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Hills Aggregates Limited

Cotswold Community, Ashton Keynes,
Wiltshire and Gloucestershire

SKCC 99

Archaeological Excavation Interim Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit
February 2000

HILLS AGGREGATES LTD

COTSWOLD COMMUNITY, ASHTON KEYNES
WILTSHIRE AND GLOUCESTERSHIRE

SKCC 99

(SU 033 962)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION INTERIM REPORT

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COTSWOLD COMMUNITY 1999

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by Hills Aggregates Limited to undertake a detailed archaeological investigation at the site of Cotswold Community, which is on the border of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire in the parishes of Somerford Keynes and Ashton Keynes. The site lies to the north of Cotswold Community School, Ashton Keynes (SU 033 962).

This year's excavation was the first phase of a programme of investigations to run over several years on the Cotswold Community site in advance of sand and gravel extraction. Before development the land was used as arable with some set-aside (Fig. 1).

1.2 Geology and topography

The drift geology consists of an alluvially-derived first terrace river gravel of the Upper Thames Valley overlying Jurassic Oxford Clay (OS Geological Map sheet 252 1: 63, 360). The land is level at around 92 m OD.

1.3 Archaeological background

Archaeological work in the area includes evaluations and excavations carried out by the Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Unit, Wessex Archaeology and the Oxford Archaeological Unit.

In Shorcote Quarry to the north-west of the new development, three Bronze Age ring ditches and discrete burials were excavated (Barclay *et al.* 1995). To the north, a Bronze Age settlement consisting of circular houses, pits and waterholes and Romano-British trackways were excavated (Hearne and Heaton 1994; Hearne and Adam in press). To the north-east of the Cotswold Community site, excavations in 1998 revealed circular structures and waterholes of Iron Age date, and field boundaries of the Iron Age and Roman period (Brossler *et al.* forthcoming).

In the vicinity of Cotswold Community, OAU's work at Claydon Pike, Thornhill Farm, Roughground Farm, Whelford Bowmoor and ongoing work relating to the field system surrounding the newly-identified villa at Kempsford, have provided considerable insights into the utilisation and development of the Romano-British landscape in this area. This work will inform the fieldwork strategy and post-excavation research design for this project.

The Cotswold Community site was evaluated by Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Section (Parry 1988) and Wessex Archaeology (1994).

1.4 Introduction to the 1999 fieldwork

The County Archaeologists of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, on behalf of their Local Planning Authorities, indicated that archaeological mitigation was required at Cotswold Community in advance of gravel extraction. A Brief was prepared and a Written Scheme of Investigation (1999) detailed how the Oxford Archaeological Unit would satisfy the terms of the Brief.

In total, 6.9 hectares out of the 37 hectares was investigated in the 1999 fieldwork programme. This comprised:

- 1 A small area in the north of the extraction zone where an entrance to the site and tunnel was to be located. This lay adjacent to Bronze Age activity identified by Wessex Archaeological in 1992 and over an area of linear crop marks seen in air-photographs (Leech 1977, 11).
- 2 An area approximately 14 m wide running 280 m south for a conveyor line, to the east of the Romano-British farmstead defined by Gloucestershire County Council in 1988. Roman ditches included trackways which have already been investigated in part within Shorncliffe Quarry (Brossler *et al.* forthcoming).
- 3 A large area measuring 380 m by 160 m to the west of the pit, immediately south-west of the Roman farmstead. Wessex Archaeology had revealed few archaeological features here in the 1994 evaluation.

2 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

2.1 Site summary

The excavation uncovered many more features than expected from the evaluation and air-photographic evidence. Activity of the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romano-British, Saxon and medieval periods was located.

