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BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

Excavations at Albrighton Moat,
Shropshire

by Jon Cane

B.U.F.A.U.



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This paper reports the results of an archaeological evaluation of a moated site immediately to the north of the A.41, at Albrighton, Shropshire (National Grid Ref. SJ 814 049).

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by Mr and Mrs W. Jukes to evaluate the threat posed to the site by a proposal to empty and re-flood the moat to create a fishing amenity for the handicapped.

This evaluation consisted of a detailed contour survey of the moat area and the excavation of three 1-metre-wide trenches across the ditch. The purpose of these trenches was not necessarily to fully excavate the deposits within the ditch, but to determine how much of the present moat fill is of archaeological importance.

The Site

The site lies under pasture on an area of sloping ground. The moat ditch, some 50 metres square, surrounds a square platform. The site's topography suggests that the platform area was formed by dumping some of the upcast from the ditch to raise the eastern side to counteract the natural slope and create a horizontal area. This has made the original cut of the western ditch considerably deeper.

Trench I

This trench was situated in the NE corner of the moat, where the ditch is shallowest, and where the moat was probably fed by means of a leat from the nearby stream. The water level at this point was contacted at 90.60m OD, a depth below ground level of c.0.80m. The outer ditch-edge was cut into the natural sandstone and clay, with a slight but definite step. The inner ditch-edge was less easy to define due to possible slumping from the platform. This was represented by a layer of tumbled stone which masked the true edge, and by surface features at this point. The lowest recorded fills of the moat were of grey, stony silt [1004/1006]. No artefacts were recovered but the presence of small fragments of preserved wood suggests extensive organic survival in the layers below. The silts were sealed by a thick layer of orange, clay soil [1002] which was observed in all three trenches, and which may be the result of erosion into the ditch.

Entering the moat from the north-east, and cut into the bedrock which formed the outer edge of the ditch, was a narrow gully filled with grey silt [F.2/1008] which may be part of the leat that fed the moat ditch. The shallowness of this feature suggests some truncation in this area.

Trench II

Although intended to span the entire ditch, the unstable nature of the latest fills at this point limited the excavations to the ditch edges. These deposits consisted of huge quantities of building debris [1006/1002], apparently derived from two nearby cottages which were dumped into the moat by a previous owner. The southern trench (IIb) contacted the inner edge of the ditch, cut into sandstone and clay, while the outer edge (trench IIa) had been masked by stone tumble [1004]. It was not possible to say whether this tumble originated from general erosion or from some structure, such as a ditch revetment. Grey silts [1005] similar to those in Trench I were contacted at a depth of 1.8m. Again, there was some evidence

of organic survival but no artefacts were recovered. Excavations ceased at this point but it seems likely that the first archaeologically important layers will be at a similar depth to the other trenches, that is, c.90.60m OD.

Trench III

The southern arm of the moat was tested across its whole width. Here, water-logged silts [1008] were contacted at a depth of c.0.6m. The outer ditch-edge was cut through clay and sandstone, with a step cut into it. This was associated with several large fragments of worked sandstone which may have been the remains of a revetment wall for which the step was cut. The sequence of fills above the silts was similar to that encountered in the other trenches, except for the presence of a layer of clean sand [1001]. This may be associated with the debris, covering the south-west corner of the site, deposited when the new A.41 was built.

Discussion

The results from the three trenches are fairly consistent. The water table, where reached, is consistently at c.90.50 - 90.60m OD, slightly below the top of the grey silts which form the latest archaeological layers. The eastern arm and most of the southern arm of the ditch have about 0.80 - 1.0m of late deposits (at the deepest points) sealing potentially early silts. The south-west corner has been effectively sealed by the embankment of the A.41, while the remainder of the western arm and most of the northern arm have been partly infilled with up to 2.0m of modern debris. The inner and outer sides of the moat ditch display some evidence of stone revetment in the form of stone tumble and steps cut into the top of the ditch edge. These features must be seen as an important part of the depositional history of the site. No artefacts were recovered but the apparent lack of major disturbance suggests a high archaeological potential.

The hypothetical extent of the ditch fills as a whole, as well as the probable extent of archaeologically significant deposits, is shown in Figure 1. Figure 2 shows the sections of all three trenches as recorded, with archaeologically important deposits indicated with shading.

