

**GREAT WESTERN ALTERNATIVE  
DIDCOT  
OXFORDSHIRE  
(ADDENDUM TO CA REPORT 02101)**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

*For*

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HOMES LTD**

CA REPORT: 03098

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GREAT WESTERN PARK,  
DIDCOT,  
OXFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

CA PROJECT: 1335  
CA REPORT: 02101

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## SUMMARY

<b>Site Name:</b>	Great Western Park
<b>Location:</b>	Didcot, Oxfordshire
<b>NGR:</b>	Centred on SU 5085 9015
<b>Type:</b>	Evaluation
<b>Date:</b>	6 August to 5 December 2002
<b>Planning Reference:</b>	Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011 (adopted August 1998) and Alteration to the Oxfordshire Structure Plan (adopted April 2001)
<b>Location of Archive:</b>	to be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service
<b>Accession no.</b>	2002.171
<b>Site Code:</b>	DID 02

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology between August and December 2002 at the request of RPS on 188ha of land to the west of Didcot, Oxfordshire. In compliance with an approved project design, a total of 245 trenches were excavated across the development area. This followed a more limited evaluation undertaken by RPS which identified a Neolithic pit and a Romano-British villa with associated features in the eastern part of the site.

Features in the form of ditches, pits, postholes, and occasional buried soil horizons dating to the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romano-British, and medieval/post-medieval periods were identified across the study area.

Bronze Age activity was represented by a few scattered features located across the landscape. Intensive activity dating to the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age was recorded at the site of an enclosed settlement located on the highest ground in the north-eastern part of the site. A more nebulous zone of activity was identified at the western edge of the site, comprising a ring-ditch and some evidence for occupation. Further isolated Iron Age features were also identified.

Occupation and/or specialist production dating to the Late Iron Age to Early Romano-British period was identified in the south-western corner of the site. Later Romano-British agricultural activity appeared to be centred on the villa located towards the eastern edge of

the site, although it should be noted that no further evidence for stone-built structures was identified. Funerary activity in the form of a probable *bustum* was identified nearby. An isolated zone of Late Romano-British activity was also identified at the southern extent of the site.

Limited activity dating to the Anglo-Saxon period was also identified, a trackway dating to this period was identified in the south-western corner of the site.

Medieval and post-medieval activity in the form of field boundaries and ridge and furrow cultivation survived across the whole of the site. Undated features together with poorly dated groups of features suggest that a scatter of more isolated features dating to the prehistoric and Romano-British periods are likely to survive across the site.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Between August and December 2002 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological evaluation for RPS on 188ha of land to the west of Didcot, Oxfordshire (centred on NGR: SU 5085 9015; Fig.1). The evaluation was undertaken to provide information on the archaeological resource across land known as The Western Alternative (Didcot West), an area earmarked for possible future development. The current fieldwork follows an initial programme of archaeological investigation which comprised desk-based assessment, walkover survey, field walking, geophysical survey, and trial trenching conducted by, or on behalf of, RPS between 2000 and 2002 (OCC 2001, RPS 1999a, RPS 1999b, RPS 2000, RPS 2001a, RPS 2001b, Stratascan 2000, Stratascan 2001a, Stratascan 2001b, and Stratascan 2002)
- 1.2 The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a brief for archaeological field evaluation (OCC 2001) prepared by Paul Smith (County Archaeologist, Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services) and with a subsequent detailed project specification produced by CA (2002) and approved by the LPA. The fieldwork also followed the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999). It was monitored by the County Archaeologist, including regular site visits throughout the course of the project. All stages of the project were monitored by RPS who were responsible for the overall management of the project.

### ***The site***

- 1.3 The boundary of the site is that formally defining The Western Alternative as presented at the Examination In Public for the Alteration to Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011. The boundary of the site provided within this report is as submitted with the Planning Application on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2002. This comprises a large swathe of land immediately to the west of the existing town of Didcot (Figs 2a and 2b). The site occupies a broad plateau to the north of the Didcot to Harwell road (B4493) sloping rapidly away to the west and the north from approximately 80m to 60m AOD. The central part of the plateau lies at approximately 84m AOD. South of the B4493, the plateau slopes more gently to the south-east from approximately 80m to 70m AOD.



- 1.4 The underlying geology of the main area is mapped as Upper Greensand of the Cretaceous period, with Head and younger Coombe Deposits along the western and northern margins (BGS 1971).
- 1.5 The proposed development area lies wholly within agricultural land, currently under arable, pasture, and set-aside. Each field within the proposed development area had previously been allocated separate field numbers (Figs 2a and 2b). This report accords with that numbering system.

### **Archaeological background**

- 1.6 The main archaeological background to the site can be found in sections 7 and 8 of the Environmental Statement for Didcot West: 'Cultural Heritage and Material Assets' and in Appendix 8a: 'Cultural Heritage Sites' (RPS 1999). The more recent results of the first phase of archaeological evaluation are contained within Didcot West: An Initial Archaeological Evaluation, Volumes 1 and 2 (RPS 2001). The principal findings of the earlier works are outlined below.
- 1.7 Previous work on the site has included walkover survey, fieldwalking, geophysical survey, and initial trial trenching. This work, together with preliminary desk based studies has collectively identified several locations of archaeological interest within the proposed development area, spanning from the Early Neolithic to the medieval period. Prior to the formal programme of archaeological investigation, the most outstanding find from the site was a hoard of gold *aurei*, the second largest found in Britain, which was recovered by a private individual metal-detecting during 1995. It was in response to this find and further evidence for Roman settlement in the area, that the initial evaluation was carried out. The trial trenching was targeted on possible features in fields 21 and 22, with trenches placed in a random grid pattern in field 23 where no evidence of archaeological activity had been recognised.
- 1.8 The evaluation identified a single possible early Neolithic pit, together with a small number of flint finds from the ploughsoil. Bronze Age pottery was also recovered from the ploughsoil, but no associated cut features were identified. Relict soil horizons dating to the Iron Age period were also identified. Early Roman activity was sparsely represented by only two features. These deposits are thought to be contemporary with the deposition of the coin hoard in c. AD 160.

- 1.9 A small Romano-British villa, probably dating to the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, was identified in field 22. The chalk-built external walls of the building, which was 13m in width, were identified. Further excavation revealed a hypocaust system, backfilled with debris including tiles from the heating system, the floor, and the roof. This deposit also included pieces of painted wall plaster from one of the rooms. Contemporary activity in the form of a metalled surface, a ditch, and a series of postholes was identified, together with an enclosure to the south of the villa. This enclosure appeared to have been initially used in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and was occupied into the late 4<sup>th</sup> century AD at least. Occupation deposits and features within this enclosure indicated possible associated settlement activity.
- 1.10 A lower density of archaeological deposits associated with the villa, including pits, and gullies was identified in the northern part of the initial evaluation area.

#### ***Archaeological objectives***

- 1.11 The objectives of the 2002 evaluation were to establish the date, character, quality, survival, and extent of any archaeological remains or deposits surviving within the site. This information will assist the Local Planning Authority in making an informed judgement on the likely impact upon the archaeological resource by the proposed development.

#### ***Methodology***

- 1.12 The fieldwork comprised the excavation of 245 trenches, varying in length from 20m to 100m, and with widths of either 1.5m or 1.8m. The positions of some of the trenches were modified on site in order to leave safe margins alongside overhead powerlines, field boundary ditches, and paths/trackways used by members of the general public. Several trenches were extended in order to investigate archaeological features, including trench 79 (extended to investigate the probable *bustum*) and trench 254 (extended to investigate a ring-ditch). All such modifications were made in consultation with the County Archaeologist and RPS.
- 1.13 All trenches were excavated by mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket. All machine excavation was undertaken under constant archaeological supervision to the top of the first significant archaeological horizon or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. Where archaeological deposits were encountered they were excavated by hand in accordance with the CA Technical Manual 1: *Excavation Recording Manual* (1996).

- 1.14 Deposits were assessed for their palaeoenvironmental potential and, where appropriate, sampled and processed in accordance with the CA Technical Manual 2: *The Taking of Samples for Palaeoenvironmental/Palaeoeconomic Analysis from Archaeological Sites* (1994). All artefacts recovered were processed in accordance with the CA Technical Manual 3: *Treatment of Finds Immediately After Excavation* (1995).
- 1.15 The archive and artefacts from the evaluation are currently held by CA at their offices in Kemble. Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner the site archive (including artefacts) will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service under accession number 2002.171.

## 2. RESULTS

### ***Presentation of results***

- 2.1 For the purposes of this report and for ease of reference, trenches containing archaeological features have been grouped together into specific areas (A to M), (Figs 2a and 2b). The features are briefly described below, area by area, with trenches in numerical order within each area. In addition, there is a brief description of the ridge and furrow cultivation system that was in evidence across the majority of the proposed development area.
- 2.2 This section provides an overview of the evaluation results in general terms. For the purposes of clarity the numerous ditches identified are described as *narrow* (<0.5m in width) or *wide* (>0.5m in width) and *shallow* (<0.25m in depth) or *deep* (>0.25m in depth). Full detailed summaries of the archaeologically significant recorded contexts, finds, and environmental samples (biological evidence) are to be found in Appendices 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

### **Area A (Fig. 3)**

- 2.3 Area A is located directly north of the Zulu Farm complex, within field 37. It was generally flat and located at a height of c.81m AOD. At the western edge of the area the ground started to slope downwards towards the stream located at the western edge of field 37. The artefactual evidence indicates that the majority of the deposits in this area date to the Late Iron Age and Early Romano-British periods. The

features comprised ditches, pits, and postholes. Notable features within this area were a number of square and rectangular steep-sided pits identified in trenches 230, 231, and 232. Further Roman-British activity (dating to the 2nd to 3rd century AD) in the form of ditches and pits, was identified in trenches 230 and 231. A trackway was identified in trench 226. The surface of the trackway contained pottery dating to the 2nd century AD, whilst the ditches on either side contained Iron Age, Romano-British and Saxon material.

#### *Trench 222*

- 2.4 A series of four narrow, shallow ditches were identified in this trench. Ditches 22208 and 22214 ran parallel to each other and were truncated to the west by two further converging gullies, 22204 and 22206. Ditch 22204 contained a quantity of Roman-British pottery and a single flint flake. Ditch 22206 produced finds including Romano-British pottery and two pieces of worked flint. A small sherd of pottery dating to the Iron Age/1st to 2nd century AD was recovered from 22208.

#### *Trench 226*

- 2.5 A trackway, 22607, with associated ditches on either side, was identified in this trench. The surface of trackway 22607 comprised compact clay silt with occasional Greensand fragments and had been laid forming a slight camber. It produced finds including a quantity of pottery dating to the 2nd century AD or later and four flint flakes. Flanking ditches 22614 and 22618 were wide, deep, and were of similar form. Each was filled by a primary deposit, which also overlaid the trackway surface. This deposit contained sherds of Saxon and Romano-British pottery, as well as three flint flakes. A depression was identified in the surface of each ditch fill. These hollows were filled by secondary deposits, 22604 and 22608. Fill 22604 contained a quantity of Saxon pottery, whilst pottery dating to the Late Iron Age/1st century AD was recovered from fill 22608. A further ditch, 22613, was identified to the east of the trackway. This was found to be wide, shallow, and produced a single sherd of pottery dating to the Iron Age or later.

#### *Trench 228*

- 2.6 Two circular postholes were identified in this trench. Posthole 22804 was 0.18m in diameter and 0.13m in depth, whilst posthole 22806 was 0.4m in diameter and 0.22m in depth. No dating evidence was recovered during the excavation of these features.

## Trench 229

### **The Finds**

- 2.103 The finds are described and tabulated in Appendix 2 and are briefly summarised below. The artefactual material provides good evidence for extended human activity in the area. The bulk of this evidence relates to the Middle/Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Romano-British periods.
- 2.104 The earliest stratified material, comprising quantities of pottery and worked flint of probable Middle and Late Bronze Age date, fits within a pattern of known occupation in the middle Thames valley. The pottery of this date consists mainly of undecorated vessels in coarse flint-tempered fabrics. Iron Age pottery is more abundant, more diverse in terms of fabric and form and includes highly decorated vessels. The Iron Age pottery is also paralleled among other sites of the Thames valley, although the diversity of styles suggestive of activity throughout the period is far more unusual.
- 2.105 Artefactual evidence is most abundant for the Roman period. In common with the later prehistoric material, there is some apparent spatial separation, in this instance between early and late Roman groups. The composition of the Roman pottery assemblage is fairly typical for the area consisting predominantly of locally made utilitarian coarsewares, with small quantities of regional and continental imports. The presence of pre-Flavian material is however noteworthy and the site has significant potential for addressing issues relating to the important late Iron Age to Roman transition. Despite the known presence of at least one reasonably substantial stone building from the area, ceramic and other building material is relatively scarce and restricted in type. Similarly the non-ceramic assemblage is very limited, comprising mostly iron nails. Of note are the large numbers of nails from the probable *bustum* pit in trench 79, which may result from the use of structural timbers as fuel.

## **3. DISCUSSION**

### **Introduction**

- 3.1 Features dating to the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romano-British, and medieval/post-medieval periods were identified across the site. These features

represent agricultural, settlement, industrial, and funerary activity and are described below in chronological order.

### ***Neolithic***

- 3.2 A pit probably dating to the Neolithic period (c. 4000-2400 BC) was identified during the initial evaluation (RPS 2001) in trench 4, area J. This comprised the earliest cut feature identified during the programme of fieldwork. No features of a comparable date were identified during the current project.

### ***Middle Bronze Age***

- 3.3 Activity dating to the Middle Bronze Age period (c.1500–1100 BC) was identified. This comprised two widely separated features; a pit in trench 56, area I, and a ditch in trench 156, area G. In addition, there is a possibility that a posthole in trench 136, area I, and a pit in trench 94, area B also dated to this period, however the latter may date to somewhere between Middle Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age. Although the presence of these features indicated activity in this period, the scarcity of deposits precludes definitive interpretation of this activity. The initial evaluation identified residual Bronze Age material within later features and the ploughsoil.

### ***Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age***

- 3.4 Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age (c. 1100–400 BC) activity is slightly better represented by a number of features within area D and several within a localised part of area I. Beyond these two areas, the only other activity that may date to this period is the pit in trench 94 which is referred to above. Within area D this Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age activity is represented by a pit and a small gully in trench 201 and a substantial ring-ditch in trench 254, although, the small piece of pottery recovered from this feature could equally date to the Early Bronze Age. Area D was also characterised by the presence of buried soil horizons and colluvial/alluvial layers.
- 3.5 The location of these features in the vicinity of a modern watercourse is probably of some significance. Although Bronze Age barrows and their associated ring-ditches are traditionally associated with upland landscapes, more low-lying examples are coming to light with the increasing investigation of gravel terraces. Examples from Oxfordshire include three round barrows identified at King's Weir, Wytham, Oxfordshire. These three barrows lie on the Thames floodplain at the confluence of that river and a palaeochannel and survived as extant earthworks at the time of

limited investigation of barrow C in 1979. The diameters of these features was between 30m and 36m and pottery dating to the later Bronze Age was recovered from the upper (alluvial) fill of the ring-ditch of barrow C. No trace of a burial was identified at the base of the trench excavated across the centre of the mound and ditches, however a gravel patch in one of the sections was thought to represent the upcast of a burial pit lying outside the excavated area (Bowler and Robinson 1980).

- 3.6 In area I, a number of pits within trenches 136 and 137 and a ditch in trench 135 appeared to date to this period. This activity probably represented a precursor to the construction of an enclosed settlement on the hilltop during the Middle Iron Age.

### ***Middle Iron Age***

- 3.7 Those features which have been dated as spanning the period from the Late Bronze Age into the Early Iron Age are described above. Deposits and features dating specifically to the Iron Age (c. 700 BC–mid 1st century AD) occurred sporadically throughout the northern part of the site. These included ditches in trenches 26 (area J) and 105 (area L) and a pit in trench 215 (area B).
- 3.8 In area D continuation of the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age activity may be represented by parallel ditches in trench 194 dating to the Mid to Late Iron Age and further parallel ditches and a pit in trench 252.
- 3.9 The majority of features dating to this period were identified within area I. This included features associated with settlement, such as pits (including storage pits) and postholes. A number of ditches were also recorded, including one which appeared to enclose the northern side of the settlement. Relict soils dating to this period were also identified in trench 131. These features therefore appear to represent an enclosed settlement on the crown of the hill which was established in the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age and which continued in use into the Middle Iron Age. This dating was supported by the lack of deep storage pits typical of the Late Iron Age period (Cunliffe 1991). Evidence for individual roundhouses was limited. A possible eaves drip gully was identified in trench 136 and a possible roundhouse ring-ditch was identified in trench 242. However it is probable that other ditches and postholes may represent further structures of this type
- 3.10 The previous evaluation identified Middle Iron Age deposits in the vicinity of the later villa, including relict soil horizons. The low density of Iron Age activity in this area

was considered to represent farming activity associated with a nearby settlement. In the light of the results of the present evaluation, this activity must be associated with the settlement to the north-east in area I.

