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A43 TRUNK ROAD WHITFIELD TURN TO BRACKLEY HATCH DUALLING:  
INITIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION.

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ABSTRACT

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Initial archaeological evaluation of the proposed route of the A43 Trunk Road Whitfield Turn to Brackley Hatch Dualling combined a desk-based study with the systematic walking of arable fields and related ground reconnaissance. The assessment reveals three potential archaeological sites along the road line.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The present report has been prepared by the Contracts Section of the Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit on behalf of External Consulting Services of the Northamptonshire County Council Planning and Transportation Department, acting as Engineering Consultant to the Department of Transport.

1.2 The work undertaken comprised two stages of archaeological evaluation:  
Stage 1 - desk-based study  
Stage 2 - fieldwalking of arable land and ground reconnaissance

2. METHOD

2.1.1 The desk-based study examined a 200m wide corridor at either side of the centre line of the proposed new road. Adjacent sites were also included. The study comprised:

(1) the preparation of geological and topographical maps of the area at 1:10000 scale in order to assess the limitations upon the recovery of information by aerial photography and fieldwalking reconnaissance.

(2) the mapping of the current land use of each parcel of land along the survey corridor in order to assess the potential for fieldwalking. At the same time the presence of any earthwork remains or former cultivation features was noted.

(3) consultation of the County Sites and Monuments Record for information regarding sites previously identified along the proposed route.

(4) the study of aerial photographs held by the County Sites and Monuments Record, with computerised plotting of relevant information at scales of 1:10000 and 1:2500

(5) the examination of Ordnance Survey and accessible historic maps in order to identify former quarried areas, historic features and field names which may be indicative of archaeological sites.

## 2.2 Fieldwalking reconnaissance

2.2.1 The area of field investigation was reduced to a corridor approximately 150m wide along the proposed route. Only that part of each available field which lay within the study area was walked by traverses at 30m intervals. Archaeological artefacts visible upon the field surface were collected. Investigation therefore relies on locating pieces of

pottery and other materials which have been dislodged from buried archaeological levels and brought to the surface by the plough. It can only be undertaken in an arable field with a low standing crop or on recently ploughed land where the soil has been subject to weathering. The technique cannot be used on pasture land or where there is a high standing crop or in fields which lie fallow.

### 3. TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY (Figs 1 and 2)

- 3.1 The proposed route of trunk road dualling runs in a south westerly direction for a distance of approximately 4km from the current A43 road at Brackley Hatch to the Whitfield Turn to the north of Whitfield village. Most of the route runs parallel with and approximately 350m to the south of the existing road. Two link roads both running in a north-south direction will connect the proposed dualling with Syresham village and the Syresham-Helmdon road thereby adding another 1.5 km of new road.
- 3.2 Immediately to the west of Brackley Hatch the proposed route leaves the course of the present A43 road and crosses the upper reaches of the River Great Ouse. It then traverses a large plateau to the south of Syresham village before crossing the valley of The Brook and climbing to the top of another plateau north of Whitfield where it rejoins the existing trunk road.
- 3.3 The underlying geology consists predominantly of Boulder Clay on the higher ground with narrow outcrops of Blisworth Limestone, Blisworth Clay, Upper Estuarine Series sands, silty clay and silts, and alluvium

within the valleys. Immediately to the west and east of the Great Ouse river valley the proposed route crosses a small area of glacial gravel which was quarried in the nineteenth century (OS 1900 25" map). The remains of some of the quarries can still be traced at NGR SP64004135 and SP64014135. The proposed link-roads traverse the relatively level Boulder Clay plateau.

#### 4. LAND USE AND GROUND RECONNAISSANCE

- 4.1 The land along the proposed route is almost entirely given over to agriculture. Of the fields affected by its line, 18 were pasture and 12 were arable in March 1993 (Fig 3). Due to the height of standing crop within them, three of the arable fields were unsuitable for walking.
- 4.2 Six areas of former ridge-and-furrow cultivation were centred at NGRs SP622409 SP622410, SP625408, SP63204090, SP632412 and SP643414 respectively (Fig 4).
- 4.3 An earthwork site within the field to the east of High Cross Farm at NGR SP623410 comprises a possible former pond (1) in the north east of the field, to the south of which are two small rectangular raised areas (2 and 3), probably created by the partial infilling of the Ridge & Furrow earthworks also present in the area, and part of a possible hollow-way (4). A linear raised earthwork (5) follows the line of the western hedge of the field and could be interpreted as denoting an old track of unknown date. Only 1, 4 and 5 fall within the path of the road.

5. **DESK-BASED STUDY** (Fig 4)

5.1 The following sources of information were consulted: Northamptonshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record, aerial photographs held by the Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit, the Royal Commission on Historic Buildings and Monuments (England) inventory of archaeological sites in Northamptonshire and The Roman Roads of Britain by I D Margary (1973).

5.2 Three sites of potential archaeological interest were identified as follows:

**Site 1** Fig 4; NGR SP60603970. In 1988 human bones from an inhumation of an unknown date were found in a test pit close to the present carriageway of the A43 (Northamptonshire SMR SN 5402).

**Site 2** Fig 4; approximate area of NGR SP62606370. The assumed course of a Roman road between Wormleighton and Bletchley may be transected by the proposed line of dualling. The road has been inferred to enter Northamptonshire at SP46155355 via Aston Le Walls and Helmdon, and to leave the county at SP63204024 at Biddlesden. (Margary 1973, Route 166) No direct evidence of the road was observed during fieldwalking, although it may be significant that a linear earthwork on the western side of site 5 (see 4.3) follows approximately the suggested alignment of the Roman axis (Northamptonshire SMR SN 31/1/0).

**Site 3** Figs 4 and 7; NGR SP64404140. Two ditched enclosures of uncertain origin were identified by aerial photography in 1982

and have been plotted by computer (Fig 7). Both lie close to the proposed road corridor but are unlikely to be affected by the works.

## 6. HISTORIC MAPS AND FIELD NAMES (Fig 5)

6.1 Maps from a 1932 survey of field-names by parish, have been consulted at the Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO). The information has been supplemented by data from the 1883 edition of the Ordnance Survey 25" map, Sheet LIX-12. While the evidence of field-names can sometimes suggest former activity and land-use, it may be misleading in itself and confirmation of direct association should be sought through corroborative information.

### 6.2 1932 Field Name Survey of the Parish of Syresham

Nine field-names shown relate to buildings and other man-made features. White Gate Ground presumably refers to a long-vanished white gate, whereas Clay Pit Leys and Gravel Pit Field denote previous quarrying. Barn Ground, First Barn Ground and Second Barn Ground allude to barns in the vicinity, with Cabin Ground and Hutch Close perhaps similarly indicating buildings. While Windmill Ground might attest the former presence of a windmill, any related structure had been demolished by the time of the survey undertaken for the 1883 OS 25" map.

References to former vegetation are found in Copy Moor and The Squitch Field. The former alludes to the ancient practice of fostering new growth by cutting mature trees down to ground level whilst the latter refers to land infested with couch or "twitch" grass (Field 1972, 216).

Short Dadwells, Long Dadwells, Pargeter's Close, Turner's Close and Kirby's Close all refer to land ownership.

