RPS Planning, Transport and Environment

INDEX DATA	RPS INFORMATION
Scheme Title A30 Trunk Road Honiton - Exeter Improvement	Details Archaeological Evaluation. Part 5: Miscellaneous sites.
Road Number A30.	Date January 1995.
Contractor Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit.	
County Devonshure.	
OS Reference SY 99	
Single sided ✓ Double sided ✓ A3 0 Colour 3	

A30 TRUNK ROAD
HONITON TO EXETER IMPROVEMENT
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
PART 5: MISCELLANEOUS SITES

by

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Report No. 95.04

January 1995

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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.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological investigations at five sites along the route of the proposed A30 Honiton to Exeter Improvement. These took the form of evaluation excavations undertaken in September 1994, except at Fenny Meadow (see 2.4) where augering only took place.

1.1 **Geophysical survey**

All five sites described below had been subjected to a geophysical survey, carried out by Oxford Archaeotechnics, prior to the archaeological excavations/investigations. In all cases, magnetometer readings revealed anomalies which suggested the possibility of archaeological features surviving below ground.

2. THE EXCAVATIONS

2.1 **Sowton Lane** (Fig. 2, site 2; Fig. 5)

An evaluation excavation was undertaken at Sowton Lane in the Blackhorse area, which is between the A30/M5 interchange and Clyst Honiton. The site is on farm land immediately to the south of the A30, opposite the block of houses to the east of the Blackhorse Garage. The natural subsoil in this area is sand over Permian and Triassic Sandstone, overlain by 0.25m of clayey sandy loam.

2.1.1 *Background*

Two areas of potential archaeological interest were identified as a result of geophysical surveys (magnetic susceptibility and magnetometer) conducted in the area. These indicated the possible presence of buried linear archaeological features.

2.1.2 *Fieldwork*

Two trial trenches were excavated in the areas where the geophysical anomalies had been recorded (Fig. 5). The trenches were excavated by machine and cleaned by hand. Trench 1 at SX97979336) was located using the geophysical survey grid. It measured 38 x 1.5m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.25m. Trench 2 at SX97869335 was located in the north-west corner of the field. It measured 28 x 1.5m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.25m. No archaeological features were observed in either trench. Two sherds of medieval pottery, three sherds of 18th-century South Somerset coarseware, and one fragment of possible smithing debris were recovered from the topsoil.

Conclusion and recommendations

No archaeological features were found within the excavated area, and it is possible that the anomalies indicated by the geophysical surveys were of geological origin or left no trace in the subsoil. However, it is strongly recommended that a watching brief be undertaken during construction in this area due to the proximity of the complex prehistoric site at Blackhorse (Fig. 1, site 1).

2.2 **Laurel Copse** (Fig. 2, site 5; Figs 6-7, Pls 1-2)

An evaluation excavation was undertaken in a field to the east of Laurel Copse (SY05989538), south-east of Straightway Head Big Wood and the B3174. The natural subsoil is gravel with bands of clay overlying Permian and Triassic Lower Marls with occasional

Sandstone.

2.2.1 *Background*
An area of potential archaeological interest was identified as a result of geophysical surveys (magnetic susceptibility and magnetometer) conducted in the area. This took the form of buried linear features.

2.2.2 *Fieldwork* (Figs 6-7, Pls 1-2)
A 5 x 25m trench was excavated in the area of geophysical anomalies. The topsoil was removed by machine, and the trench was then cleaned by hand. Two ditches (594 and 595), were found to cut into the natural subsoil on a south-west/north-east alignment. These represented the line of a former hedgebank. The ditches had been recut for the insertion of modern land drains. Two other land drains were located to the east of the ditches.

No finds were recovered from the excavated features, but the hedgebank was probably of 19th-century or later date. Four worked flints were found on the ground surface in the general area of the excavation. One of these was possibly a partially-made arrowhead of late Neolithic/early Bronze Age date, which had apparently been discarded after breaking during manufacture (T.H. Gent pers. comm.).

Conclusion and recommendations
The presence of worked flints at Laurel Copse does suggest prehistoric occupation, if not settlement, in the immediate area. It is therefore recommended that a watching brief be maintained during construction work.

2.3 **Long Range Swimming School and Straitgate Farm** (Fig. 2, sites 6-7; Figs 8-9, Pls 1-2)

Evaluation excavations were undertaken at the Long Range Swimming School and Straitgate Farm, which lie just within Ottery St Mary Parish, to the east of the B3180 and Straightway Head Big Wood. The areas of archaeological interest which lie within the proposed road route are on high ground. The Swimming School site (SY06369592) is at the top of the hill above 160m OD, with commanding views to the north, west and east. The site at Straitgate Farm (SY06459609) lies in the next field to the south, above 150m OD. The River Otter flows along the valley to the east, and the underlying geology is Bunter Pebble Beds, which vary in texture between clay and gravel in a clay matrix.

2.3.1 *Background and documentary history*
At Straightway Head, the proposed route cuts across the north-west corner of Ottery St Mary parish boundary with Whimple. The parish of Ottery St Mary, as it existed until *c.* 1840, was of some importance and antiquity: the boundaries being roughly equivalent to those recorded in a charter for the manor and hundred of Ottery, when given by Edward the Confessor to the canons of St Mary at Rouen in 1061 (Rose-Troup 1939). The parish itself also formed a hundred at the time of Domesday and in later medieval times.

The sites at Long Range and Straitgate Farm lie close to two possible prehistoric boundaries. The B3180, which forms the western parish boundary of Ottery, is described in the charter of 1061 as a *Herepath* or 'army path'. It forms part of a long ridgeway from the coast, near

Exmouth, to the Blackdown Hills in the north. There is also a clear boundary feature which can be traced for at least 6km in a north-south direction, between the Roman roads on the line of the A30 and the A3052 (Exeter-Dorchester). The course of this feature lies approximately 300m east of the B3180 within Ottery St Mary, although its course is not certain immediately to the south of the A30. Both these boundaries appear to be cut by the Roman road (A30) and are therefore likely to be of prehistoric origin (Weddell 1991, 28-9, Fig. 31).

2.3.2 *Fieldwork*

Long Range Swimming School (Figs 8-9; Pl. 1)
An open area 10 x 10m was excavated in the area of an anomaly recorded by the geophysical survey *c.* 300m south of the school buildings (Fig. 8). The topsoil was removed by machine and from this two small fragments of indeterminate pottery were retrieved. During subsequent hand cleaning down to the level of the natural subsoil, six sherds of indeterminate prehistoric pottery also were recovered. Two small oval shaped pits (585 and 587) were exposed cutting into the natural subsoil. Pit 585 measured 0.55m from north to south, 0.35m east to west and deepest on its south-east side at 0.22m. Pit 587 had a flat bottom and steep sides: it measured 0.7m from north to south, 0.5m from east to west and was cut into the subsoil to a depth of some 0.15m.

Both pits contained abundant charcoal fragments, and samples were taken from the fills for potential macrofossil analysis and radiocarbon dating. Although no finds were recovered from the pit fills, the existence of the pottery from the surface of the subsoil might suggest a prehistoric context for both features, which could be verified by radiocarbon dating.

Four pieces of worked flint were also found in unstratified contexts during topsoil stripping. One of these was a core of Neolithic date.

Straitgate Farm (Figs 10-11; Pl. 2)
The geophysical survey showed a linear feature running approximately north-west/south-east *c.* 160m south-east of the Long Range Swimming School building. Due to the close proximity of possible prehistoric boundaries in the area (see above), it was decided to excavate a trial trench to determine whether the feature was associated with any such boundary (Fig. 10).

The trench (3.3 x 0.5m) revealed a former hedgebank, represented by two parallel ditches (564 and 563/565) cut into the subsoil (Fig. 11). No finds were recovered to enable the hedgebank to be dated. Two small fragments of slag/vitrified material were found within the topsoil (560), one sherd of possible medieval pottery and one fragment of coke/smithing debris were found in the layer below the topsoil (561).

Conclusion and recommendations
The pottery recovered from the Long Range site does suggest some prehistoric activity, possibly associated with the two pits, and the commanding aspect of the site would have been attractive for settlement. The nearby presence of prehistoric boundary features is yet to be archaeologically demonstrated, but remains a firm possibility. It is recommended that this area of construction be subjected to a watching brief, in order to identify any further surviving features prior to their destruction. Provision should accordingly be made for area (rescue)

excavation, should any archaeological deposits be encountered.

2.4 **Fenny Meadow** (Fig. 3, site 9; Figs 12-13)

Archaeological investigations at Fenny Meadow, near Feniton, were undertaken immediately north of the A30 just east of Fenny Bridges at SY114988 (Fig. 3, site 9). The site lies in the floodplain of the River Otter. The proposed route cuts across part of the southern end of the field.

