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Jarvis Construction (UK) Ltd

**COMMUNITY HOSPITAL
TURNPIKE ROAD
NEWBURY**

*Phase 1 Archaeological Mitigation
Strip, Map and Sample Investigation
Interim Report*

Planning reference 145254

NGR SU 4970 6770

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24/10/2001

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**Community Hospital
Turnpike Road
Newbury**

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**Community Hospital
Turnpike Road
Newbury**

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Non technical summary

Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a strip, map and sample investigation on the site of a proposed community hospital on the western edge of Newbury. This work has revealed evidence for an extensive network of Romano-British fields. On the eastern edge of this a trackway, two cremation burials, together with pits, suggest a settlement site may lie within the boundaries of the development area further to the east or south-east. Further work is planned on the site including sample excavation within the footprint of proposed buildings and a watching brief across other areas of the site.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Permission has been granted for the construction of a Community Hospital on land off Turnpike Road, Newbury (Planning reference 145254) (Fig.1). Work is to be undertaken by Jarvis Construction (UK) Ltd., on behalf of West Berkshire Priority Care Service NHS Trust. A condition of the permission requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological work.
- 1.2 An evaluation of the development area has already been carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit¹. The evaluation identified an area of archaeological significance comprising Romano-British activity, within the southern part of the site. This consisted of enclosure ditches, suggesting settlement close by but not within the development boundaries.
- 1.3 The condition to the permission requires an archaeological watching brief to be undertaken across the southern part of the site during construction to record any additional archaeological features.
- 1.4 In addition Jarvis construction proposed that a first phase of Strip, Map and Sample (SMS) investigation be undertaken prior to construction. This was undertaken by OAU between 13.08.01 and 06.09.01, across approximately 0.44ha where ground-works associated with the main hospital block intruded into the area of archaeological significance. The purpose of the investigation was to ensure that all archaeological remains were adequately recorded at an early stage, thereby reducing the risk of delay during construction. A second phase of work comprising the remainder of the watching brief will take place

¹ OAU 1998, Community Hospital, Turnpike Road, Newbury; Archaeological Evaluation Report

separately (currently scheduled for early 2002).

- 1.5 This interim report sets out the methodology employed for the SMS, presents a summary of the archaeological findings to date and outlines a programme of future works.

2 Methodology

- 2.1 The work was organised in two stages;
 Stage 1: Strip and map
 Stage 2: Sample excavation
- 2.2 All works were undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Oxford Archaeological Unit's Field Manual (ed. D Wilkinson 1992).

Outline methodology for Stage 1 Strip and Map

- 2.3 The work comprised the machine stripping of an area totalling approximately 0.44ha. Excavations were located as indicated on Figure 1 (attached).
- 2.4 Plans were produced at a scale of 1:100, 1:50 or 1:20 as appropriate.
- 2.5 Artefacts were collected from the surface of features to provide a provisional date.

Outline methodology for Stage 2 sample excavation

- 2.6 An excavation sampling strategy as outlined in Appendix 1 s.9.8 of the WSI was carried out. Hand excavation was undertaken on the basis of the results of the Strip and Map and after consultation with the West Berks Archaeological Officer.
- 2.7 The objectives of this phase were to characterise and date any archaeological remains not already recorded adequately recorded during the evaluation.

3 Results

- 3.1 The investigation revealed significant archaeological remains which have been categorised below by period (Fig.2).

Prehistoric

- 3.2 A possible prehistoric feature was located towards the south-west corner of the site. This large pit (82) measured 4.35m by 3.65m and was roughly oval in plan. It was 1.60m deep, with a distinct shelf 0.60m below the ground surface, giving it a stepped profile. The shelf was most pronounced on the south side, where it was 1.20m wide and may have been intended to facilitate access into the pit, but was missing from the east. It is possible that this was a well or water-hole, although the lower fills were not obviously water-lain. The feature had been

deliberately back-filled and abraded pottery sherds recovered from the upper part of the fill suggest a prehistoric, possibly Bronze Age, date (awaiting detailed analysis).

Roman

- 3.3 The investigation uncovered several apparent Roman features including a field system, a trackway and a series of cremations.

