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**A30 OKEHAMPTON BYPASS TO LAUNCESTON
BYPASS ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
PART 4: EVALUATION EXCAVATIONS
AT EBSWORTHY**

by

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Preface

This report is the fourth 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 undertaken on a cropmark site near Ebsworthy Town Farm. 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. Introduction

Ebsworthy Town Farm is situated in the parish of Sourton towards the eastern end of the road scheme corridor (No. 7 on Fig. 1). The site which is described in this report was identified in the preliminary assessment as a possible settlement site lying to the north of the present farm of Ebsworthy Town. It was identified from 1947 RAF vertical aerial photographs which showed evidence for possible enclosures and field banks (see Fig. 2). The documentary research which has subsequently been carried out and is summarized below shows that there is good reason to suspect that a deserted medieval settlement site exists somewhere in the vicinity of Ebsworthy.

2. Historical background

The name of Ebsworthy is documented from the time of the Domesday Book which records that the estate of *Etbolduswrda* was held by Thane Godwin in 1066. It held independent status during the late Saxon period as it was not attached to any particular manor, although it had become attached to Bridestowe manor by 1086. Throughout the medieval period this estate and tenements within it were simply known as Ebsworthy in Bridestowe. The name Ebsworthy Town is not recorded before 1613.

The Ebsworthy family

The family name of Ebsworthy occurs in several forms within Bridestowe from the 13th century onwards. This family took their name from, and presumably held, the estate during the medieval period. An undated deed of c. 1280 mentions John de Ebbolesworth, the son of Milisent de Bydelake, gaining possession of Stone (to the south of Ebsworthy). The Ebsworthys connections with Stone and the Bidlake family continued throughout the next 400 years or so. They appear as witnesses, for example, on leases pertaining to each others lands. In the 16th century the Bidlakes included as part of their estates a place called Uphill in Ebsworthy, and there was also a clear connection between 'Little Bidlake' and Ebsworthy Wood up until the 19th century. In c. 1609 John Bidlake claimed right of way over the land of Paul Ebsworthy of Stone, and in 1612 John and William Bidlake sued Paul Ebsworthy for trespass. In 1613 Peter Ebsworthy and his wife were brought to task for misbehaviour in church towards Agnes Bidlake, so it is clear that the relationship was not always amicable.

The Ebsworthy estate

Ebsworthy itself clearly comprised several tenements by the 16th century which were either owned by the family and leased out, or had come under separate ownership. The tenement of Uphill mentioned above is one of the few that is actually named. This is documented in the 14th century. None of the tenements are specifically located in the documents which have been examined. By the 17th century the names of other families were linked with the estate and further subdivisions had taken place.

It is therefore possible that one or some of these tenements were represented by farm sites other than the main Ebsworthy Town site which is recorded on 19th-century maps. By c. 1840 the land belonging to Ebsworthy Town had become amalgamated into three holdings and was shared between two landowners. The northern division formed a distinct holding which bordered on the parishes of Bratton Clovelly and Sourton and was owned jointly by both J.G. Newton and J.M. Woollcombe (Fig. 3). The mid 19th-

century pattern might well reflect both the extent of the land which belonged to formerly separate tenements to the north of the present farm.

Another, now abandoned, settlement site may therefore have lain in this general area and the site identified in the preliminary report was in a suitable location for such a settlement. Trial excavations were therefore carried out here in order to determine whether or not this interpretation was correct.

3. The site (Fig. 4)

The site lies on the southern side of the Thrushel valley on a gentle slope just above the valley floor at a height of c. 142 m (SX4989059). The area is now open pasture which has been improved through the construction of an extensive system of land drains. In the mid 19th century the area was still rough pasture or moorland.

The aerial photographs taken in 1947 show several irregularities on the ground surface as well as indicating the position of former stream courses. One of the marks was particularly significant as it appeared to show a sub-circular boundary or possible enclosure (Fig. 2 a/c). Such an enclosure might well be expected to be associated with the placename *-worthy*, particularly when the name is documented in the early medieval period. The photographs also show signs of extensive ploughing in this area and many of the surrounding fields on the south side of the Thrushel. The marks of the ridges are very long, straight and regular with furrows relatively close together.

