RPS Planning, Transport and Environment

INDEX DATA	RPS INFORMATION
Scheme Title A30 Oakehampton to Launceston bypass.	Details Archaeological Assessment Part 5.
Road Number A30.	Date December 1990.
Contractor Exeter Museums.	
County Devon.	
OS Reference Sx 38.	
Single sided ✓ Double sided A3 O Colour O	

A30 OKEHAMPTON BYPASS TO LAUNCESTON BYPASS ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT PART 5: DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH AND FIELD SURVEY

by

P.J. Weddell

Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit

Report No. 90.37

December 1990

Preface

This report is the fifth 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 documentary research and fieldwork carried out on the Published Route excluding Sourton Down which is described in part 2. 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.

Contents

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES

1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the findings of archaeological fieldwork and documentary research carried out on the line of the Published Route *excluding* Sourton Down. For this purpose the design drawings have been used and areas of landscaping and re-alignments of slip roads etc have been taken into account. The recommendations for further archaeological input into this road scheme are set out in Part 1 of the assessment.

1.1 **The route** (Figs 1-4)

The overall course and alignment of the proposed A30 route have changed little since 1985. The route commences at Sourton Down about 5km south-west of Okehampton at a height of nearly 300m OD. Following a westward course, it descends into the upper part of the Thrushel valley near Blatchford Farm and proceeds along the southern side of the valley for *c.* 4.5km. At Wrixhill Bridge the route crosses to the north side and passes on a south-westerly course close to the settlements of Patchill and Wollacott. Beyond Eastlake Wood the route leaves the Thrushel valley and passes across the Wolf valley below Drownsmill. From there it ascends the high ground to the north of Lifton reaching a maximum height of 130m OD before rejoining the present A30 and the Launceston Bypass at Liftondown. The overall distance is some 20km.

The main changes from the earlier route are as follows:

i) slight re-alignment between Jordan and Lillicrap farms near Sourton;

ii) major change at Staddon, beginning at Eastlake Wood: the route now passes to the north of the farm, instead of the south;

iii) three small re-alignments between Drownsmill and Liftondown.

1.2 **Soils and geology**

The soils along the route fall into four main groups: Hallsworth 1 and 2, Denbigh 1, and Halstow (Soil Survey England and Wales Sheet 5). These are all derived from the Carboniferous shales and slates of the Culm Measures which underlie the whole area. They are broadly similar in nature being subject to some seasonal waterlogging. The drainage characteristics vary, however, from the slowly permeable clays of the Hallsworth soils to the well-drained loamy soils of the Denbigh series. All these soils are predominantly best suited to stock rearing on permanent pasture. The Hallsworth types are the most restrictive soils in terms of agricultural practices. This is particularly the case within the upper part of the Thrushel valley. Here there are large areas of rough waterlogged pasture, some of which have been improved by drainage only in recent years. There are no known settlements within this part of the valley below the 182 m (600 ft) contour. Part of the area near Way has also been given over to coniferous plantations.

1.3 **Archaeological and historical background**

Prehistoric

As noted above, the area through which the route passes is predominantly a pastoral landscape. Many of the existing farm sites are documented by the 13th or 14th century

and have been continuously occupied ever since. Our knowledge of prehistoric and Roman settlement in the area is however very slight. Evidence for prehistoric settlement is most often forthcoming in the form of scatters of lithic material containing flint or other stone tools which indicate human activity in the vicinity. The exposure of such material can normally only take place where arable cultivation is carried out. This evidence is therefore generally lacking in west Devon where livestock-rearing and dairy-farming have been the norm for many years. The examination of palaeoenvironmental deposits therefore takes on an added significance in areas where the lithic evidence is not forthcoming (see section 5 below).

No upstanding earthwork sites of prehistoric date have been located along the line of the preferred route. Buried prehistoric sites may eventually come to light through archaeological fieldwalking or by chance discovery where ploughing or other earth-moving works take place. Such sites may also be discovered through aerial reconnaissance which continues to produce new sites of probable prehistoric date in all parts of Devon.

Roman

No indication of Roman settlement has yet come to light within the area of the route corridor to the north of the A30. The main Roman road from Exeter to Cornwall (more fully described in Parts 1-2) probably followed a broadly similar course to the present A30 between Okehampton and Launceston. Settlement sites may be expected along its line, most notably the lost site of *Tamaris* which still awaits discovery. This is likely to have stood near the Roman river crossing of the Tamar. Any sites revealed before or during construction work would need to be recorded.

Medieval and later

The area traversed by the proposed new road is characterised by hamlets or small scattered farms. There are no major contemporary settlements close to the roadline which itself is an entirely new corridor and does not respect any well-established communication lines. The area was generally remote and inaccessible until recent times and most of the farms are sited on the valley sides or adjacent to springs or tributary streams.

Most of the farms are not well-documented; few of them are for instance directly recorded in the Domesday Book. The manorial centres recorded in Domesday generally reflect the medieval ecclesiastical parish units, principally Sourton, Bridestowe, Thrushelton, Bratton Clovelly, Broadwoodwidger and Lifton. The main exception to this, the manor of *Godescote*, now in Broadwoodwidger parish, is discussed below (section 3). It is probable that many of the farms in the vicinity of the roadline were however in existence by the time of Domesday. Though not mentioned by name, some of these are likely to be the holdings of villeins and bordars belonging to the manor. In west Devon the difficult topography and generally poor land have resulted in the development of a class of small independent farmers. There is strong continuity of settlement sites and ownership with farms staying in the hands of the same family for hundreds of years (viz. Lillicrap, below). The medieval settlements are grouped into three main types:

i) small farms on single sites, e.g. Jordan (Dowden), Lillicrap, Patchill, Woolacott. These all have well-established continuity of occupation by the same families from the 13th or

14th centuries. There is no documentary evidence for their having been hamlets of any size in the post-medieval period;
ii) similar to (i) above but with dual settlement sites: East and West Linnacombe, East and West Rowden, Higher and Lower Wolladon;
iii) farms which show clear evidence of having been substantial hamlets with several occupiers, e.g. Week, Blatchford, Ebsworthy Town, Eastlake, Higher Cookworthy;
iv) Liftondown, the settlement area which in the 19th century achieved the size of a village (see Part 3).

The documentary history of the area has been studied in some detail in order to ascertain the status of the existing farm sites and to locate any deserted sites which lie within the scheme corridor. No obvious candidates have been identified apart from those noted in the preliminary assessment. Two of the latter were the subject of evaluation excavations described in Parts 3-4.

2. ROADS AND BRIDGES

The line of the Published Route cuts across many ancient roads and trackways.

2.1 Roads

Documentary evidence for roads before the 17th or 18th century is generally quite rare. For this part of Devon however there are some medieval references which are recorded in manorial Court Rolls for Bratton Clovelly manor in the Devon Record Office (DRO: Ref 314M). These date back to the 14th century and record cases where roads were badly damaged or out of repair. These normally refer to main roads called *Viae Regiae* or King's Highways. Such roads were often major cross-country routes which passed through several manors or parishes. The occupiers of each manor in the Middle Ages were responsible for the upkeep of that particular stretch of road. The relevant roads are described below (DTp Classification numbers are given in brackets).

2.1.1 Liftondown to Bratton Clovelly (C615) (Nos 5, 13, 17 on Figs 2-4)
This ran from Bratton Clovelly westwards past Headson and over Gadcombe Cross down towards the River Wolf at Rexon. After crossing a tributary stream at Drownsmill it passes south-westwards to Liftondown and then on to the Tamar. The road forms part of a cross-country routeway stretching as far as Hatherleigh 25 km to the north-east. It is mentioned in the 14th and 15th-century Court Rolls as follows:
1377 *Via Regia* at *Hedystone* [Headson] ford
1408 - do - at Headson Bridge (one of the earliest references to a bridge in the area)
1422-3 - do - between Rexon and West Banbury
1431-2 - do - between *Dounton* in *Godescote* and West Banbury
The Published Route crosses this road at Drownsmill (also Manor Mill) Bridge (see below) and just north of Yeat near Lifton Down (SX38228646). The southern part of the course is described in Part 3, section 4 (Liftondown).

2.1.2 Bratton Clovelly to Lewtrenchard (C463) (No. 12 on Fig. 3; Pl. 2)
This runs from Bratton Clovelly past Wrixhill over Wrixhill Bridge to Orchard. It runs southwards across the A30 to Lewtrenchard village. It is referred to as follows:

1378 *Via Regia* at Wrixhill
1422 - do - at Chimsworthy
This again must have been a major cross-country route and probably formed part of a road running from Great Torrington in the north to the Tamar estuary in the south.

The date of origin of medieval roads is uncertain but in some cases in other parts of Devon they appear to be cut across by the lines of Roman roads. It is therefore quite possible that these medieval cross-country routeways are of prehistoric origin.

2.1.3 Boasley Cross to Sourton (UC96) (No. 4 on Fig. 2)
Locally this runs between Boasly Cross at the junction with the *Via Regia*, south-east over Cowsen Down and on to the present A30. It originally continued beyond here to Prewley Moor and Dartmoor. To the north it also links up with the ridgeway over Broadbury Common (the B3218). In a document of 1474 this was referred to as the *Moreway* which leads from *Loddon* to *Dertemore* (DRO DD30124). It is therefore likely to be of great antiquity and would have been used by farmers to gain access to summer pastures on Dartmoor.

2.2 Bridges

2.2.1 *Wrixhill Bridge* (SX46538984) (No. 11 on Fig. 3, Figs 5-6; Pl. 1)

This bridge which lies astride the River Thrushel links the parish of Bratton Clovelly on the north side with that of Thrushelton on the south (Fig. 3). The road which it carries is an ancient routeway and is described above (2.1.2). It takes its name from the farm of Wrixhill sited some 800m to the north in Bratton Clovelly.