Conclusions

These results have significant implications for the development proposals.

Firstly, only a small amount (c.0.80m) of soil could be removed from the ditch on the eastern side of the moat without endangering archaeological layers. Certainly, the proximity of these layers to the surface and their potentially undisturbed nature means that any removal of fills on a significant scale should ideally be carried out in an archaeologically controlled manner. This constraint may present problems in re-flooding the moat to a practical depth.

Secondly, if re-flooding was practical at this point, by, for example, adding height to the eastern outer ditch edge, the resultant water level in the deeper western arm would be very low in relation to the rest of the ditch. This may cause problems in the positioning of the proposed fishing platforms, which are to be constructed at ground level.

Thirdly, and most important, there would be considerable problems in preventing the disturbance of the archaeological layers (mainly tumble from the ditch edges) on the edges of the moat ditch. Certainly in the deeper western and northern arms this would require sensitive consolidation and shoring to prevent erosion.

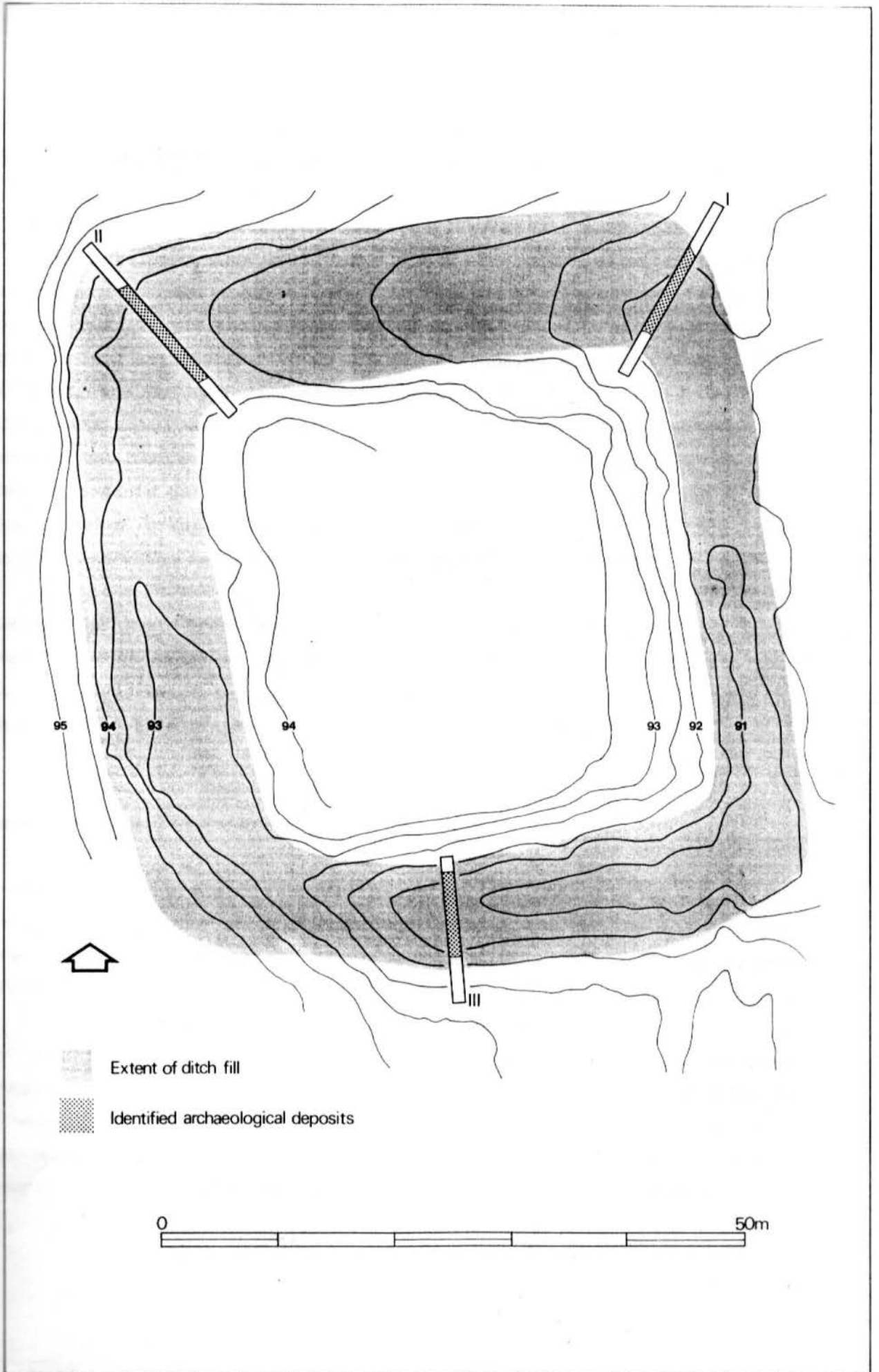


Fig. 1: Contour survey and strata prediction.

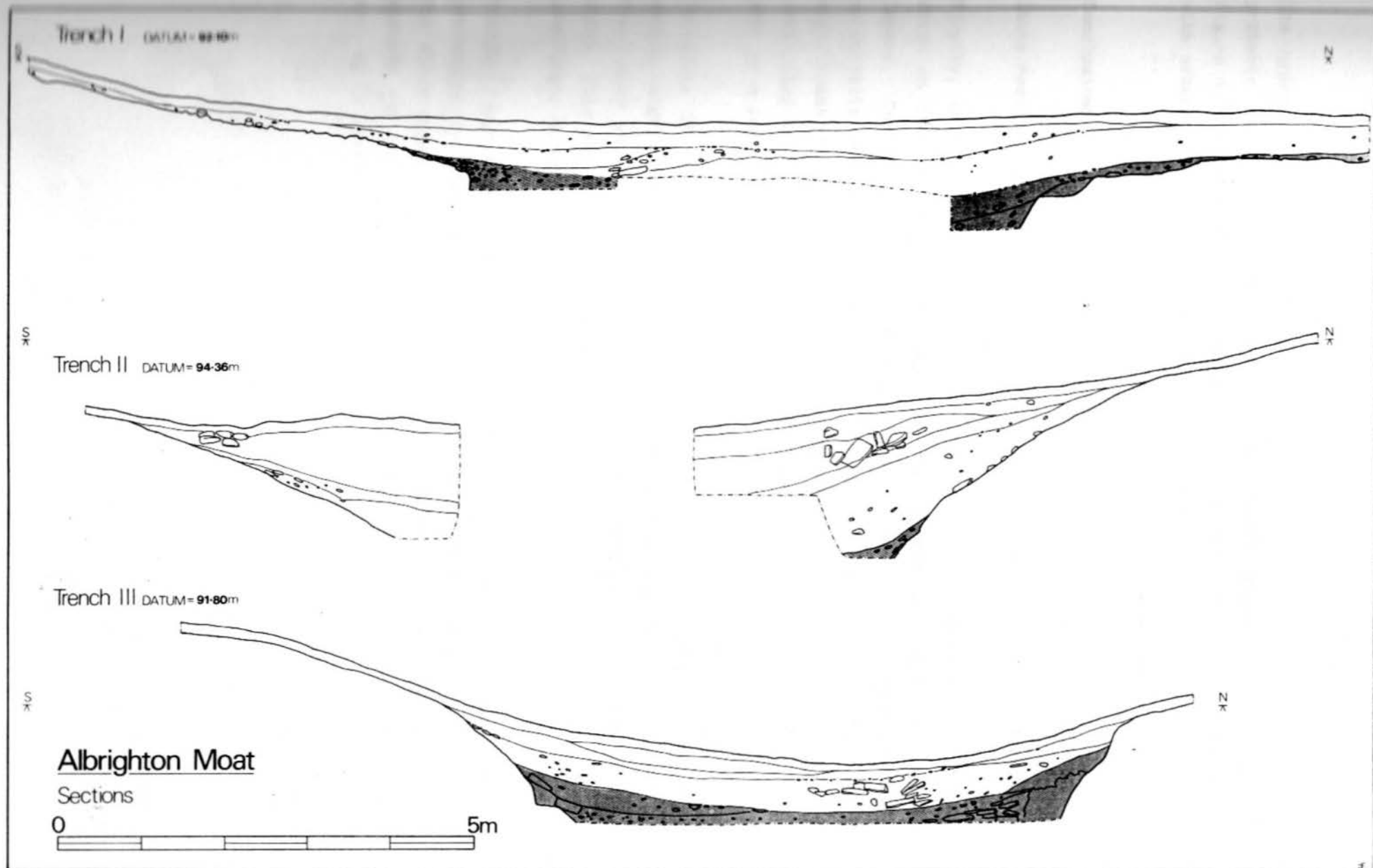
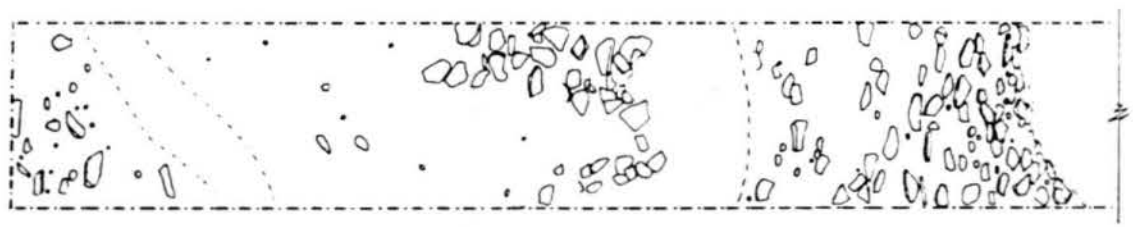
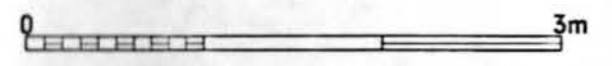


