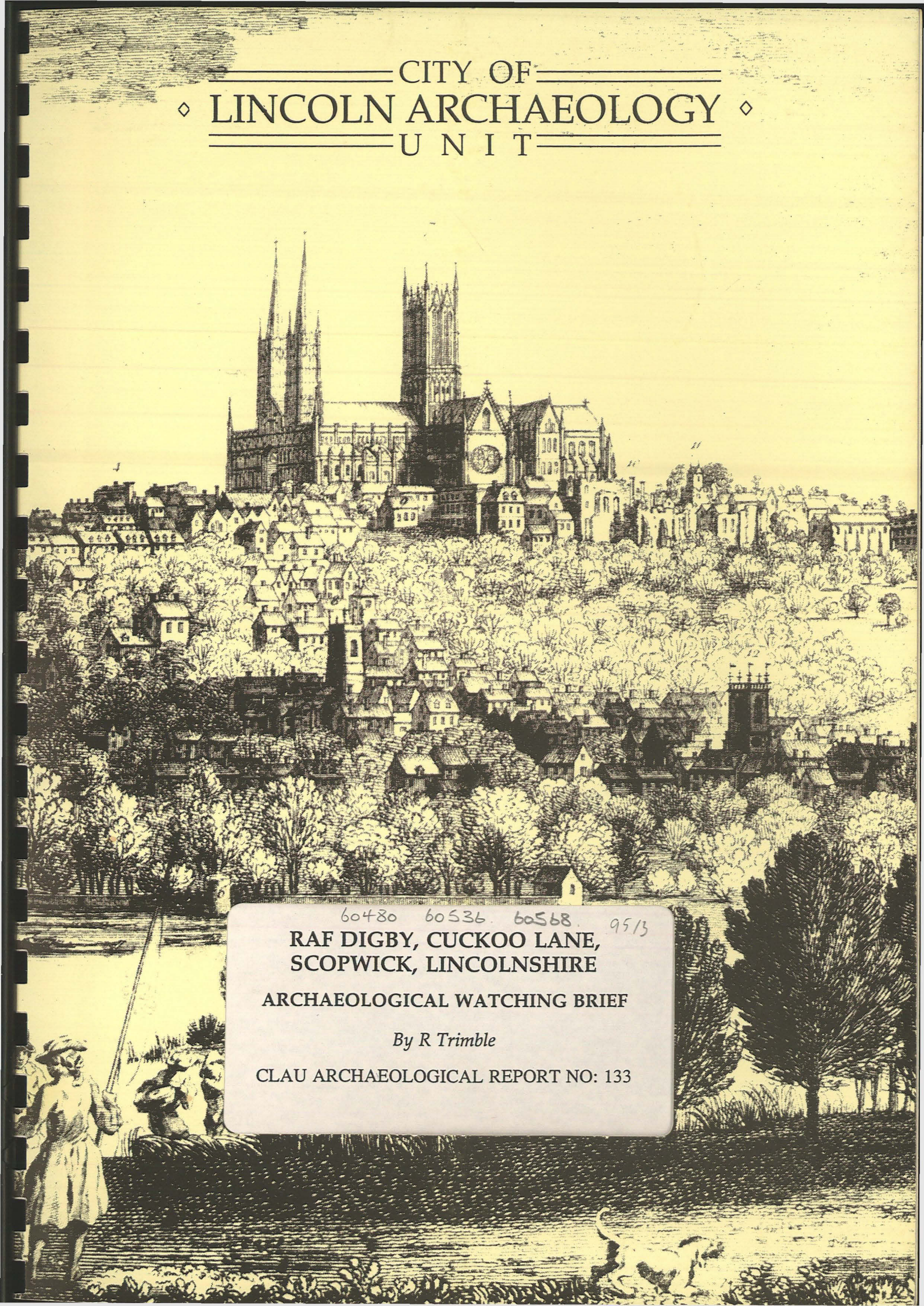
CITY OF
LINCOLN ARCHAEOLOGY
UNIT



RAF DIGBY, CUCKOO LANE, SCOPWICK, LINCOLNSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

By R Trimble

CLAU ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT NO: 133

A

Report to

Frank Graham Consulting Engineers

on behalf of

The Ministry of Defence

November 1994

Prepared by

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING

Introduction

In response to an archaeological condition of planning consent, CLAU was commissioned by Frank Graham Consulting Engineers on behalf of the Ministry of Defence to carry out an archaeological watching brief during groundworks relating to the construction of new airmen's married quarters at RAF Digby, Cuckoo Lane, Scopwick, Lincolnshire (TF 0490/5650). The watching brief was maintained during the period 7 April 1994 - 17 June, 1994 through intermittent visits to the site, timed to coincide with the main phases of contractor's groundworks.