Field system -early phase

- 3.4 A series of ditches and gullies were identified during the investigation. A perfectly straight linear ditch (Group 101) ran north-south across the site for 60m, extending beyond the limits of the excavation in both directions. The ditch was V-shaped in profile, 1.50m wide and up to 0.80m deep. A second ditch (Group 102) branched eastward from 101 at right angles. This feature was shallower, with a maximum depth of 0.30m, and extended for 14m before being truncated out. It appeared in section at the eastern edge of the site, showing that it had continued in this direction prior to truncation. These ditches were found to be contemporary and to form part of a rectilinear field system previously identified from aerial photographs. A continuation of this ditch system had been detected to the south during the evaluation.
- 3.5 Ditch 102 was found to truncate the southern terminus of another ditch (103), that was orientated southwest-northeast, that extended for 23m and continued beyond the northern edge of the excavation. Its alignment was not obviously related to that of the other ditches, but it is thought that it was part of another field boundary.
- 3.6 A possible ditch terminus (123) extended into the northern edge of the excavated area and yielded Romano-British pottery, part of a quern-stone and a large iron nail. Its form and function were unclear as it was only partially within the excavation. It is likely to have been associated with the field system as it appeared to run parallel with ditch 102 and perpendicular to ditch 101, respecting 103.

Field system -later phase

- 3.7 Three gullies (100, 104 and 105) possibly formed a related group of boundaries. For instance 104 ran southward for 35m from the northern edge of the excavation before turning sharply westward, where it extended for a further 6m before terminating. This westward extension was aligned with the northern end of 100, a north-south gully 10m long, which ran parallel to 104. Gully 105 was located just south-east of 104 and was perpendicular to both 100 and 104. The spatial association and common orientations of these features suggests that they were related, probably being the remains of a series of field boundaries. They were all fairly insubstantial due to truncation from later ploughing. The dating of this group of gullies is based on some abraded pottery from 105, although they must post date the field system defined by 101 and 102, since 104 cuts 101.

- 3.8 Finally, another ditch (106) ran northwards for 12m from the southern edge of the excavation before turning east and forming a right angle that continued beyond the site. This feature, although not particularly substantial, was likely to have been the corner of an enclosure or field boundary to the south-east of the excavation. From the right-angled corner of the ditch a gully (107) ran north-eastwards for 22m before terminating. This appears to have a spatial relationship with both the early and later phases of the field system and so may represent an early element retained into the later phase.

Track-way

- 3.9 At the north-eastern end of the site two ditches (108 and 109) defined a track-way aligned northwest-southeast. The ditches were both *c.* 1m wide and 0.30m deep, with regular V-shaped profiles. Romano-British pottery was retrieved from both of the ditches, with a particular concentration in 109. This track would have run diagonally across the fields, and was clearly in use for some time as the original ditches had been re-dug after silting.

Cremations

- 3.10 Two cremation burials (35 and 45) were located adjacent to the track-way. Both had suffered some degree of disturbance from later ploughing. Cremation 45 was by far the better preserved due to its greater depth. This burial was in a circular pit which was 1.00m in diameter and 0.20m deep. The cremated bone itself, which was un-urned, was placed at the centre of the pit and presumably contained within an organic container such as a leather or textile bag. Within this bone deposit were two brooches, which were unburnt and had thus been added after the body had been cremated. Arranged in a ring around the cremation deposit were nine pots including two matching pairs of drinking vessels and a plate. A knife had been placed on the latter. One pot had toppled over while three others were leaning towards the north west, having probably been dislodged while the pit was being back-filled. Cremation 35 was in a more oval pit that measured 0.88m by 0.69m, but had only survived to a depth of 50mm. Again the cremated remains were un-urned and centrally placed, but this time they were surrounded by six vessels. These pots had been severely truncated by ploughing, with only the bases surviving, and as with the other cremation a plate was also uncovered.

Other Features

- 3.11 Also adjacent to the track-way was a sub-circular pit (117). This was 1.80m across and 0.56m deep with near-vertical sides and a flat base. No finds were discovered but its shape is consistent with that of a grain storage pit.
- 3.12 Pit 148 was an irregular elongated oval shape, 3.90m long and 0.10m deep. Its purpose is unknown but it contained Romano-British pottery.
- 3.13 Post-holes 27 and 33 were both located adjacent to the eastern side of gully 104 and may represent the truncated remains of a fence-line which ran alongside the gully.