The bridge is not recorded until 1677. It is not certain when it was built but a late-medieval date would seem likely. The bridge was certainly old in 1677 when the Justices of the Peace recommended its repair.

The Quarter Sessions accounts of the 19th century record various amounts of money spent on the upkeep of the bridge. The most significant expenditure was in 1836 when the bridge was apparently entirely rebuilt. It was recorded by the County surveyors, James Green and Thomas Whitaker, in the mid 19th century. Their elevation drawing is reproduced here in Fig. 6.

On either side of the bridge at some 90m distant are two tapered stones which were known as County Bridge stones (Pls 3-4). These defined the area of carriageway and bridge for which the County, rather than the parish, was responsible. These stones are Listed as being of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, Grade II.

2.2.2 *Manor Mill or Drownsmill Bridge* (SX40468772) (No. 18 on Fig. 4; Fig. 7)

This bridge lies across a small tributary stream of the River Wolf (Fig. 4). The stream forms the historic parish boundary between the parishes of Lifton and Broadwoodwidger. The settlement of Drownsmill, formerly Manor Mill, lies about 300 m to the north-east. The bridge itself is not well-documented although the road which it carries was part of

the King's Highway described above between Bratton Clovelly and the main road to Cornwall at Lifton Down. The date of the first bridge to have been built at this crossing is not known. The elevation in Fig. 7, dated 1889, is one of the few records of the bridge surviving in the Quarter Sessions records. The present bridge is of modern construction incorporating a concrete culvert.

2.3 **Milestones**

2.3.1 *Sourton Down* (SX54249157; No. 2 on Fig. 2, Fig. 8; Pl. 5)
This is a granite milestone with rounded head inscribed OKEHAMPTON 4 MILES. It is positioned in a hedgebank on the north side of the existing carriageway 400m west of the Sourton Down roundabout. Due to the danger from passing traffic it was not possible to make a detailed measured drawing. A photograph of the stone is shown on Pl. 5. The stone is likely to be of 19th-century date and marks the distance out of Okehampton towards Launceston on roads of the Okehampton Turnpike Trust. The Trust was created by Acts of Parliament in 1760 and its jurisdiction on this road extended to Combebow Bridge, Bridestowe.

2.3.2 *Liftondown* (SX37378540; No. 20 on Fig. 4, Figs 9-10; Pl. 6)
This is a granite triangular-headed milestone measuring 00.5 x 0.9m above ground and inscribed: LAUNCESTON 3 OKEHAMPTON 15½ (although the ½ is now almost illegible). It is at present positioned on a grass verge behind the pavement and is firmly embedded in the ground. It is probably of 19th century date and stands on the former Turnpike Road out of Launceston towards Okehampton.

3. LOST MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENTS (BRATTON CLOVELLY PARISH) (Nos 15, 16 on Figs 3-4; Fig. 11)

These settlements lay within a land unit or estate lying between the River Wolf near Drownsmill and the Thrushel by Eastlake Wood. Up until the late 19th century it formed an outlier of Bratton Clovelly parish; it was subsequently amalgamated with Broadwoodwidger to the west. This area of Bratton Clovelly is likely to have been contiguous with that of the manor of Guscott which is recorded in the Domesday Book as *Godescote*, when it was held by Colwin from Baldwin the Sheriff.

The manorial centre, the farm of *Godescote* itself, probably lay about 500m north of the roadline near Eastlake. This site was abandoned by the end of the 16th century. The manor itself was still recognised as an administrative unit in the mid 16th century but by that time it had been absorbed by the larger manor of Bratton Clovelly. This association dates back to the 14th century at least and explains the parochial attachment to Bratton of this land area which is otherwise completely detached from the main part of the parish.

In the Middle Ages the manor included the settlements of East and West Banbury, Eastlake, Staddon and probably Rexon. There were a number of other settlements belonging to this manor which, along with the main farm of Godescote, have since disappeared. These included places called East and West Moretown, Downtown and Yeo. Of these four only the site of Yeo has been located: this lies a few hundred

metres to the south of the route just east of Staddon. The other three sites are documented up to the 15th century but little record is found after this date. The sites of these settlements probably lie to the north of Yeo in rough or hilly ground from which the names *moor* and *down* derived.

This area was studied carefully in the field so as to locate any possible settlement sites. Documentary research was also undertaken to this end. Two possible sites were located on the basis of placename evidence and examined in the field. The first (A on Fig. 11; at SX42958870; Bratton Clovelly Tithe No. 2091) lay in a narrow combe at a height of about 91m OD. The site is partially wooded, containing oak and willow, with rushes and rough grasses in the open areas. The area is extremely marshy, with water draining into it from three sides upslope, and a small stream flowing off downslope to the south. No signs of earthworks or buildings were visible and the site would seem to be quite unsuitable for settlement. (See also section 5 below).

The other site (B on Fig. 11 at SX42008830; Tithe No. 2206-8) lies at a similar height to Site A. This was in a similar topographical position but occupies a more level site. The area appears to have been improved in recent years so that the poor drainage is not influencing the character of the vegetation at present. This site is effectively in a valley floor situation close to the confluence of a small stream with the River Thrushel. Again it is unlikely to have contained medieval settlement sites.

One possible location of the farmsteads noted above is on the valley side at a higher level, perhaps on the 121m (400 ft) contour between Eastlake and Banbury. This lies outside the corridor of the Published Route (but see Part 6 Alternative Route D).

4. PARISH BOUNDARIES

The parish as a land unit had come into existence in Devon by the 12th century at least. Many of their boundaries are much older than this as the parishes were frequently contiguous with pre-Conquest estates. The date of origin of these estates, particularly in west Devon, remains uncertain. A list of parish and Domesday estate boundaries is given below (the Grid Reference refers to the point at which it is cut by the Published Route):

Parishes	*Estates*	*NGR(SX)*	
i) Sourton/Bridestowe	(as parish)	50819099	Fig. 2 No. 6
ii) -	Ebsworthy/Way	49409047	Fig. 2 No. 8
iii) Bridestowe/ Lewtrenchard	Way/Wortham?	47829018	Fig. 3 No. 9
iv) Lewtrenchard/ Thrushelton	(as parish)	46778988	Fig. 3 No. 10
v) Bratton Clovelly/ Thrushelton	(as parish)	46368882	Fig. 3 No. 14
vi) Thrushelton/ Bratton Clovelly	Thrushelton/*Godescote*	43648889	Fig. 3 No. 15
vii) Bratton Clovelly/ Stowford	*Godescote*/Stowford	41908825	Fig. 4 No. 16

viii)	Bratton Clovelly/ Broadwoodwidger	*Godescote*/Broadwood-widger	40848774	Fig. 4 No. 16
ix)	Broadwoodwidger/ Lifton	(as parish)	40468772	Fig. 4 No. 18

4.1 **Palaeoenvironmental evidence**

One of the most important aspects of these boundaries is their potential for preserving palaeoenvironmental remains in the form of buried soils (see below). These may contain organic remains, particularly pollen and charcoal, which can be subjected to pollen analysis and radiocarbon dating which may provide a date for the laying out of the boundaries and provide information about the character of the local environment, agricultural practices and land management (see below).

The estate or parish boundaries containing upstanding remains which will be cut through and disturbed during road construction are as follows (see section 4 above):
ii) Ebsworthy/Way
iii) Bridestowe/Lewtrenchard
iv) Lewtrenchard/Thrushelton
viii) Bratton Clovelly/Stowford

5. PALAEOENVIRONMENTAL STUDY

5.1 **Introduction**

As part of this assessment the road corridor was examined in detail to identify the nature and extent of archaeological deposits which might provide information about the character of the local environment in the past. Although such deposits may not be directly associated with human activity, e.g. in the form of settlement sites, they can often provide evidence of man's influence on his environment.

This assessment attempted to identify occurrences of two types of deposit along the line of the Published Route:
i) *Peat.* This is an organic material formed from partly decomposed plant material. It forms in waterlogged anaerobic (i.e. oxygen-starved) conditions. These conditions are most suitable for preserving plant remains, including seed, pollen, insect remains and charcoal. Within a stratified deposit of peat, therefore, a record of the development of the local vegetation and environment can be preserved. Such sequences can be dated by taking samples for radiocarbon dating at various horizons within the peat.

ii) *Buried soils.* These soils are important because they contain preserved organic material which can be analysed and dated. They are formed when a turf horizon is covered and sealed by dense material such as that used in hedgebanks. Such soils are usually less anaerobic than peat deposits but often preserve pollen and charcoal sufficiently well to allow for radiocarbon dating.

5.2 **Sites examined** (Figs 12-14)

This section deals with areas of the Published Route examined for palaeoenvironmental evidence, except for Sourton Down which is dealt with separately. Investigations were carried out by fieldwalking and visual observation. Sampling of the soils was undertaken using a hand auger with samples being taken at intervals of 5 to 10 metres. This method of fieldwork caused minimal disturbance to the surface of the pasture and enabled large areas to be covered fairly rapidly.

5.2.1 *Jordan Farm* (SX52749154; No. 1 on Fig. 12)
The fields to the south of the farm bordering a small north-flowing stream are very waterlogged pasture. As well as surface drainage from upslope they also receive water from a nearby spring. This area contains deposits of silty organic material, which is not fully developed peat but contains preserved plant remains. The deposit ranges in depth from 0.4m to 0.75m.

