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**Covert Farm (DIRFT  
East), Crick,  
Northamptonshire:**

**an archaeological watching brief**

*Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit*



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**Covert Farm (DIRFT East), Crick, Northamptonshire:  
an archaeological watching brief**

by  
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## **Covert Farm, (DIRFT East), Crick Northamptonshire: an archaeological watching brief**

### **1.0 Summary**

*A watching brief was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on part of the site of Covert Farm (DIRFT East), Crick, Northamptonshire (NGR SP572734) in July and September 1999. The watching brief consisted of monitoring of topsoil stripping in advance of construction work. The work followed a major programme of excavation on an extensive Iron Age settlement undertaken by BUFAU in 1997 and 1998 as part of the development of Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT East). The results of the watching brief added to the excavation results by recording the continuation of known archaeological features beyond the excavation limits and by revealing other areas of previously unknown archaeology dating to the Iron Age and Romano-British periods.*

### **2.0 Introduction**

The following report provides a brief outline of the results of an archaeological watching brief on part of the site of Covert Farm (DIRFT East), Crick, Northamptonshire (NGR SP 572734; Fig.1). The watching brief was undertaken during ground preparation for the construction of units for Eddie Stobart Limited and Project Scorpio. The work followed a major programme of excavation of an extensive Iron Age settlement undertaken on the Covert Farm (DIRFT East) site by BUFAU between August 1997 and September 1998 (Fig.2). The main focus of this Iron Age settlement covered 16 hectares, of which 13 hectares lay within the DIRFT East (Covert Farm) excavations. Previous archaeological work, including geophysical survey and the monitoring of topsoil stripping, had indicated that survival of archaeological features within the area covered by the watching brief was not high (RPS Clouston 1997). Accordingly, a watching brief condition was required by Northamptonshire Heritage, acting on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, which was carried out according to a method statement approved by Northamptonshire Heritage (BUFAU 2000). The work was conducted on behalf of Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal Limited and was commissioned through their environmental consultants RPS Clouston.

### **3.0 Objective**

The objective of the archaeological work was to obtain a record of any archaeological deposits or finds disturbed or exposed by work associated with the development and outside of the areas already subjected to detailed excavation.

### **4.0 Method**

The initial topsoil strip was monitored by an archaeologist who, in the first instance, maintained a continuous presence. Subsequently, the frequency and timing of the monitoring visits was dependent upon the timetable and working practices of the contractors, and upon the character of the archaeological results. Any archaeological

features, deposits or artefact scatters exposed by the groundworks were recorded by means of scale drawings and a full written and photographic record. The area covered by the watching brief was situated to the west of a link road and to the north west and south east of the 1997/1998 excavations (Fig.3). The watching brief was further subdivided into two zones (Zone A and Zone B), which were opened at different times and encompassed the sites of the Eddie Stobart and the Project Scorpio developments respectively. The topsoil stripping was undertaken using 360° mechanical excavators with toothless ditching buckets. Topsoil stripping of Zone A was undertaken in July, while topsoil stripping of Zone B began in September 1999.

## 5.0 Results

### 5.1 Zone A (Fig.4)

Zone A was located to the north west of Field 3 of the 1997/98 excavations. Removal of the topsoil revealed a series of mixed subsoil horizons that included a compact, yellow-brown alluvium to the west that merged into a darker, iron-stained deposit on the higher ground to the east. Further uphill, patches of iron-concreted gravel showed through a brown clay deposit. This deposit continued eastwards across half of the site until giving way to a yellow-blue clay that prevailed over the remaining area. Running east-west across the site were the faint remnants of ridge-and-furrow field systems.

A handful of undated or modern archaeological features was cut into the clay subsoil in the north of Zone A. A linear ditch, F4008, running east-west, was a modern field boundary. While F4001, F4002 and F4003 were all shallow circular features containing silty-clay fills, including charcoal, calcined bone fragments and iron nails.