- 1 The entrance and tunnel area (Fig. 2) revealed archaeological features dated to the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman periods. Segmented ditches, postholes and waterholes of Bronze Age date were exposed and a fenced enclosure with an entrance, possibly Iron Age in date, was located. Roman ditches, including trackway ditches, were also found. SU09NW
155
- 2 Along the conveyor area (Fig. 2) archaeological features of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman date were encountered. Bronze Age and Iron Age waterholes, pits and postholes, and Roman trackway ditches were present. GLOS

- 3 The large open area in the west of the site (Fig. 3) revealed archaeological activity covering the Bronze Age, Iron Age Roman, Saxon and medieval periods. Small clusters of Bronze Age features were located across the site, including postholes, pits and waterholes. One such cluster consisted of two circular post-built structures, a waterhole and a fenced enclosure. A pit alignment orientated north-south, probably late Bronze Age to early Iron Age in date, was uncovered, crossed by a segmented ditched enclosure. Four human burials of varying dates (Bronze Age/Iron Age, Roman and Saxon), two cremations and one animal burial were also found.

Romano-British trackways and contemporary field systems were identified, and between one of the two trackways were earlier, regular, short lines of postholes. Areas of Saxon activity were located, including rectangular post-built structures with associated pits and waterholes. Medieval field systems were evidenced by boundary ditches and extensive ridge and furrow. One boundary formed the old parish boundary and later became the County boundary in the last century.

2.2 Periods represented: features and finds

Features of Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romano-British, Saxon and medieval date were represented on site.

Neolithic

No features were located but a polished axe (probably from Cornwall; Fiona Roe pers. comm.) came from a Bronze Age pit (2004).

Early Bronze Age

To the south-west of the site clusters of postholes and pits were located. In one of these clusters sherds of (early Bronze Age) Beaker comb-decorated pottery were retrieved from a pit (2819). A single sherd of Beaker pot was retrieved from a square-ish pit (2579) located to the south of the site.

Bronze Age/Middle Bronze Age

Small clusters of features, such as pits and waterholes were scattered over the entire site and segmented ditches to the north produced small amounts of Bronze Age pottery; one shallow pit (2004) contained large amounts of middle Bronze Age Bucket Urn. Other artefacts such as flint flakes, cores and scrapers were recovered from Bronze Age contexts, particularly waterholes/pits (2146, 2715 and 3237). Pit 3260 contained Bronze Age pottery and had a posthole in its base. It was situated at the south end of the pit alignment; pit 3237 was cut by one of the pits in the alignment.

To the west of the pit alignment a small occupation area was located that consisted of a fenced enclosure (2986) a waterhole (2146) and two circular post-built structures (2531 and 2532). These features could not certainly be dated to the Bronze Age, as no finds

GLOS

were recovered from the postholes, but the waterhole produced sherds of Bronze Age/Iron Age pottery.

To the north of site from one of a group of segmented ditches (682) and a waterhole (460) a quantity of Bronze Age pottery was retrieved.

Late Bronze Age/Iron Age

Small amounts of pottery of this period were recovered from pits, postholes, ditches and waterholes.

A pit alignment (3333), roughly 140 m long, consisting of 164 pits in a double row, was identified to the south. It terminated near the southern edge of the site but continued beyond its northern limits. One of the pits in the alignment cut a middle Bronze Age feature (3237), and another yielded a small abraded shell-tempered sherd of Bronze Age date from its lower fill. From the upper fills of the pit alignment 20 to 30 sherds of Iron Age pottery were collected. A segmented ditched enclosure (3239) was excavated which cut the pit alignment. No finds were retrieved.

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East of the pit alignment and within the segmented ditched enclosure lay a crouched inhumation burial (3173). The grave fill was similar to the fill of the pit alignment but no finds were retrieved. The body had been unusually positioned to fit within a grave cut that was too small to accommodate it. The legs had been broken, the left arm was stretched out and the head pushed in.

GLOS

An animal burial (2048) excavated to the west of the pit alignment and opposite to the crouch inhumation burial was identified as a cow. One of the two cremations (1205 and 1224) located to the south of site contained Iron Age pottery.

GLOS

Further possible Iron Age activity, consisting of pits and postholes, was located west of Romano-British trackway (944). On close investigation two four-post-built structures (1481 and 1759) and two deep pits (1363 and 1529) were identified, but no finds were retrieved.

