

**An archaeological evaluation
at Old Down Farm,
East Meon, Hants**

centred on NGR: SU 6750 2485

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Report to Ralls Builders Ltd

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Summary statement

In 1996 a substantial find of 256 Late Iron Age and early Roman gold coins plus some pieces of Roman jewellery, known subsequently as the Alton Hoard, was made in a field to the SE of Old Down Farm, East Meon, Hampshire (at approximately SU 675 248). Since then further isolated finds have been made, and the finder, Mr Peter Beazley, has obtained sponsorship from Ralls Builders Ltd of Waterlooville, and support from the landowner, Mr John Dalton of The Old Dairy, Stocks Farm, Privett, Hants, to carry out limited evaluation of the site. The sponsors have approached the author for advice on how best to use the funding to find out more about the context of the finds.

Following consultation with David Hopkins, the County Archaeologist for Hampshire, it has been decided that the most useful activity for this site would be to examine the context of the hoard. The evaluation was therefore made to establish the nature, location, and extent of archaeological remains at the find site so that the archaeological implications can be better understood and appropriate farm management arranged. The work will also seek to establish the archaeological context of the Alton Hoard in order that this important find can be related to its contemporary environment. This hoard was of particular importance as it contained some of the earliest Roman jewellery to be found in the UK, and many of the coins were of a rare and exceptional nature.

The work was carried out by C K Currie and Dr Neil Rushton of CKC Archaeology, with assistance from David and Audrey Graham, between Monday 22nd and Wednesday 24th September 2003.

A late Iron Age or early Romano-British ditch and associated post hole were found that were thought to be part of a contemporary settlement near the find spot of the Alton Hoard, an exceptional collection of Iron Age and early Roman coinage and jewellery. The sharp profile of the ditch suggests it was a short-lived feature filled in with material containing moderately large quantities of contemporary pottery around the time of the Roman invasion. This would make the infilling of the feature roughly contemporary with the deposition of the Alton Hoard. This might suggest uncertain conditions around the time of the conquest may have led to the temporary abandonment of the settlement site. Work undertaken 100m to the south in 1976 seems to suggest that occupation was resumed at some time afterwards, and continued into the 2nd century AD.

The exercise also indicated that the find spot could not be immediately located by the original finder of the Alton Hoard. As the location has clearly been lost, it is not recommended that any further work is undertaken in the field in the present circumstances, as this could result in unnecessary damage to an important local archaeological site.

An archaeological evaluation at Old Down Farm, East Meon, Hants

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This report has been written based on the format suggested by the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for an archaeological field evaluation* (Birmingham, 1994). The ordering of information follows the guidelines given in this document, although alterations may have been made to fit in with the particular requirements of the work. All work is carried out according to the *Code of Conduct* and By-laws of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, of which CKC Archaeology is an IFA-registered archaeological organisation (reference: RAO no. 1).

1.0 Introduction (Figs. 1-2)

In 1996 a substantial find of 256 Late Iron Age and early Roman gold coins plus some pieces of Roman jewellery, known subsequently as the Alton Hoard, was made in a field to the SE of Old Down Farm, East Meon, Hampshire (at approximately SU 675 248). Since then further isolated finds have been made, and the finder, Mr Peter Beazley, has obtained sponsorship from Ralls Builders Ltd of Waterlooville, and support from the landowner, Mr John Dalton of The Old Dairy, Stocks Farm, Privett, Hants, to carry out limited evaluation of the site. The sponsors have approached the author for advice on how best to use the funding to find out more about the context of the finds.

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2.0 Historical & topographical background (Fig. 2)

The find spot for the Alton hoard is thought to be to the south of the centre of a large field to the immediate SE of Old Down Farm in the parish of East Meon, Hampshire. This farm is in the north part of the parish, 2.5km NNW of the village of East Meon., and at a height of about 170m AOD. The local geology is clay-with-flints over chalk. At the time of writing the site was covered in stubble from a recent cut cereal crop. The field is large, covering a maximum area of approximately 400m E-W and 500m N-S (covering approximately 20

hectares/50 acres). The field drops away to the south where it is bounded by a public lane. On the west side of the field is a private road leading to Old Down Farm (Fig. 2).

In the approximate centre of the southern boundary was a former disused quarry pit. This was infilled in 1976, but its location is still marked by a notable depression in the field. During the infilling, Romano-British features were observed and a salvage excavation undertaken. This was subsequently published (Whinney & Walker 1980), and showed the site to be part of a larger Romano-British settlement which extended further to both the north and south of the former quarry. Pottery finds dated the site from the Late Iron Age through to the 2nd century AD, and included ditches, pits, post-holes and two cremation burials. The Alton Hoard was thought to have been found approximately 100-150m to the north of this postulated settlement site.

A search of the Hampshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record (hereafter SMR) has shown that other finds made within a 500m radius of the find site include prehistoric flint artefacts, an Iron Age gold coin and a possible prehistoric field system.