### **Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British**

- 3.11 A single gully dating to the Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British (c. 100 BC–150 AD) period was recorded towards the northern extent of the site, in trench 155 (area G). Elsewhere, a small number of features of similar date were identified in area J. These comprised a gully in trench 88 and ditches in trenches 25, 26, 88, and 110.
- 3.12 The majority of features dating to this period were identified in area A immediately to the north of Zulu Farm. Features dating to this period included a trackway, ditches, pits, and possibly postholes in trenches 222, 226, 228-232, and 264. A number of square or rectangular pits were identified and partially excavated in trenches 230, 231, and 232. These features appeared to represent some form of industrial activity, possibly tanning. Evidence for the use of a rectangular pit during the production of leather was identified at Frocester Court Roman Villa where a tanning pit was identified during excavation of the courtyard between 1968 and 1977 (Gracie and Price 1979). A rectangular pit which measured 2.7m in length and 2.6m in width was excavated into the natural clay during the 4th century AD. This was then lined with a pre-fabricated wooden structure held together with iron nails. A drain at the base of the pit discharged into a boundary ditch presumably to drain used fluid. The backfill of the pit contained polished stone slabs (similar to those used in traditional tanneries until recent times) and a number of ox skulls were recovered from the vicinity. Clearly this example is more developed than those partially excavated in area A, however the size and form of the features is not incomparable and differences in form may be due to both improvements in the design over time and the differing contexts in which the features were built.
- 3.13 However shallow rectangular pits may also be associated with pottery production and a number have been excavated at Lower Farm, Nuneham Courtney, on the route of the Didcot to Oxford pipeline. In this instance they were associated with a number of Romano-British kilns (Booth *et al.* 1993).
- 3.14 Continuation of early Romano-British (1st century AD) activity to the south-west is indicated by the features excavated on the route of the Harwell to Blewbury pipeline by Cotswold Archaeological Trust in 1997-8 (Enright *et al.* 1999) (fig. 3).



**Romano-British**

- 3.15 Continuation of activity into the 2nd and 3rd century AD in area A is demonstrated by the recovery of pottery dating from this period from a ditch in trench 230, the trackway in trench 226, and the backfill of one of the square pits in trench 231. Although these features may have been out of use for some time when this pottery was deposited.
- 3.16 The majority of features dating to the later part of the Romano-British period were located in area J and are centred on the villa identified in the initial evaluation (RPS 2001).
- 3.17 The vast majority of features identified in area J comprised ditches presumably excavated to establish land division and drainage. A notable exception was the probable *bustum* identified in trench 79. This feature was of typical Romano-British form and clearly indicates the presence of funerary activity in the vicinity of trench 79.
- 3.18 The features recorded in area I, apparently associated with the main concentration of activity to the south, area J, comprised ditches in trenches 50 and 129, pits in trenches 125 and 129, and a square posthole in trench 132.
- 3.19 Within this main concentration of Romano-British activity, the dating evidence indicates continuous use of the site from the 1st century AD period until the 4th century AD. It is likely that many of the ditches represent boundaries associated with agricultural field systems spanning the whole of this period. The focus of this activity in the later Romano-British period is undoubtedly the small villa within field 21, however the earlier ditches intimate a precursor to this complex. A number of the ditches in this area probably relate to the enclosures discovered in the initial trial trenching exercise. It is most likely that the large ditch revealed in trenches 83, 26, and 28 represents one of these features.
- 3.20 The activity identified in area E, a number of ditches, one of which was of Romano-British date, may represent more extensive field boundary ditches associated with the Romano-British settlement.

- 3.21 Further sporadic Late Romano-British activity in the form of a layer identified in area M was also identified.

### ***Anglo-Saxon***

- 3.22 The trackway identified in trench 226 appeared to date to the Anglo-Saxon period. Sherds of organic-tempered pottery probably dating to the early to middle part of this period were recovered from the ditches flanking and covering the surface of the trackway. Sherds of residual material dating to the Iron Age and Romano-British periods was also recovered during the excavation of this feature. An Anglo-Saxon bow brooch was also recovered from the vicinity of the coin hoard by a metal-detectorist (RPS 2001).

### ***Medieval/post-medieval***

- 3.23 Furrows dating to the medieval and/or post-medieval periods were encountered across the site. Excavation of the furrows produced pottery and other artefacts dating to the medieval and post-medieval periods together with a quantity of earlier residual material. Such material was also recovered from the ploughsoil.
- 3.24 The most significant medieval and/or post-medieval features were identified in area I. The parish boundary, dividing the parishes of Didcot and Harwell was identified as the boundary between fields 21 and 22, extending along the boundary between these fields and field 23. It survived partly as a ditch running from the B4493 to approximately half way up the boundary of fields 21 and 22. It is likely that the large undated ditch revealed in trench 38 probably represented a continuation of this boundary and that the large ditch running through trenches 34 and 37 is the same feature. It is also possible that the colluvial deposit in trench 58 represents a lynchet associated with this boundary. Features dating to these periods were also identified in areas C and F.

### ***Undated***

- 3.25 The largely undated ditches identified in areas E and K suggested that more extensive field system ditches may be encountered across the site. Such features may be virtually devoid of artefactual material due to their spatial removal from the main areas of settlement, but are likely to date to the later prehistoric and/or Romano-British periods.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Features in the form of ditches, pits, and postholes dating to the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romano-British, and medieval/post-medieval periods were identified across the site in areas A to M. Earlier activity is represented by one microlith dating to the Mesolithic period, which was recovered from a furrow in trench 27 and the Neolithic pit identified during the initial evaluation (RPS 2001).
- 4.2 Bronze Age activity appeared to be represented by the continuation of the excavation of scattered features, located in areas B, C, G, and I, across the landscape. A ring-ditch dating to this period was also identified in trench 254, area D.
- 4.3 Intensive activity dating to the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age is represented by the enclosed settlement located on the highest ground in the north-eastern part of the site, area I. A more nebulous zone of activity, area D, was characterised by limited evidence of occupation dating to this period. Further isolated Iron Age features were identified in areas B and L.
- 4.4 To the north of Zulu Farm, area A, occupation and/or specialist production dating to the Late Iron Age to Early Romano-British period was identified. Later Romano-British agricultural activity appeared to be centred on the villa site, area J, although it should be noted that no further evidence for stone-built structures was identified during this evaluation. Limited funerary activity in the form of a probable *bustum* was also identified nearby. An isolated zone of Late Romano-British activity was also identified at the southern extent of the site, area M.
- 4.5 Limited activity dating to the Anglo-Saxon period was also identified, a trackway dating to this period was identified in area A.
- 4.6 A limited assessment of the biological remains produced significant ecofactual material which can be divided into two distinct classes. Burnt plant remains (typical of the period) were recovered from charcoal-rich deposits within prehistoric features and the remains of molluscs were recovered from the fill of the ring-ditch in area D. By extension, features dating to both the prehistoric and the Romano-British periods may potentially contain significant assemblages of burnt plant remains. The results from the ring-ditch, together with field observation, suggested that the alluvial and/or

colluvial sequences and any associated archaeological features in area D may contain significant assemblages of molluscs.

- 4.7 The distribution of archaeological features dating to the prehistoric and Romano-British periods was clearly widespread over the northern part of the site (north of the B4493). The majority of trenches excavated across the southern part of the site (south of the B4493) were devoid of archaeological features. However the identification of significant quantities of artefactual material dating to the prehistoric and Romano-British periods within field 4 during the Fieldwalking Survey (RPS 2001a) and the identification of a Romano-British layer in trench 265, area M, suggested settlement activity may be located in the western and southern parts of the area located to the south of the B4493.
- 4.8 Post-medieval activity in the form of field boundaries, areas C, F, and H, and ridge and furrow cultivation survived across the whole of the site. Undated features together with poorly dated groups of features suggest that a scatter of more isolated features dating to the prehistoric and Romano-British periods are likely to survive across the northern part of the site, areas B, G, and K.

## 5. CA PROJECT TEAM

Fieldwork was undertaken by Mark Brett, Laurent Coleman, Jon Hart, David Kenyon, and Franco Vartuca assisted by Kate Cullen, Leslie Cross, Derek Evans, Tim Havard, Mike Kershaw, John Naylor, Kirsty Owen, Michael Rowe, Dave Sabin, Kelly Saunders, Jon Webster, Briega Williams, Charlotte Wymark, and Steve Yeates. The report was written by Mark Brett and Laurent Coleman assisted by Franco Vartuca. The illustrations were prepared by Lorna Gray. The archive has been compiled by Laurent Coleman and Dave Sabin, and prepared for deposition by Ed McSloy. The project was managed for CA by Clifford Bateman and Martin Watts.

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**APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS**

## Trench 20

2001	Topsoil: loose, mid grey-brown silty clay, 0.42m in depth.
2002	Subsoil: loose, light to mid orange-grey silty clay, 0.30m in depth.
2003	Natural Greensand: fairly compact, pale green-grey/pale grey-orange clay sand with occasional sub-angular gravel and occasional patches of iron panning/staining.
2004	Ditch cut: straight linear orientated north-west south-east, with moderate to steep concave sides and a flat bottom. Width 2.75m, depth 0.78m.
2005	Ditch fill of 2004: compact, mid grey-brown silty clay containing the very occasional sherd of Roman/Romano-British pottery, the odd fragment of metal and flint flakes. Depth 0.78m.

## Trench 25

2501	Topsoil: loose, mid grey-brown silty clay, 0.25m in depth.
2502	Subsoil: loose, light to mid orange-grey silty clay, 0.30m in depth.
2503	Natural Greensand: fairly compact, pale green-grey/pale grey-orange clay sand with occasional sub-angular gravel and occasional patches of iron panning/staining.
2504	Ditch cut: straight linear orientated north-east south-west, with a concave base and symmetrical sides at approximately 45°. Width 1.40m, depth 0.27m.
2505	Ditch fill of 2504: compact, mid yellow-brown silty clay with frequent small angular fragments of limestone. Depth 0.27m.
2506	Ditch cut: straight linear orientated north-east south-west, with a concave base, straight north-west side and convex south-east side, both at approximately 45°. Width 0.94m, depth 0.30m.
2507	Ditch fill of 2506: moderately compact, dark yellow-brown silty clay with frequent small angular fragments of limestone and the odd sherd of Roman/ Romano British pottery. Depth 0.30m.

## Trench 26

2600	Topsoil: loose, mid grey-brown silty clay with occasional fine gravel, 0.30m in depth.
2601	Subsoil: loose, mid orange-brown silty clay with occasional fine gravel, 0.30m in depth.
2602	Natural Greensand: fairly compact, pale green-grey clay sand with occasional patches/lenses of limestone brash.
2603	Upper ditch fill of 2605: compact, dark grey silty clay with frequent small angular fragments of limestone and the odd sherd of Roman/Romano-British pottery. Depth 0.76m.
2604	Lower ditch fill of 2605: firm dark brown silty clay with occasional small angular fragments of limestone and the odd sherd of Roman/Romano-British pottery. Depth 0.44m.
2605	Ditch cut: straight linear orientated north-east south-west, with symmetrical, gentle concave sides and base. Width 7.96m, depth 1m. Truncates ditches 2607, 2609 and 2611.
2606	Ditch fill of 2607: compact, dark grey silty clay with frequent small angular fragments of limestone and the odd sherd of Roman/Romano-British pottery. Depth 0.84m.
2607	Ditch cut: straight linear orientated north-east south-west, with steep, straight sides and a flat base. Width 1.92m, depth 0.84m. Truncated by ditch 2605.
2608	Ditch fill of 2609: firm, dark brown silty clay with frequent small angular fragments of limestone and the odd sherd of Roman/Romano-British pottery. Depth 0.20m. Truncated by ditch 2605.
2609	Ditch cut: straight linear orientated north-east south-west, with shallow concave sides and base. Width 1.36m, depth 0.20m. Truncated by ditch 2605.
2610	Ditch fill of 2611: firm, dark green-grey silty clay with frequent small angular fragments of limestone and the odd sherd of Roman/Romano-British pottery. Depth 0.66m. Truncated by ditch 2605.
2611	Ditch cut: straight linear orientated north-east south-west, with steep, straight sides and a concave base. Width 1.38m, depth 0.66m. Truncated by ditch 2605.
2612	Gully fill of 2613: firm, dark grey-brown silty clay with occasional small angular fragments of limestone. Depth 0.20m. Runs into ditch 2605 but relationship unknown.
2613	Gully cut: straight linear orientated north-west south-east, with symmetrical, steep concave sides and base. Width 0.60m, depth 0.20m. Runs into ditch 2605 but relationship unknown.
2616	Ditch fill of 2617: firm, dark grey silty clay with occasional small angular fragments of limestone, occasional fine gravel, charcoal flecks and the odd sherd of Roman/Romano-British pottery. Depth 0.40m. Truncated by furrow 2615.

## APPENDIX 2: THE FINDS

### ***The Pottery by Ed Mcsloy***

A total of 2064 sherds of pottery (16.974 kg) were recovered from 196 contexts. The pottery ranges in date from the Bronze Age to the post-medieval periods, although the bulk pottery is of Iron Age and Romano-British date.

The condition of the pottery is generally good, with little abrasion noted, good preservation of surfaces, slips or colour-coats and calcareous fabric inclusions intact. Some later prehistoric types which are of a characteristically friable fabric occur frequently as small, highly fragmented sherds. The fragmented nature of this material partly explains the overall low average sherd weight (8.2g).

Pottery was recorded at a very basic period-dated level by sherd count and weight per context (table 1). Additionally, incidence of fabric types and diagnostic forms was noted within the context spot-dating lists. Quantitative and spot-dating data has been added to an Access database for ease of manipulation.

### *Earlier prehistoric (Bronze Age) Pottery*

Material of probable middle to late Bronze Age date was recovered from seven contexts and amounts to at least 96 sherds (650g).

A scrap of coarse flint -tempered pottery was recovered from ring-ditch 25410. On the basis of the fabric this sherd, which weighs less than 1g, may date to the late Neolithic period, however a mid-late Bronze Age date is equally likely. An isolated sherd (2g) of possible Bronze Age pottery was also recovered from context 13616. This sherd exhibits characteristics common to some earlier prehistoric pottery types, pitted 'corky' appearance and bi-partite reddish brown exterior and black interior.

A small quantity of pottery, 7 sherds (55g), characterised by an extremely coarse fabric with abundant quartzite or calcined flint inclusions, is thought to represent middle or late Bronze Age material. This material was recovered from two widely separated contexts 5614 and 15606. No featured sherds were recovered however the fabric is consistent with coarsewares in the Deverel Rimbury tradition, or perhaps more likely with the late Bronze age plainware tradition. Significantly, small quantities of Deverel Rimbury pottery were recorded from excavations west of Didcot Church (Timby 1994, 29).

Larger groups of material were recovered from contexts 9407 (53 sherds), 20108 and 20110 (25 and 9 sherds respectively). These groups contain a mix of fabrics, including coarse or finer calcined flint tempered, grog-tempered, sandy and organic-tempered types and in the case of 9407 a leached calcareous (shell?) tempered fabric. No decorated sherds were recovered and featured sherds are restricted to a single plain rim sherd from a small 'fineware' vessel. Significantly all of the groups discussed here occurred together with sizeable and very clearly stratified quantities of worked flint (see below). In the absence of diagnostic forms dating is difficult, although the range of fabrics and absence of decorated pieces make it most likely that this material belongs to the late Bronze Age plain ware tradition previously recognised in the middle/upper Thames valley (Barrett 1980, 306-309).

### *Iron Age Pottery*

Some 816 sherds of Iron Age pottery (6488g), equivalent to 40.0% of the total assemblage, were recovered. The pottery would seem to span the entire period from the early Iron Age to the late pre-Roman Iron Age (*circa* 800 BC to mid first century AD). A proportion of the late prehistoric material is represented as small numbers of unfeatured but hand-made sherds, typically in the long-lived quartz-tempered fabric. Contexts characterised thus are allocated an 'IA' spot date in table 1.

The earliest material, that of probable earlier Iron Age date, is characterised by hand made vessel forms with carinated or rounded shouldered profiles, 'high' upright or everted rims and sometimes decoration in the form of fingernail/fingertip impressions or incised 'zoned' designs. Material of early Iron Age occurs in trenches 136, 137 and 215. Quartz tempered fabrics dominate with occasional sherds of coarse shell and fine flint tempered types. The distinct 'fineware' vessels are of near inclusionless clay and are highly burnished. A fineware vessel, a sharply carinated bowl from 13717, is of particular note as it survives to full profile and is highly decorated with an incised geometrical design. Further sherds with incised decoration come from 21506.