In the south east corner of Zone A F4005, a wide, curvilinear ditch, was clearly a continuation of the linear ditch LD2 that was dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD during the excavations in 1997/8 (BUFAU 1998, 8). In profile F4005 was V-shaped and contained four fills. The uppermost fill of F4005 contained numerous potsherds, including greyware, samian and mortaria, fragments of a quern stone and some slag. The course of F4005 was clearly discernible for a length of c.22m before disappearing under a spoil-heap to the north. There was some evidence to suggest that F4005 continued in a gentle curve to the north beyond the spoil-heap, but the surface here was very disturbed. F4005 was intersected by another ditch, F4006, with a V-shaped profile that was 1m wide and 0.55m deep. Pottery recovered from F4006 was of similar date to that found in F4005 and the two features were probably contemporary. The course of this ditch was only visible for a distance of 2.5m, before it disappeared beneath an adjacent spoil-heap. F4005 was also cut by another ditch, F4004, with a U-shaped profile and north west-south east alignment. F4004 had a single fill, which contained highly degraded fragments of bone. A modern rectangular pit with vertical sides, F4007, had been cut through the intersection of F4004 and F4005.

The topsoil strip revealed that another linear ditch, LD1, excavated in 1997/98 (BUFAU 1998, 8), extended a further c.65m outside the excavation area (as F4009), curving gently to the west before becoming indistinct. This ditch (LD1) was 4m wide and 0.9m deep with a V-shaped profile that had been re-cut several times. Sherds of Grey ware and Samian pottery were recovered from the top of the ditch.

Elsewhere in Zone A topsoil stripping along the planned route of the link road revealed no significant archaeological features apart from a modern field boundary and three modern animal burials (AB 1, 2 and 3, two dogs and a bovine) in the vicinity of Covert Farm.

### **5.2 Zone B (Fig.5)**

Zone B, located to the south and east of Field 1 of the 1997/98 excavations, was at the lowest point of the development area, where the water table was close to the cleared-ground level. The subsoil horizon consisted of iron-concreted gravel deposits that gave way to yellow-blue clay up-slope to the south east. A series of parallel curvilinear gullies (F4011- F4019) was cut into the natural gravel or clay in the vicinity of the link road. Extensive flooding masked the continuation of these features into the area excavated in 1997/98. Gullies F4011-F4016 were shallow and U-shaped and no datable pottery was recovered from these features. Although gullies F4017 and F4018 were inter-cut it was not clear which was the later, and no finds were recovered from either feature. Feature F4019 was a shallow-sided, U-shaped ditch, 1.45m wide and 0.65m deep. It had been cut through the alluvium layer which overlay the yellow-blue clay sub-soil, but it too, produced no finds.

After the stripping of this zone was completed, an embankment was constructed to raise the level of the link road above the waterlogged ground. This bank buried the curvilinear features detailed above, and included a significant part of the north east corner of the 1997/98 excavations in Field 1.

Topsoil stripping in the south east corner of Zone B revealed no archaeological features, while stripping from the south west area exposed an alluvial deposit associated with a palaeochannel located during the 1997/98 excavations. No archaeological features were cut into this deposit. Subsequently, a 25m by 35m area of the alluvium was machine-excavated to reveal a yellow-blue clay subsoil beneath. A number of features was cut into this subsoil horizon (Fig.5). A ring gully (F4026) 0.9m wide and 0.3m deep, contained fragments of fired clay. A 4m-length of a second, 1m wide, curvilinear gully (F4027) was visible before it ran under the western baulk of the excavations. A third curvilinear feature (F4028) to the north of F4027 was heavily disturbed during the site clearance.

### **6.0 Conclusions**

The watching brief has added to the results of the 1997/98 Covert Farm (DIRFT East) excavations. Topsoil stripping in Zone A revealed the continuation of ditch LD1 (F4009) outside the northern limits of the earlier excavations, and the continuation of ditch LD2 (F4005) outside the eastern limits of these excavations. These large ditches, together with a smaller intersecting ditch, F4006, are indicative of the continuation of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD Romano-British occupation in the higher, northern, end of Field 3 as noted in the 1997/98 excavations (BUFAU 1998, 51).

