

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT FOUR WAYS CROSS,
WILLAND, DEVON 2007
(PHASE 1)
POST-EXCAVATION ASSESSMENT REPORT AND UPDATED PROJECT DESIGN**

Prepared on behalf of CgMs Ltd

**by
M.F.R Steinmetzer**

with contributions from
Michael Allen, Jenny Durrant, Tim Gent, Graham Langman, Henrietta Quinnell
& Kerry Tyler

Exeter Archaeology

Project No. 5933

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SUMMARY

A series of archaeological excavations were undertaken by Exeter Archaeology at Four Ways Cross, Willand, Devon (ST 0384 1138), between September 2006 and January 2008.

The work took place in advance of the development of some 5 hectares of land, and revealed activity of late prehistoric and Roman date. This included the remains of a circular ditched feature, possibly a barrow or mortuary enclosure, of early Neolithic origin, which seems to have survived as a visible feature within an area used until the middle Bronze Age. This represents the only feature of its type and date excavated in the Southwest.

Segmented ditches to two enclosures of Bronze Age date were exposed, with one possibly reworked during the late prehistoric or Roman period. A further circular enclosure was dated to the mid to late Iron Age.

Further probable prehistoric features included a post-pit alignment, a posthole alignment and a small enclosure. Two linear features can be securely dated to the post-medieval period.

1. INTRODUCTION

A series of excavations and watching briefs were undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) at Four Ways Cross, Willand, Devon (ST 0384 1138) on behalf of CgMs Ltd. as part of a condition attached to planning permission (05/2177/OUT) granted by Mid Devon District Council for the industrial redevelopment of a 5 hectare area on the outskirts of Willand. The project was undertaken according to a method statement produced by EA in March 2007 (Valentin 2007). This report represents the post-excavation assessment report for the Phase 1 works only and it is envisaged that a combined publication will be produced after completion of Phase 2. Certain elements may therefore be modified at that stage.

Preliminary works comprised trench evaluations undertaken between September 2006 and March 2007. An Area excavation was carried out in May-June 2007(lower site), followed by the upper site in July 2007. Outside of the main excavation areas an extensive programme of monitoring and recording was carried out during the construction of the access road and extensive landscaping works in the lower site.

1.1 Original aims and objectives

The original objectives for the recording of the project were detailed in the project brief supplied by the Senior Archaeologist (DCHES) for Devon County Council (DCC). These were:

- to monitor all the groundworks associated with the construction of a new industrial estate at Four Ways Cross, Willand, that were likely to impact upon buried archaeological material;
- to excavate, record and interpret archaeological features located across the site; and
- to report the results and deposit the finds and archive

1.2 Summary of results

The main results from the project, can be summarised as follows:

General state of preservation of deposits

Within the site, preservation of archaeological deposits was generally good, with only a small area in the southern corner of the development area truncated as a result of works associated with a water main. There was also some localised truncation resulting from post-medieval and modern agricultural activity.

Prehistoric

Neolithic

The earliest features on the site date to the early Neolithic. The principal component was a segmented penannular ring-ditch with an associated internal rubble mound. This had the appearance of a barrow, although it is possible that it represented the remains of a mortuary enclosure, with the stone representing the debris from collapsed walling. Significant animal and/or tree disturbance has removed any possibility of identifying human activity within the enclosure, and subsequent cultivation had dislodged part of the stone layer. 17253

Sited just below the ridgeline, the complex measured approximately 13.75m in external diameter and had survived under a thick layer of accumulated soils that had

partially preserved it from the effects of modern ploughing. The surrounding ditch, which was on average approximately 1.4m wide and roughly 0.68m deep, had been excavated in up to 10 distinct segments, with a relatively flat bottom and steeply sloping sides. There is evidence of a narrow causeway in the northern corner of the ditch. Around much its circuit, the ditch contained three clearly defined fills, suggesting that the segments belong to a single phase of activity. The primary fill had accumulated quite rapidly, while a soil had been able to develop at the interface of the secondary and final fill. This tertiary fill contained stone of the same type as the capping of the feature, suggesting that it had accumulated once cultivation of the area had commenced.

