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**A30 TRUNK ROAD
HONITON TO EXETER IMPROVEMENT
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
PART 3: CASTLE HILL, NEAR FENITON**

by

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Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit

Report No. 94.103

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Preface

This report is one of a series of six describing the results of archaeological investigations along the proposed route of the A30 Trunk Road Honiton to Exeter Improvement Scheme in east Devon. The fieldwork was undertaken by Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit (EMAFU) between June and December 1994. The project was funded by the Highways Agency.

A preliminary archaeological assessment of the published route had been prepared in 1991 (EMAFU Report No. 91.22). At a meeting on 31 March 1994 representatives of interested parties (the Highways Agency, Acer Consultants, EMAFU, Devon County Archaeological Service and English Heritage) discussed the archaeological implications of the scheme. It was agreed to bring the level of archaeological assessment in line with recent guidelines laid out in the Department of Transport's document: *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, Vol. II* (1993).

A Scoping Statement was subsequently produced by EMAFU identifying the archaeological requirements as follows: an update/review of the 1991 assessment; an assessment of existing borehole/trial-pit data; the implementation of a geophysical survey; evaluation excavations; field survey and fabric recording; fieldwalking; palaeoenvironmental sampling and dating.

The geophysical survey was carried out by Oxford Archaeotechnics and will be produced as a separate report.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation excavation undertaken between 24 October and 8 November 1994 on the lower slopes of Castle Hill, near Fenny Bridges.

1.1 Location (Fig. 1)

Castle Hill is situated on the north side of the existing A30 (which at this point follows the line of the Roman road) at SY108986, between Ash Farm and Fenny Bridges. Although in Ottery St Mary Parish, the site lies adjacent to the parish boundary near Feniton. The site is located on gently sloping ground which rises to about 90m above the River Otter. The underlying geology is Permian and Triassic Upper Sandstone.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND PRELIMINARY FIELDWORK

Castle Hill is an area of land north-west of Skinners Ash, now cut by the Exeter to Waterloo railway line. It was considered to be of potential archaeological importance because the place-name suggests the former existence of earthworks or other archaeological features. There is no prominent hill or natural feature from which the name could have derived.

2.1 Documentary research

The antiquity of the name Castle Hill is uncertain, but it appears on the 1st edition OS 6" map (1891). On Donn's Map of Devon (1765) the area was called Tower Hill. The name Castle Hill is used on the OS Surveyors Draft of 1806-7, and found in documents of the Kennaway family from 1823 (DRO B961M/T8; F2), which record properties called Castle Hill Cottages. There are no other records which allude to the 'Tower' of Donn's map. It is possible that the 'Tower' or 'Castle' element refers to a former landmark, perhaps a folly of some kind. Alternatively, it may indicate archaeological feature in the form of an earthwork which has not survived. The land in this area has been intensively farmed (Weddell 1991, 23).

2.2 Fieldwork

Fieldwalking has produced finds which indicate prehistoric and Roman activity in the area. Work to the north and north-east of Skinner's Ash in the early part of 1992 produced finds which included a number of pieces of worked flint and chert, and some tile fragments of possible Roman date (SMR: SY19NW/100, 101). A sherd of Roman pottery found in the field immediately west of the railway line suggests a possible Roman settlement in the vicinity. Roman pottery of the 2nd and 4th century AD has also been found to the south of the A30 (SMR: SY19NW/99).

2.3 Other archaeological features in the area

There are two prehistoric ring-ditches, visible as cropmarks, to the north of Castle Hill (SMR: SY19NW/86) which may represent the sites of round barrows (i.e. burial mounds) of the second millennium BC. The ring ditches appear to be associated with linear marks which may extend south into the road scheme corridor, and may be part of an earlier field system (see below). There are instances where the 'Castle' element of a place-name has derived from a mound feature such as a barrow, and some connection may be possible here, although the features lie over 100m to the north of the area now known as Castle Hill (Weddell 1991, 23).

There is also evidence of a prehistoric field system in the area. It has been noted that some hedgebanks on land between Higher Gosford Farm and Little Ash appear to continue their alignment south beyond the A30, implying that the Roman road (A30) has cut through an existing field system (SMR: SY09NE/22; SY19NW/88-91). One particular field boundary east of Little Ash Farm may be an example of this (Fig. 6). There is other evidence for pre-Roman field systems further east on the A30 between Hamlet and Honiton where field boundaries follow a completely different alignment to that of the Roman road (Weddell 1991, 31).

3. THE EXCAVATION (Figs 2-6, Pls 1-6)

The proposed route at Fenny Bridges skirts the lower slopes of Castle Hill, passing between Castle Hill and Skinners Ash Farm. Three trenches, aligned along the route corridor, were excavated mechanically and subsequently cleaned by hand to locate any features. Trench 1 was located two fields south of the railway cutting running along the southern edge of corridor, Trench 2 was located in the field to the south of the cutting, and Trench 3 north of the cutting (Fig. 2).

3.1 Results

Trench 1 (Figs 3-5, Pls 1-6)

Trench 1 measured 1.7 x 106m. It contained a series of linear features, all crossing the trench approximately from north to south. They were all cut into undisturbed subsoil and no stratigraphic relationships could be established. Seven features were located within this trench:

- (i) About 0.5m from the western end of the trench was a U-shaped ditch (853), running north-west/south-east (Fig. 4). It had a varying width of between 1.12-1.9m and was cut 0.4-0.5m into the gravelly subsoil. No datable material was recovered from the fill of this ditch. There was no clear evidence to indicate the position of an associated bank, and no bank material survived above the level of the subsoil.
- (ii) Another ditch (856) lay 19m to the east (Fig. 4) and followed a broadly similar alignment to the ditch (853) mentioned above. This feature was V-shaped, 1.5-1.9m wide and cut 0.5m into the subsoil. Twelve sherds of Bronze Age pottery were found within the fill (854) of this ditch, of which 5 were from a collared urn (see 3.3 below and Appendix 1). There was no evidence to indicate the position of any associated bank.
- (iii) Some 24m further east was a shallow gully (674), 0.8m wide and 0.15m deep, again on a north-west/south-east alignment (Fig. 5). The base of the feature was cut by five stakeholes (676-680). From the upper part of the fill (673) two sherds of abraded prehistoric pottery of indeterminate date were recovered.
- (iv) Another ditch (686) was located 15m further east (Fig. 3). This was 1.9-2.2m wide and c. 0.75-1.0m deep and orientated north-west/south-east. The ditch was variable in profile, its north-eastern face being generally steeper, with a rough undulating base, giving the impression that it had been dug as a source of bank material rather than as a defensive feature. Evidence

for a bank on this side is represented by slumped bank material (687; Fig. 3, section 1), although no bank material survived above the level of the subsoil.

Fills 689, 685 and 684 represented the initial weathering of the ditch sides and bank. Fill 672 (Fig. 3, section 2) represented the gradual infilling of the ditch and contained three flint waste flakes. Radiocarbon analysis of charcoal recovered from the lower level of this fill gave a Neolithic date of 2915-2605BC, calibrated to 2σ (95% probability) (see Appendix 3).

(v) To the west of the ditch (686) were three stakeholes (690-692; Fig. 3, plan), which lay in a line approximately parallel to the ditch.

(vi) Approximately 1.5m east of the ditch (686) was a pit (683; Fig. 3, plan). The true shape and nature of this feature could not be determined due to extensive badger disturbance. No stratigraphic relationship was demonstrated between the pit and ditch.