3.0 Strategy (Fig. 3)

The strategy for this work was outlined in a project design issued by Currie (2003). This envisaged reasonably accurate knowledge of the find spot by the original finder. To this end a trench no more than 10m by 5m was recommended by the Hampshire County Archaeologist, David Hopkins, to be sufficient to meet the project aims. Once work started it appeared that Peter Beasley, the finder of the Alton Hoard, had misjudged his recall of the position of the find spot. Consequently the first trench excavated, on a position chosen by Mr Beasley, failed to identify the find spot. This trench was designated Trench 1 and had maximum dimensions of 7.8m E-W by 7.8m N-S. Mr Beasley then suggested another spot about 40m to the NE. A trench here, subsequently extended, also failed to locate the find spot. This trench was designated as Trench 2 and was approximately 7.6m square. The total area excavated was 118.6 square metres, over twice that originally envisaged.

4.0 Results (Figs. 3-6)

4.1 Trench 1 (Figs. 3-5)

This trench was excavated on a spot designated by Mr Peter Beasley, joint finder of the Alton Hoard. No evidence for the Alton Hoard find spot was found within this trench. Topsoil was a clay loam [context 03] less than 150mm deep. This overlay a sandy clay subsoil [context 04] that was largely undisturbed beyond 250mm depth. It was possible to identify a criss-cross pattern of modern ploughmarks in the underlying subsoil.

A linear feature [context 05] was located cut within this subsoil. This extended from the southern baulk of the trench for 5.3m in a northerly direction. It terminated in a pointed shape that was thought to contain the cut of a former post hole [context 07]. The width of the linear feature was approximately 0.7m at its southern end, gradually tapering to 0.6m near its northern terminal. The average depth cutting into undisturbed subsoil was between 0.25m to

0.37m in its southern half, being reduced to between 0.15m and 0.2m nearer its terminal. The post hole [07] was 0.28m in diameter and cut undisturbed subsoil to a depth of 0.16m. The fill of both features was a similar sandy clay [contexts 06, 08]. Both post hole and linear feature contained moderately large quantities of Iron Age and early Romano-British pottery.

4.2 Trench 2 (Figs. 3, 6)

This trench was excavated approximately 40m to the NE of Trench 1. Ploughsoil was relatively shallow, being no more than 250mm thick [context 01]. This came down on to a lighter coloured clay subsoil [context 02]. No features were seen cut into the subsoil in this trench. The only finds were a some small and heavily abraded sherds of late Iron Age or early Romano-British pottery found near the western baulk of the trench. These sherds weighed less than 5grms in total.

5.0 Discussion

The two trenches excavated failed to locate the find spot of the Alton Hoard. The distance between the two suggested spots (about 40m) suggested that Peter Beasley's recall of the location was hazy, although he seemed very positive about the veracity of both the indicated spots in turn. The final conclusion must be that the find spot was not known precisely, and any future efforts to locate it are likely to cause far more of the field to be disturbed than would be desirable.

Despite the failure to locate the find spot, this evaluation did locate further information about the Iron Age and Roman occupation of the area. The linear feature found in Trench 1 was thought to be a ditch. It would appear that its terminal was located, with a possible post hole at the north end. This terminal with post hole might suggest an entrance into an enclosure. The apparent sharp profile of the ditch suggested that it was not open for long. Likewise, the quantities of pottery found in the fill might indicate deliberate infilling. The date of the pottery in the fill appeared to be late Iron Age or very early Roman, suggesting abandonment of the ditch roughly around the time of the Roman conquest. This ties in with the date of the Alton Hoard, thought to have been deposited around AD 48. This evidence might suggest infill of the ditch and deposition of the hoard were roughly contemporary events, and might hint at some local uncertainty about conditions in the years around the time of the Roman invasion. It is possible that the settlement associated with the hoard was temporarily abandoned after the Roman invasion.

Judging by the evidence of the 1976 excavations around the quarry site about 100m to the south, any abandonment was relatively short-lived, as Whinney and George (1980) recovered evidence that there was occupation on this site from the Iron Age though to the 2nd century AD. At least one of the ditches located in 1976 was heading in the approximate direction of the linear feature found during this current exercise, and it is highly probable that the ditch found here is part of the occupation site found in 1976. The evidence clearly shows that the Alton Hoard was buried in close proximity to a settlement and was not hidden in an isolated area.

6.0 Finds

6.1 Prehistoric flint

A few pieces of waste flake were noticed in the field whilst surveying. These were not collected. Only three pieces were found in stratified contexts. These were crude waste flakes from the fill of linear feature [05].

Four further unstratified pieces were found in the field near the trenches. These included two blades, a fine Mesolithic core used to produce thin blades, and a possible Neolithic scraper. These finds indicated some prehistoric activity in the general area from the Mesolithic period onwards.

6.2 Tile

Only two small fragments of Roman tile were found in unstratified contexts. Both were small and heavily abraded. There was no indication of a building using tile in its construction in the immediate vicinity, although Whinney and Walker (1980, 159) report more substantial quantities about 100m to the south of the evaluation site.

6.3 Pottery

A reasonable assemblage of Late Iron Age and early Roman-British pottery was collected. Nearly all of this came from the fill of ditch [05] or post-hole [07]. There were also sherds from the general subsoil [04] adjoining the ditch. It is likely these were once in the ditch fill but had been dragged into the surrounding soils by ploughing. There were very few sherds found elsewhere in unstratified contexts.

Six main fabrics were identified. These were as follows:

Fabric A: moderate sandy fabric with moderate large flint inclusions up to 80mm. Uneven firing to black or red-brown colour. Iron Age.

