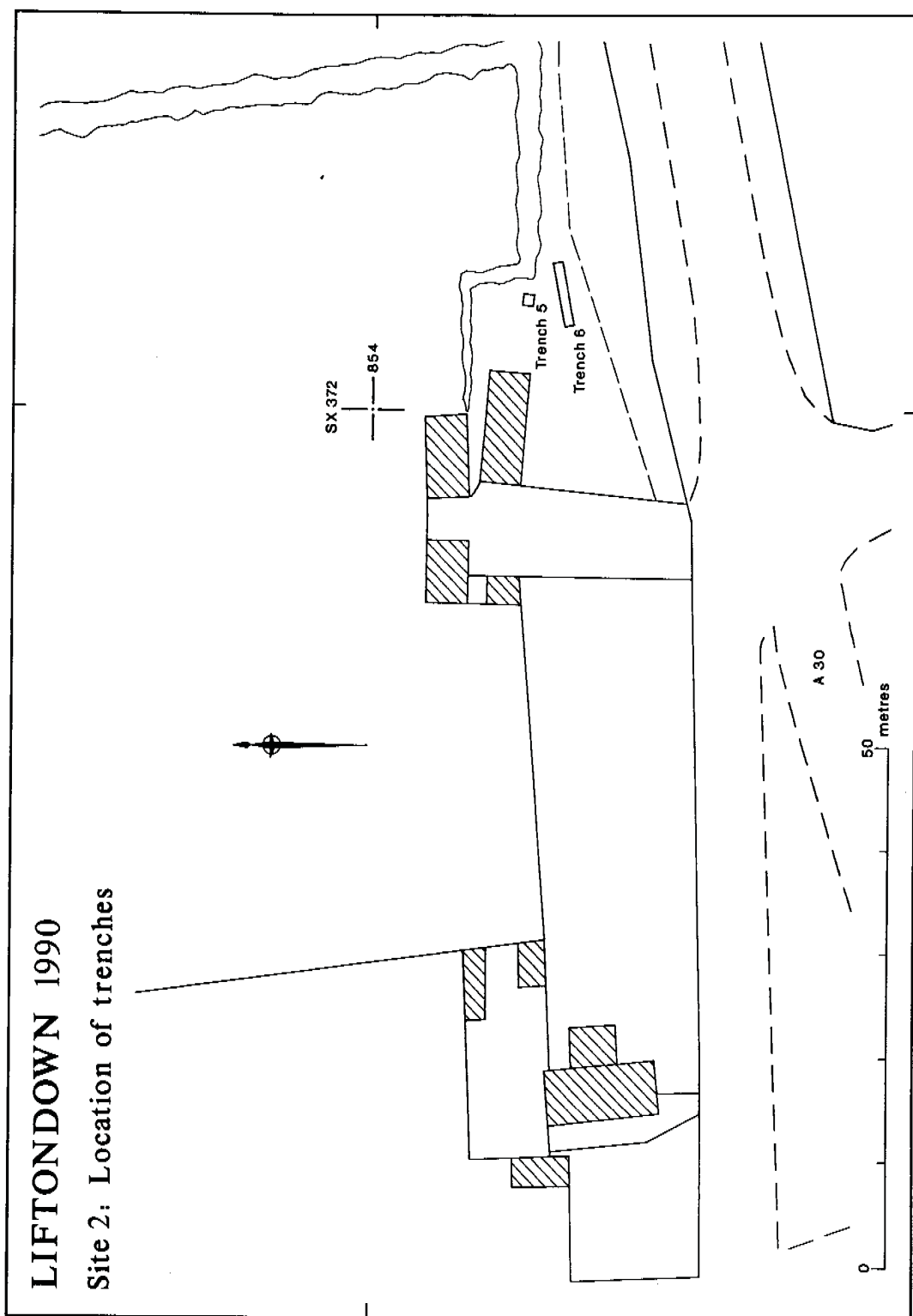
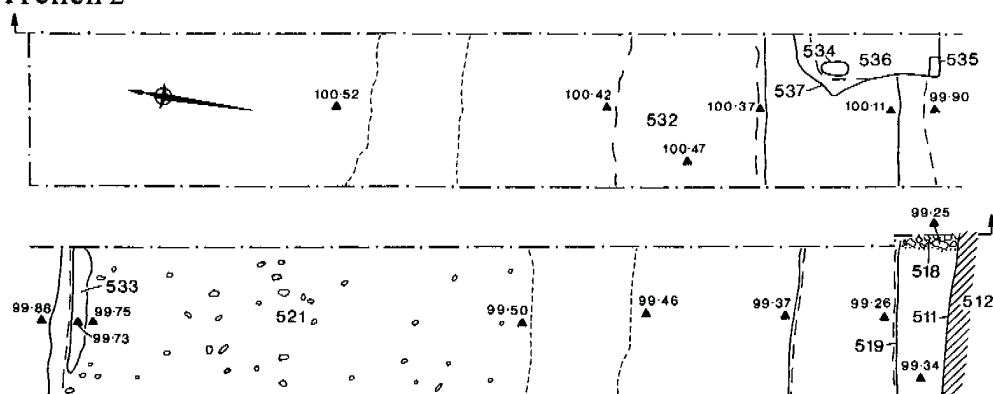


