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Archaeological Service
Sites and Monuments Record

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION OF A PROPOSED
NEW CEMETERY SITE,
LONGDALES ROAD,
BIRMINGHAM
(AREA 2)

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Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt and Laura Templeton

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Archaeological Evaluation at proposed new cemetery site Longdales Road, Birmingham (Area 2)

Chris Patrick and Erica B Darch

Part 1 Project summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Longdales Road, Wythall, Worcestershire (NGR: SP 0533 7761, Fig 1), on behalf of Birmingham City Council Urban Design Department. The client intends to develop the site as the second phase of a new cemetery and has submitted a planning application to Birmingham City Council Planning Department.

An archaeological evaluation had been undertaken earlier in the year on an area to the north of the present site. This evaluation discovered features of Roman date and an excavation of the area revealed a large triple ditched Romano-British enclosure located approximately 200m west of Icknield Street Roman road.

In the current phase of evaluation, three trenches were excavated across the three fields to the south and east of the enclosure. The two trenches nearest to the excavated enclosure revealed more features of Roman date including a possible trackway leading from the Roman road to the enclosure and a possible wooden rectangular structure in the field to the south.

The results of the evaluation indicate that the Romano-British archaeological deposits discovered during the evaluation and excavation of the area to the north continue south into the area of the current evaluation. These include post-holes and gullies relating to part of a structure and a track-way linking the site to Ickneild Street. The site is particularly important as it is one of very few settlements from the Roman period known in the Birmingham area.

Part 2 Detailed report

1. Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Longdales Road, Wythall, Worcestershire (NGR: SP 0533 7761, Fig 1), on behalf of Birmingham City Council Urban Design Department. The client intends to develop the site as the second phase of a new cemetery and has submitted a planning application to Birmingham City Council Planning Department. The Planning Archaeologist for Birmingham City Council considered that a site of archaeological interest might be affected by the development, in light of the discovery of Roman deposits in the adjacent fields during the evaluation of the first phase of the cemetery to the north of the present site.

1.2 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IFA 1999).

The project also conforms to a brief prepared by Birmingham City Council Planning Department and dated 21st May 2002 (BCC 2002), for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (AS 2002).

1.3 Aims

The aims of the evaluation were to define the nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains on the site, so that an appropriate mitigation strategy can be devised (BCC. 2002).

2. Methods

2.1 Documentary search

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). In addition the following sources were also consulted:

Cartographic sources

- Ordnance Survey 1st edition,

Documentary sources

- Site archives (from earlier excavations, evaluations etc).

3. Topographical and archaeological context

The evaluation of the current area is the second phase of a proposed cemetery development on the southern edge of the City of Birmingham. The whole development site comprises just over 13ha of land lying between Longdales Road and Ickneild Street which is divided into seven fields surrounding Lilycroft Farm which spans the county boundary between the City of Birmingham and Worcestershire. The second phase of the proposed cemetery consists of a field to the east of Lilycroft Farm and two fields to the south of Primrose Hill (Fig 2).

Topographically the proposed development site is located on a ridge overlooking Birmingham, the three fields which comprise the second phase of the cemetery are located on the eastern side of the ridge which slopes down to Ickneild Street. The fields are under pasture and are surrounded by mature hedgerows.

The soils are of the Brockhurst 2 Association (711c) comprising typically stagnogley, slightly stony clay loam soils, in fine loamy drift over mudstone. They are seasonally waterlogged and overlie solid geology of Mercian Mudstone, glacial boulder clay and undifferentiated drift (Ragg *et al* 1984; Geological Survey of England and Wales 1989).

Prehistoric finds from the area include a single flint blade which was found on the Lilycroft Farm site and a Neolithic axe which was found to the 1km to the north-east of the site (BSMR 20152-BI1792).

An evaluation of the first phase of the cemetery to the north of the present site identified a series of shallow linear gully-ditches on perpendicular alignments in association with a small number of pits/postholes (Vaughan 2002). The features contained substantial quantities of pottery sherds, dating from the 1st to 4th centuries but with a small proportion being able to be more precisely dated to the 2nd to 4th centuries. An excavation of the site in the late summer of 2002 (Fig 2) revealed a triple ditched Roman enclosure measuring approximately 80m by 60m containing the remains of a round house and a cobbled yard surface (BUFAU forthcoming). The enclosure seemed to date to the later Romano-British period 2nd to 4th century AD. Further trial trenching identified another possible enclosure to the north-east and alongside Ickneild Street which borders the site to the east.

Ickneild Street Roman road (also known as Rykneild Street) forms the eastern border to both phases of the cemetery (BSMR 20577-BI2227/WSM 03276). Its course has been traced from Gloucester to Birmingham and excavations have taken place along it at Weoley Hill and Sutton Park (Hetherington and Whitehouse 1966; VCH I 1901; Walker 1936). Other occupation in the area includes a possible 1st to 3rd century farmstead at Kings Norton 1km to the north of the present site, also in the area is a Roman coin hoard reportedly found 0.5km to the north-west (BSMR 20122-BI 1765). The Roman fort at Metchley is also visible from the site.

