RPS Planning, Transport and Environment

INDEX DATA	RPS INFORMATION
Scheme Title A30 Okehampton bypass to Launceston bypass.	Details Archaeological Assessment
Road Number A30.	Date December 1990.
Contractor Exeter Museums.	
County Devonshire.	
OS Reference SX 59.	
Single sided ✓ Double sided A3 0 Colour 1	

A30 OKEHAMPTON BYPASS TO LAUNCESTON BYPASS ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT PART 2: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF SOURTON DOWN

by

A.R. Pye

Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit

Report No 90.34

December 1990

Preface

This report is the second 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. A detailed evaluation of the area of Sourton Down at the eastern end of the route has been carried out. Sourton Down contains a range of upstanding archaeological features, including Bronze Age boundaries and a Roman roads which merit preservation. This report presents the detailed results of field survey and evaluation excavations on the Down. Recommendations for future archaeological input into the design of the road and for preservation and recording of archaeological remains are made in Part 1 of the assessment (Summary Report and Recommendations, EMAFU Report No. 90.33).

Contents

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF PLATES

1. INTRODUCTION

Sourton Down is located some 5km to the south-west of Okehampton, immediately north of the present A30 trunk road to Launceston (Figs 1-2). The western part of the Down is truncated by the planned route of the new A30 road (Fig. 3), and would be extensively affected by the associated landscaping as currently proposed. In view of this a detailed review of the archaeological implications of the road construction proposals has been prepared at the request of Devon County Council. A possible alternative route for the A30 truncates the northern part of the Down, and the archaeological implications of this are discussed in a separate report (Part 6).

The present survey (Figs 2, 11-12) covers the western part of Sourton Down. Archaeological remains within the area likely to be affected by the Published Route and the proposed landscaping are identified and described (sections 5-7), and recommendations are made for selective preservation and archaeological recording which would be necessary prior to the construction of the new road (Part 1). A survey of the eastern part of the Down was undertaken with similar objectives in 1986 by the Central Excavation Unit of English Heritage, prior to the construction of the new Okehampton Bypass (Cook & Towell 1986). Subsequently archaeological excavation was undertaken on the most important remains identified by the survey before their destruction.

The main features of archaeological interest on the western part of the Down are a possible prehistoric burial mound (Fig. 11, No. 62; Pl. 3), a Roman road (Figs 10-12, Nos 6, 33; Pls 4-6), and an area of medieval settlement remains (Figs 11-12, No. 117; Pls 10-11). These are described in detail below (sections 5-6). Outside the survey area to the east, an earthwork structure, possibly a Roman signal station, is the only Scheduled Ancient Monument on the Down, while to the south the field system continues into an area affected by later mining.

2. PHYSICAL BACKGROUND

The western part of Sourton Down (Pls 1-2) lies at a height of between 280 and 290 m OD, rising up to 298 m to the east. It forms a relatively level plateau, bounded on the north and south by small valleys containing the farms of East Linnacombe and Hursdon, and the disused copper mine of Sourtondown Consols. The underlying geology is of the Culm Measures series (shale bedrock). This contains quartzite which outcrops along the southern edge of the survey area, where there are several quarries (Figs 11-12, Nos 28, 31, 32, 41).

The soil is a clayey loam with a moderately high humus content. The ground is subject to seasonal waterlogging which restricts use for cultivation, since the anaerobic conditions so created limit the breakdown of organic material into the soil. The soil is also slightly acidic due to the intrinsic acidity of soils derived from the underlying Culm Measures. The pH is further lowered by organic litter which is poorly assimilated into the soil. The vegetation of Sourton Down is therefore dominated by water and acid-tolerant flora such as gorse and rushes, as well as sedges and grasses with undemanding nutrient needs. Low hedgebanks support oak, hawthorn and blackthorn.

The land is now used as rough pasture and is not enclosed. However, the presence of relict field banks and the remains of narrow rig (cultivation ridges) indicate a more intensive use of the land in the past, including arable cultivation. The narrow rig probably dates from the 18th and 19th centuries. Although several of the field banks survive to a considerable height, none is currently maintained as a boundary, with the exception of the hedgebanks bounding the modern roads along the south and west sides of the survey area.

3. DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

This section deals with the documented history of Sourton Down as far as is known at present. It deals with the area of the Down itself, the adjoining farms, and the roads and tracks which cross it.

3.1 Sourton Down

Introduction

The name Sourton Down was used on 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps to describe the whole area of common land lying between Meldon Lane in the east and Cowsen Lane in the west, a distance of about 2 km (Fig. 9). Locally the western part of the Down has also been known as Linnacombe Down, though this name was not adopted by cartographers. In the mid-19th century this part of the Down belonged to the farms of East and West Linnacombe to the north (Fig. 8). The area shown as No. 747 on the map reproduced in Fig. 8 is that which was specifically described as Sourton Down. It should be noted that this, and therefore also the boundary of West Linnacombe Farm, extends across the present A30 road. The south-western boundary of this farm is in fact the Tavistock Road (A386). The parcel immediately to the north of No. 747 (i.e. No. 743) is defined on the map by a line of dots which suggests an imprecise boundary or fence line. This boundary in fact follows the line of a disused trackway which originated as a Roman road. Parcel No. 743 was referred to as Linnacombe Down. The fields belonging to West Linnacombe are bounded to the south by the line of the trackway. Most of the field names here include the element 'down', e.g. Nos. 696-8 are South, Middle and North Down. The major north-south farm boundaries here all appear to be dictated by the lines of natural combes: East/West Linnacombe; West Linnacombe/Hursdon and East Linnacombe/Yeolditch.

Medieval

The early history of the farms of East and West Linnacombe is obscure. There are references to a John Lonecombe or Louecombe in the Lay Subsidy Rolls for Devon 1332-3. It is likely that he was an inhabitant of one of the Linnacombe farms as the name is recorded under Sourton parish. Nothing is known however of the extent of either farm in the medieval period or indeed whether or not they were contemporary foundations. At this time the farms may have formed part of the large manor of Sourton which embraced much of the ecclesiastical parish of the same name. However, Linnacombe would probably have represented a relatively independent holding attached by the financial obligations of the occupiers to the Lord of the Manor. Hence no references to it have yet been found in medieval *Inquisitions Post Mortem* which describe the extent of lands held from the king by their recently deceased owners. Such

descriptions would also mention areas of waste or common land which might have included Sourton Down. Further documentary evidence may however come to light in the future which will assist in the interpretation of the field evidence.

The Civil War

During the Civil War a minor skirmish is recorded in the vicinity of Sourton Down in 1643. The Royalist forces under Sir Ralph Hopton were marching up from Bridestowe towards Okehampton. Towards nightfall at Sourton Down however they were surprised by a small Parliamentarian cavalry force which was based at Okehampton.

Contemporary accounts of the incident do not give a great deal of topographical information, although the name 'Sourton Downe' is mentioned, described as 'a large Downe'. In addition, as the Royalist army regrouped after the attack, they fell back on 'an olde trenche that they found upon the Heath'. The 'trench' cannot be located from this description but it is clear from subsequent events that it was a linear feature rather than an enclosure.

Field systems in the vicinity of Sourton Down (Fig. 4)

As noted above, the history of Sourton Down itself is not well documented. There is however some cartographic evidence for holdings around the Down in the late 18th century. This is contained in the records of the Courtenay family, the Earls of Devon, who owned much of the land around Meldon village. A Survey Book of 1780 includes maps of this area (DRO 1508M Devon/Surveys V4). Although the maps depict only dispersed lands within Courtenay ownership, certain conclusions can be drawn:

a) There were several areas of open moorland in the area referred to as 'Downs'. These included Sourton Down, Prewley Moor to the south, Yelland Down to the north-east, an unnamed Down to the north of Linnacombe, and Rigs Down north of the latter.

b) Most of the fields are small, often narrow, enclosures but many follow the same general NW/SE alignment. They could therefore be seen as part of a large co-axial field system.

c) There are some indications that certain areas of Sourton Down contained relict field boundaries. These are shown as faint lines.

d) Other map evidence shows that certain areas were enclosed or re-enclosed after 1780.

Conclusions

There is ample archaeological and cartographic evidence for the agricultural exploitation of Sourton Down in the form of enclosures and field systems which were probably in intermittent use between the Bronze Age (about 1500 BC) and the 19th century. Environmental conditions may have been more favourable in the Bronze Age and the earlier medieval period.

In the later medieval and post-medieval periods the Down is likely to have been marginal land. The latest phase of arable cultivation indicated by the narrow rig, may have been of quite short duration - perhaps only a few years.

3.2 Roads

The Okehampton to Launceston and Okehampton to Tavistock roads cross Sourton Down. The main Roman road from Exeter to Cornwall is now an abandoned trackway.

Roman road
The course of a road running westwards from Exeter to Okehampton and Launceston was described by Margary in 1955. The route passed from Exeter to North Tawton, where a large military complex is now known to exist, and thence to Okehampton. At Okehampton a fort has been identified on the east side of the Okement valley near Higher Chichacott Farm, SX597961 (Fig. 5), just north-east of the town. Margary suggested that the Roman road crossed the Okement along the line of the old High Street in Okehampton and then followed roughly the line of the present A30 to Lifton. Further west beyond Liftondown Margary postulated a crossing of the Tamar to the north of the present one at Polson Bridge probably near the farm of Welltown about 1.3km west of Liftondown. At the end of his description however Margary concludes with the comment: 'It is possible that further work may clarify or modify the route near Okehampton'.

It is now possible to propose certain alternatives to Margary's route in the vicinity of Okehampton. It will first be convenient to set out the evidence from later periods for the roads in this area.

The medieval road: Okehampton - Launceston
The route now represented by the A30 from Exeter to Okehampton and Launceston is shown on the Gough map of Great Britain dated 1360 which is preserved in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The map shows five of the principal roads in the kingdom including the one under discussion, which ran from London through Winchester, Salisbury, Shaftesbury, Honiton and Exeter and then on to Okehampton. Beyond here a badly creased area of the map obscures the town of Launceston, although the figure of 16 miles referring to the distance from Okehampton is clearly visible. The road then continued to Camelford, Bodmin and St Ives. The map is too small-scale to draw any conclusions about the detailed course of the route between the main towns.

A slightly earlier documented date of 1338 can be applied to Polson Bridge which carries the road across the Tamar. References in 13th-century legal documents to the 'Cornish Road' between Exeter and Launceston may also refer to this road although no specific locations are given (Summerson 1985).

The earliest large-scale map which shows the road is in the Bidlake family archives (DRO 189M add/2). This is dated *c.* 1609 and was produced in connection with a dispute between neighbouring landowners. The map depicts the main road from Okehampton through Bridestowe and Lifton to Launceston but is limited in the detail portrayed.

Clearly the important arterial route between Okehampton and Launceston was well established by the 14th century and probably earlier. Although the exact route is not recorded, it was apparently broadly similar to the present A30.

Post-medieval and later
It is possible to use the more plentiful post-medieval cartographic evidence to throw some light on the earlier period.

The trackway (formerly the Roman road) across Sourton Down is depicted on the following maps:
a) 1765 Donn's Map of Devon: it is shown as branching off from the main road from Launceston to Okehampton, which then joins the Tavistock - Okehampton road. It runs north-eastwards to branch again at Place Cross with one fork heading towards Hatherleigh and the other returning south-east to the Tavistock road near Okehampton (Fig. 6).
b) *c.* 1800 (surveyed) OS Surveyor's sketch draft maps: it is depicted as following much the same course as Donn's map (Fig. 7).
c) 1809 OS 1st edition 1" map: as above.
d) 1827 Greenwood's Map of Devon: as above.
e) 1844 Sourton Down Tithe Map: the trackway is not depicted and it forms a solid boundary line only at the western end (Fig. 8).

It may be concluded that the trackway and the present A30 on the western side of the Down co-existed in use for a time in the 18th century. This section of the A30 probably came into being as a link between the Launceston road and the Okehampton-Tavistock road. The Launceston road originally followed a more northerly circuitous route into Okehampton and also carried traffic heading towards Hatherleigh to the north. A link to the Tavistock road and thence to Okehampton was probably created at the same time in the 17th or 18th century which resulted in the present course of the A30 from Okehampton to Sourton Cross becoming the primary route for both Launceston and Tavistock traffic. A further link was created at some time leading nothwards from the Sourton Cross junction to the old Launceston-Okehampton road for traffic passing from Tavistock towards Hatherleigh (now the A386).

Suggested course of the Roman road (Figs. 4-5)
From North Tawton to Okehampton the course of the road has not been examined in detail; it may broadly follow the line of the existing B3215 road. At the River Okement the fort just to the north of Okehampton would probably have guarded a river crossing in the vicinity.

Stoney Park Lane on the opposite side of the valley is in a direct alignment with the B3215 road just mentioned. This road ascends to Beacon Down where it has been realigned to meet the modern (19th-century) road to New Road Cross. After passing over Beacon Down the suggested route turns at the head of Bowerland Road to run south-westwards towards Sourton Down where it meets the disused trackway at the site of the disused railway line. One possible alternative route would be along the line of Broadmoor Lane to the north of Stoney Park Lane. This route would cross the river about 800m south of the fort and about 120m north of the confluence.

4. PREVIOUS WORK

Sourton Down has been a focus of archaeological interest since the mid 1970s, when the field system and trackway were identified and an outline survey produced (Balkwill and Silvester 1976). The trackway was suggested as the line of the Roman road leading from the forts at North Tawton and Okehampton to Launceston. The field system was described as aligned on the trackway, and therefore of Roman or later date. One field bank (Fig. 12, No. 47; Pl. 13) cut through the trackway and was dated to between 1809 and 1840. Remains of narrow ridge-and-furrow ('narrow rig') were also noted, and a Napoleonic date was suggested for this phase of activity. The field system was considered likely to be of similar (i.e. Napoleonic) date. No mention was made of the possible burial mound (Fig. 11, No. 62), the medieval remains (Fig. 12, Nos 116, 117), or the ponds and quarries.

Some of the field banks were subsequently identified by Fleming (1983, 218, 236-7; Fig. 4) as possible components of a Bronze Age parallel boundary (or reave) system (the Meldon system). Such reaves were common elsewhere on Dartmoor and its fringes, consisting of parallel field banks laid out in a regular pattern over wide areas of land. Elsewhere they have been found to date from around 1600-1500 BC. On Sourton Down it is the field banks (Figs 11-12, Nos 75, 83) located to the north of the trackway and orientated NW-SE which Fleming identifies as possible reaves, and not those to the south.

Other work has included a preliminary archaeological assessment of Sourton Down carried out in 1985 (Berridge & Weddell for Devon County Council) and a survey of the eastern part of the Down in 1986 by the Central Excavation Unit of English Heritage (Cook & Towell). The 1985 assessment identified the field system as possibly of medieval or earlier date; the trackway was interpreted as the probable line of a Roman road. A prehistoric enclosure (Fig. 12, No. 58) was also identified, together with two possible prehistoric burial mounds. One of the latter was examined during the present survey (Fig. 11, No. 62); the other (Fig. 12, No. 107) is now considered probably to be of modern date, associated with the recent rebuilding of a field bank (No. 9).

The 1986 survey was part of a wider project covering the whole of the route of the Okehampton Bypass, and only therefore encompassed the part of Sourton Down lying to the east of the track to East Linnacombe Farm (the eastern limit of the present survey). An attempt was made to trace the sequence of development of the field system, with the earliest field banks again being placed in the same phase as the remains of narrow rig, and therefore being interpreted as probably of post-medieval date (Cook & Towell 1986, 15-16). Most of the later boundaries in the sequence were thought to be of 18th- or 19th-century date. No date was suggested for the disused trackway, although subsequent excavations by the Central Excavation Unit of English Heritage have indicated that it pre-dates the adjoining field banks (B. Kerr, pers. comm.).

Thus the field system has variously been interpreted as of medieval origin (Fleming 1983; Berridge & Weddell 1985), with elements possibly dating back to the Bronze Age (Fleming 1983), or alternatively of post-medieval origin, perhaps even as late as the 18th or 19th centuries (Cook & Towell 1986).

5. THE SURVEY (Figs 11-13)

5.1 **Aims and method**

The aim of the survey was to identify and accurately map all the visible archaeological features lying on the course of the planned road and within the area of landscaping. The features were mapped using an EDM. Measured profiles across selected features were also obtained (Figs 14, 17), to illustrate their character. The physical background of the land and its potential for the preservation of environmental remains, such as pollen, seeds, bone and charcoal, was also assessed (Part 1).

An attempt is made to trace the chronological development of the field system (section 7, Fig. 10), and dates are suggested for the mound (Fig. 11, No. 62), the road embankment and trackway (Figs 11-12, Nos 6, 33), some building remains (Figs 11-12, Nos 116, 117) and the ponds and quarries.