2.4.1 *Background and documentary history*
Fenny Meadow is the supposed site of the battle which took place as a result of the Prayer Book Rebellion in 1549, when rebels from Cornwall and west Devon unsuccessfully laid siege to Exeter (Hoskins 1952, 233-4). While attempting to block the main road into Exeter, the rebels were defeated at this site in July 1549 by Lord Russell's mercenary troops.

The field in which the battle is said to have taken place is called 'Bloody Meadow'. The level ground has been used as water meadow for the last 60 years, and subjected to very little ploughing. The present farmer recalled that two 'cannon balls' were found over 50 years ago during trenching for a water supply. As the battle site was probably chosen at short notice it is unlikely that there were ever any substantial fortifications, although the site may contain burials of those who fell in battle, as well as miscellaneous finds of weapons (Weddell 1991, 24-25).

2.4.2 *Fieldwork*
A geophysical magnetometer survey revealed a slight anomaly in the south-west of the field, suggesting the possibility of archaeological features existing below the ground surface. As a result, augering was carried out along a 24m traverse of the area (Fig. 13). Auger cores of a maximum depth of 0.75m were taken at 2m intervals with a helical auger (0.04m diam). The cores revealed topsoil overlaying a light greyish-brown, silty-clay, stone-free subsoil and no archaeological deposits were identified.

Conclusion and recommendations
It seems unlikely that any archaeological features directly relating to the battle would be revealed during construction work in this area, although there is still a strong possibility of chance finds (e.g. weapons). The anomaly revealed by the geophysical survey, and confirmed by augering, appears to be a slight natural hollow as shown by the dip in the subsoil in Fig. 13.

APPENDIX: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Sowton Lane

537	Topsoil. Brown fine sandy loam.
538	B horizon of soil profile; pale brown silty sand.
539	Completely weathered sandstone natural (C horizon); red/reddish-brown sand.

Straitgate Farm

560	Topsoil, mid reddish-brown, friable, silty loam with abundant small round and sub-rounded stones.
561	Lower horizon of 560, 'B' horizon. Mid yellowish-brown, friable clay silt loam with abundant small round and sub-

rounded stones.

563 Cut for eastern ditch of hedgebank.

564 Cut for western ditch of hedgebank.

565 Re-cut for eastern ditch of hedgebank.

Long Range Swimming School

580 Topsoil; mid brown, friable, silty loam with occ small sub-rounded stones.

581 Lower soil horizon (B horizon) of 580. Mid brown, friable, clay silt with freq rounded and sub-angular small stones.

583 Interface between 581 and natural subsoil (588-92) from which prehistoric pottery was recovered.

584 Pit fill within 585. Sampled for radiocarbon dating. Yellowish-brown, friable, clay silt, occ small ww stones and occ charcoal.

585 Pit cut. Contains 584; sub-rounded in shape with steep sides and uneven bottom. W: 0.4-0.5m, D: 0.22m.

586 Pit fill within 587. Sampled for radiocarbon dating. Mid brown, friable, clayey silt, abundant medium ww stones and occ charcoal.

587 Pit cut containing 586. Sub-rounded in plan with steep sides and a flat bottom. W:0.6-0.7m, D: 0.14m.

588 Natural clay subsoil. Grey silty clay with abundant gravel.

589 Natural clay subsoil. Grey silty clay with occ ww pebbles.

590 Natural clay subsoil. Yellowish-brown silty clay, stoneless.

591 Natural clay subsoil. Yellowish-brown silty clay, common small ww pebbles.

592 Natural gravel bed (Bunter gravel beds) which underlies and mixed to a degree with 588-591.

Laurel Copse

593 Primary fill of grubbed-out hedgebank. Reddish-brown, friable when dry, sandy clay, freq manganese nodules and small ww stones and fine intrusive roots.

594 Ditch cut for grubbed-out hedgebank; cuts natural 599; contains 593.

595 Ditch cut for grubbed-out hedgebank; cuts natural 599; contains 596.

596 Primary ditch fill of grubbed-out hedgebank. Brown clay silt, friable, slightly plastic, common small ww pebbles.

597 Recut through ditch fill 596 for insertion of land drain. Contains earthenware pipe at base and context 598.

598 Fill of land drain cut 597. Brown clay silt, friable when dry, with black oxidising inclusions.

599 Natural gravel subsoil. Very friable gravel with lenses and bands of fine sandy silty clays.

600 Recut of ditch fill 593 for insertion of land drain. Contains 601.

601 Land drain fill within cut 600. Greyish-brown friable clay silt, occ small angular and ww stones, common fine intrusive roots, pockets of organic silts.

602 Topsoil. Mid brown, friable, clay silt; occ medium sub-rounded stones.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluation excavations were commissioned and funded by the Highways Agency (HA). The project was administered by R. Park and B. Lewis (HA), R.H. Veevers and C.R. Wilson (Acer Consultants Ltd, consulting engineers) and P.J. Weddell (EMAFU). Advice on archaeological matters was provided throughout by F.M. Griffith (Devon County

Archaeological Service). R. Iles (English Heritage) advised on the Scoping Statement. T. Johnson (Oxford Archaeotechnics, geophysical survey consultants) provided invaluable assistance and information. Thanks are due to the landowners along the route for allowing access to their land for the purposes of fieldwork. S.J. Reed was assisted on site by W. Hetton, E. Jones, P. Manning, B. Middleton, S. Ottery, A. Sage and S. Sage. T.H. Gent examined the lithics. The illustrations were prepared by S. Blackmore and T. Ives.

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Devon Record Office (DRO)

Whimple Tithe Map and Apportionment, 1842

DRO 69/9/2 Box 9/21 Collection of 19th century and later sales catalogues

Fig. 1 Location of sites along proposed route: sites 1-3.

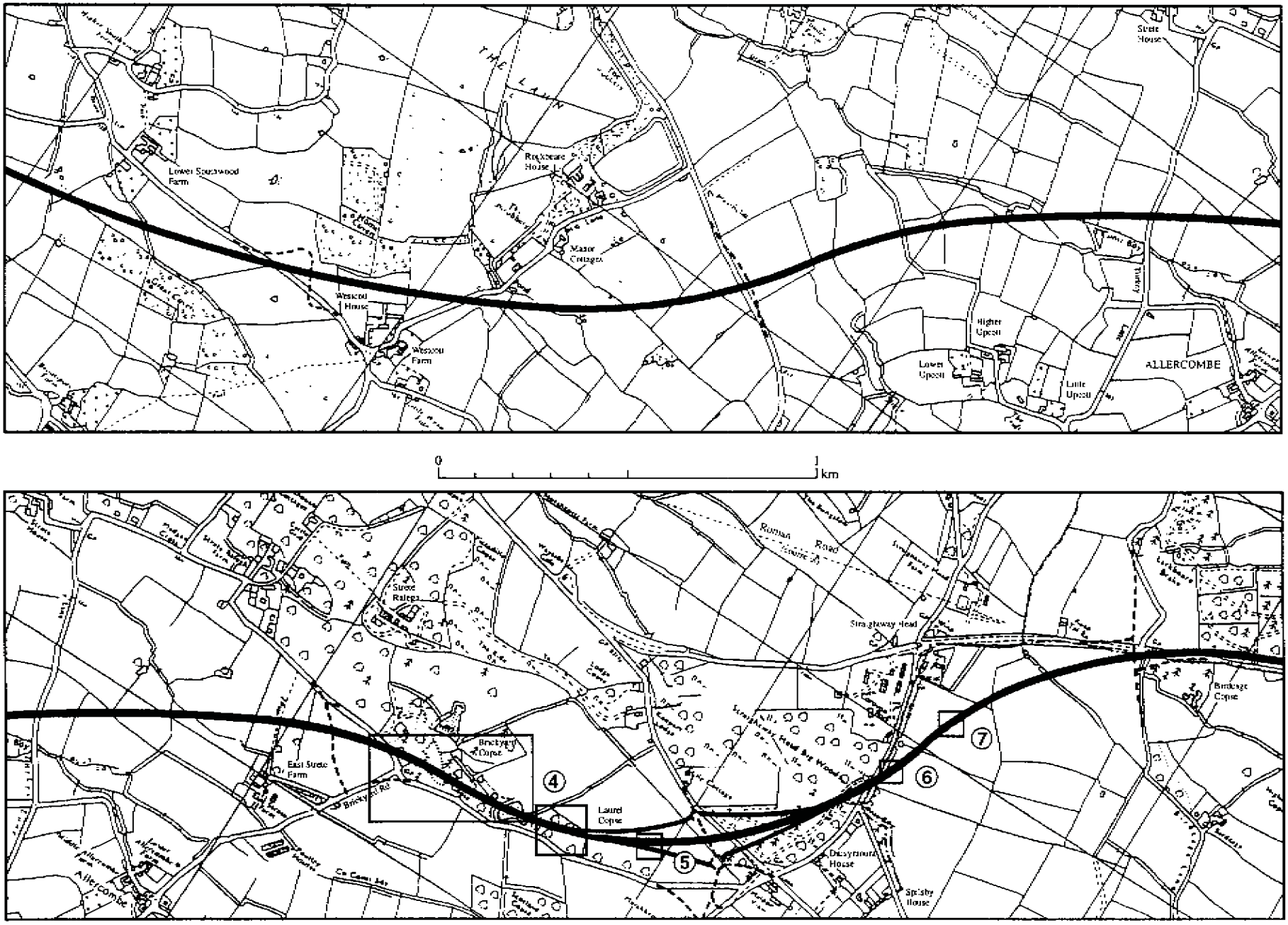

Fig. 2 Location of sites along proposed route: sites 4-7.