The archaeological features recorded in Zone B were consistent in character with the results of the 1997/98 excavations and have indicated that further activity existed to the east and south west of Clusters 16 and 17, found in Field 1 during 1997/98. The features situated to the south west of Cluster 17 lay within the line of the

palaeochannel recorded in 1997/98. The alluvium extended beyond the confines of the palaeochannel and also sealed a sequence of curvilinear ?drainage gullies (F4011-F4019) located in the vicinity of the link road. Where datable evidence was recovered these features were Iron Age, and would appear to represent a continuation of the seasonal occupation of the lower part of the valley in this period.

### **Acknowledgements**

Roy Krackowicz undertook both watching briefs in July and September 1999. Sarah Watt wrote the report and the figures were drafted by Nigel Dodds. Thanks are due to Mr Jeff Jones of Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal Limited and Mr David Freke of RPS Clouston for commissioning this work. In addition, Myk Flitcroft of Northamptonshire Heritage monitored the project on behalf of Northamptonshire County Council.

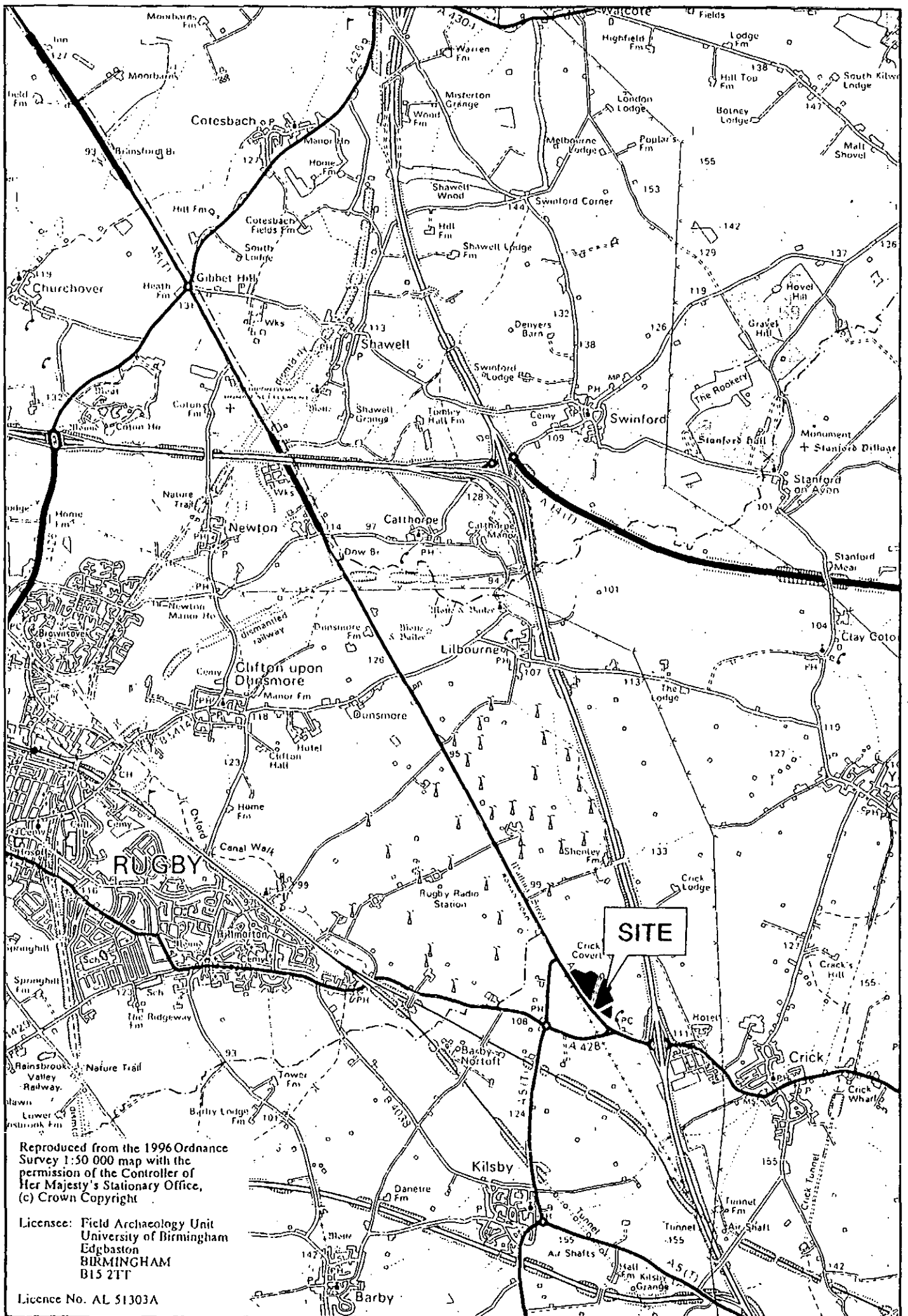
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BUFAU 2000 *DIRFT East: Method statement for an archaeological watching brief*, BUFAU internal report.