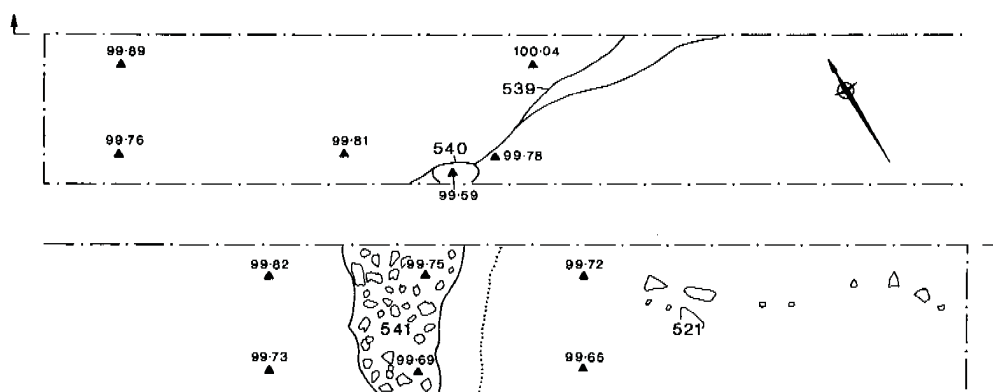
Fig. 7 The location of trenches in Site 2.

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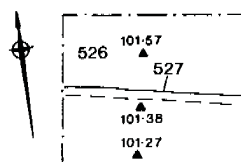
Trench 2



Trench 4



Trench 5



0 5 metres

Fig. 8 Plans: Trenches 2, 4 and 5.