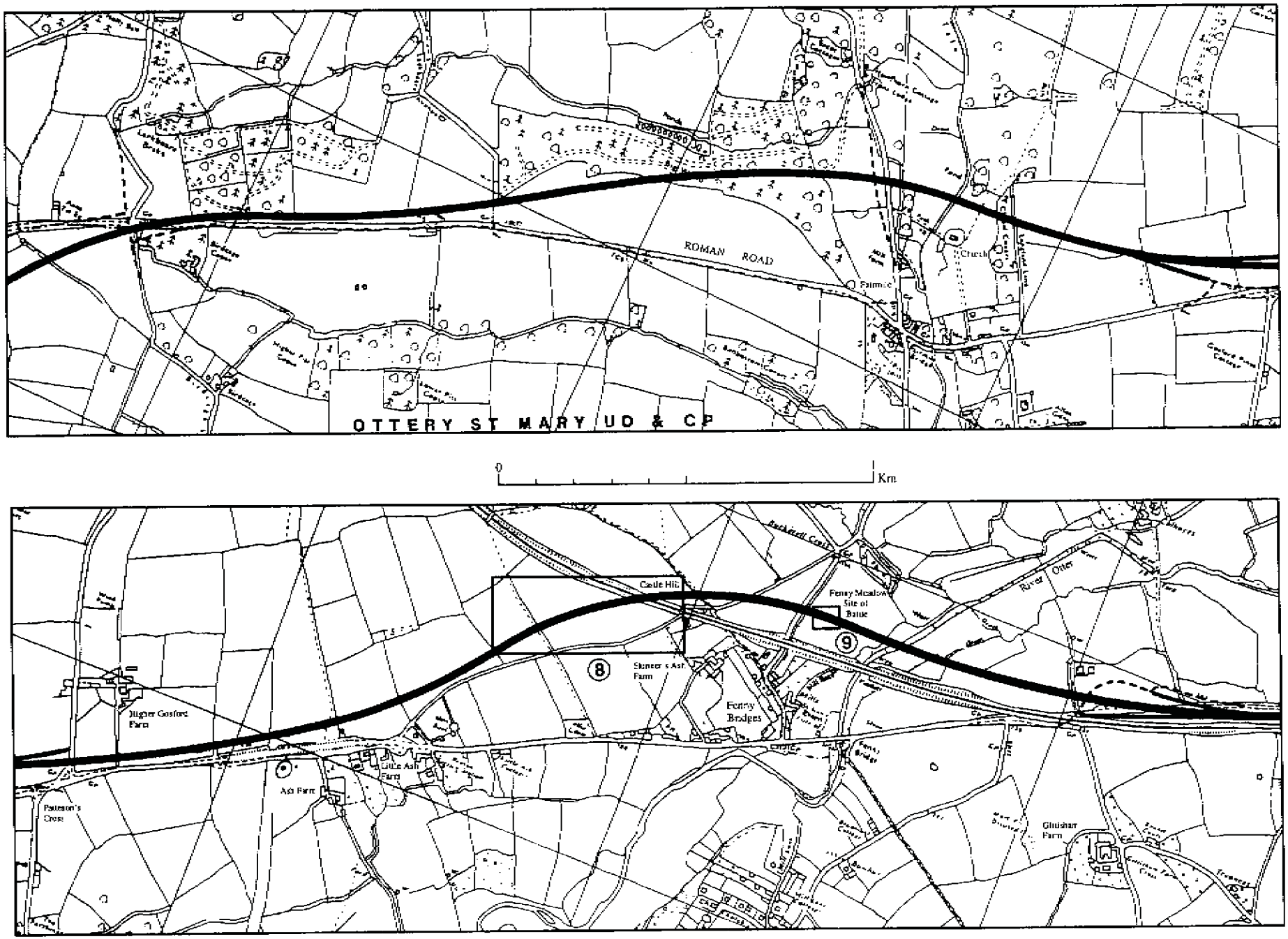

Fig. 3 Location of sites along proposed route: sites 8-9.

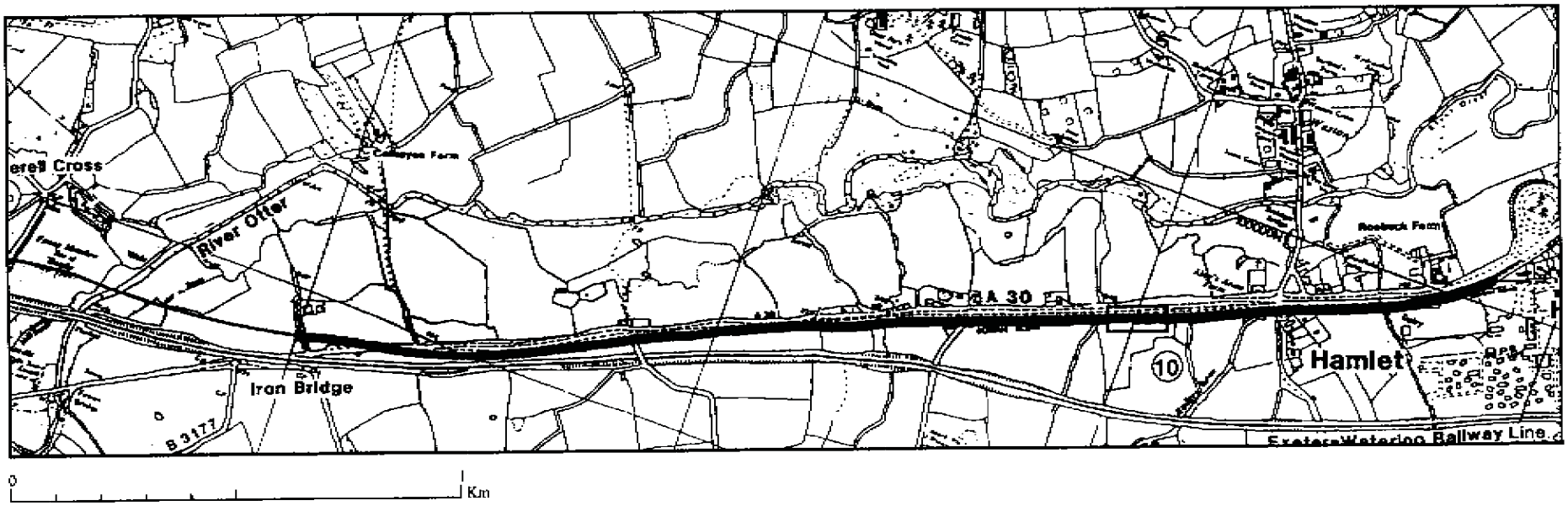

Fig. 4 Location of sites along proposed route: site 10.