Pottery of probable early to middle Iron Age date was recovered from trenches 131, 133-137 and 134 (see table). Vessel forms are a mix of large, slab-sided, slack-shouldered vessels with square or heavy, flanged rims and smaller rounded shouldered vessels with upright rims. Decoration is restricted to fingernail impressions to the outer edge of the rim of some vessels and occasional finger-tipping to girth areas. Fabrics are generally quartz tempered or contain a mix of quartz and shell. The burnished fineware fabrics noted among the LBA/EIA dated



groups would appear to be absent. Pottery identified as of early to middle Iron Age date is reminiscent of similarly dated material from previous excavations at Didcot (Timby 1994, 29-31).

Late Iron Age and 'late pre-Roman Iron Age' pottery would appear to be concentrated to the south and south-west of the earlier material, particularly in trenches 26, 88, 110, 225 and 230. The overall quantity of material of this period is relatively small (table 1), however dating is reliant to a large extent on identification of vessel form and a proportion of the undiagnostic Iron Age material probably relates to this period. It should be noted that the continuation of pre-conquest fabrics and forms into the early Roman period means that the description 'late prehistoric' pottery here refers to the tradition rather than strictly to chronology.

Material of late Iron Age/LPRIA date includes both hand-made and wheel-thrown forms. The occurrence, in some instances, of native tradition hand-made vessels together with wheel thrown grog-tempered vessels may suggest that all may date to a relatively brief period of time, most likely the early to mid first century AD. Represented forms are restricted to ovoid or globular jars, a single probable butt-beaker copy from 23244. Additionally, thick walled sherds from 19410 probably derive from a large storage jar. Several wheel-thrown sherds (contexts 2608, 2610, 8809) feature cordoned decoration. Wheel-thrown vessels are of grog, grog and sand, grog with flint or organic tempered fabrics. Hand made material is primarily quartz tempered or occasionally with fine crushed flint inclusions. Context 8804 is noteworthy in containing a substantially complete hand-made jar with short rounded rim of late Iron Age type together with wheel-thrown grogged sherds.

#### *Roman Pottery*

Pottery of Roman date amounts to 1104 sherds (9481g), or equivalent to 53.5% of the total assemblage (according to sherd count). The bulk of the Roman pottery belongs to locally produced ware types, including sandy oxidised wares, reduced sandy 'greywares' and black-sandy wares and Oxfordshire red-slipped wares. Regional imports relatively poorly represented but include quantities of Dorset BB1, Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware, Verulamium region whiteware and 'Soft pink grog-tempered ware' (probably from the Towcester region). Continental imports are restricted to sherds of Rhone valley mortaria, Gaulish samian and southern Spanish (Baetican) amphorae.

The Roman pottery spans the mid/late first centuries through to the late third or fourth centuries AD, perhaps with a slight bias detectable towards the later Roman period. As with the later prehistoric ceramics, in many instances individual contexts are characterised by small numbers of sherds of long-lived types. In such instances it is possible only to give very broad date ranges or suggest a 'Romano-British' date.

The earliest diagnostic material occurs from related contexts 23103 and 23109, together amounting to 40 sherds (488g). Forms are a mix of neckless, short everted rim jars and necked jars/bowls with cordons at the junction of neck and shoulder. Fabrics are a mix of fairly soft-fired, grog-tempered 'belgic' types and developed grog-tempered greywares which resemble Savernake products. Also present are a small number of flint-tempered sherds, which if not regarded as residual prehistoric sherds, are likely to be related to 'Silchester ware' known from the North Hants/Berkshire region (Timby 2000, 239). A pre-Flavian or early Flavian dating is thought likely for this group.

Material datable to the late first century to early second century occurs most prominently in Trench 89. Also noteworthy is a single abraded sherd of Rhone valley mortaria from 2603 which is likely to pre-date the mid second century. A Verulamium Region white ware mortaria rim from 8904 is stamped 'MATVGENUS', a potter who is known to be operating from the Brockley Hill kilns in the period c. AD. 80-110/20. A similar or possibly slightly earlier date can be ascribed to a sizeable group of material from context 8915. This group comprises mainly local? developed grog-tempered wares and reduced or oxidised sandy wares. The presence of platter and butt-beaker copies may indicate a Neronian/Flavian date although such material would seem in Oxfordshire to continue somewhat later than might be expected elsewhere (Henig and Booth 2000, 164).

Several contexts, within trenches 89, 103, 129 and 230, produced material of Antonine to early third century date (see concordance). Reduced wares are most common, most commonly as necked jars and plain or beaded rim dishes, but also including carinated jars. Also present are small quantities of oxidised wares and coarse shell-tempered ware, both of which are likely to have been produced relatively locally. The bulk of the grey or oxidised coarsewares are only broadly datable and date markers are mainly those provided by other types. Diagnostic material is however present as flat-top or reeded-rim bowls, certain flagon types and vessels decorated with barbotine panel decoration. Of note are joining sherds Central Gaulish samian beaker (Drag.72/Lud Vd) from 8909 and an isolated sherd of Wilts? type colour-coated beaker with self-coloured barbotine scroll decoration from 12909.

Later Roman (LC3-C4) dated contexts occur in 26, 49, 79, 106, 132 and 265. Such contexts are also dominated by reduced wares, with small quantities of Oxfordshire red slipped, Oxfordshire whiteware or white slipped mortaria and (less commonly) Oxford parchment wares, LNVCC, Dorset BB1, and 'soft pink grog-tempered ware'. The latter occurs as a single storage jar with heavy square rim from 2606, a form typical of this ware type when found at some distance from its core area of use. Coarseware forms are dominated by necked jars/bowl-jars with some plain-rimmed dishes. Late Roman mortaria comprise flanged Oxfordshire whiteware and flanged

or wall-sided Oxfordshire red-slipped forms. 'Finewares', mostly Oxfordshire red-slipped ware, comprise mainly samian derived bowls, with a single LNVCC rouletted beaker also recorded. Fabrics and forms are for the most part only broadly datable to after c. 240AD or in some instances after 300AD. It is perhaps significant that there are no vessel forms or fabrics, such as Midlands shell-tempered ware, which are typical of the second half of the fourth century.

#### *Anglo-Saxon Pottery*

A group (25 sherds, weighing 191g) of hand-made pottery in a distinctive micaceous, organic tempered fabric from trackway fills 22604-22606 is thought to date to the early/middle Saxon period (6th to 8th/early 9th centuries). No decorated sherds or diagnostic forms were present, however the fabric is closely comparable to material from previous excavations at Milton Park, Didcot (Timby 2000; 34).

#### *Medieval and later Pottery*

A small quantity of pottery of medieval and post-medieval date was recovered predominantly from topsoil/subsoil contexts. Medieval material comprises mainly flint and limestone tempered ('Newbury B') type and sandy (Oxford type?) cooking pot fabrics with a few glazed (Oxford or Brill/Boarstal) sherds. All may be broadly dated to the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. The post-medieval pottery consists almost entirely of glazed earthenwares, with additional single sherds of 'Tudor Green' and Frechen stoneware.

#### **Fired or Burnt Clay By Ed Mcsloy**

A single, substantially complete triangular loomweight of late Iron Age or early Roman date was recovered from context 8804. Fragments from 13512 and 24109 preserve curving edges and may also represent (triangular) loomweight forms.

An additional 91 fragments (1276g) of fired or burnt clay were recovered. The majority of pieces are generally formless and undiagnostic of original function. However a fragment from 13628 preserves rounded wattle-like impressions and may represent burnt daub.

#### **Ceramic Building Material by Ed McSloy**

One hundred and thirty-three fragments of ceramic building material were recovered (table 1). Miscellaneous (unfeatured) tile fragments, of a broadly similar orange sandy fabric and between 10-20mm thick, form the bulk of this material. In most instances fragments are highly fragmented and abraded. Association with Roman post-medieval pottery indicates a mixed date range. Roman brick, *imbrex* and *tegula* as well as late medieval/post-medieval peg-tile and brick forms were also identifiable (see concordance).

Of interest is a quantity of brick like material, presumed to be of (probably early) Roman date, from contexts 2714, 2604, 2608, 8810, 10617 and 23103. Where full depth is preserved this material is between 30-40mm thick. The 'bricks' would appear to be hand fashioned and all of a similar, fairly soft, red-brown sand and organic tempered matrix. The function of this material is unknown, although use within an oven or similar lower temperature pyrotechnic installation might be imagined.

#### **The Worked Flint by Ed Mcsloy**

A total of 222 pieces of worked flint were recovered. Tool types are scarce and restricted in type, comprising 7 scrapers and single examples of microlith, piercer and an unclassifiable core tool. The remaining pieces consist of 13 cores or core fragments and 198 flakes or 'shatter pieces'. Raw material is primarily unpatinated grey or black flint seemingly for the most part from secondary gravel deposits. Condition varies, however a majority of the demonstrably residual pieces exhibit significant edge damage or breakage.

The majority of worked flint can be seen to be demonstrably residual, occurring with Romano-British and later dated material, or else from unstratified ploughsoil or subsoil contexts. A proportion of the flint (approx. 30%) occurs in association with probable Bronze Age and early/middle Iron Age pottery or else with undiagnostic late prehistoric material and may be regarded, potentially at least, as stratified. Evidence that much of this material is indeed stratified is provided by its 'fresh' condition. Of particular note are groups of 15 flakes and 'shatter-pieces' from context 9407 and 16 flakes from 20110, both of which occurred in association with pottery of mid/late Bronze Age date. In both instances the flakes are fresh and most likely resulted from a discrete knapping episodes.

The character of the 'potentially stratified' pieces and much of the remaining assemblage is consistent with what might be expected with a later prehistoric group, although a small proportion clearly relates to earlier periods. Flakes are generally thick-butted and of broad, 'squat' proportions. Longer removals of blade-like proportions are present although none are considered to be intentional or are described as 'blades'. Some removals and core fragments are accurately described as 'shatter-pieces' with little or no suggestion of directional control. Correspondingly the cores and core fragments belong to multi-platform or pebble core types and a number of examples show evidence for repeated, unsuccessful striking as 'platform shatter' or sometimes as incipient bulbs of percussion. As noted previously, tools are scarce and the absence of Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age types may be significant. The scrapers and 'piercer' are not in themselves closely datable but neither would be

considered incongruous in a later prehistoric (Mid/late Bronze Age+) group. An obliquely blunted blade microlith (from 2708) is exceptional in the assemblage as a piece clearly of Mesolithic date.

#### **Metal Objects by Ed Mcsloy**

Metal artefacts comprise entirely items of iron and almost entirely of nails or hobnails (see concordance). Exceptions are a riveted strip-like object from Iron Age dated context 13140, a loop-headed spike of likely Roman date from the subsoil over Trench 128 and a 'joiners dog' of probable medieval or post-medieval date from 20207.

Hobnails (41 in total) and nails (56) are almost certainly all of Roman date. A large proportion of the nails (22) derive from fills of pyre pit feature (7905, 7907). The concentration of nails in this feature may indicate the re-use of structural timber as fuel.

#### **Worked Stone by Ed Mcsloy with identifications by Fiona Roe**

Three quern fragments, almost certainly all of Romano-British type, were recovered. Fragments from 5007 and 13202 are burnt and of unidentifiable sandstone. That from 2800 is of millstone grit.

Flat fragments of sandstone approx. 15mm thick from 2600 probably represent roofing material, again of likely Roman date.

A disc-like object of fine-grained limestone from 2714, with a roughly scratched cross to its upper surface and further scored vertical lines to its edges, is likely to represent a gaming piece. A Roman date is suggested by associated pottery.

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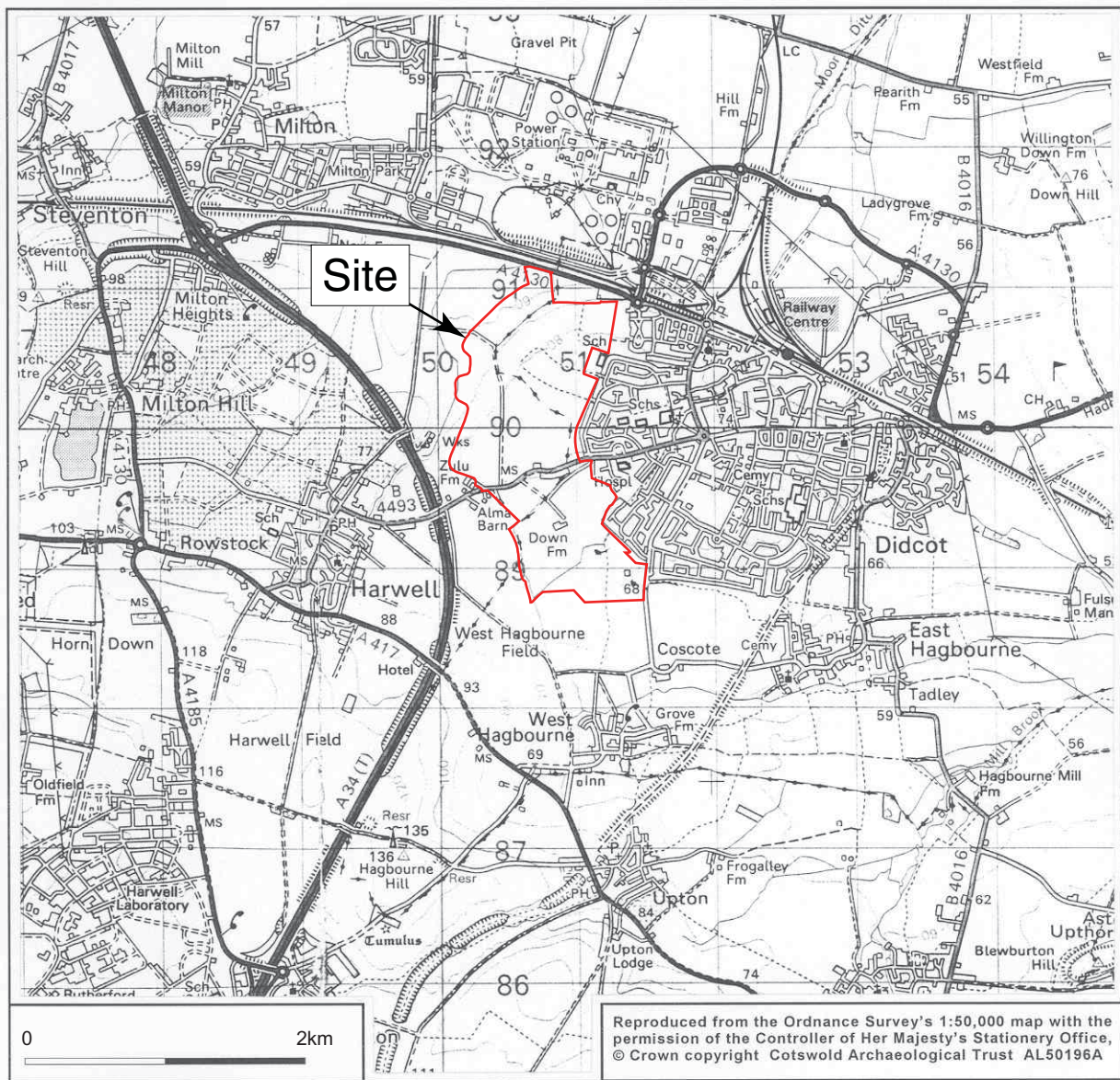
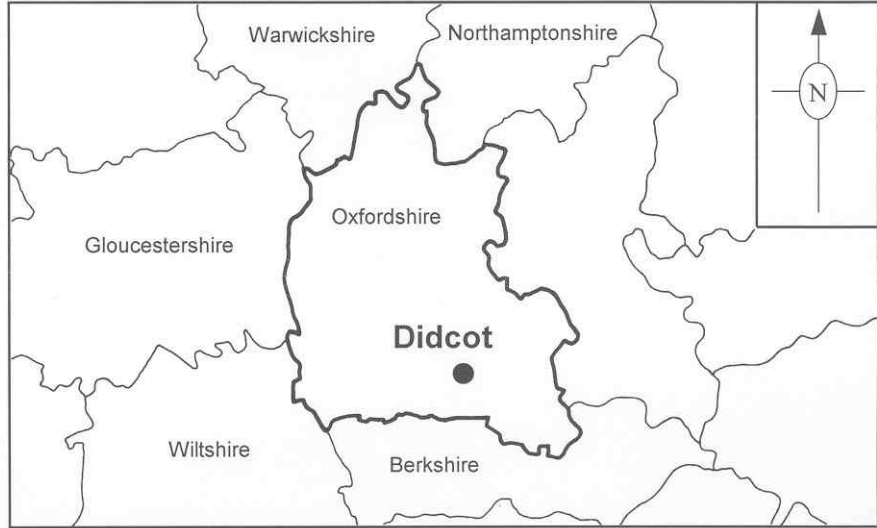
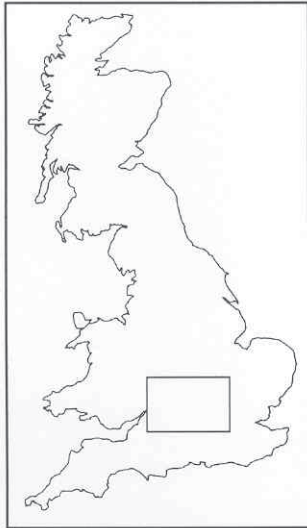