5.2 **Description** (Figs 11-12)

The archaeological remains consist of a mound (No. 62), a road embankment (Nos 6, 33) which continues eastwards as a trackway, and an area of medieval settlement (including Nos 116, 117) at the south end of a trackway from West Linnacombe Farm. There are also the remains of field systems lying to each side of the trackway. Other probable post-medieval features include a small enclosure in the north of the survey area (Nos 88, 90-92), various quarries and ponds, and extensive remains of narrow rig (Fig. 13 & Pl. 1). The latter are post-medieval cultivation ridges, some of which truncate earlier field boundaries (e.g. Nos 53, 55, 101).

?Bronze Age barrow (Fig. 11, No. 62; Fig. 14; Pl. 3)
This is a sub-circular clay mound *c.* 20m in diameter, located on the western fringe of the survey area on the line of a planned slip road. The mound is partly truncated by a later field bank (No. 61) and survives about 1m high. It appears to spread out towards the north, although this extension may consist of spoil spread when the field bank was formed. The mound does not appear to have been surrounded by a ditch. A disturbed area in its crown indicates that it may have been investigated in the past, perhaps during the last century.

The truncation of the mound by the field bank indicates that it is of relatively early date. This, together with its prominent location on a ridge and on marginal agricultural land, supports the suggestion that it is a prehistoric burial mound (Berridge and Weddell 1985).

Road embankment (Roman and medieval road) (Figs 11-12, Nos 6, 33; Figs 15-17; Pls 4-7).
The embankment is situated in the western part of the survey area and continues up the hill to the east as a disused trackway between field banks (Fig. 11, Nos 98/131, 132). The best-preserved section (Fig. 12, No. 33) is about 10m broad, with a maximum height of 0.50m. Its southern edge is well-defined and to the north there is a flat-bottomed hollow way running between it and a field bank (Fig. 12, Nos 35, 36; Pl. 8). The embankment

is truncated by a 19th-century field bank (No. 47) and also perhaps by an earlier north-south field bank (Fig. 12, Nos 38, 47). However, this disturbance may have been caused by livestock, as has happened in the west of the survey area (Fig. 11). A low field bank (Fig. 12, Nos 34, 37) survives in places along its northern edge. A slight break of slope (Fig. 12, No. 39) running parallel to the embankment along its southern side may either be the southern limit of the earliest road (see section 6 below) or the northern limit of post-medieval cultivation represented by the narrow rig present elsewhere in the field (see Fig. 13).

To the west (Fig. 11) the embankment (No. 6) is slighter, more disturbed and its southern edge less well-defined. The line of the hollow way (No. 5) along its north side is clear, however. In places the rear of the embankment appears to be overlain by cultivation ridges (No. 7).

Medieval structures (Fig.12, Nos 116, 117; Fig. 18; Pls 10-11).
These consist of a sub-circular rubble stone foundation (No. 117), from which medieval pottery was recovered (see section 6 below), and an adjacent bank (No. 116) which forms a small sub-rectangular feature, possibly a house site. They lie immediately south of the old road line, and at the southern end of a trackway (between field bank Nos 78 and 75) leading in the direction of West Linnacombe Farm (now abandoned). Adjoining features include another truncated enclosure (bank Nos 123, 122, 126, 127), a bank and ditch to the south (Nos 58, 59) and two ponds to the west (Nos 120, 121). Whether these are contemporary with the possible medieval remains is not clear. To the east are three linear hollows (No. 100). These are aligned parallel to the trackway, and merge where they enter the area of medieval remains to the west. To the east they become submerged in the narrow rig. They may represent a series of narrow hollow ways.

Field banks (Figs 11-12, 19-20; Pls 9, 12-13)
These range from substantial banks up to 1.5m high, topped with the remnants of thorn hedges (e.g. Nos 1, 36, 47), to very slight banks only *c.* 0.2m high and ill-defined for much of their course (e.g. No. 55). Several have shallow ditches along one or both sides. The majority are arranged in two field systems, one to each side of the old road. That to the south (bank Nos 23, 26, 29, 40, 38, 39, 44, 50, 53, 55, 101, 102) is aligned slightly askew to the trackway, as is the northern system. Both abut the trackway however. Each system is subdivided into smaller fields by low banks little more than 1.2m wide and 0.50m high. Some (e.g. No. 101) have been truncated by post-medieval narrow rig. Later boundaries (e.g. Nos 45, 52, 133/134) subdivide the area between the southern field system and the present A30 route. This had been established by 1765 (Fig. 6), when Benjamin Donn's map of the county of Devon was produced (Ravenhill 1965).

The material from which individual field banks are constructed varies according to the type of material available in the immediate vicinity. Both large and small banks generally have a high stone content where they are in the vicinity of the rock outcrops along the southern edge of the area (e.g. Nos 23, 26) or in the centre (No. 83). Elsewhere the more substantial of the banks tend to have a high clay subsoil content and deeper ditches (e.g. Nos 1, 94, 35), whereas the slighter ones consist largely of topsoil (e.g. No. 101). Any firm correlation between the different materials and methods used in the construction of individual field banks with particular dates could only be

demonstrated by a comprehensive programme of sampling by excavation. In the meantime a possible sequence of development for the field systems can be suggested on topographical grounds (see section 7 below & Fig. 10).

Narrow rig (cultivation ridges) (Fig. 13)
Although in places this is discernible at ground level, its full extent is only visible from the air (Pl. 1). It is present over most of the area, with the exception of one small close bounded by field banks Nos 19, 20, 73, 1 and 94, the quarry areas, and the area of medieval settlement at the south end of the track from West Linnacombe Farm. The rig does not appear to overlie this track.

The most substantial remains lie in the eastern part of the survey area. Most ridges are only a maximum of *c.* 0.20m high, and are spaced at average intervals of *c.* 2.0m. Somewhat broader ridges lie in a small area (Fig. 11, No. 7) to the west, and are spaced at intervals of *c.* 3.0m (Fig. 17, Profile C). Most ridges are aligned parallel with the trackway, although some lie at right angles to it. In one northern area, however, they appear from the air photograph (Pl. 1) to lie askew to the whole field system. In some cases (e.g. Fig. 12, No. 105; Pl. 9) earlier very slight field banks lie on the same orientation as the narrow rig and are thus obscured by it.

Enclosure (Fig. 11, Nos 88, 90-2).
This lies in the north of the survey area, just outside the proposed area of landscaping. It is sub-rectangular in shape, and consists of a level area bounded by low rubble stone 'banks'. It coincides with an entry through field bank No. 93 with which it may be contemporary. The enclosure is truncated by a quarry (No. 89) in its SE corner. No features are visible in its interior.

From its relatively late place in the sequence of development, it is probably post-medieval in date. It may be contemporary with or later than the narrow rig, which does not appear to overlie it.

Quarries, ponds and other features less than a metre deep (Figs 11-12, 17)
Most of the quarries occur along the southern edge of the survey area. A small group of shallow ones (Nos 11-13) is present in the west, and others to the east (Nos 54, 109, 110). The latter truncate field banks and the narrow rig, and are therefore presumably 19th-century in date. A group of more substantial quarries (up to at least 2.5m deep) is located on an escarpment immediately north of the present A30. At least one (No. 28) has a gateway (No. 30) giving access to the present A30 route. Much of the visible stone waste is quartzite. Two other small quarries are located in the north of the area (Nos 85, 89). One (No. 85) cuts the ditch (No. 86) belonging to field bank No. 83 and probably the narrow rig also. Another quarry (No. 118) lies immediately to the east of the probable medieval remains (No. 117). It is not clear whether it was related to the latter or whether it is earlier or later than the narrow rig which lies to the south and east.

Only one very slight 'quarry' (No. 119) is overlain by narrow rig and is therefore probably pre-19th century in date. Most of the remainder are almost certainly 19th or early 20th-century as they truncate field banks and narrow rig. It has been suggested that similar 'quarries' on the eastern part of Sourton Down may have been prospecting

pits associated with Sourtondown Consols Mine (Cook & Towell 1986, 18).

Two ponds (Nos 120, 121) lie to the west. The southern is at least 2m deep and is partially infilled with stone rubble (Fig. 17, profile E, No. 601). The northern (No. 121) is shallower and flat-bottomed, and has no clear western edge. To the north it is bounded by the road embankment (No. 33), and to the east by banks (Nos 124, 122). Both become waterlogged and contain standing water during the winter months, and are referred to locally as dewponds. A thin strip of narrow rig aligned NW-SE along the western side of these ponds, in contrast to another area to the south of them which is aligned NE-SW (Fig. 13), indicates that this episode of the rig was probably laid out after the ponds were dug.

Another pond (Fig. 11, No. 17; Fig. 17, profile D) to the west may be relatively modern. It is associated with a shallow ditch (No. 15) which enters its western corner, and which may represent a relatively recent attempt at land drainage.

Two other mounds were identified, in addition to the possible burial mound (Fig. 11, No. 62). Both are small, and only a maximum of *c.* 0.30m high. One (Fig. 11, No. 71) is located adjoining a modern track in an area of bog in a valley bottom. Its position and slightness argues against identification as a prehistoric burial mound. The other (Fig. 12, No. 107) is both slight and small, overlies the ditch (No. 108) of field bank No. 9, and is probably related to the modern rebuilding of the adjoining section of this field bank.

6. THE EXCAVATIONS (Figs 14-16, 18-20; Pls 6-7, 9-13)

6.1 **Aims**

The main objectives of the excavation programme as defined by Devon County Council were to evaluate the character of the archaeological remains identified in the survey and in the previous assessment (Berridge & Weddell 1985), to date the remains if possible, and to assess the potential for the recovery of information about the past environment of Sourton Down. No attempt was made fully to excavate the remains.

6.2 **Results**

Trench 1 (the ?Bronze Age barrow) (Fig. 11, No. 62; Fig. 14; Pl. 3)
One trench was excavated along the present hedgeline, where the mound has been partially removed by the hedge ditch (No. 63). The purpose was to assess the character of the mound material, and to determine whether or not there was a ditch surrounding it. No attempt was made to cut the trench into the mound material itself as this would not be an appropriate way to approach the excavation of a barrow. An examination of the section exposed in the side of the ditch (No. 136) running along the western side of the hedge was also made. Measured profiles across the mound were recorded (Fig. 14, F, G), and an augered profile (H) was obtained to the north of the mound in an attempt to locate any ditch associated with the mound in this area.

No ditch was identified around the mound; feature No. 607 at the southern end of the excavation trench was a shallow hollow which did not extend the full width of the

trench. The mound material consists of firm, relatively clean clay. The examination of the side of the western hedge ditch revealed that this lies directly over slightly more compact natural clay containing layers of shale. Much of the north-west area of the mound seems to consist of a natural shale outcrop. No layer of buried soil was identified between the clay mound material and the underlying natural deposits, although a few fragments of charcoal were discovered within the clay at the northern edge of the mound through augering.

Thus whether or not this prominent feature represents a prehistoric burial mound remains unclear, as neither a surrounding ditch nor an underlying buried soil was discovered. Neither of these is however a necessary attribute of a barrow of the second millennium BC, and the prominence and structure of this feature suggest that part of it at least was deliberately constructed, perhaps making use of a pre-existing natural outcrop or eminence. The date and function of the mound will only be discovered through further evaluation excavation.

Trench 2 (the Roman and medieval road embankment) (Figs 15-17; Pls 4-7)
A trench was cut across the disused trackway embankment (Fig. 12, No. 33) to evaluate the character and extent of any metalled surfaces which might survive, and if possible to obtain dating evidence for their construction.

Three separate road surfaces were identified. The earliest (Fig. 15, Plan 3, No. 509; Pl. 6) consisted of compact gravel which overlay irregular hollows reminiscent of tree roots (Plan 4). The surviving road metalling was *c.* 11.50m wide, although both edges of the road had been disturbed by quarrying and ploughing, the latter possibly associated with the post-medieval narrow rig visible to the south (Fig. 13). The presence of possible root holes and the lack of turf or topsoil beneath the road surface may indicate that the land was cleared of trees and scrub immediately before the construction of the road. The road metalling was overlain by a thin layer of turf (No. 505) which contained a sherd of medieval pottery. This was subsequently overlain by another stone surface (Fig. 15, Plan 2, No. 504) *c.* 4m wide, which contained two possible ruts. This metalling is restricted to the northern part of the earlier road, and is likewise truncated on the north by a quarry pit. A shallow ditch (No. 522) running along the southern edge of the road may be contemporary with this phase. Later another heavily worn cobbled surface (Fig. 15, Plan 1, No. 501; Pl. 7) was laid over the same area of road on a bedding of clay. This had again been truncated to the north by later quarry pits (Nos 503 and 523). Consequently no relationship survived between the road surfaces and the field bank (No. 544) running parallel to them to the north.

The presence of a sherd of medieval pottery directly above the earliest road surface clearly indicates that the two later surfaces are medieval or later in date. The earliest metalling is identified as the truncated remains of a Roman road (a) on topographical grounds and (b) because a medieval highway is unlikely to have been constructed with such a wide and solid embankment as this road possesses. The Sourton Down road is similar in scale and character to the Roman road excavated in 1990 on the line of the A35 Axminster bypass.

Trench 3 (medieval structure) (Fig. 12, No. 117; Fig. 18; Pls 10-11)
Approximately half of a sub-circular stone feature was exposed, with the purpose of examining its character and if possible dating it. No archaeological deposits were removed, other than topsoil.

The structure consists of low rubble stone walls which on excavation appeared sub-rectangular in shape. The walls contain undressed, medium-sized rubble stone; no facing or kerb stones were visible. Clay was exposed in the interior of the structure, from the surface of which medieval pottery was recovered.

Although the pottery indicates that the structure was used in the medieval period, the wall bears some similarity to those of prehistoric hut circles excavated on Shaugh Moor (Smith 1985, 6-13). There are cases elsewhere of prehistoric enclosures and structures being partly re-used during the medieval period, for instance at Hound Tor (Beresford 1979, 104-5).

Trenches 4-11 (field banks) (Figs 19-20; Pls 9, 12-13)
Several trenches were cut to sample the character of the different types of field bank identified in the survey, and to assess the survival of any buried soils underlying them and the potential for the retrieval of environmental information.

Most of the banks consisted solely of topsoil, for example Nos 101, 102, 133, 103, 23, 14 and 73 (Trenches 6, 10, 4, 7, 9 and 8 respectively; Figs 19-20; Pl. 12). Two of the others, Nos 36 and 47 (Trench Nos 2 and 5; Figs 16, 20; Pl. 13) also contained clay upcast from ditches flanking each side. These were the most substantial of the field banks sampled, and the only ones to possess ditches.

Others, including Nos 23, 133 and 105 (Pl. 9) (Trenches 7, 4 and 11 respectively; Figs 19-20) contain a high proportion of rubble quartzite, probably cleared from the adjoining fields. There appears to be a quartzite outcrop running approximately SW-NE through the southern part of the survey area, on which are located several 19th-century quarries or prospecting pits. Trench Nos 4 and 11 lie slightly to the south of this apparent alignment, but stone from the downslope side of the outcrop may have been utilised.

In section several of the banks appear to be very slight. Bank No. 14 (Trench 9, Fig. 20) is hardly discernible at all, and may be a slightly more prominent example of the narrow rig, which in this area runs NW-SE (Fig. 13). However, the differing orientation of the narrow rig to each side of this feature indicates that a boundary probably did exist in this area. Bank No. 105 (Trench 11, Fig. 19; Pl. 9) likewise may be little more than a particularly prominent example of narrow rig, which in this field is again aligned parallel to it (Fig. 13). However, its relatively high stone content suggests that it represents a low field wall, predating, and submerged within, the narrow rig. It may be a westward continuation of a similar feature discovered to the east in 1986 (see phase 1 in Fig. 10; Cook & Towell 1986, 23, feature No. 134) which is thought to be related to a probable prehistoric enclosure (B. Kerr, pers. comm.).

All the banks appear to be of a single phase of construction, with the components of Bank No. 36 (Trench 2, feature Nos 525-27; Fig. 16) being interpreted as contemporary upcast from each side.

Buried soils were found beneath bank Nos 36 and 47 (Trenches 2, 5; Figs 16, 20), and bank No. 73 (Trench 8, Fig. 20). Samples have been taken for examination. Although no identifiable buried soil was present below any of the other banks, such deposits would probably be discovered through a more comprehensive sampling programme. No dating evidence was recovered.

6.3 **Conclusions**

The results of the excavations indicate that the old roadline represented by the embankment and trackway had been in use since at least the medieval period, and almost certainly has a Roman origin. An area of medieval activity incorporating feature No. 117 and probably also No. 116 (Fig. 12) exists around the southern end of a trackway from West Linnacombe Farm. No conclusive evidence of the date and function of the mound (Fig. 11, No. 62) on the western edge of the survey area emerged, although its shape and prominence suggests it is man-made, and its relationship with the hedge (which skirts it) implies an early date. More extensive excavation would be necessary to assess its date and function.