RPS Clouston 1997 *DIRFT East Topsoil Stripping Report*.





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Fig.1

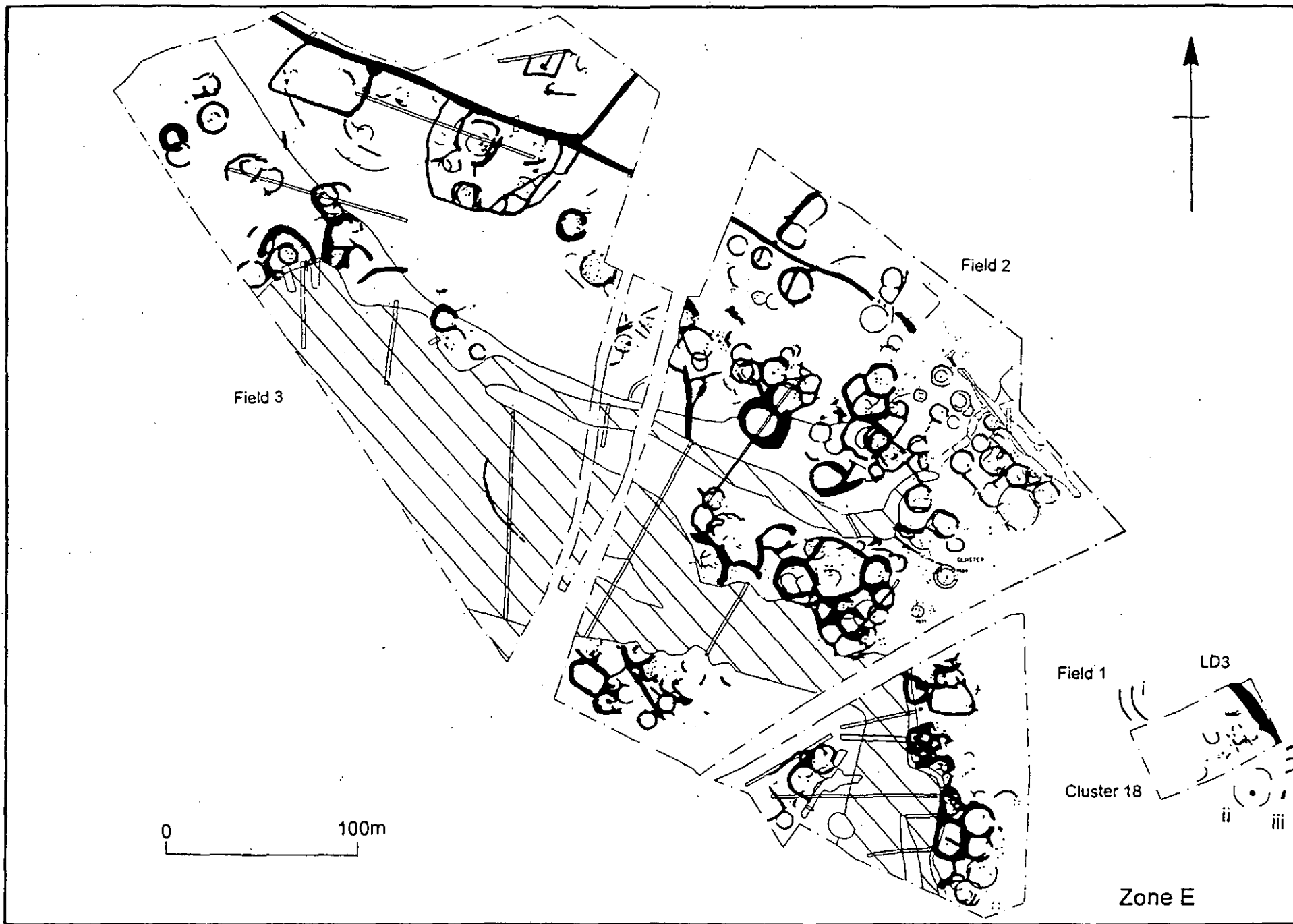
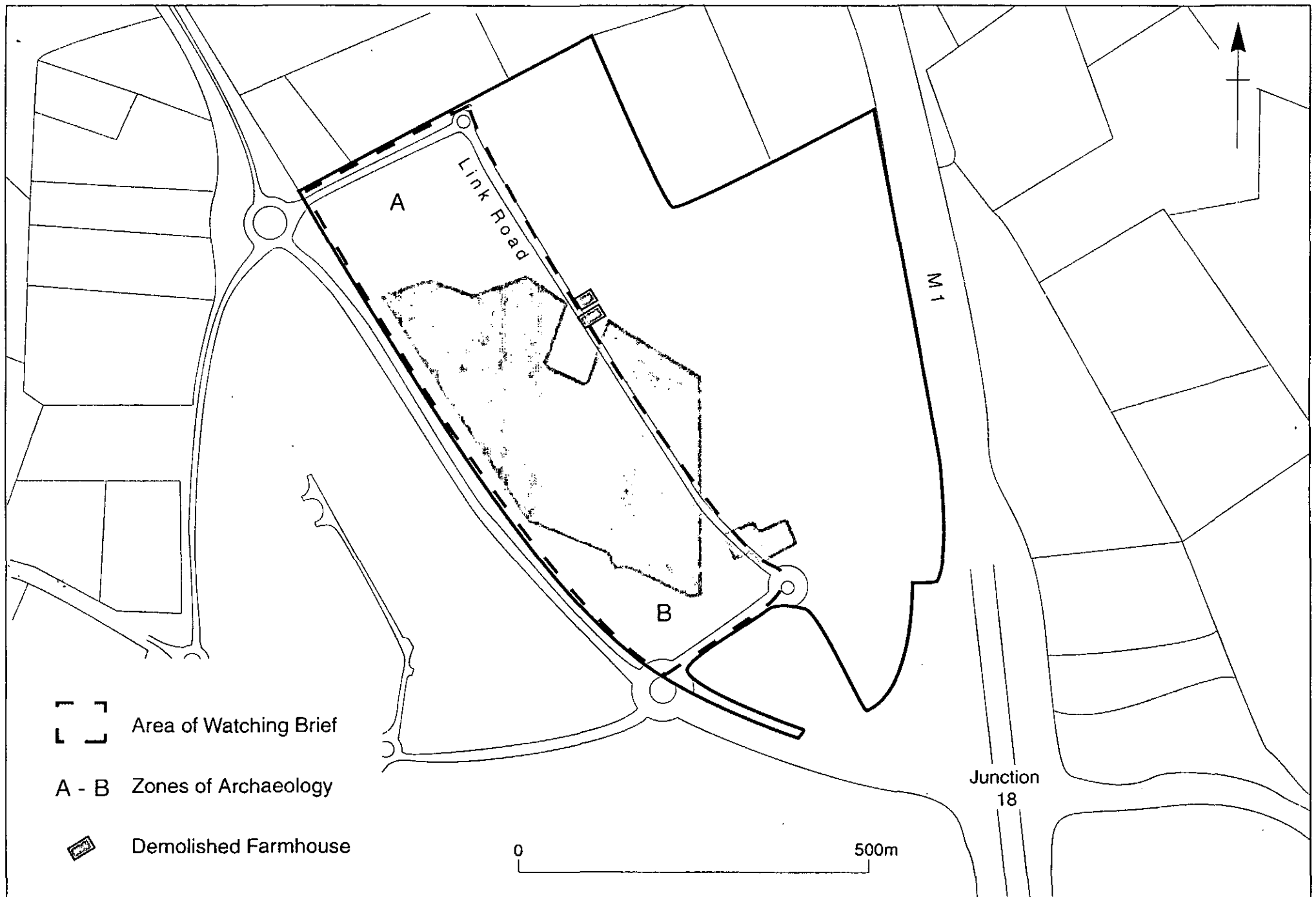