5.2.2 *Lillicrap* (SX525915; No. 2 on Fig. 12)
The area to the north of Lillicrap is bounded by a west-flowing stream which separates the land belonging to the farm from Cowsen Down to the north. The pasture fields bordering the stream contained hummocks of rough grass and rushes, suggesting waterlogged conditions (Pl. 7). No organic or waterlogged deposits were however located by auger. The soil depth at the bottom of the valley was 0.2m, with a mottled grey clay subsoil beneath.

5.2.3 *Ebsworthy* (SX49909060-SX50809098; No. 3 on Fig. 12)
A large area along the line of the route about 1km in length was examined here. This lies in the wide part of the valley bottom of the River Thrushel described above, close to the site of the evalution excavations. The land here shows signs of having been waterlogged; it was mainly moorland in the mid 19th century although it has been improved recently by drainage.

Despite extensive augering here no peat deposits were located. The soil is generally of a fairly heavy clay mixed with loam and overlying mottled yellow clay. The fields on the north part of the farm are still waterlogged for much of the winter, despite the insertion of extensive land drains.

It is hoped that buried soils from adjacent hedgebanks may provide information about the vegetational history of this area. One possible explanation is that the waterlogging of the soil and the subsequent change to moorland was assisted by deforestation at some period in more recent historic times. No evidence for such woodland in the Thrushel valley floor has yet been discovered.

5.2.4 *Wrixhill Bridge area* (SX465898; No. 4 on Fig. 13)
Fields in the floodplain of the Thrushel to either side of the bridge were examined. These areas are subject to flooding from the river as well as seepage of water from higher areas to the south. Again no peat deposits were located; the soils here proved to be entirely alluvial in character with those to the east being up to 0.6m deep.

5.2.5 *Patchill* (SX457897; No. 5 on Fig. 13)
The fields to the north and east of the farm have generally been improved for grazing. No areas of likely peat deposits were located although the fields on the valley floor show signs of waterlogging and contain rushy *juncus* species. The hedgebanks in this area do however appear to be generally well preserved and substantial. This together with the wetness in the soil may assist in the preservation of buried soils. The banks include those which define the course of a trackway leading from Patchill Farm (Pl. 8). In addition, there is a disused mill leat to the west of the farm which still functions as a boundary and may date back to the 13th century. These features may also contain organic material preserved in waterlogged conditions.

5.2.6 *Bratton Clovelly parish outlier* (No. 6 on Figs 13-14)
In conjunction with the fieldwork described in section 3, there were areas which were thought to contain significant deposits. The first possible settlement site (A above) at SX42958870 contained very marshy areas with some rushes and rough grasses as well as oak and willow copses. The soils however are very shallow here less than 0.2m and unlikely to be of great value.

To the west of this area is the confluence of the River Wolf with the tributary stream flowing from the north. The soils here are again alluvial in character and appear to be quite well-drained with no evidence of peat development.

The hedgebanks which formed the historic estate boundaries between the farms of Staddon, East and West Banbury and Eastlake were also examined. This is in addition to the parish boundaries already described above (section 4). These boundaries all date from at least the 13th century and therefore provide a possible chronological context for any buried soils which may be discovered during a watching brief.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Documentary research for this report was undertaken by R. Goodyer and S.D. Turton. Fieldwork and palaeoenvironmental research was carried out by S. Reed with the assistance of V. Biver. The illustrations were produced by T. Dixon. Thanks are also due to the staff of the Devon Record Office (DRO) and Westcountry Studies Library in Exeter for their assistance with the documentary work.

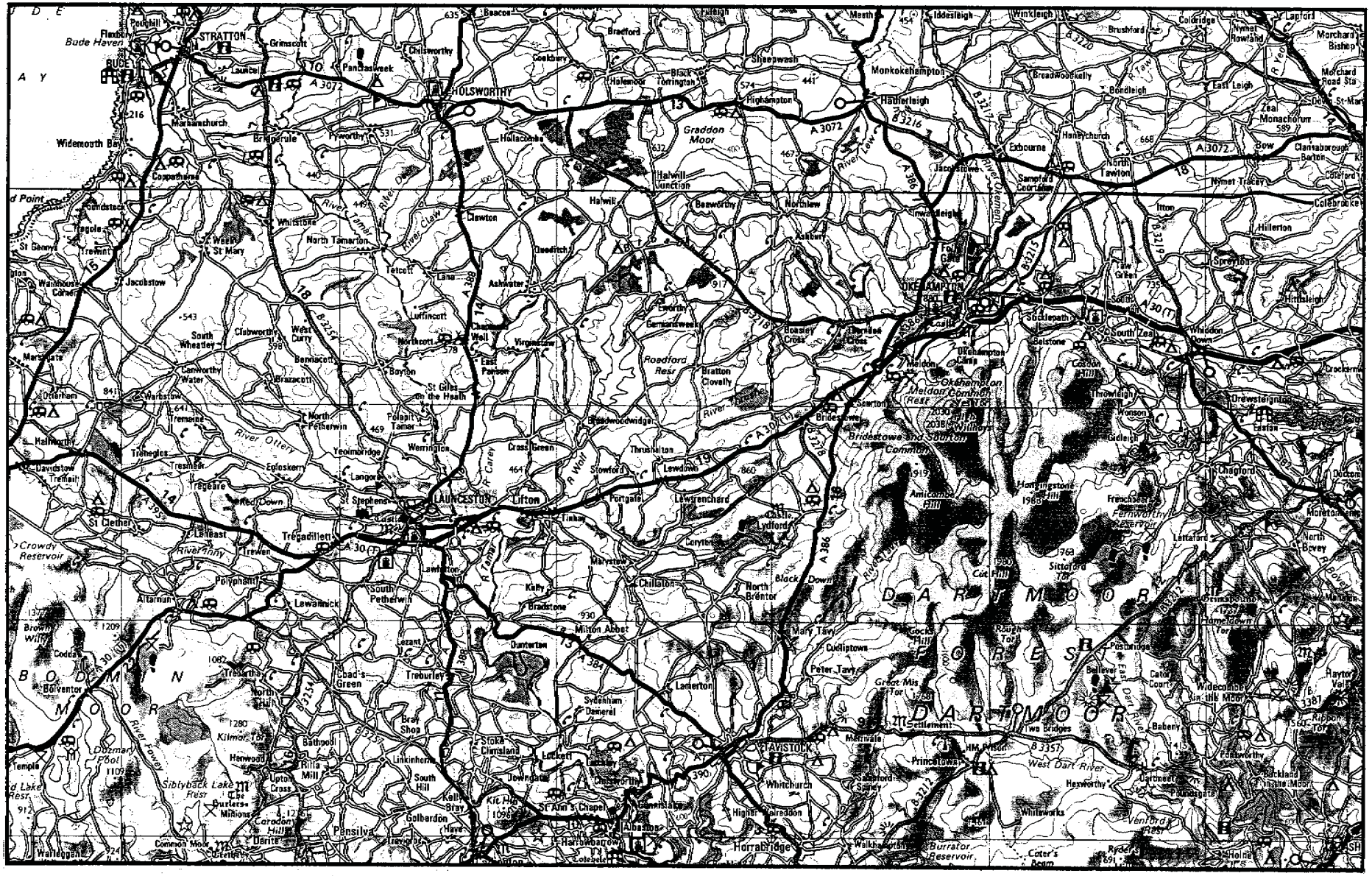

Fig. 1 The overall line of the Published Route.

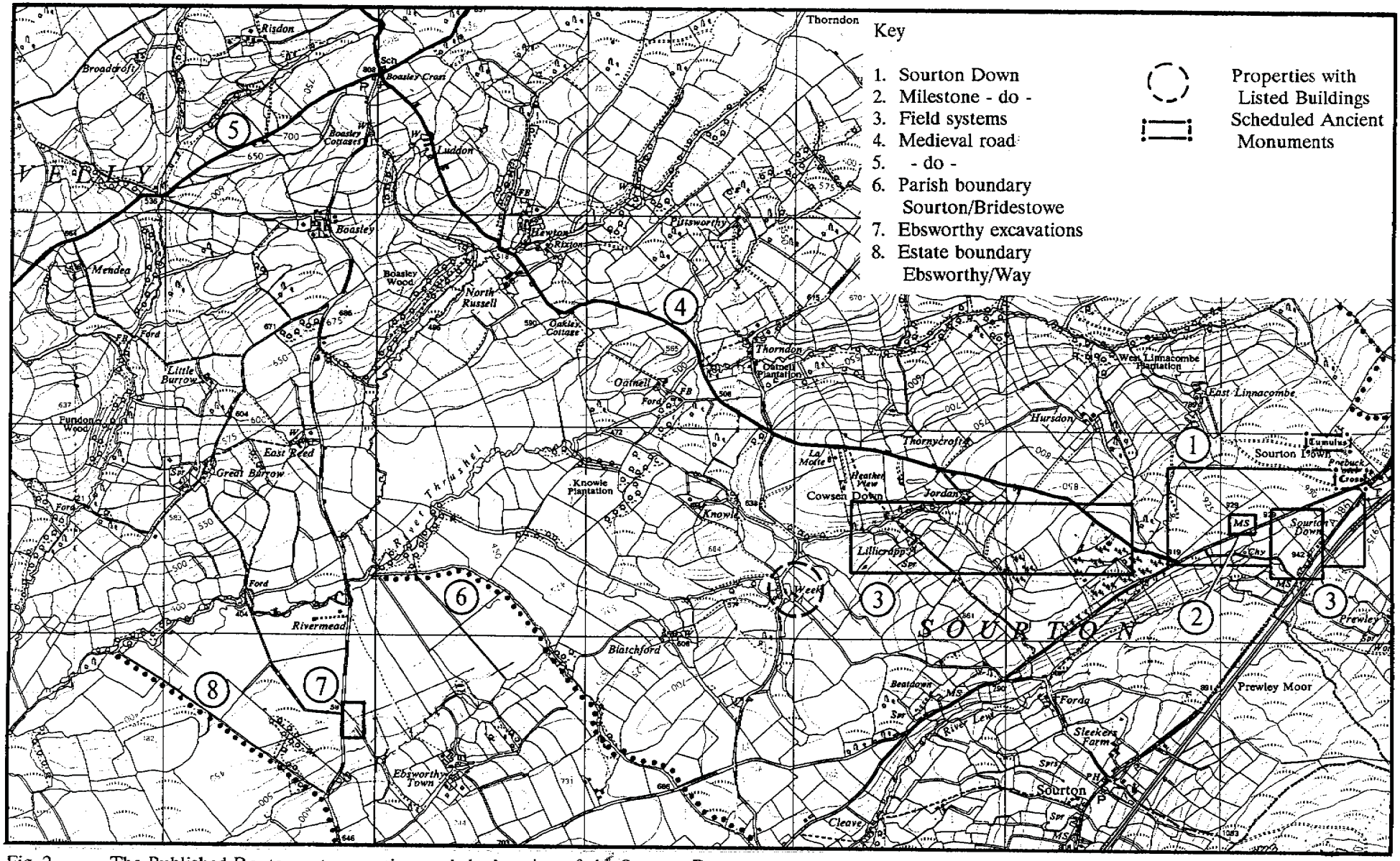

Fig. 2 The Published Route: eastern section, and the location of the Sourton Down survey.