The information in this document is presented with the proviso that further data may yet emerge. The Unit, its Members and employees cannot, therefore, be held responsible for any loss, delay or damage, material or otherwise, arising out of this report. The document has been prepared in accordance with the Unit's Article of Association, the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists and *The Management of Archaeology Projects* (English Heritage, 1991).

Archaeological Background

The site lies approximately 11km north of Sleaford and approximately 3km north west of Ashby de la Launde on a geology of oolitic limestone. Although previous development on the site itself has obscured any remains which may have been susceptible to identification through aerial photography, a Desk Top Study carried out by Lindsey Archaeological Services (N. Field, 1993), produced evidence of extensive prehistoric, Roman and medieval remains in the immediate vicinity of the development area. A subsequent field evaluation by Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire (G. Taylor 1993), demonstrated the presence of undated ditches and postholes in addition to a substantial north south ditch.

Methodology

All archaeological features were located with reference to the contractor's ground plans. Features revealed in trench sides were recorded through sketch sections drawn at scales of 1:10 or 1:20 with reference to either ground surface or to the trench base to provide an approximate indication of level, together with appropriate context descriptions and colour photographs.

Results

For ease of recording the site was divided into five areas (Fig.2). The descriptions below follow this subdivision.

Area 1 (Fig.2)

Area 1 was located in the north west corner of the site and included the east-west turn of the main through road together with 9 new houses clustered around a cul-de-sac. Due to the rapidity of construction, there was only time for cursory inspection of foundation trenches relating to the new houses. Extensive disturbance through previous development was noted. More detailed recording took place during the excavation of the cuttings for the new roads.

Within the road cuttings (approximately 0.5m deep) a considerable depth of reddish brown silty sand was observed in the trench sides, especially in the area to the west of Unit 16. The same material was present over much of the trench floor with the underlying limestone brash exposed in irregular patches.

A broad, shallow hollow (126) containing a primary fill of loose, mid-brown silty sand (125) and a secondary fill of friable, reddish-brown silty sand (124) had been cut into the limestone brash in the trench side immediately to the south of Unit 7 (Section 6, Fig.5). These deposits were sealed by a 0.4m depth of topsoil. A similar depression in the limestone brash was noted at a point approximately 1.6m to the west of 126. In their profiles, fills and spatial relationship, these features are reminiscent of the troughs which occur within medieval ridge and furrow field systems. If this is the case it is it can

probably be assumed that the silty sand which extends throughout the site derives from the same formation process.

Area 2 (Fig.2)
Area 2 denotes the western half of the central part of the site, with12 house plots which were nearly all examined during the groundwork phase.

Inspection of the ground surface of plot 25,26 following a general reduction in ground level demonstrated the occurrence of reddish-brown silty sand within hollows and fissures in the natural limestone brash. Corresponding stratigraphy was in evidence in the trench sides, with limestone brash extending to a maximum of 0.2m above the trench base and reddish brown silty sand displaying an irregular lower horizon extending to 0.4m above the trench base.

Further recording took place following the excavation of the plot 27,28,31 and 32 foundation trenches. The stratigraphy in the northwest corner of plot 32 consisted of 0.1m of limestone brash overlain by 0.4m of mid reddish-brown coarse sand (thought to be redeposited), and an upper horizon of mixed topsoil, concrete, and limestone fragments indicative of recent disturbance.

Apart from confirming the presence of a probable medieval ploughsoil, recording in Area 2 failed to produce any conclusive evidence of archaeological deposits.

Area 3 (Fig.2)
Area 3 was situated in the north-east corner of the site and contained 11 house plots together with an access road leading into a cul-de-sac (Fig.2).

The subsoil in the north-eastern corner of the site was a mix of sands and gravels, occuring at a minimum depth of 0.3m in plot 83,84 and extending into plots 85,86 to the south and 75,76 to the north east where it was overlain by relatively undisturbed subsoil.