(vii) At c. 13m from the eastern end of Trench 1 were two linear features cutting across the trench. The westernmost feature, a U-shaped ditch (670) was 0.8-1m wide and 0.25-0.34m deep. No finds or charcoal were recovered from the fill (669). The easternmost feature (668) ran parallel, although it was more open in profile and varied in width between 1.2m and 1.9m with a depth of 0.2m. Again no finds or charcoal were recovered from the fill (667). No direct stratigraphic relationship could be demonstrated between the dated ditch (686), the pit (683) and these linear features.

Trench 2 (Fig. 5)

Trench 2 measured 1.7 x 216m. At its western end was a shallow ditch (656), 0.4m wide and 0.12m deep (Fig. 5, section 4). A flint end scraper was recovered from the fill (657). No other features were observed in Trench 2 except the truncated ditches of a former hedgebank. However, three sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from the ploughsoil (654) and one abraded Roman pottery sherd was found during fieldwalking within the area to the south-east of the trench. From the topsoil and lower soil horizon (652, 653) in Trench 2, a further 48 flint and chert artefacts were recovered (see Appendix 1).

Trench 3 (Fig. 5)

Trench 3 measured 1.7 x 64m, and was orientated north-east/south-west along the centre of the route corridor. Five metres from its western end was a shallow ditch (663), 1.8m wide and 0.2m deep, cutting across the trench. No finds or charcoal were recovered from the fill (665). Fifteen metres further east was a shallow depression (660), 0.4m wide and 0.06m deep, which ran into the floor of the trench from the north and petered out within 1.2m. The other feature within Trench 3 was of indeterminate function. It measured c. 0.15m deep, 2.5m long and 0.75m wide in total, but consisted of two shallow depressions (658 and 675) which contained one fill (659). A stakehole (681) was cut into the south-western corner of the feature (675). No finds were recovered from the fills.

3.2 The prehistoric pottery

The presence of the remains of a probable collared urn in Trench 1, ditch (856) is of considerable significance. This pottery type is usually associated with cremation burials of the early Bronze Age, but is occasionally found in domestic contexts. Collared urns are rare in Devon. Furthermore, this particular piece has very unusual decoration. The decoration

comprises close-spaced, short whipped-cord and fingernail impressions, with a decorative row right under the collar pushing the edge to an outer lip. Most collared urns from the West have a looser, more widely-spread decoration. It is possible that this particular piece dates either from very early in the Bronze Age, or it may represent the remains of a ?transitional late Neolithic vessel in the 'Peterborough' tradition (which used similar impressed decorative techniques), although there are no easy parallels (H. Quinnell pers. comm.).

3.3 Geophysical survey

A geophysical (magnetometer) survey was undertaken by Oxford Archaeotechnics which covered two parallel strips of land either side of Trench 1. The results of this and other surveys will be published in a separate forthcoming report.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation excavation demonstrated the presence of a very important prehistoric site at Castle Hill containing a number of possible boundary and other features. These may relate to a pre-Roman co-axial field system. On current evidence at least two of the features in Trench 1 appear to date to the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age period. The recovery of fragments of a probable collared urn may be indicative of nearby cremation pits or domestic occupation. The discovery of Roman pottery on site is also significant but has yet to be explained.

In view of the importance of the surviving archaeological deposits, it is recommended that an area (rescue) excavation be undertaken prior to construction work in order to record the features already identified, and to investigate other likely surviving features within the route corridor. The area excavation will need to concentrate on the field containing Trench 1, extending into the field to the west (the exact distance depending on the final results of the geophysical survey).

APPENDIX 1: FINDS CATALOGUE by G. Langman

<i>Context</i>	<i>Comments</i>
650	10 flint lithics: 6 flakes, 4 scrapers (1 burnt) Brick: 1 fragment - post-medieval Tile: 2 fragments - post-medieval? Slag: 1 fragment tap slag, weight: 10gms
652	Pot: 1 small abraded sherd ?prehistoric, 2 sherds post-medieval South Somerset wares (17C/18C) Glass: 1 fragment bottle glass (1650-1800), 1 fragment window glass 18C/19C 43 lithics: 8 chert: flakes 35 flint: 4 scrapers, 1 notched flake, 2 blade cores (1 burnt), 1 broken blade, 27 flakes Slag: 3 fragments tap slag, weight: 90gms
653	Pot: 1 sherd South Somerset coarseware (17C/18C) 5 lithics: 2 flint flakes 2 chert: 1 flake core, 1 flake 1 flint nodule

"very important prehistoric site"
How is relative importance assessed to justify area rescue excavation?

- 654 Pot: 3 sherds from one vessel - Roman
- 655 Pot: 1 small abraded sherd ?prehistoric, 1 sherd post-medieval South Somerset black-glazed (after 1660)
Glass: 1 small fragment blue glass - post-medieval 18C/19C
43 lithics: 9 chert; 9 flakes, 1 chip
34 flint: 3 chips, 1 scraper, 1 blade, 1 awl, 26 flakes, 2?unused
- 657 Lithics: 1 flint end scraper
- 672 3 flint lithics: flakes
- 673 Pot: 2 sherds from same vessel - ?prehistoric
- 694 Claypipe - 1 stem (after 1600 AD)
- 665 Pot: 1 sherd S. Somerset 18C coarseware
- 854 Pot: 12 sherds Bronze Age - 5 sherds probable collared urn with corded decoration (?late Neolithic/early Bronze Age) (H. Quinnell identification)
- Unstrat Pot: 3 small abraded sherds; 1 large sherd - probably prehistoric.

APPENDIX 2: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

- 650 Topsoil in Trench 1. Dark yellowish-brown, 10YR 4/4 fine sandy clay; friable; common small to medium ww stones. 5YR 4/4 fine sandy clay; friable; stoneless <1%.
- 651 Natural subsoil in Trench 1, a variable sandy clay subsoil locally very gravelly. Strong brown 7.5YR 4/6, fine sandy clay; friable, slightly plastic; freq to abundant small to large ww stones.
- 652 Topsoil in Trench 2. Dark brown 7.5YR 3/4 fine sandy clay loam; friable; common small to medium ww stones.
- 653 Interface between topsoil 652 and subsoil 654 in Trench 2.
- 654 Lower soil horizon in Trench 2 (B horizon). Strong brown 7.5YR 4/6 clayey fine sand; friable, slightly plastic; occ small to medium rounded stones.
- 655 Fieldwalking in vicinity of Trench 2.
- 656 Shallow ditch cut in Trench 2; V-shaped cut into natural 666 running across the trench orientated NW-SE. Contains fill 657. Cut W: 0.4m; D: 0.12m.
- 657 Fill of 656. One flint end scraper was recovered from this context. reddish-brown
- 658 Pit cut into natural 662 of Trench 3. This pit is cut by 675 which may be contemporary as an extension to 658. No function could be attributed to this feature. L: 1.1m; W: 0.6m; D: 0.15m.
- 659 Fill of 658 and 675. Brown/dark-brown 7.5YR 4/4 fine sandy clay loam; friable; contains freq lumps of redeposited natural and freq charcoal frags.
- 660 Shallow scoop/ditch. Extending into the trench 1.2m from the northern edge of excavation before petering out. This feature had no distinct fill. W: 0.4m, D: 0.06m.
- 662 Natural in Trench 3 into which all features are cut. Strong brown 7.5YR 5/6 fine sandy clay, friable; freq small to medium ww stones, locally more gravelly in bands.
- 663 Shallow ditch cut in Trench 3. Probably a hedge ditch; the natural is higher on the eastern side of the ditch suggesting the position of a bank associated with the ditch. W: 1.8m, D: 0.2m.
- 664 Topsoil in Trench 3. Dark yellowish-brown