References to size and location are evident in Bottom Plough, Lower Ground, Great Ground and Little Meadow. Baulk Ground refers to an unploughed boundary strip, and The Stripe is similarly a reference to a narrow piece (or strip) of land.

The Croft and Dairy Ground fields refer to earlier land use. Fullingford Meadow may be a reference to the washing of cloth (or "fulling") close to the point where the Towcester-Syresham road crossed the River Great Ouse prior to the construction of the Kings Hill Bridge.

Immediately east of Abbey Way House, the field named Water Furrows refers to waterlogged plough-furrows and, nearby, Abbey Way Ground is a reference to the road from Syresham to Biddlesden, where the site of the Cistercian Abbey which was founded in AD 1147 is now occupied by Biddlesden House.

The field named Little Round Hill may refer to a small natural hummock within the field or alternatively it could be a reference to a man-made feature such as a windmill mound or a round barrow.

### 6.3 1932 Field-name Survey of the Parish of Whitfield.

A reference to land ownership occurs in Smith's Forground. The



meaning of "Astwell" in Astwell Hill is unclear but it may be associated with Astwell Farm and Astwell House, both of which are found in nearby Helmdon parish. Similarly, although Hoppersford Meadows refers to meadowland close to Hoppersford Bridge it has been suggested that the name Hoppersford is associated with the family of Thomas Le Hoppere of Steane Gover et al 1933, The Place-Names of

Northamptonshire.

The names Big Furlong and Elm Tree Baulk are self-explaining as too is Backside which simply refers to land at the rear of properties in the northern part of Whitfield village.

Grass Big Ditch and Big Ditch could refer to a field ditch, along the parish boundary or allude to a lost ancient feature.

6.4 1883 edition Ordnance Survey 25" map, Sheet LIX-12 and 1900 edition Ordnance Survey 25" map. Sheet LIX-12.

Previous editions of the Ordnance Survey maps of the area show former buildings, possibly field barns, at NGRs SP61604030 and SP62904080 together with a former quarry and limekiln to the south of Kiln Farm at NGR SP61804070 and a gravel quarry at NGR SP64014135.

7. **FIELDWALKING RECONNAISSANCE**

7.1 Of the 12 arable fields along the proposed route of dualling one was unploughed (Field 10) and two (Fields 11-12) contained a cereal crop that had grown too high to permit reconnaissance. The remaining fields (Fields 1-9) were walked over between 16-19 March 1993.

7.2 The fieldwalking reconnaissance took place systematically along parallel lines or transects spaced 30m apart. Finds of archaeological material were collected and later plotted at 20m intervals (stints) within each transect. As a general rule, the transects ran at right-angles to the straightest boundary of each field and were laid out to cover the line of the proposed corridor of dualling. All pottery which appeared to be of medieval or earlier date was recovered. All struck flints were also collected. Spreads of building material which might indicate the presence of an archaeological site were observed in field 1.

### 7.3 Significance of distributions

In general the individual quantities of material recovered are too small and of too dispersed nature to be significant. With the exception of Fields 1 and 9, the details of their distribution has not been illustrated.

### 7.4 Field 1 (Figs 8-10)

The geology of this field is Boulder Clay. Three transects were walked along the route of the proposed dual carriageway in the southernmost portion of the field. The following material was recovered:

Struck flint		8
Pottery	Romano-British	279
	Early-middle Saxon	3
	Medieval	58
	Unidentified	65

A total of 279 sherds of pottery was positively identified as Romano-British (Fig 7). The majority of sherds occurred in the central southern portion of the field but the pottery concentration was observed to continue northwards for a distance of approximately 50m into part of the field which was not surveyed. The pottery is dated mostly to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD. and may be associated with a contemporary rural settlement (site 4). The greatest quantity of pottery coincides with two separate scatters of limestone, which might denote ploughed-out building debris, although no other types of building materials such as tiles, mortar, plaster and fragments of mosaic were present. A total of 65 unidentified sherds was recovered in the area of the scatter but have not been illustrated. Fifty-eight medieval sherds were also recovered, and presumably denote manuring (Fig 9). Three sherds of Early-middle Saxon pottery from Field 1 were the only finds of that date from the entire survey (Fig 10).

#### 7.5 Field 2

The geology of the field is Boulder Clay. Two transects were walked and the following material was recovered:

Struck flint		2
Pottery	Romano-British	5
Miscellaneous	Whetstone	1

The flint distribution is without significance. While the small number of Romano-British sherds probably represents a slight eastward continuation of the Romano-British site in Field 1. The whetstone appears to be medieval or post-medieval.

7.6 Field 3

The predominant geology in the south and west of the field is Boulder Clay. To the north and east, Blisworth Limestone and Upper Estuarine clays and silts occur. Four transects were walked with the following material being recovered:

Struck flint		34
Pottery	Romano-British	10
	Medieval	11
	Unidentified	1

The struck flint was widely scattered apart from a slight concentration above the Blisworth Limestone in the north-east of the field. The Romano-British and Medieval sherds indicate light manuring scatters.

7.7 Field 4

The geology is Boulder Clay. Two transects were walked and the following finds were recovered:

Struck flint		4
Pottery	Romano-British	3
	Medieval	3

7.8 Field 5

Walking took place in the north-west corner of the field on Upper Estuarine clays and silts and alluvium. Two transects were walked from which the following finds were recovered:

Struck flint		3
Pottery	Medieval	1

### 7.9 Field 6

Walking took place close to the northern boundary of the field where the geology is predominantly Blisworth Limestone. A single transect was walked.

Struck flint		2
Pottery	Romano-British	2

### 7.10 Field 7

Walking took place close to the northern boundary of the field, on Blisworth Limestone at the west and Boulder Clay at the east. One transect was walked from which the following finds were recovered:

Struck flint		3
Pottery	Romano-British	4

### 7.11 Field 8

The geology is Boulder Clay. Three transects were walked in the northern part of the field and the following finds were recovered:

Struck flint		1
Pottery	Romano-British	3
	Medieval	1
	Unidentifiable	1
Miscellaneous	18th century coin	1

The coin was barely legible, it may have been a George II halfpenny (1727-60) and was presumably associated with a post-medieval manuring scatter.

7.12 Field 9 (Fig 11)

The predominant geology of the field is Boulder Clay. Three transects were walked in the northern part of the field from which the following finds were recovered:

Struck flint		4
Pottery	Romano-British	1
	Medieval	29
	Unidentifiable	1

The distribution of medieval pottery suggests a manuring scatter.

8. **SITES WITHIN THE ROAD CORRIDOR**

8.1 The available evidence indicates that three potential archaeological sites will be affected by the proposed trunk road dualling.

8.2 All lie on boulder clay and comprise:

Site 2, NGR SP62606370 the conjectural line of a Roman road. No direct evidence has been found.

Site 4, NGR SP60733991, a possible Romano-British small rural settlement perhaps associated with the inhumation discussed previously 200m to the south-west.

Site 5, NGR SP62304100, the earthwork remains of a pond and hollow-way.

8.3 Otherwise, it appears that site 1 (undated inhumation) would only be affected if the road improvement works continue westwards.

8.4 It cannot be assumed however that all archaeological sites which lie within the proposed road corridor have been discovered. In particular two factors mitigate against the discovery of sites:

(1) The lack of aerial photographs available in the Northamptonshire Sites and Monuments Record for parts of the area under investigation.