Post-Medieval

- 3.14 The western edge of the excavation effectively half-sectioned a large hollow which interrupted the slope of the natural topography. This hollow (5) was about 30m long east-west, 20m wide north-south and 3m deep. It was one of a number of such undulations along that side of the London Road which are believed to have resulted from modern gravel quarrying.
- 3.15 A short distance east of that hollow, a ditch (93) ran north-south across site. It curved along its length giving an S-shaped appearance in plan. The ditch yielded a quantity of brick and tile fragments and some large sherds of 17th or 18th century pottery. It is likely to have been a field or property boundary.
- 3.16 A ditch terminus (135) extended 4.30 m from the northern edge of the excavation and contained pottery tentatively dated post-medieval.

Unphased Features

- 3.17 A small circular pit (97), evidently discoloured by burning, contained some fired clay and had a pinkish fill. It is possibly associated with the fence-line formed by post-holes 27 and 33.
- 3.18 A 0.25 m deep pit (152) was 1.30m in diameter and had a concave base. It had been used for dumping burnt material.
- 3.19 A post-hole (150) was located close to pit 152 and also contained burnt material. This may have been a root hole rather than a genuine feature.

4 Summary of Results

- 4.1 The topography of the site, a level gravel terrace overlooking the River Kennet to the south, suggests an ideal location for settlement. The light well-drained soils would have been exploited for cultivation from an early date and the pit, containing small fragments of prehistoric pottery, possibly of Bronze Age date, indicates that the process of forest clearance and the opening up of the landscape to agriculture and permanent settlement was well underway.
- 4.2 By the Roman period the site probably formed a part of a dense network of ditch (and probably hedge) enclosed fields that may have covered the terrace for many miles. In amongst these fields would have sat the farming settlements, either small individual 'family farms' or larger agglomerations. While the Newbury site is dominated by what appear to be field boundaries, nevertheless pits and the two cremations suggest a nearby settlement - probably to the east of the excavated area. How close the settlement sits is difficult to judge. The field boundaries contained few finds, suggesting they may be some distance from habitation (and so little rubbish was finding its way into the ditches, either from dumping or manuring) but cremation cemeteries are often located, if not within the settlement, then close by or even directly attached to them. The double ditch trackway running to the SE may point in the direction of the settlement

which may lie beyond the site boundaries closer to the known Roman road. The location of two cremations next to the trackway is a classic location for burials in the Roman world.

- 4.3 It is likely that much of the Newbury site will contain evidence for further agricultural boundaries, and already at least two phase of enclosure can be seen. It is also likely that more cremation burials will be located close to those already recorded. Rural cemeteries are normally relatively small with twenty or thirty burials probably representing an upper limit, although other concentrations of burials may exist, possibly including inhumations. While the evaluation did not indicate direct settlement it is possible that settlement features do encroach onto the site, possibly to the east or south-east of the Phase 1 excavated area.
- 4.4 Clearly the evaluation did not provide a reliable guide to the density and type of archaeological features on the site. This appears to have been due to two main of reasons.
- Evaluation trenches were only undertaken at a sample level of 2% of the site area. Work here and elsewhere is increasingly demonstrating that a sample level of 5% provides a better picture of the site and more reliably reduces the risk of unexpected discoveries.
 - The Newbury features did not contain either high levels of dark humic soil or high levels of cultural material and were consequently difficult to identify. This would have been particularly the case in narrow evaluation trenches where many of the features were either invisible or appeared to be filled with natural deposits suggesting a natural origin.

5 Forward Programme

- 5.1 The results of the first phase of work demonstrate that the development area contains significant archaeological remains and construction is likely to have a greater impact than indicated by the evaluation. Jarvis Construction have already implemented an enhanced level of archaeological recording in response to these circumstances and propose to continue this approach.
- 5.2 In the original Brief from West Berkshire District Council only the southern part of the site was highlighted as having archaeological significance. The results of the latest phase of work indicate the likelihood of archaeological remains being present across much of the site.
- 5.3 It is proposed that a second phase pre-construction strip map and sample approach, similar to that already undertaken, be followed in those areas where ground will be disturbed by the footprint of the building (see fig. 1). Time and resources will be allowed for this within the programme and a detailed Project Design for these works will be provided once the overall development programme is confirmed (ground clearance may begin early 2002).
- 5.4 On other areas of the site where proposed works are less intrusive, but will nevertheless involve some ground disturbance (e.g. areas of surface

construction, e.g. roads and car-parks, and landscaped areas), a watching brief will be undertaken during construction. The Project Design will also include a method statement and protocols for the watching brief to ensure reasonable time and resources are available for any recording.