- 10YR 4/4 fine sandy loam, friable, relatively stoneless, occ small to medium ww stones.
- 665 Fill of 663. Strong brown 7.5YR 5/8 silty clay loam, friable, slightly plastic.
- 666 Natural subsoil in Trench 2. Strong brown 7.5YR 5/8 fine sandy clay, plastic when wet; abundant small to medium ww stones, locally very gravelly.
- 667 Fill of 668. Brown/dark-brown 7.5YR 4/4 fine sandy clay, friable, occ small ww stones, rare medium-sized ww stones.
- 668 Ditch cut in Trench 1 containing 667; probably associated with ditch 670 to the east as possibly a grubbed-out hedgebank. W: 1.2-1.9m (N-S), D: c. 0.3m.
- 669 Fill of 670. Strong brown 7.5YR 5/6 fine sandy clay, friable, occ to rare small ww stones and occ charcoal frags.
- 670 Ditch cut in Trench 1. Irregular base, deeper in the middle. Probably associated with 668 as a grubbed-out hedgebank (see 668). Contains 669. W: 0.7-0.9m, D: 0.25-0.49m.
- 672 Fill of 686. Reddish-brown 5YR 4/4 fine sandy clay, friable, occ small to medium ww stones and freq small to large (up to 4cm) pieces of charcoal. This fill contained three lithic finds and charcoal, radiocarbon dated to 2915-2605BC 2σ (95% probability).
- 673 Fill of 674; contained abraded sherds of ?Roman/prehistoric pottery. Brown/dark-brown 10YR 4/3 fine sandy clay, friable, occ small ww stones.
- 674 Ditch cut in Trench 1. Contains 673. The base is cut by five stakeholes 676-680. W: 0.8m, D: 0.2m.
- 675 Pit cut in Trench 3. Natural 662 and pit cut 658 contained fill 659. No function could be attributed to this feature.
- 676 Stakehole cut into base of ditch 674 in Trench 1.
- 677 Ditto
- 678 Ditto
- 679 Ditto
- 680 Ditto
- 681 Stakehole cut into pit cut 675 in Trench 3.
- 682 Fill of 683. Yellowish-brown silty clay, friable, occ charcoal flecks.
- 683 Pit cut in Trench 1 just NE of ditch 686. Approx dimensions: 1.6 x 1.4m where it runs into the southern edge of excavation. Its depth (and true size) could not be accurately ascertained, due to later disturbance by badger burrowing.
- 684 Fill of 686 representing weathering of the bank and ditch sides. Reddish-brown 5YR 5/3 fine sandy clay, friable, occ small to medium ww stones and freq small to medium charcoal frags.
- 685 Fill of 686. Yellowish-brown 10YR 5/4 fine sandy clay, friable, stoneless, rare charcoal frags.
- 686 Ditch cut into natural subsoil (651). Contains fills 684, 685, 688, 689, 687, 672. Rough undulating base; the northern face was steeper than the southern. The ditch had a U-shaped profile suggesting that it had been dug as a quarry ditch for a bank rather than as a defensive feature. One of the fills 687 appeared to represent slumping of the bank, which would indicate that the bank lay on the north of the ditch. No bank survived above the natural 651. W: 1.9-2.2m, D: 0.79-0.97m.
- 687 Fill of 686. Possible bank material slumped into the infilled ditch. Reddish-brown 5YR 5/4 sandy clay, friable, plastic when moist; stoneless.
- 688 Fill of 686, possibly dumping material. Yellowish-brown 10YR 5/6 clay, some sand content, friable, stoneless.
- 689 Primary ditch fill of 686. Reddish-brown 2.5YR 5/4 sandy clay, common small sub-angular and ww stones (chert).
- 690 Stakehole cut in Trench 1. Diam: 0.14m. Cut into natural to the south of 686 and probably associated with 691 and 692 as a parallel row of stakes parallel to ditch 686,

- and as such may be of similar date.
- 691 Stakehole cut in Trench 1. Diam: 0.14m. Associated with 690 (see above).
- 692 Stakehole cut in Trench 1. Diam: 0.12m. Sec 690 above.
- 693 Hedgebank ditch cut in Trench 2 associated with 695. Hedgebank is now grubbed-out; contains context 694.
- 694 Fill of 693. Brown 7.5YR 5/2 clay loam, friable, slightly plastic.
- 695 Hedgebank ditch cut in Trench 2 associated with 693. Hedgebank is now grubbed-out. Contains 696.
- 696 Fill of 695. Brown 7.5YR 5/2 clay loam, friable, slightly plastic.
- 850 Strong, compacted lower horizon beneath topsoil 650 in Trench 1. Not present in the eastern part of the trench. In the western half of the trench it seals all the archaeological deposits. Dark yellowish-brown 10YR 4/4 fine sandy clay, friable, more compact than 650. Freq small to medium rounded stones/chert.
- 851 Fill of 853. Reddish-brown 5YR 5/4 fine sandy loam, friable, slightly plastic when moist. Common small to medium ww and angular stones. Rare charcoal flecks.
- 852 Fill of 853 derived from weathering of ditch sides. Yellowish-red 5YR 5/8 silty clay, plastic. Common small to medium rounded and angular chert.
- 853 Open U-shaped ditch cut containing 851, 852. Cut 0.4-0.5m into subsoil 651. The eastern edge is steeper, suggesting bank on this side. W: 1.12-1.9m.
- 854 Fill of ditch cut 856. Contained Bronze Age pottery sherds. Yellowish-brown 10YR 5/6 silty sandy loam, friable, slightly plastic. Freq small to medium rounded stones, occ fine intrusive roots.
- 855 Ditch fill of 856 derived from weathering of ditch sides. Reddish-brown 5YR 5/3 sandy clay, plastic, stoneless.
- 856 Open V-shaped ditch cut. Cut c. 0.05m into subsoil. Contains fills 854, 855. W: 1.5-1.9m (S-N).

APPENDIX 3: RESULTS OF RADIOCARBON DATING UNDERTAKEN BY BETA ANALYTIC, MIAMI, FLORIDA, USA

<i>EMAFU Sample No.</i>	<i>Laboratory No.</i>	<i>Radiocarbon Age</i>	<i>1 σ calibrated result (68% probability)</i>	<i>2 σ calibrated result (95% probability)</i>
639300	Beta 78183	4220±60BP	cal BC 2895-2865 and BC 2810-2695	cal BC 2915-2605

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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T. Ives and S. Blackmore. The report was edited by S.D. Turton.