Fabric B: moderate sandy fabric with frequent flint inclusions up to 25mm. Mainly reduced. Late Iron Age.

Fabric C: moderately coarse sandy fabric with occasional black haematite inclusions up to 10mm. Beige or light grey colour. Late Iron Age or early Romano-British.

Fabric D: silty fabric with moderate sand inclusions and occasional black and red haematite to 10mm. Reduced or slightly oxidised red-brown colour. Late Iron Age or early Romano-British.

Fabric E: coarse sandy fabric with rare flint or calcite inclusions to 15mm and occasional haematite. Generally reduced or red-brown in colour. Late Iron Age or early Romano-British

Fabric F: Black burnished ware. Slightly sandy fabric in reduced black colour. Late Iron Age or early Romano-British.

Table 1: fabrics recovered by sherd numbers and weight

Fabric	Total no of sherds	% of overall sherd total	Weight in grms	% of overall weight
A	15	15.46%	530	40.61%
B	7	7.22%	140	10.73%
C	39	40.21%	390	29.89%
D	13	13.40%	120	9.20%
E	17	17.53%	95	7.28%
F	1	1.03%	25	1.92%
Miscellaneous sandy fabric	5	5.15%	5	0.38%

The largest number of sherds belonged to fabric C, a light grey or beige sandy ware that can probably be related to the most common ware found during the excavations in 1976 (Whinney & Walker 1980, 155). The next most common ware was crude, flint gritted Iron Age wares (fabrics A & B), of which only a relatively few sherds were found in 1976 (ibid, 154). The assemblage was notable for being entirely made up of plain bodied vessels. The only rim sherds found belonged to everted rimmed jars in fabrics C, D and E. The latter fabrics were all thought to be roughly contemporary, and dated from the late Iron Age or early Romano-British period, as is evidenced by the jar rims that were of a form that spanned the later Iron Age and early Roman period. A single sherd of Black Burnished Ware (BB1) was found unstratified on the site of Trench 2 before excavation commenced. This was a base from a small urn, the fabric being from the type produced in the Poole area from the 1st century AD.

Overall the stratified assemblage seemed to date from the Late Iron Age or early Roman-British period, with a date around the time of the Roman invasion being the most likely.

7.0 Conclusions

A late Iron Age or early Romano-British ditch and associated post hole were found that were thought to be part of a contemporary settlement near the find spot of the Alton Hoard, an exceptional collection of Iron Age and early Roman coinage and jewellery. The sharp profile of the ditch suggests it was a short-lived feature filled in with material containing moderately large quantities of contemporary pottery around the time of the Roman invasion. This would make the infilling of the feature roughly contemporary with the deposition of the Alton Hoard. This might suggest uncertain conditions around the time of the conquest may have led to the temporary abandonment of the settlement site. Work undertaken 100m to the south in 1976 seems to suggest that occupation was resumed at some time afterwards, and continued into the 2nd century AD.

The exercise also indicated that the find spot could not be immediately located by the original finder of the Alton Hoard. As the location has clearly been lost, it is not recommended that any further work is undertaken in the field in the present circumstances, as this could result in unnecessary damage to an important local archaeological site.

8.0 Copyright

C K Currie (trading as CKC Archaeology) shall retain full copyright of any commissioned reports or other project documents written by himself or his agents, under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act* of 1988 with all rights reserved; excepting that it hereby provides an exclusive licence to the client and the local planning authorities for the use of such documents by them in all matters directly relating to the project as described in the project design, as well as for *bona fide* research purposes.

9.0 Archive

The archive for this work will be deposited with the Hampshire County Museum Services. Copies of the report were lodged with the client, Ralls Builders Ltd, the landowner, John Dalton, the Hampshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), the British Museum, and the National Monuments Record in Swindon, Wiltshire.

10.0 Acknowledgements

Thanks are given to all those involved with this project. John Dalton, the landowner, gave access to the field and provided a driver and digging machine for the work. Ralls Builders of Waterlooville provided the sponsorship for the exploration. Peter Beasley and his son, Gary Beasley, provided metal detectors, and scanned the spoil and the area around the trenches for metal finds. David Hopkins, County Archaeologist for Hampshire County Council, gave support and advice on the intellectual justification for the project. J D Hill of the British Museum provided the author with background information on the Alton Hoard. David and Audrey Graham provided total station equipment and carried out a survey of the site. Dr Neil Rushton assisted the author with the excavation.

11.0 References

C K Currie 2003, *Project design for an archaeological evaluation evaluation at Old Down Farm, East Meon, Hants*, unpublished client report

Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994, *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation*, Institute of Field Archaeologists

R Whinney & G Walker 1980, 'Salvage excavations at Old Down Farm, East Meon', *Hampshire Field Club & Archaeological Society* 36, 153-60

Other sources:

Hampshire County Council Sites & Monuments Record (SMR), The Castle, Winchester,
Hants, SO23 8UE

Appendix 1: list of contexts excavated

Context	Description	Munsell Colour
01	T/2; clay loam layer	10YR 4/2
02	T/2; clay layer	10YR 6/6
03	T/1; clay loam layer	10YR 4/2
04	T/1; sandy clay layer	10YR 6/6
05	T/1; linear cut	
06	T/1; sandy clay loam fill of cut 05	10YR 4/3
07	T/1; cut of possible post hole	
08	T/1; sandy clay loam fill of cut 07	10YR 4/3

Appendix 2: catalogue of photographs taken

Photographs were taken in both colour slide and monochrome print. In the archive the colour slides are prefixed with the site code, followed by 'S' to indicate photograph type, eg (Site Code = H07)/S/* (* indicating the photograph number). Monochrome prints are numbered (Site Code = H07)/M/*, following the same procedure as for slides.