Possible ploughsoil with a thickness of approximately 0.4m was noted in the trench side of the new road between the junction to the west and the private drive to the east. The underlying limestone brash had been exposed throughout most of the cutting's base. A greater degree of modern disturbance was noted in the stretch of road leading into the cul-de-sac.

Limestone brash at a depth of 1.1m below the existing ground level was recorded in an east-west service pipe trench extending to the western edge of the former Trenchard Road. This was overlain by a 0.45m depth of uncompacted reddish brown silty sand (identical to the material previously described as ploughsoil) containing occasional small angular stones towards its upper horizon. A possible deepening of this deposit towards the eastern limit of the trench provides further evidence for the interpretation of this material as ridge and furrow. A 0.65m thick greyish brown (garden) soil containing occasional modern objects (wire, iron etc) extended up to the present ground surface and suggests raising of the ground level in this area during landscaping for the original housing development.

Several possible features were recorded in service trenches located to the south and east of plots 71 and 72. A cut revealed in the south facing section of the east- west trench (103, Fig.3) had slightly concave sides sloping at approximately 45 degrees and a flattish base and contained an uncompacted light reddish brown sandy silt (104). The absence of datable and associated artefactual material precludes any attempt to interpret this feature and a natural origin cannot be discounted. The east facing section of the north-south trench produced evidence of two possible features. The first (107), a broad cut or hollow containing a fairly compact mid reddish-brown silty sand with frequent limestone fragments which was sealed by topsoil with a thickness of 90mm (Section 2, Fig.3), could be regarded as the trough of a furrow (see area 1 discussion) with an east west orientation. The second, a small steep sided cut (110) filled by 109, a moderately compacted reddish-brown silty clay containing frequent limestone fragments (Section 5, Fig.5), was originally interpreted as a posthole due its shape and size. However, given the irregular character of the geology and the frequent occurrence of fissures in the limestone brash, formation through natural processes would appear to be a more appropriate interpretation.

Other plots from which information was obtained include 79,80,81 and 82 along the northern periphery of the development, all of which displayed a high degree of modern disturbance, and 67,68 where a very disturbed topsoil directly overlay the limestone brash.

Areas 4 and 5 (Fig.2)
A substantial north-south orientated linear feature was recorded during the excavation of foundation trenches within plots 57,58 61,62 48 39,40 and 41,42. The surface limits of this feature were measured in relation to foundation trench plans at every available opportunity and more detailed recording was carried out where appropriate (Fig.2).

At a point within the area of plot 61,62 the cut (119) was steep sided, cutting through the limestone brash, and extending below the the lower limit of excavation. Its primary fill (118) consisted of 60% limestone fragments and 40% loose mid brown silty sand. This was sealed by 117, a loose mid reddish-brown silty sand containing occasional limestone fragments.

An unstratified sherd of Roman pottery was recovered from spoil in close proximity to the feature where it intersected with plot 48. To the south of plot 40 the western side of the cut (recorded as 112) sloped at 45 degrees from horizontal extending below the lower limit of excavation and was filled by a reddish brown silty sand containing frequent limestone flecks and fragments. Further information was provided by site workers who reported the removal and consolidation of a particulary deep (circa 2m from ground surface) "soft spot" or "dyke" at all points where the feature intersected with the foundation trenches in the area of plots 41,42.

A substantial ditch revealed during the pre-development evaluation (G.Taylor, 1993), in a trench sited approximately at the centre of plot 65,66, almost certainly represents a northward continuation of the same feature, giving an overall known length of approximately 150m. In the absence of associated and datable artefactual remains, and in view of the lack of stratigraphic information particularly concerning the relationship between the linear feature and the subsoil or ploughsoil, interpretation with regard to date and function is difficult. However, the results of the watching brief do appear to support the conclusions drawn from the evaluation; that the feature, in its magnitude (especially towards the southern boundary of the site), is more likely to represent an estate or farm boundary, or enclosure ditch, than a field ditch. (G.Taylor, 1993)

A second, much less well-defined cut feature (121), also north-south orientated, was recorded to the west of 119, within plot 61,62 (Section 4 Fig.4). It had fairly steep sides and was cut through the natural limestone, extending to below the lower limit of excavation. The fill consisted of approximately 70% limestone fragments/ 30% light yellowish brown sand. The southward extent of the ditch was recorded in an adjacent trench as 116 (Section 3, Fig. 4), a steep sided cut breaking to a flat base and containing a primary fill (115) of loose mid grey sandy silt containing infrequent small limestone fragments which was overlain by a fill consisting of 60% limestone fragments and 40% light brown sand (114). Cut 116 was very indistinct and the fills were close in composition to the adjacent geological deposits. It is, therefore, a possibility that the true base of the feature is close to 121 in depth.