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SU03309NW

To the north of the site an L-shaped fenced enclosure (175 and 176) with a gated entrance (177) was excavated. Sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered from two postholes within the entrance.

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SU 0337 9654

Romano-British

Most of the pottery collected on the site came from the trackway ditches and associated field system, east and south of the Romano-British farmstead. From ditch 1758 stone blocks, ceramic and stone tiles and Roman pottery were retrieved. Several metal objects, including a socketed spearhead, a blade and a coin dated to 3rd to 4th century were retrieved from around trackway 944. Between the trackway ditches to the east of site, lines of regularly-spaced postholes (1284) were located, possibly predating the trackway.

SU09NW
301

The trackway (2985) to the west of site yielded no pottery. However, in 1990 an excavation carried out by the OAU further to the north dated it to the Roman period (Barclay *et al.* 1995).

A waterhole (1544) to the south of the Romano-British farmstead and between the field ditches contained Roman pottery and cattle bones. *SU09NW301*

Two extended inhumation burials (2217) and (3221) were located at the southern end of the pit alignment. Coffin nails were found around the bodies. *9105*

Saxon

Scatters of Saxon features were located to the south and west of the site, consisting of one to four rectangular post-built structures, waterholes, pits and postholes. *9105*

A sunken-featured building (SFB; 2949) was located on the last day of excavation beneath a later ditch. The SFB contained a large quantity of Roman tile.

The post-built structures (2533, 2905, 2906 and 2987) were hard to define due to truncation by ploughing, and the postholes were shallow and yielded no finds.

Saxon pottery, slag and Roman tile were retrieved from a waterhole (2507) to the north-west of site. An inhumation burial (2477) cut into the top of the pit; no finds were recovered from burial.

Three other pits/waterholes (2864, 2390 and 1740), possibly Saxon in date, were located and excavated and these contained finds such as cattle and horse skulls and an undated coin (the latter from 2864).

Fragments of loomweight were recovered from a shallow pit (2279) and from the surface of a tree-throw hole (2403).

Medieval

A medieval boundary was formed parallel to, and 5 m east of, the pit alignment. It is now seen as a headland, to the west of which furrows are orientated north-south, and to the east, east-west. In the late Saxon period this formed the parish boundary between Shorncote and Ashton Keynes, and a century ago became the County Boundary between Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

Undated Ditch

SU 0324 9613 *SU09NW624*
Ditch 2750, which is prominent in the landscape, produced no dating evidence. This ditch, which was orientated east-west, snaked along the southern edge of site and terminated to the west. The relationship of the ditch to the Romano-British trackway (944) to the east has not been revealed (this will be investigated in next year's excavation), but to the west the ditch cut SFB 2949 and the eastern ditch of the Roman trackway 2985.

2.3 Economic and landscape evidence

In previous excavations soil samples have demonstrated poor environmental preservation in this area. In this season's fieldwork some deposits appeared quite promising and features such as cremations, waterholes, ditches and pits were sampled for charred and waterlogged remains (seeds, insects, snails and pollen).

Environmental samples were taken and processed from five pits in the pit alignment during the excavation to assist in dating and understanding the environmental context of the features. The results were disappointing, and no datable artefacts nor charred remains existed. Snails were present, however, and further samples have been taken for snail and pollen analysis from the pit alignment. Two cremations were retained for careful processing.

An alluvial deposit of grey-blue mottled green silty clay, seen intermittently along the east edge of the site, and appearing regular and thicker to the south-east corner, has been interpreted as the result of seasonal flooding. These events had an effect on the way the trackway was laid out. In the north of the site the trackway broke up into segments and was realigned. Silting was more frequent to the east and south in the upper fills of the trackway ditches and between them, but the alluvial deposit did not extend west of the eastern trackway (944).