Photo no	Description
1	T/2; completed from N
2	T/2; completed from S
3	T/1; showing ditch [05] and post hole [07] unexcavated from N
4	T/1; showing ditch [05] and post hole [07] unexcavated from S
5	T/2; showing western extension completed from S
6	T/2; showing western extension completed from N
7	T/1; showing ditch [05] half sectioned from S
8	T/1; showing ditch [05] half sectioned from N
9	T/1; showing half sectioned post hole [07] from N

Appendix 3: glossary of archaeological terms

Archaeology: the study of man's past by means of the material relics he has left behind him. By material relics, this means both materials buried within the soil (artefacts and remains of structures), and those surviving above the surface such as buildings, structures (e.g. stone circles) and earthworks (e.g. hillforts, old field boundaries etc.). Even the study of old tree or shrub alignments, where they have been artificially planted in the past, can give vital information on past activity.

Artefacts: any object made by man that finds itself discarded (usually as a broken object) or lost in the soil. The most common finds are usually pottery sherds, or waste flint flakes from prehistoric stone tool making. Metal finds are generally rare except in specialist areas such as the site of an old forge. The absence of finds from the activity of metal detectorists is not usually given much credibility by archaeologists as a means of defining if archaeology is present

Baulk: an area of unexcavated soil on an archaeological site. It usually refers to the sides of the archaeological trench.

Burnt flint: in prehistoric times, before metal containers were available, water was often boiled in pottery or wooden containers by dropping stones/flints heated in a fire into the container. The process of suddenly cooling hot stone, particularly flint, causes the stone to crack, and form distinctive crazed markings all over its surface. Finds of large quantities of such stone are usually taken as a preliminary indication of past human presence nearby.

Context: a number given to a unit of archaeological recording. This can include a layer, a cut, a fill of a cut, a surface or a structure.

Cut: usually used to mean an excavation made in the past. The 'hole' or cut existed in time as a void, before later being backfilled with soil. Archaeologists give a context number to the empty hole, as well as the backfilled feature (called the 'fill').

Evaluation: a limited programme of intrusive fieldwork (mainly test-trenching) which determines the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within a specified land unit or area. If they are present, this will define their character, extent, and relative quality, and allow an assessment of their worth in local, regional and national terms.

Munsell colour: an objective method of defining soil colour using a specially designed colour chart for soils. The reading defines hue (an objective description of colour; eg YR means yellow-red), value (darkness or lightness of the colour) and chroma (the greyness or purity of the colour). For example 10YR 3/2 is a dark grey-brown.

Natural [layer]: in archaeological reports, this is a layer that has been formed by natural process, usually underlying man-made disturbance.

Period: time periods within British chronology are usually defined as Prehistoric (comprising the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age), Roman, Saxon, Medieval and Post-medieval. Although exact definitions are often challenged, the general date ranges are as given below.

Prehistoric c. 100,000 BC - AD 43. This is usually defined as the time before man began making written records of his activities.

Palaeolithic or Old Stone Age 100,000 - 8300 BC
Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age 8300 - 4000 BC
Neolithic or New Stone Age 4000 - 2500 BC
Bronze Age 2500 - 700 BC
Iron Age 700 BC - AD 43

Roman AD 43-410

Saxon AD 410-1066

Medieval AD 1066-1540

Post-medieval AD 1540-present

Pottery sherds: small pieces of broken baked clay vessels that find their way into ancient soils. These can be common in all periods from the Neolithic onwards. They often find their way into the soil by being dumped on the settlement rubbish tip, when broken, and subsequently taken out and scattered in fields with farmyard manure.

Project Design: a written statement on the project's objectives, methods, timetable and resources set out in sufficient detail to be quantifiable, implemented and monitored.

Settlement: usually defined as a site where human habitation in the form of permanent or temporary buildings or shelters in wood, stone, brick or any other building material has existed in the past.

Site: usually defined as an area where human activity has taken place in the past. It does not require the remains of buildings to be present. A scatter of prehistoric flint-working debris can be defined as a 'site', with or without evidence for permanent or temporary habitation.

Stratigraphy: sequence of man-made soils overlying undisturbed soils; the lowest layers generally represent the oldest periods of man's past, with successive layers reaching forwards to the present. It is within these soils that archaeological information is obtained.

Worked flint or stone: usually taken to mean pieces of chipped stone or flint used to make prehistoric stone tools. A worked flint can comprise the tools themselves (arrowheads, blades etc.), or the waste material produced in their making (often called flint flakes, cores etc.).