There are no recorded archaeological finds from the Saxon period in the vicinity of the site. Place-name evidence such as Moundsley Hall and Headley Heath derives from the word for 'clearings' and suggests that the area was heavily wooded at this time. Ridge and furrow which may date to the later medieval period is present in a number of fields within the proposed cemetery area (BSMR 20519-BI2168; 20520-B2169). Excavations undertaken to the east of Ickneild Street opposite the present site revealed 13th-14th century occupation evidence sealed by ridge and furrow dating from the 14th century and later (Edwards and Jackson 1998). A number of tree bowls were also present and were interpreted as showing the clearance of the woodland in the early medieval period.

The farm house of Lilycroft Farm is a grade II listed building, with late 17th and early 18th century elements (BSMR 03681-BI1317), and it is thought in the light of recent finds that the farm may have earlier origins.

4. Fieldwork

4.1 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (AS 2002). Fieldwork was undertaken between 24th and 28th October 2002. Three trenches, amounting to just over 940m² in area, were excavated over the site area. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2. Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket and under archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits

were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Service practice (CAS 1995). Mention any variation from standard practice. On completion of excavation, the trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

4.2 **The methods in retrospect**

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved, however flooding in Trench 1 prevented excavation of some features.

5. **Description**

The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1. The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figs 2-5

5.1 **Phase 1 Natural deposits**

Natural deposits were encountered in all three trenches at depths of between 0.35-0.5m

5.2 **Phase 2 Roman**

Features of Romano-British date were found in Trenches 1 and 2. The features in Trench 1 consisted of a pair of linear gullies aligned approximately east to west, the southern gully measured 0.5m wide and 0.16m deep (Fig 3) while the northern gully was narrower and measured 0.4m wide. The gullies were spaced approximately 6m apart with the area in between them covered with a layer of blue-grey clay with a large quantity of round pebbles (105,109). Roman pottery was recovered from the fill of the southern gully (108) and from the pebble surface during machining.

A cluster of features of apparent Roman date were found at the west end of Trench 2 (Figs 4 and 5). The most westerly of these was a linear terminal/pit (213), which was aligned north to south and measured 1.3m wide and 0.25m deep. To the east of the terminal was a row of three post-holes (215, 217, 219), aligned approximately north-west to south-east with a gully (210) perpendicular to them aligned north-east to south-west and an area of compact gravel and pebbles to the south (221). The two eastern postholes (215, 217) were sub-rounded in plan measuring approximately 0.4x0.35m and were 0.22m deep. The fills were of blue-grey clay with a large quantity of rounded stones, some of which appeared to have been fractured by heat. The westerly posthole (219) was smaller and shallower than the other two and had a more gravelly fill. The gully was 0.5m wide, 0.1m deep with sloping sides and a flat base, along with the postholes it formed the boundary to a layer of compact blue-grey clay and small stones that appeared to be a surface (221). Further to the east was another ditch terminal/pit (203) measuring 1.6m wide and 0.25m deep with sloping sides. The fill was a blue grey clay (204) and contained sherds of Roman pottery. Further east was a curvilinear gully measuring 0.2m wide and 0.1m deep the gully was aligned approximately north-south but was gently curving off to the northeast and terminated just short of the northern edge of the trench. The fill was a light grey clay (206) but contained no finds. Three metres to the east was another linear aligned north-south which then turned to the northwest (211). The feature measured 0.7m wide and 0.15m deep with shallow sloping sides and a flat base

5.3 Phase 3 Post-medieval

The post-medieval deposits consisted largely of 19th century ceramic field drains, which were present in all three trenches. A stakehole (304) and three charcoal patches (305, 306, 307) in Trench 3 also seem post-medieval in date. Low and narrow ridge and furrow was present in Field F and overlies a marl pit in the north-east corner of the field.

6. Artefacts

6.1 Artefact recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995).

6.2 Method of analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. Artefacts were identified, quantified, dated and recorded on a Microsoft Access 1997 database. A *terminus post quem* date was assigned to each stratified context.

The pottery was examined and recorded by fabric type according to the fabric reference series maintained by the Service (Hurst and Rees 1992).

Pottery fabrics are referenced to the fabric reference series maintained by the Service (Hurst 1994).

6.3 Artefact analysis

The assemblage contained material that dated to the Roman and medieval to post-medieval periods. The Roman material was highly abraded, while the later material was less abraded.

There were 18 sherds of fabric 12 (Severn Valley ware) from contexts 101, 105, 201 and 204, and one sherd of fabric 43 (samian ware) from context 212. A rim sherd from context 109 dated from the 3rd to the 4th century (Webster, 1976, 24). Nine pieces of flat roof tile from context 101 were of a type made from the 13th to 18th century (J D Hurst, pers comm). A single abraded fragment of tile from context 201 was undated. Two pieces of undated fuel ash slag came from contexts 201 and 218.

Contexts 105 and 204 have a *terminus post quem* of mid 1st to 4th century, context 212 of 1st to early 3rd century and context 101 of 13th to 18th century. Context 218 contained no dateable material, and although context 201 contained Roman pottery that could be dated from the mid 1st to 4th century, it also contained a small piece of tile which may be later.