Fig. 1 Site location plan (1:50,000)



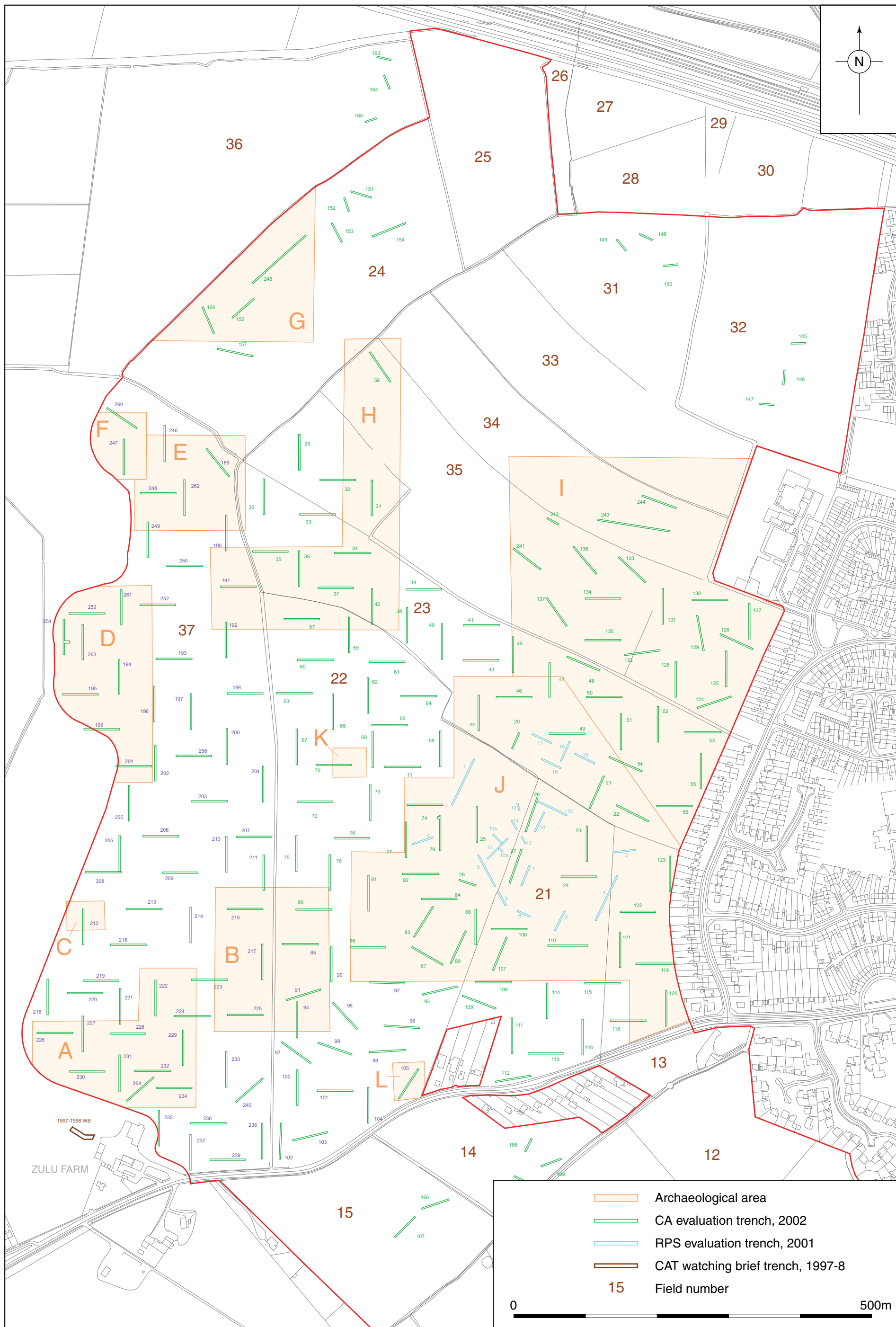


Fig. 2a Trench location plan, north (1:5000)

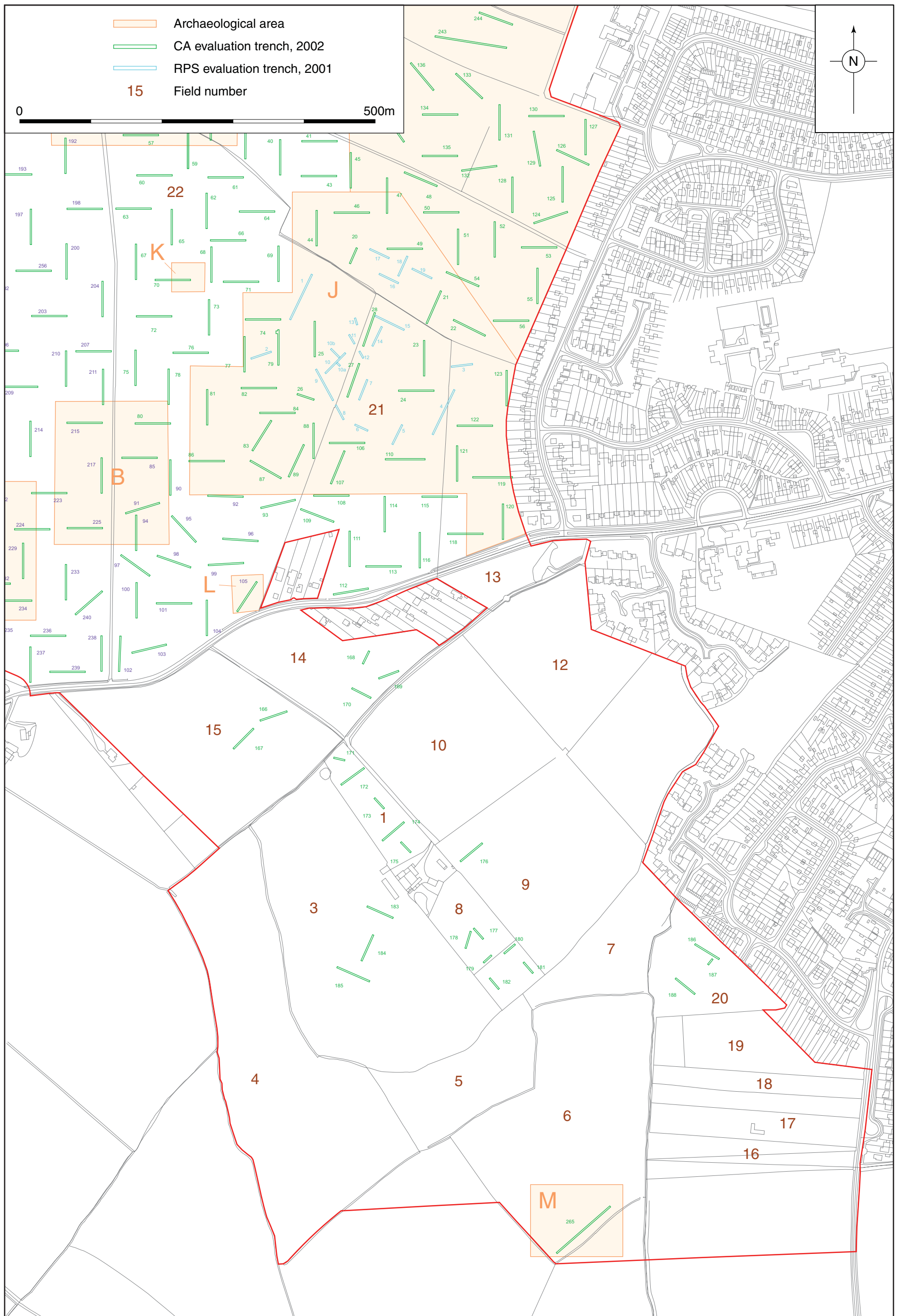


Fig. 2b Trench location plan, south (1:5000)

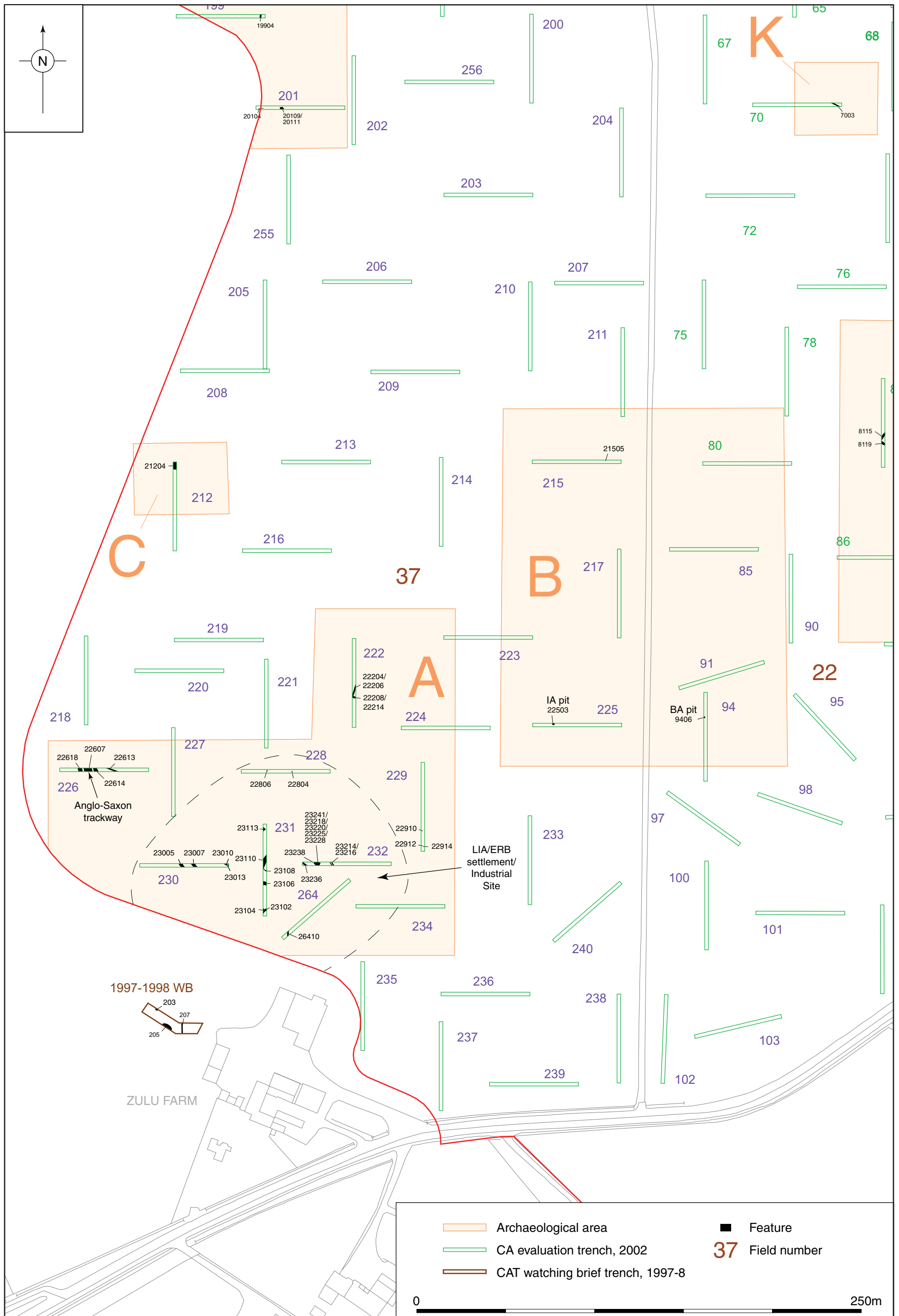


Fig. 3 Areas A-C, showing location of trenches and archaeological features (1:2000)



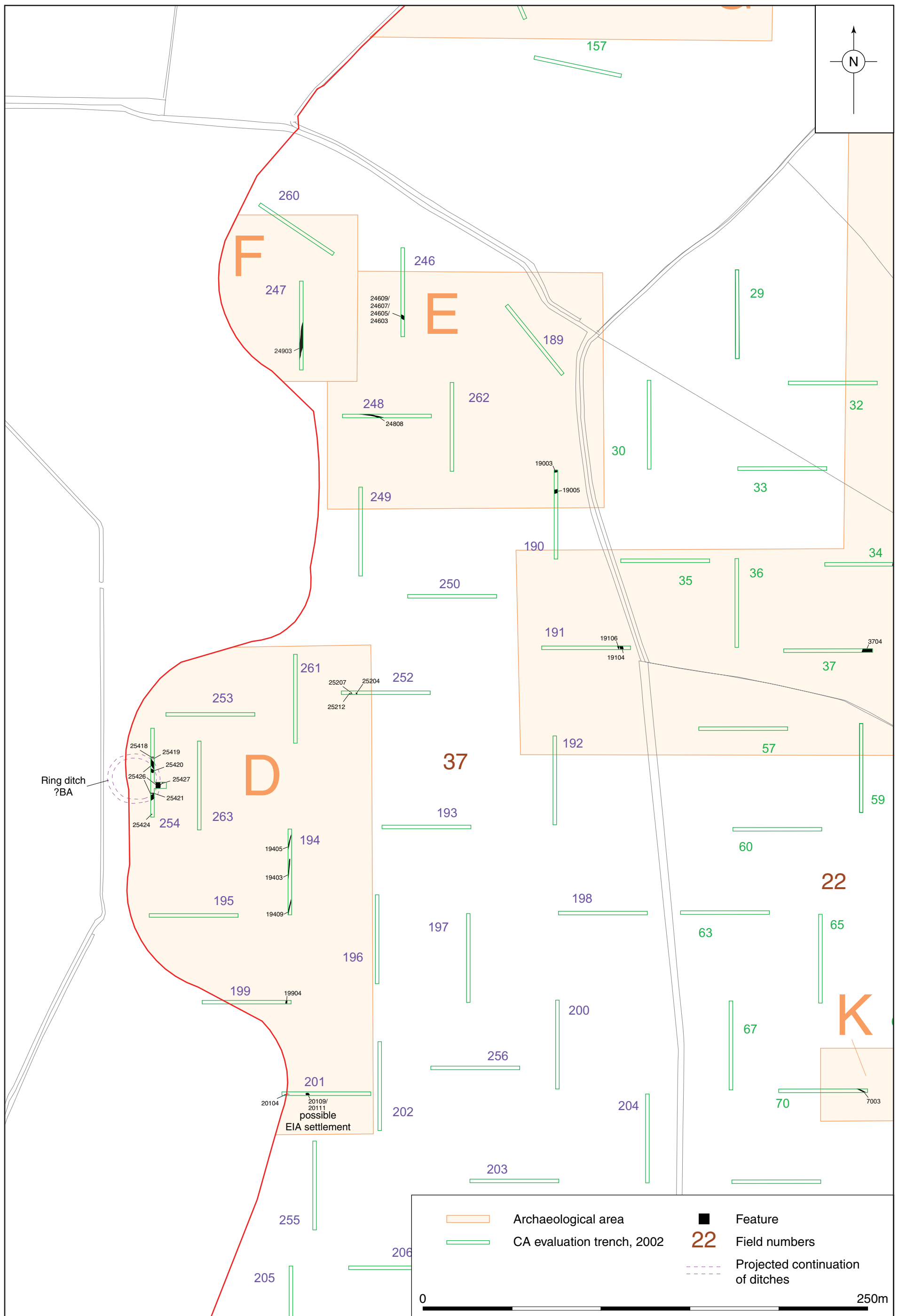


Fig. 4 Areas D-F, showing location of trenches and archaeological features (1:2000)