Buried soils were discovered beneath some of the fieldbanks sampled, and variations were demonstrated in the latter's mode of construction. Whether these variations are due solely to differences in the material locally available for use in their construction, or to differences in date and function, will only be established by a more comprehensive programme of excavation.

7. INTERPRETATION (Fig. 10)

A sequence of development can be suggested for the archaeological remains in the survey area, including those to the east surveyed and excavated by the Central Excavation Unit in 1986. This is based on topographical considerations, on 18th and 19th-century documentary sources, and on the preliminary results of the 1990 excavations (section 6 above) and the 1986 Central Excavation Unit excavations. The latter were kindly provided by Brian Kerr.

Topographical evidence includes the following. Certain field banks run up to others, and not beyond them, indicating that the latter are earlier in date. Similarly, some banks abut or halt immediately short of the corners of other fields, often turning slightly to meet them. This again indicates that the latter existed before the construction of the former. A particularly clear example is the junction between field bank Nos 40 and 38/39 (Fig. 12). Bank Nos 38, 39, 44 and 50 enclose a field which was clearly already in existence by the time another field (represented by bank Nos 23, 26, 29 and 40) was enclosed to the west. Other relationships, such as the truncation of earlier field banks by a 19th-century bank (No. 47) and its associated trackway (Nos 51, 56, 115) are clear.

Documentary evidence includes Donn's 1765 map of Devon (Ravenhill 1965; Fig. 6), the early 19th-century Ordnance Survey 2" to 1 mile sketch plans (Fig. 7), the 1844 Tithe Map (Fig. 8), and the 1889 1st edition OS 6" map (Fig. 9). No earlier documentary evidence is known at present. The earliest accurate depiction of the field system is on the 1844 Tithe Map, although earlier maps do show the roads. The early 19th-century OS sketch plans are just that; many of the field boundaries depicted indicate the presence of fields, but not the accurate location of individual boundaries. Similarly, not all field boundaries were necessarily included on tithe maps. If the land was not subject to tithe, then it may not have been mapped. Further, if fields were only used intermittently for pasture or cultivation, their boundaries may only have been slight and may not have been considered of sufficient significance (or permanence) to be mapped. This may be especially true of intermittently cultivated marginal upland areas such as Sourton Down.

The excavation evidence indicates that the old road line was in use during the medieval period, and was probably Roman in date. An area of medieval activity, perhaps a small settlement or farmstead, was identified at the end of a track from West Linnacombe Farm. In 1986 a possible Bronze Age funerary enclosure was found to the east, and a square enclosure to the north of this was thought to be of Roman date, though no convincing dating evidence has been recovered (B. Kerr, pers. comm.). In this area the old roadway was found to predate the adjoining field banks, and to have continued in use after their construction. However, whilst the excavated evidence indicates the date of particular remains, there is as yet no direct evidence for when the earliest elements of the field system were first laid out, or of any direct relationships between these and the medieval remains.

7.1 **Phase 1. Prehistoric and Roman**

Prehistoric remains on Sourton Down include a possible funerary enclosure excavated by the Central Excavation Unit in 1986, together with a probable burial mound identified in the present survey (Fig. 14; Pl. 3; section 6 above). A low stone bank running westwards from the enclosure may be a contemporary feature. A Bronze Age origin for some field banks has been suggested by Fleming, who identifies them as possible elements of the Meldon parallel reave system (1983, 218, 236-7; Fig. 4). This is supported by the fact that they are cut across by the Roman road (see below) at a slight angle, suggesting that they are earlier in date than the road. They were maintained as boundaries until earlier this century (compare phases 1 & 4, Fig. 10). The line of the eastern boundary is continued southwards by a field bank (No. 47) which was constructed between 1840 and 1889. Whether this followed the line of a reave by coincidence is not clear; no early bank was found within it where it was sectioned (Trench 5, Fig. 20). The earlier medieval and post-medieval field system to the south of the old road is not aligned upon the suggested reaves, and is clearly cut across by the 19th-century bank (No. 47). Thus the Bronze Age reaves, if such they are, continued to be utilised as field boundaries to the north of the road, but not to the south.

In the Roman period a metalled road embankment was constructed running slightly askew to the line of the suggested Bronze Age reaves. This was at least 11.5m wide, about twice the width of the later medieval trackway. The substantial size of this feature

and its solidity of construction suggest that it was an important highway. On topographical grounds (see section 3.2 above) it can be identified with the main Roman road leading from Exeter around the north of Dartmoor and into Cornwall. This interpretation is further supported by the presence of a turf layer overlying it (which implies a time lapse between its construction and that of the overlying medieval roads).

7.2 **Phase 2 Medieval**

This phase of development is identified largely on topographical and later cartographic grounds, as there are no contemporary documentary sources available for Sourton Down and none of the trenches through the fieldbanks produced any dating evidence. A sherd of medieval pottery found underlying the upper road surfaces in Trench No. 2 (section 6.2 above) indicates that the Roman road was in use during the medieval period. At least one medieval structure has been identified adjoining the road, lying at the south end of a track from West Linnacombe Farm (Trench No. 3, section 6.2 above).

During this phase there is no direct link between the field systems to each side of the road. Although each is aligned upon the road, they lie askew to one another, and no boundary alignment continues across the road line. The exception is that represented by field banks Nos 83 and 23 (Fig. 11). However, No. 83 is one of the earliest elements of the northern system (and may be Bronze Age in origin), whilst No. 23 represents the latest of a series of successively enclosed fields. Therefore they are unlikely to be contemporary.

The field system lying to the north of the road consists of several parallel major banks aligned NW-SE (Figs 11-12, Nos 61, 94, 83, 75), possibly on the line of earlier Bronze Age reaves (see above). None continue beyond the road. They join another bank (Figs 11-12, Nos 1, 22, 36) running along the northern edge of the road. To the east a slight bank (Fig. 12, Nos 78, 81, 113) forms (with bank No. 75) a trackway leading north-westwards towards the site of West Linnacombe Farm (abandoned early this century). Bank No. 130 may overlie its southern terminus. The southern boundary of the field to the east of this track is probably represented by a slight bank (No. 98) running down the centre of the later trackway. This has a stone base, and would seem to predate the much more substantial bank lying immediately to the north (No. 131). There is no room for a trackway or road between the two.

The four large fields were then subdivided by slighter boundary banks, not necessarily all at the same time. In the westernmost field the construction of boundaries (Fig. 11, Nos 73, 64/66/68/69) running NE-SW was probably followed by others (Nos 19/20, 72/112, and possibly No. 74) running NW-SE. The boundary represented by bank No. 72/112 probably continued along the line of a stream to meet No. 69 (Fig. 10). Alternatively, the western portion of No. 73 may have been built first with No. 19/20, to be followed by the remainder of No. 73 and Nos 72/112. Or indeed the reverse may have been the case.

The central fields were subdivided by bank Nos 82 and 87. The latter turns sharply northwards at its western end, and was continuous with another, slighter bank running NW-SE (which is outside the survey area). Two parallel banks (Nos 79, 80) were

constructed within the easternmost field.

The field system to the south of the road appears to have been first established in the east of the area, and then progressively extended westwards. In the 1990 survey area the earliest element appears to be a slight bank (No. 101) which runs NW-SE and turns north-eastwards at its southern end (bank No. 102). Towards the east the latter becomes indistinguishable from the later narrow rig (cultivation ridges) and is not visible beyond the modern track. It may originally have joined up with a fieldbank to the east surveyed in 1986 (Cook & Towell, plan Nos 2A, 2B; feature Nos 18, 39). Whether the remainder of the field enclosed by bank Nos 18 and 48 was also in existence at this time is not clear.

Later other fields were enclosed to the west. One represented by bank Nos 38, 39/44/50 was followed subsequently by another formed by bank Nos 23, 26/29/40 (Fig. 12). The former was subdivided into three by two banks running NW-SE (Nos 53, 55). These have largely been ploughed out and the remaining sections are truncated by narrow rig.

To the south two hollow ways identified in 1986 may have formed an early alignment of the Okehampton to Tavistock route, which was later (phase 3) established on the line of the current A386 trunk road. To the west three possible hollow ways (Fig. 12, No. 100) along the southern edge of the trackway may date to before the constriction of the trackway route by the construction of bank No. 132 and the enclosure of the fields to the south (bank No. 50). To the west the hollow ways merge into one, perhaps respecting the medieval settlement (structure No. 117 and possibly No. 116), or the beginning of the hillslope.

Date

No direct dating evidence in the form of finds or documentary material exists for these field systems. However, the following factors indicate that they probably date to the medieval period.

The enclosure of marginal ground on the upland fringes of Dartmoor has been ascribed to three main periods: the Bronze Age (from *c.* 1600BC-1000BC); the medieval period up to the 14th century AD; and to the later 18th century and early 19th century, when much marginal land elsewhere in the country was enclosed by Act of Parliament. Temporary enclosure of moorland for the intermittent cropping of potatoes, oats and other hardy root and corn crops also occurred during the latter period.

The Bronze Age enclosure took the form of co-axial reave systems: a series of parallel field banks laid out over wide areas of land. In some areas these have continued to be used as field boundaries, in others they have been overlain by later field systems of different form and alignment.

Earlier medieval enclosure produced fields of varying regularity, although a regular pattern of elongated strips of land within these fields often evolved. In the 13th century areas of moorland adjoining already enclosed lands were often enclosed as a result of land hunger and favourable climatic conditions. These were briefly cultivated until the

mid 14th century, when population decline and climatic deterioration usually led to their abandonment. In contrast to the above types of enclosure late 18th and 19th-century enclosure was usually of a highly regular form. New boundaries were laid out in straight lines and at right angles to existing features.

On Sourton Down the field system to the south of the road is not generally aligned 'square on' to the road alignment. Moreover, several of the boundaries are sinuous, and the system as a whole has been built up progressively from east to west. This is in contrast to later 18th and 19th-century enclosures which involve the regular subdivision of an area of land taken as a whole, rather than the type of piecemeal enclosure which has occurred here. Thus on morphological grounds alone the southern field system on Sourton Down would seem likely to predate the main period of 18th/19th-century enclosure.

In contrast the overall framework of the field system to the north of the road is more regular, and appears to have been laid out as a single unit. However, this may be due at least in part to its being based on earlier Bronze Age reaves. The main NW-SE banks (Figs 11-12, Nos 75, 83, 94) are set slightly askew to the pre-existing road line, rather than at right-angles to it. The narrow rig (Fig. 13) is aligned upon these major NW-SE banks, and respects certain of the slighter subdivisions (Nos 19/20, 72/112, 93/87). However, others (Nos 73, 82) running SW-NE are sinuous in character, and do not therefore appear to be contemporary with the narrow rig. Of these it is possible that No. 82 may have been constructed after the narrow rig. This cannot be the case for No. 73 since it forms an integral part of the network of boundaries which include Nos 19/20 and 72. These are clearly respected by the narrow rig and are thus presumably contemporary or earlier. It is most likely therefore that in this area the 18th/19th-century narrow rig has been fitted into a pre-existing field system.

Other factors indicate that most of the field systems within the survey area originated before the latest period of enclosure activity, and may therefore be of medieval or earlier origin.

Thus on topographical grounds it is clear that the main elements of the phase 2 field systems date to before 1765, when the present line of the A30 route over Sourton Down is first documented (on Donn's 1765 map of Devon; Ravenhill 1965; Fig. 6). Most of the presumed medieval boundaries were re-used during the later 18th and 19th-century phase of enclosure, with narrow rig being inserted into pre-existing fields, and with some subdivisions being removed (see phase 3 below). However, part of the field system (not surveyed) lying to the north of the area surveyed may be the result of 18th/19th-century enclosure. The alignment of the Phase 2 field system is clearly dictated by the course of the Roman and medieval road rather than the A30 road to the south. This is true of the latest element in this phase (represented by Nos 23, 26, 29 on Fig. 12) which was the westernmost field laid out on the south side of the medieval road. Furthermore the trackway leading towards West Linnacombe Farm which is thought to be of medieval date (Fig. 12, Nos 75 and 78), is integral with the field system as a whole.

7.3 **Phase 3 Late 18th century**

By 1765, when Benjamin Donn produced his map of the county of Devon (Ravenhill 1965; Fig. 6), the lines of the present A30 and A386 routes had become established, although the Roman and medieval road across Sourton Down is still depicted. The A30 route ran through unenclosed land immediately to the south of the earlier field system (phase 2 above), and the A386 route to Tavistock probably replaced a sinuous trackway which had previously run across the same unenclosed land just to the north. Hence, the new routes became established across unenclosed waste rather than through already existing field systems.

The old Launceston road remained in use, although probably as a route of lesser status. In the western part of Sourton Down the original Roman and medieval road seems to have gone out of use, with the track running along a hollow way immediately to the north (Figs 11-12; Nos 5, 35; Pl. 8). There are the remains of a low field bank along the southern edge of this hollow way (in effect the northern edge of the earlier road embankment, Fig. 12, Nos 34, 37), and cultivation ridges (Fig. 11, No. 7) overlie the earlier road to the west. Although broader, these are probably contemporary with the narrow rig present elsewhere (Fig. 13).

To the east the bank (Fig. 12, No. 98) along the northern edge of the roadway was probably replaced by a more substantial one immediately to the north (No. 131). At its western end this runs (as No. 130) along the eastern side of the trackway to Linnacombe Farm, implying that this trackway remained in use. Indeed, it was later (in phase 4) extended southwards to the A30 route after the old road went out of use. To the east this bank (No. 131) has been truncated by another NW-SE field boundary (surveyed in 1986), but this apparently went out of use before the tithe map of 1844 (Fig. 8) was surveyed.

There is no evidence for the medieval settlement at the south end of the trackway from West Linnacombe Farm remaining in use in the post-medieval period, although the construction of bank No. 130 indicates that the line of the trackway was maintained. In common with similar sites elsewhere, at Hound Tor (Beresford 1979) and Holne Moor (Fleming and Ralph 1982) for example, it was probably abandoned in the early to mid 14th century, when population decline and climatic deterioration rendered the cultivation of marginal upland areas such as Sourton Down both unprofitable and impracticable.

For similar reasons some parts of the medieval field systems on Sourton Down may have been abandoned in the 14th century. However, most fields were later re-used when the Down was cultivated in the 18th and 19th centuries, except for some subdivisions which are truncated by the narrow rig (Figs 11-12, Nos 53, 55, 101, ?74). At Hound Tor former medieval fields (which had fallen out of cultivation) were similarly re-used when the land was cultivated in the late 18th/early 19th century (Beresford 1979, 150-2).

Most of the field system to the north of the old road line was re-utilised in this period, with regular narrow rig being inserted within the pre-existing fields. One possible NW-SE field bank (No. 74) has been removed, whilst that running northwards from the west end of No. 87 is overlain by narrow rig. Field bank No. 87 continues as

No. 93, which has been added later. This may have occurred in the late medieval period (phase 2) or later. In any event it is respected by the narrow rig. There is also a small enclosure to the south of the entrance left between bank Nos 87 and 93. No internal features are visible. It is not overlain by narrow rig and its function is unclear.

The narrow rig is generally aligned (Fig. 13) at right-angles to the main NW-SE axis of the system (Figs 11-12, bank Nos 61, 94, 83, 75), except in the north of the area where it is aligned N-S and not on any particular boundaries. It is present in all fields except one, and does not run across the line of the trackway to West Linnacombe.

To the south of the road most of the earlier field system was re-used, except for some internal subdivisions which were largely ploughed out (Fig. 12, Nos 53, 55, 101). To the south, new field banks were added, subdividing the area between the earlier field system and the present A30 road. These are generally aligned at right-angles to the latter and post-date its construction (which had occurred by 1765). They include bank Nos 45/46, 52/111 and 133/134, together with two surveyed in 1986 (Cook & Towell, context Nos 1, 47). Boundaries also probably existed in the western area, as is indicated by the differing orientations of the narrow rig (Fig. 13). The line of one (No. 18) is clear from aerial photographs, but is indistinct on the ground. The other may be represented by 'bank' No. 14 (Fig. 11). Narrow rig is present in all the fields, except to the west of bank No. 45/46 and in the area of the medieval settlement. Immediately to the west of this it skirts around two ponds, suggesting that these may be earlier in date, and perhaps related to the settlement.

Date
The present A30 route was established by 1765, and had completely superseded the old road line by the time the Tithe Map was produced in 1844 (see section 3.2 above). Several field boundaries clearly post-date the A30 route, and probably therefore date from the late 18th or early 19th century. These are not shown on the OS surveyor's sketches of *c.* 1800 (Fig. 7), which indicates either that they post-date this map, or that they were too temporary and inconsequential to be included. The narrow rig respects these later boundaries and most of the earlier ones, and is probably of late 18th/early 19th-century date. Cultivation probably ceased in the economic slump which occurred in the 1820s after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1844 the only field banks to be shown on the Tithe Map are the main NW-SE boundaries of the northern system (Fig. 8; and Figs 11-12; Nos 61, 94, 83, 75), together with the main NE-SW line (Nos 1/21/36).