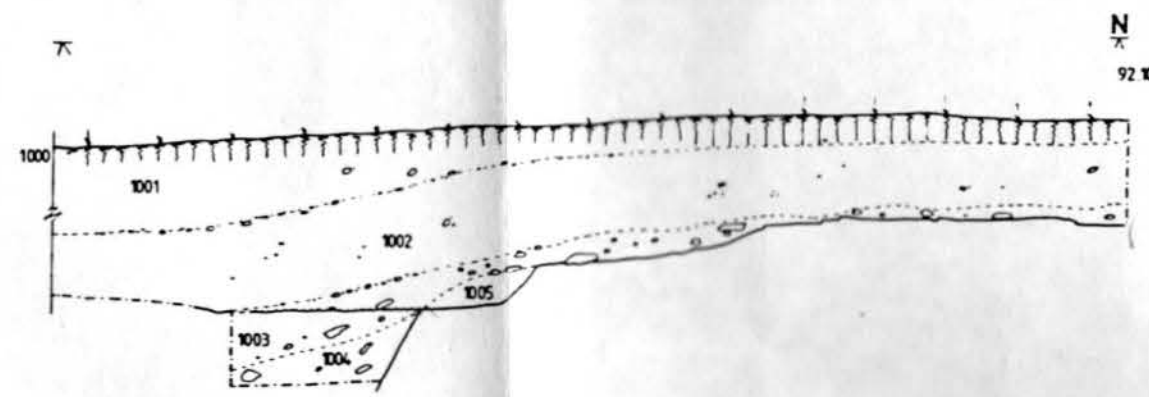
Fig. 2: Trench sections (all east-facing). Shaded areas show deposits of archaeological significance.