The type of stones used for the cairn indicated that they had been deliberately selected and collected locally, to be used in the mound. A number of tree-hollows and/or animal burrows punctuated the natural surface of the cairn. There were no internal features under the central mound and nothing to suggest that the stone was part of an enclosure; however, the level of disturbance may well have removed evidence of this. Twenty-three pieces of worked flint and 12 sherds of Neolithic pottery were recovered from the primary ditch fill. The secondary fill produced 9 sherds of Neolithic pottery and 17 flints, while the tertiary fill produced 10 sherds of middle Bronze Age pottery and 5 sherds of unidentified prehistoric date, and 16 pieces of worked flint.

Bronze Age

An L-shaped ditch, possibly part of a smaller segmented enclosure, was located immediately to the north of the circular Neolithic feature and extended for approximately 46m across the site. This enclosure consisted of a longer N-S aligned, slightly curved segment, which was 0.71m wide and roughly 0.43m deep, while the return consisted of a shorter E-W aligned linear, which was approximately 0.7m wide and roughly 0.46m deep. Three sherds of middle Bronze Age pottery were recovered from the lower and upper fills. A possible posthole was located within the entrance, although it was heavily disturbed.

Iron Age

A ring-ditch was located on higher ground to the north-west of the Neolithic feature. The ditch was approximately 0.6m wide and roughly 0.25m deep, with an external diameter of 12.58m. There was no indication of internal or external mounds or banks or other internal features and the ditch itself had been heavily truncated by ploughing. A total of 146 sherds of early Iron Age pottery were recovered from the fill of the curvilinear ditch, along with a single sherd of probably residual Neolithic pottery. As many as 115 of the early Iron Age sherds were recovered from the southern terminus, and probably belong to at least three different vessels.

Prehistoric or Roman features (not closely dated)

A collection of features, mainly ditch sections, was exposed in the southern, or lower part of the site. These are notable for their almost complete lack of dating material, resulting in only relative dating being possible.

A large, curving, segmented ditch, approximately 1.25m wide and roughly 0.6m deep, was located in the lower area of the site. This extended for roughly 125m across the site and was composed of three segments of varying sizes producing three small

causeways, two close together. The collection of features is interpreted as the southern extent of a large enclosure. The ditch was filled with gravels and silty clays, with the material tipping in from the northern edge of the feature, possibly indicating a former bank on this side. This was a gradual and natural process rather than deliberate backfilling. A single sherd of residual Neolithic pottery was recovered from the upper fill of the ditch. Elements of these ditches were cut through by two further ditch alignments and a pit-like feature. This is provisionally interpreted as ?Bronze Age on the summary plan, in the light of the very meagre dating evidence and relationships to other features.

A pit cut through the western terminal of one of the ditch sections. This was roughly oval, 2.54m long and 1.83m wide and roughly 0.69m deep, with vertical sides and a flat base. The base of a Roman cooking pot, not closely dated, was recovered from the upper fill.

A NW-SE aligned ditch cut through one of the ditch sections to this possible enclosure. This ditch appears to be part of a segmented boundary; two ditch segments having been exposed. It was roughly 1.2m wide and 0.7m deep and 10m long, with sharply breaking sides and a flat base. A terminus was exposed at either end. The segment to the south was approximately 30m long, 2.5m wide and roughly 1.2m deep. No extension to this boundary was uncovered north of the hedgeline dividing the two excavation areas.

The northern of the two ditch sections was cut by a narrow gully. This also cut through the pit. The gully extended from the east edge of the site, converging with, and cutting the earliest enclosure ditches, before turning sharply to the north-west as if respecting the NW-SE aligned ditch assemblage. This feature is roughly 0.7m wide and 0.25m deep, and extends for about 110m across the site. As with the larger ditches, this gully was not exposed to the north of the hedgeline. No dating material was recovered from this feature, or what may be an associated gully that extended beyond the turn to the west.

Medieval and Post-medieval

A small number of medieval and post medieval ditches were the latest features exposed on the site. These were arranged parallel or at right angles to the current field system, suggesting a roughly contemporary date in origin.

Undated features

There was a general paucity of finds from the site, this resulted in a number of the features being classified as undated. A group was located towards the south-eastern edge of the site. These included a posthole alignment and an L-shaped pit alignment. The L-shaped feature and the posthole alignment may well represent the sockets or postholes for timber alignments. These features appear to have been single lines of posts, as adjacent areas did not contain similar features. The purposes of the alignments are not known.

To the south-east of the L-shaped alignment was a regular D-shaped ditched enclosure that measured 5.7m in diameter. The ditch was on average 0.7m wide and roughly 0.3m deep, with gradually breaking sides and a concave base. The purpose of the feature is again unknown.