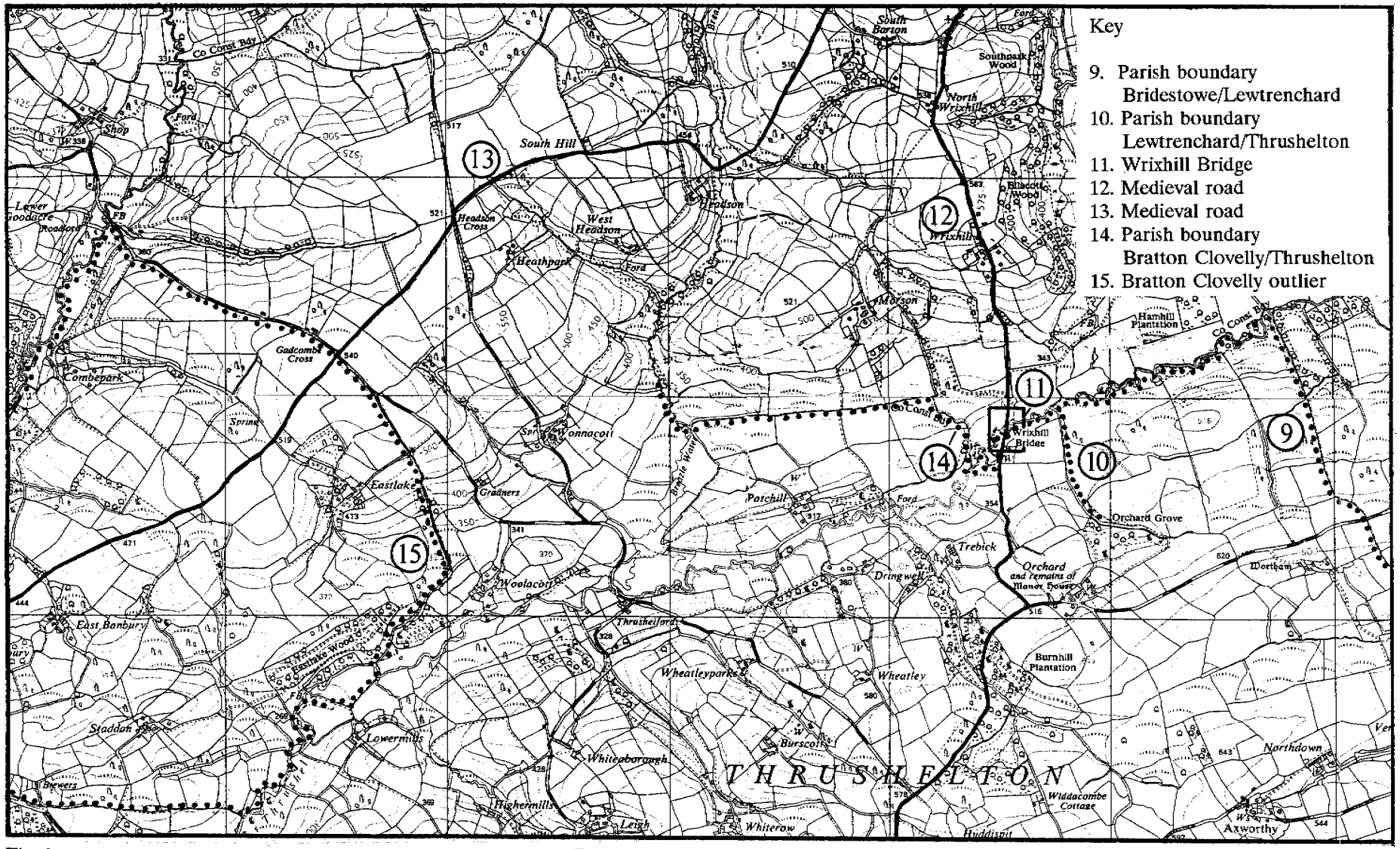

Fig. 3 The lines of Routes C and D in relation to the Published Route.

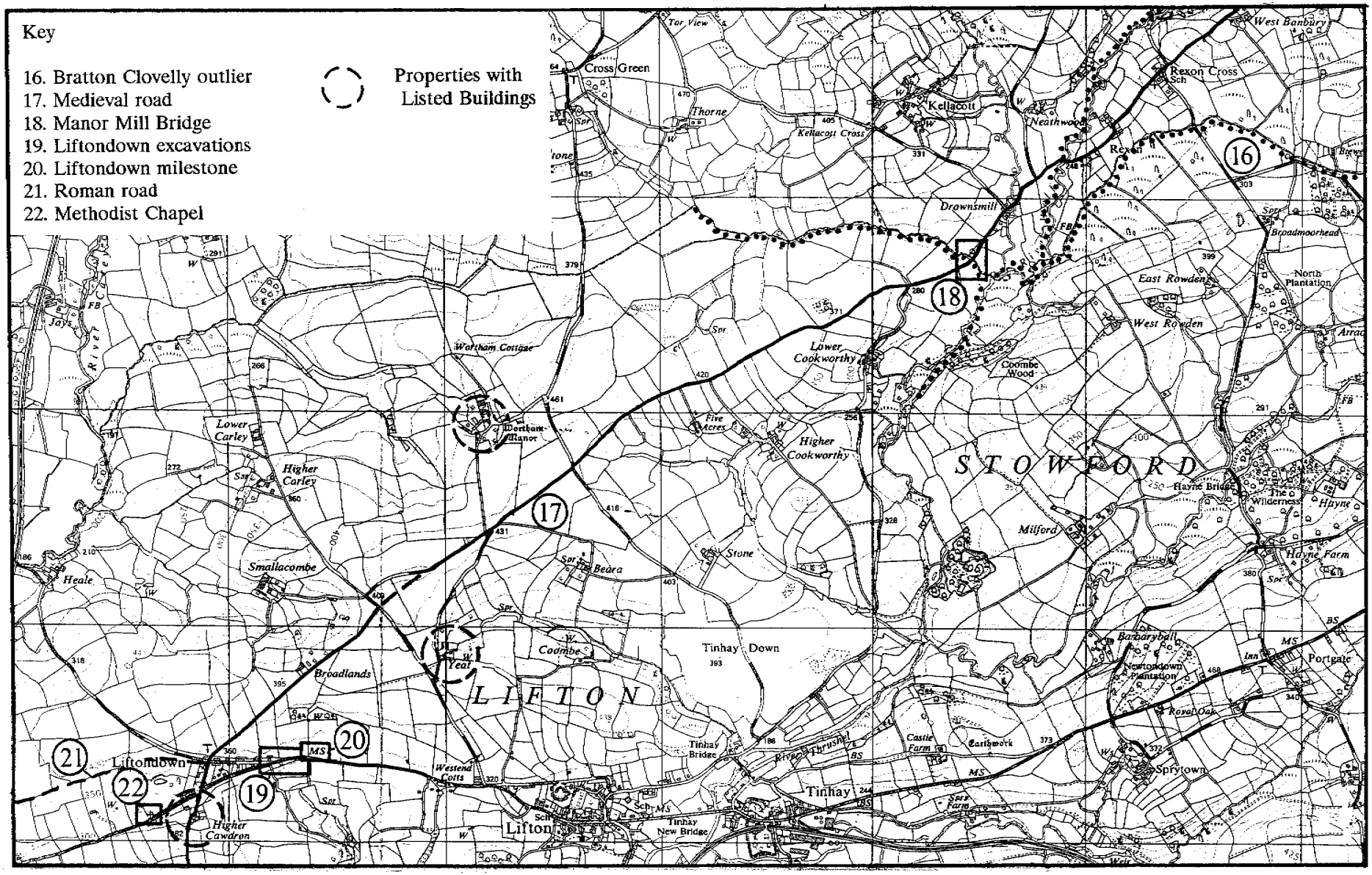

Fig. 4 The line of Route E in relation to the Published Route.