3 SIGNIFICANCE AND POTENTIAL OF RESULTS

The fieldwork at Cotswold Community is revealing an important multi-period landscape. The remains uncovered in this year's excavations were more intensive than previously thought, and included a wider range of archaeological periods than anticipated. For example Iron Age and Saxon material was recovered.

Middle Bronze Age features were found scattered across the landscape, in small clusters, perhaps representing shifting settlement. This period has been poorly represented in the area until now. There is potential to tie into landscape evidence from a well excavated to the north-east on the Shorcote site, which was dated by radiocarbon to 1270-1040 cal BC at 95% confidence (2937 ± 30 ; NZA-10031; Brossler *et al.* forthcoming).

Pit alignments are rare, particularly in the south-west of Britain, and are not well understood. As far as we know, this alignment has been more extensively excavated than those exposed elsewhere and will enhance the archaeological record nationally. There is potential to understand how the pit alignment was laid out, what it was used for and what influence it had on later boundaries. Investigations in the north of the site will hopefully determine the relationship of the pit alignment to the Romano-British farmstead. It will also be possible to ascertain whether the alignment continues to the south, after a break. Such interruptions have been observed in pit alignments in the Midlands and north of

England, (eg Simpson *et al.* 1989; Lofthouse 1993). It is important that the Cotswold Community alignment can be seen in the context of earlier, contemporary and later settlement.

Excavation of the Romano-British trackways and boundaries adds to our knowledge of the contemporary landscape, how it was divided up and used. This will link the settlement that will be excavated in Site A with fields examined by the OAU in Shorncote pit to the north-east and areas yet to be revealed to the south.

Saxon settlement is poorly represented in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. The Saxon features from this season's excavation will enhance an understanding of a period of settlement not previously seen in this vicinity.

The field boundary headland and the ridge and furrow will contribute to a picture of development of the medieval landscape.