Around Ebsworthy Town can be seen a well-defined pattern of small fields (Fig. 2) reminiscent of open arable fields which were often found in the Middle Ages around villages and hamlets. This pattern appears to have once extended northwards into the marshy ground on the upper slopes of the Thrushel valley as indicated by the above aerial photographs. It is not known when these fields were abandoned or what may have caused the deterioration in the soils which made their cultivation unprofitable or impossible. The cultivation-line does however appear to have receded southwards and the arable land area has contracted considerably. This line is to some extent reflected by the property boundary between the two major holdings of Ebsworthy (Fig. 3).

It may therefore be postulated, as noted already, that the northern holding originally contained a separate settlement site which was eventually abandoned. Its land was absorbed by the southern holding, centred on Ebsworthy Town and was later used as common grazing or pasture. A trackway still leads northwards from the farm towards this area and terminated at point **d** on Fig. 2.

4. The excavations (Figs 4-6)

Three trenches were excavated in the vicinity of the features identified in the aerial photographs (Fig. 5). The overall location of these was obviously determined by the position of the proposed road corridor but they were primarily intended to locate any features below ground which might be associated with a medieval enclosure or any other settlement evidence. All three trenches were sited on a NE/SW alignment, consistent with the alignment of the features described above. Trenches 1 and 2 were intended to locate features **b** and **c** and Trench 3 feature **d** (see Fig. 2).

Trench 1 (Fig. 6; Section /Plan 1)

This was 18.1 m long by 1.0 m wide. The stratification within the trench was only 0.25 m deep consisting of topsoil and a very thin layer of peaty clay (506) overlying the natural clay. There was extensive evidence of ploughing here in the form of shallow, narrow ploughmarks (503) which were cut into the subsoil. The ploughmarks were relatively closely spaced, 0.5 m apart, and were aligned NNW/SSE.

Trench 2 (Fig. 6; Section/Plan 2)

This trench was 5.0 m long and 1 m wide and was sited about 10 m to the south-east of Trench 1. Within it were found ploughmarks identical to those recorded in Trench 1. They were sealed by the same dark peaty clay (512) and were on the same alignment. The stratification within the trench was made up of topsoil (508) and a lower horizon of soil (511) which overlay the above deposits. A small drainage ditch (509) was cut through these layers. This may have replaced an earlier feature which had caused the discrepancy in the levels of layers 508 and 511 (see section 2). The overall depth of the deposits was 0.5 m.

Trench 3 (Fig. 6; Section/Plan 3)

This was located about 20 m to the south-west of Trench 1 and was 6.3 m long by 1 m wide. The ploughmarks with overlying peaty material (514) were again located. The topsoil here overlay a very intermixed disturbed deposit of dark soil, clay and loam (513). This material was probably deliberately dumped here. On the east side of the trench was a bank of redeposited natural yellow clay (516). This was cut into by a narrow feature which was sealed only by the topsoil. Other disturbances were evident on the south-west side of the trench.

5. Conclusions

Ploughmarks

The ploughmarks which were identified in all three trenches were undoubtedly of a single phase. Their alignment is also consistent with the marks observed on the 1947 aerial photographs. There is no definite dating evidence for the ploughing but the nature of the marks as described above suggests a date in the 19th century or later. This type of cultivation was known as 'narrow rig' and was particularly common during the Napoleonic Wars when home demand for food increased dramatically. It was often carried out on marginal land which was then abandoned after a few years and reverted to pasture. This would suggest that this part of the Thrushel valley had become marginal land by the end of the 18th century at least.

Interpretation of cropmarks

It is likely that the marks visible on the aerial photographs represent former field boundaries and are not enclosure ditches. One such feature was 516 in Trench 3 which survived as a truncated bank, feature a in Fig. 2 from the aerial photographs. The presence of another boundary feature was indicated at the south-western end of Trench 1 (Fig. 6, plan 1) where the ploughmarks end abruptly and appear to respect a hedgebank (c on Fig. 2). Feature 505 represents a ditch associated with a field boundary ('old hedgeline' on Fig. 5) which post-dates the early 19th-century ploughing. This is shown on late 19th-century OS maps. The earlier fields appear to have been relatively

small and narrow such as those to the east of Ebsworthy Town (Fig. 2). Most of the fields which existed by the late 19th century were very large and defined by long straight hedgebanks and ditches. Many of the other surviving field boundaries in this part of the valley are likely to be of mid 19th-century or later origin.