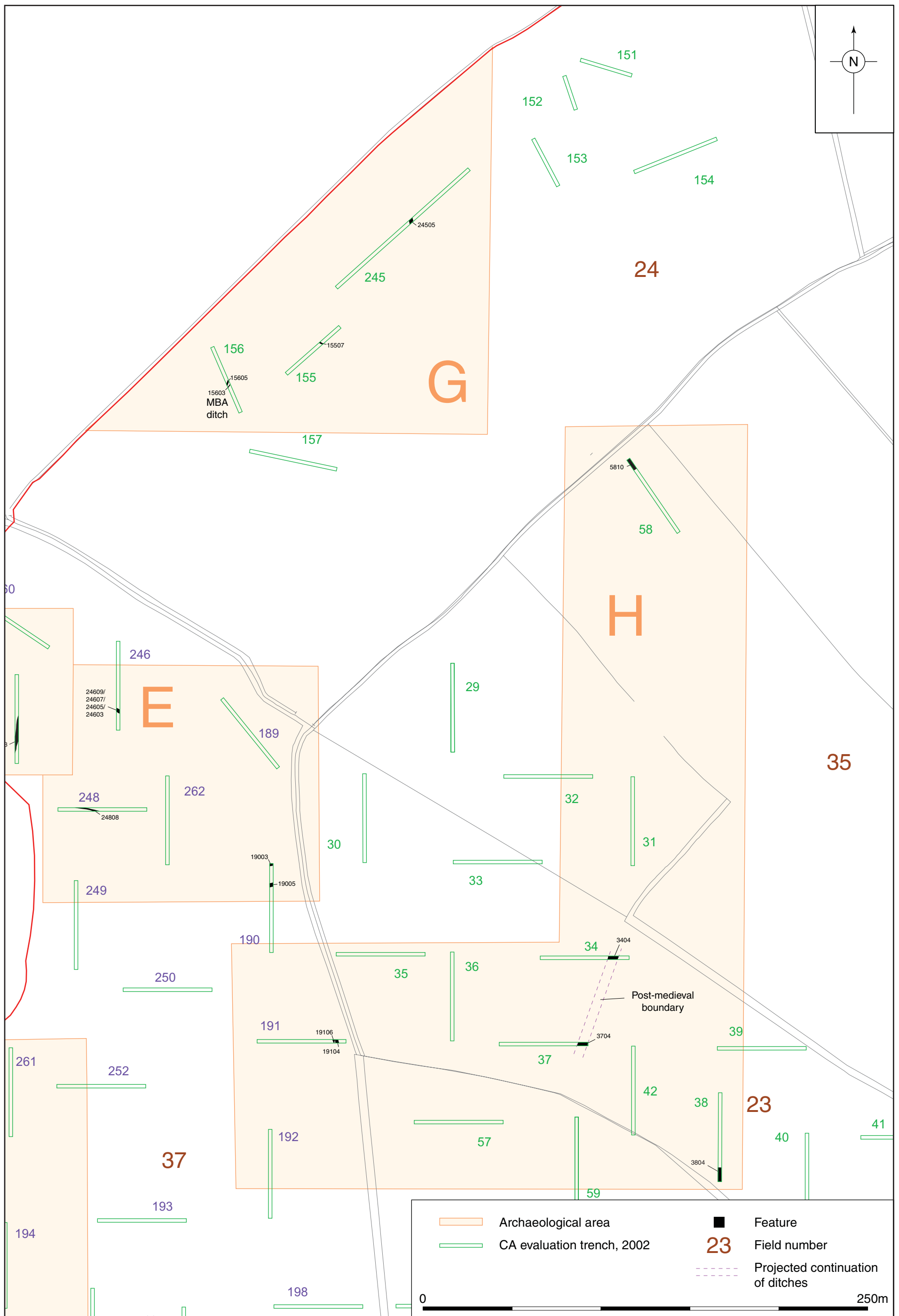


Fig. 5 Areas G-H, showing location of trenches and archaeological features (1:2000)

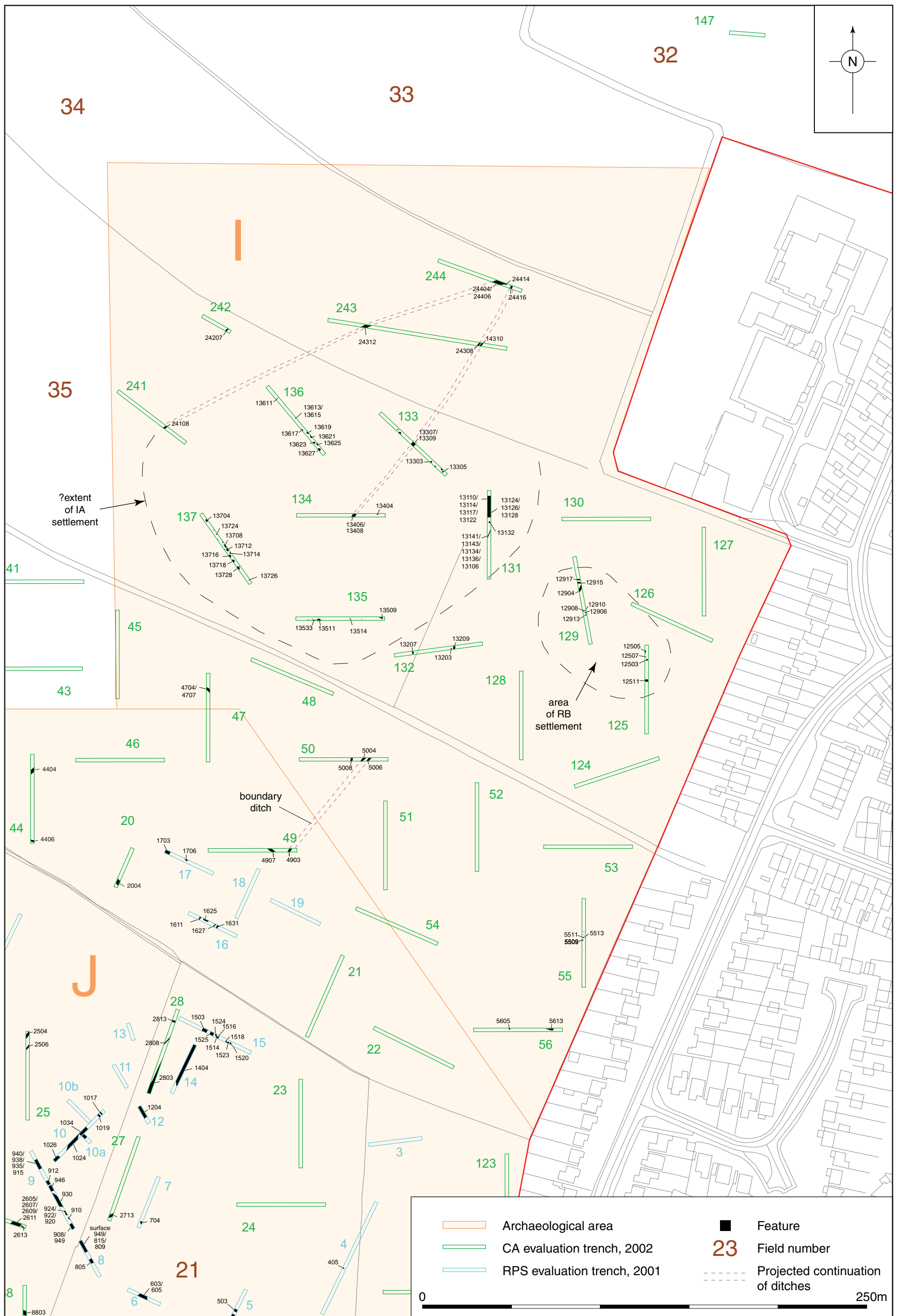


Fig. 6 Area I, showing location of trenches and archaeological features (1:2000)

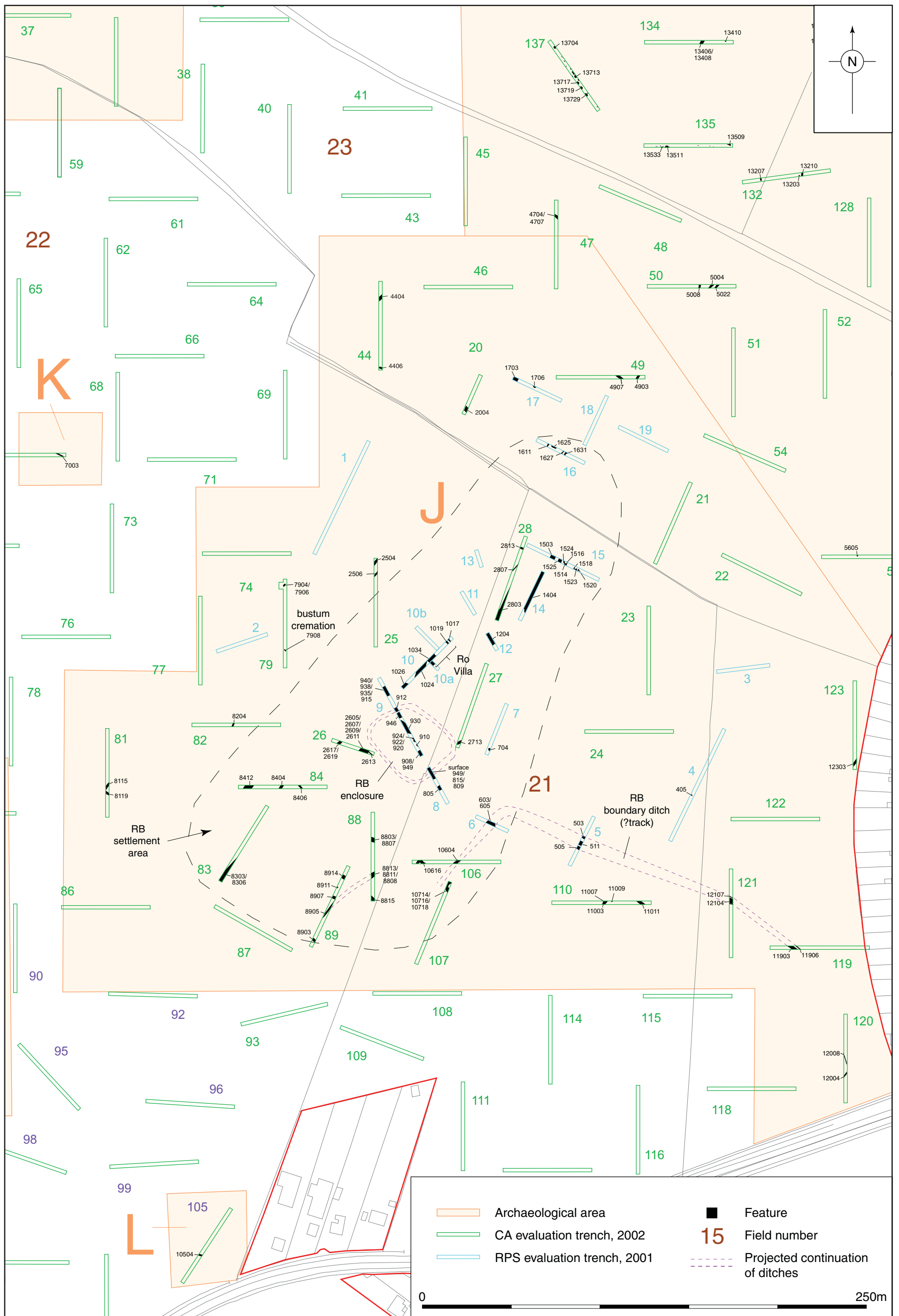


Fig. 7 Areas J-L, showing location of trenches and archaeological features (1:2000)

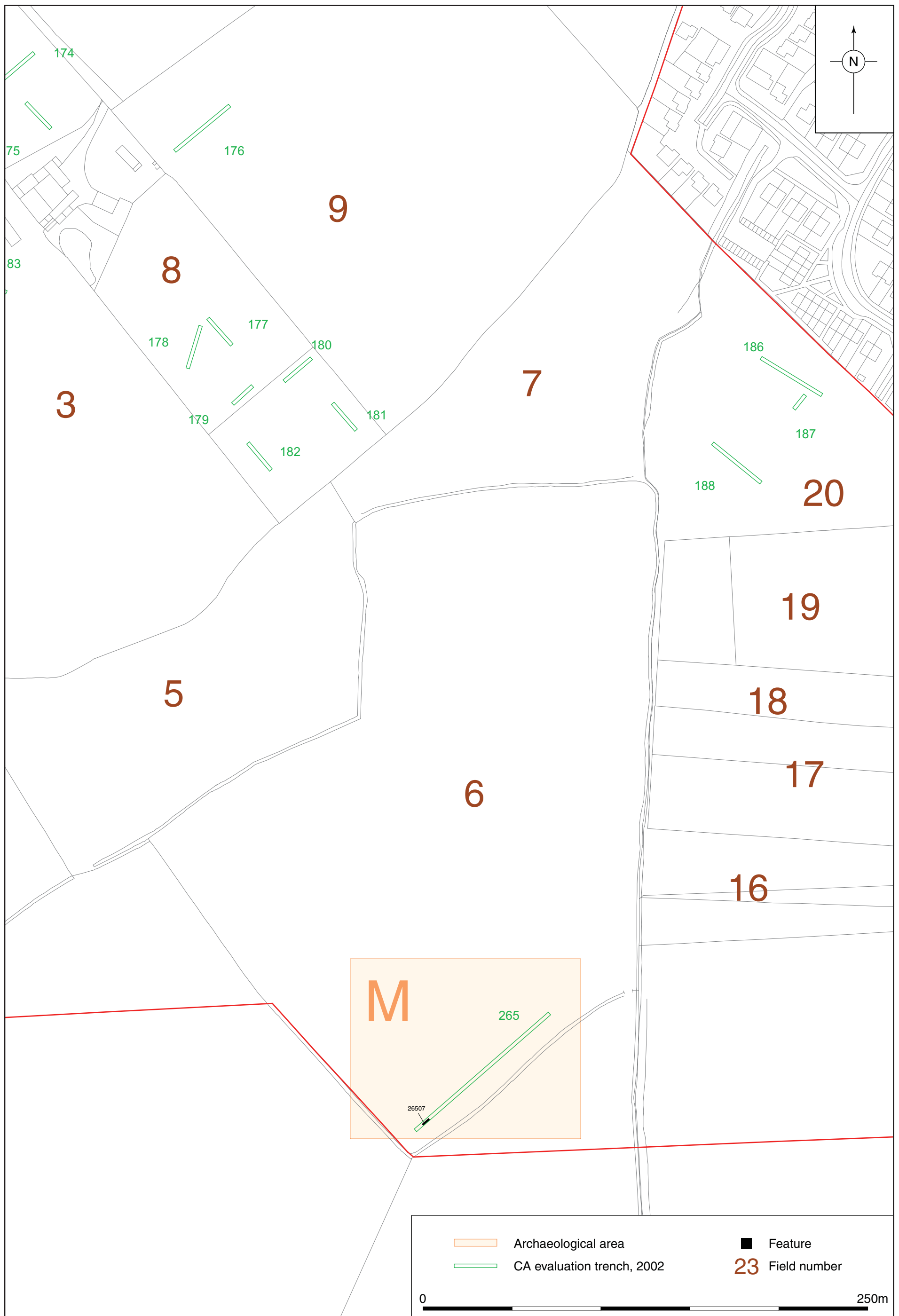
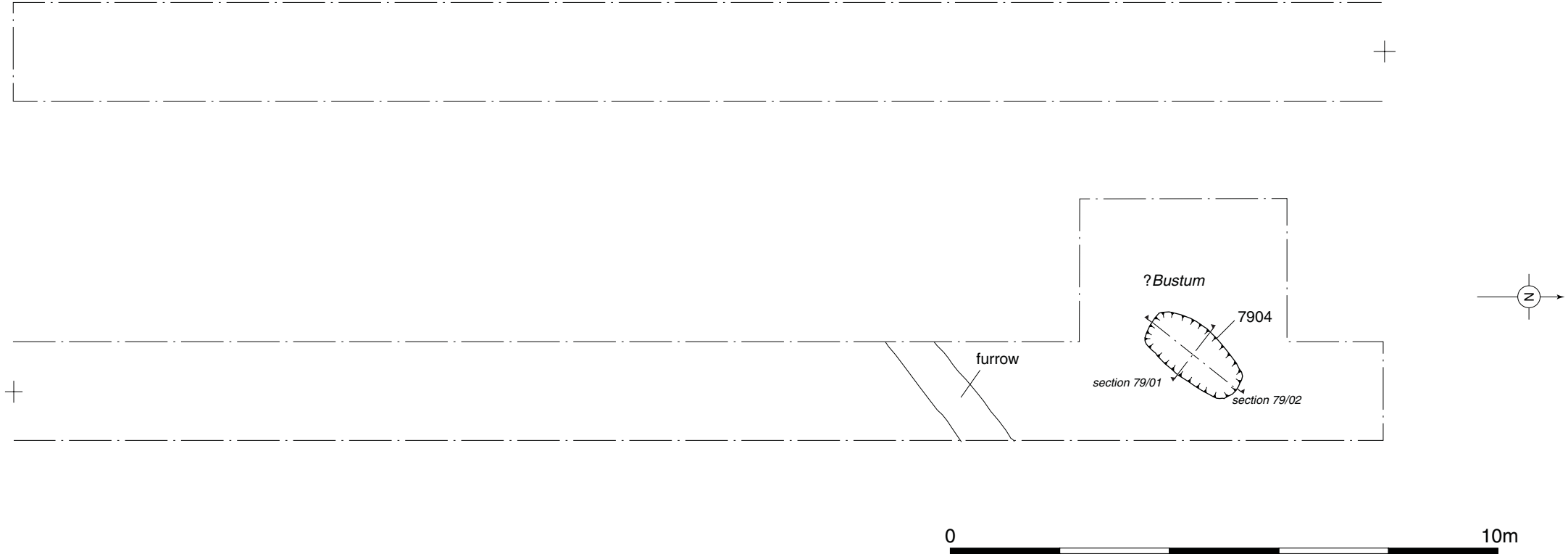
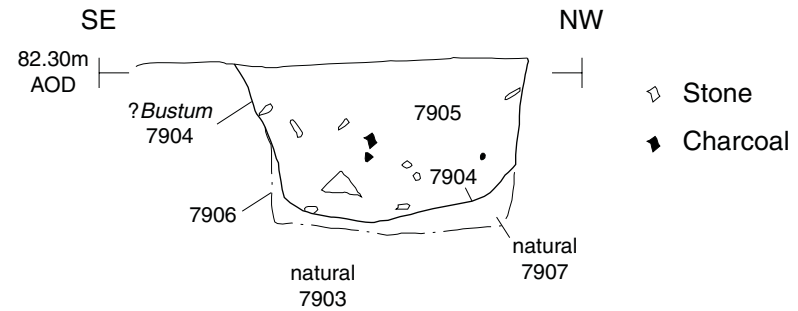