ALBRIGHTON MOAT 1988

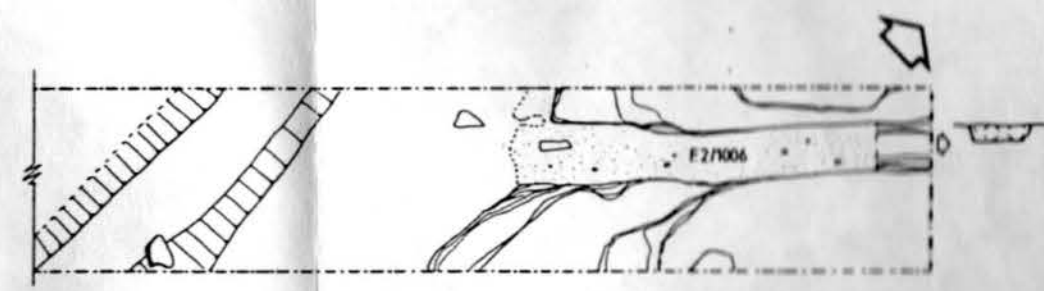
TRENCHES 1&2



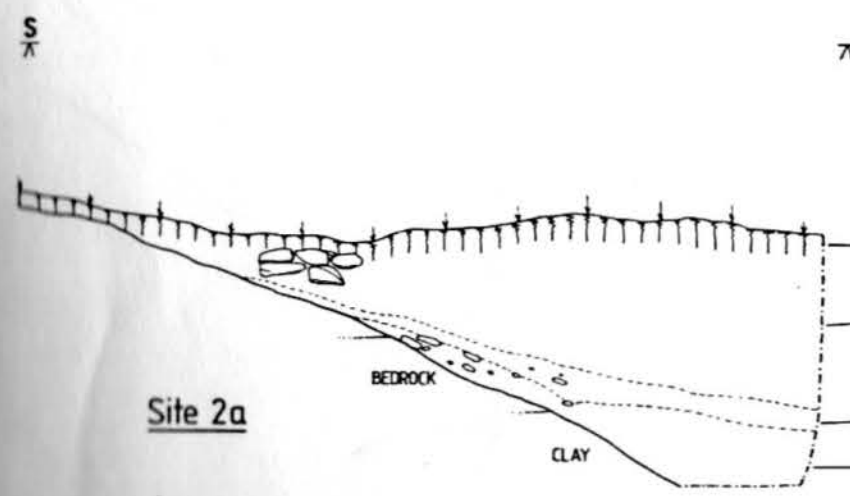
Site 1