There was clearly activity at the site in the Roman period. Although the material would be consistent with a domestic function, the assemblage is too small to draw many conclusions about the activities carried out on the site.

7. Environment

7.1 Sampling policy

The environmental sampling strategy conformed to standard Service practice (CAS 1995; appendix 4). Samples of 10 litres were taken from two post-holes (contexts 216 and 218).

7.2 Method of analysis

The samples were processed by flotation followed by wet sieving using a Siraf tank. The flots were collected on a 300µm sieve and the residue sorted on a 1mm mesh. This allows for the recovery of items such as small animal bones, molluscs and seeds.

The residues were fully sorted by eye and the abundance of each category of environmental remains estimated. The flots were fully sorted using a low power EMT light microscope and remains identified using modern reference specimens housed at the Service.

7.3 Results

No plant remains were present in the flots. Both samples did however contain a quantity of rounded heavily burnt pebbles, some which had been fractured by heat. These burnt stones were interpreted as being pot boilers, used domestically for heating pots of water.

8. Discussion

8.1 Roman

The features found in Trenches 1 and 2 were very shallow with grey silty-clay fills and were very similar in nature to those discovered during the evaluation of the area to the north. The evaluation seems to show the site discovered in the earlier evaluations and excavations extending east and south into the current. The excavated enclosure was thought to date from between the 2nd and 4th centuries AD, but whether the remains discovered in the current evaluation trenches are contemporary with it is uncertain due to the lack of precise dates from the pottery. All of the pottery recovered was Severn Valley ware and only gave a broad Roman-British date of between the 1st and 4th centuries with the exception of a rim sherd from Trench 1 which was dated to the 3rd-4th century. A smaller pottery assemblage was recovered from the current evaluation than was recovered from the evaluation of the area to the north, but like the assemblage from the earlier evaluation it demonstrated the dominance of the locally made Severn Valley wares on the site in the Roman period and suggests the presence of fairly low status domestic activity.

The features in Trench 1 could be interpreted as being two ditches flanking a pebble surfaced track-way, leading from Ickneild Street to the enclosure at the top of the ridge. No certain entrance was found to the enclosure but could have been either on the southern side where gaps in the ditches were detected, or on the eastern side/south-eastern corner, which was outside the excavated area (Josh Williams pers comm). Either location would be appropriate for a track approaching from the east. The postholes in Trench 2 would seem to be the remains of a structure of some kind and are probably associated with the shallow gully that runs perpendicular to them and the area of gravel/pebble surface whose extent was demarcated by the features. The burnt and heat-fractured stones found in the post-holes are interpreted as being pot-boilers used for heating water. These are often found on sites dating to the Iron Age or early Romano-British period in the West Midlands and suggest domestic activity such as cooking was taking place. The fuel ash that was also found in the post-hole maybe a by-product of the extreme heat, which fractured the stones.

8.2 Post-medieval

Post-medieval evidence such as the marl pit and the ridge and furrow shows that the fields were in arable use for much of the post-medieval period opposed to their pastoral use today.

9. Significance

In considering significance, the Secretary of State's criteria for the scheduling of ancient monuments (DoE 1990, annex 4), have been used as a guide.

These nationally accepted criteria are used to assess the importance of an ancient monument and considering whether scheduling is appropriate. Though scheduling is not being considered in this case they form an appropriate and consistent framework for the assessment of any archaeological site. The criteria should not, however, be regarded as definitive; rather they are indicators, which contribute to a wider judgement based on the individual circumstances of a case.

The results of the evaluation indicate that the archaeological deposits discovered during the evaluation and excavation continue to the east and south of Lilycroft Farm into the current evaluation area. The site is particularly important as it is one of very few settlements from the Roman period known in the Birmingham area. The second phase of evaluation has shown evidence for structures and a trackway linking the site to Ickneild Street.

10. Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Longdales Road, Wythall, Worcestershire (NGR: SP 0533 7761, Fig 1), on behalf of Birmingham City Council Urban Design Department.

An archaeological evaluation had been undertaken earlier in 2002, to the north of the present site, this had discovered features of Roman date and a full excavation of the area revealed a large triple ditched Romano-British enclosure located approximately 200m west of Ickneild Street Roman road.

The evaluation of the present area, consisted of the excavation of three trenches across the three fields to the south and east of the enclosure. The two trenches nearest to the excavated enclosure revealed more features of Roman date including a possible trackway leading from the Roman road to the enclosure and a possible wooden rectangular structure in the field to the south.

The results of the evaluation indicated that the Roman-British archaeological deposits discovered during the evaluation and excavation extended south and east into the present area. These include post-holes and gullies relating to part of a structure and a track-way linking the site to Ickneild Street. The site is particularly important as it is one of very few settlements from the Roman period known in the Birmingham area.

11. The archive

The archive consists of:

- 38 Context records ASI
- 1 Colour transparency film
- 1 Black and white photographic films
- 4 Scale drawings
- 1 Box of finds

1 Computer disk

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum

Hartlebury Castle

Hartlebury

Near Kidderminster

Worcestershire DY11 7XZ

Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416

12. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank Janice Baker of Birmingham City Council Urban Design Department and Dr Mike Hodder, Birmingham City Council's Planning Archaeologist, for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project. Thanks also to Josh Williams of BUFAU for information on their excavations on Area 1.