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Devon Record Office (DRO)

B961M/E2 Kennaway estate papers

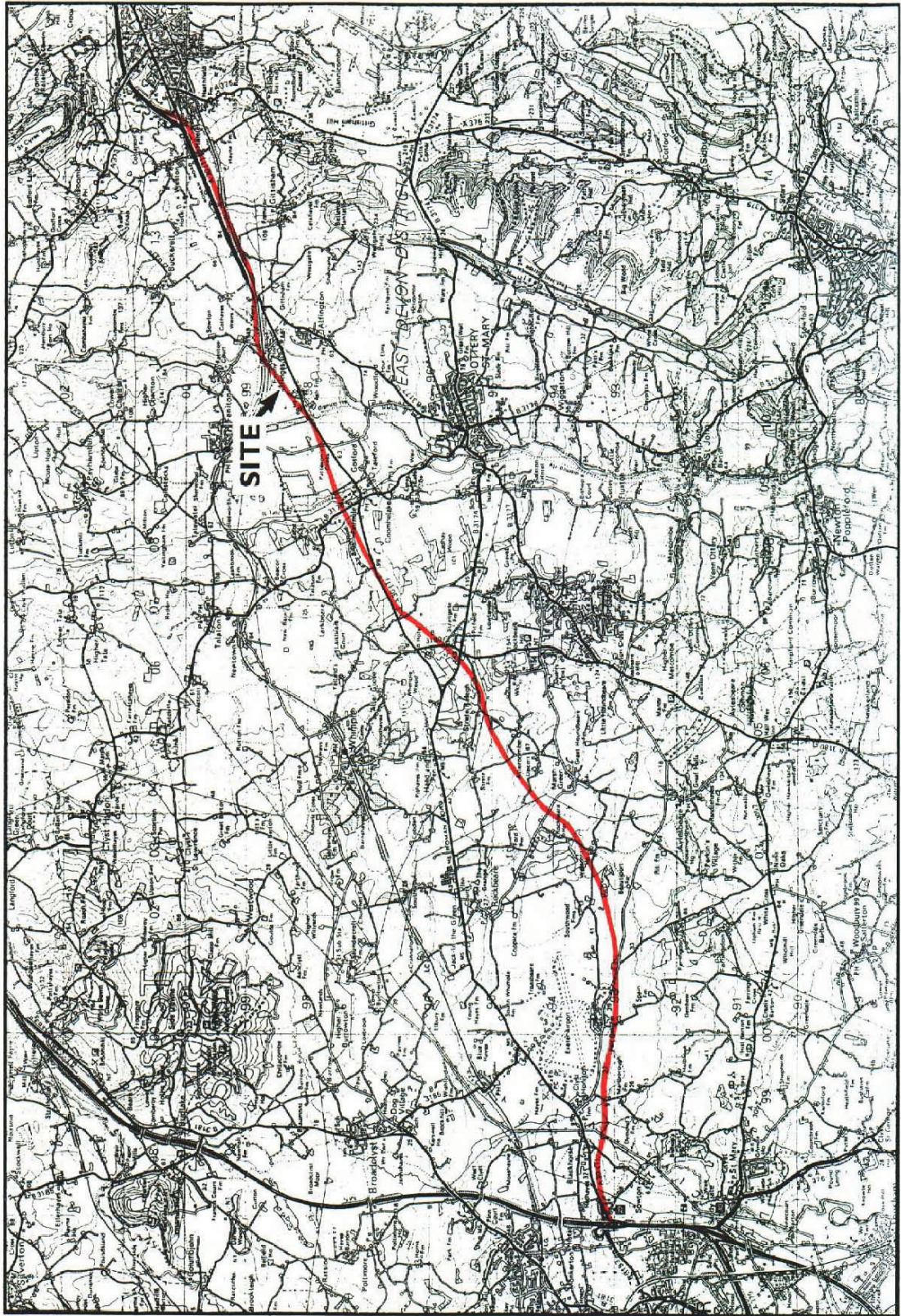


Fig. 1 Location of site.

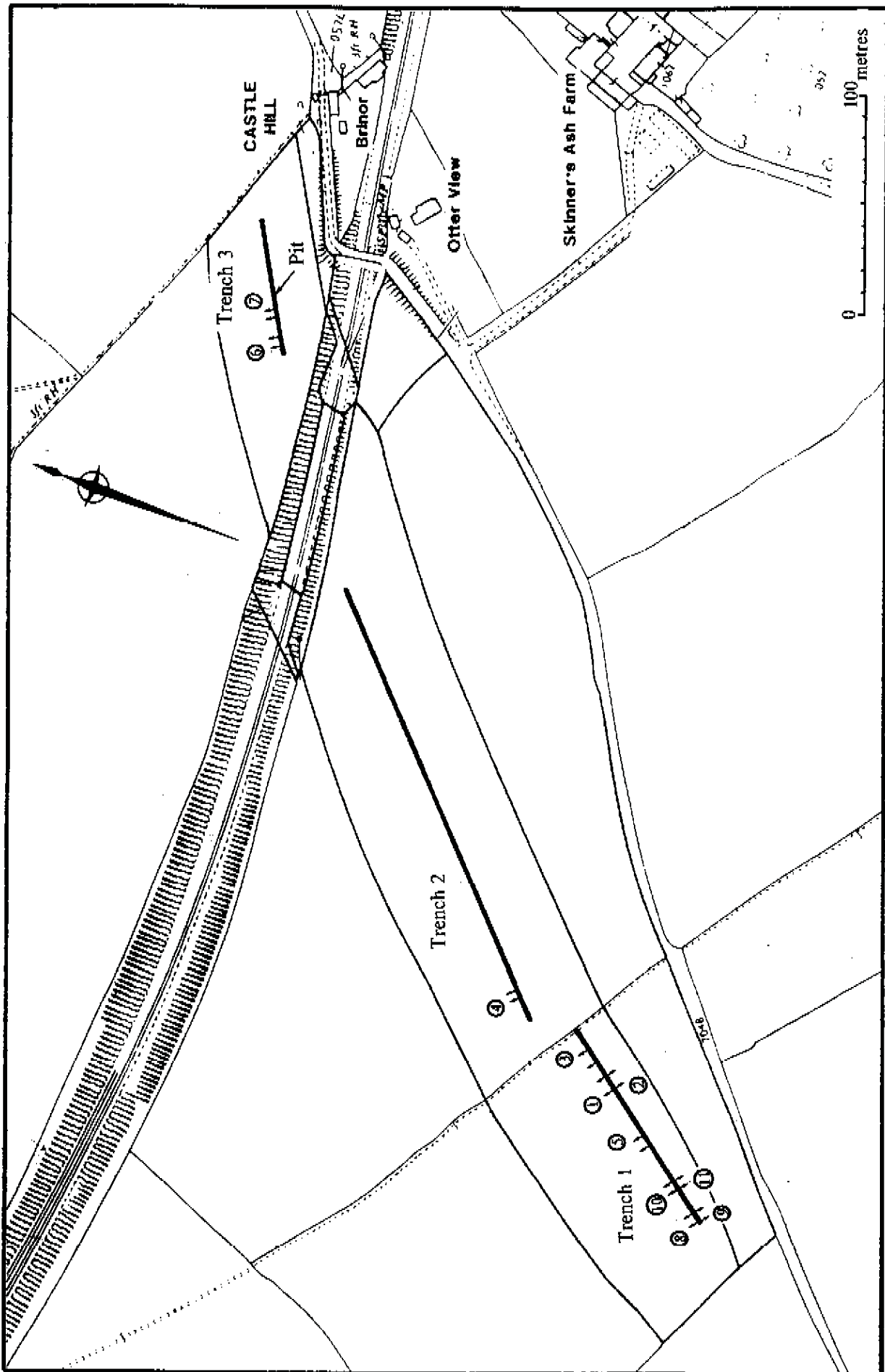
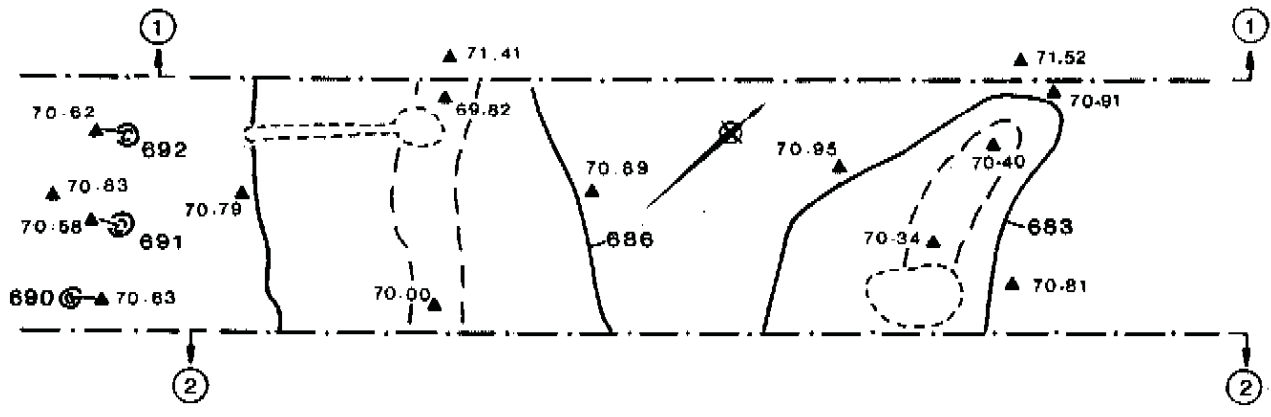