7.4 **Phase 4. Late 19th century**

By 1844 the old Roman and medieval road had gone out of use entirely, although it still appears as a boundary between two plots (Fig. 8, Nos 743 and 1747). Of the fields only the main elements of the system to the north of the road are depicted.

By 1889, when the 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey 6" map was produced (Fig. 9), the easternmost of these boundaries (No. 75) was extended southwards to the A30 route (Fig. 12, No. 47). A track (No. 51/56/115) ran along its eastern side, truncating earlier boundaries (e.g. Nos 50, 58) and linking up with the track running to West Linnacombe Farm. It presumably provided access to the farm from the A30 route after

the old road went out of use.

To the east an earlier boundary (Cook & Towell 1986, context No. 48 (N part)) was also extended southwards to the A30. This extension (the S part of context 48) ran parallel to the western example (Fig. 12, No. 47). An earlier NE-SW field bank was also utilised as a boundary at this time (Cook & Towell 1986, context No. 39). Thus the area was divided up into six large fields.

A series of quarries of varying size and depth are present throughout the area in this period. Most truncate earlier field boundaries and the narrow rig, and are therefore mid to late 19th-century in date. One group (Fig. 12, Nos 28, 31, 32, 41) is concentrated along a vein of quartzite running approximately NE-SW through the south of the area, with a gate providing access to the A30 route. These may be prospecting pits associated with Sourtondown Consols Mine which was being worked for copper in the late 19th century (Fig. 9) and lies immediately south of the current A30. Others in the north and north-east of the area may have been worked for limestone (Cook & Towell 1986). A pond was also constructed in the west of the area (Fig. 11, No. 17), together with a ditch running into its western corner. A slight mound (Fig. 11, No. 71) in the north-west of the area may be related to the crossing of a stream bed by a track at this point. It is slight, and probably of no great antiquity.

7.5 **20th-century developments**

These have included the rebuilding of the westernmost portion of field bank No. 9 (Fig. 11, bank No. 10), and the patching of the latter to the east. A small adjoining mound (Fig. 12, No. 107) is probably the result of this. Earthworks associated with a World War II 'layby' and 1970s stock-car racing were present on the eastern part of the Down (B. Kerr, pers. comm.). Most recent developments include the construction of the current trackway to Linnacombe Farm and of the new Okehampton Bypass and adjoining garage and picnic area.

8. CONCLUSION

Sourton Down is an agriculturally marginal upland area which has not been subjected to intensive modern farming methods, so that extensive archaeological remains survive from the prehistoric period onwards.

The archaeological evaluation has identified a probable Bronze Age barrow, a broad metalled Roman road (the main Roman route into Cornwall), a small medieval settlement, and a multi-phase field system, the earliest elements of which were probably established in the Bronze Age. A possible sequence of development for this complex landscape can be suggested on topographical grounds and on the preliminary results of the 1986 and 1990 excavations.

The Roman road continued in use throughout the medieval period and into the 18th century, although the presence of a thin layer of turf overlying the earliest surface may indicate a period of abandonment or intermittent use. In the medieval period the road was only half the width of its Roman predecessor, and by the late 18th century had

degenerated into a trackway running along a hollow way to the north of the earlier road. It was superseded as the main northern route into Cornwall by the present A30 road, which had become established by 1765. By 1844 it was no longer used as a road at all.

A small medieval settlement was identified at the southern end of a trackway from West Linnacombe Farm. This may be related to the exploitation of the Down at this period from the farms or settlements at East and West Linnacombe. The medieval settlement on the Down had probably been abandoned by 1400, in common with others in similar agriculturally marginal upland locations.

The bulk of the field system can be shown on topographical grounds to pre-date the present A30 trunk road. This had been established by 1765, indicating that most of the field system belongs to the medieval phase of enclosure, which ended in the 14th century, rather than the later 18th/19th-century phase. Indeed, the main lines of the field system lying to the north of the old road may represent the remnants of a Bronze Age parallel reave system (dating to *c.* 1600-1000BC).

During the late 18th and early 19th century several more field boundaries were added and the Down was cultivated, as was the case with other marginal moorland areas at this time. The narrow rig dates from this period. Cultivation probably ceased with the economic slump which occurred soon after the end of the Napoleonic wars. Most of the fields had probably gone out of use by 1844, and by 1889 the southern area had been divided into two by a new hedgebank and trackway leading to West Linnacombe Farm. Stone quarrying and mineral prospecting also occurred after the fields had been abandoned for cultivation.

Although the above sequence of development can be postulated with some confidence, further archaeological work is needed to confirm and clarify the picture, particularly as regards the date of the various elements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The western part of Sourton Down is owned by Mr R.A. Coles of Higher Beardon Farm, Lydford, who kindly allowed the survey and excavations to take place. Thanks are due also to Brian Kerr of the Central Excavation Unit of English Heritage for kindly making available the preliminary results of his 1986 excavations.

The survey was undertaken by A.R. Pye and S. Noble, with the assistance of V. Biver and Dr K. Westcott. The excavations were supervised by M. Knight, R. Mortimer, P. Stead and M. Hall, and were undertaken with the assistance of M. Gardner, N. Goodwin, S. Reed, and A. Stead. S. Reed compiled the environmental assessment and R. Goodyer and S. Turton with W.R. Bridgewater assisted with the historical research. The figures were compiled by T. Dixon, M. Gardner, R. Mortimer and S. Noble. These and the plates (except No. 1) were printed by G. Young and mounted by R. Mortimer. Plate 1 was taken by F.M. Griffith of Devon County Council, and the remainder by the project staff. The text was typed by P.A. Wakeham and J.Z. Juddery.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Balkwill, C.J. & Silvester, R.J. 1976 Earthworks on Sourton Down, near Okehampton. *Proc. Devon Archaeol. Soc.* **34**, 86-9.

Beresford, G. 1979 Three deserted medieval settlements on Dartmoor: a report on the late E. Marie Minter's excavations. *Med. Arch.* **23**, 98-158.

Berridge, P.J. & Weddell, P.J. 1985 *Preliminary archaeological assessment of proposed A30 trunk road improvement scheme. Sourton to Lifton Down.*

Cook, M. & Towell, J. 1986 *Okehampton Bypass Field Survey.*

DRO *Devon Record Office*

Fleming, A. 1983 Prehistoric landscape of Dartmoor, Part 2. *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* **49**, 195-241.

------ & Ralph, N. 1982 Medieval settlement and land use on Holne Moor, Dartmoor: the landscape evidence. *Med. Arch.* **26**, 101-137.

Margary, I. 1955 *Roman Roads in Britain.*

Ravenhill, W.L.D. 1965 *Benjamin Donn. A map of the County of Devon, 1765.*

Smith, K. 1985 The excavation of a Bronze Age enclosure on Shaugh Moor. *Devon Archaeology*, **3**, 6-13.

Summerson, H. 1985 *Crown Pleas of the Devon Eyre of 1238*, Devon Cornwall Record Soc. New Ser., **28**.

Vancouver, C. 1808 *General view of the agriculture of the County of Devon.*

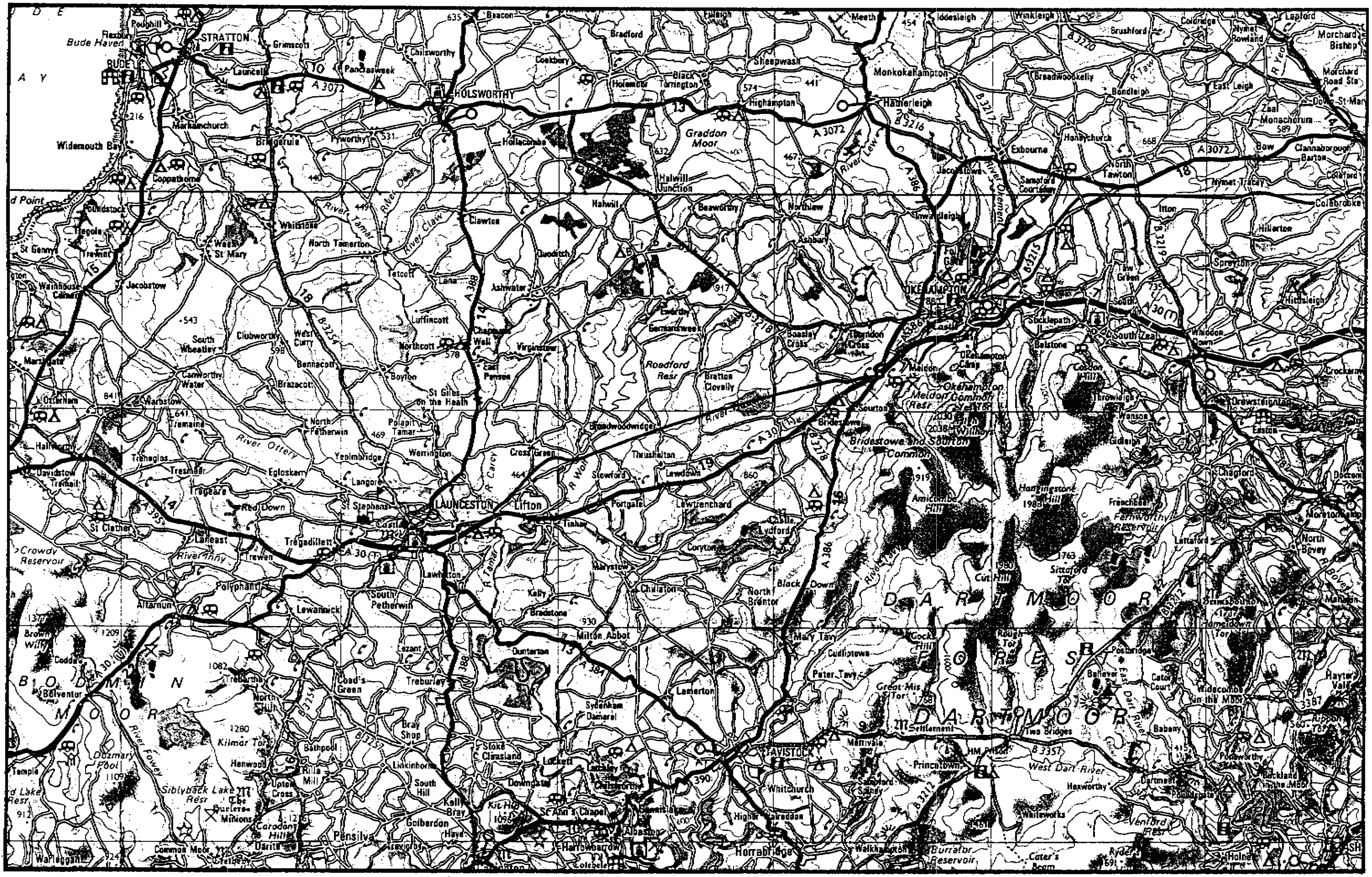
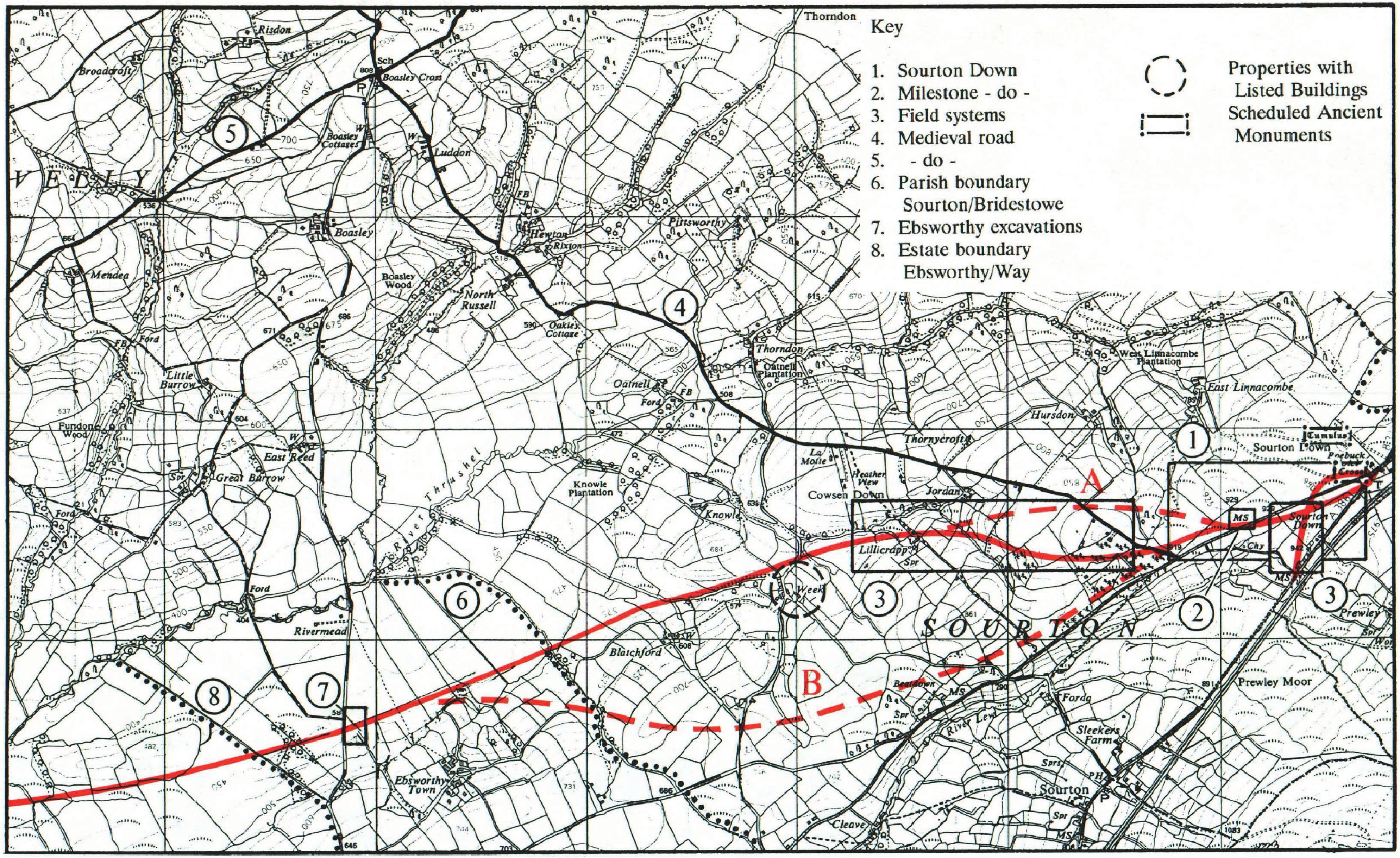


Fig. 1 The overall line of the Published Route.