It is possible that 121/116 is a ditch running parallel with 119 or that 119 is a recut of 121/116 which deviates from the line of its predecessor at this point. The latter explanation might account for the absence of a comparable feature in plots to north and south but interpretation of 121/116 as a ditch should still be regarded as tentative.

Surfacing on the main north-south road was already well advanced at the time of inspection and the opportunity to observe an extensive length of the linear features was missed. However, a considerable depth of reddish-brown subsoil was noted in the sections in the area of plot 38, extending into hollows within the limestone brash.

Plot 59,60 was inspected with the concrete footings already in place. In the south west corner of the plot a possible pit cut into the natural limestone brash was recorded. The northern edge had been truncated by a modern pipe trench and the new foundation trenches truncated the feature to south and west but approximate surface dimensions of 0.9m east-west and 1.1m north-south were recorded. This feature remains undated.

Plots 50, 51,52 53,54 were inspected after excavation but displayed extensive modern disturbance.

Conclusions

The archaeological watching brief confirmed the presence of a deep ploughsoil extending over most the site with minimal disturbance (for example through landscaping) outside the main areas of truncation. This suggests that the area was under arable cultivation during the medieval and post-medieval periods, the associated settlement being outside the current development area. The likelihood is that any prehistoric or Romano-British features are relatively well preserved below this initial truncation horizon. That features dating to these periods were not identified during groundworks may be a reflection of the irregular geology (mostly limestone brash), rather that a real absence.

The watching brief succeeded in mapping the southern extent of a major ditch first recognised during the evaluation carried out by Heritage Lincolnshire. Its function and date could not be

established within the framework of a watching brief but its depth and width suggest a significant land dividing feature probably predating the enclosure of the fields. This had already been completed at a date prior to the publication of the 1789 parish map (N. Field 1993)which indicates that the entire development area falls within the limits of one of the post enclosure fields (G. Taylor 1993).

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Shepherd Construction, and in particular Les Root (site agent), for excellent co-operation during the project.

References

Field, N. 1993. Airmens Married Quarters, RAF Digby. Archaeological Desktop Study, LAS report, Lindsey Archaeological Services, Lincoln

Taylor, G. 1993. Evaluation Excavation of Airmen's Married Quarter's, Ashby de la Launde, Lincolnshire. HTL report, Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire, Sleaford

Archive Deposition

The archive consists of:

No.	*Description*
1	Site Diary
1	Report
26	Context Records
8	sketch sections
31	Colour transparencies

The primary archive material as detailed above, is currently held by:

The City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit, Charlotte House, The Lawn, Union Road, Lincoln, LN1 3BL.

It is intended that transfer to the City and County Museum, Friars Lane, Lincoln, in accordance with current published requirements, under Museum Accession Number 44.94, will be undertaken within approximately six months of completion of this report.