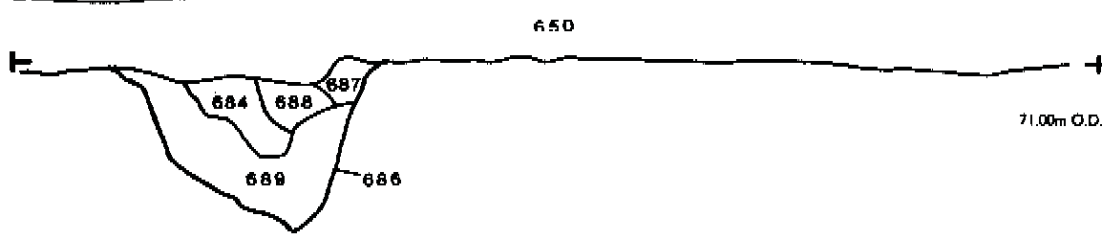
Fig. 2 Location of trenches and sections.

Plan: Trench 1



Sections

1
SW NE



2
NE SW

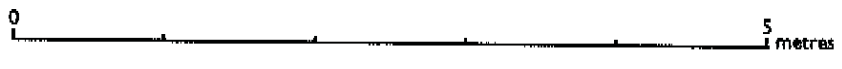
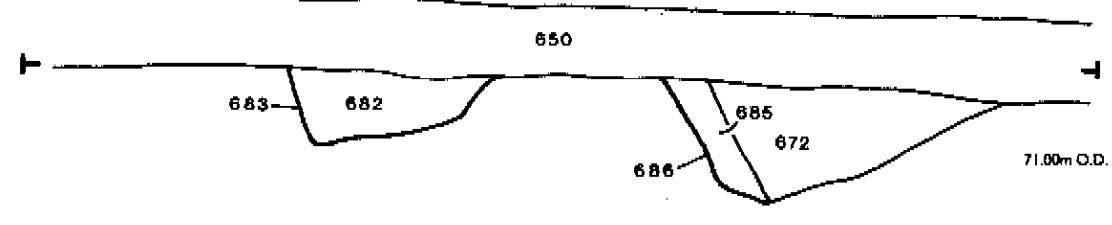


Fig. 3 Trench 1: plan and sections.

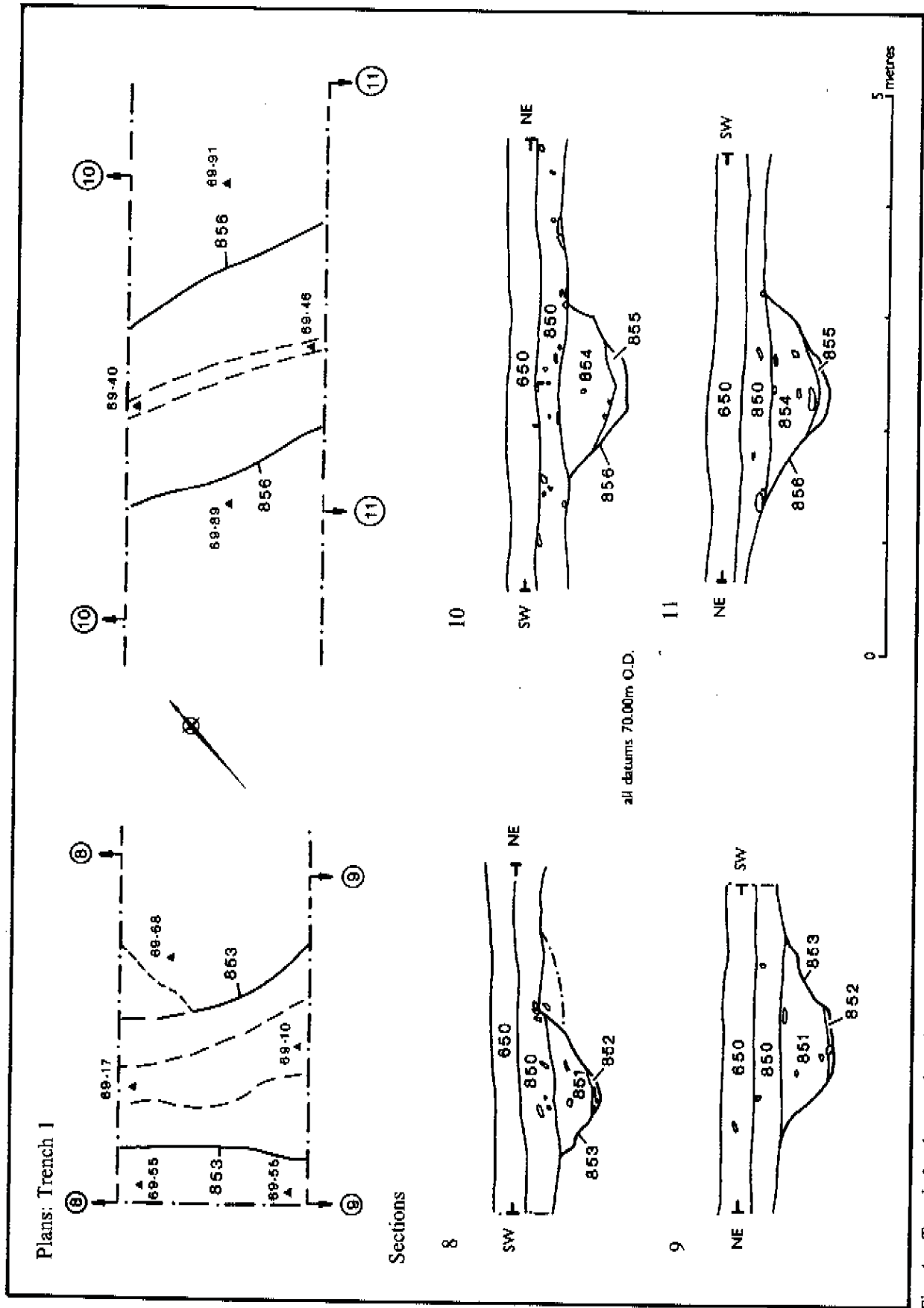


Fig. 4 Trench 1: plans and sections.