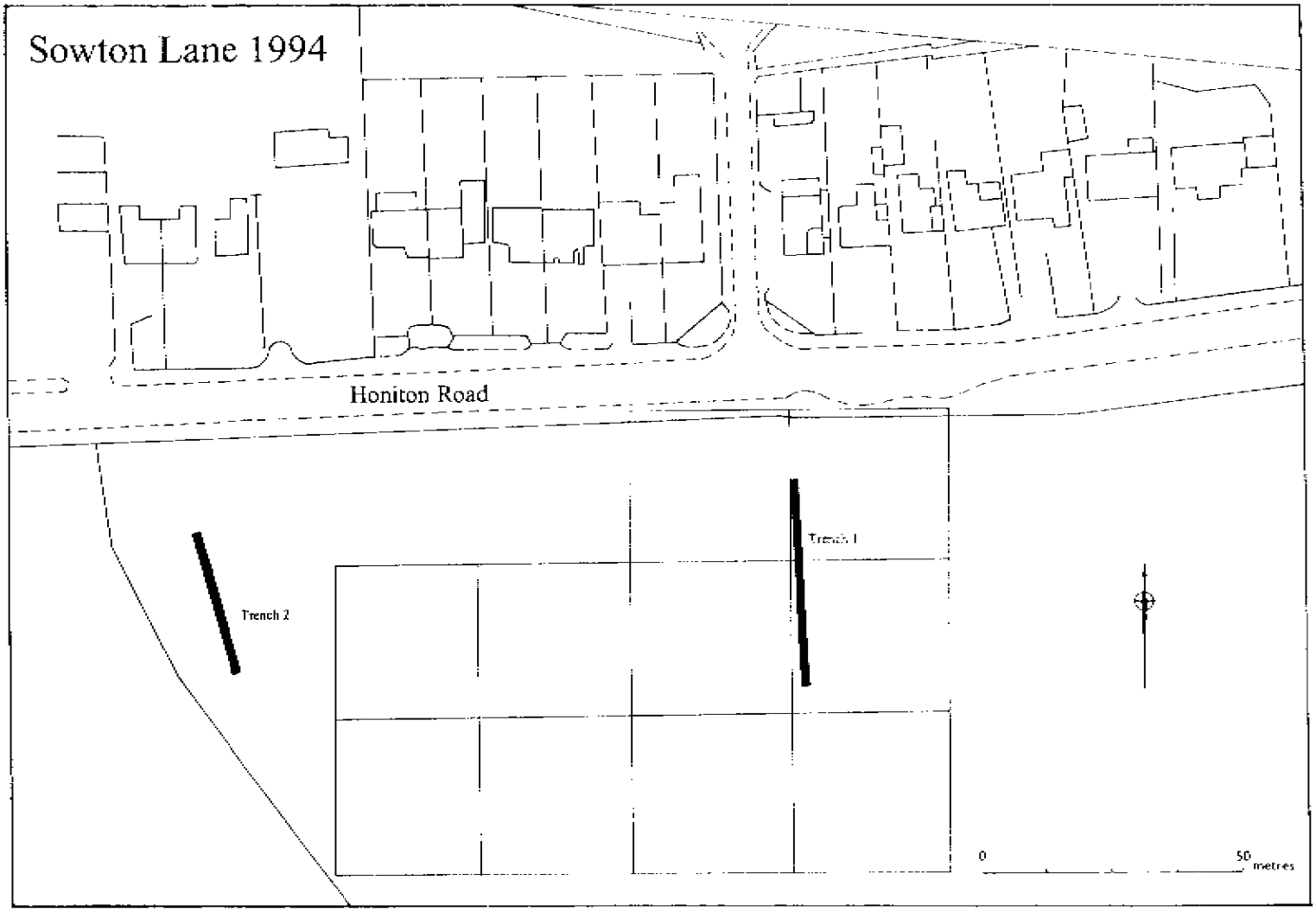

Fig. 5 Sowton Lane: location of trenches.

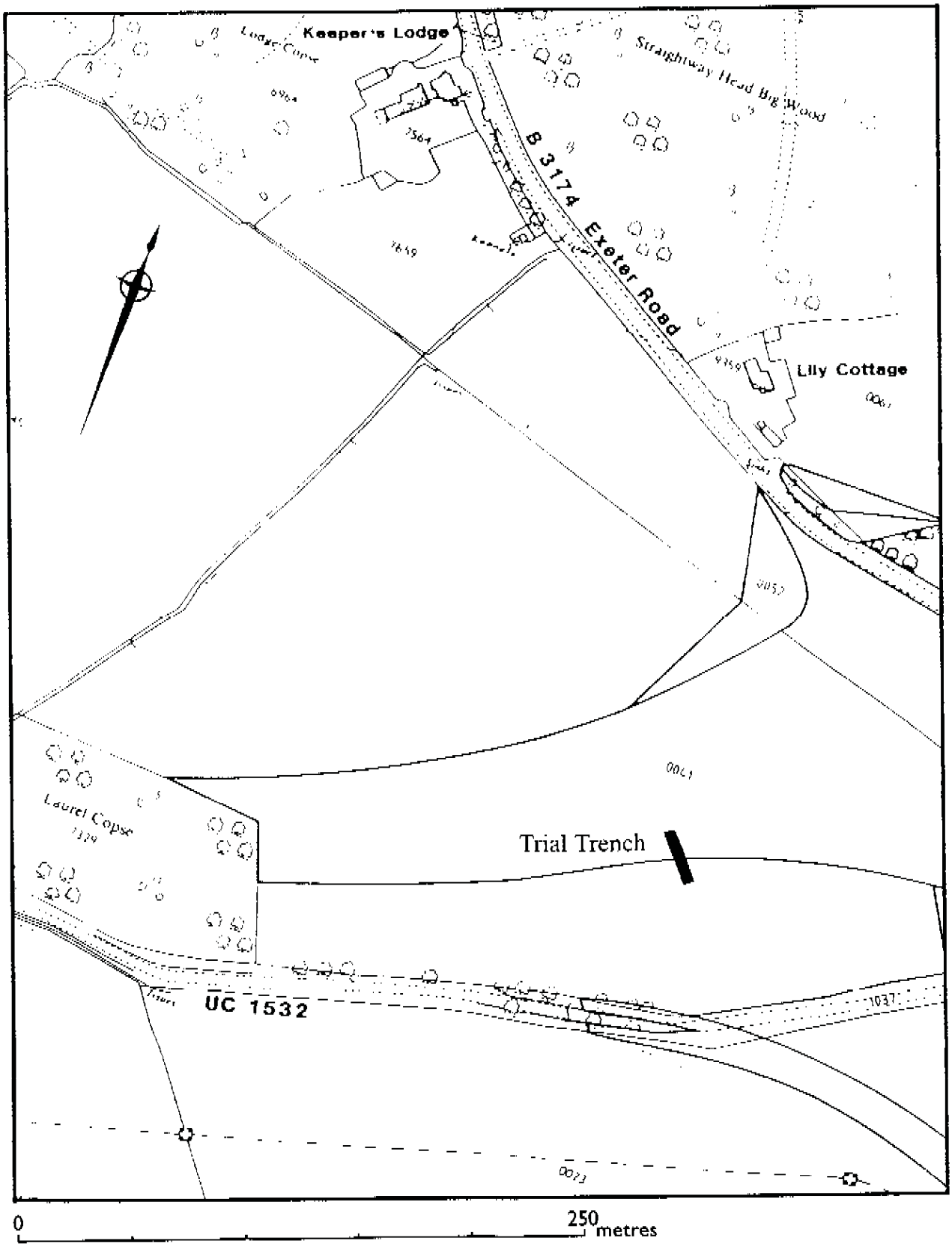

Fig. 6 Laurel Copse: location of trench.