Key
1. Sourton Down
2. Milestone - do -
3. Field systems
4. Medieval road
5. - do -
6. Parish boundary Sourton/Bridestowe
7. Ebsworthy excavations
8. Estate boundary Ebsworthy/Way
Properties with Listed Buildings
Scheduled Ancient Monuments
A
B
SOURTON
Sourton Down
Prewley Moor
Sourton
Ebsworthy Town
Blatchford
Lillicrapp
Cowsen Down
Jordan
Thornycroft
Hursdon
Thorndon
Oatnell
Knowle Plantation
Knowle
Week
Rivermead
Boasley Cross
Boasley
Luddon
Risdon
Broadcroft
Mendea
Little Burrow
Great Burrow
East Reed
Fundon Wood
North Russell
Boasley Wood
Oakley Cottage
Hewton
Rixton
Pittsworthy
West Linnacombe Plantation
East Linnacombe
Sleekers Farm
Cleave
River Thrushel
River Lew
Fig 2

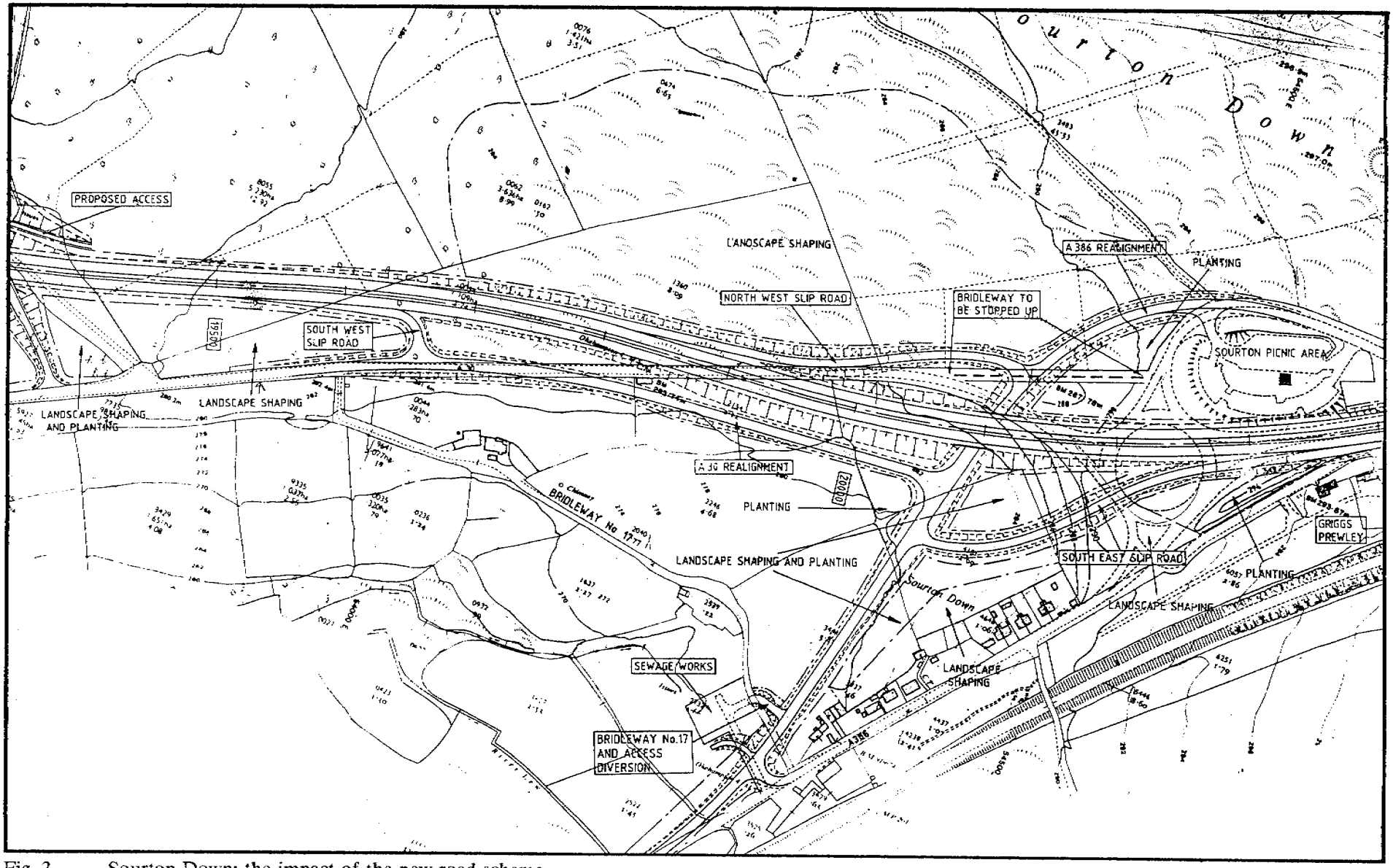


Fig. 3 Sourton Down: the impact of the new road scheme.

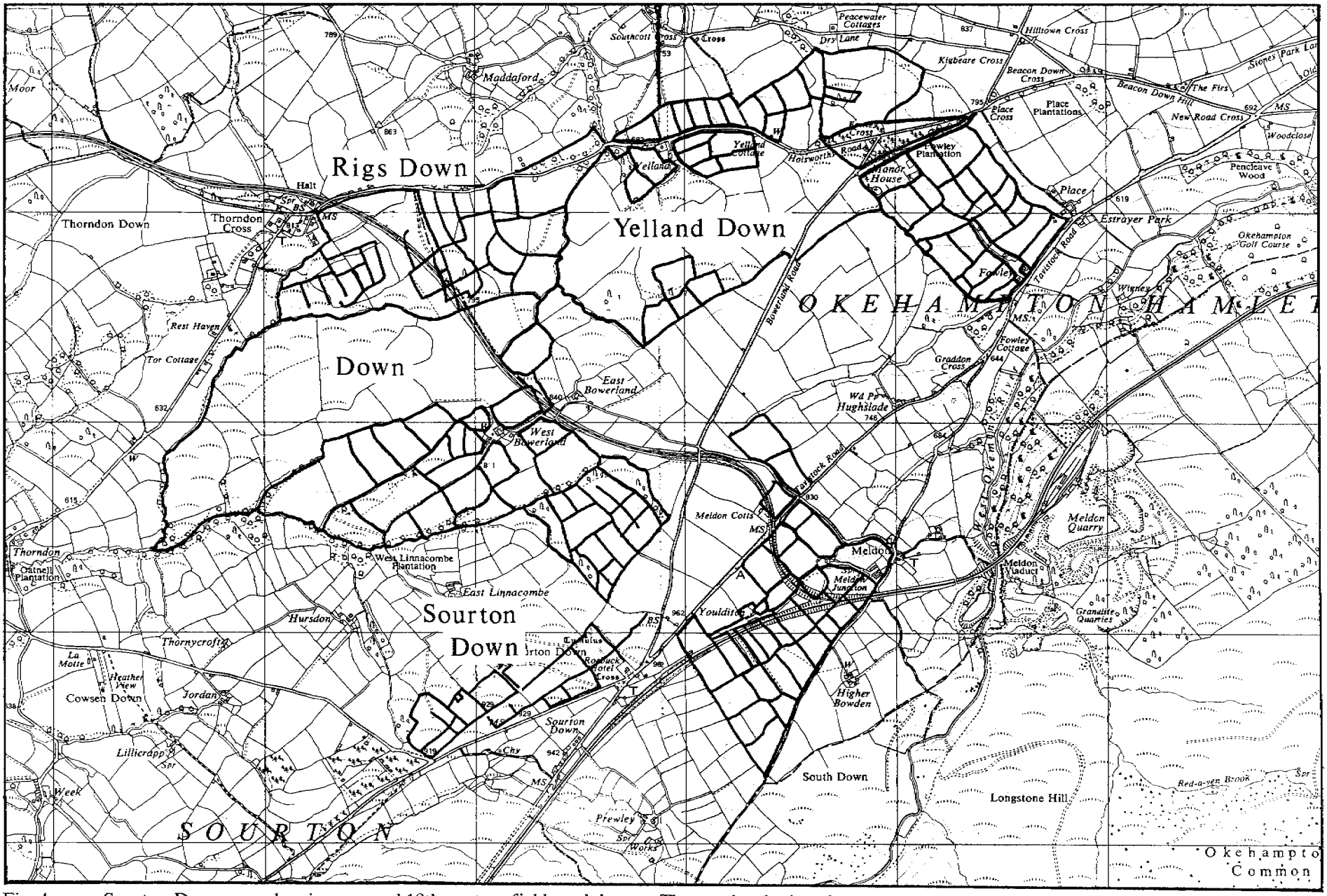


Fig. 4 Sourton Down area showing mapped 18th-century fields and downs. The overlay depicts the suggested Bronze Age reaves (based on Fleming, 1983, 218) and Roman road alignment.

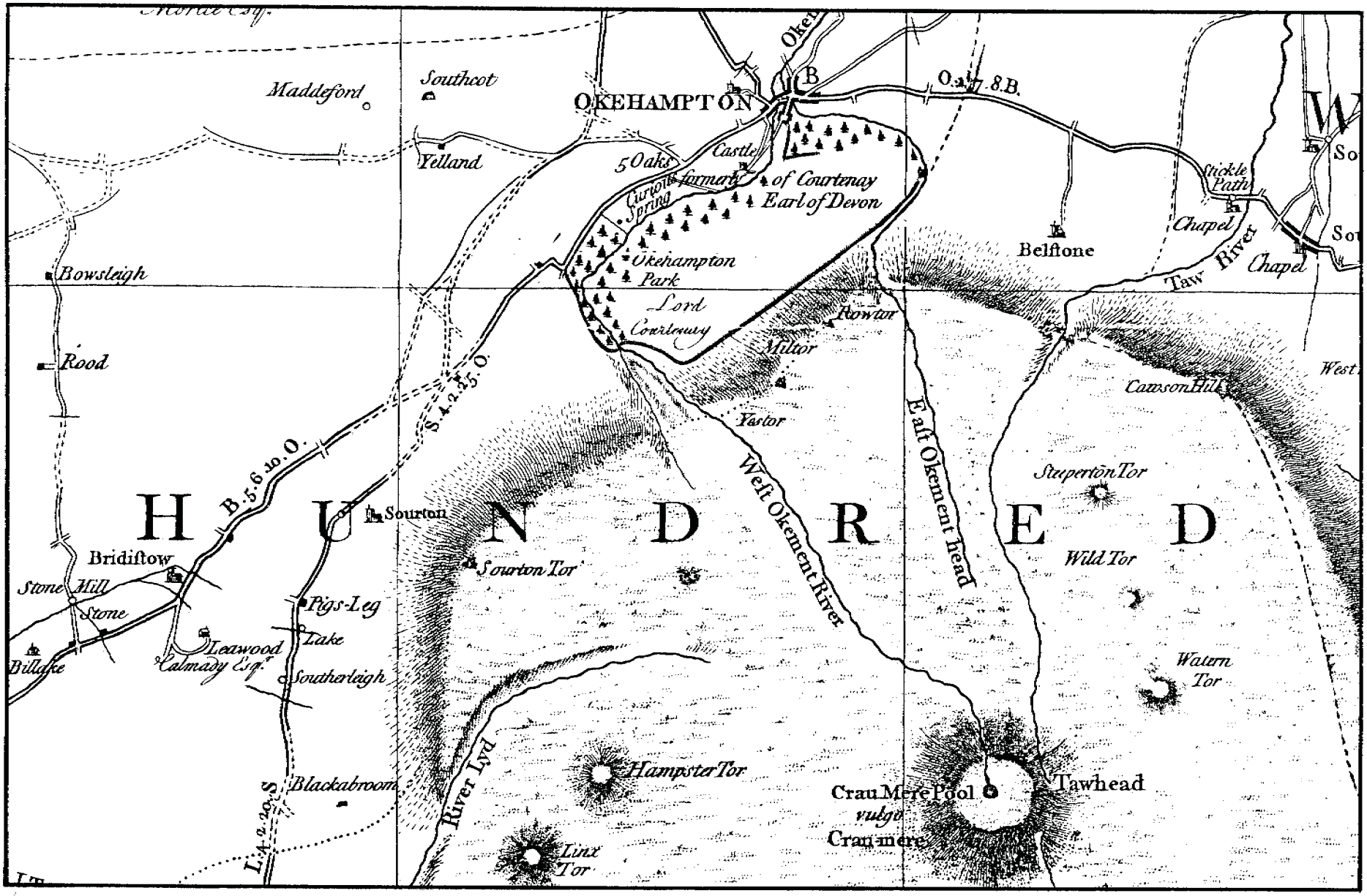


Fig. 6 Sourton Down in 1765. Benjamin Donn's map of the County of Devon (Ravenhill, 1965).

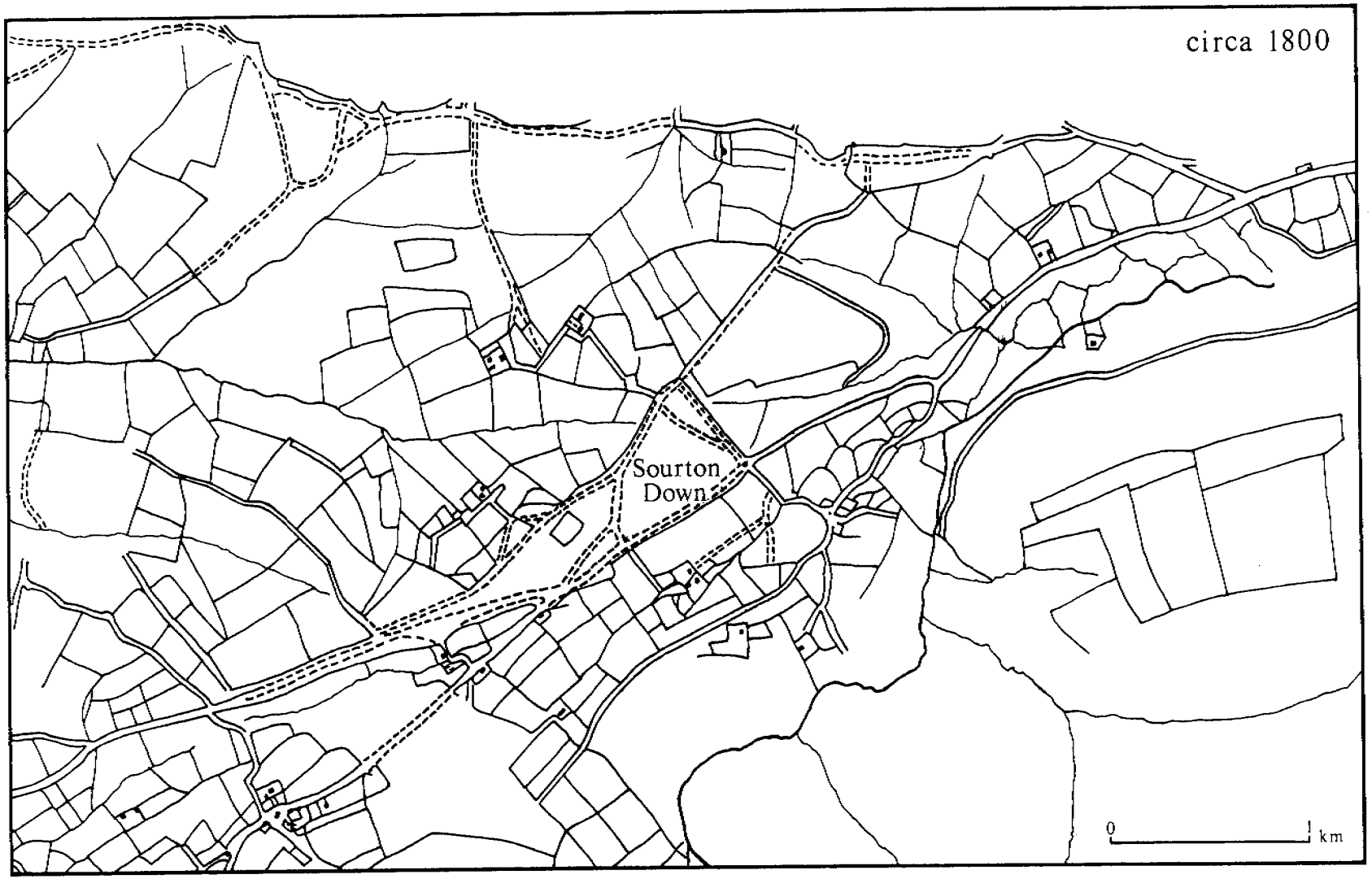


Fig. 7 Sourton Down in *c.* 1800. Based on OS Surveyors' sketch draft maps.

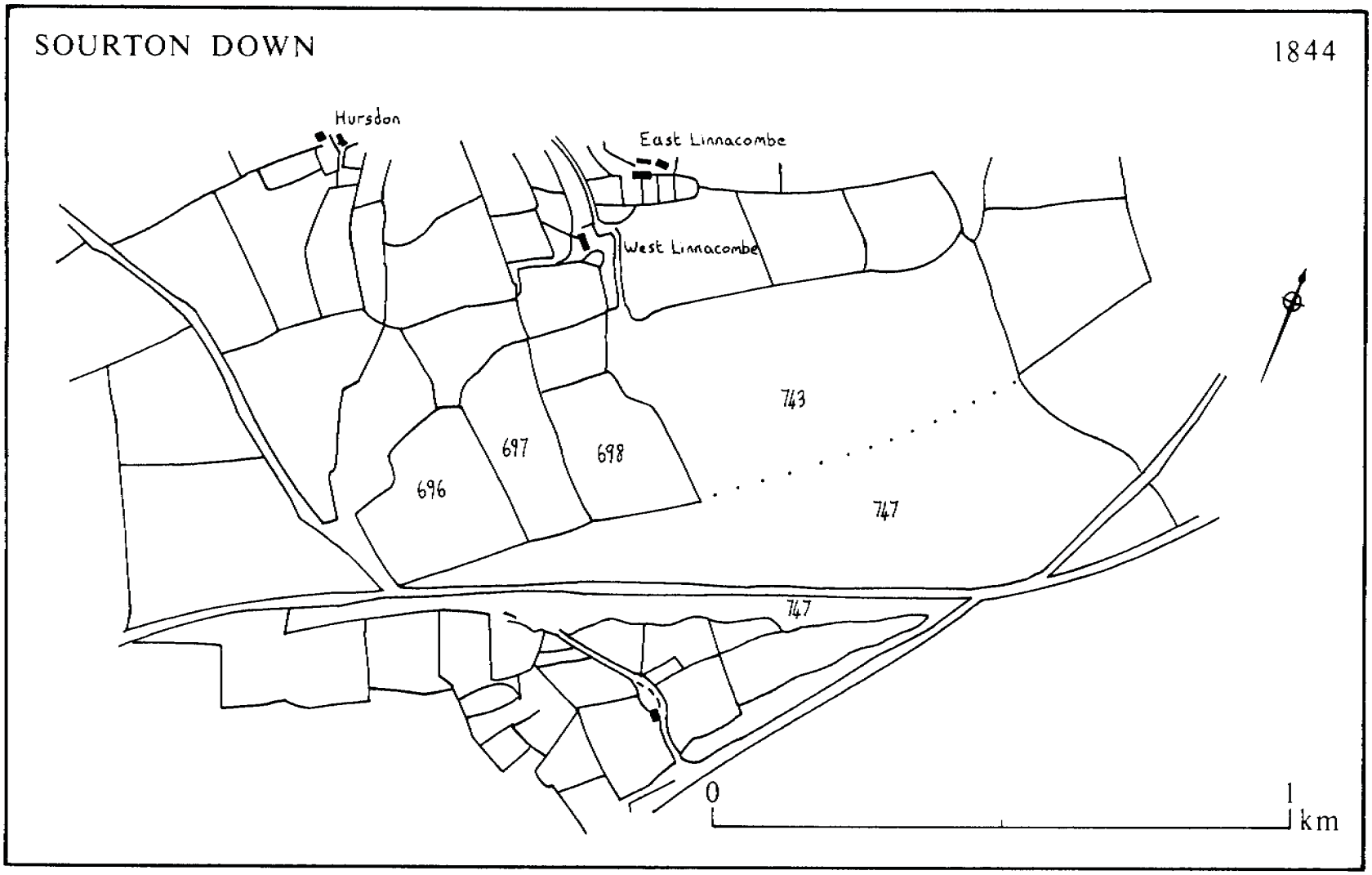


Fig. 8 Sourton Down in 1844. Tithe map of Sourton parish.