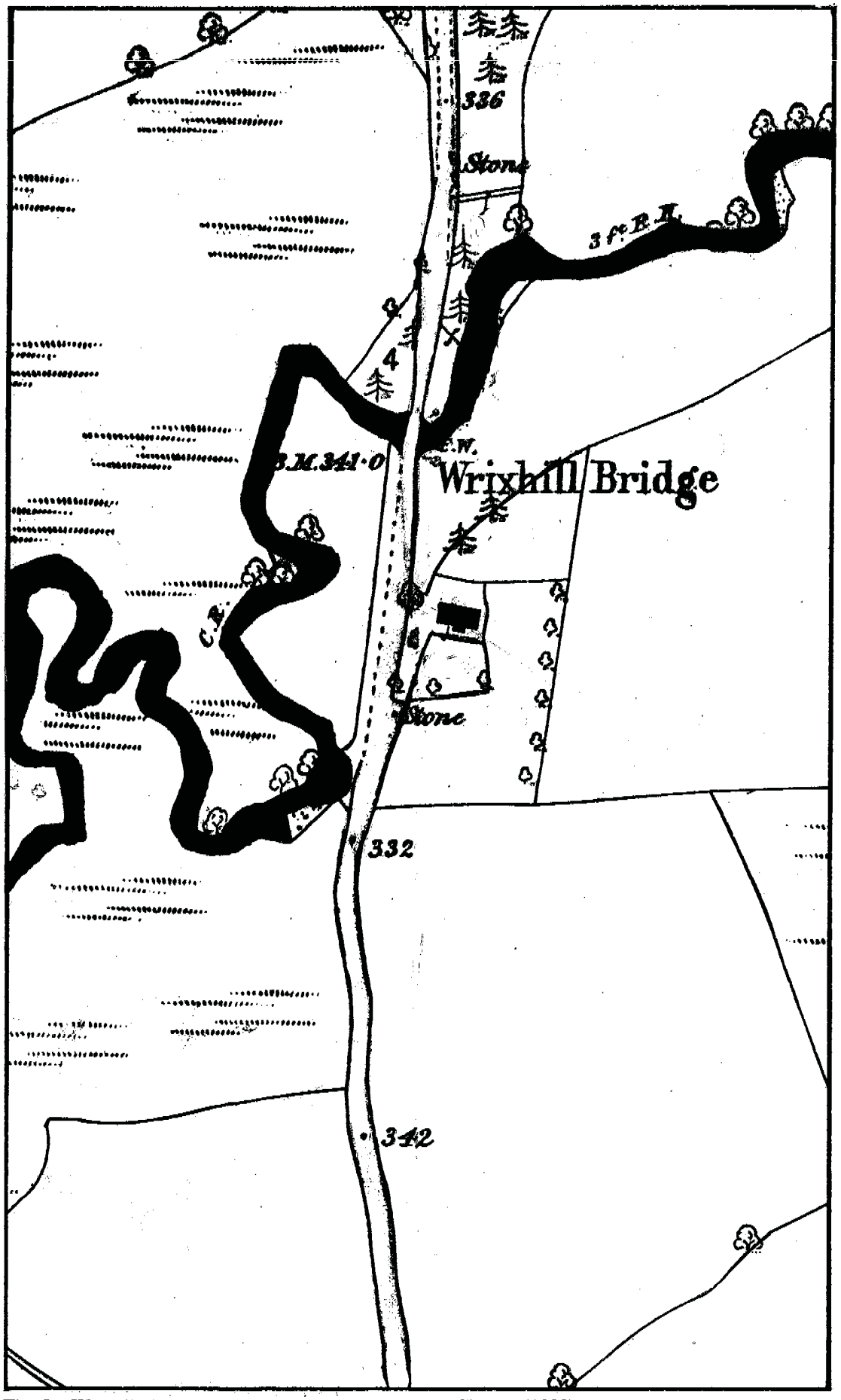

Fig. 5 Wrixhill Bridge as shown on the 1st ed. OS 25" map (1888).

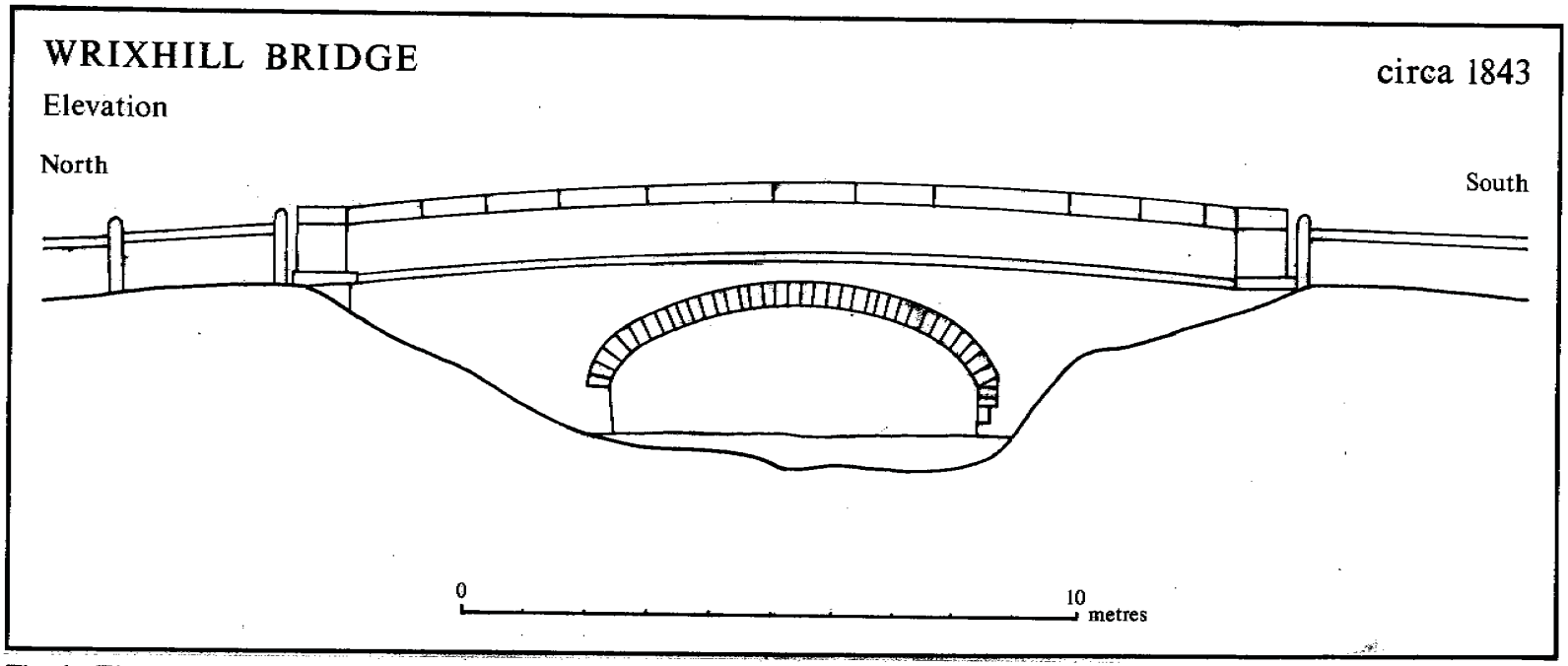

Fig. 6 Elevation of Wrixhill Bridge in 1843 (based on the County Bridge Survey Book, DRO).

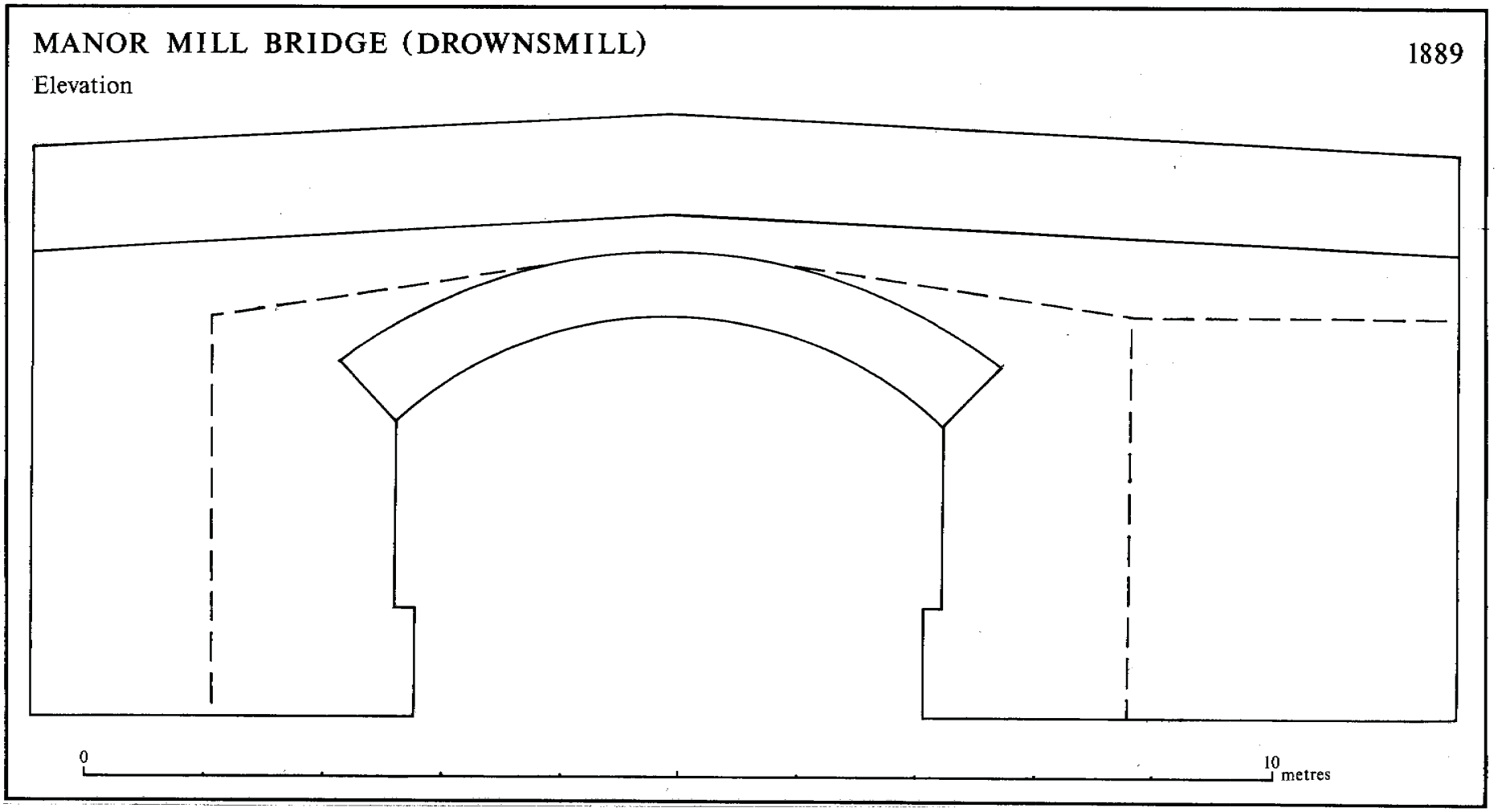

Fig. 7 Elevation of Manor Mill Bridge (near Drownsmill) 1889 (based on Quarter Sessions record 7/12, DRO).