The general characteristics of these undated features located towards the south-east of the site suggest a prehistoric to Romano-British date in origin. No finds were recovered from the fills, although charcoal samples taken for radiocarbon analysis may provide dates.

Further undated features in the lower site include a large pit to the immediate north of the same Neolithic feature. These, as well as a single large pit located to the immediate north-west of the barrow and may well be prehistoric in date.

2. FACTUAL DATA AND STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL

2.1 Stratigraphic and structural record

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Context Record Sheets | 487 |
| Environmental Record Sheets | 61 |
| A1 and A3 Plans | 24 |
| <i>Photographic record</i> | |
| B/W Films | 60 |
| Digital images | 688 |

Provisional phasing for contexts is based on their interrelationship with other contexts as recorded in the site archive context matrix. In addition, spot dates have been provided for 18 contexts based on pottery type. The overwhelming majority of contexts relate to linear features.

Value of stratigraphic record

The value of the stratigraphic and structural record lies mainly within that body of data relating to the barrow and its associated features. The barrow and its potentially early Neolithic date were an unexpected discovery and as such their context, date, form and extent now represent important new research questions. The other potentially prehistoric linear features are also of significance, particularly the topographic relationship between the two narrow linears in the lower part of the site. The context of these in the overall landscape history of this area is of potential importance.

The artefactual record, particularly the analysis and scientific dating of the pottery, may greatly enhance the importance of the stratigraphic record. Should the pottery allow the barrow to be dated to the early Neolithic, the site would be considered to be of regional, if not national importance, as features of this date are extremely rare, and as yet unrecorded in the Southwest.

2.2 Artefactual record

2.2.1 Prehistoric

Lithics

A total of 121 worked flints, of which 39 were unstratified, were recovered from the site. Few diagnostic pieces are included, although one microlith produced during the Mesolithic period is present, along with three further objects of Mesolithic date - an end scraper, a blade core and a possible burin. The majority of the lithics assemblage uses flake-based technology, and is therefore likely to be Neolithic or early Bronze Age in date. The range of material represented is wide, with good quality chalk derived flint, probably from the Beer region, poorer quality flint from the same source, and redeposited pebble flint. Greensand chert is also represented in some numbers.

Pottery

by Kerry Tyler

The prehistoric ceramic assemblage recovered from the site represents a total of 207 sherds, representing 43 different vessels and weighing 534 grams. Of the total pottery assemblage 11 fragments weighing 27g were recovered from the topsoil, 4 sherds weighing 22g from the subsoil and 5 sherds weighing 15g were unstratified. The remainder came from stratified contexts, including 29 sherds representing 17 vessels from the possible barrow, 148 sherds, indicative of 11 vessels, from the ring ditch, and 4 sherds representing 3 vessels from the open linear boundary/enclosure systems. A further 4 sherds from 1 vessel were recovered from a pit feature, while the remaining 2 sherds were recovered from natural features within the area enclosed by the barrow.

Following a brief visual inspection, the assemblage was divided into eight different fabric groups according to their most dominant inclusions. However, microscopic examination is needed in order to examine the clay matrices and identify further subdivisions within the fabric groupings. The majority of the pottery (34 sherds representing 19 vessels and weighing 155g) has been tempered with varying degrees of carboniferous vein quartz. These fabrics share great similarities with the early Neolithic vein quartz-tempered wares.

Only one rim form was identified within the quartz tempered fabric, but unfortunately was too small to be diagnostic. None of the pottery exhibits signs of decoration, although surface treatments have been noted in the form of either wiping or smoothing. The absence of any flat basal fragments within this fabric group also suggests the vessels would have had rounded bag-shaped bases. The lack of basal sherds and any decoration is a typical occurrence in pottery assemblages from the early Neolithic period.

Less frequently occurring fabrics include three large, thick walled bodysherds weighing 44g and representing 2 vessels of a rock tempered fabric. These three sherds have burnt fractures, no decoration and are most likely middle Bronze Age in origin. The rock appears to have been crushed and added, an admixture fabric, and is quite possibly the Permian volcanic fabric recognised at Hayes Farm, Teigncombe and Heatree, which was dated to the middle Bronze Age.