6. Overall conclusions

In conclusion the evaluation excavations have produced evidence for the development of the landscape and of land in this area of the Thrushel valley. They have demonstrated the existence of a field system which had extended north from the open fields around Ebsworthy Town towards the wetter ground of the valley bottom. The date of the field system is not known. By the time of the major ploughing phase, which was recorded in all the excavated trenches, the fields had been abandoned. The ploughing evidently did not take place within small-scale fields but in an unenclosed environment. This is confirmed by the evidence from aerial photographs as described above. Such ploughing of marginal land in this form is characteristic of late 18th to early 19th-century cultivation techniques. The arable cultivation had ceased by the mid 19th century when the valley was mainly open moorland. Later in the 19th century some large-scale enclosure took place though still probably for pastoral use. In the modern period the area has been improved and drained and some of the later 19th-century boundaries removed.

A putative deserted medieval settlement site was not located in the excavations; the features which had the appearance of enclosure ditches proved to be relict boundary features. The excavations have however thrown light on the agricultural use of this part of the Thrushel valley in the last 300 years or so. A settlement site in this general area however probably still awaits discovery; this is referred to in Part 6 on the Alternative Routes. Alternatively evidence for the site may come to light during an archaeological watching brief, as recommended in Part 1 of this assessment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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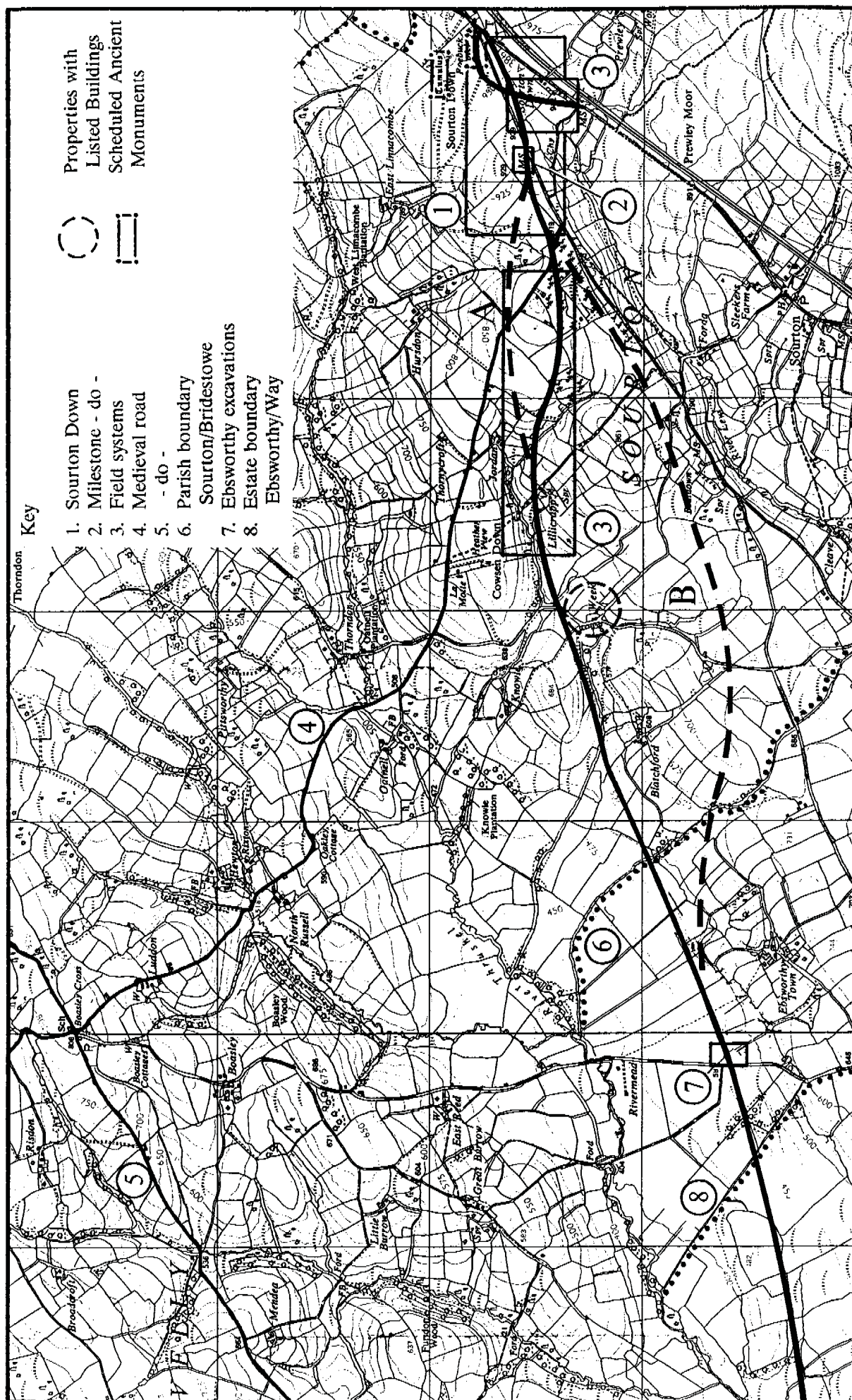