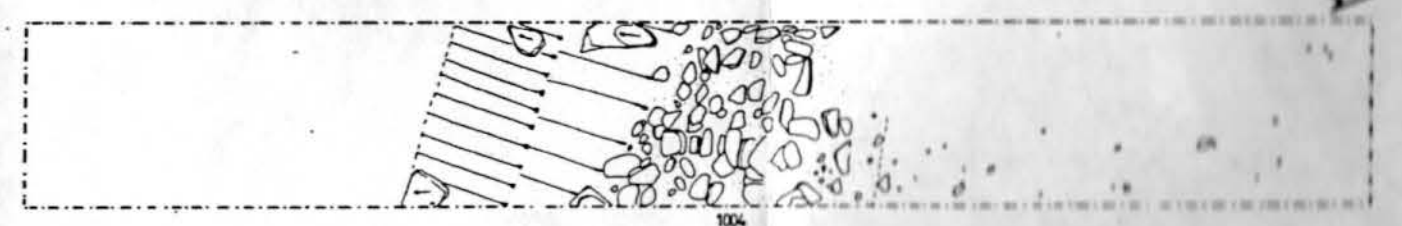
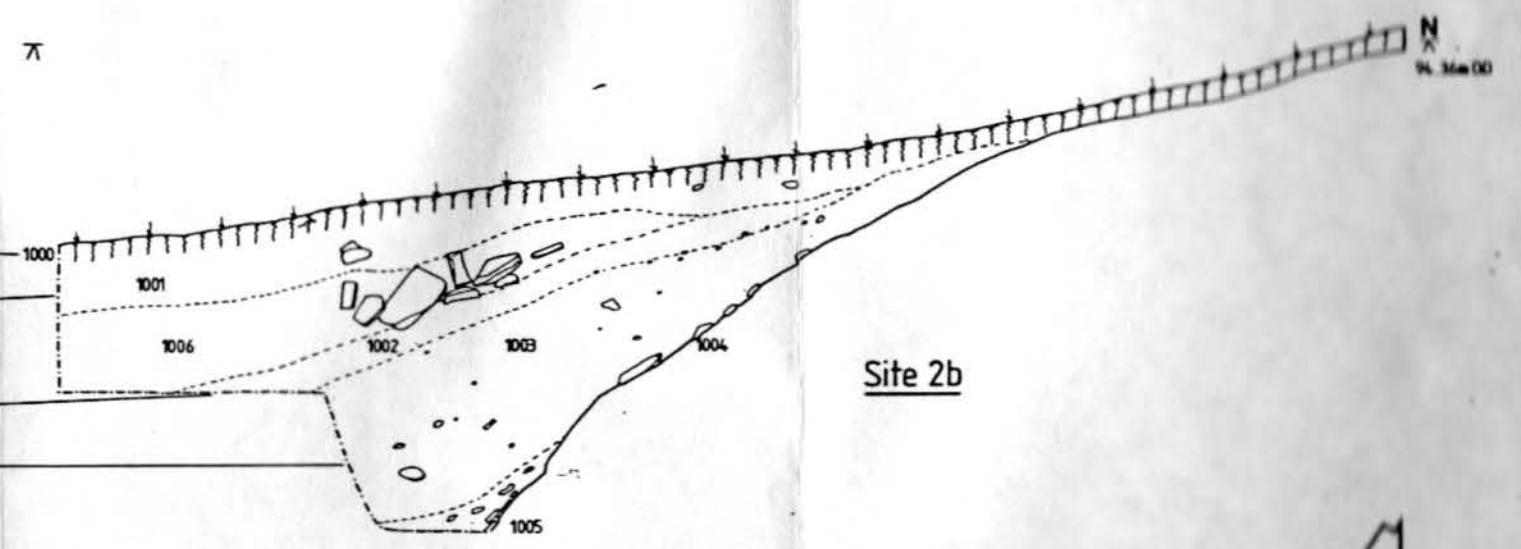
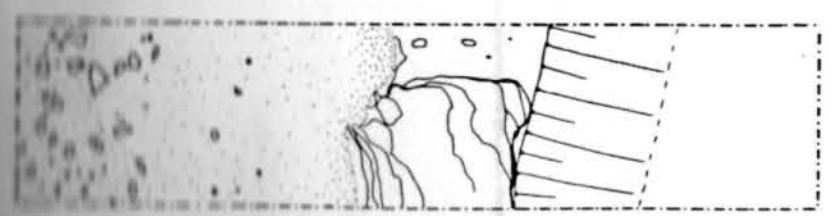
N
92.10m OD