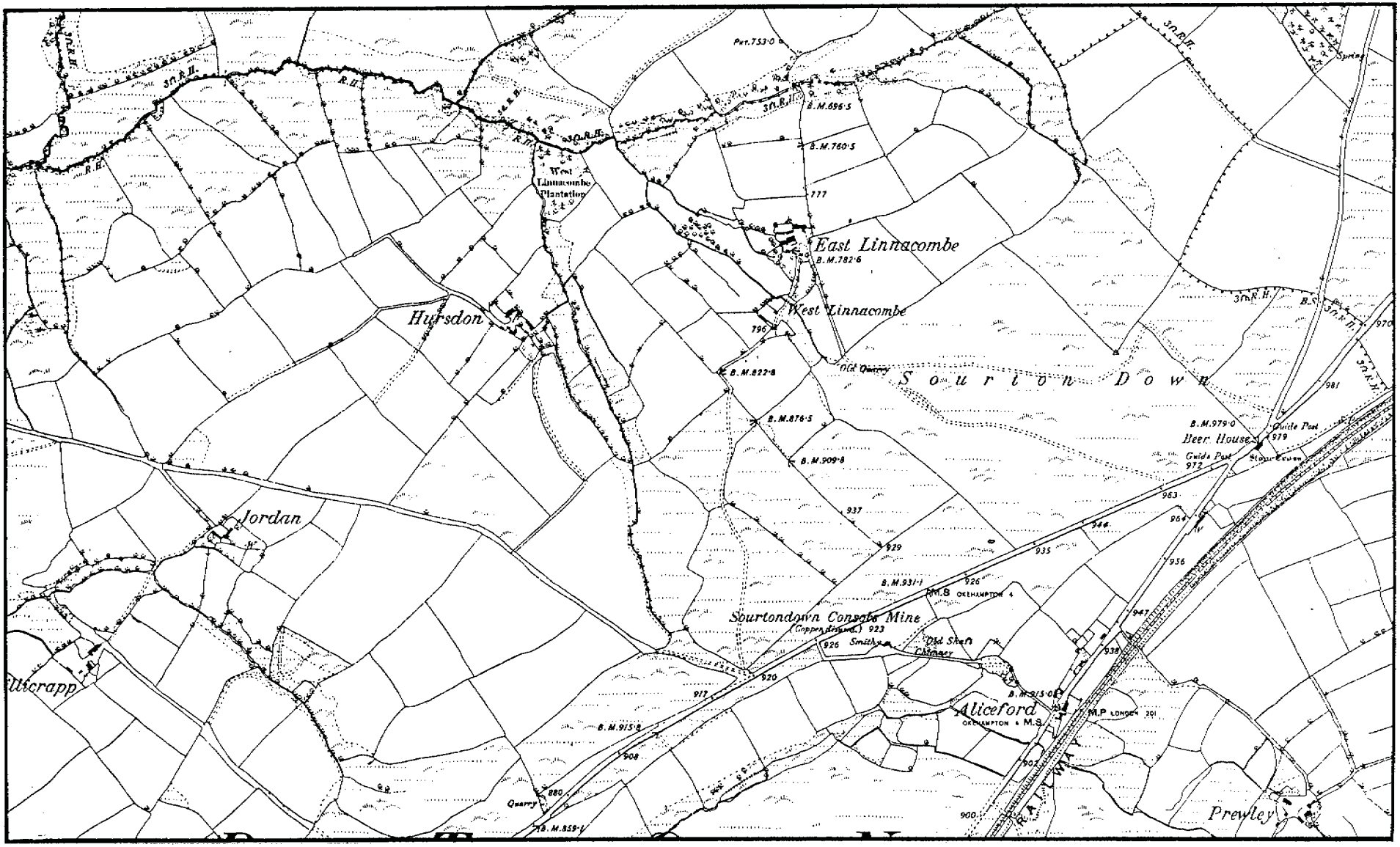


Fig. 9 Sourton Down in 1889. 1st edition OS 6" to 1 mile map. Devon, sheet 76 SW.

SOURTON DOWN 1990

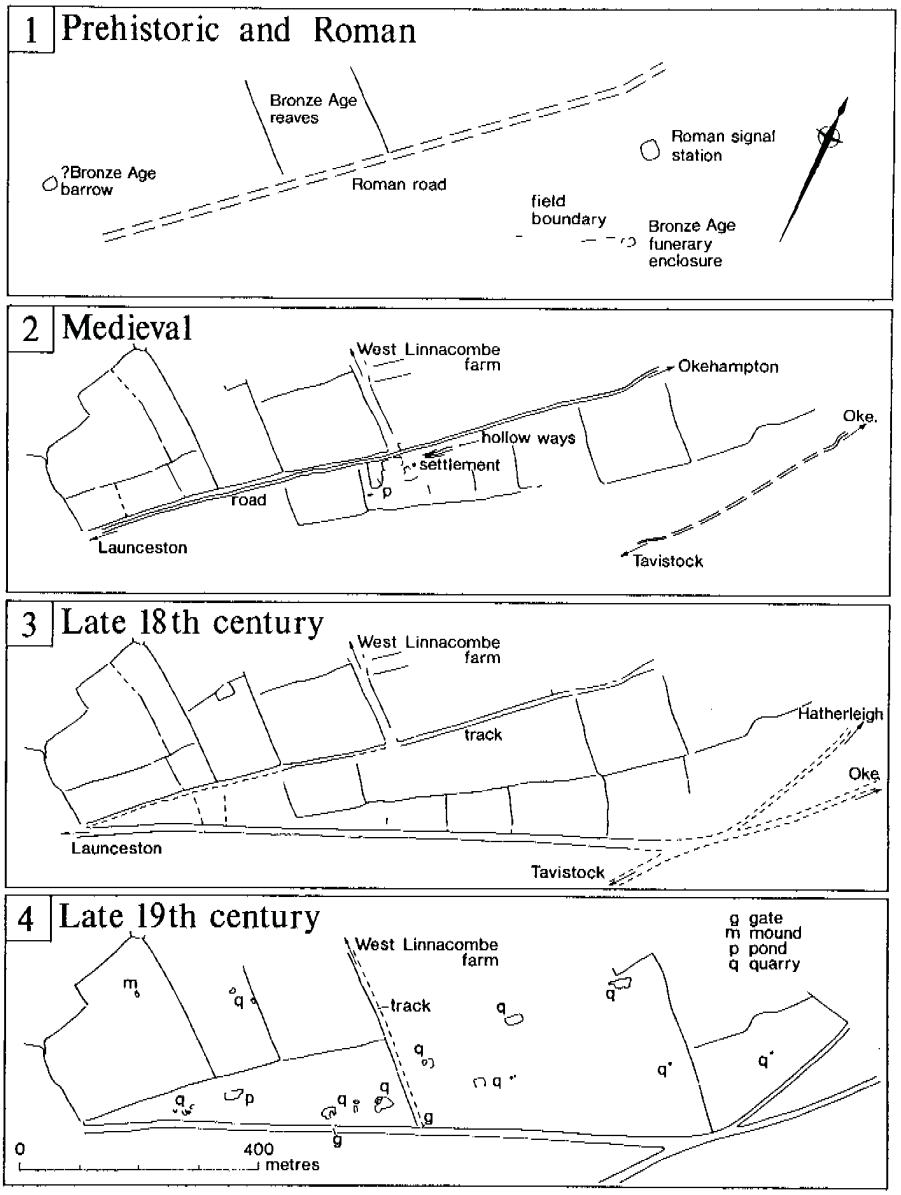


Fig. 10 Sequence of development.

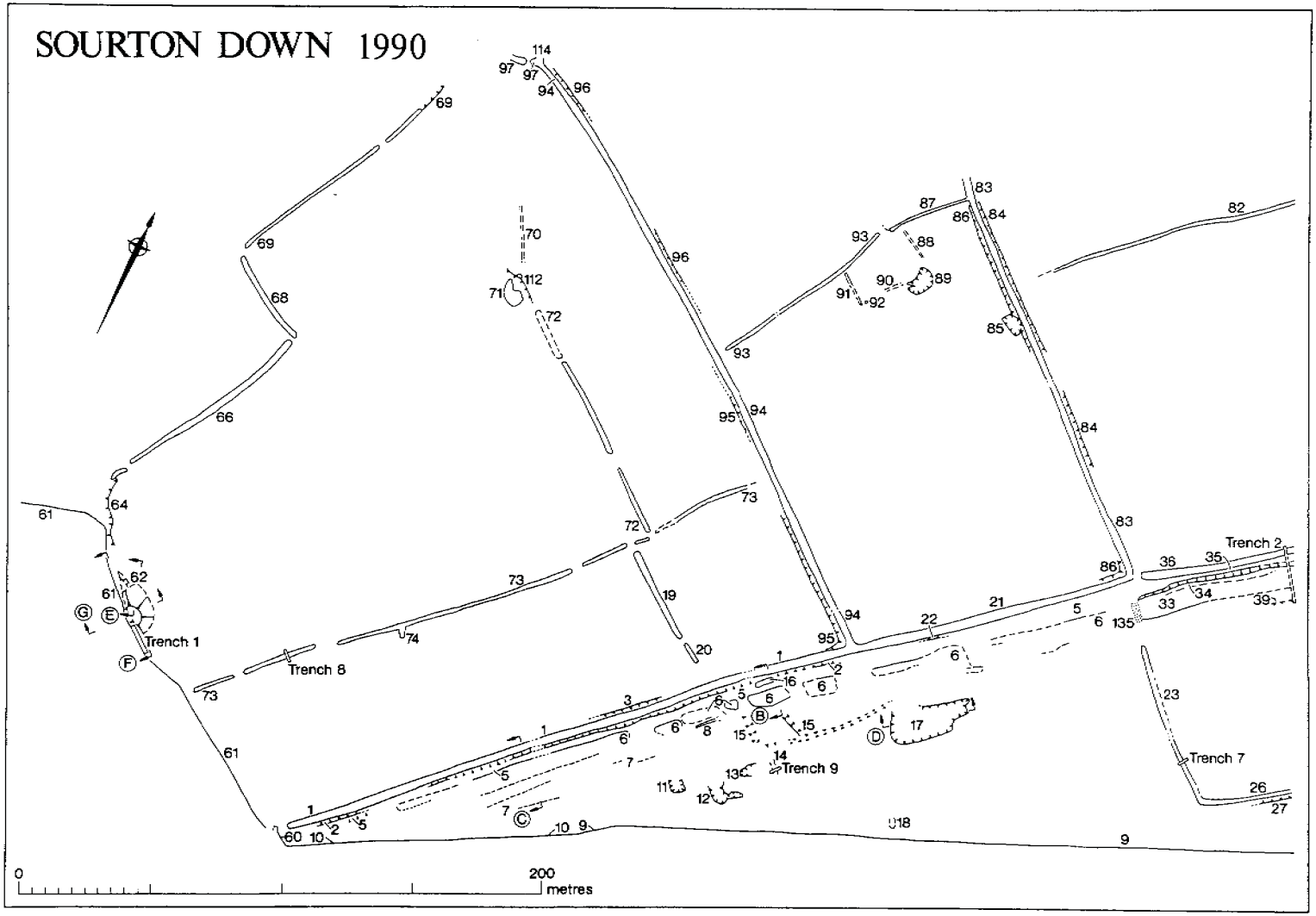


Fig. 11 Overall plan, the western area.

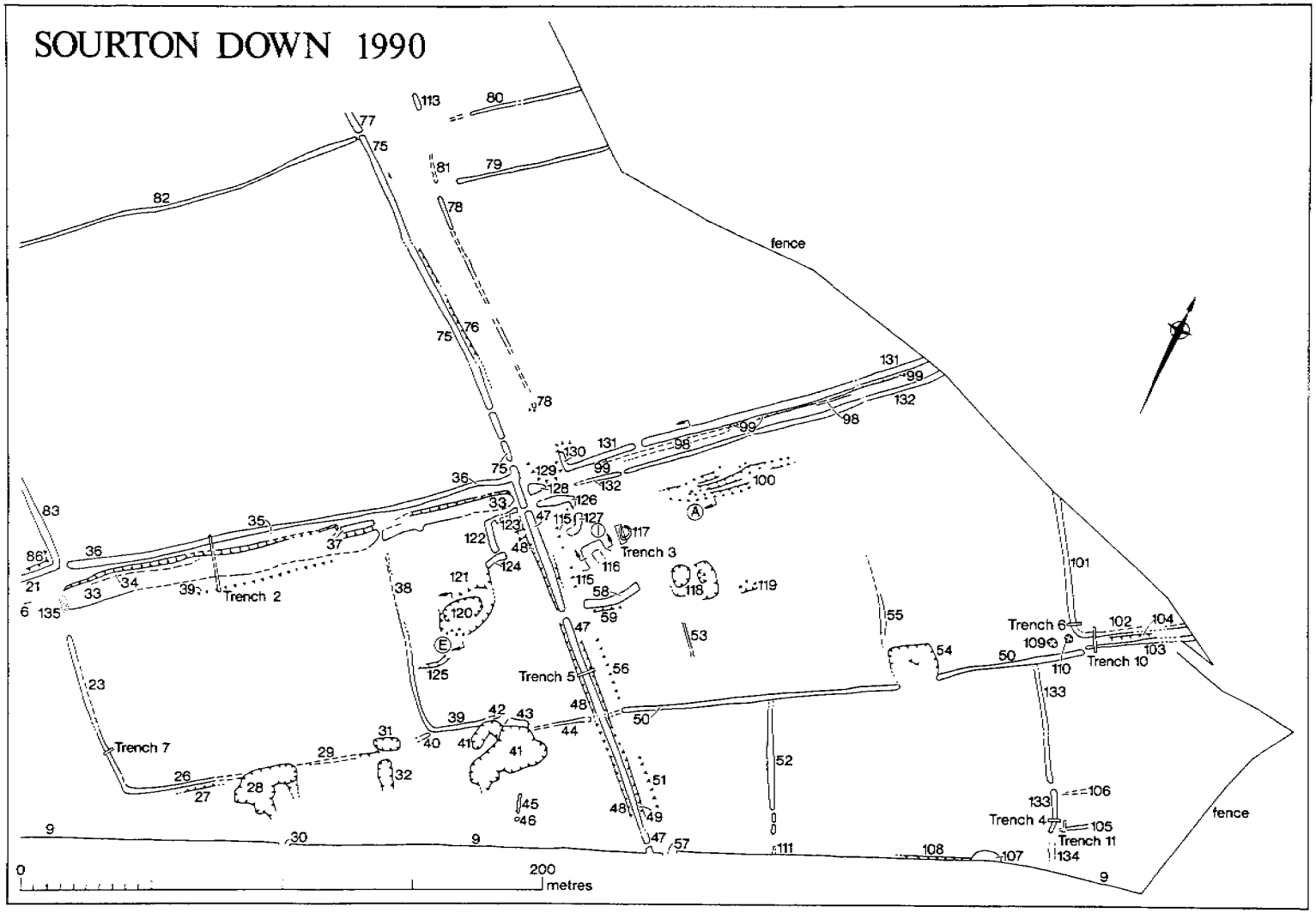


Fig. 12 Overall plan, the eastern area.