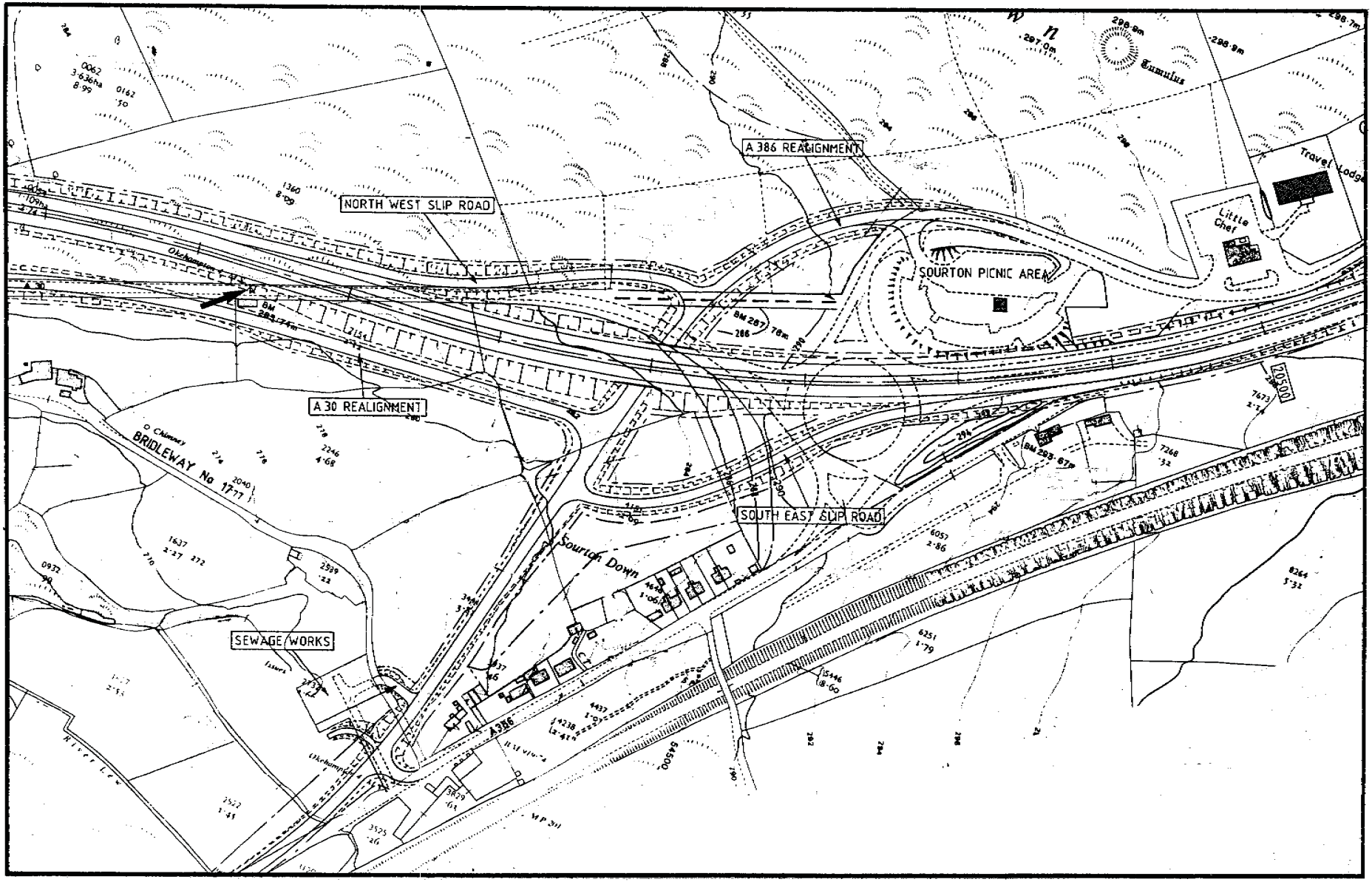

Fig. 8 The location of the Sourton Down milestone.

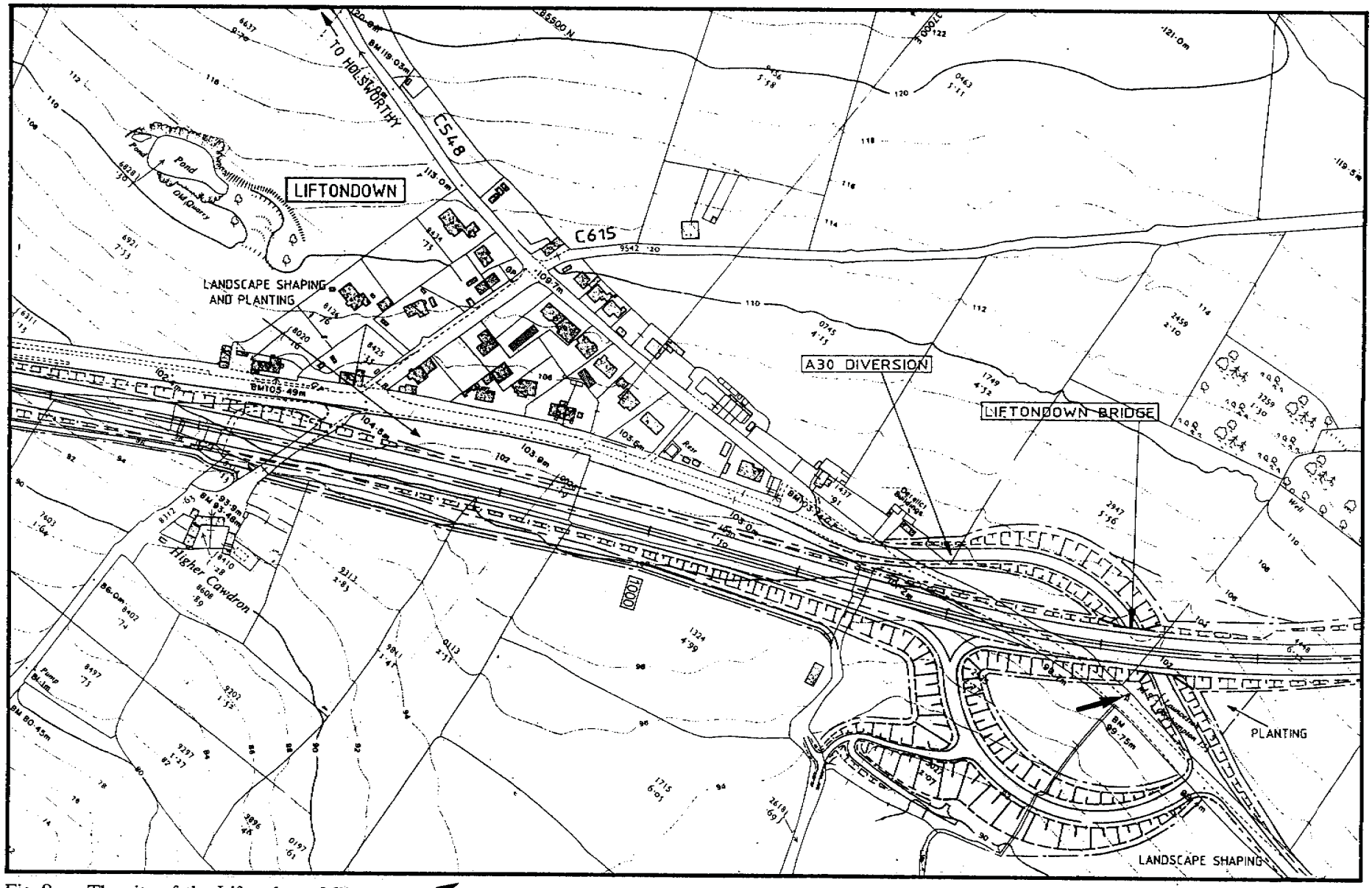

Fig. 9 The site of the Liftondown Milestone.