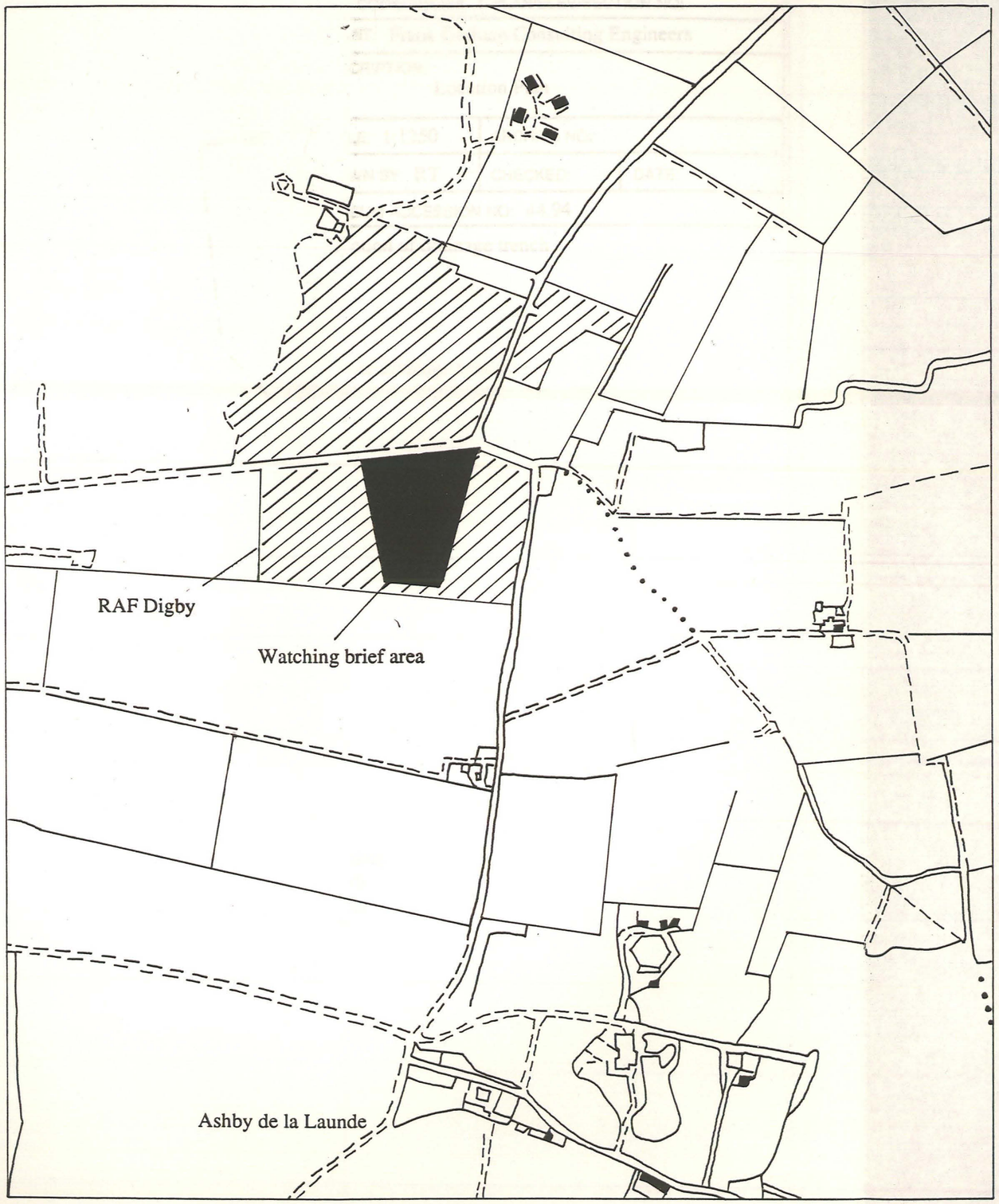

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Fig.1

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