There are also two iron oxide fabrics present within the assemblage. The first fabric is solely iron oxide tempered and is represented by 32 sherds including 3 basal and 2 rim fragments, which weigh a total of 106g and demonstrate four different vessels. The second fabric has been tempered with iron oxides and carbonised organic material and is represented by 22 bodysherds, weighing 62g and indicating 2 separate vessels. A very small proportion of sandy quartz wares are represented in the assemblage by two basal sherds, weighing 26g, and which belong to the same vessel. These iron oxide and quartz sandy wares are most likely Iron Age in origin. The 5 basal fragments have simple, flat profiles and the two rim forms are unfortunately too small to be diagnostic. Again, this small Iron Age element lacks decoration and any definitive form types. The majority of this material comes from a ring ditch located on higher ground to the northwest of the barrow and seems to parallel the ranges of early Iron Age fabrics at Raddon Hill in mid Devon, with several base angles of the form illustrated at Raddon (Quinnell 1999).

The final fabrics include vesicular wares, vesicular wares with argillaceous inclusions and a very fine silty fabric with no visible inclusions. There are 94 fragments from 6 different vessels, which weigh a total of 77g from this group of fabrics. However, further analysis is needed for these fabrics as their origin/date is uncertain, but they could represent a late Neolithic or early Bronze Age element of the assemblage.

The pottery assemblage from Willand is very fragmentary and fairly abraded. Therefore, due to the absence of any form types and characteristic decoration the assemblage requires further fabric analysis in order to identify inclusions and clay matrices, which will help with comparable studies and produce a more secure dating system.

Fired clay

4 fragments of fired clay weighing 6 grams were recovered from the site. None was identifiable as recognised artefact types.

2.2.2 Romano-British

Pottery

Two sherds of Roman pottery were recovered, one greyware bodysherd (unstratified) and one coarseware base (context 5147, fabric as yet unidentified). They are both large, but abraded, sherds.

Tile

Two fragments of tile were recovered (both unstratified). Their identification is dubious, and they may be of modern date.

2.2.3 Medieval and Post-medieval

Pottery

Eight sherds were recovered, all abraded and probably resulting from manuring.

Glass

Only a single shard of 19th-century bottle glass was recovered. No further work required.

Metal

All metalwork was unstratified, and no further work is considered to be required.

2.3 Environmental record

2.3.1 Charcoal

27 Charcoal samples were taken, of which 24 (23 prehistoric and 1 Roman) were selected for the assessment. The condition of the charcoal varied, although in general fragments were poorly preserved, being impregnated with minerals and silts, and sometimes eroded. The bulk of the material was recovered from the principal excavation. Samples included deposits from pits and ditches and deposits associated with the Barrow. In some cases sufficiently large fragments were present to be identified. Although oak appeared to be the dominant taxon, non-oak (possibly hazel/alder) fragments were also observed.

2.3.2 Plant macrofossil

27 samples from a range of prehistoric and roman features were taken, of which 24 (23 prehistoric and 1 Roman) were selected for the assessment. The samples were processed by flotation sieving to a minimum mesh size of 300 microns for the float and 500 microns for the residue. There was a general scarcity of charred plant macrofossils, with only a single fragment of possible interest, an eroded and impregnated hazelnut shell fragment. Hazelnut shell is commonly recovered from archaeobotanical samples of all periods, so its presence cannot be used to date deposits accurately. However, in early prehistoric samples it is sometimes the only identifiable taxon with an economic use, pointing to the importance of wild food resources. The general lack of charred plant remains would suggest that the site was located away from settlement and the burning and processing of crops.

2.3.3 Pollen

Although a comprehensive sampling strategy was implemented, including the fills of the main linear features, no samples suitable for analysis were found.

2.3.4 Geoarchaeology

by Michael J. Allen

The site was visited on 10th July 2007. Two sections through the barrow and one ditch section were described following standard pedological notation (Hodgson 1976). An undisturbed sample for soil micromorphology and subsampling for pollen and three disturbed samples for soil chemistry were taken from the buried soil and the natural. This was done to investigate and describe deposits associated with the barrow.

The site is situated immediately below the ridgeline, with land falling away to the south and west. It lies on Permian basal breccias, sandstones and mudstones that take the form of clays and gravel in the field. A thin concentration of subrounded medium sized brecciated stones form the gravel component. Stanogleyic argillic brown earths of the Whimble 3 Association, which are seasonally waterlogged, and reddish fine loamy or fine silty soils occur over clayey drift over Permian geology. This gives rise to temporary waterlogging and poor to no preservation of bone, shells and snails.