Fig. 1 The location of the Ebbsworthy site on the line of the Published Route (No. 7).



Fig. 2 Field boundaries and cropmarks taken from the 1947 RAF vertical air photographs.



Fig. 3 Landholdings around Ebsworthy Town in the mid 19th century.

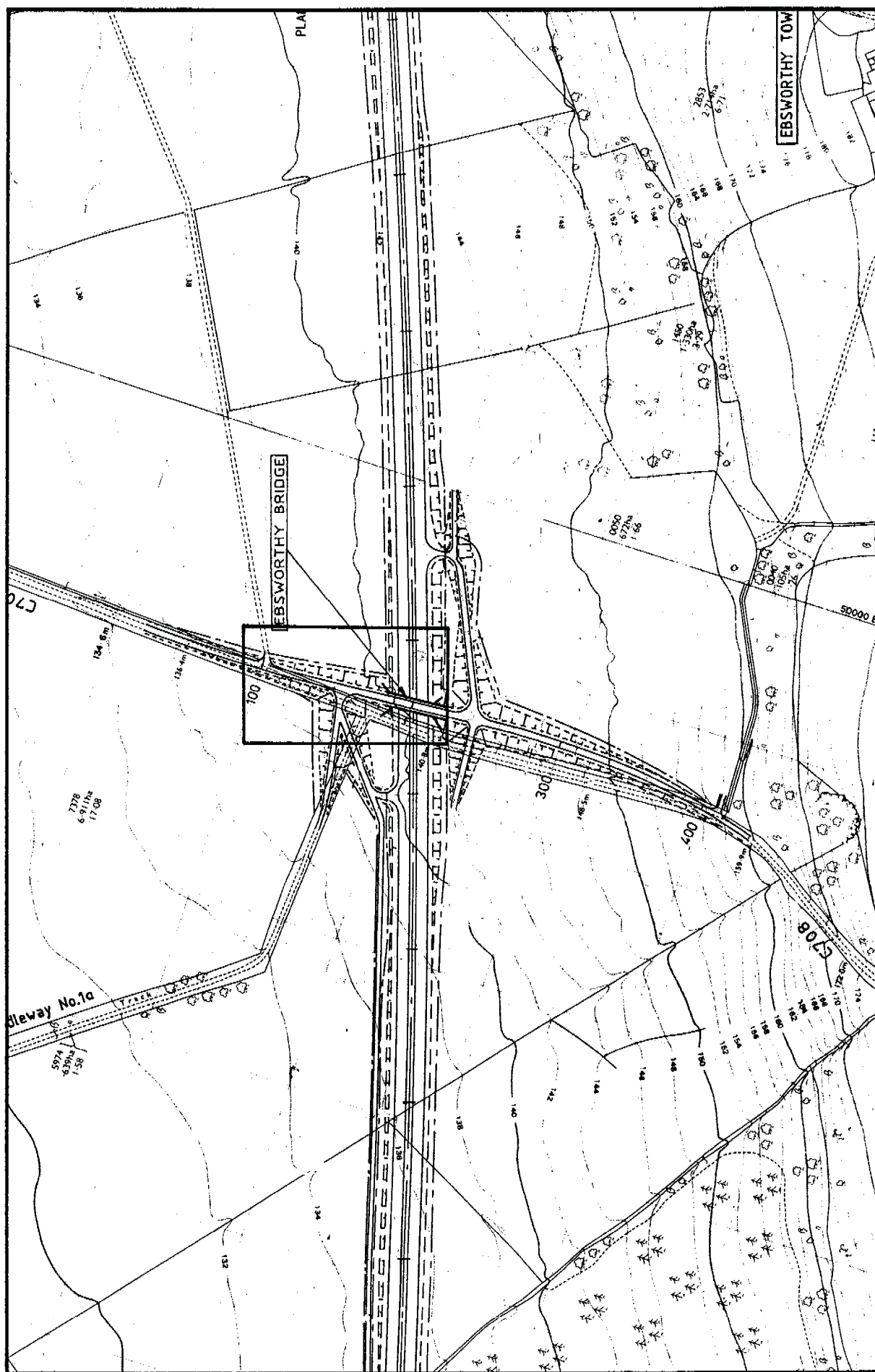
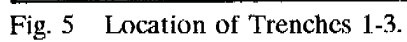