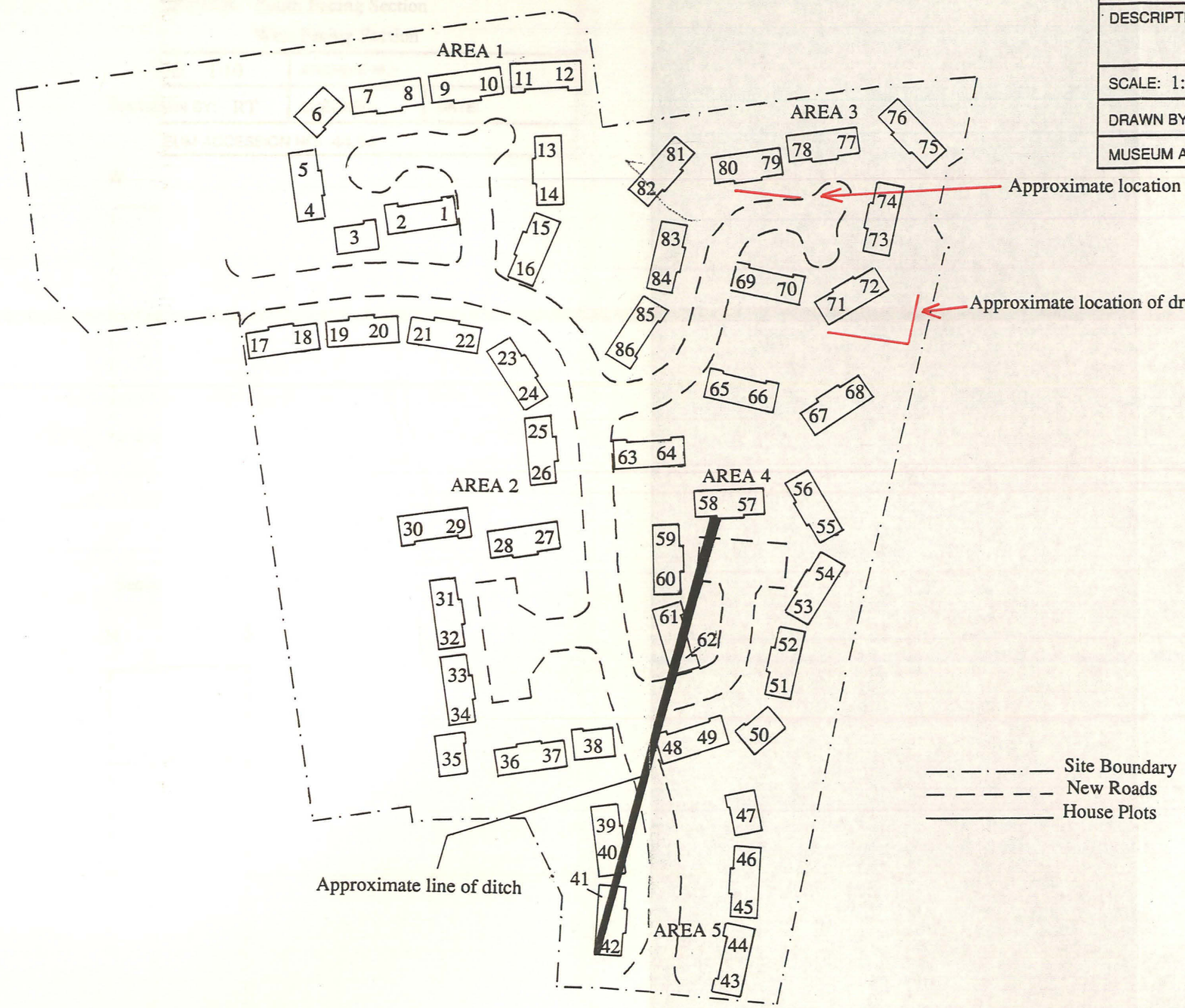

Fig.2

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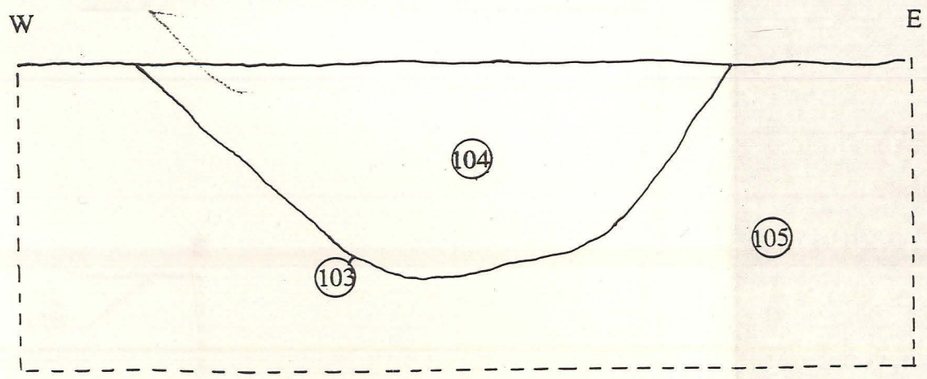