13. **Personnel**

The fieldwork and report preparation was led by Chris Patrick. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Simon Woodiwiss. Fieldwork was undertaken with assistance from Richard Lee, finds analysis by Erica Darch, environmental analysis by Andy Mann and illustration by Carolyn Hunt and Laura Templeton.

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15.

Abbreviations

BSMR Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record

WSM Numbers prefixed with 'WSM' are the primary reference numbers used by the Worcestershire County Sites and Monuments Record.

Trench 1

Site area: Field E

Maximum dimensions: Length: 150m Width: 2m Depth: 0.4m

Orientation: NW-SE then turns NW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Dark brown silty soil, occasional small stones.	0-0.15m
101	Subsoil	Light brown orange-brown silty clay occasional small stones.	0.15-0.4m
102	Natural	Orange brown clay.	0.4m+
103	Fill	Fill of linear 104. Blue grey coloured silty clay with small stones and charcoal.	0.4-0.54m
104	Cut	Cut of shallow gully aligned E-W 0.7m wide, 0.15m deep, filled by 103.	0.4-0.54m
105	Layer	Layer of blue-grey clay with small rounded pebbles. Same as 109.	0.4-0.45m
106	Cut	Cut of linear gully aligned E-W. Unexcavated due to flooding	0.4m+
107	Fill	Grey brown silty-sandy clay fill of 108.	0.38-0.52m
108	Cut	Cut of shallow gully, aligned E-W 0.6m wide, 0.14m deep, filled by 107.	0.38-0.52m
109	Layer	Layer of blue grey clay with large quantity of rounded pebbles. Same as 105.	0.38-+
110	Cut	Cut of E-W aligned gully, filled by 111. Unexcavated.	0.38-+
111	Fill	Blue grey clay fill of 110. Unexcavated.	0.38-+

Trench 2

Site area: Field F

Maximum dimensions: Length: 160m Width: 2m Depth: 0.5m

Orientation: NE-SW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Topsoil	Mid brown silty soil, occasional small stones.	0-0.3m
201	Subsoil	Light yellow-brown silty clay occasional small stones.	0.3-0.5m
202	Natural	Yellow brown clay.	0.5m+
203	Cut	Cut of pit or ditch terminal filled by 204, 0.25m deep, 1.6m wide, circular in plan with gently sloping sides.	0.4-0.66m
204	Fill	Fill of 203, blue grey coloured clayey silt with lots of small rounded stones. Roman pottery present.	0.4-0.66m
205	Cut	Cut of curvilinear gully, 0.2m wide, 0.1m deep filled by 206.	0.5-0.6m
206	Fill	Light blue grey clayey silt fill with small rounded pebbles. Fill of 205.	0.5-0.6m
207	Cut	Shallow sub-circular pit feature 1.14m wide, 0.12m deep, filled by 208.	0.5-0.62m
208	Fill	Fill of sub-circular pit 207. Reddish brown clayey silt with rounded pebbles and charcoal.	0.5-0.62m
209	Fill	Fill of linear gully, grey-brown clayey silt with abundant pebbles and charcoal.	0.45-0.55m
210	Cut	Cut of N-S aligned gully, filled by 210, 0.5m wide, 0.1m deep, sloping sides with flat base.	0.45-0.55m
211	Cut	Cut of linear gully, aligned N-S then turning towards NW, 0.7m wide, 0.15m deep, filled by 212.	0.45-0.6m
212	Fill	Blue-grey clayey silt fill of 211, with rounded stones and charcoal, Roman pottery present.	0.45-0.6m
213	Cut	Pit/linear terminal aligned approximately NE-SW, 0.25m deep, 1.3m wide, filled with 214. Gentle sloping sides with a gully at the base.	0.4-0.65m

214	Fill	Grey-brown clayey silt with rounded pebbles. Fill of 213.	0.4-0.65m
215	Cut	Cut of sub-circular posthole, 0.4m in diameter, 0.22m deep, filled by 216. Associated with postholes 217 and 219.	0.4-0.62m
216	Fill	Mixed grey-brown clayey silt fill of 215. Abundant rounded pebbles and flue ash present	0.4-0.62m
217	Cut	Cut of sub-circular posthole measuring 0.42mx0.32m, 0.22m deep, filled by 218	0.4-0.62m
218	Fill	Grey clayey-silt fill with abundant rounded stones. Fill of 217.	0.4-0.62m
219	Cut	Cut of sub-circular posthole, measuring 0.32mx0.22m, 0.15m deep, filled by 220.	0.4-0.55m
220	Fill	Grey-brown clayey silt with gravel. Fill of 219.	0.4-0.55m
221	Layer	Layer of grey-brown silty clay with large quantity of sub-rounded stones. Possible surface bounded by postholes and gully 210.	0.35-0.4m