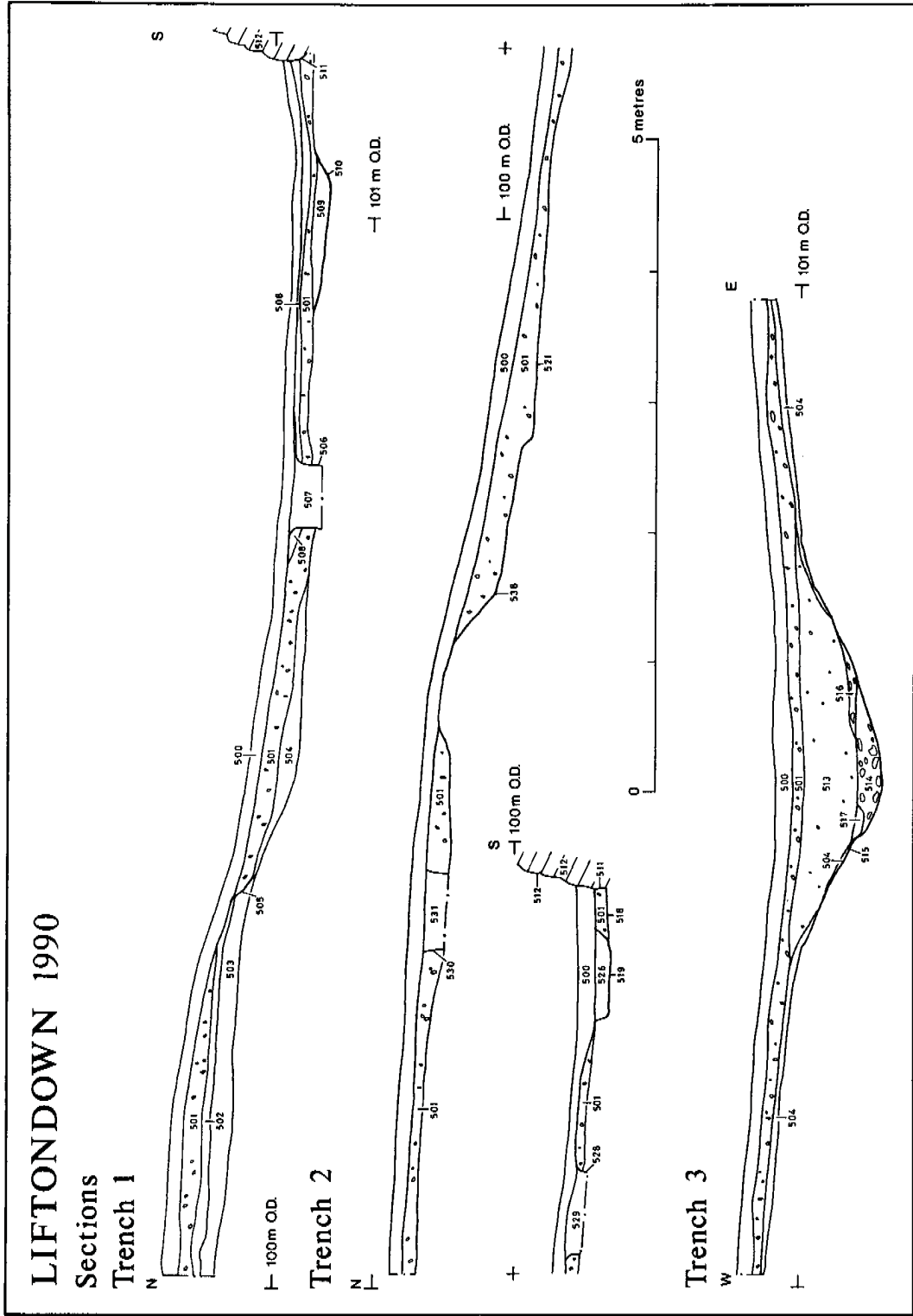
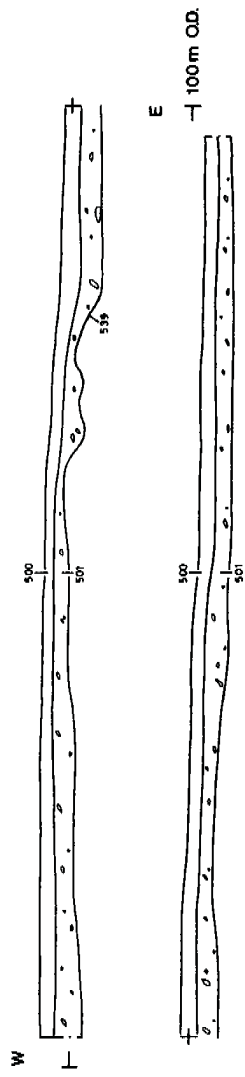


Fig. 9 Sections: Trenches 1-3.

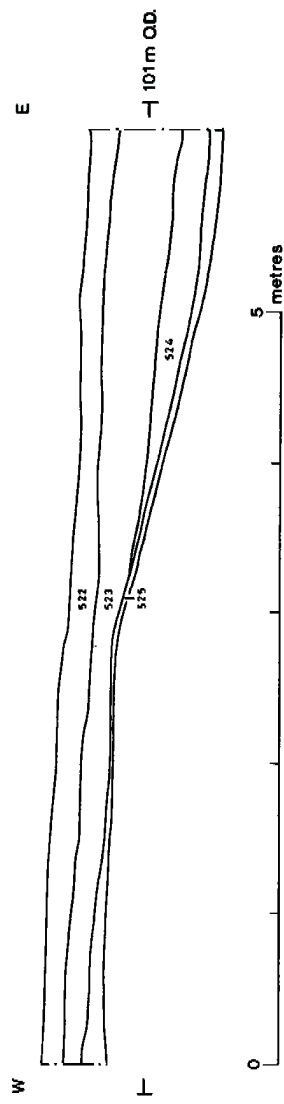
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Sections

Trench 4



Trench 6



0 5 metres

Fig. 10 Sections: Trenches 4 and 6.