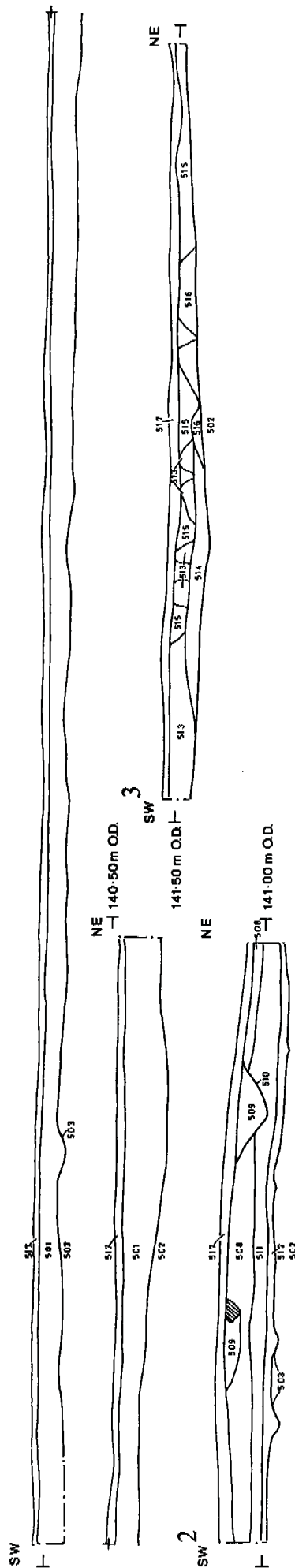
Fig. 4 Site location in relation to the road scheme corridor.

Location of Trenches

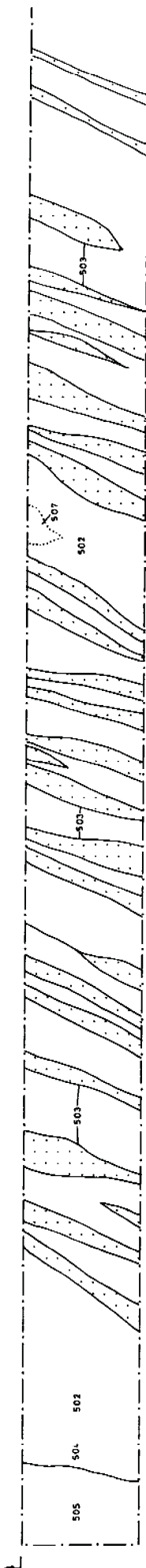


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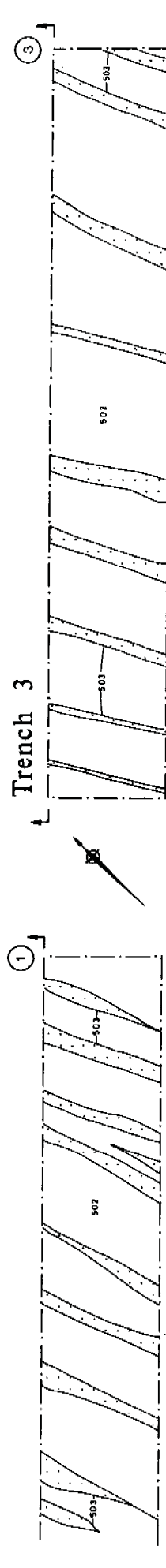
Sections 1