Trench 3

Site area: Field G

Maximum dimensions: Length: 160m Width: 2m Depth: 0.35m

Orientation: NE-SW

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) = top and bottom of deposits
300	Topsoil	Dark brown silty soil, occasional small stones.	0-0.15m
301	Subsoil	Medium brown sandy silt with occasional small rounded stones.	0.15-0.35m
302	Natural	Light orange brown clay with patches of grey clay.	0.35m+
303	Fill	Fill of stake hole 304, blue grey clay with carbonised wood and charcoal.	0.35-0.0.49m

304	Cut	Cut of stake hole measuring 0.1mx0.23m and 0.14m deep. Filled by 303.	0.35-0.49m
305	Layer	Very thin layer of blue grey clay with charcoal. Oval shaped measuring approximately 0.1m diameter and 10mm deep.	0.35-0.36m
306	Layer	Very thin layer of blue grey clay with charcoal. Oval shaped measuring approximately 0.1m diameter and 10mm deep.	0.35-0.36m
307	Layer	Very thin layer of blue grey clay with charcoal. Oval shaped measuring approximately 0.1m diameter and 10mm deep.	0.35-0.36m

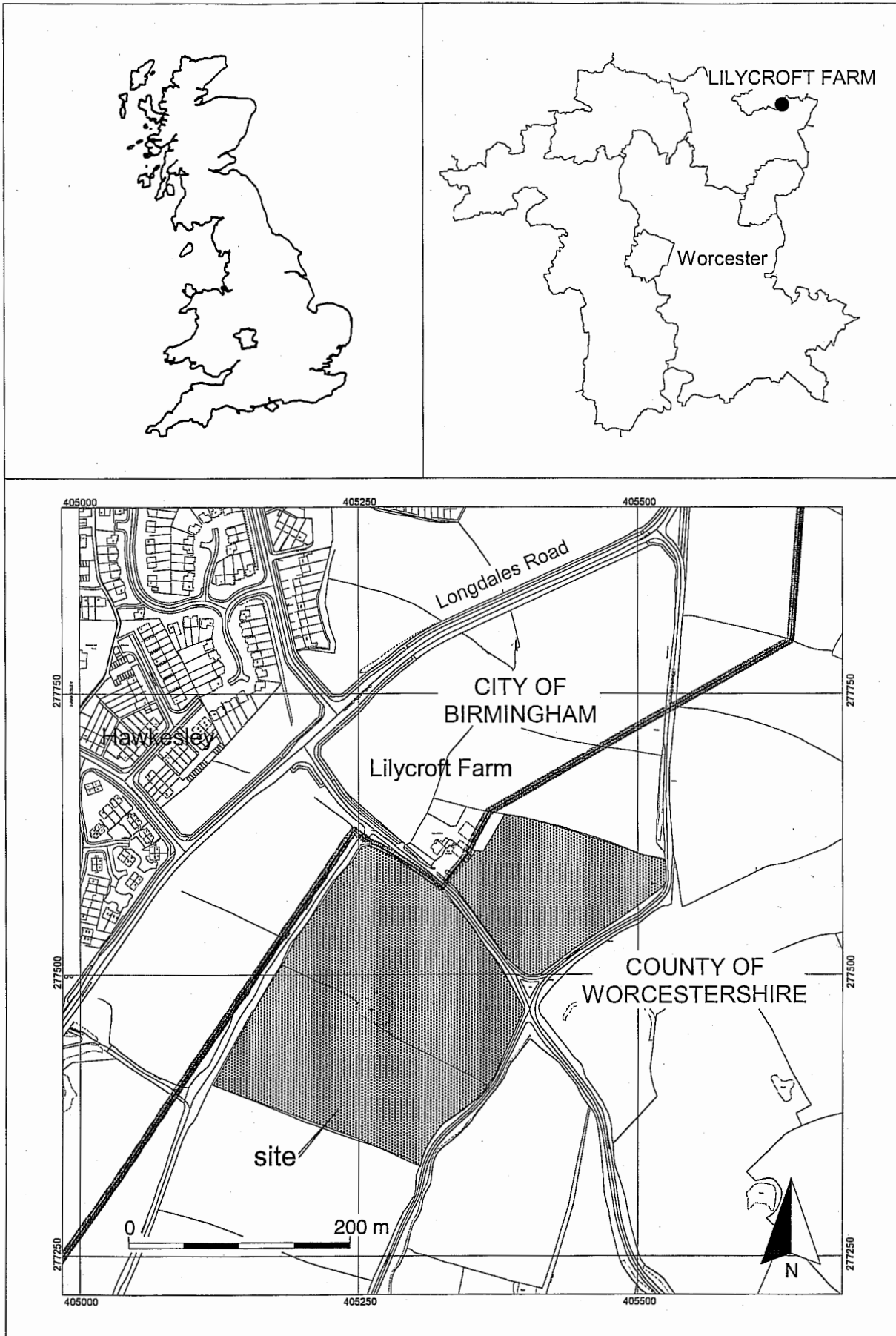
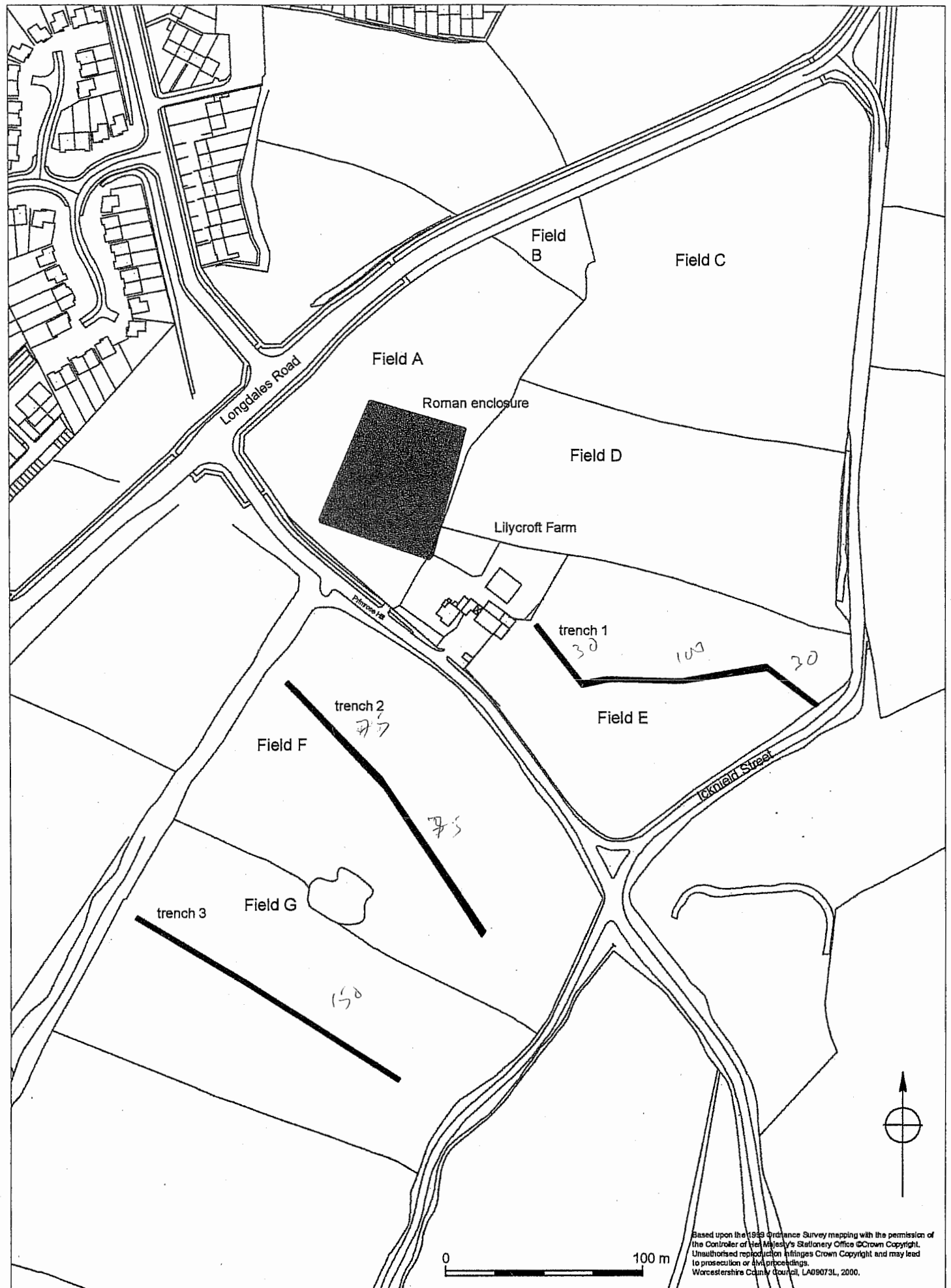