Fig.2



[ - ] Area of Watching Brief

A - B Zones of Archaeology

Demolished Farmhouse

0 500m

Fig.3

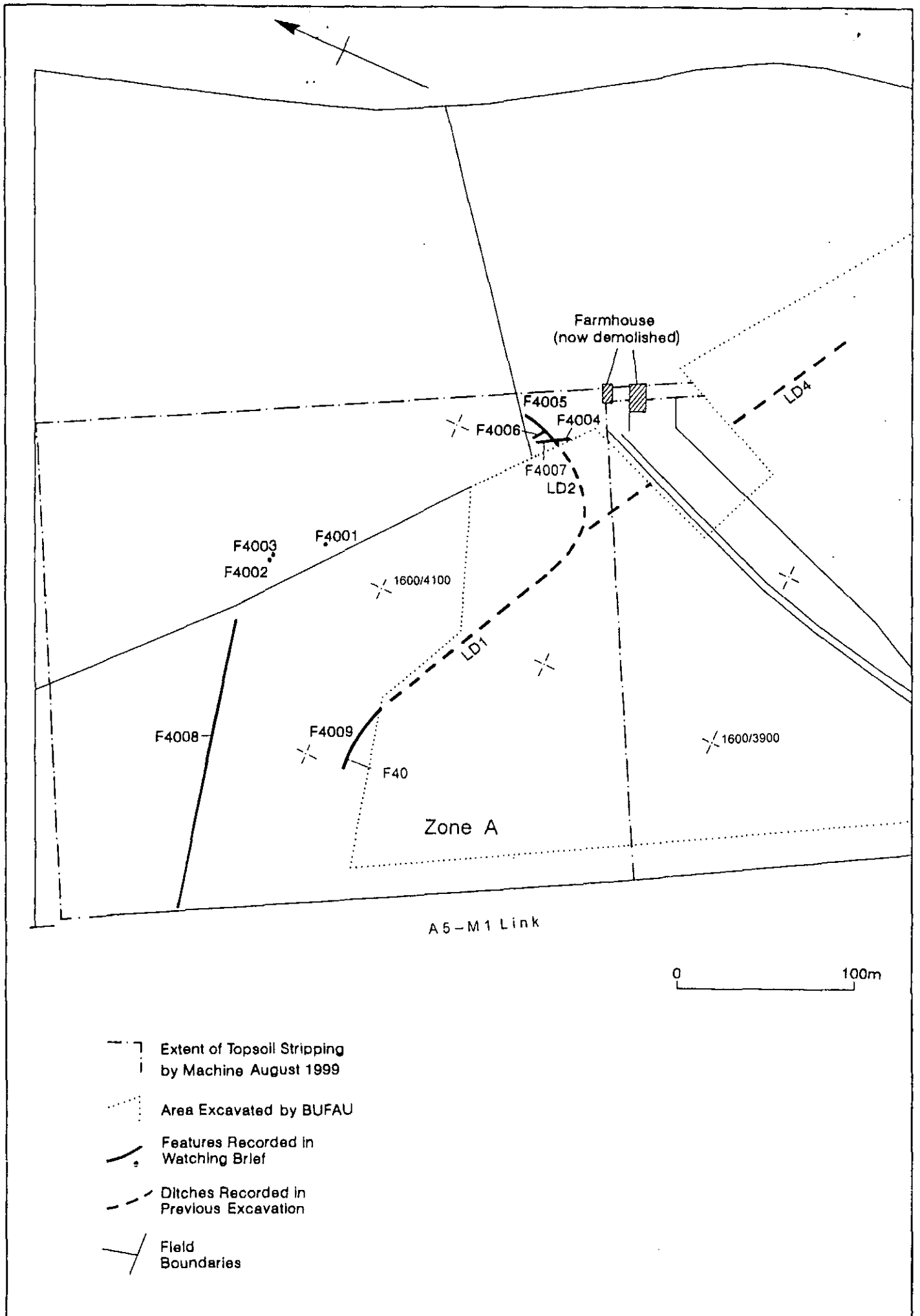