(2) The large number of parcels of land under pasture (18) combined with arable fields with high standing crop (3), where fieldwalking could not be undertaken.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Contracts Section of the Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit would like to thank the landowners, agents and tenants of the land at both sites for allowing access to carry out the fieldwork.



#### SCHEDULE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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- Fig 2: Local topography and geology.
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- Fig 5: Field names.
- Fig 6: Site 5, earthworks.
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- Fig 8: Field 1, Romano-British pottery and stone scatters.
- Fig 9: Field 1, distribution of medieval pottery.
- Fig 10: Field 1, distribution of early-middle Saxon pottery.
- Fig 11: Field 9, distribution of medieval pottery.

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Text: Michel Audouy and Tim Sharman, Contracts Section, Northamptonshire  
Archaeology Unit, 8th April 1993.

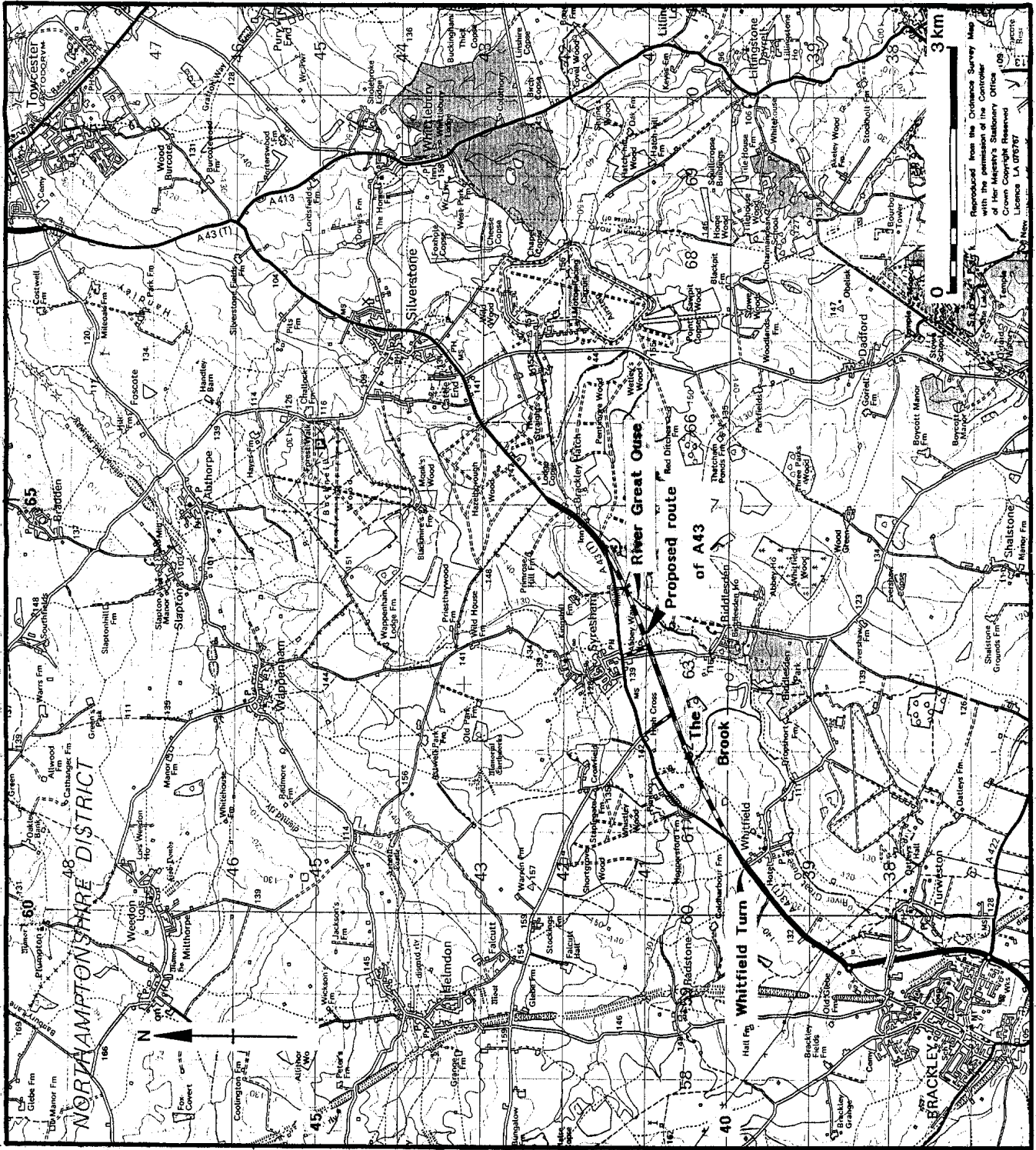


Fig 1: Proposed route of the A43 Whitfield Turn-Brackley Hatch Dualling.