Figure 1: Location of Site



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Figure 2: Trench locations

20

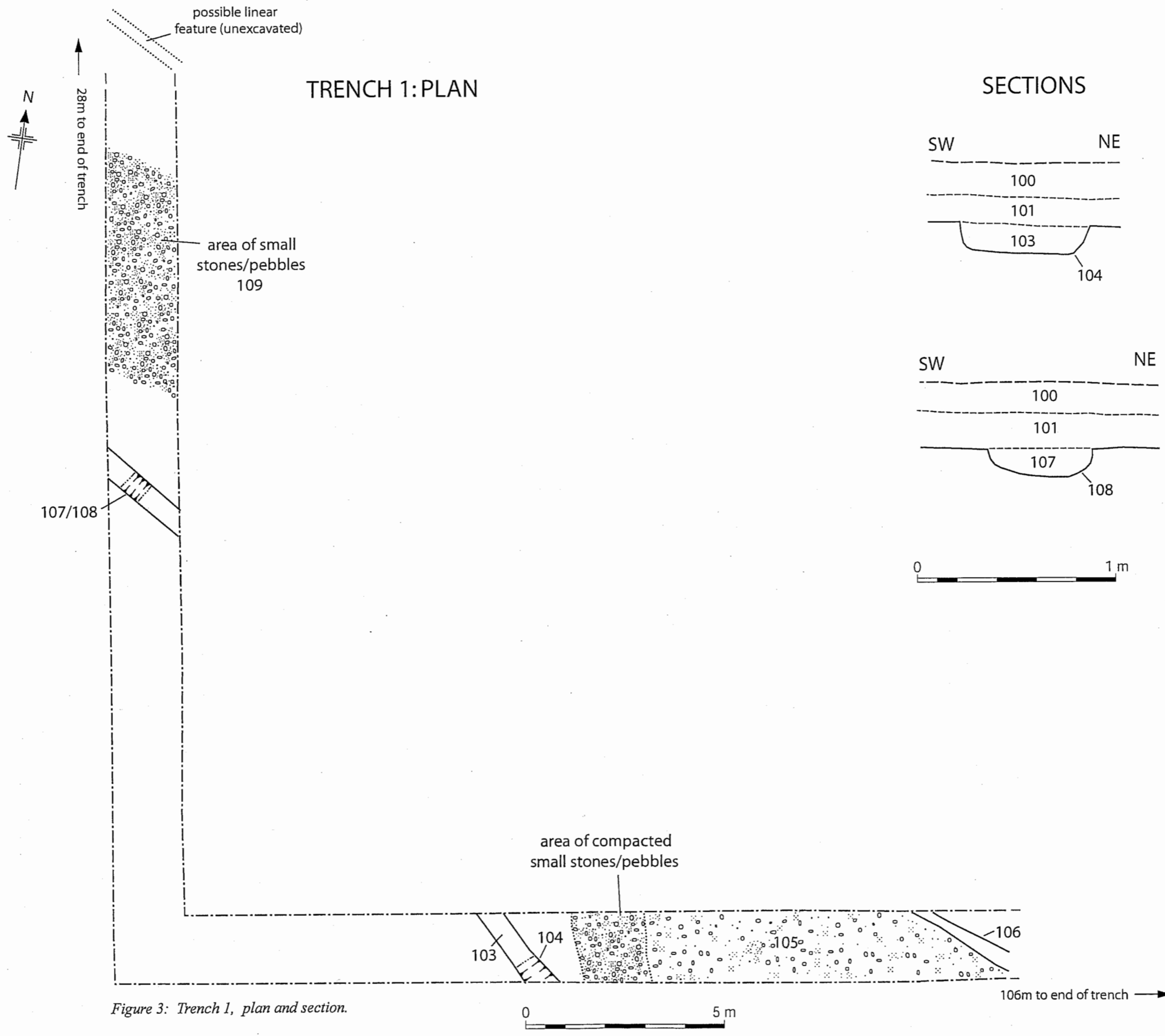


Figure 3: Trench 1, plan and section.