Fig.4

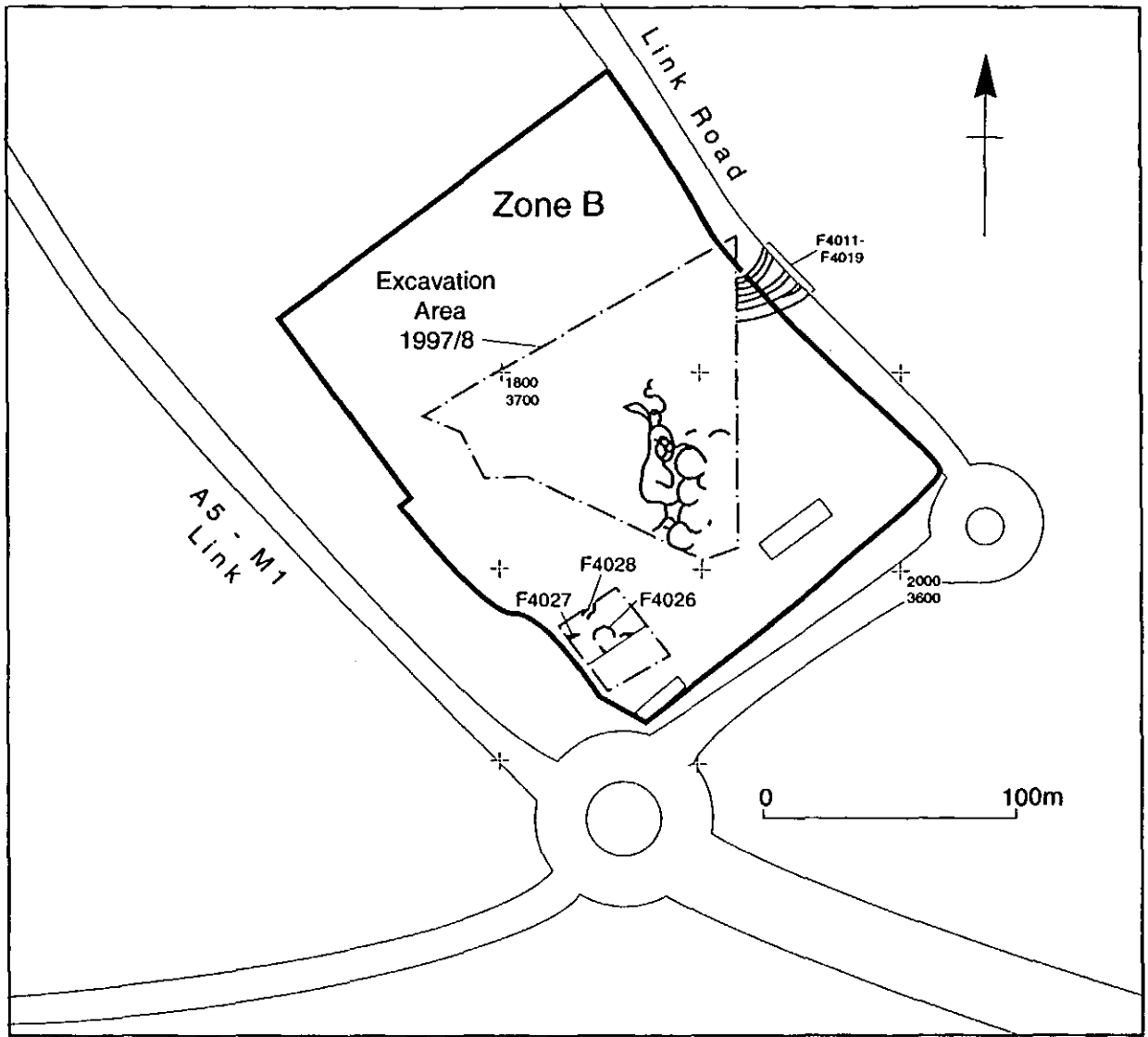


Fig.5

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