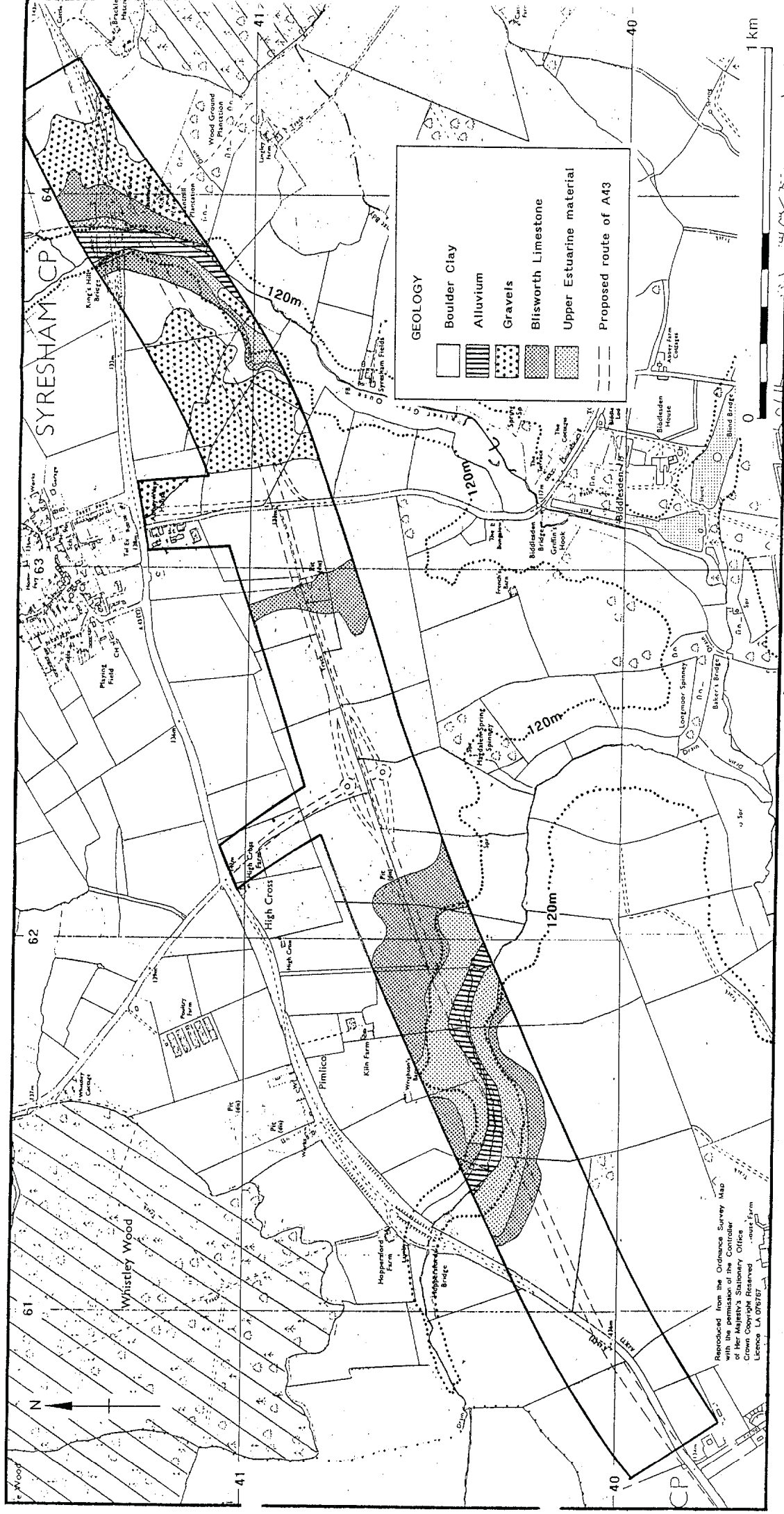


Fig 2: Topography and geology.

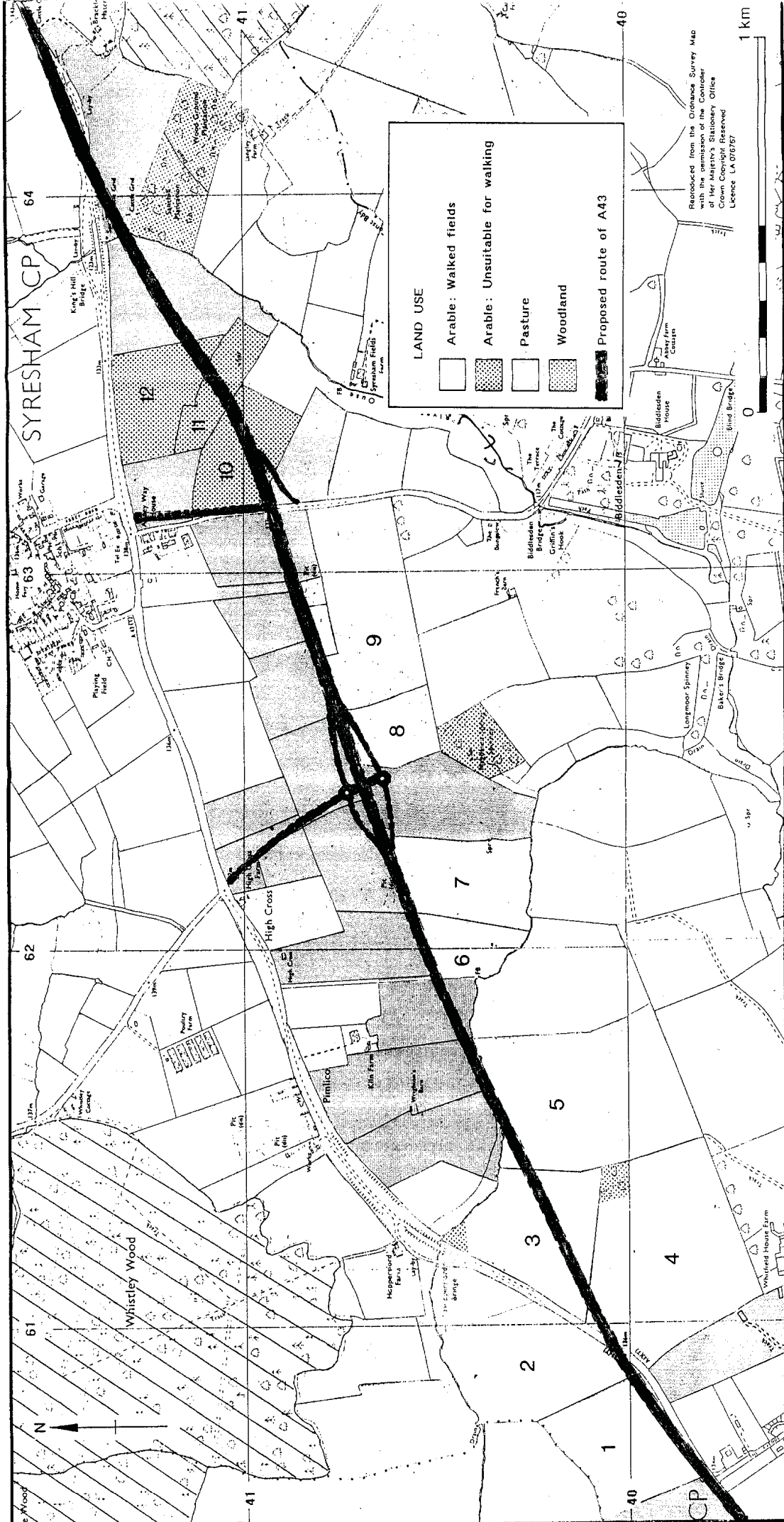


Fig 3: Land use.