- 5.5 Particular note should be made of the location of the cremation burials which are close to the position of a proposed access road. It should be assumed that any works in this area risk disturbing human remains and so time should be built into the programme to reduce the risk of any unplanned delays.
- 5.6 The Project Design will also outline the responsibilities of Jarvis Construction with regard to the post-excavation analysis and publication of the results of the archaeological investigation.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 Archaeological remains of local significance are preserved within the boundaries of the development. The construction of the proposed hospital will have an impact upon these remains.
- 6.2 The impact will be mitigated by a mixed approach comprising strip, map and sample excavation within the footprint of buildings together with a watching brief across other areas of the site. This has been agreed in outline by the Archaeological Officer for West Berkshire District Council.

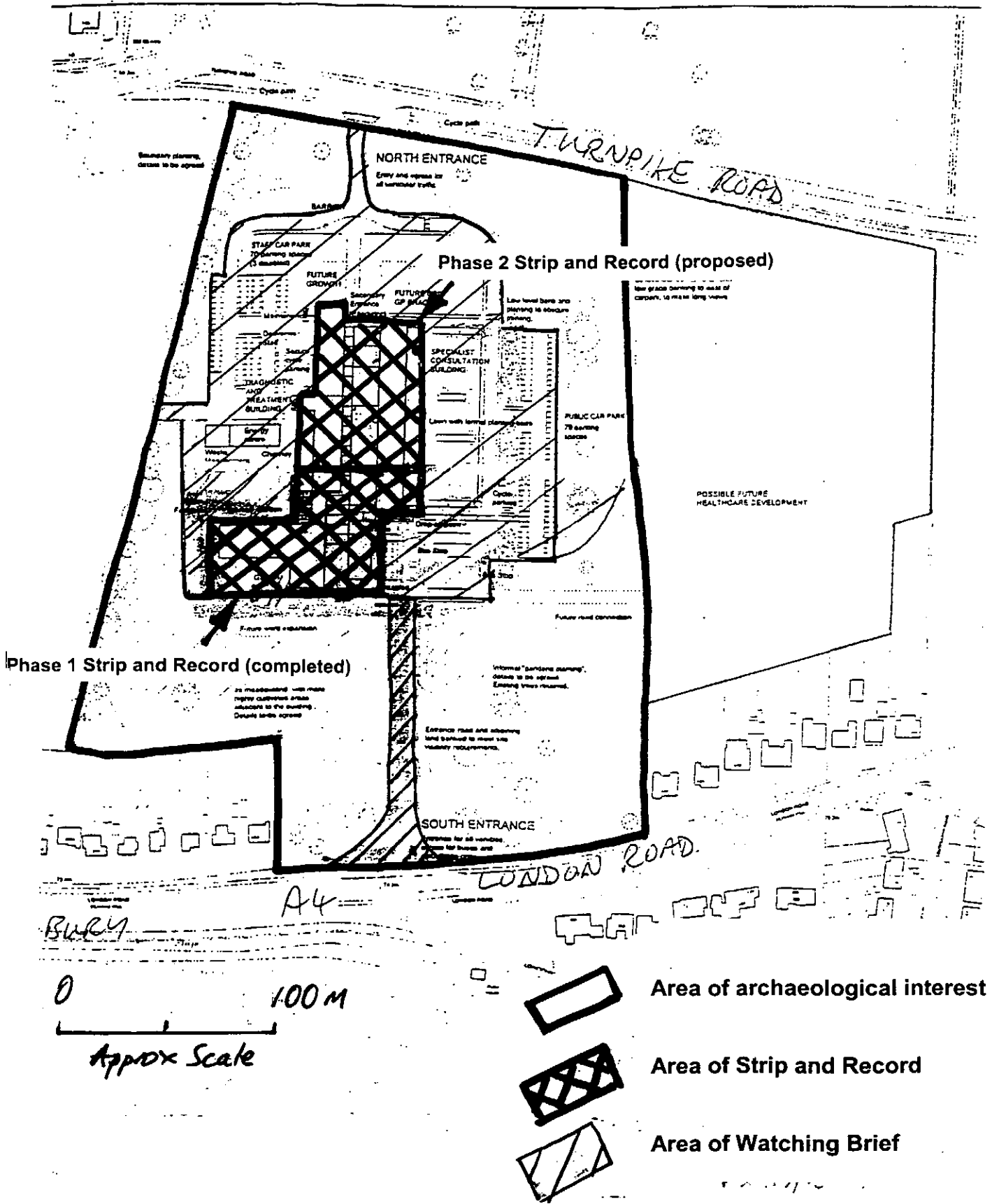

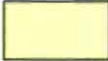





Figure 1 Sketch locating the areas of investigation (not to scale)