A number of treehollows and/or animal burrows punctuated the natural surface below the cairn. Many predated the ditch as it clearly cut many of them. Although this is an indication of woody or scrubby vegetation prior to the barrow construction, those excavated have been sterile or produced residual artefacts. Without any chronological control on these features the value of further detailed palaeo-environmental (i.e. pollen) enquiry seems unhelpful. The presence of trees beneath barrows is a common feature and the significance of such at barrows has been indicated at Buckskin, Hants (Allen *et al.* 1995), and their archaeological significance discussed by Evans *et al.* (1999), and Cummings and Whittle (2003).

Careful examination of the buried soil revealed this context to be bipartite and the remnant of a former brown earth. The lower portion represents the lower part of the buried soil and the weathered junction with the parent material (drift geology). The upper content is clearly largely in situ 'B' material (i.e. the lower body of the soil). No 'A' horizon (topsoil) material could be discerned, and the matrix around the mound material was largely 'B' horizon material with evidence of local puddling (fine silt and clay laminations). It is thought that it is this mixing of the topsoil that was largely responsible for the truncation and loss of the majority of the soil profile.

The barrow mound comprises largely rounded stones (typically 20-27cm) that differ from those in the geology in the immediate vicinity, indicating that they have been deliberately selected and collected locally and brought to the site to form the barrow cairn. A number of stones are present in the tertiary fills of the surrounding ditch potentially indicating either denudation and slippage of the cairn into the ditch, or more probably Roman, medieval or post-medieval ploughing of the cairn. The ditch encircles a small area, and is itself a small slot-like feature. Nevertheless, around much of its circuit where exposed it contains three main fills that clearly equate to primary, secondary and tertiary fill. The primary fill accumulated rapidly, a soil seems to have formed in the secondary fill, and the tertiary fill probably represents post-barrow destruction of the monument.

The lack of artefacts within the barrow and the proven lack of charred plant remains and charcoals (Carruthers in Jones & Valentin 2006), suggest the barrow was located in a 'quiet' part of the landscape, away from settlement, burning and processing of crops. It may have been located within fields away from the foci of daily activities.

PART TWO: UPDATED PROJECT DESIGN

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The original aims and objectives of the project have been fulfilled through the excavation phase and these will be enhanced by achieving a greater understanding and more complete interpretation of the archaeological resource and through the dissemination of the results. Again it must be noted that the updated project design is viewed as provisional in the context of the results of the further work that is to take place on the site.

3.1 Post-excavation research design

The research aims to be addressed during analysis remain those detailed in section 2.1 of the assessment:

- to establish a stratigraphic context for the site;
- to establish as far as possible within the current development proposals the extent, context and date of the site;
- to establish an absolute dating for the barrow;
- to place the barrow within the context of the regional distribution of this type of feature;
- to place the potentially prehistoric/Roman features in their landscape context; and
- to advance an understanding of the pottery, environmental and lithic material recovered from the site.

These represent a revision of the original aims contained within the project brief and are founded in the potential of the data recovered during fieldwork.

The assessment has identified the following classes of data as being of crucial importance for an understanding of the site and to fulfil the research aims:

- the stratigraphic and structural record in respect of the potential Neolithic barrow and associated features,
- the pottery sherds from the artefactual record.

With respect to the probable date of the barrow, the results of the project are deemed to merit wider academic publication by virtue of the unexpected nature of the discovery and should probably be considered of regional or national importance.

Ultimately, the context and date of the barrow and its associated features is most likely to be resolved by analysis (scientific dating) of the artefactual record.

Artefacts

Prehistoric pottery

The total assemblage will be recorded according to the guidelines provided by the Prehistoric Ceramic Research Group, using the standard University of Birmingham system. This will be entered into an Excel database. Fabric and form classifications will be developed by Kerry Tyler in conjunction with Henrietta Quinnell and will include the following data fields:

- Area; feature number; context number; context type;
- Fabric code; fabric name; colour;
- sherd type (e.g. rim, base angle, wall, decorated wall); form code; form name;
- quantity (no. of sherds); weight (g);
- diameter (of rim or base); % diameter represented;
- decoration (type, technique and location);
- drawing number; cross fits; minimum vessels represented;
- manufacture (i.e. handmade); modification (surface finish); abrasion;
- occurrence of residues/sooting;
- date and other comments

It is envisaged that there will be about ten LBA pottery fabrics defined, two categories for abrasion, and the occurrence of charred residues and sooting will also be recorded. Analysis will investigate the occurrence and relationships between form, fabric, decoration and vessel size, with a view to informing the themes of chronology, spatial variation across the site, the nature and location of on-site production, and local trade and exchange.