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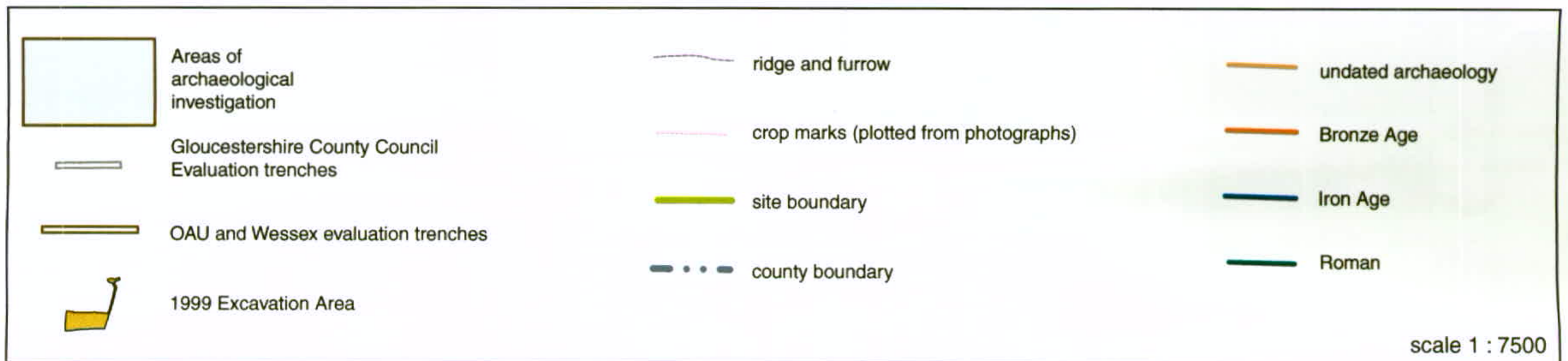
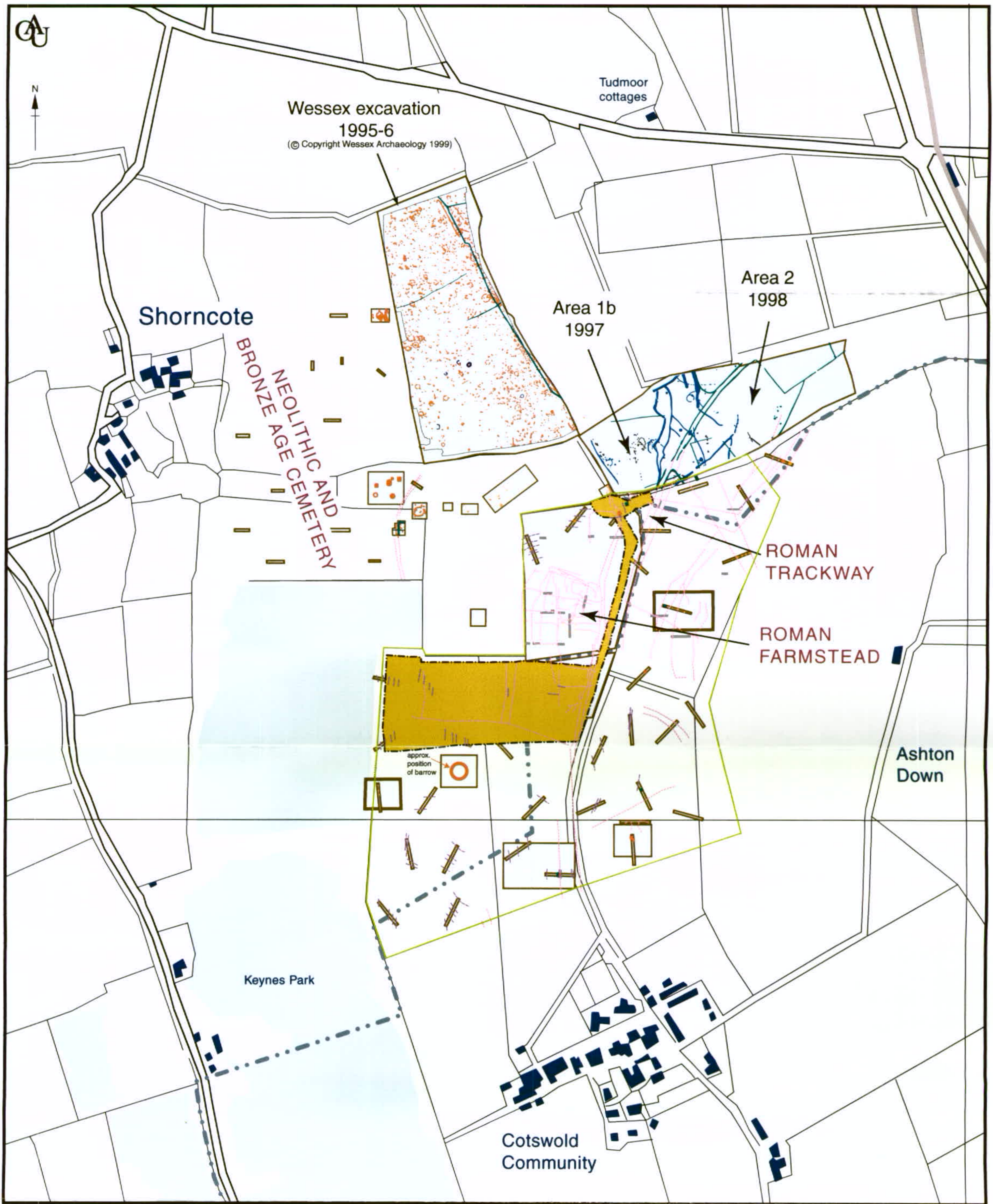
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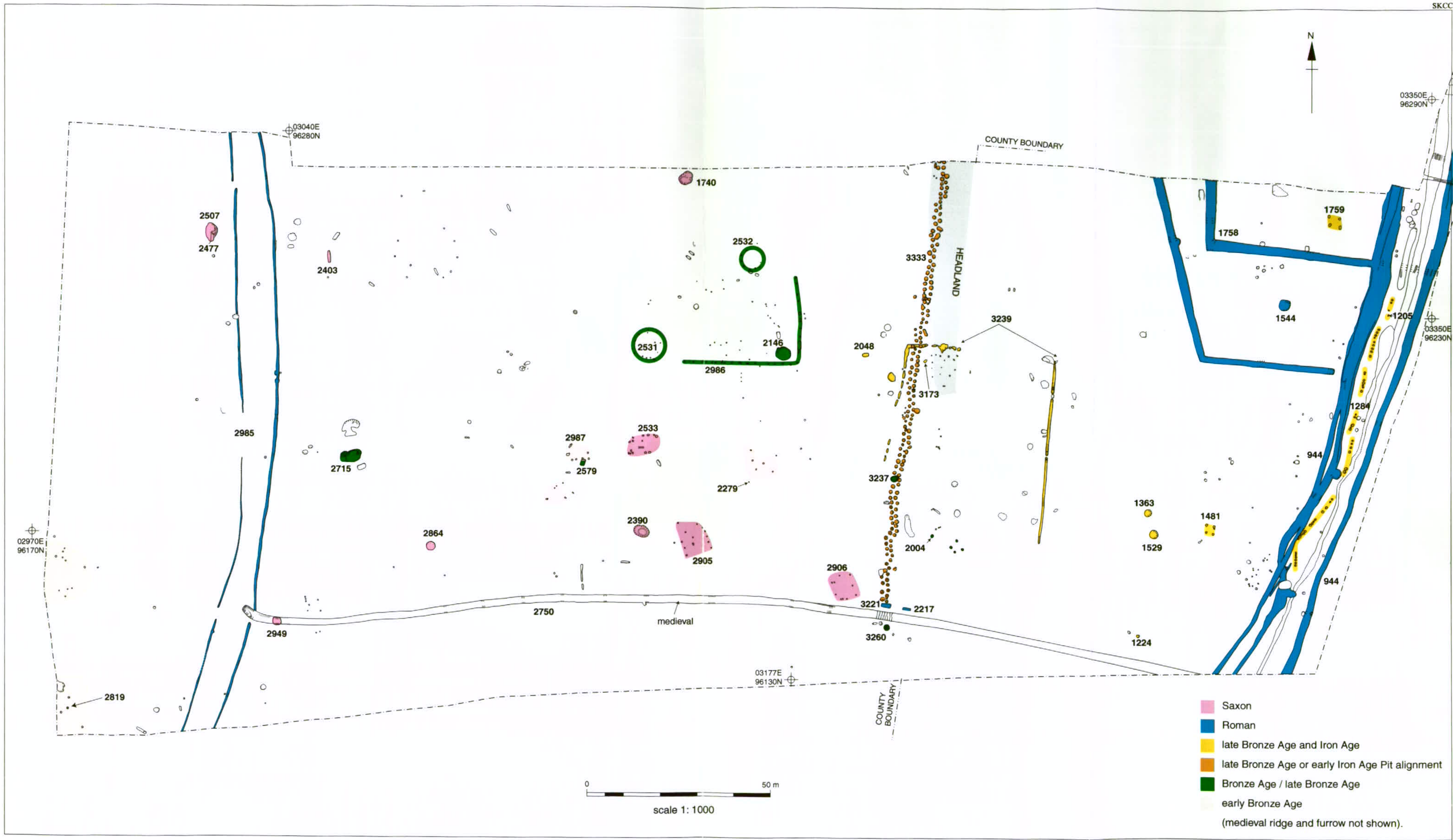


scale 1 : 7500

Figure 1: site and trench location



Figure 2: Entrance, Tunnel, and conveyor Area



- Saxon
- Roman
- late Bronze Age and Iron Age
- late Bronze Age or early Iron Age Pit alignment
- Bronze Age / late Bronze Age
- early Bronze Age
(medieval ridge and furrow not shown).

Figure 3: Large Excavation Area.

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