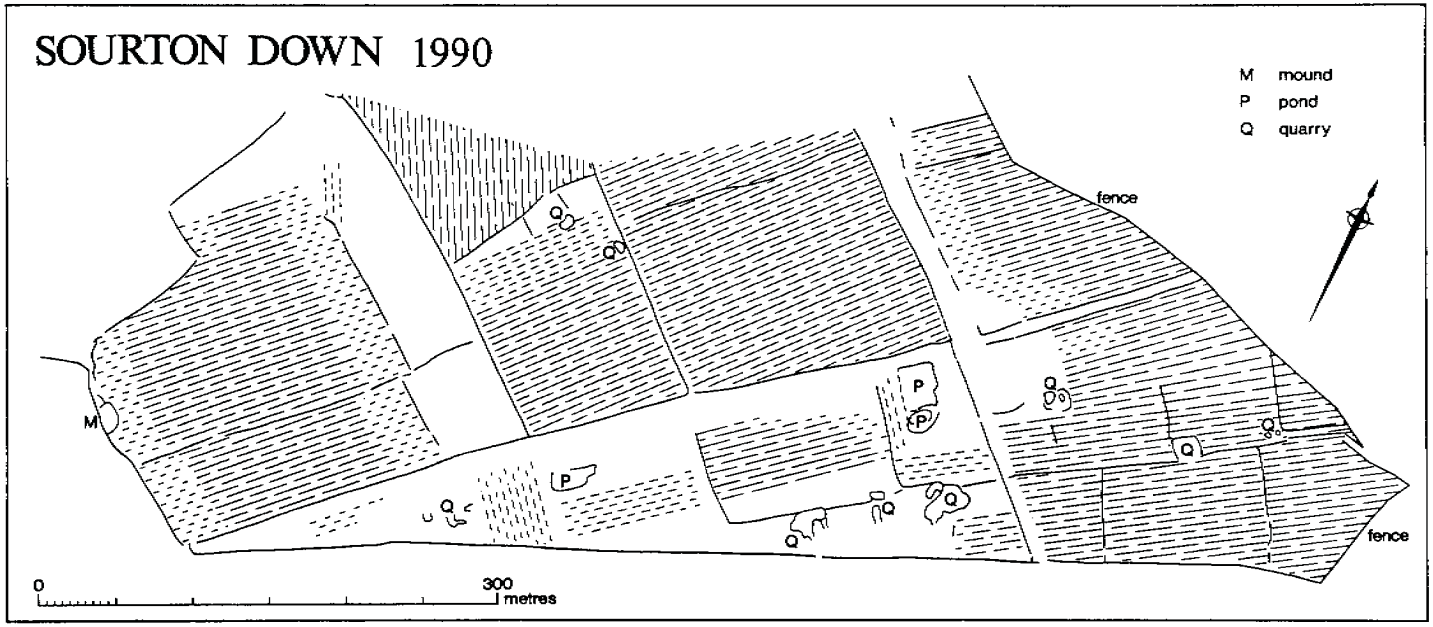


Fig. 13 The 18th-/19th-century narrow rig : extent and orientation.

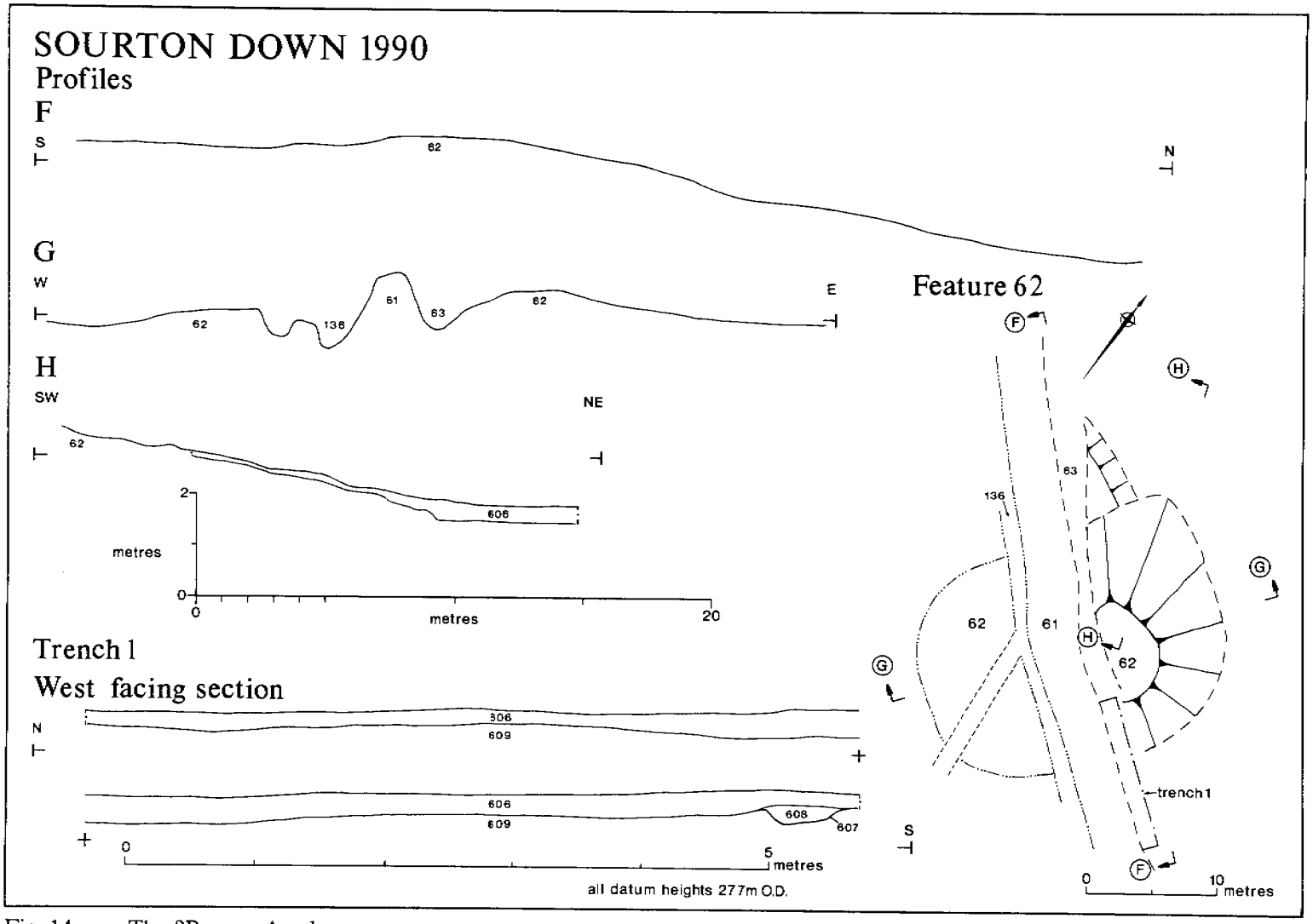


Fig. 14 The ?Bronze Age barrow.

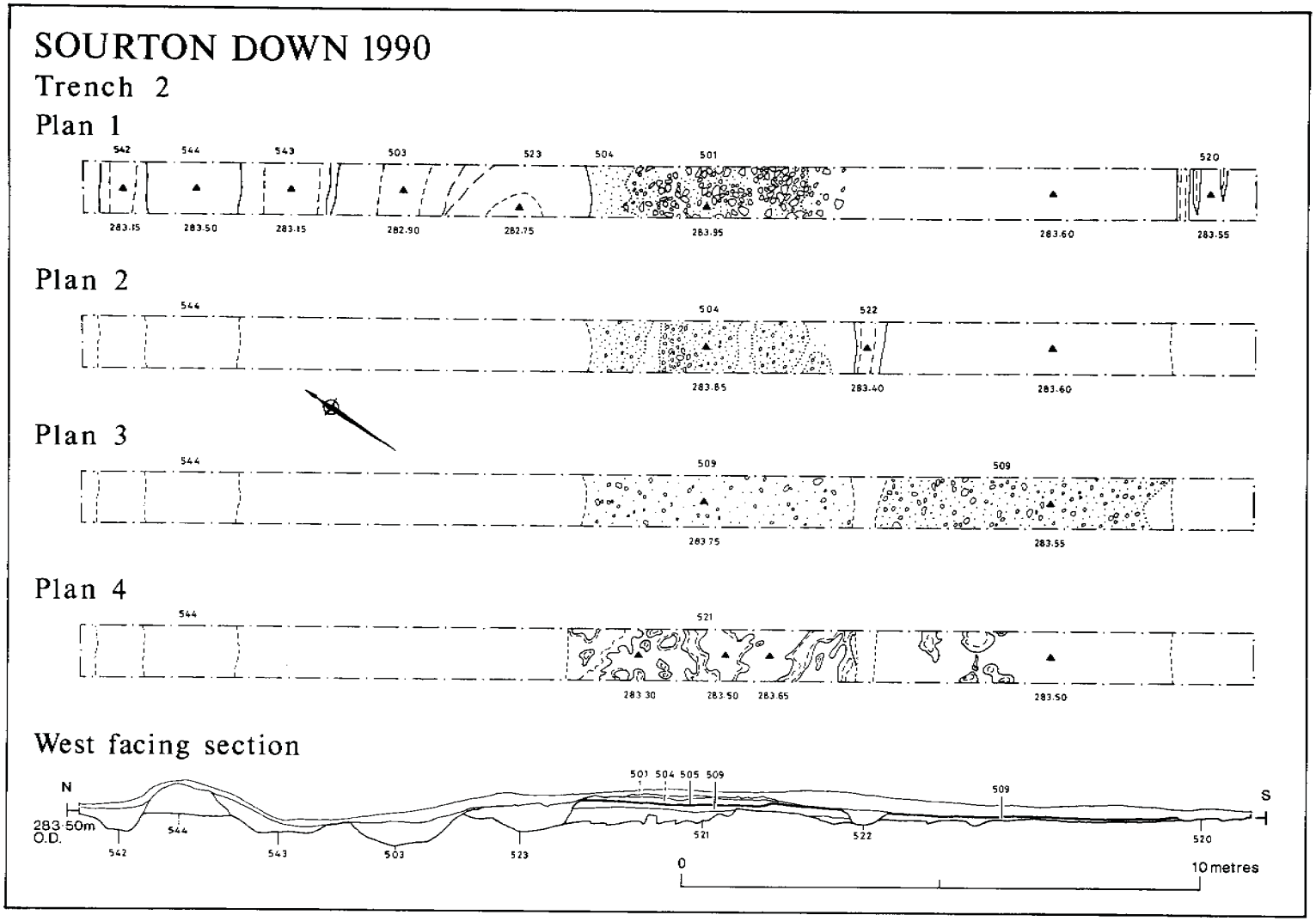


Fig. 15 The Roman and medieval road.

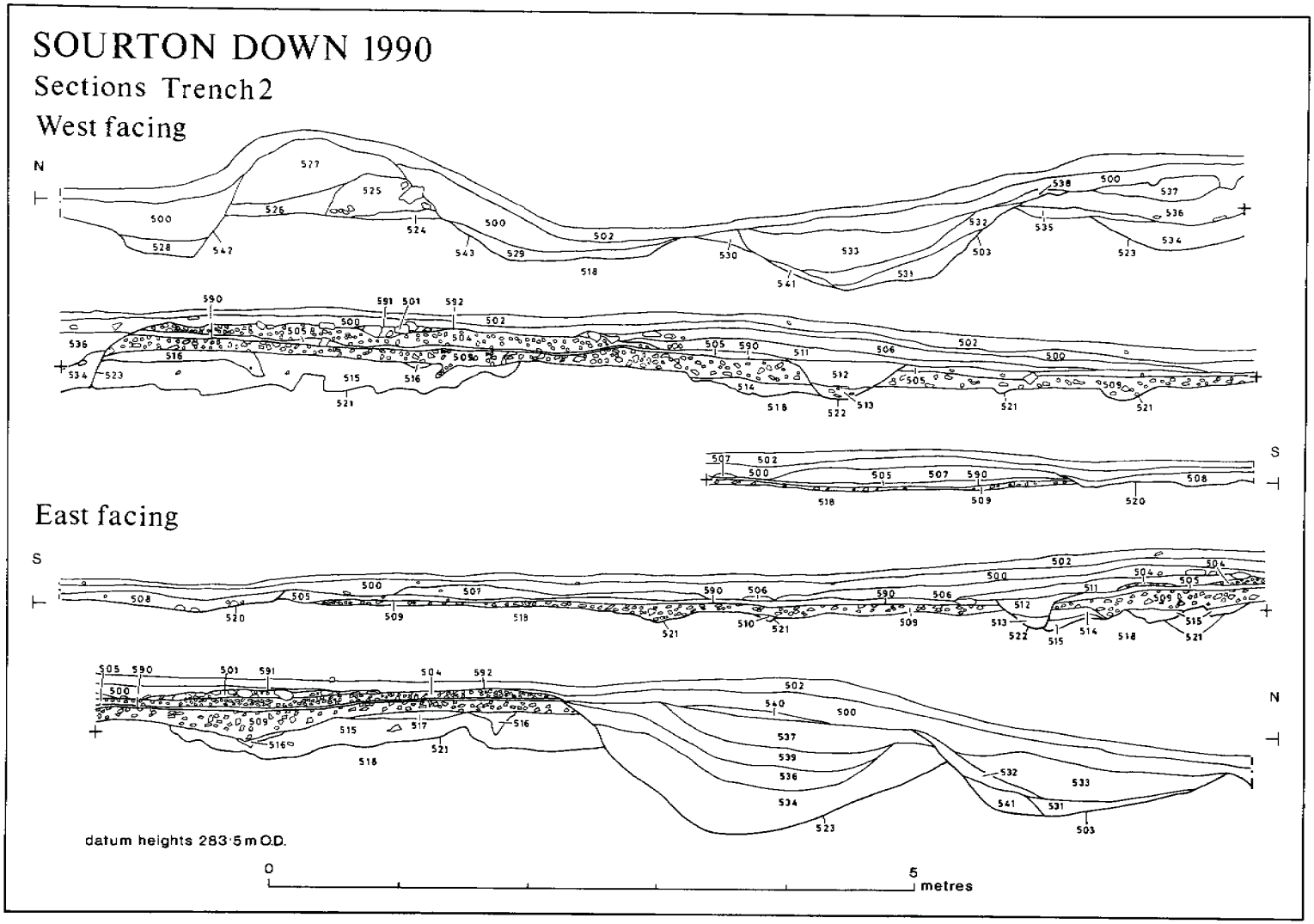


Fig. 16 Detailed sections through the Roman (509/590) and medieval (504/592, 501/591) roads.

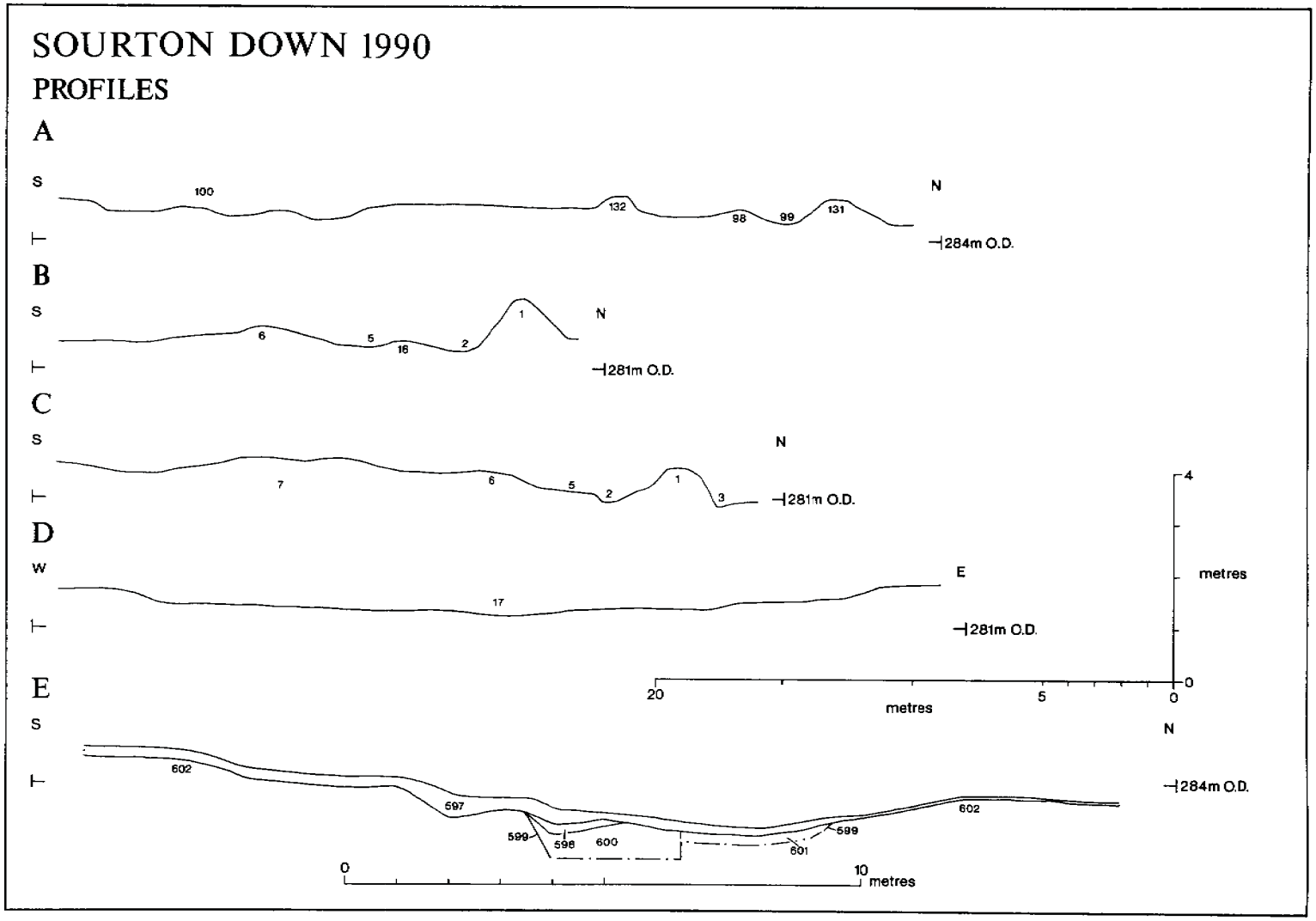


Fig. 17 Profiles across the Roman and medieval road (A -C), and the later ponds (D & E).