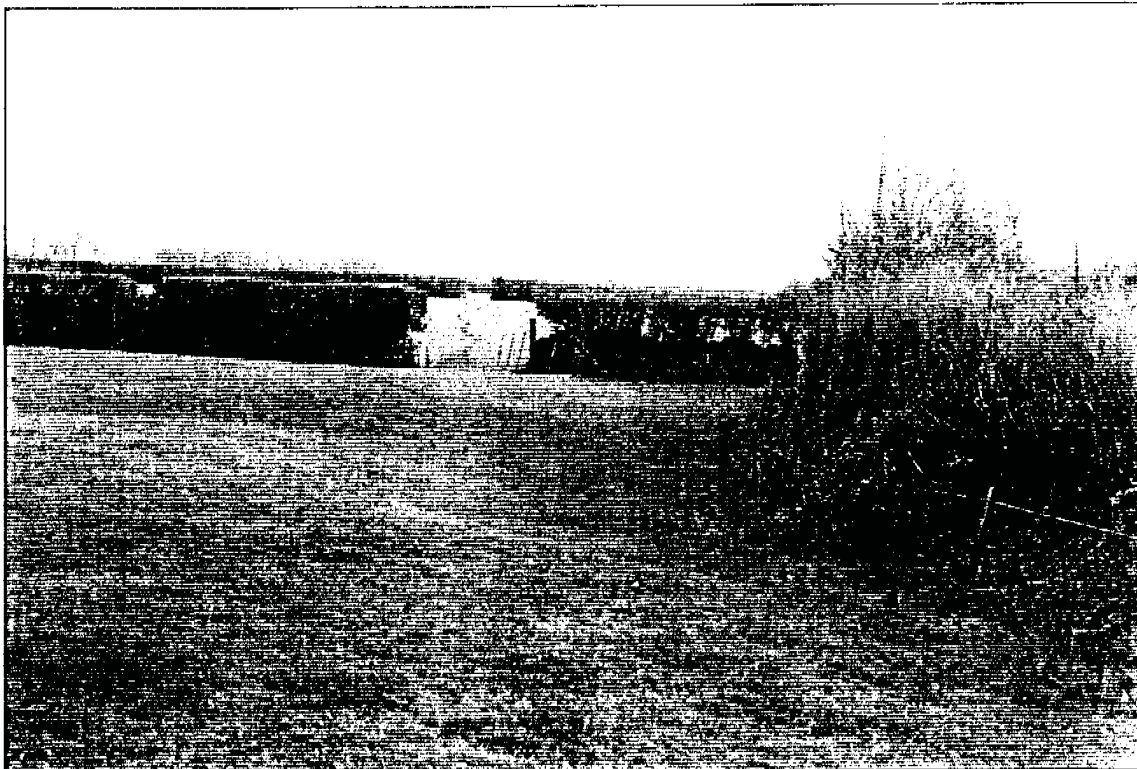


Plate 1 Site 1 before excavation: note the shallow terrace.



Plate 2 Trench 4

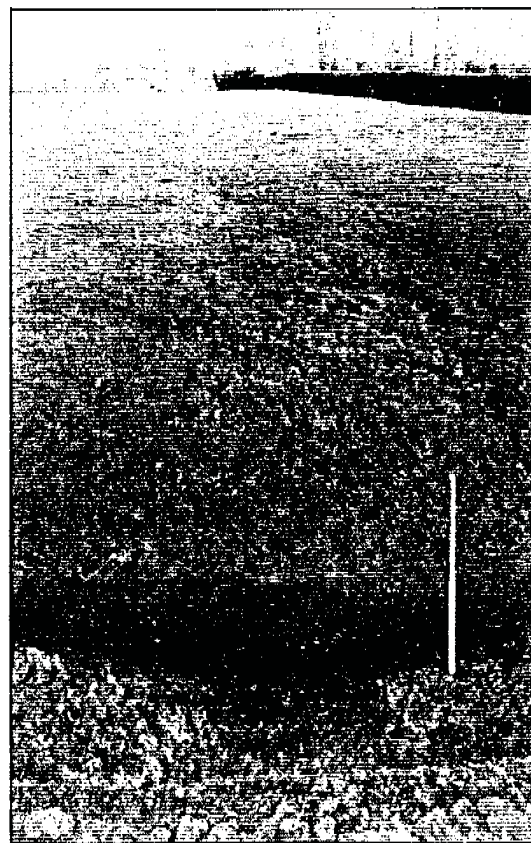


Plate 3 Trench 3, gully 515.