Other artefact groups

For the fired clay, Roman pottery and tile, medieval and post-medieval pottery glass and metalwork further analysis is not merited. Only minimal description of fabric etc. will be required. The lithic collection although small is of potential value in the context of the stratigraphic record of the site and a summary report on the dating and character of the assemblage will be produced.

Environmental record

Few of the sampling strategies produced significant environmental data with the charred plant remains, macrofossils and pollen being of limited value. Further analysis on the charcoal samples would have the potential to shed light on the character of woodland over time; i.e. the range of taxa, species dominance and evidence of woodland management, and shed further light on the type of activities taking place in the area. It is proposed that the existing flots, residues and unprocessed samples are retained for the present and the potential for further analysis is reviewed again in the light of the results of the Phase 2 investigations.

3.2 Publication

It is proposed that the academic publication of the project will take the form of a single integrated report in standard form to be published in the county journal the *Proceedings* of the Devon Archaeological Society. Abstracts will also be produced for inclusion in relevant period journals as appropriate. The results of the Phase 2 work will, however, be taken into account in the post-excavation process and in determining a suitable publication outlet.

The report will contain an executive summary, and a background to the project, which will detail the location and topography of the site and the circumstances under which the project was carried out. A summary of the stratigraphic, structural, and artefactual records, i.e. a description of the site, the results of scientific dating, and ceramic analysis will be presented, based on the site research archive. This will be followed by

an account of the archaeological evidence to set the site within its appropriate context, as far as may be possible. A general discussion will follow which will set the results within the context of regional and national tradition. The final text and layout will be agreed with the editor of the receiving journal.

Final amended entries summarising the results of the project will be produced for deposition with the County Historic Environment Record (HER) once the academic publication has been produced.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Fig. 1 Site location. Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping (1:10000 and 1:75000) with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright Exeter City Council 100025345.



Fig. 2 Summary plan of excavated features. Scale 1:1000.



Fig. 2 Summary plan of excavated features. Scale 1:1000.



Plate 5 General View of Ditch 5310, 5309 and 5308. Looking southwest. 2m scale.



Plate 6 General View of Pit alignment 5070. Looking northeast. 1m & 2m scale.

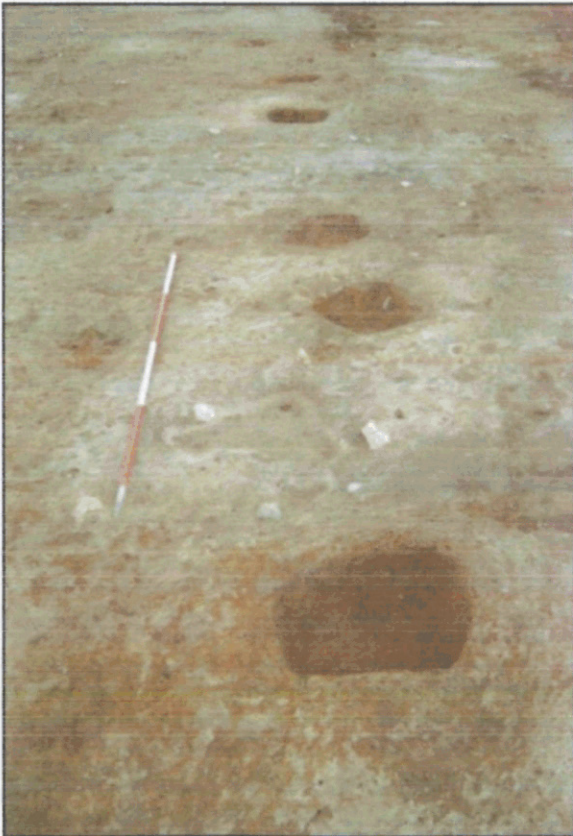


Plate 7 General View of Posthole alignment. Looking northwest. 2m scale.



Plate 8 General View of Ditch 5302 and Gully 5232. Looking northeast. 2m scale.



Plate 9 General View of Ditch 5017 and 5187. Looking west. 2m scale.



Plate 10 General View of enclosure Ditch 5024. Looking northeast. 2m scale.