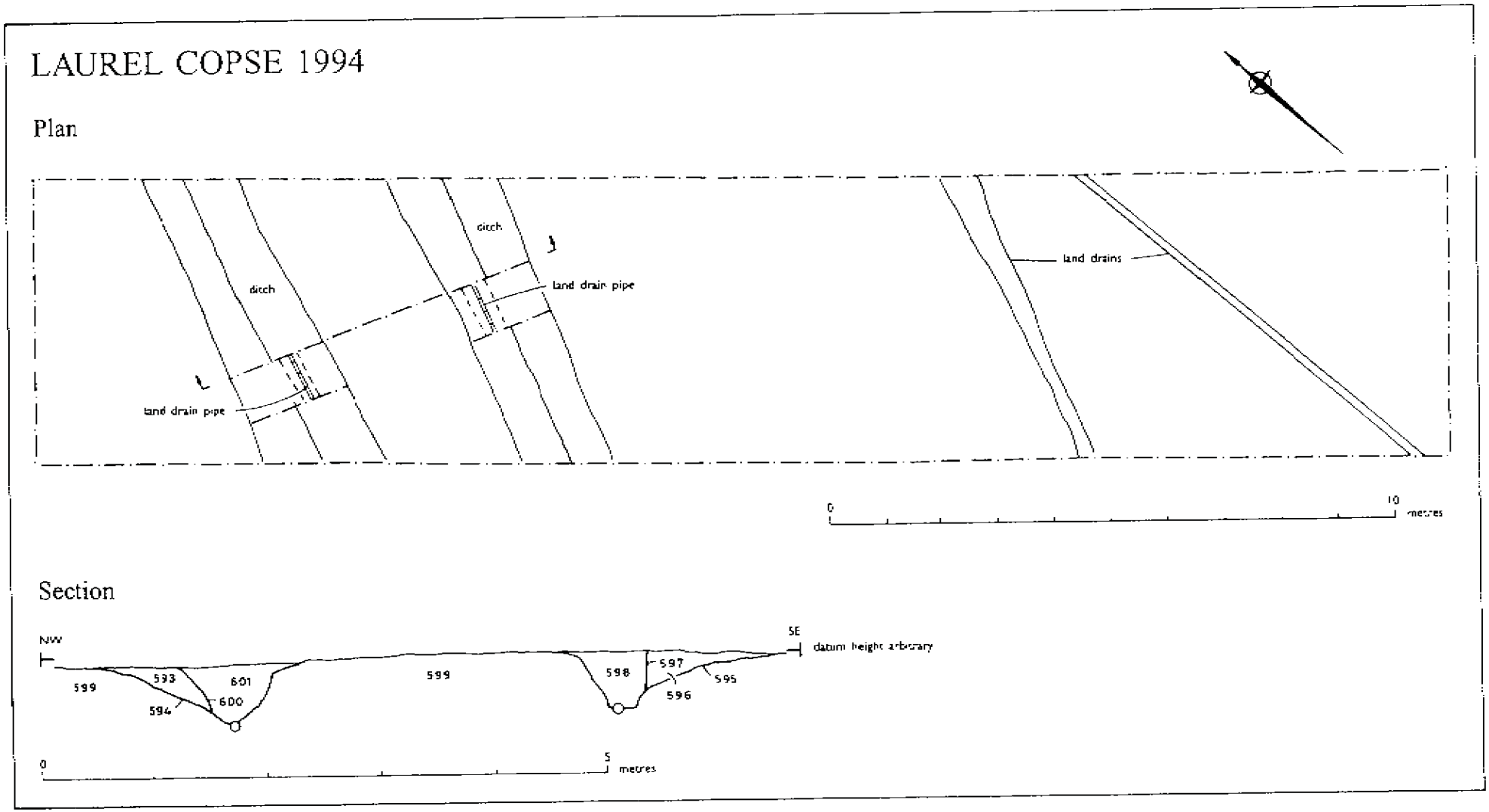

Fig. 7 Laurel Copse: plan and section.

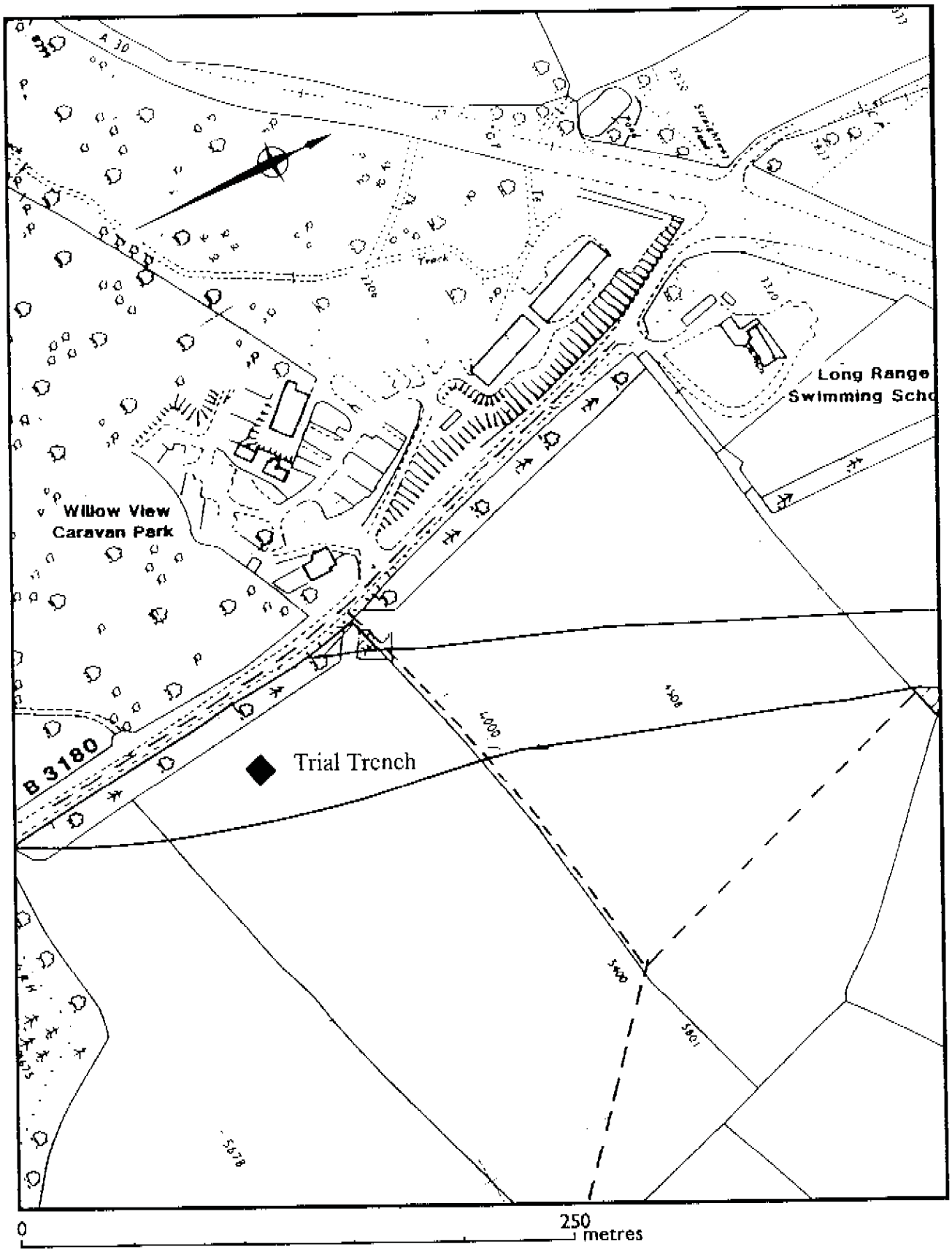

Fig. 8 Long Range: location of trench.

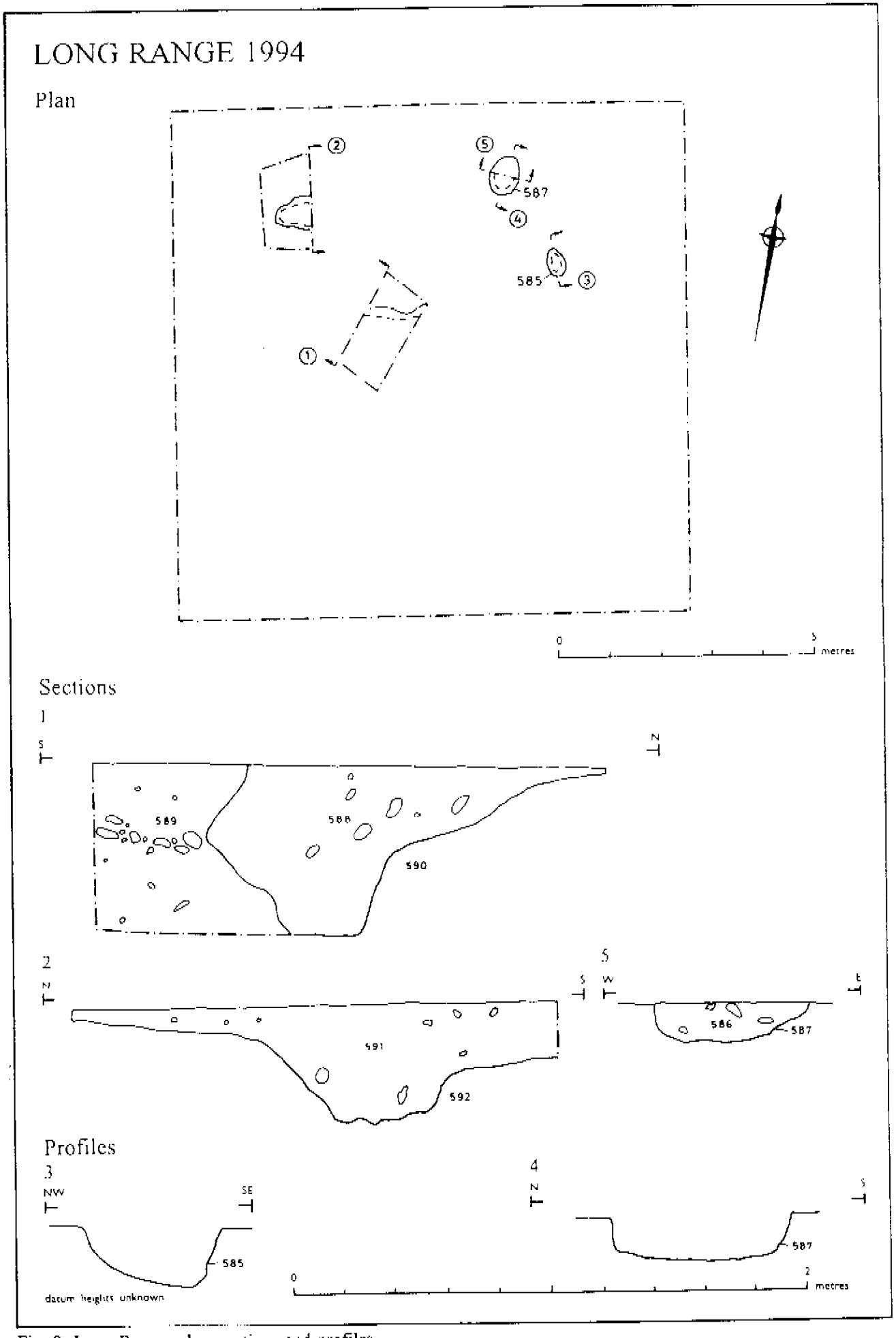

Fig. 9 Long Range: plan, sections and profiles.