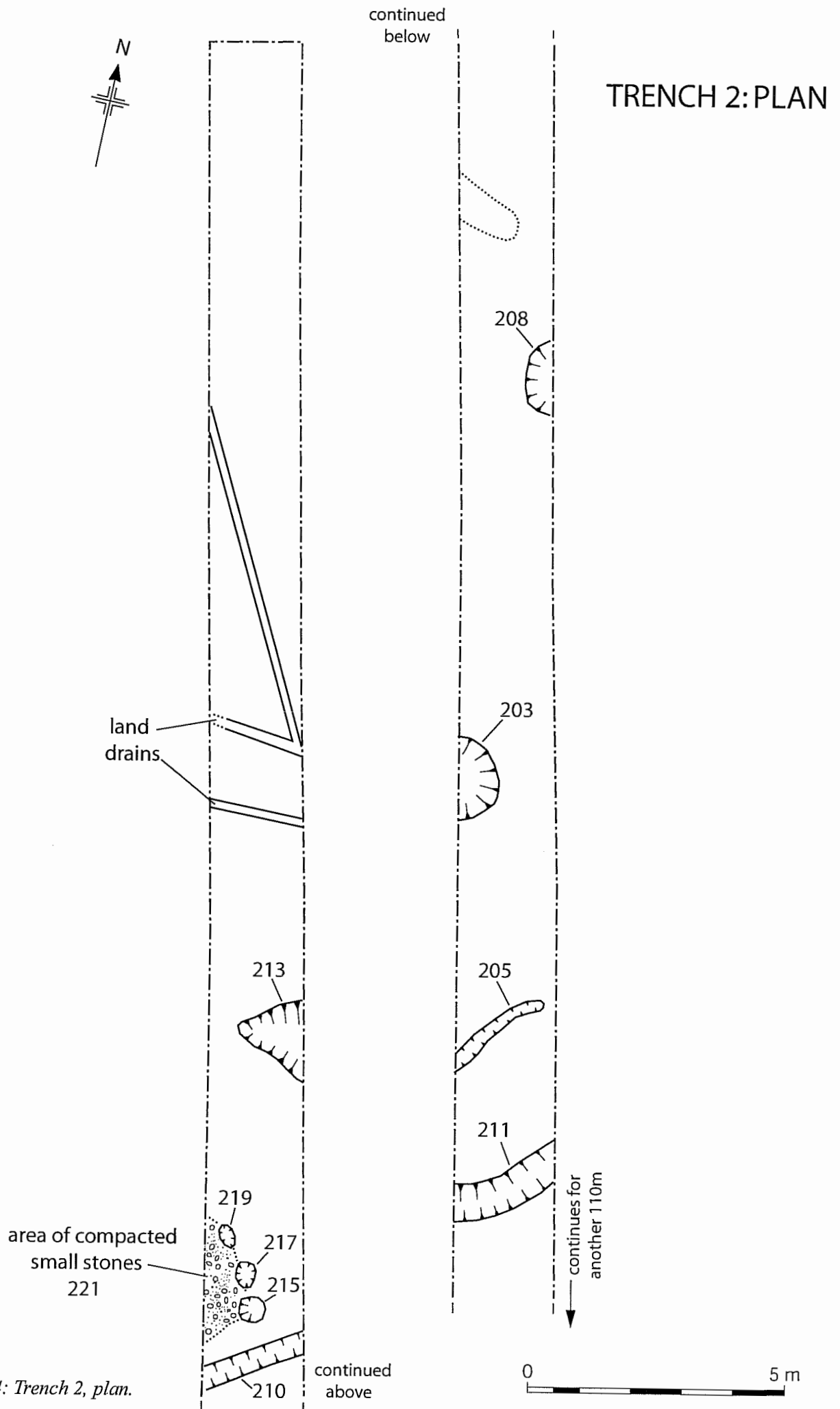


Figure 4: Trench 2, plan.

TRENCH 2: SECTIONS

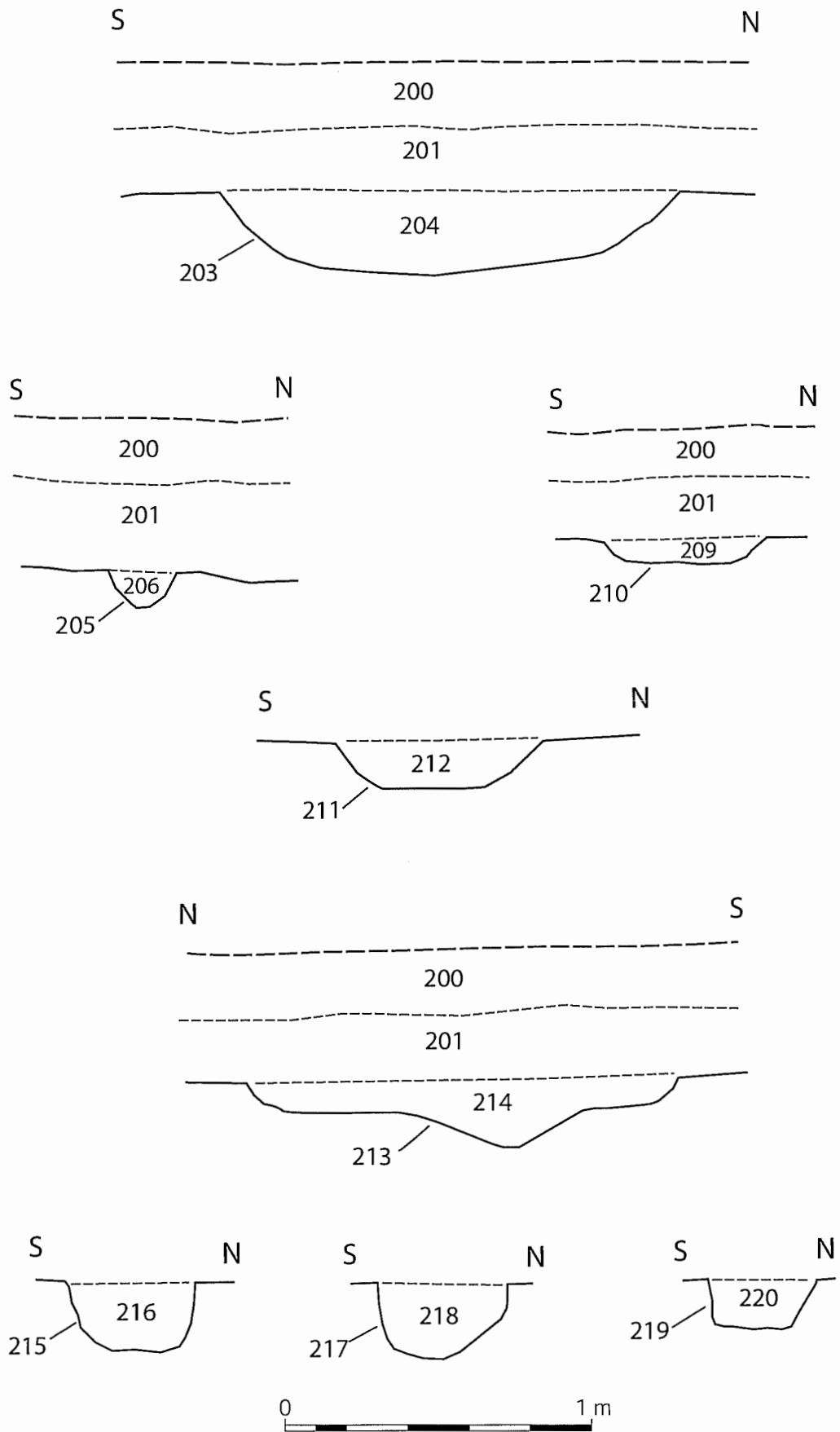


Figure 5: Trench 2, sections.