Hampshire

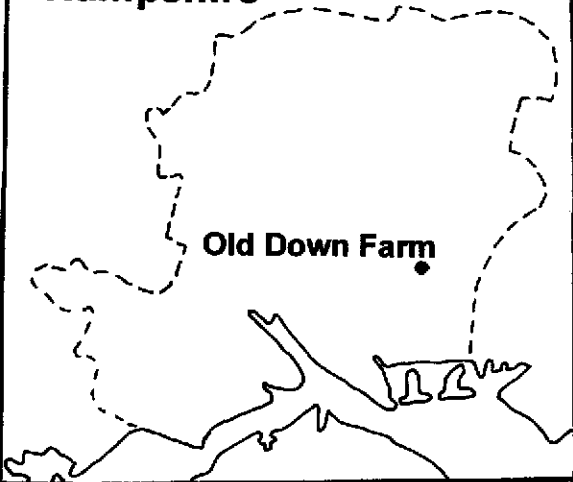


Fig. 1: location

North is at the top of the page.

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Scale: each grid square represents 1km x 1km

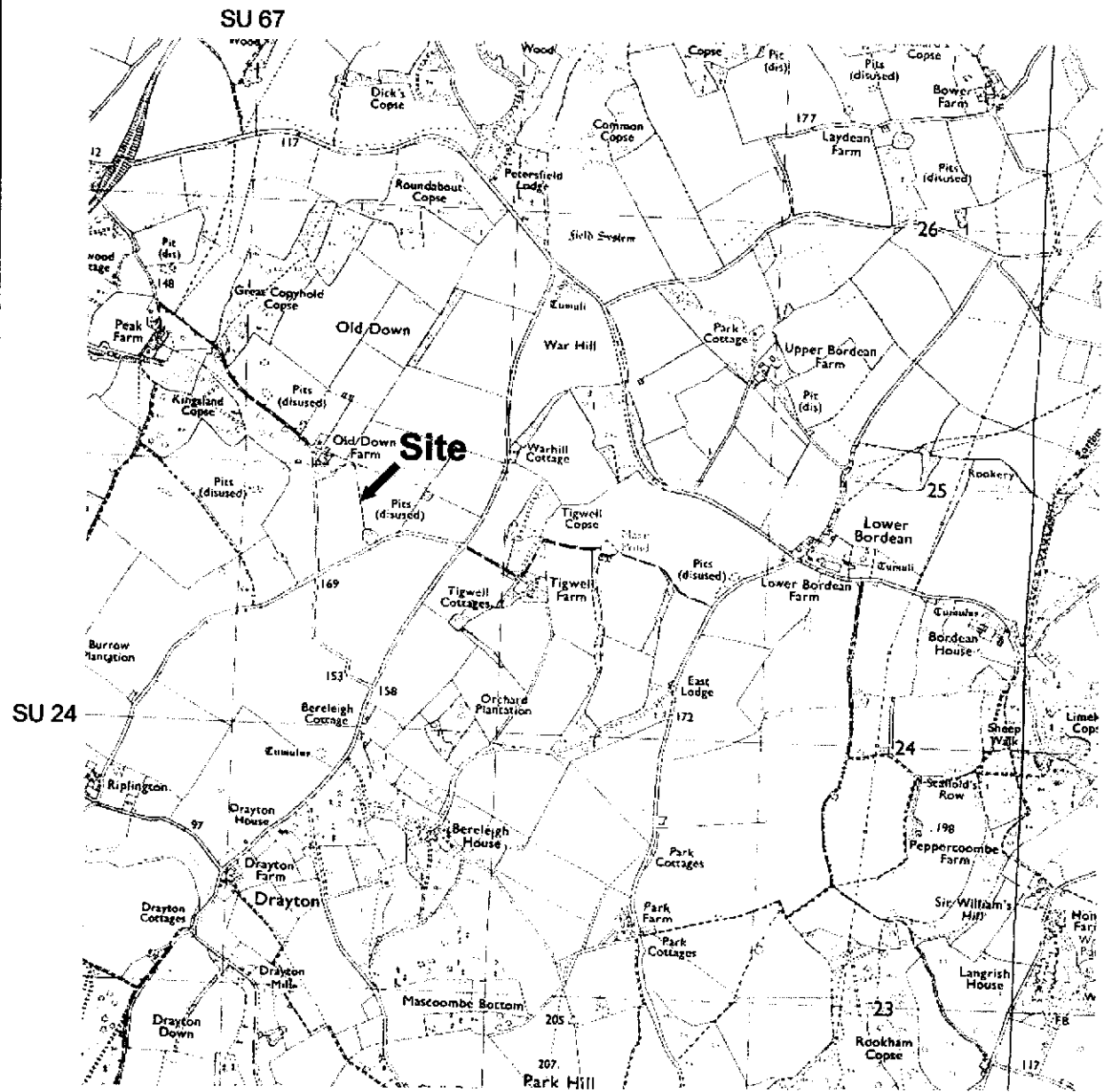
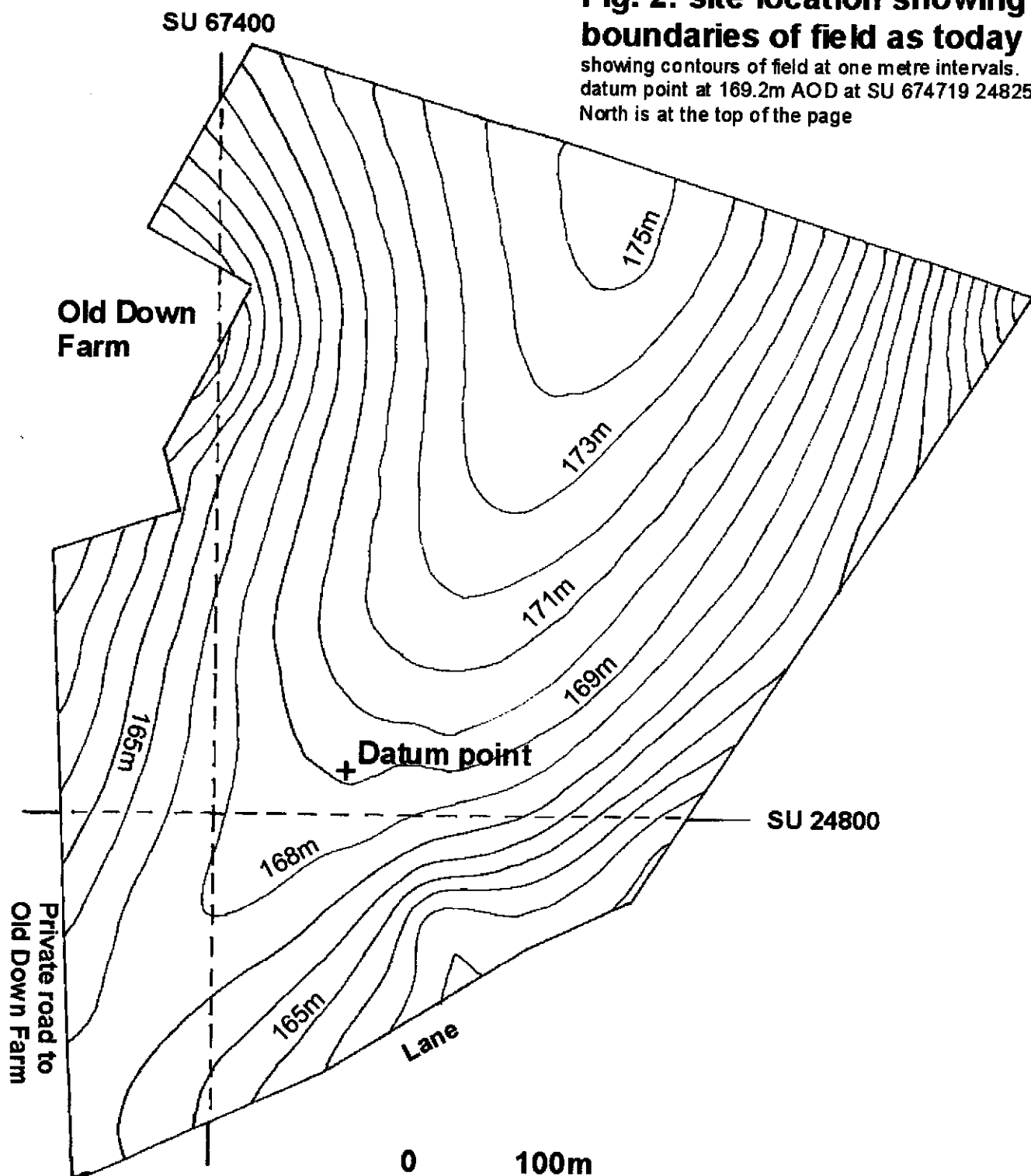