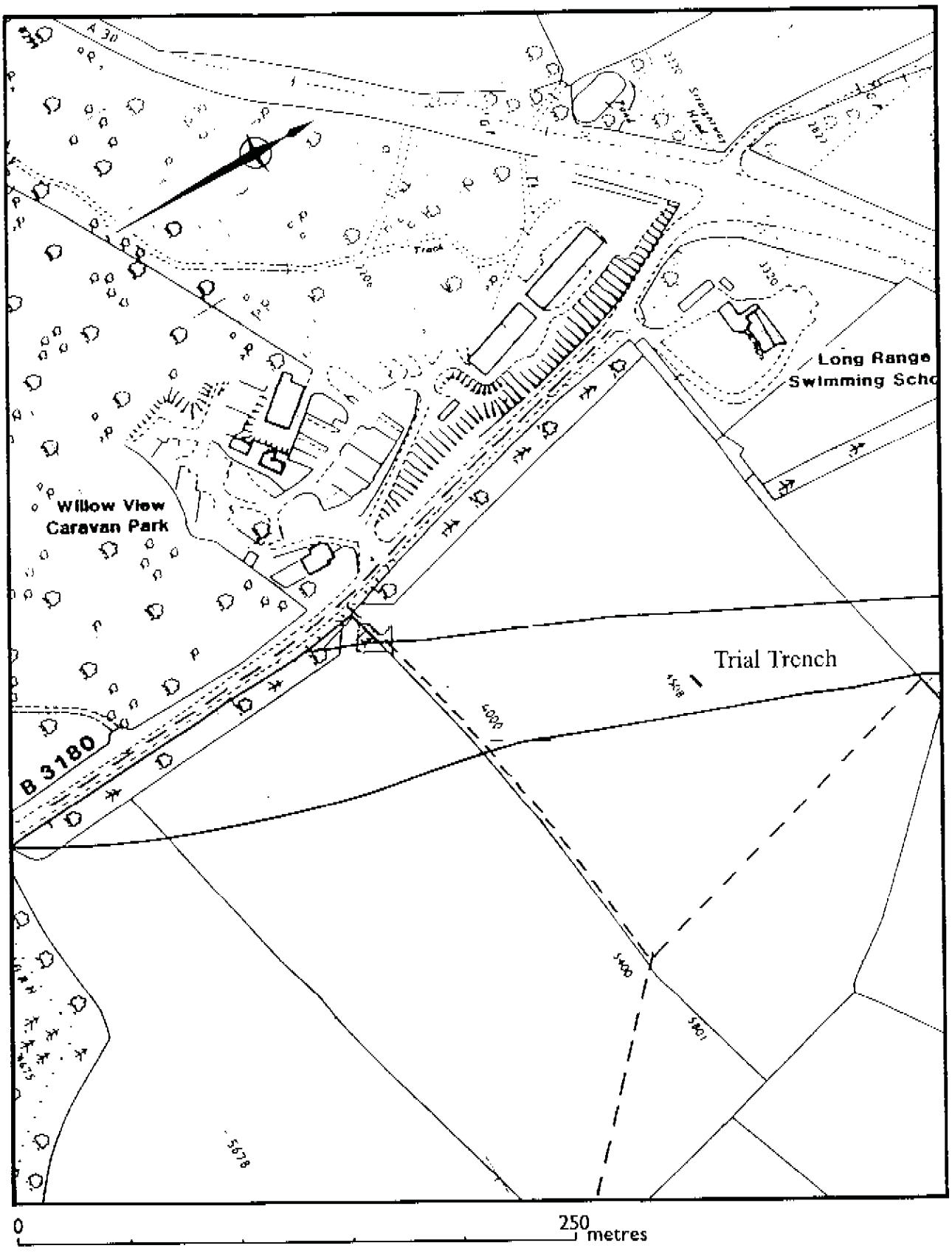

Fig. 10 Straitgate Farm: location of trench.

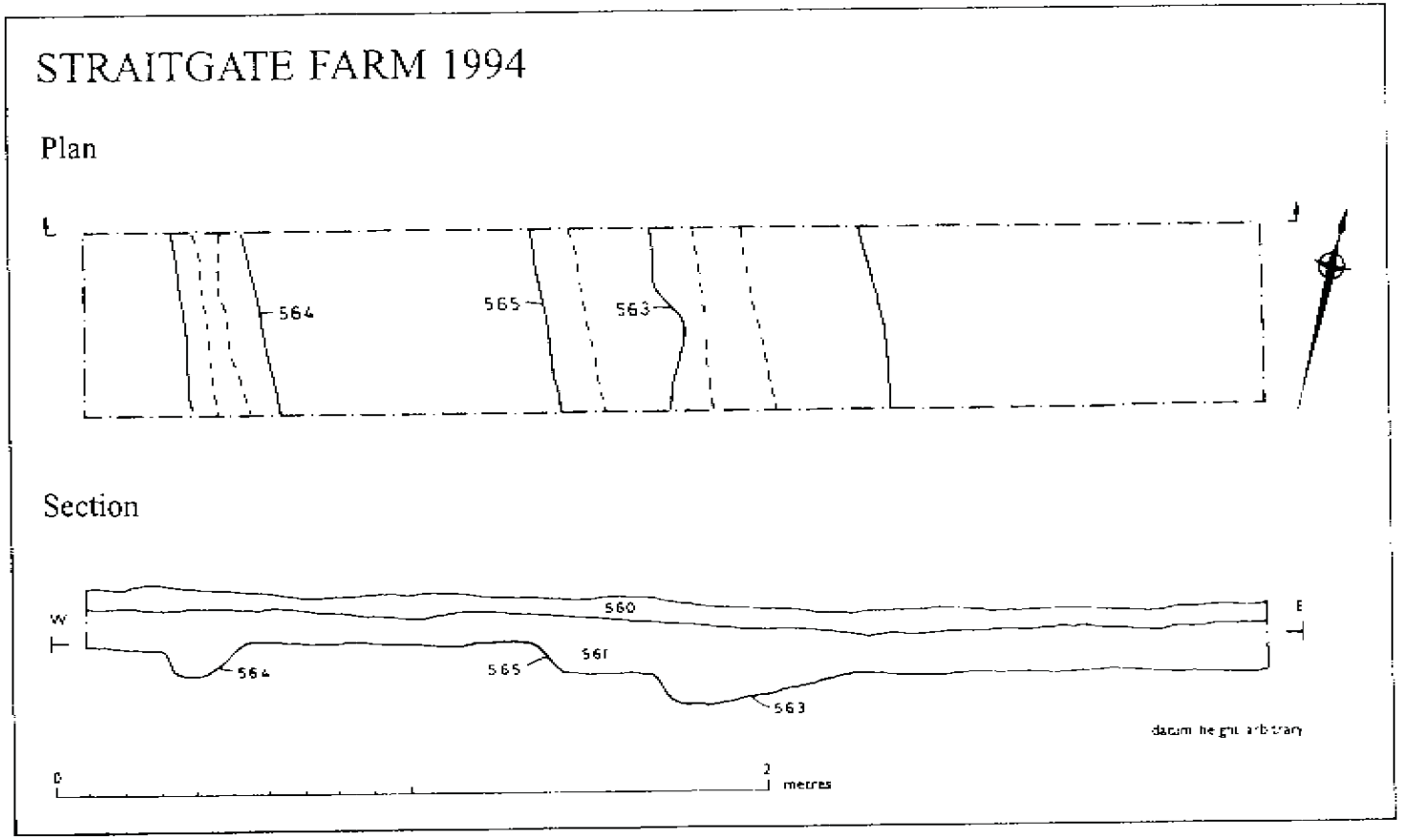

Fig. 11 Straitgate Farm: plan and section.