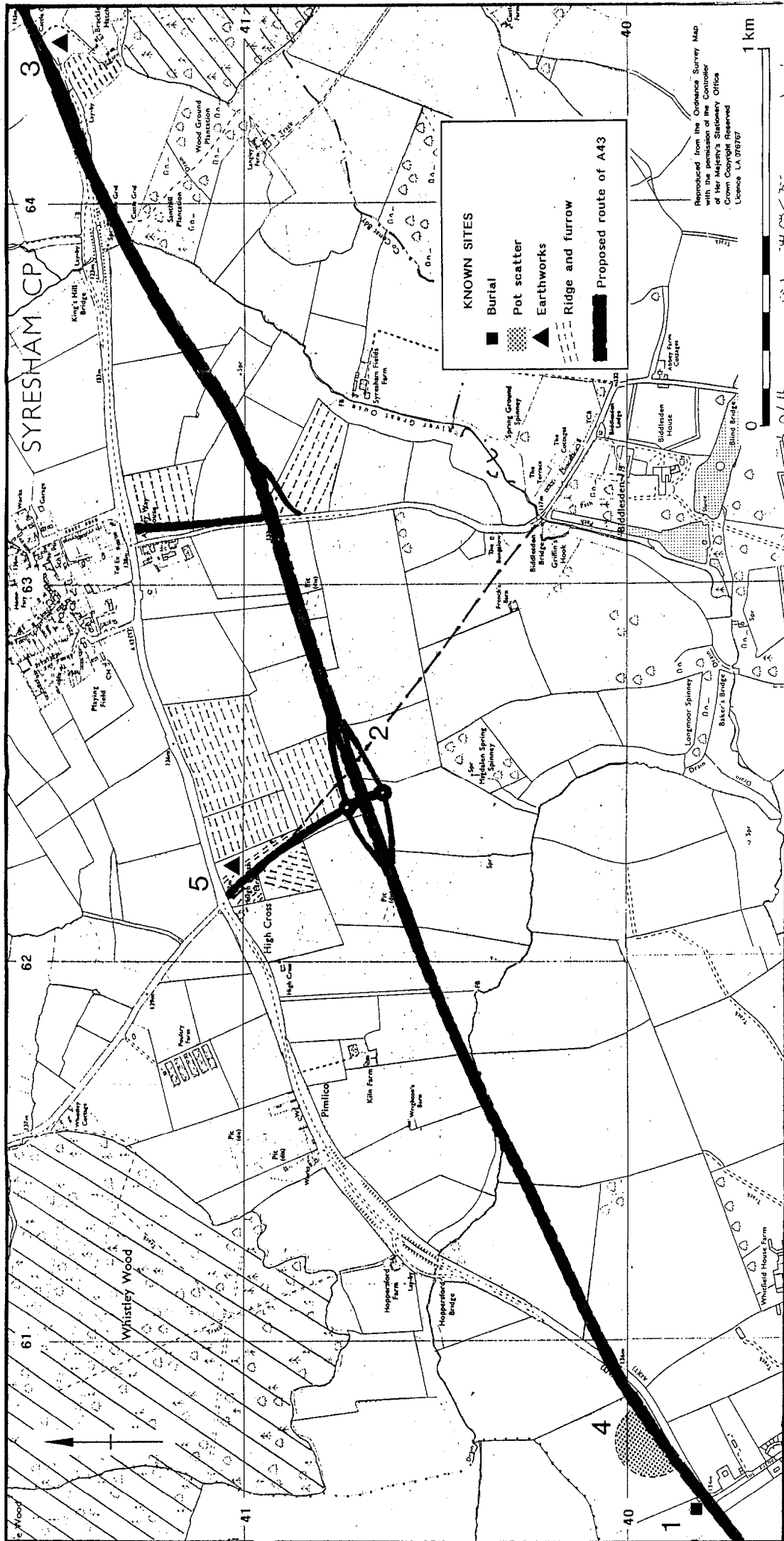


Fig 4: Known sites, recently discovered sites and earthworks.

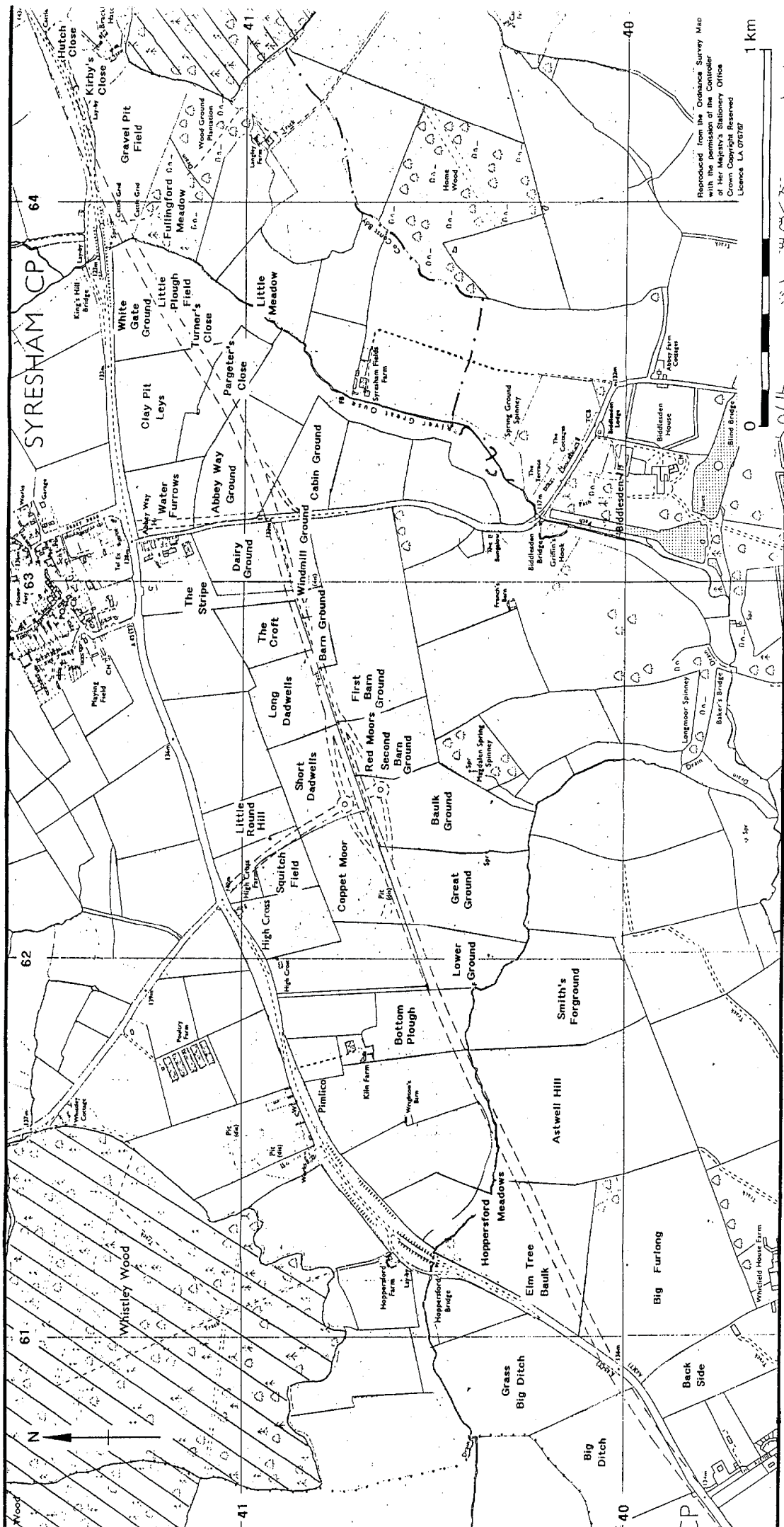


Fig 5: Field-names.