Fig. 8 Areas M, showing location of trenches and archaeological features (1:2000)

Plan 79/01



Section 79/01



Section 79/02

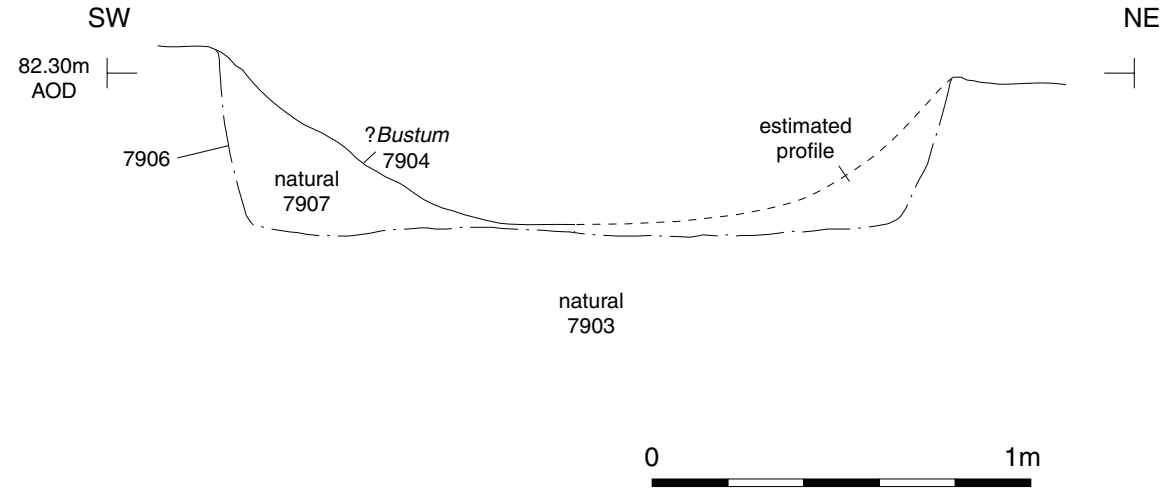
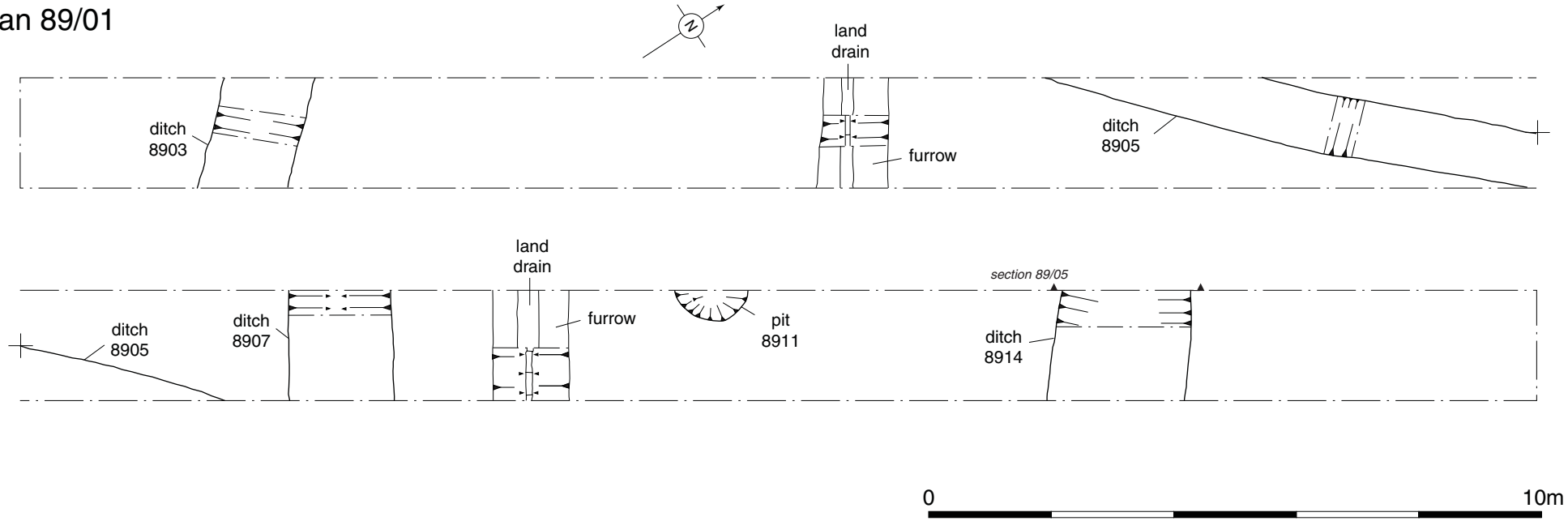


Fig. 9 Trench 79, plan (1:100) and sections (1:20)

Plan 89/01



Section 89/05

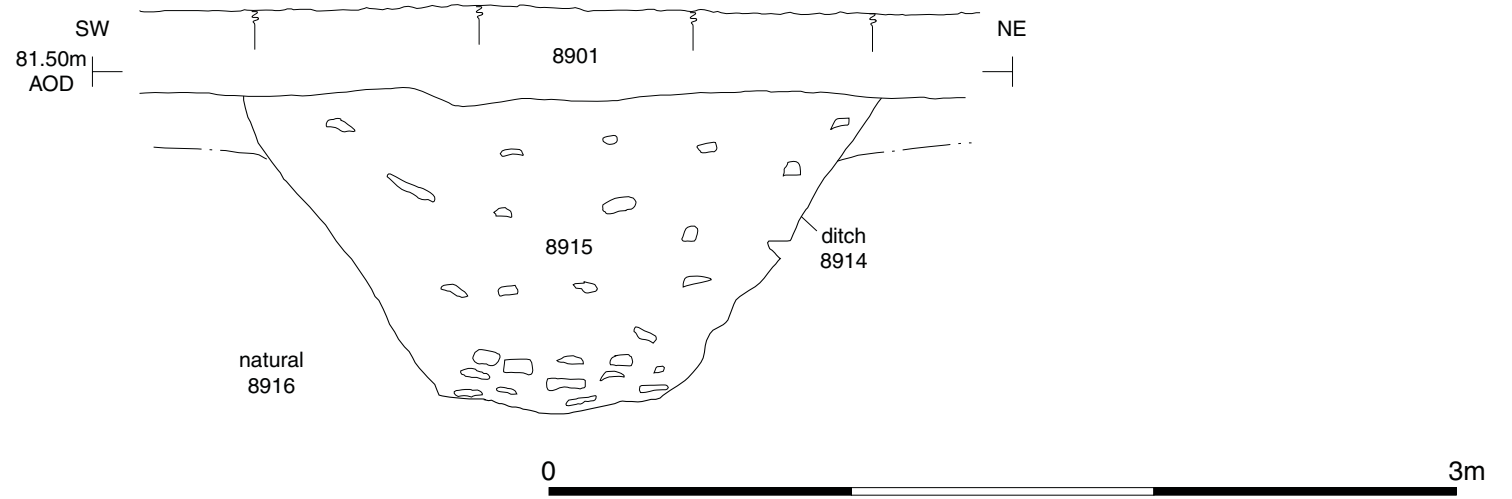
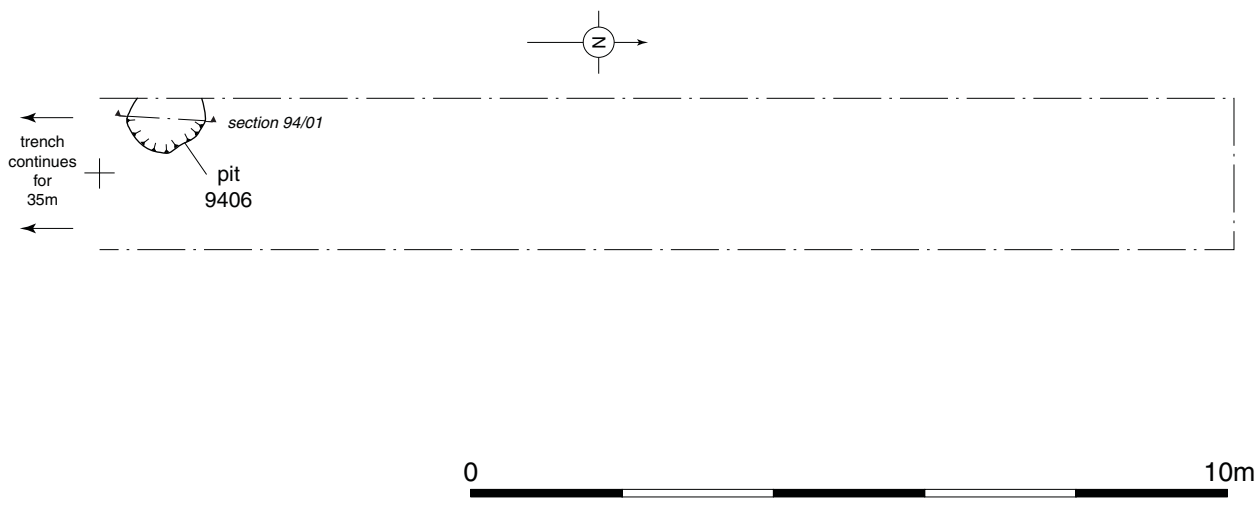


Fig. 10 Trench 89, plan (1:100) and section (1:25)

Plan 94/01



Section 94/01

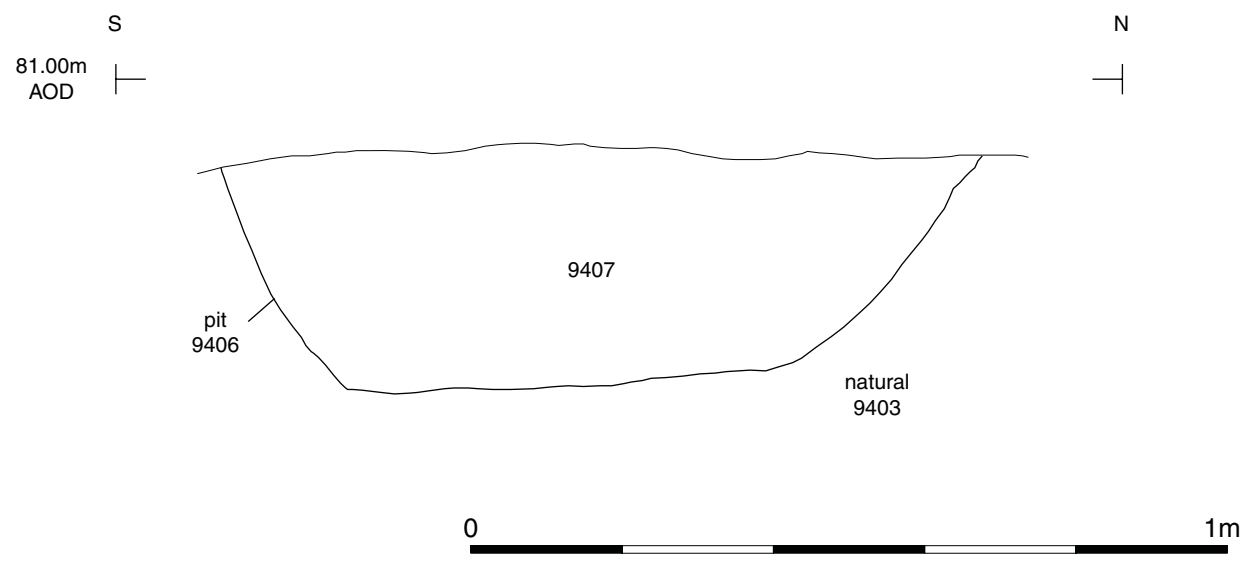
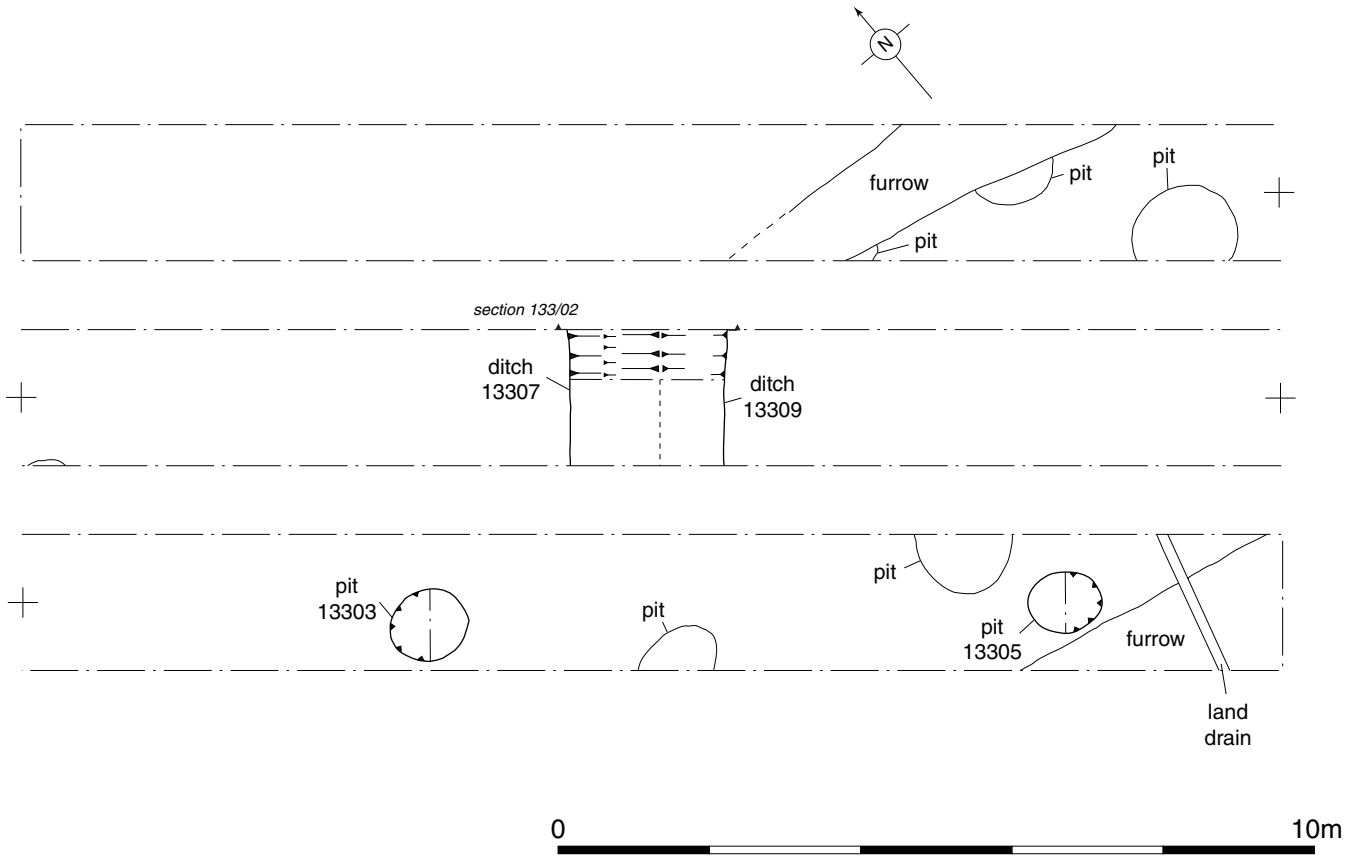


Fig. 11 Trench 94, plan (1:100) and section (1:10)