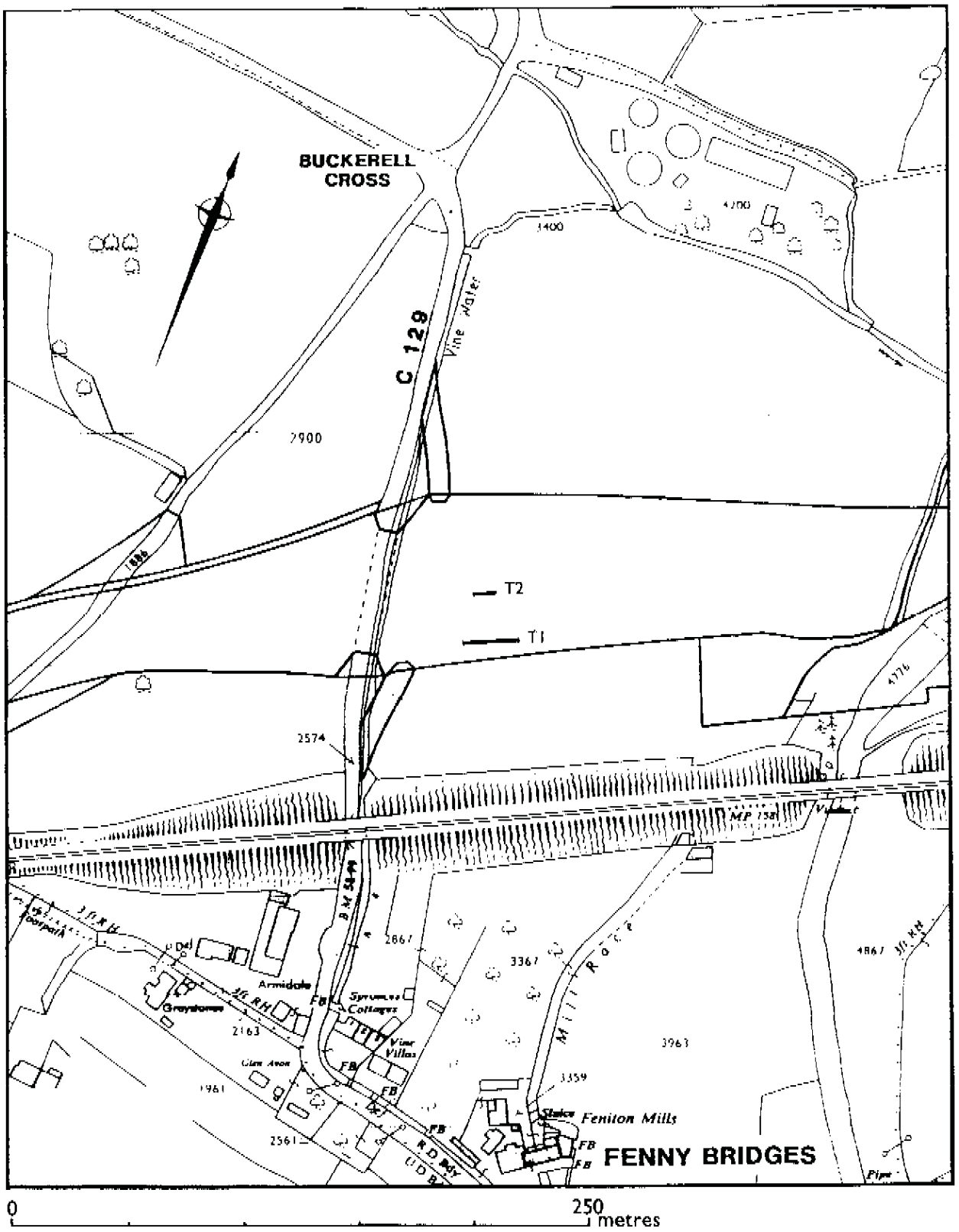

Fig. 12 Fenny Meadow: location of auger traverses.

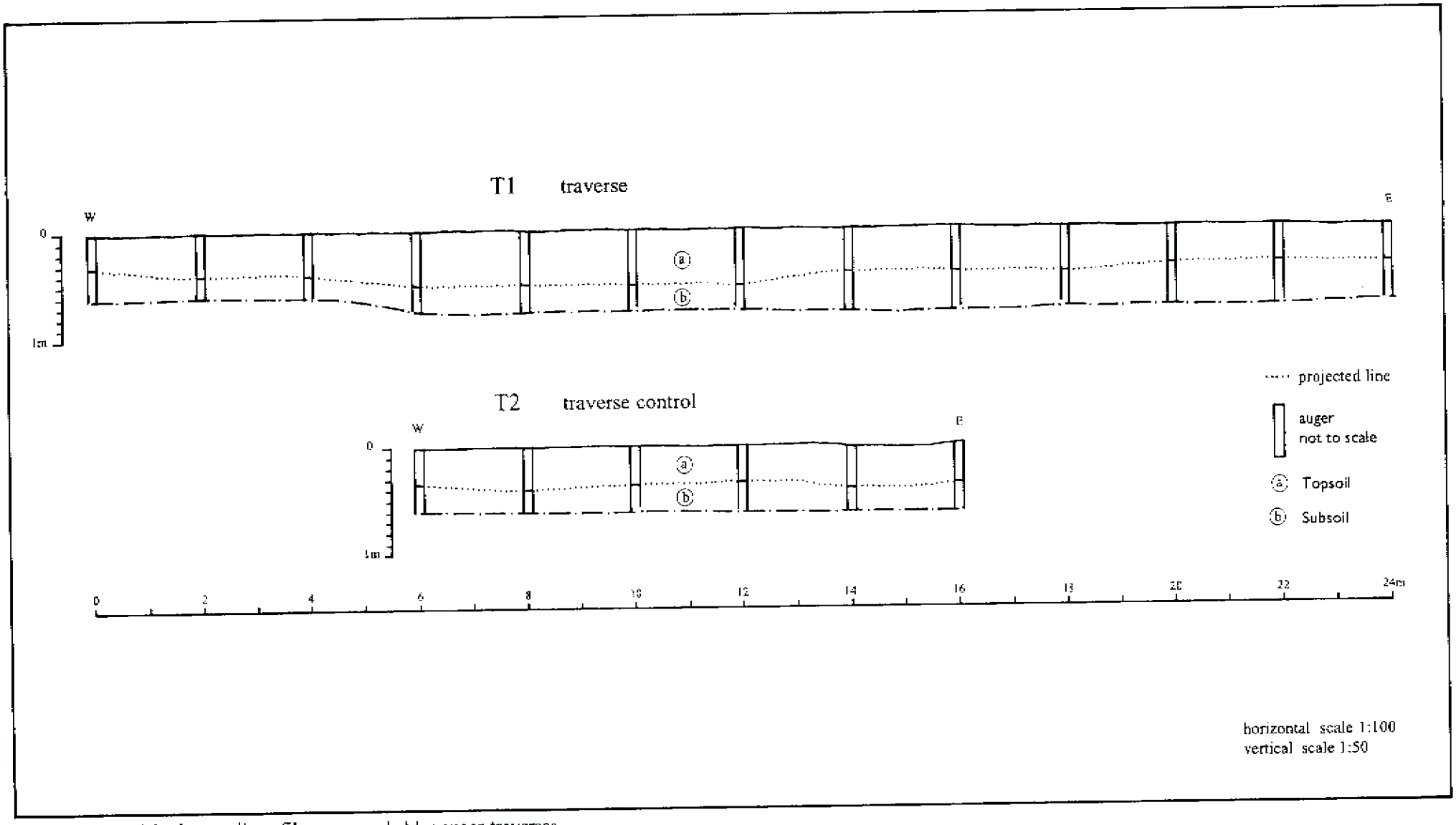

Fig. 13 Fenny Meadow: soil profiles as recorded by auger traverses.