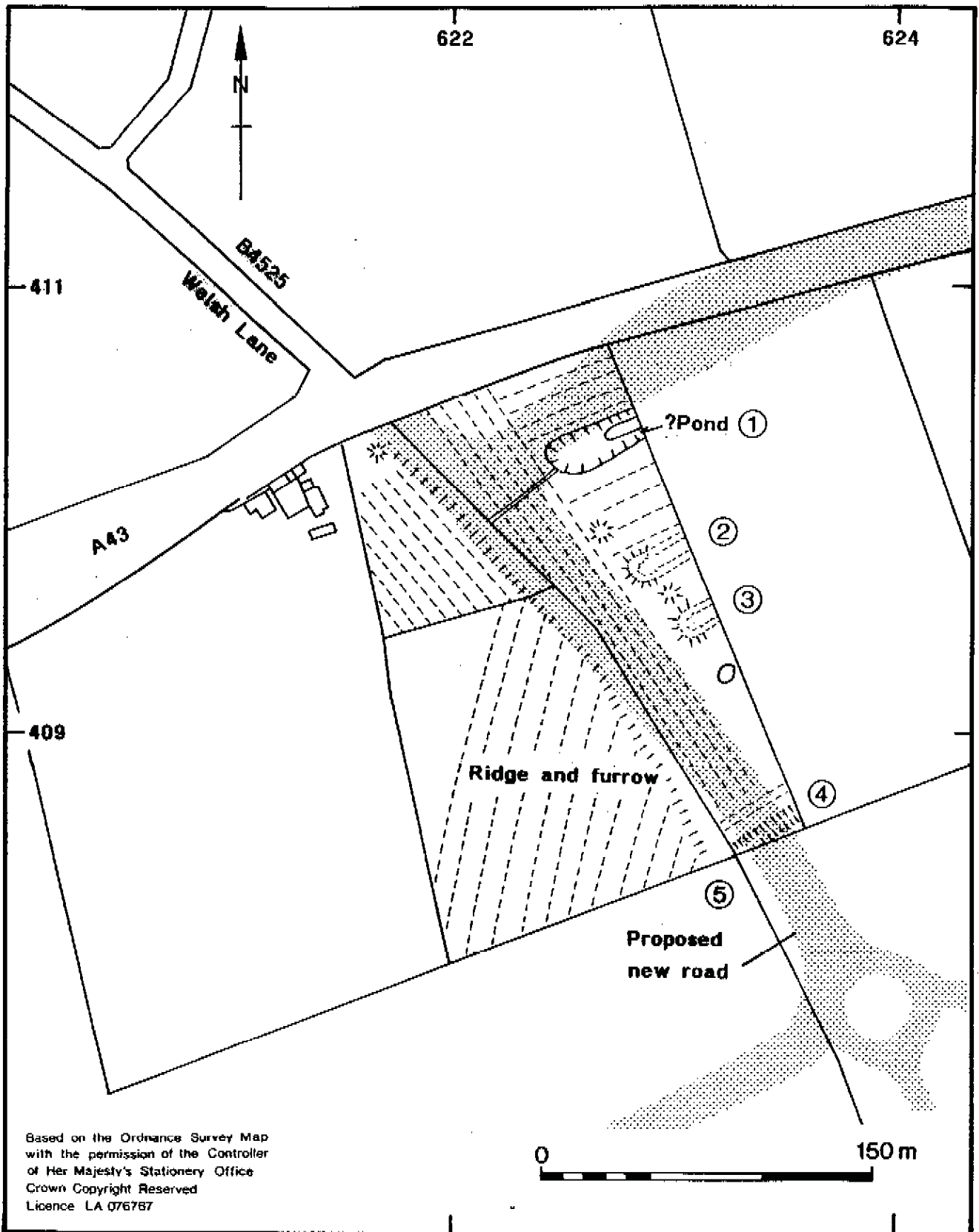


Fig 6: Site 5, earthworks.

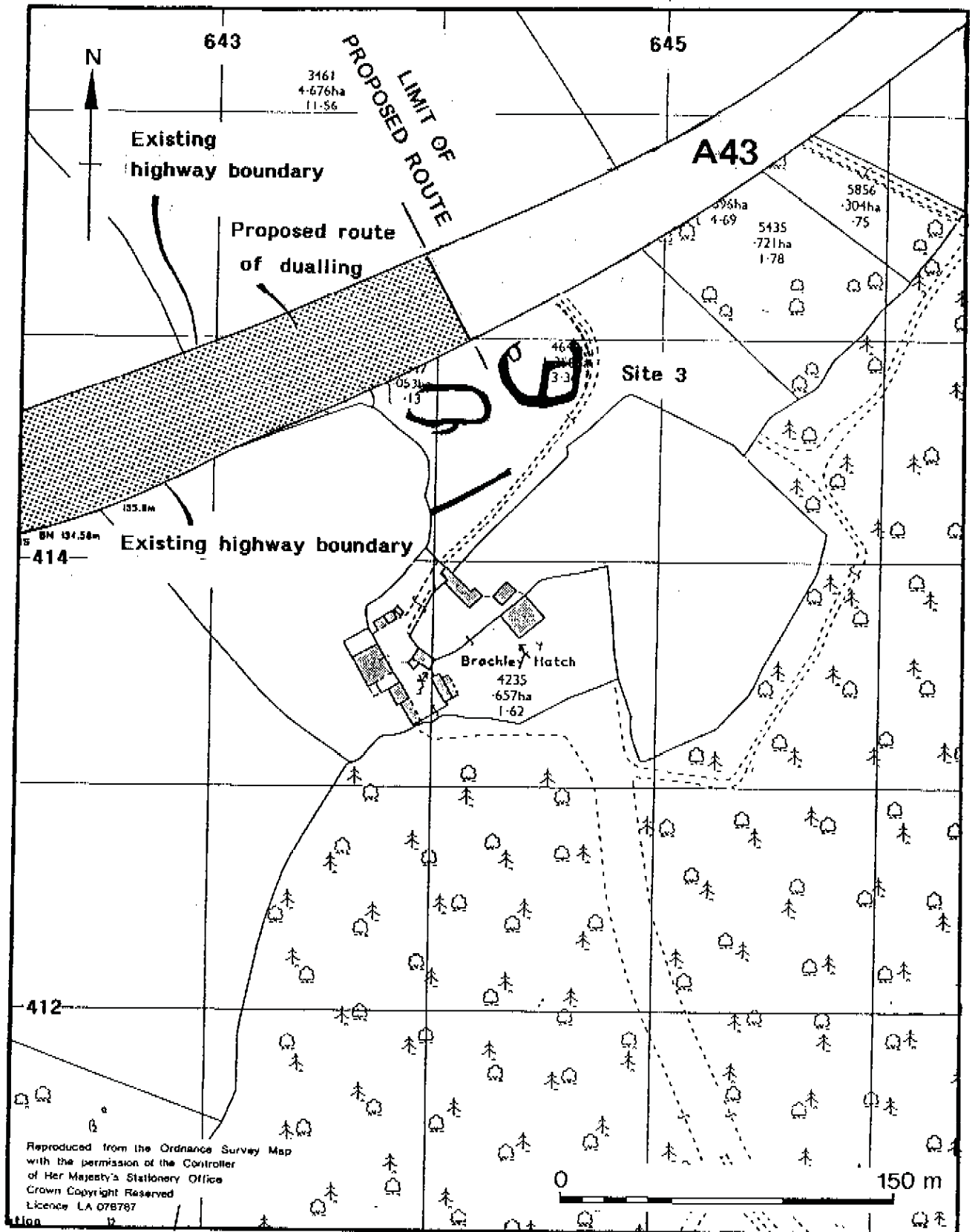


Fig 7: Site 3, carthworks plot.