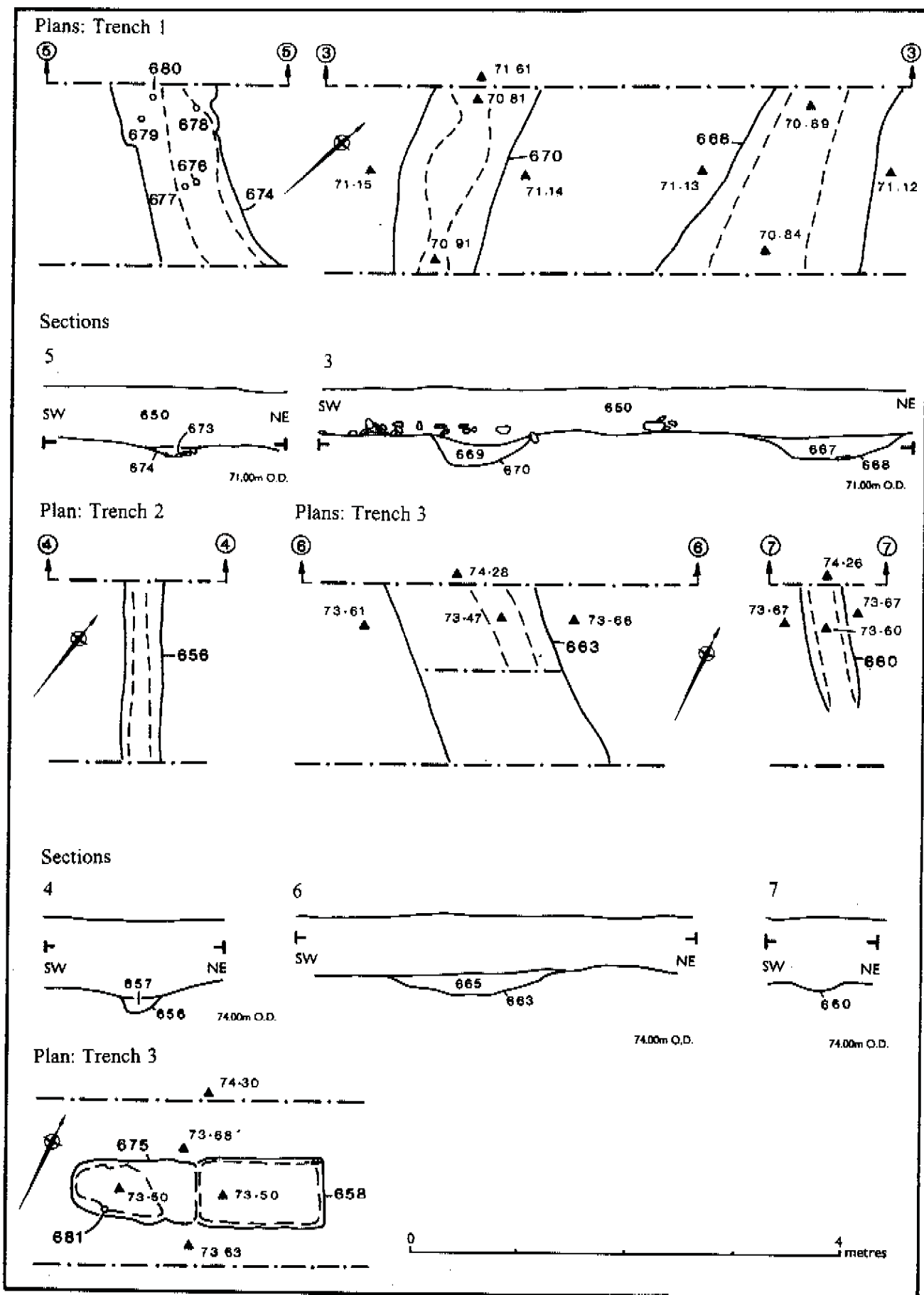


Fig. 5 Trenches 1-3: plans and sections.

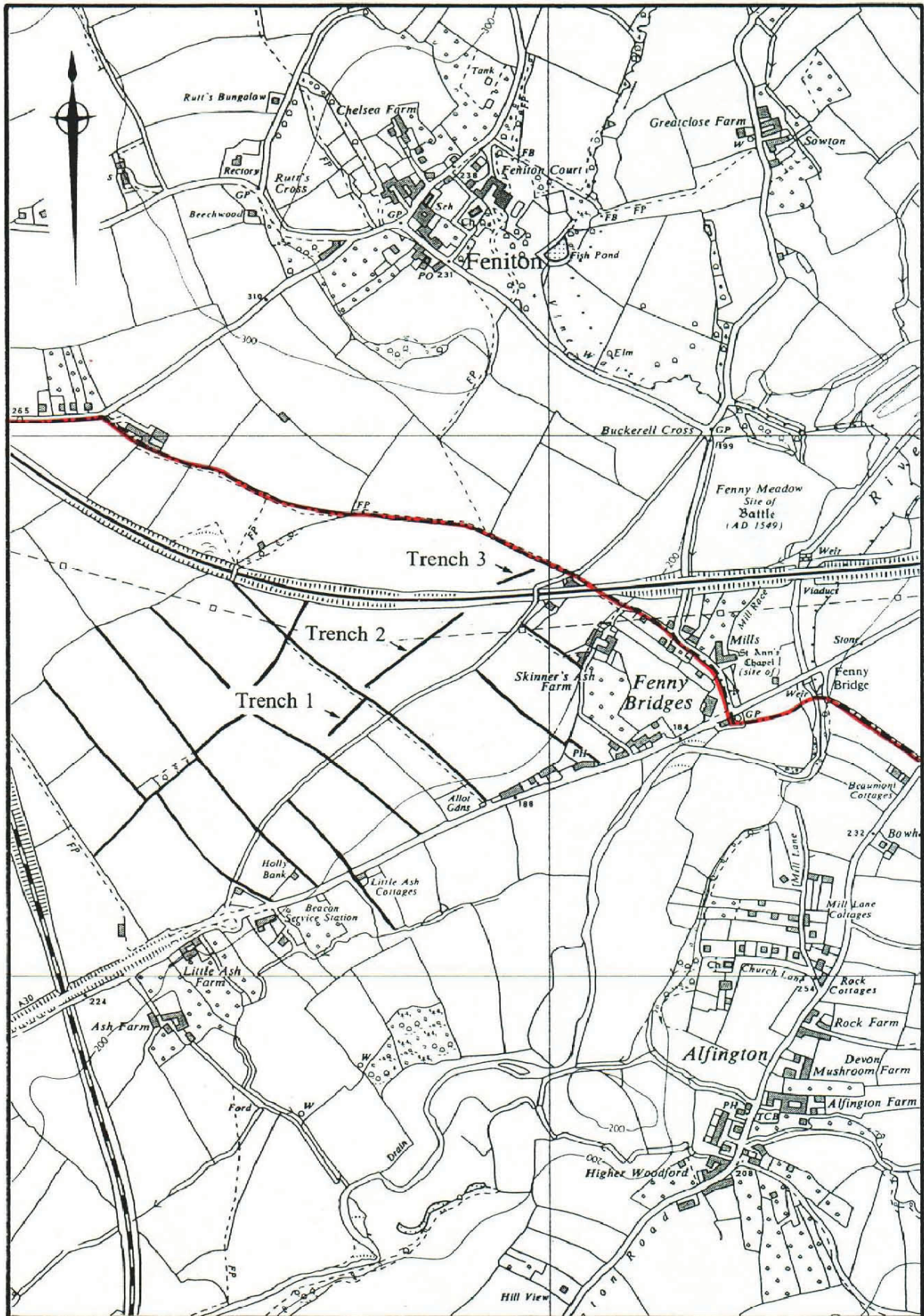
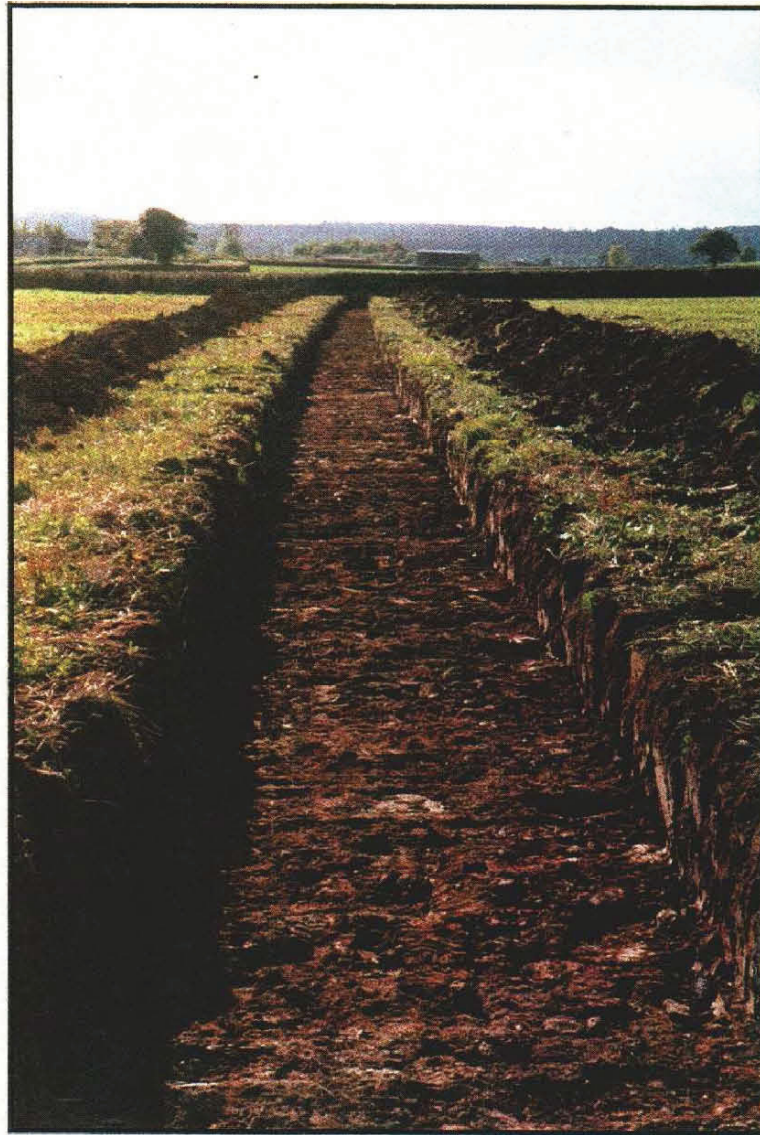