# Plan 133/01



# Section 133/02

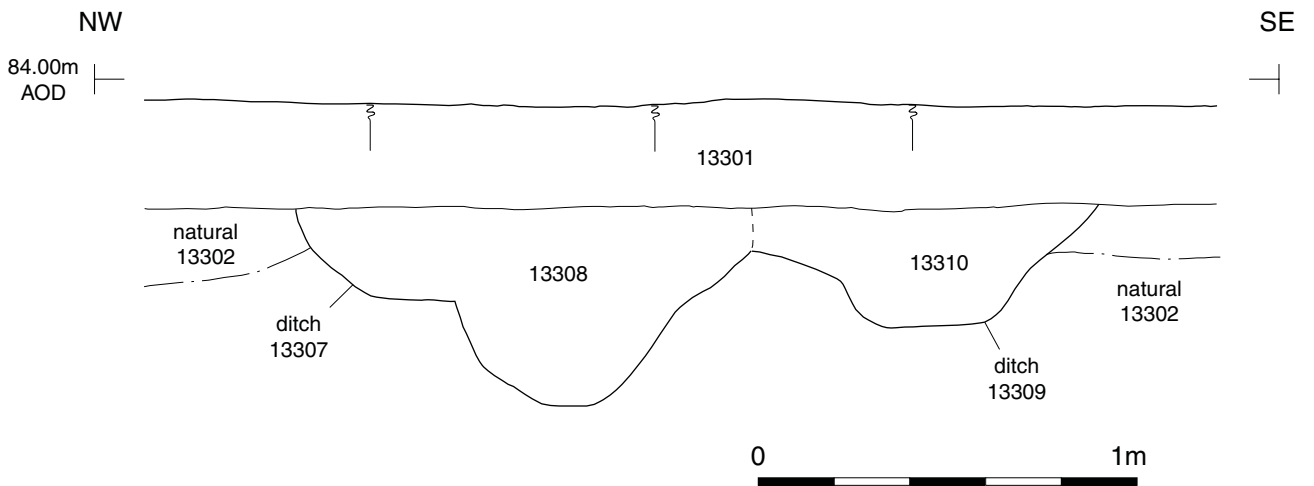
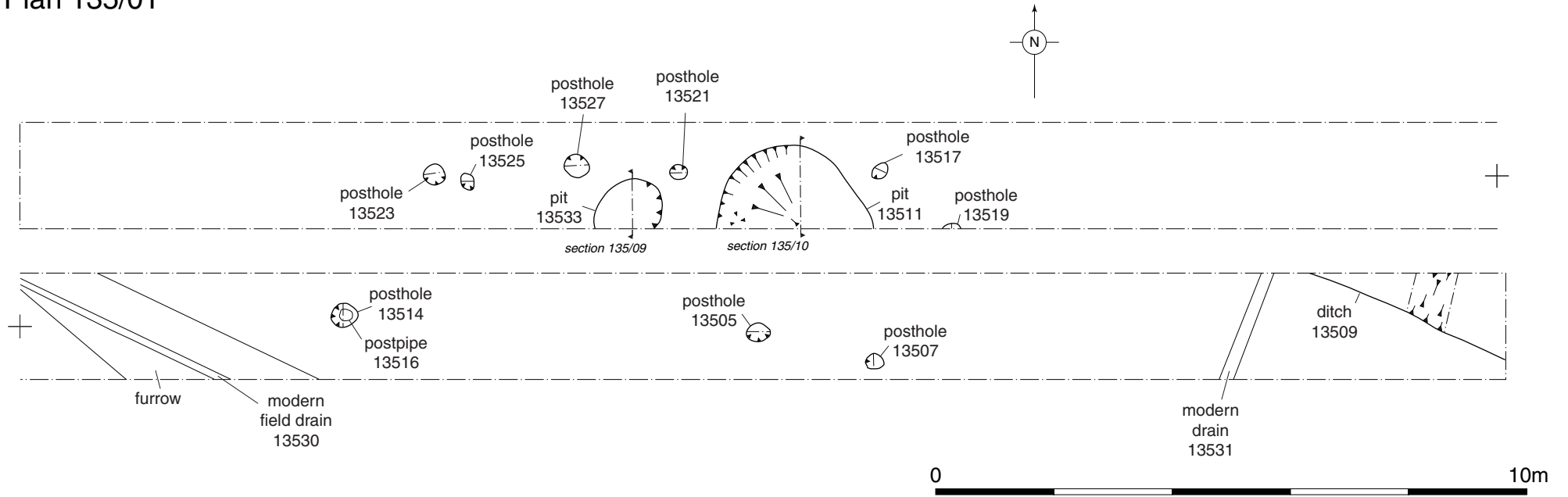


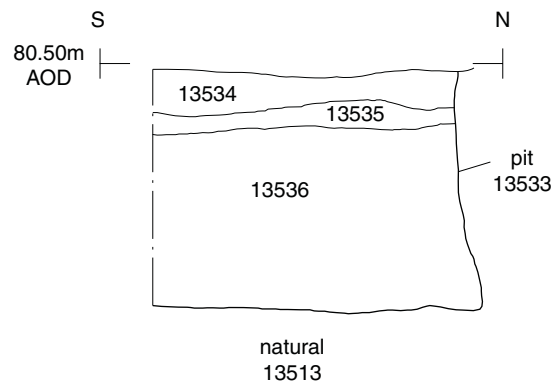
Fig. 12 Trench 133, plan (1:100) and section (1:20)



# Plan 135/01



## Section 135/09

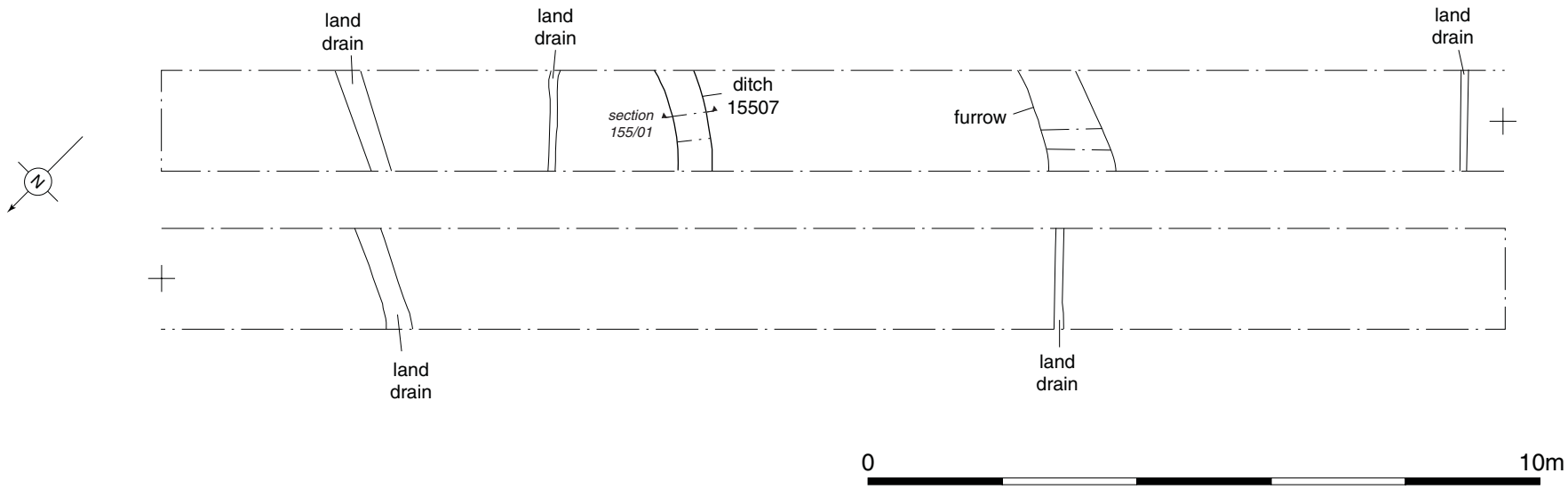


## Section 135/10



Fig. 13 Trench 135, plan (1:100) and sections (1:20)

# Plan 155/01



# Section 155/01

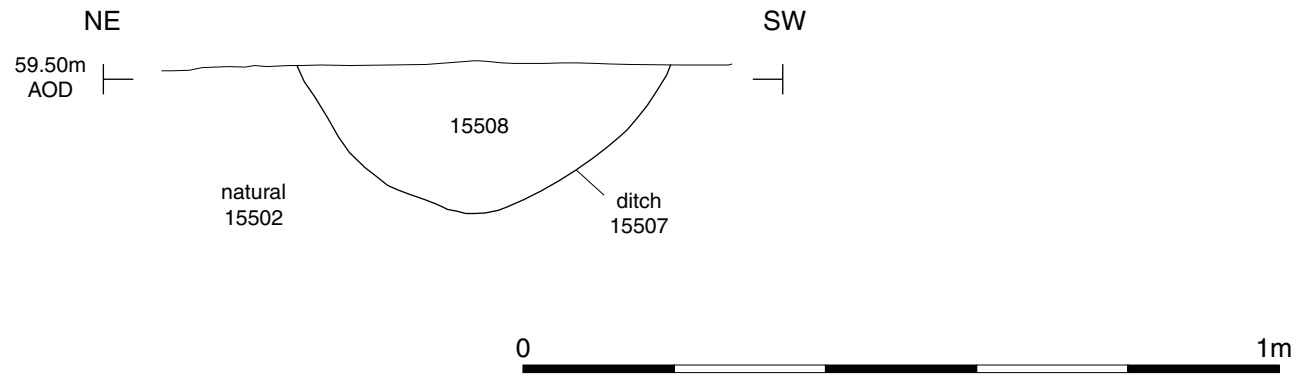
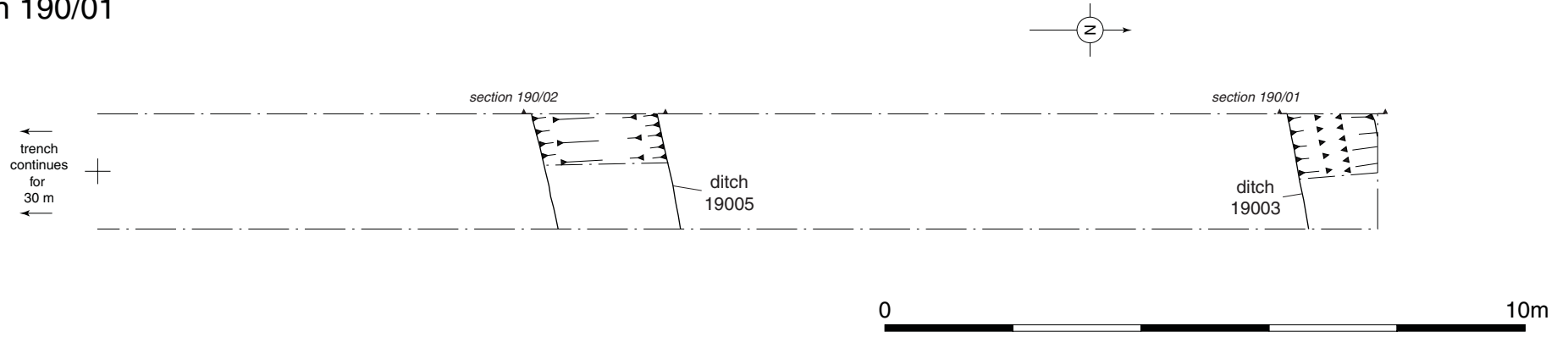
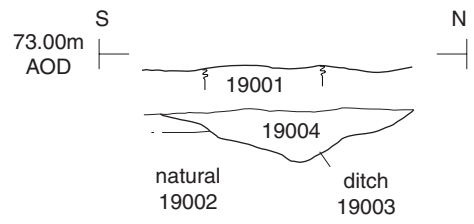


Fig. 14 Trench 155, plan (1:100) and section (1:10)

# Plan 190/01



## Section 190/01



## Section 190/02

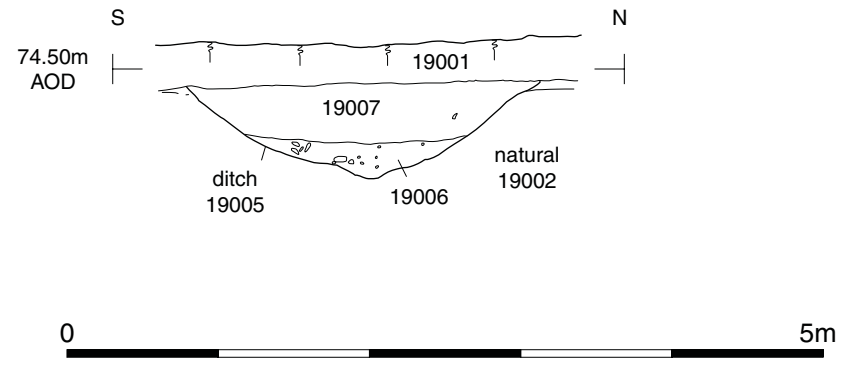
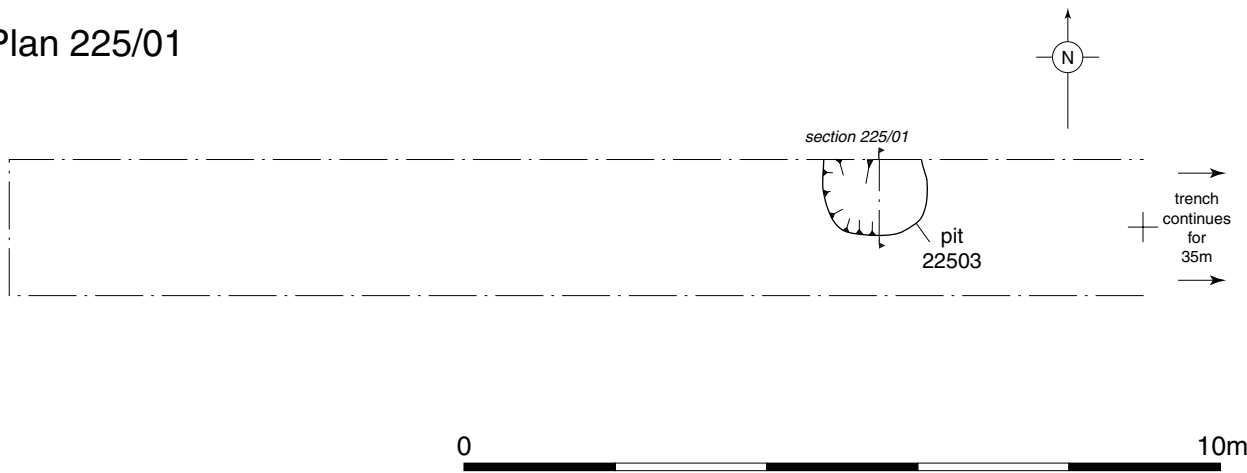


Fig. 15 Trench 190, plan (1:100) and sections (1:50)

# Plan 225/01



# Section 255/01

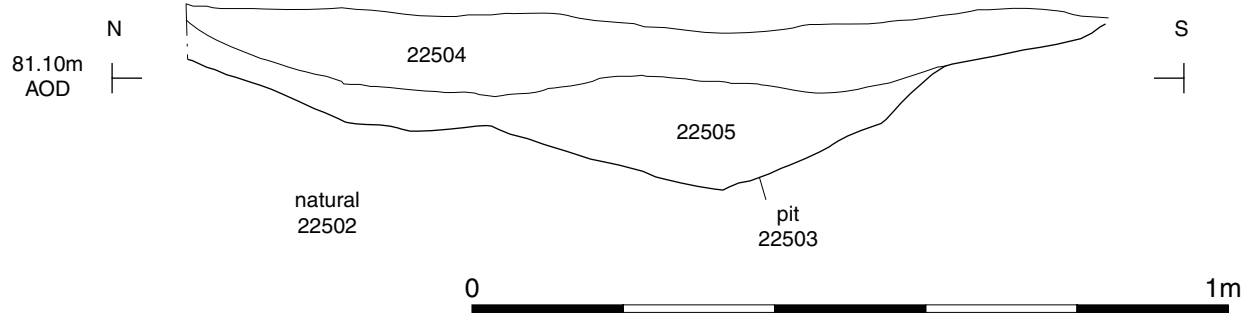
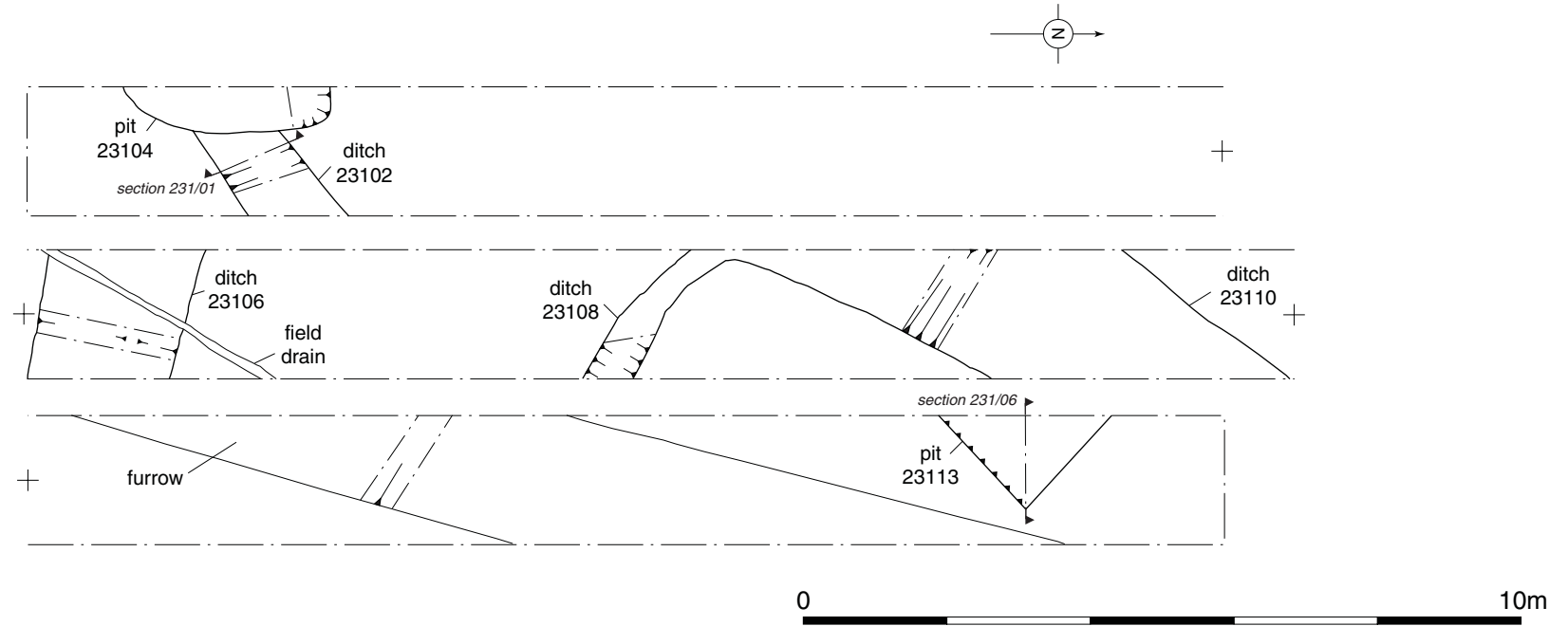
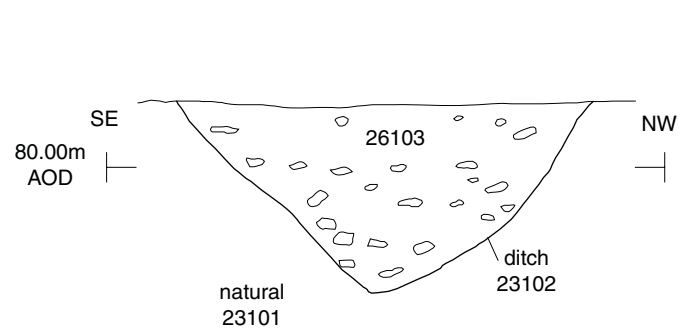