Site name:
Newbury
Community
Hospital

Site code:
NEHOS 01

KEY

-  Prehistoric
-  Roman
-  Post-Med
-  Modern
-  Undated

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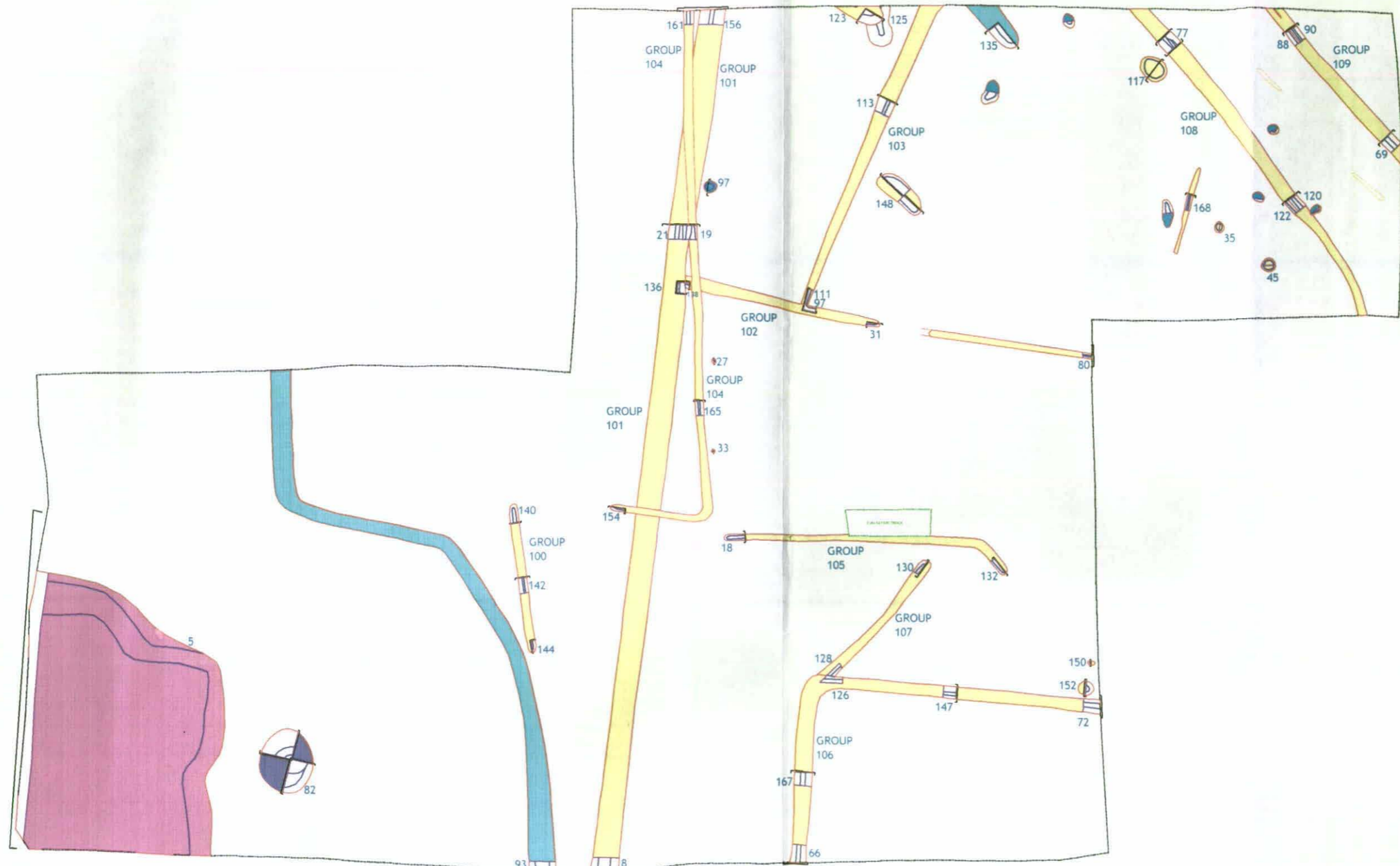


Scale at A3 1:300

Drawing No. NEHOS_01_151001

Plan of
excavated
archaeological
features

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