Trench 1



Trench 3



Trench 2

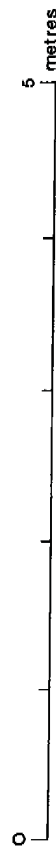
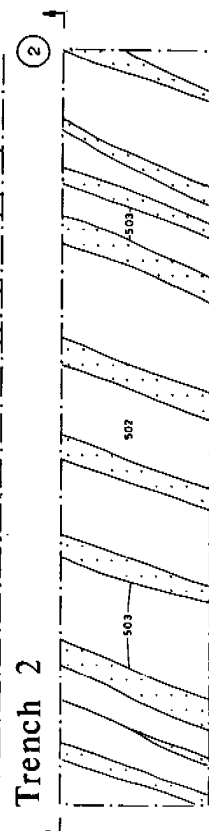


Fig 6 The excavations, plans and sections.



Plate 1 View of the Thrushel valley at Ebsworthy.

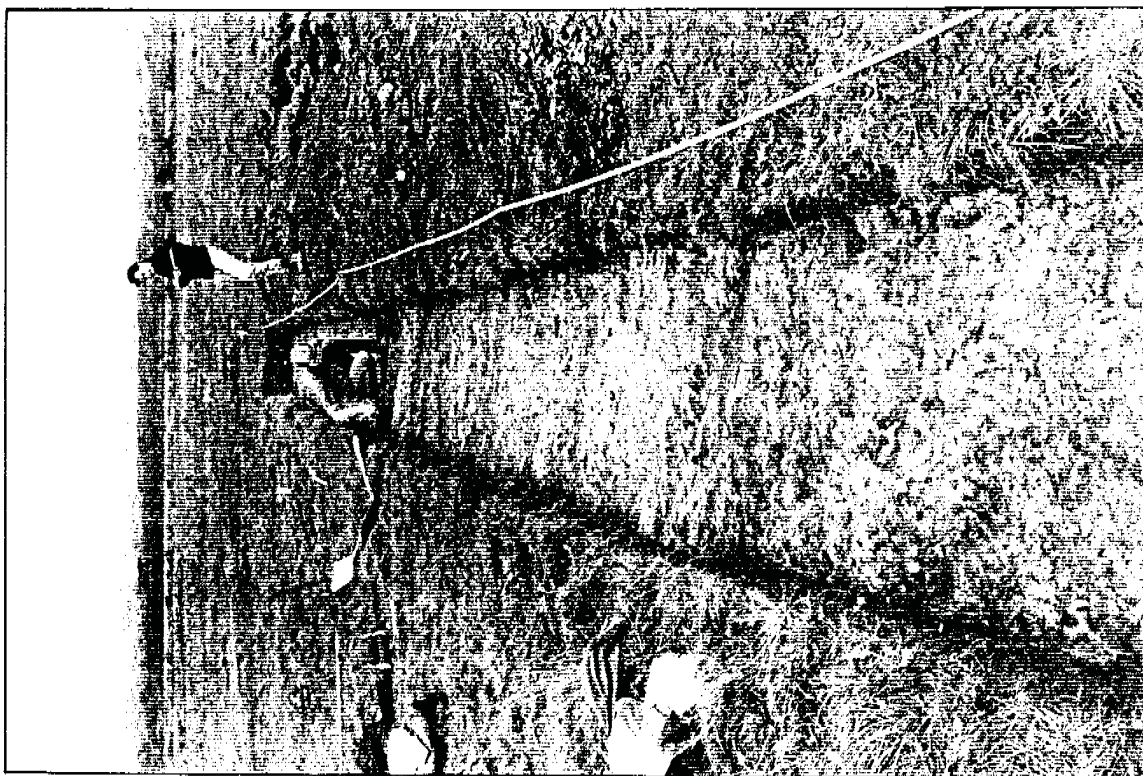


Plate 2 Trench 1 during excavation.