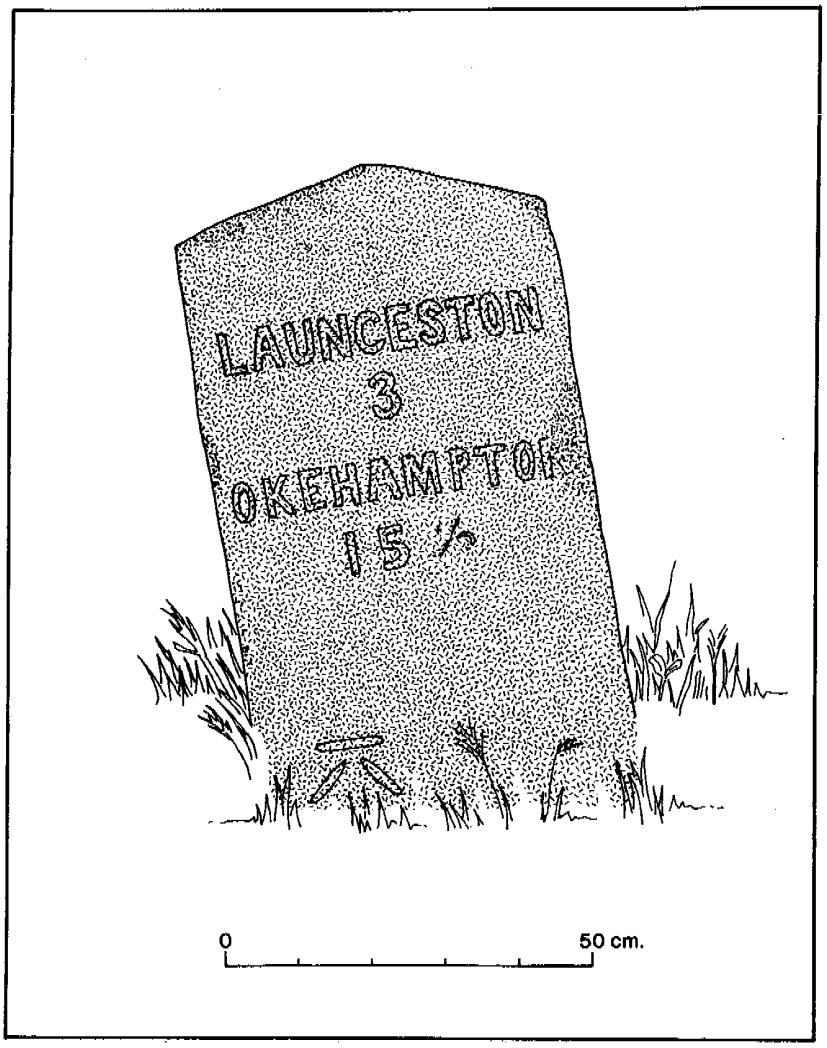

Fig. 10 Elevation of the Liftondown milestone, 1990.

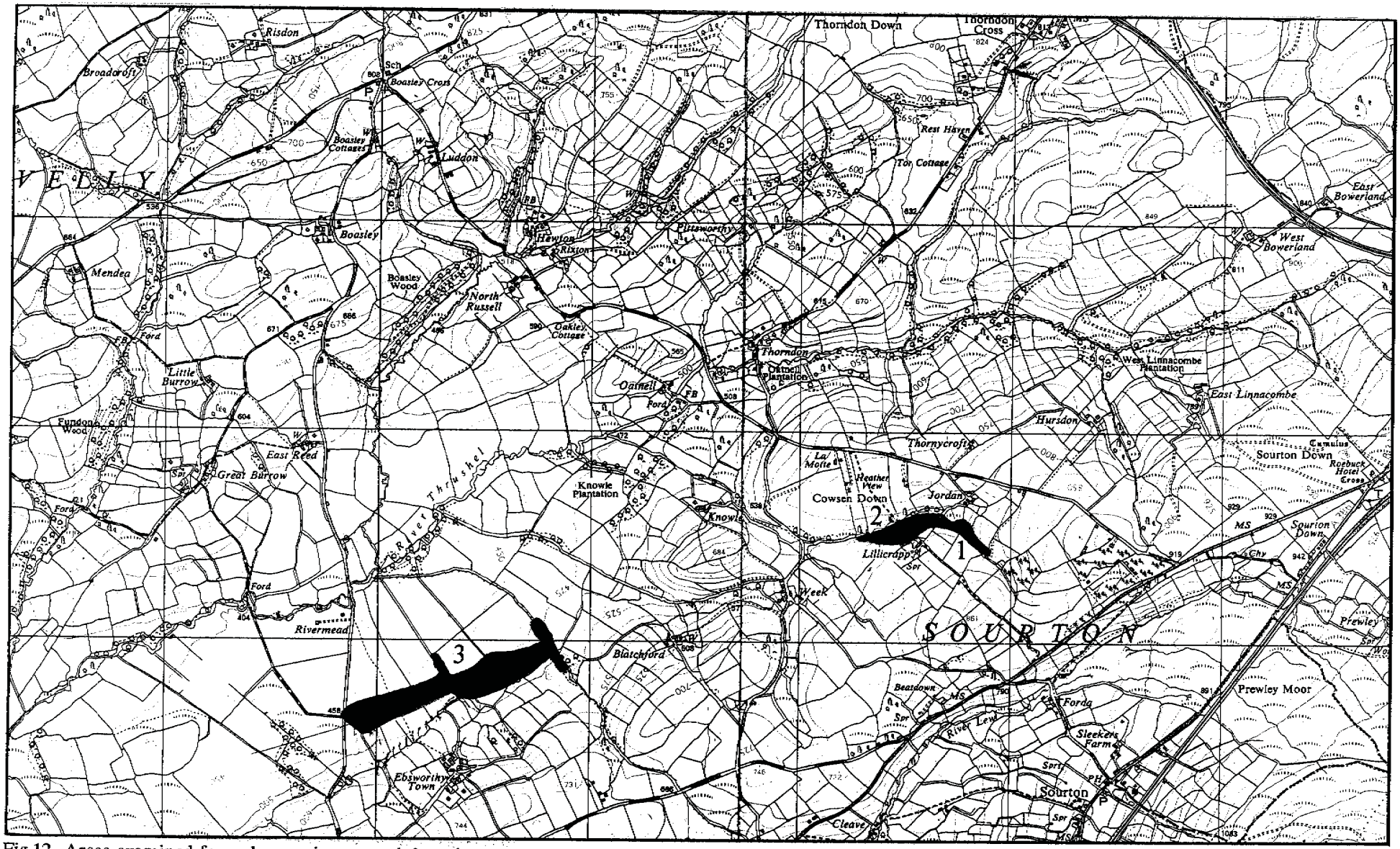

Fig.12 Areas examined for palaeoenvironmental deposits.

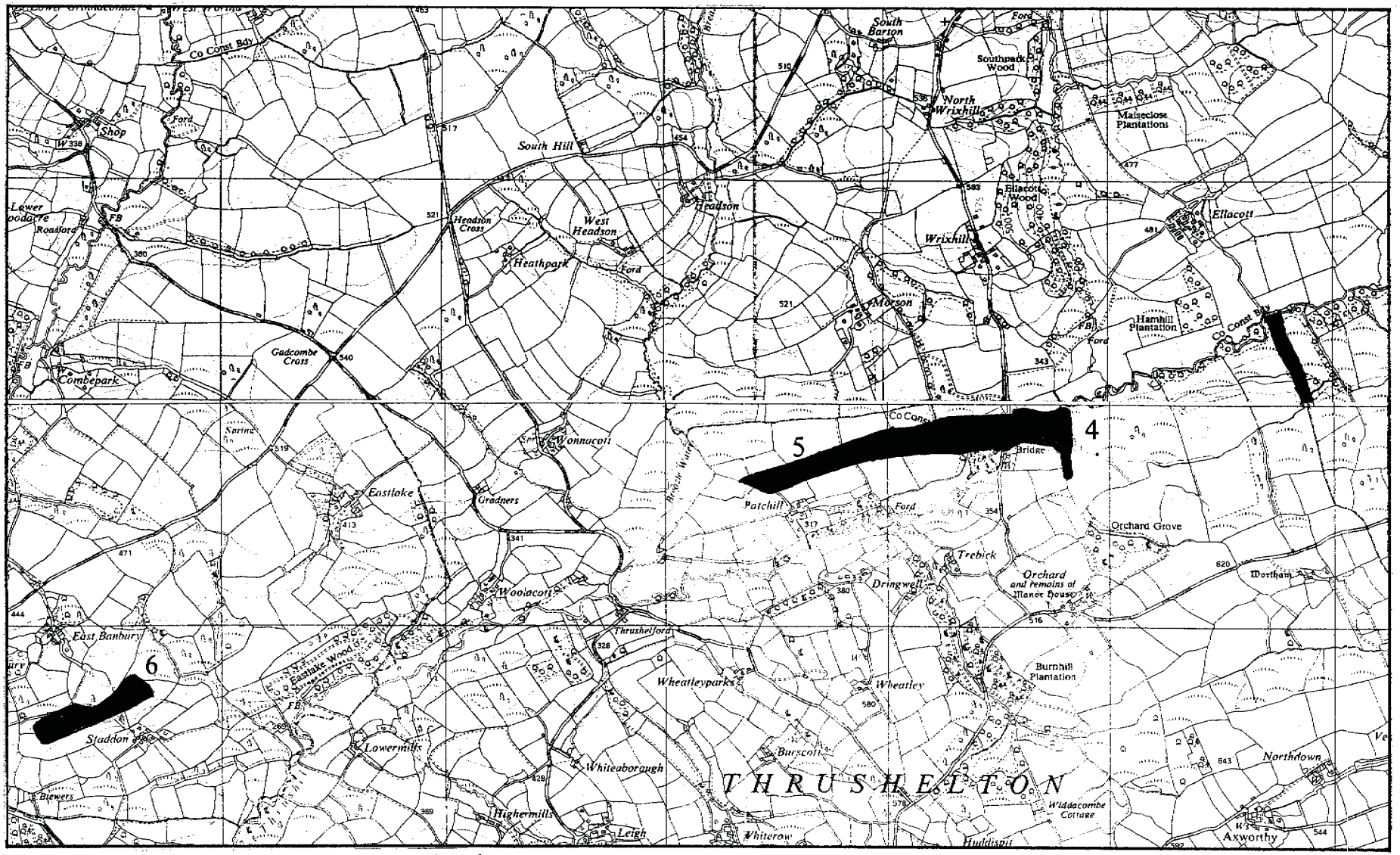

Fig. 13 Areas examined for palaeoenvironmntal deposits.