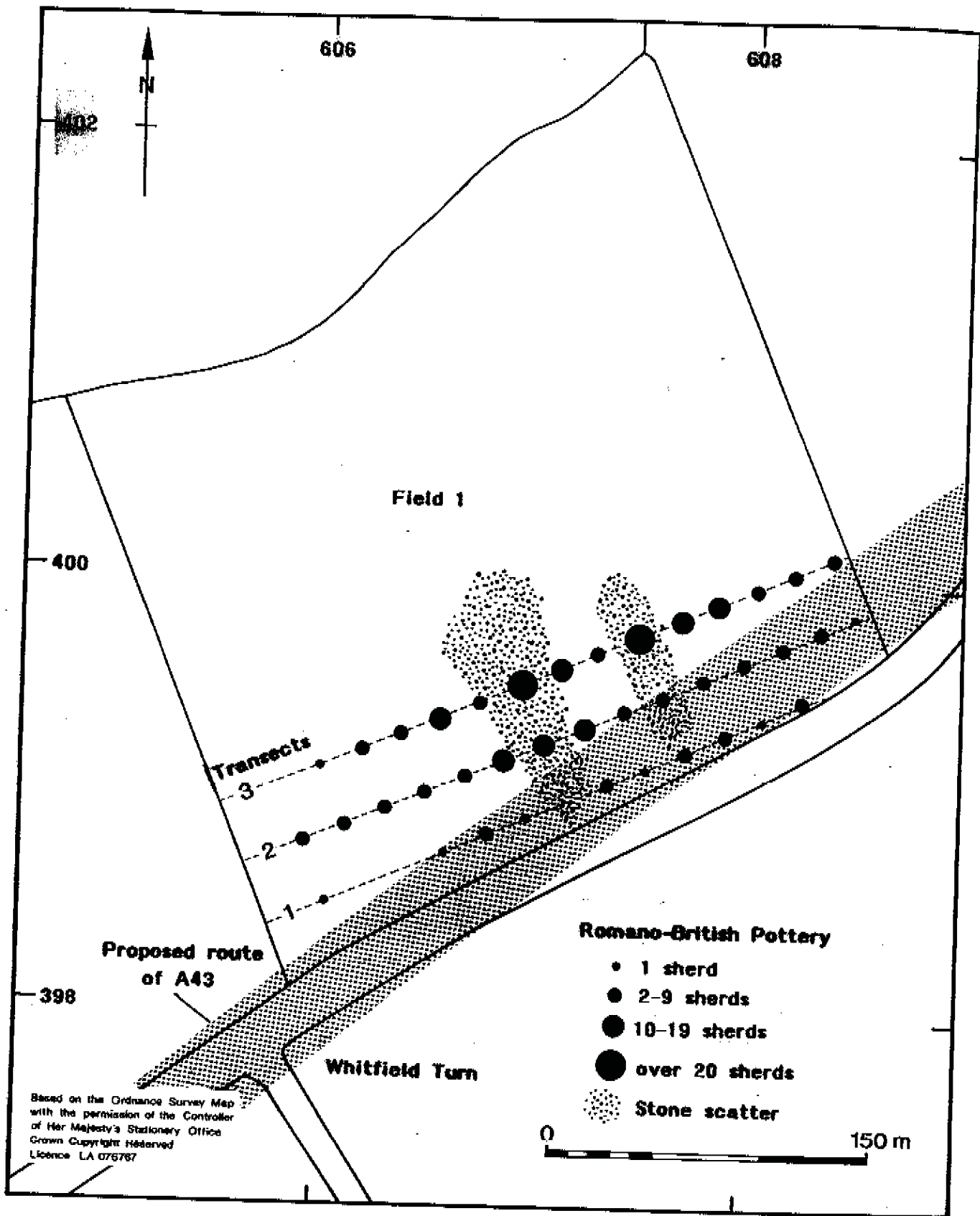


Fig 8: Field 1, Romano-British pottery and stone scatters.

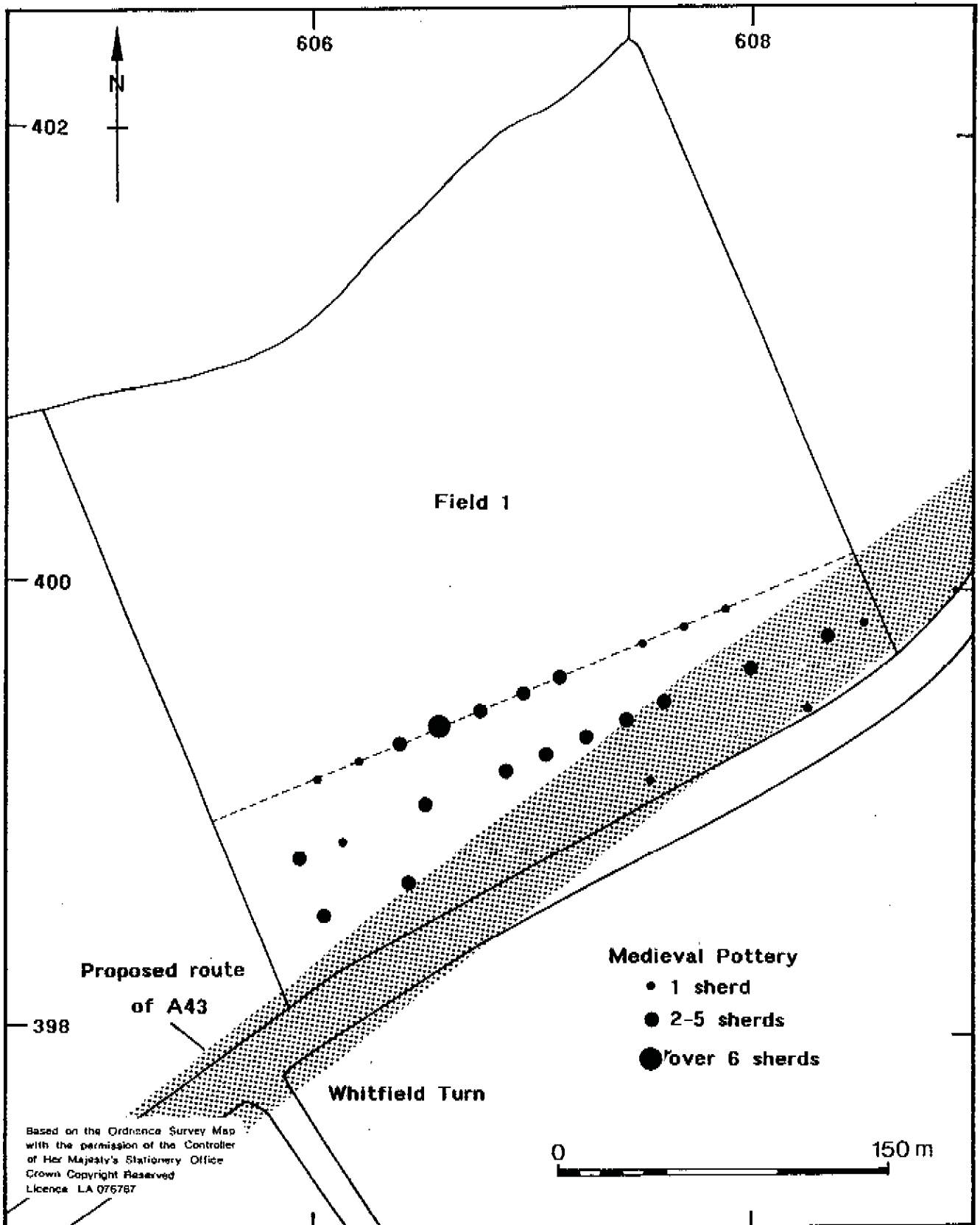


Fig 9: Field 1, distribution of Medieval pottery.