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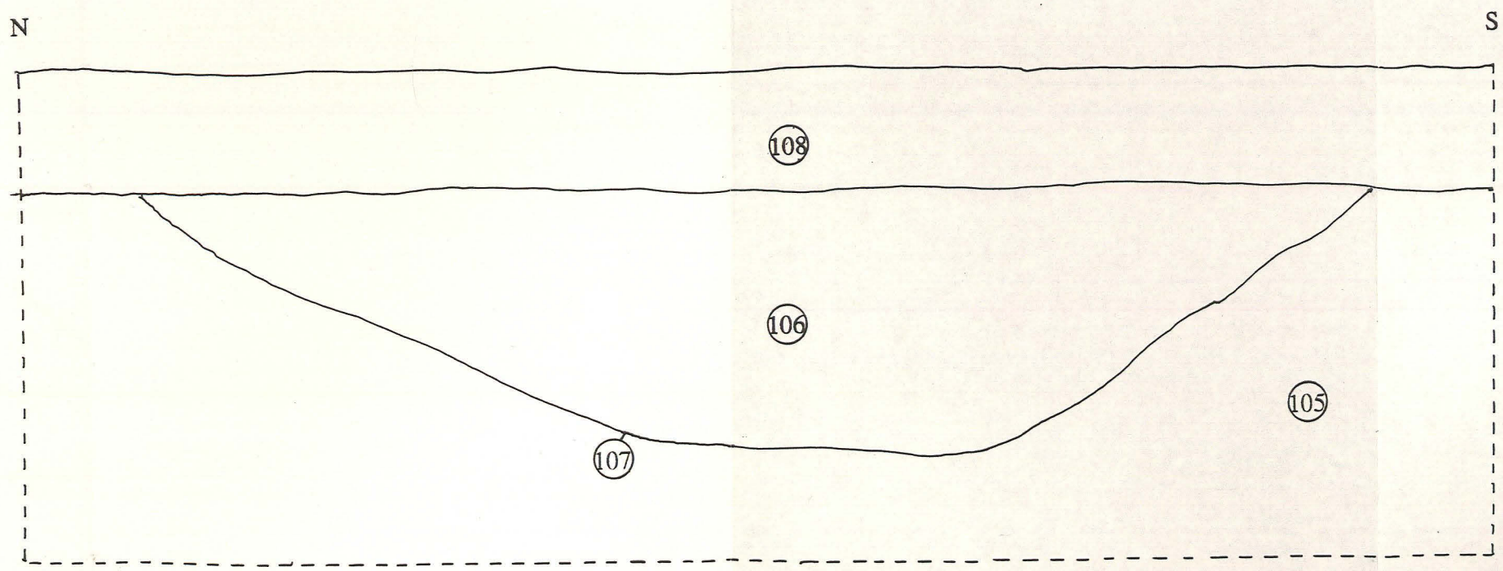

Fig.3

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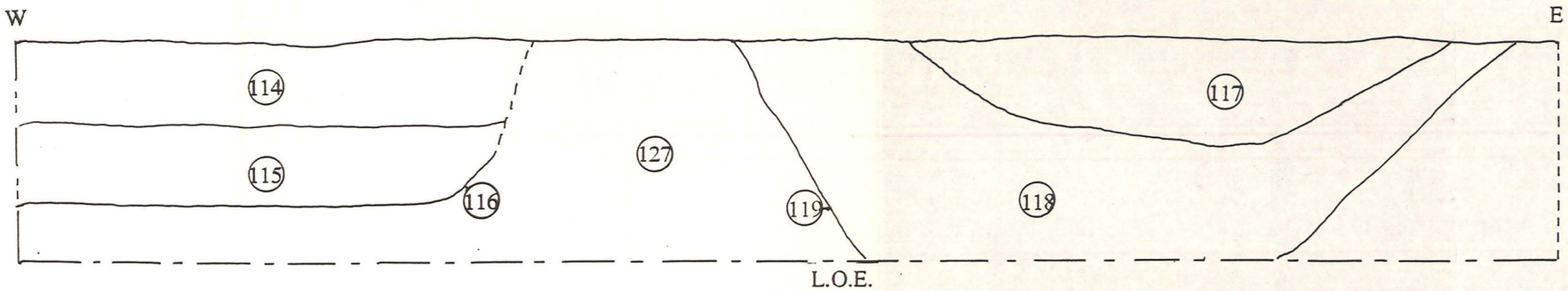

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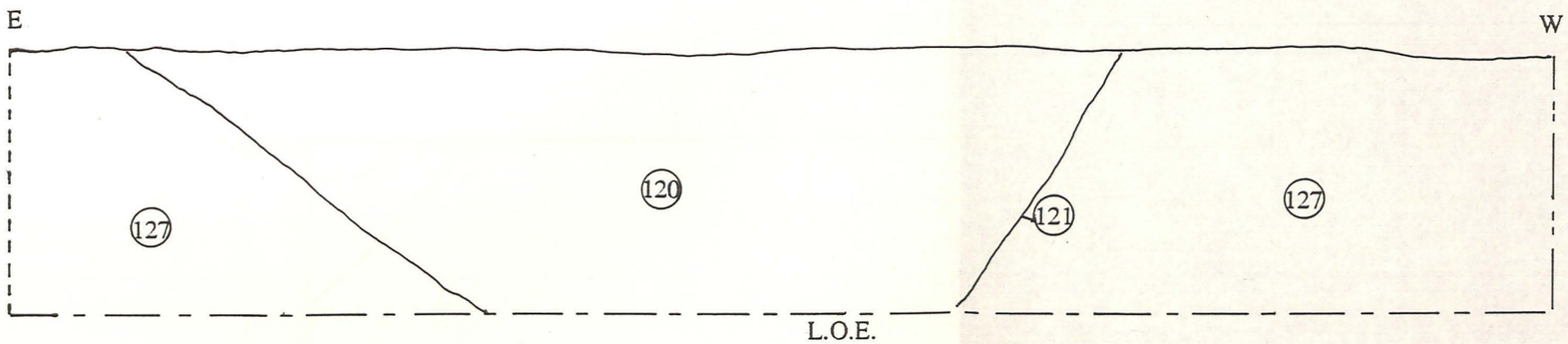