SOWTON LANE

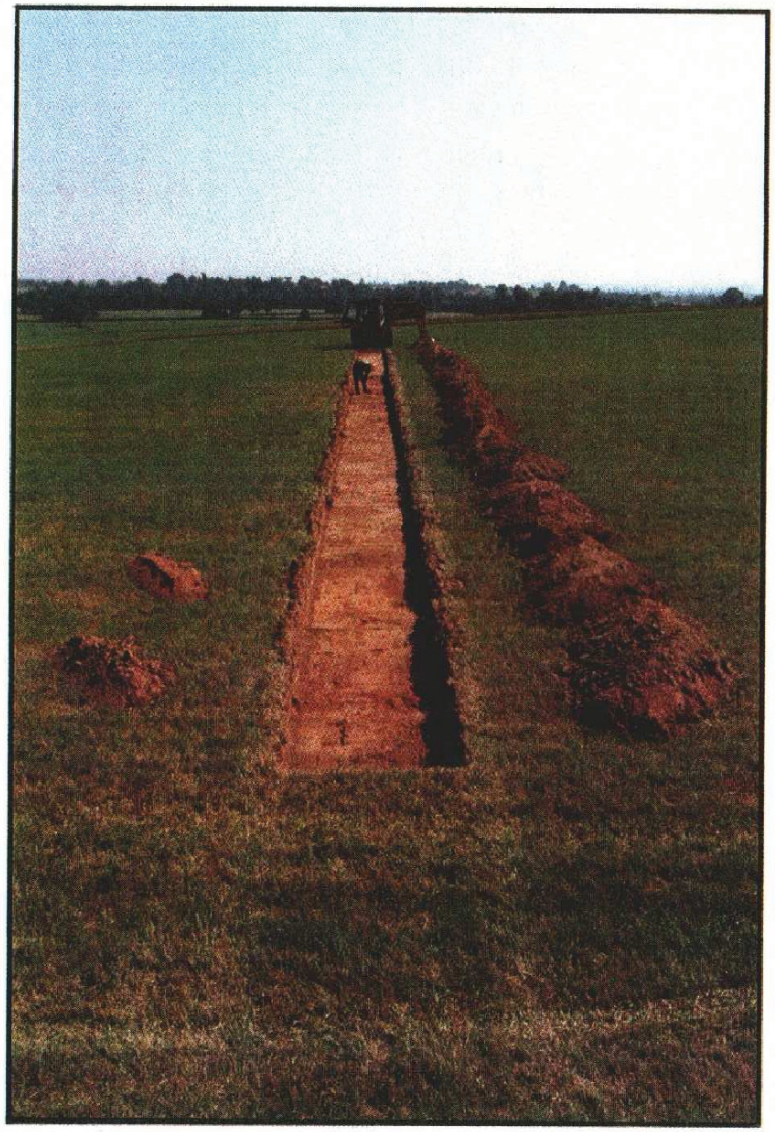

Plate 1 Trench 1. Looking south.

Plate 2 Trench 2 under excavation. Looking south.

ORIGINAL IN COLOUR

LAUREL COPSE

Plate 1 View of site prior to excavation. Looking north.

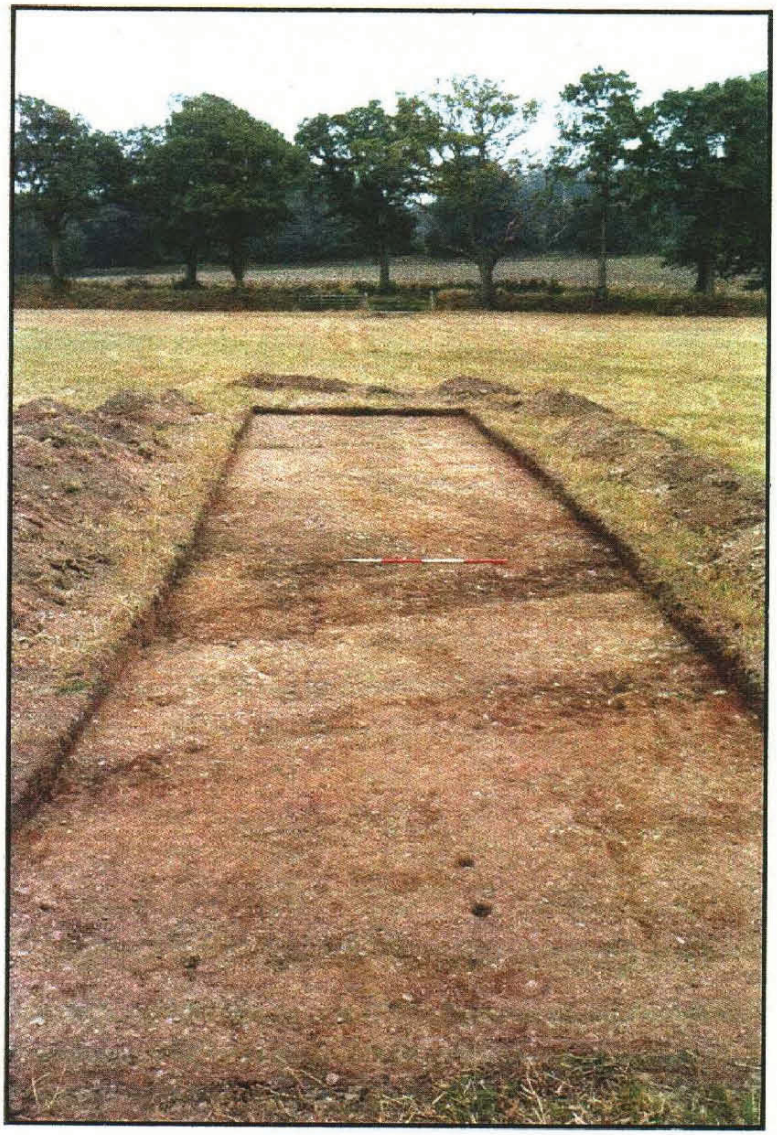

Plate 2 View of site with topsoil stripped. Hedgebank ditches run from left to right. Looking south-east. (Scale: 1m).

ORIGINAL IN COLOUR

LONG RANGE & STRAITGATE FARM

Plate 1 Long Range Swimming School: view of site after topsoil had been removed. Looking north.

ORIGINAL IN COLOUR

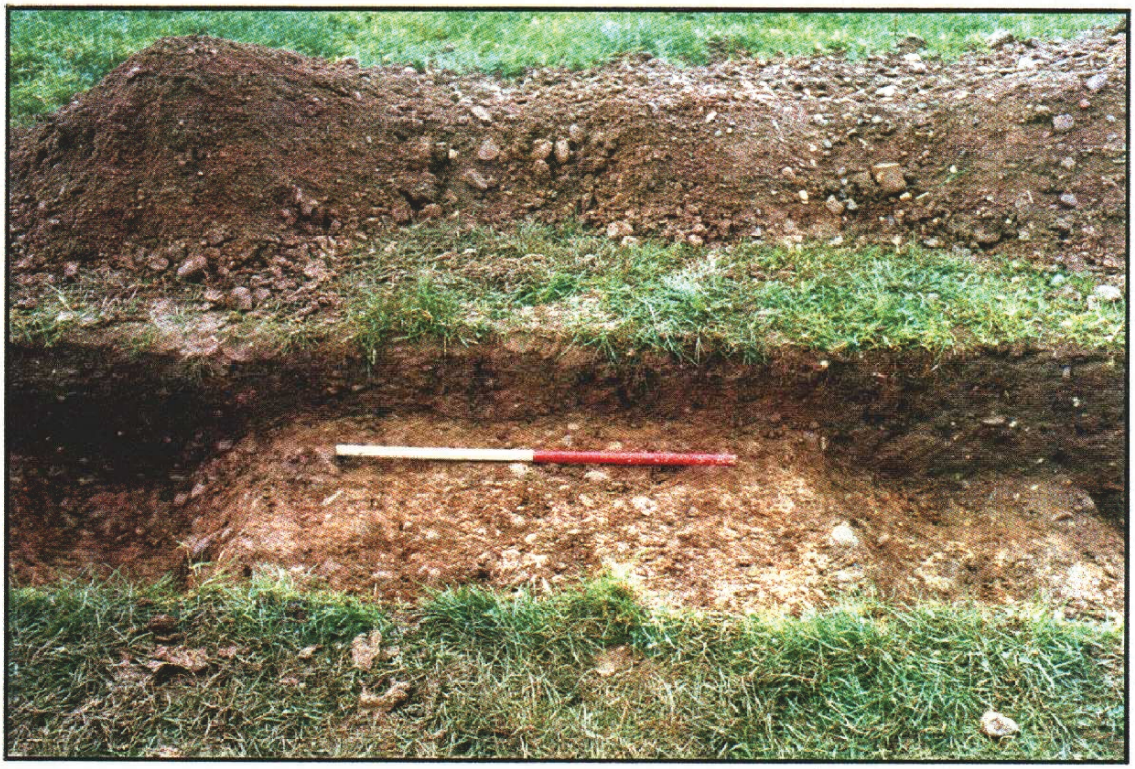

Plate 2 Straitgate Farm: remains of hedgebank exposed during excavation.