Fig. 6 Field alignments at Castle Hill. Ottery St Mary estate boundary shown in red.



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Plate 1 Trench 1. Looking west.

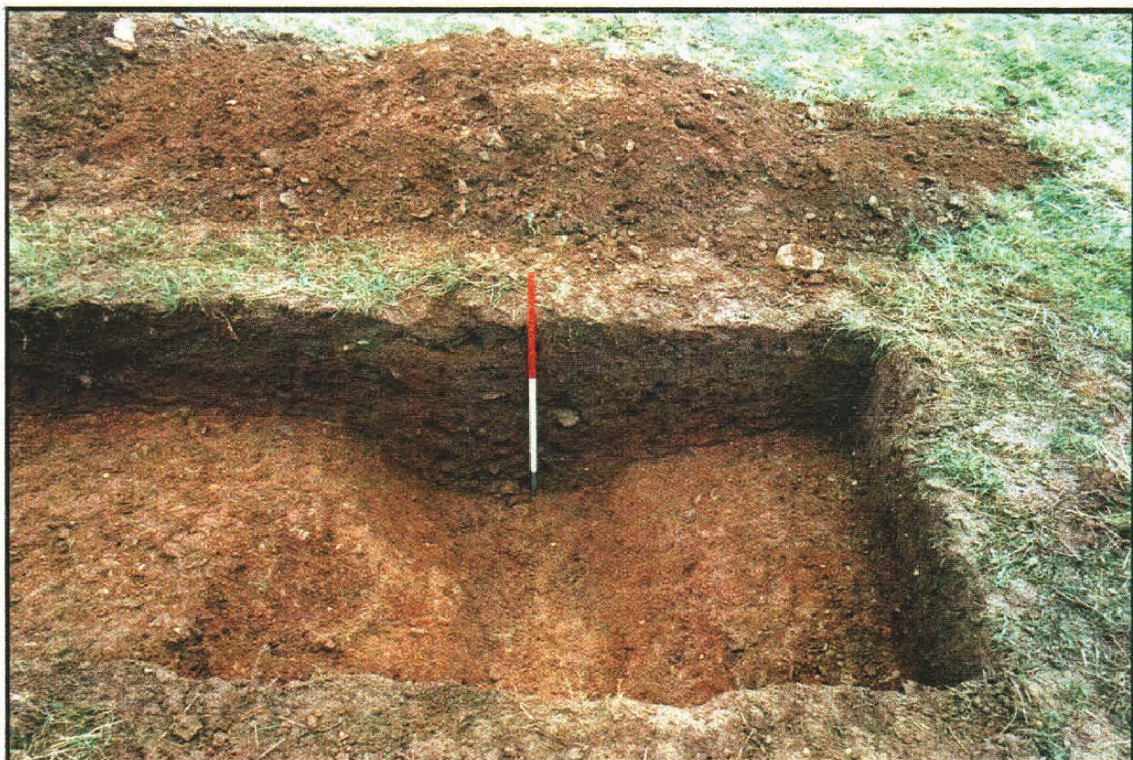


Plate 2 Ditch 853 at western end of Trench 1, fully excavated. Looking south. (Scale:1m).