Site 2b

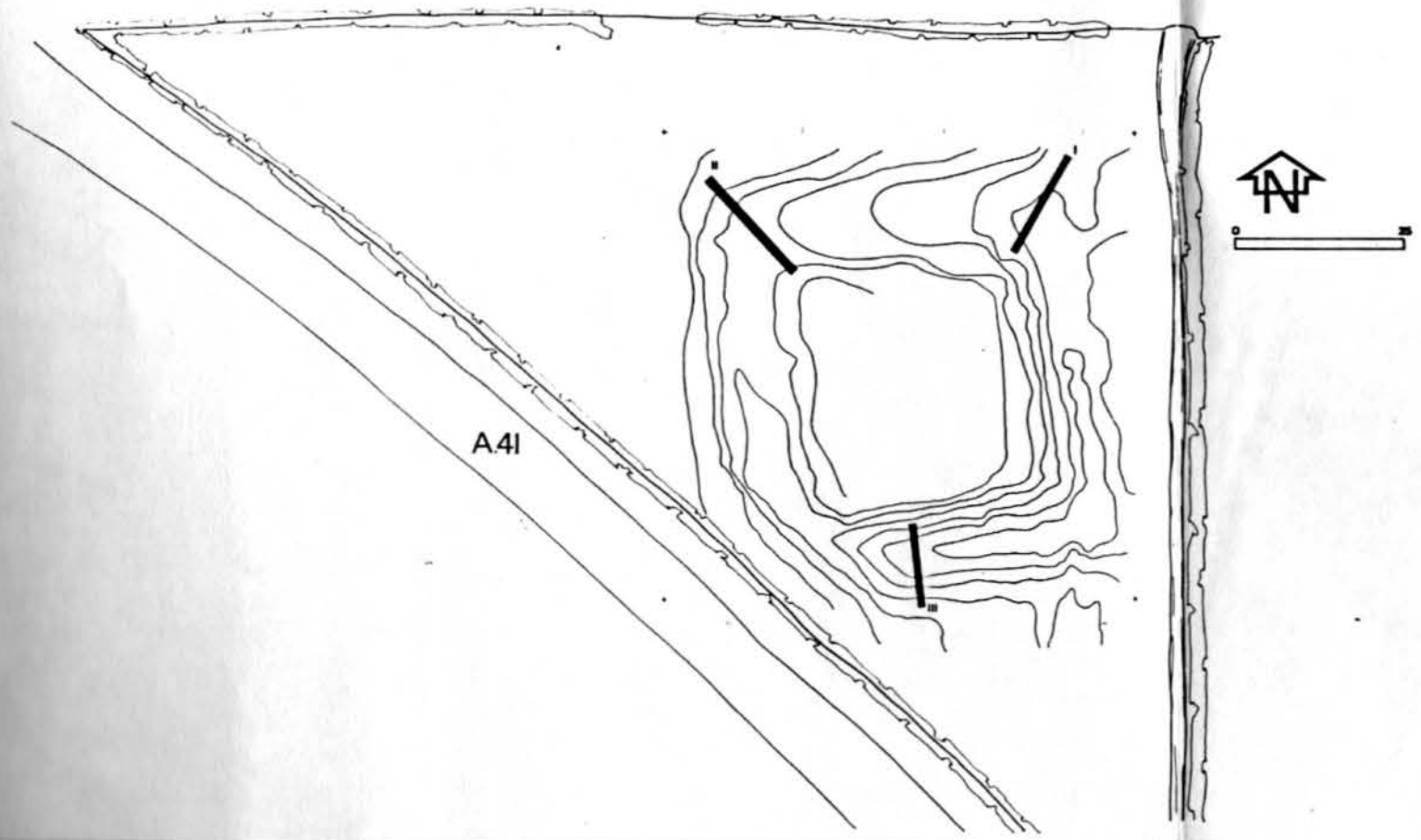
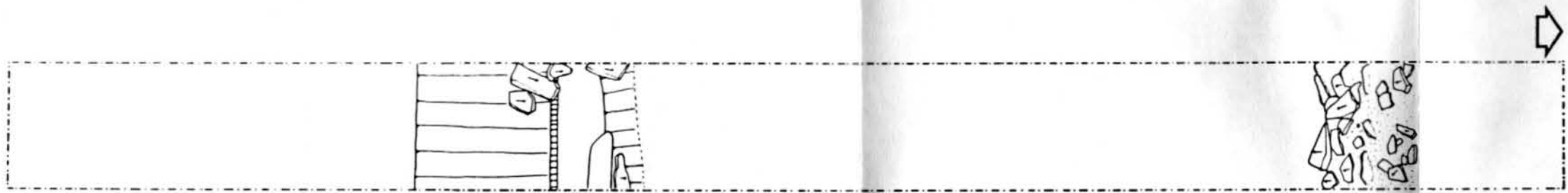
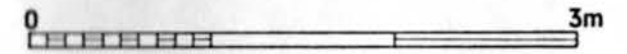
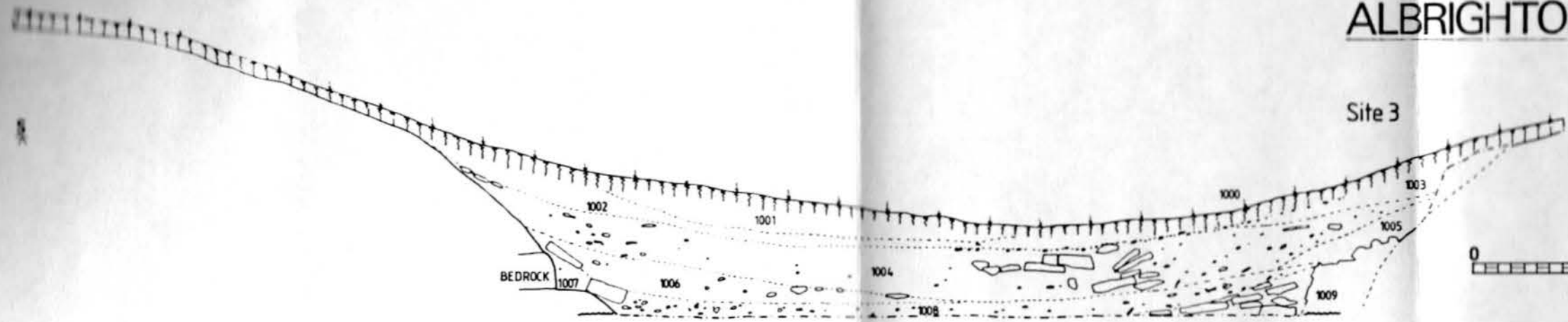


Site 2a



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Site 3



A41



60 =