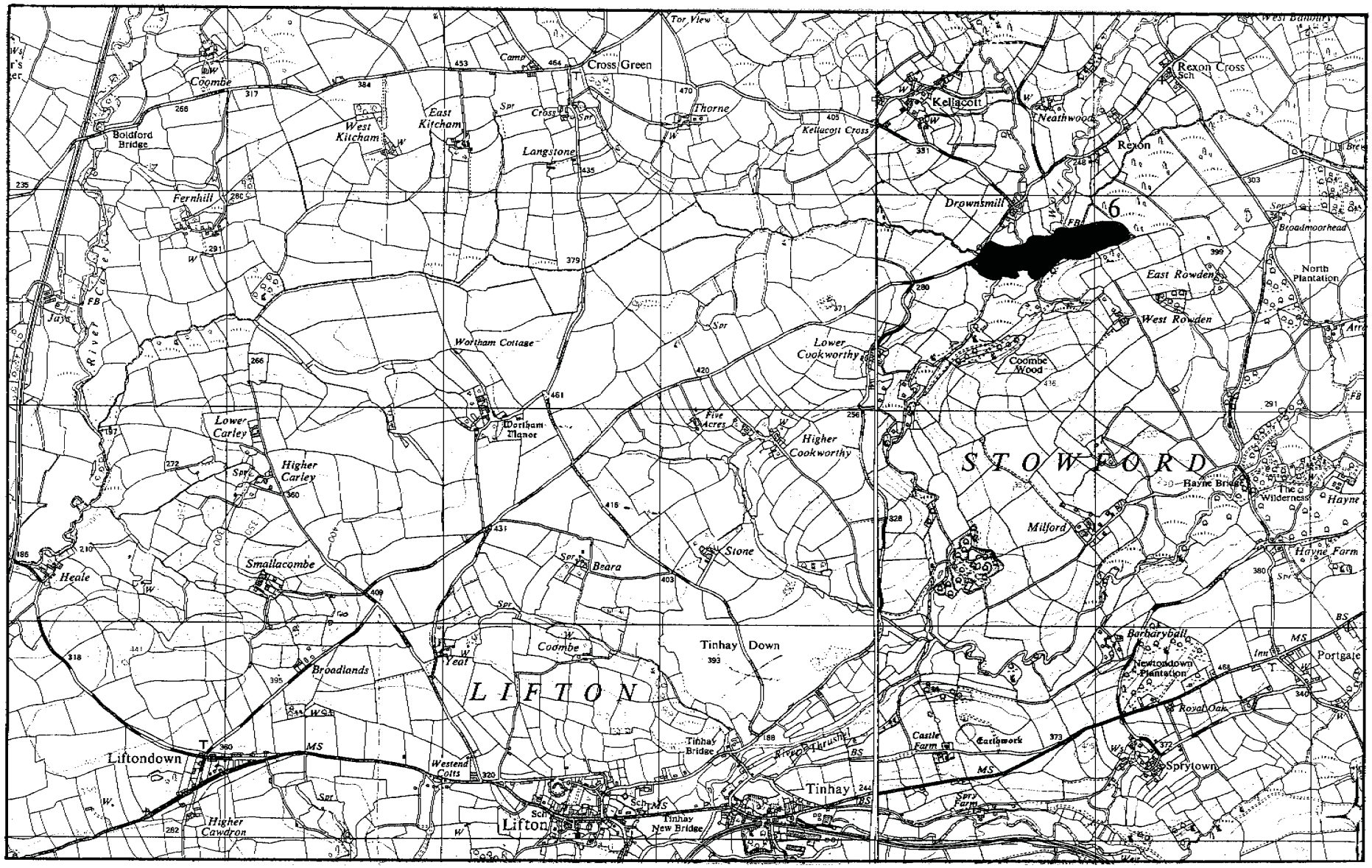

Fig. 14 Areas examined for palaeoenvironmental deposits.

Plate 1 Wrixhill Bridge.

Plate 2 Road to north of bridge (Bridge stone on left).

Plates 3-4 Wrixhill County Bridge stones.

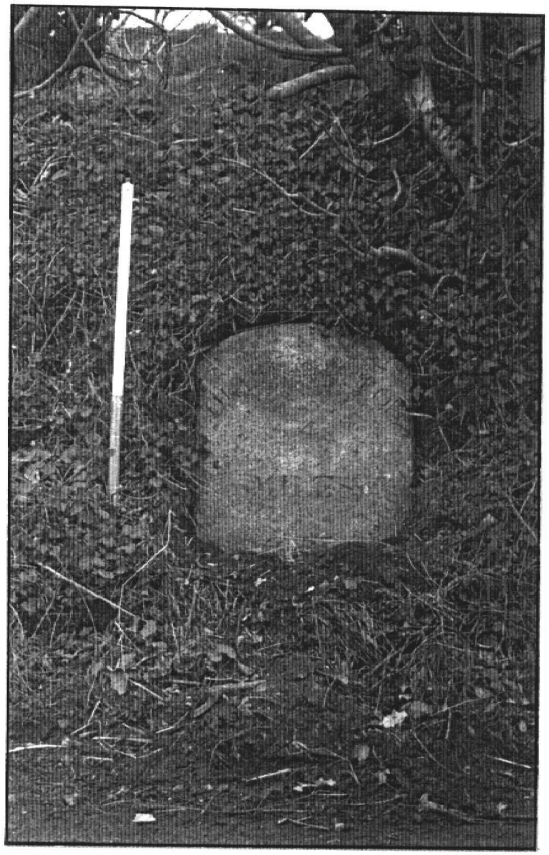

Plate 5 Sourton Down milestone (scale 50cms).

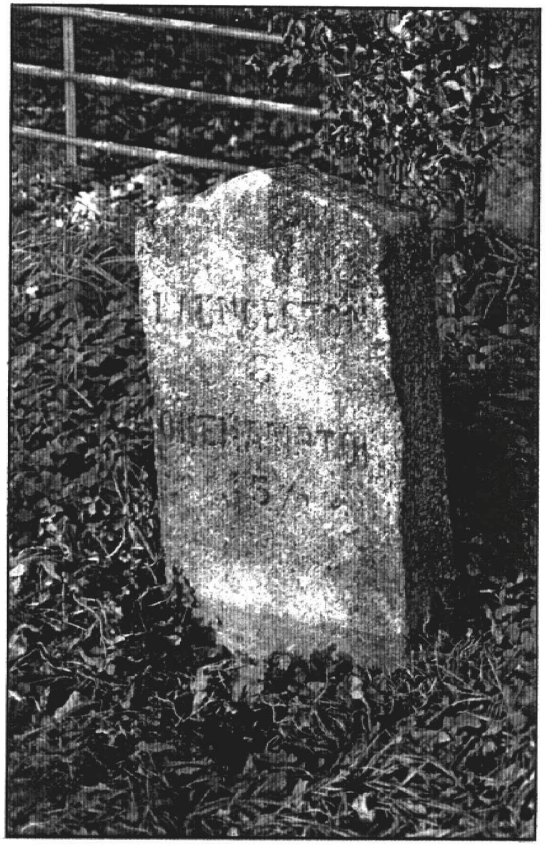

Plate 6 Liftondown milestone.

Plate 7 Landscape near Lillicrap Farm.

Plate 8 Disused trackway north of Patchill.

Plate 1 Wrixhill Bridge.

Plate 2 Road to north of bridge (Bridge stone on left).

Plates 3–4 Wrexham County Bridge stones.

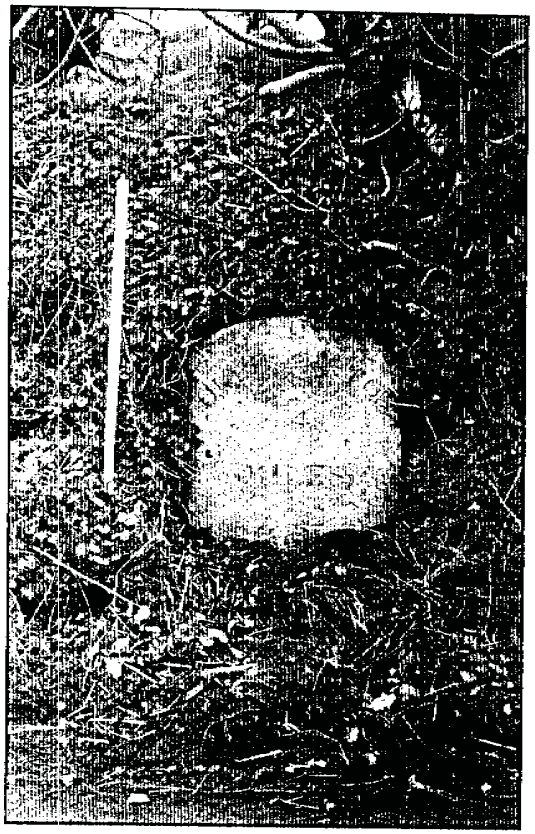

Plate 5 Sourton Down milestone (scale 50cms).

Plate 6 Liftondown milestone.

Plate 7 Landscape near Littlecrap Farm.

Plate 8 Disused railway south of Purcell

Plate 7 Landscape near Lillicrap Farm.

Plate 8 Disused trackway north of Patchill.