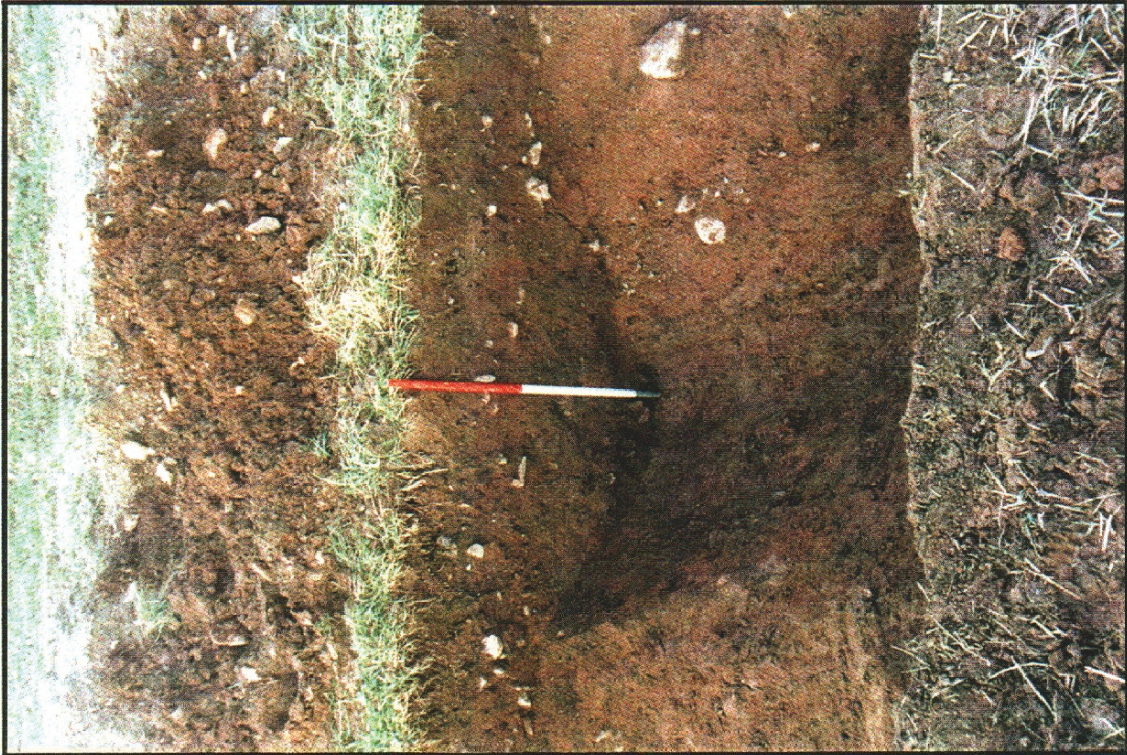


Plate 3 Ditch 856 in Trench 1 from which Bronze Age pottery was recovered. Looking north. (Scale: 1m).



Plate 4 Ditch 674 in Trench 1, showing stakeholes 677-680. Looking north-west.

**ORIGINAL IN
COLOUR**

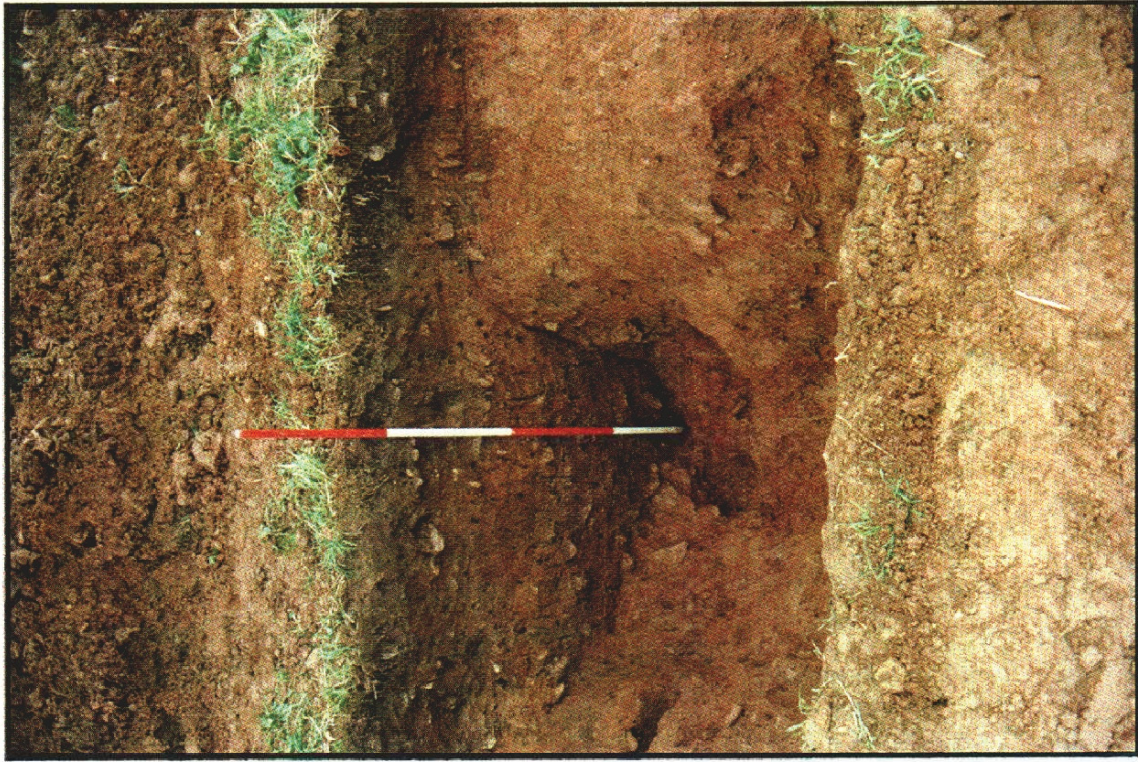


Plate 5 Ditch 686, fully excavated. Looking north. (Scale: 2m).

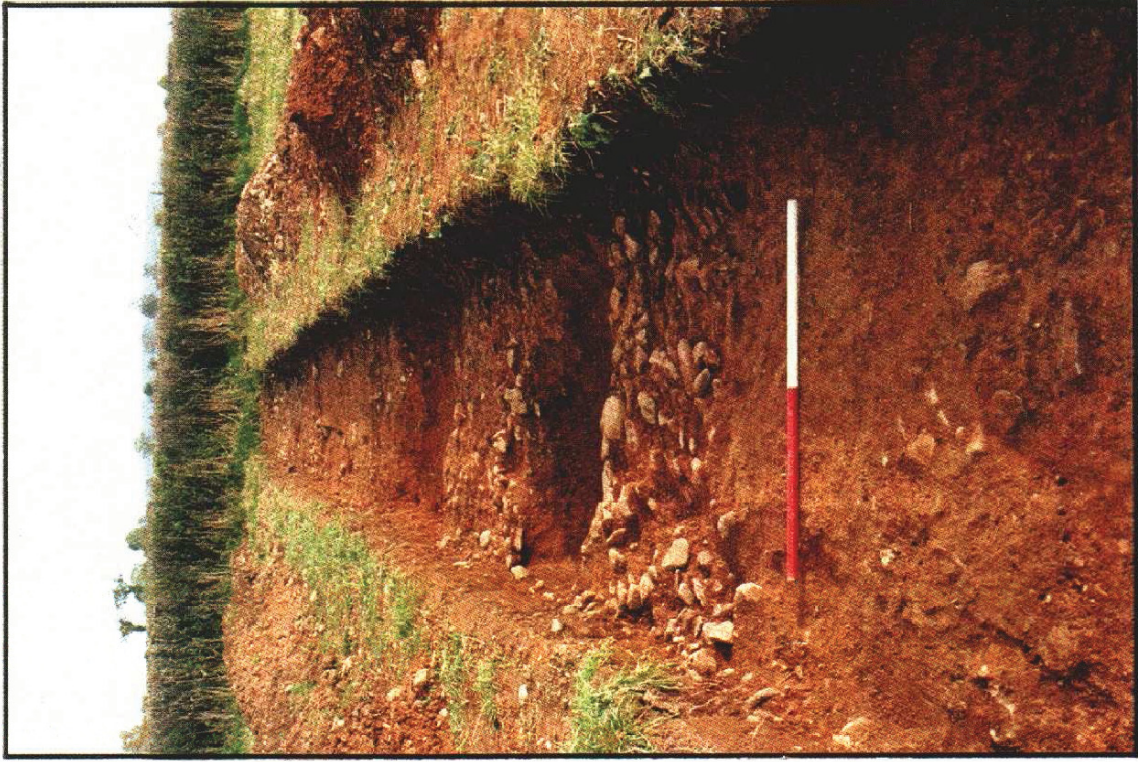


Plate 6 Ditches 668 and 670 at eastern end of Trench 1. Looking east. (Scale: 1m).

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