Fig. 2: site location showing boundaries of field as today

showing contours of field at one metre intervals.
datum point at 169.2m AOD at SU 674719 248255
North is at the top of the page



Survey information provided
by David & Audrey Graham

Fig. 3: Site grid & trench location

Site grid reference given by + (eg 200/200) are not related to OS grid
Datum point is at peg 200/200

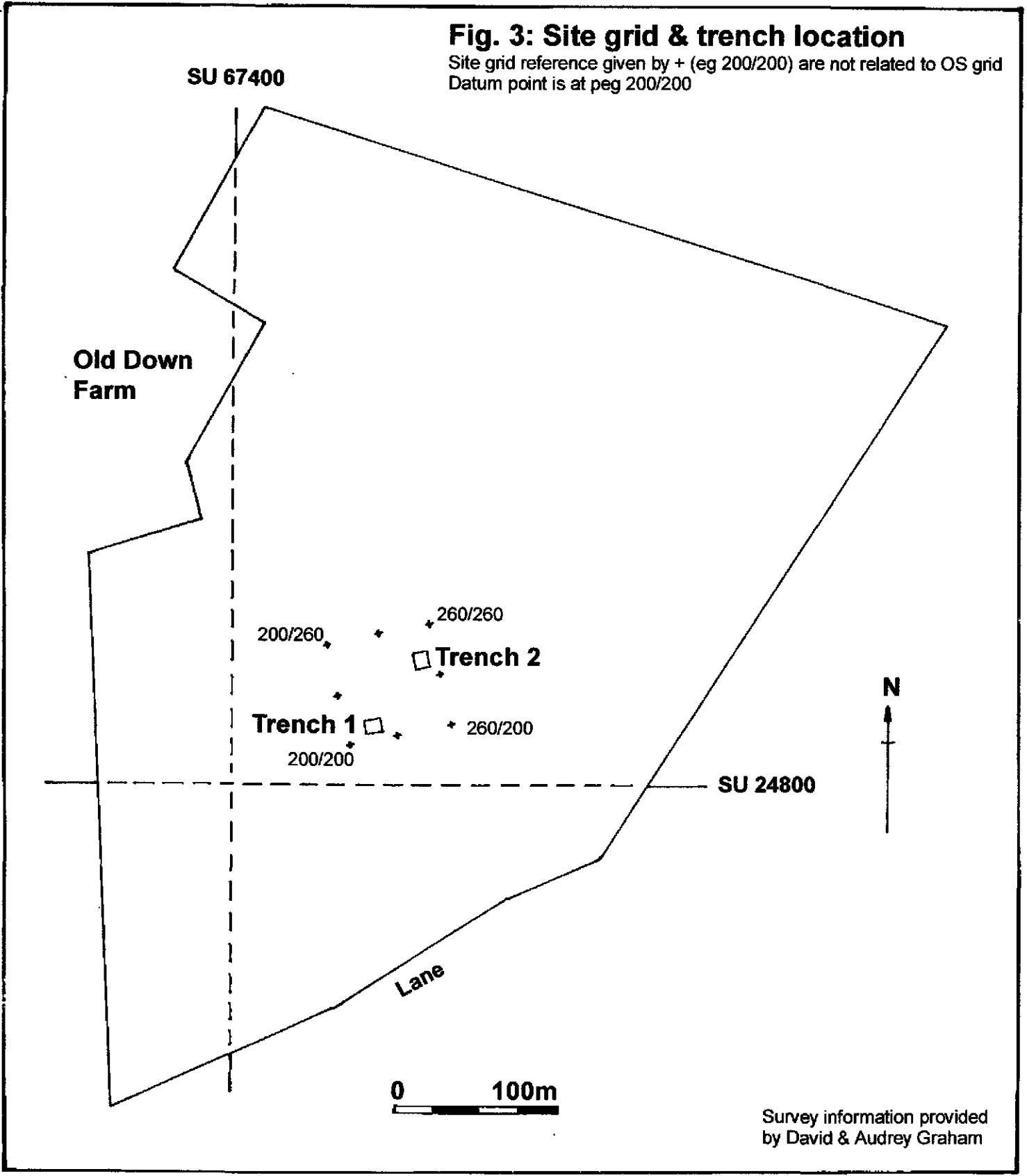


Fig. 4: plan of Trench 1

For location of site grid refer to Fig. 3

For sections see Fig. 5; sections marked on this plan A-A, B-B etc

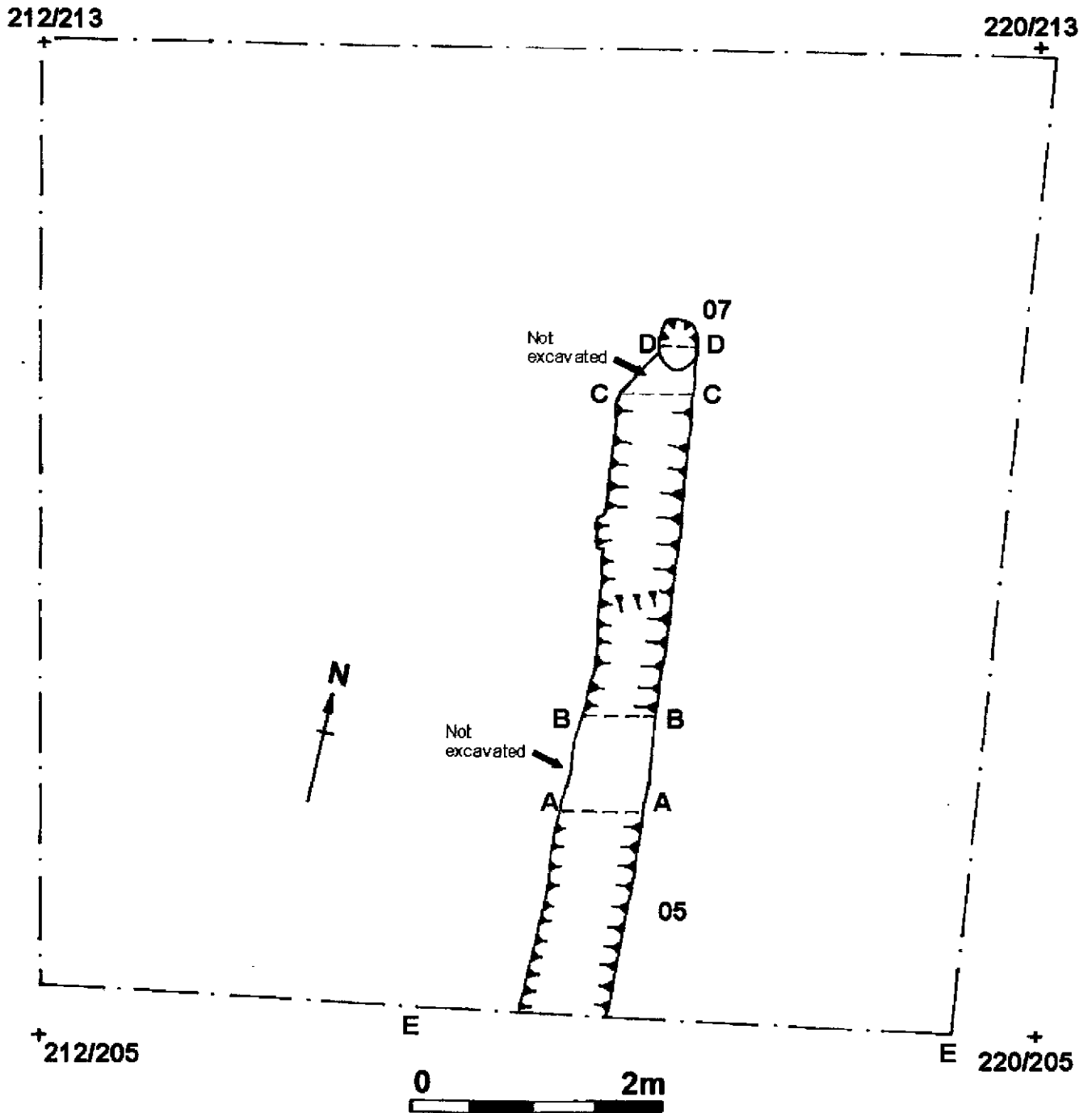


Fig. 5: trench 1 sections
For location see Fig. 4

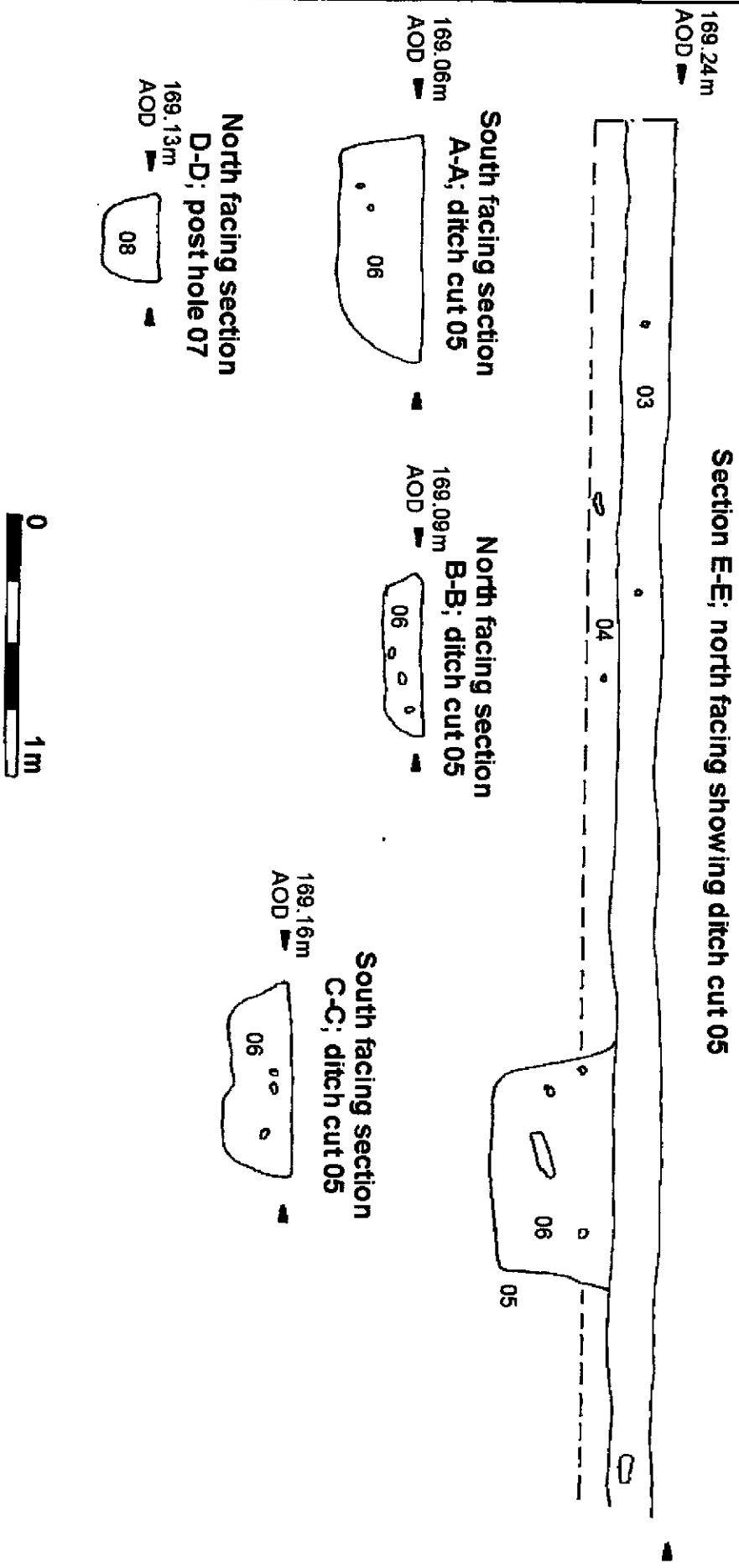


Fig. 6: plan of Trench 2

For location of site grid refer to Fig. 3