Fig. 16 Trench 225, plan (1:100) and section (1:10)

# Plan 231/01



## Section 231/01



## Section 231/06

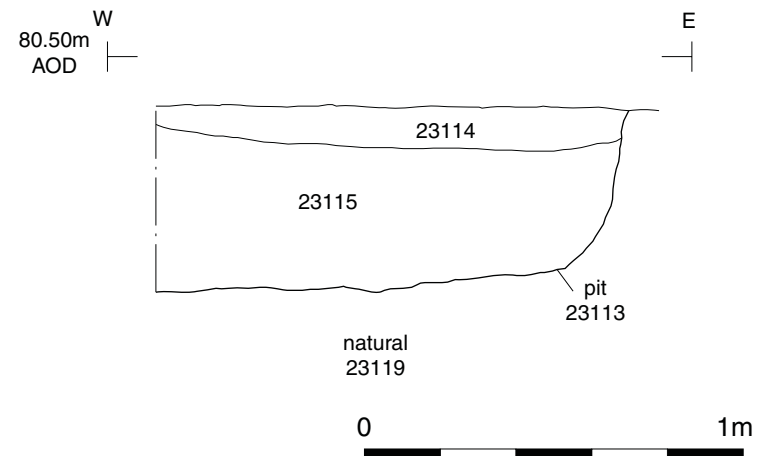
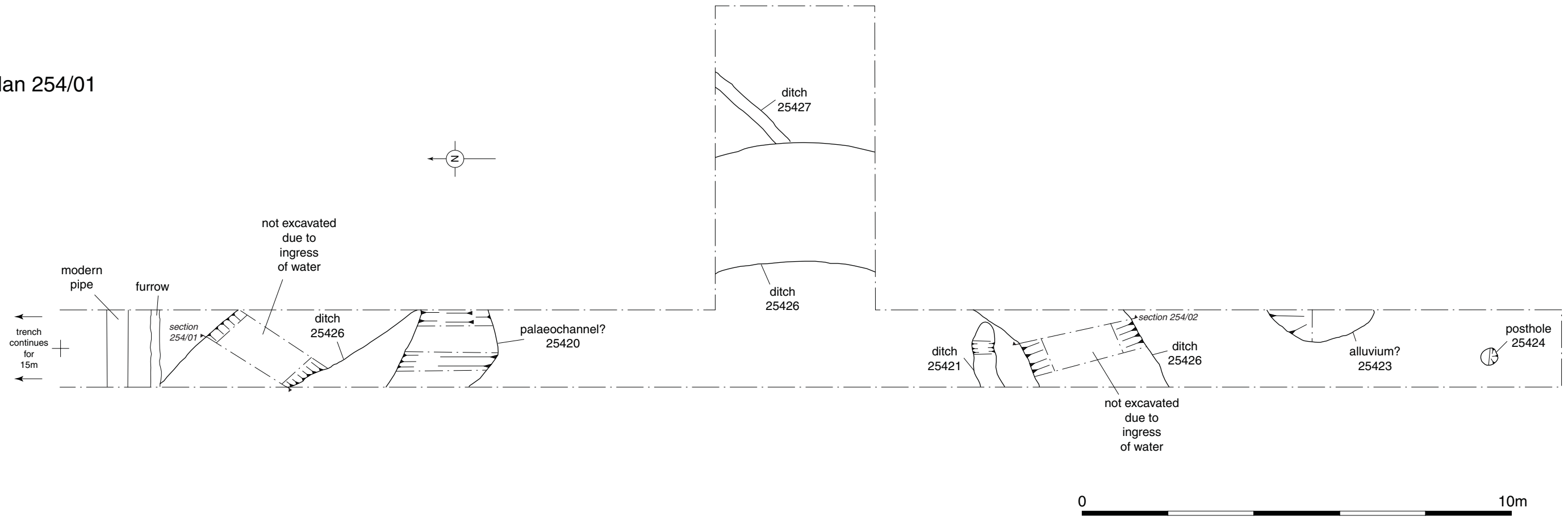
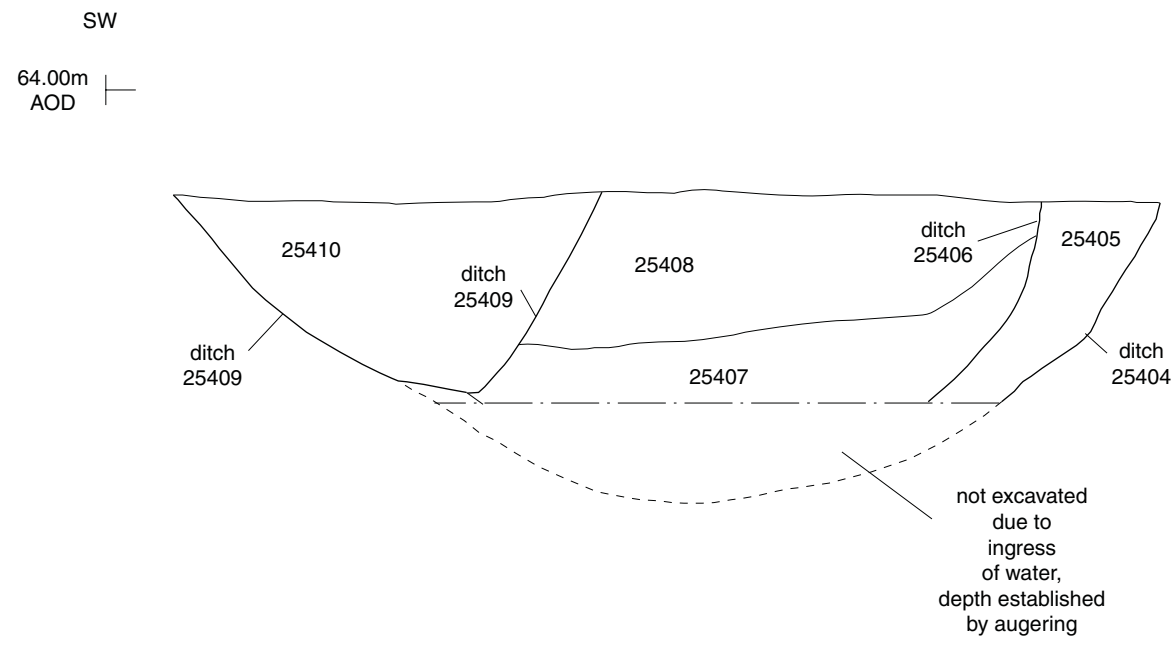


Fig. 17 Trench 231, plan (1:100) and sections (1:20)

Plan 254/01



Section 254/01



Section 254/02

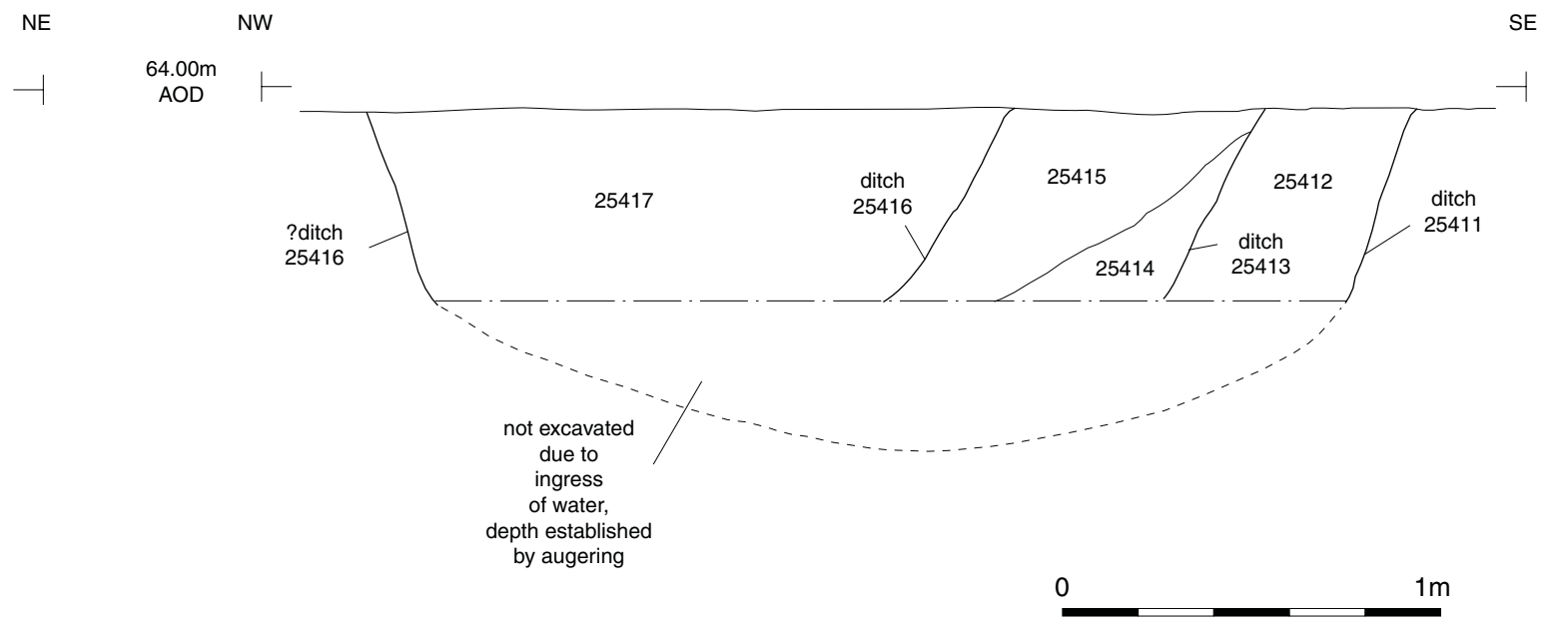
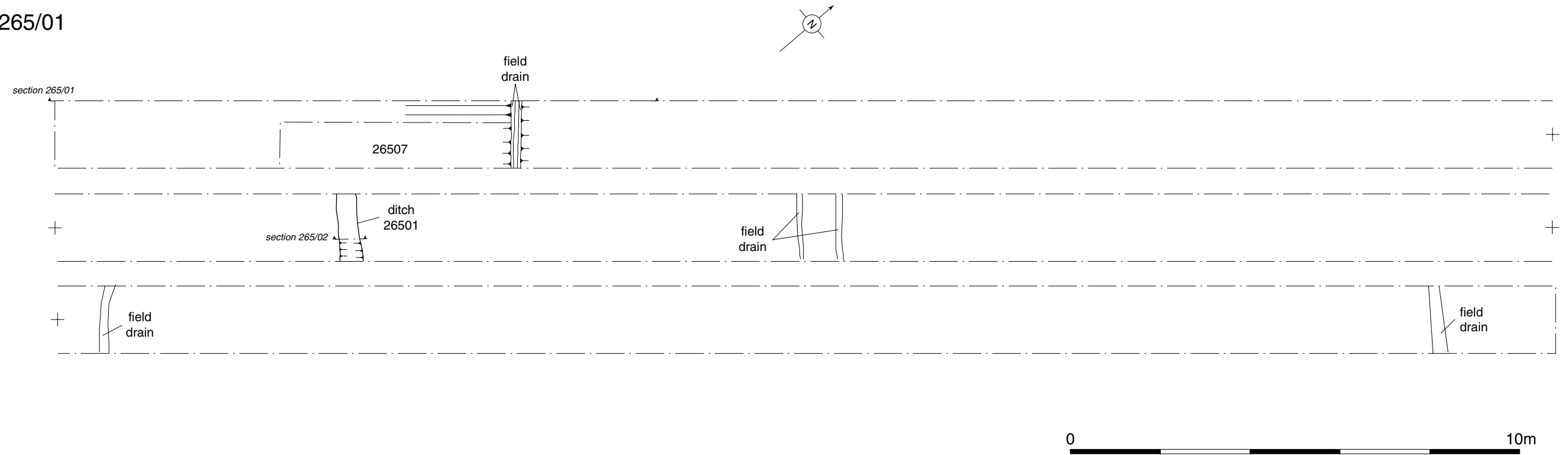
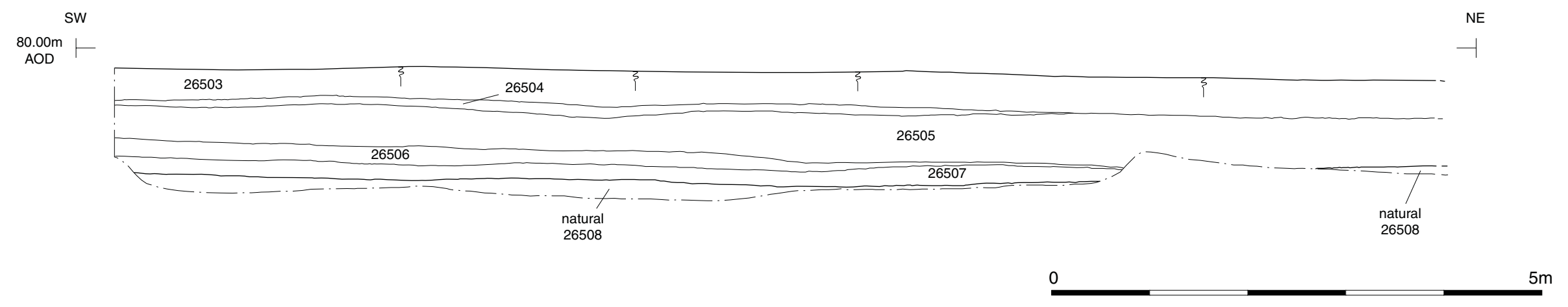


Fig. 18 Trench 254, plan (1:100) and sections (1:20)

Plan 265/01



Section 265/01



Section 265/02

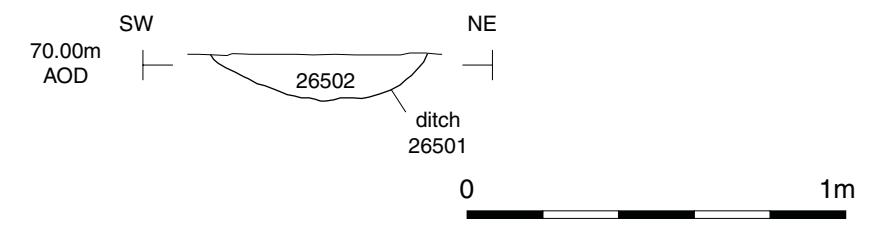


Fig. 19 Trench 265, plan (1:100) and sections (1:50 and 1:20)