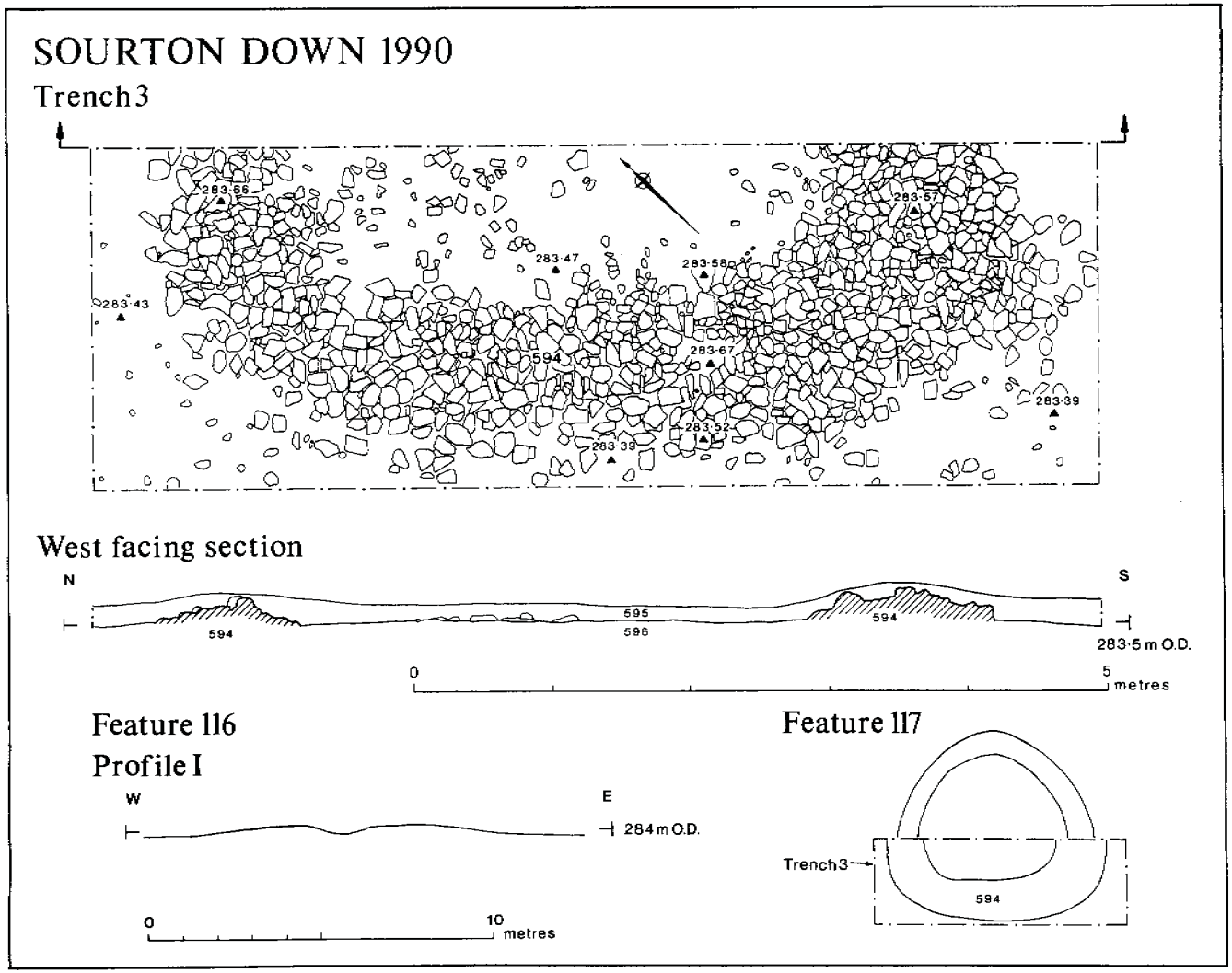


Fig. 18 The medieval building.

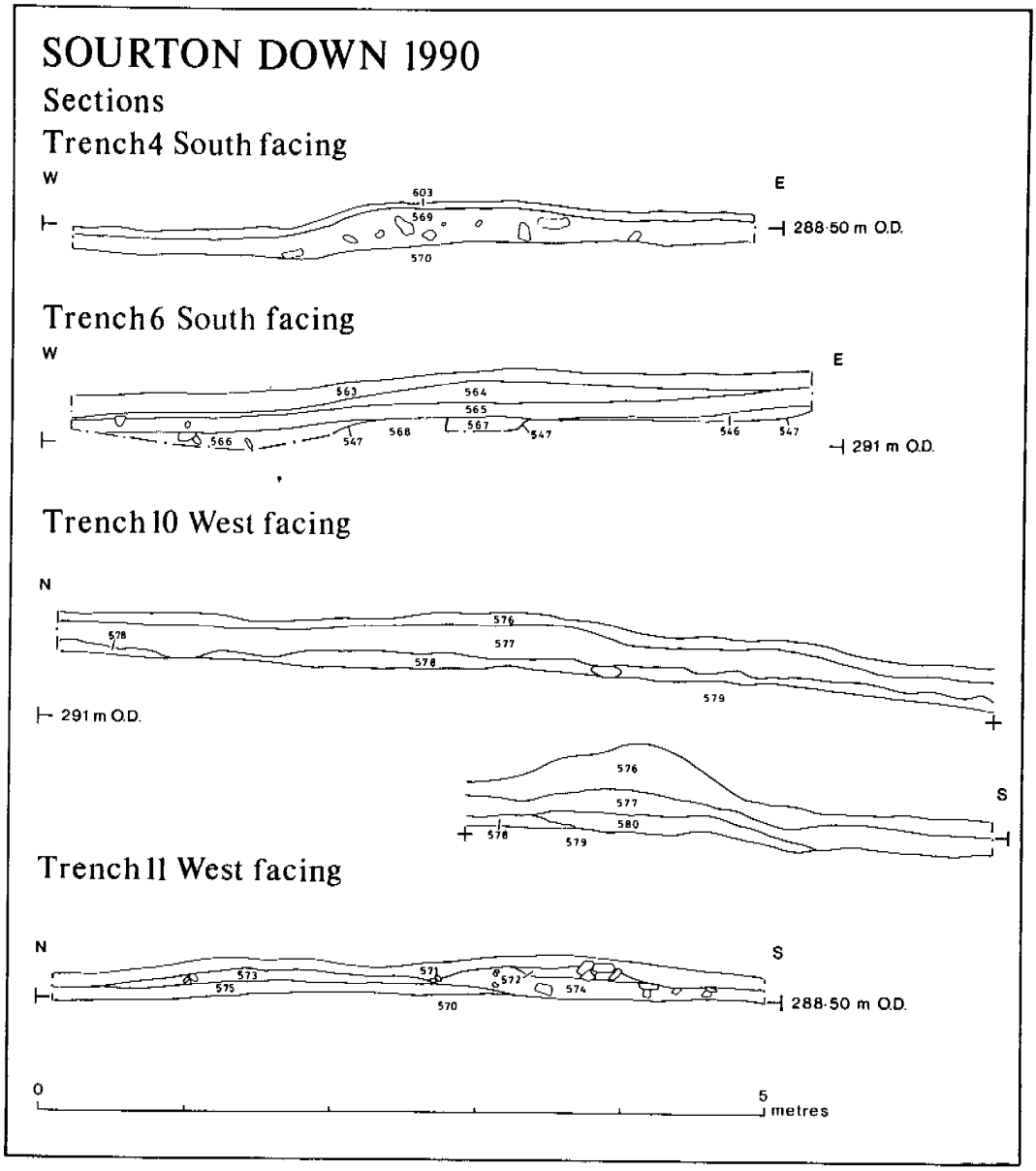


Fig. 19 Sections through field bank Nos 133 (Trench 4), 101 (Trench 6), 102 & 103 (Trench 10), and 105 (Trench 11).

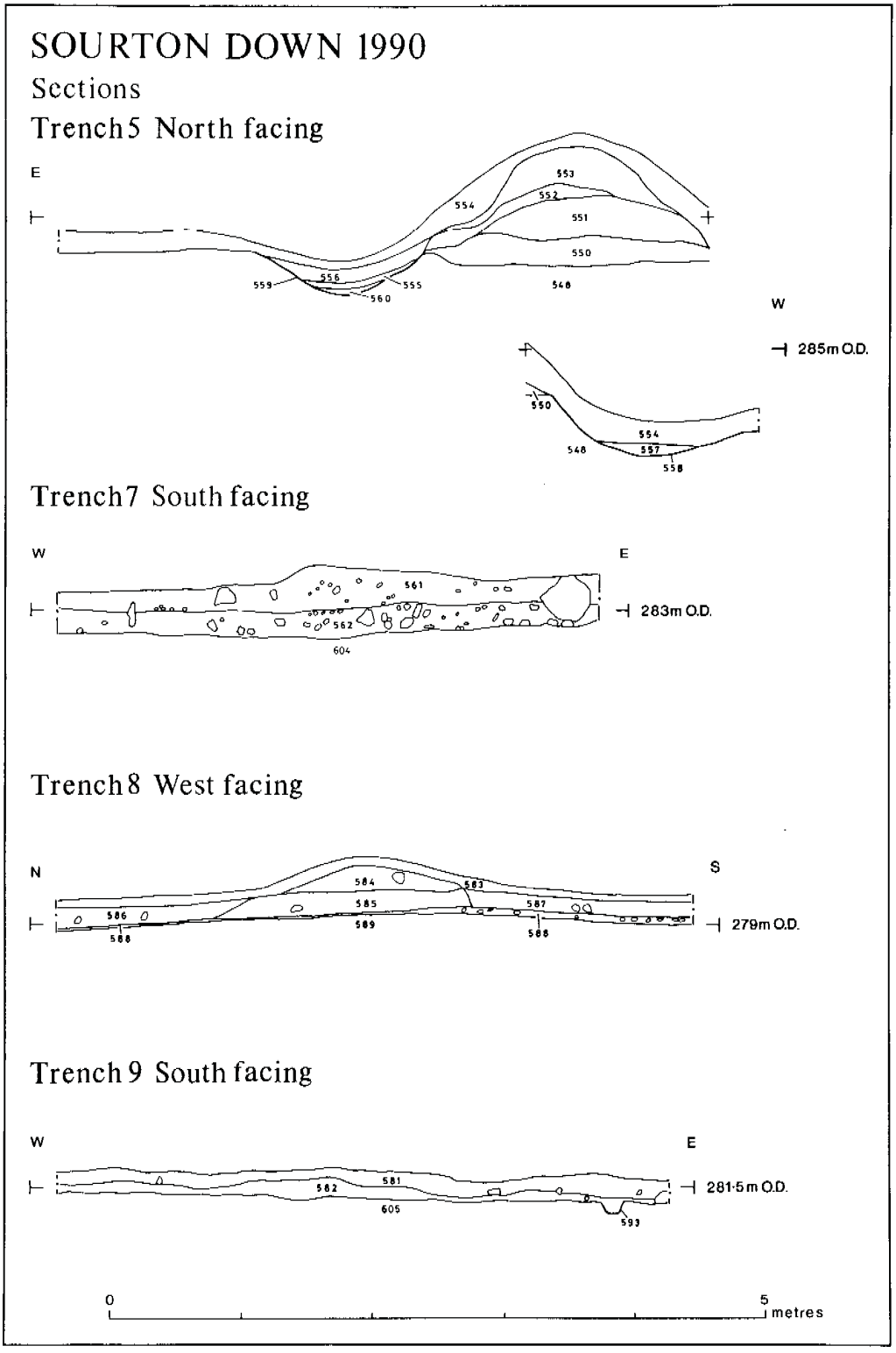


Fig. 20 Sections through field bank Nos 47 (Trench 5), 23 (Trench 7), 73 (Trench 8), and 14 (Trench 9).

Plate 1 Aerial view of Sourton Down from the north-east. Taken by F.M. Griffith of Devon County Council on 5th March 1985.

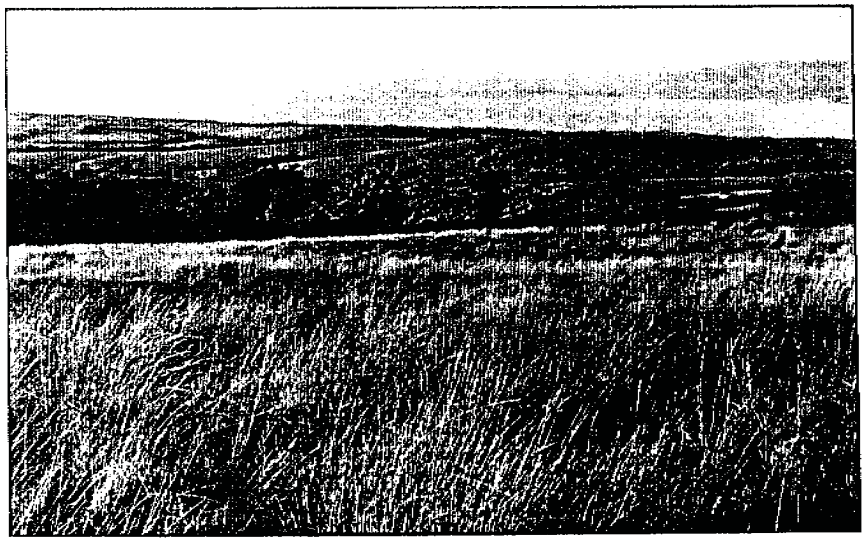


Plate 2 General view of the NW part of Sourton Down.

Plate 3 The probable Bronze Age barrow.

Plate 4 The Roman/medieval road embankment (centre) and trackway (top right).

Plate 5 The Roman/medieval road embankment and site of Trench 2.

Plate 6 Trench 2. Roman and medieval roads.

Plate 7 Trench 2. Medieval road surface.

Plate 8 Hollow way along northern side of Roman road (to left).

Plate 9 Trench 11. ?Prehistoric field boundary (No. 105).

Plate 10 Trench 3. Medieval building.

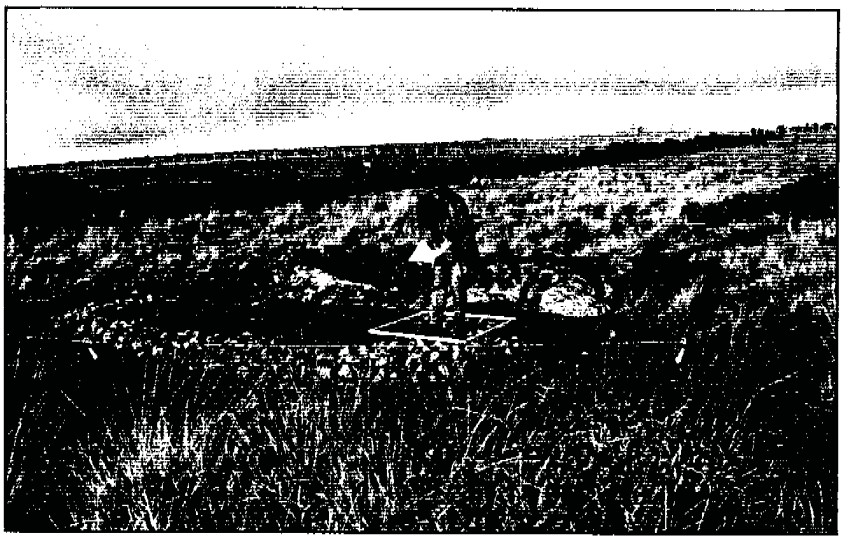


Plate 11 Trench 3. Medieval building (foreground) and trackway (background).