Fig.4

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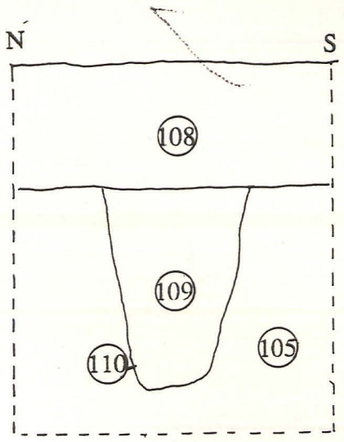

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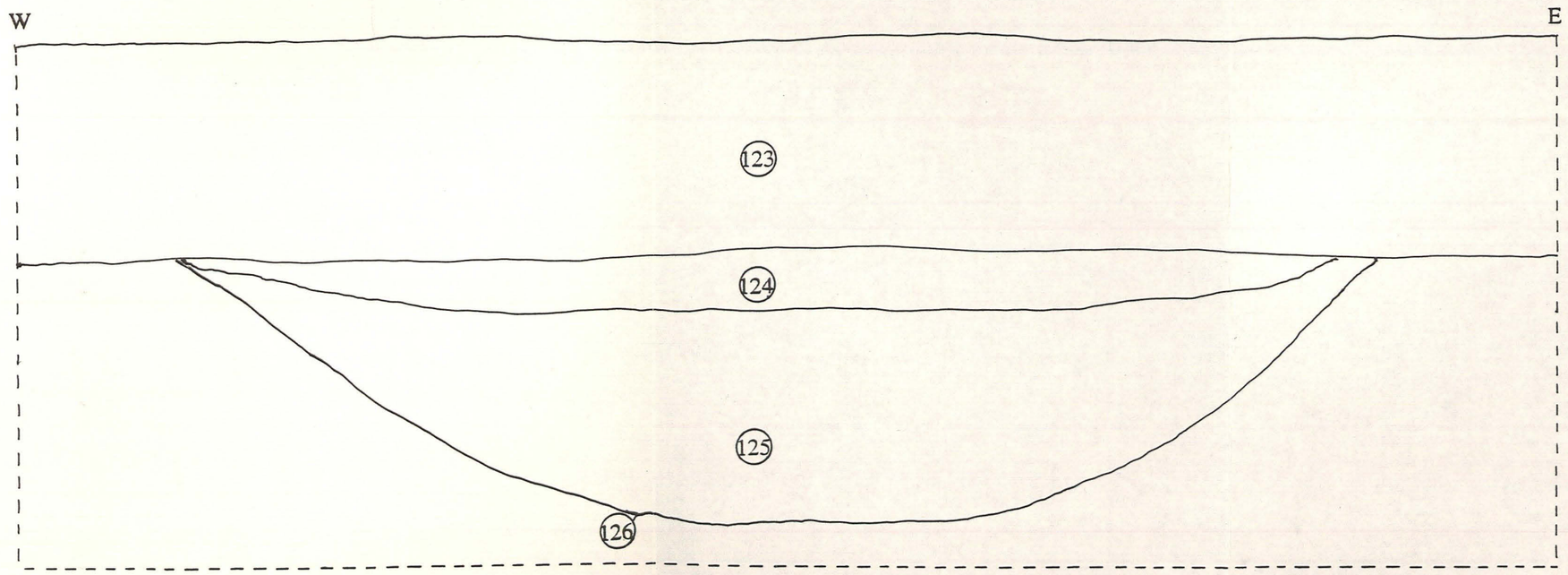

Fig.5