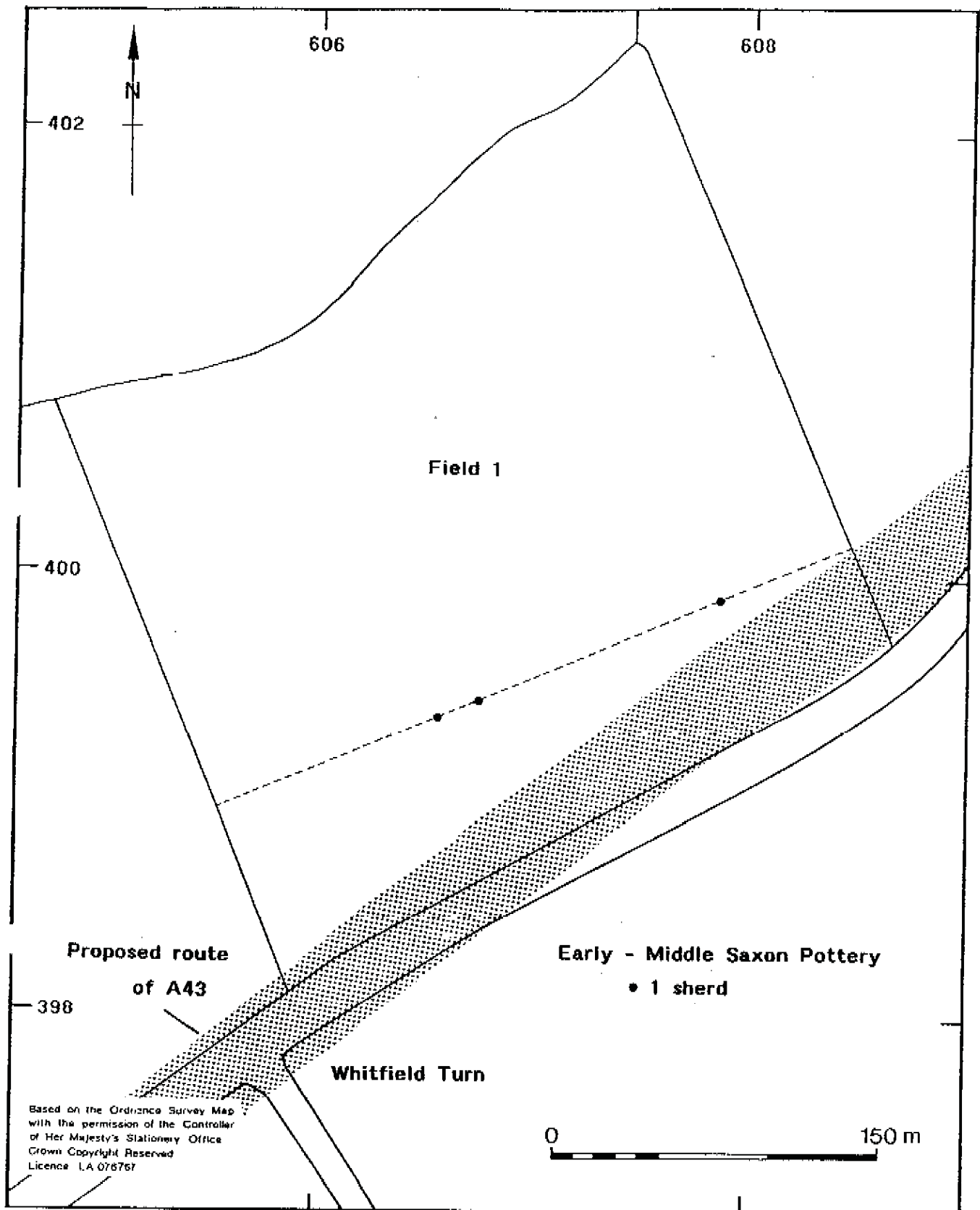


Fig 10: Field 1, distribution of early-middle Saxon pottery.

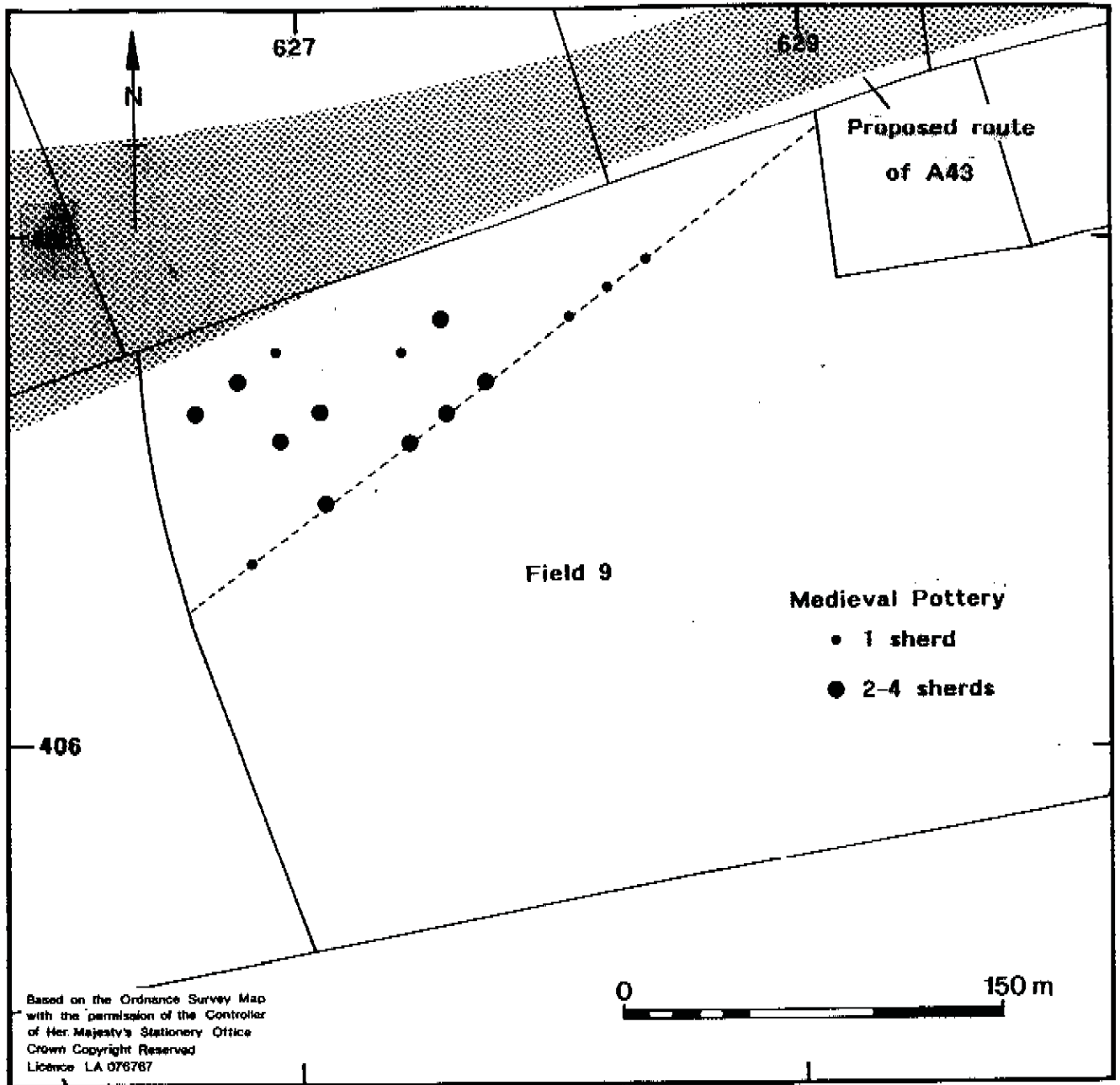


Fig 11: Field 9, distribution of Medieval pottery.