BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

LEWELL FARM

WEST KNIGHTON, DORSET

A preliminary archaeological evaluation

by Ann Woodward

B.U.F.A.U.

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Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. May 1989.

Lewell Farm, West Knigton, Dorset: a preliminary archaeological evaluation

1. Introduction

An archaeological assessment of fields around Lewell Dairy, West Knighton (Fig. 1: NGR centring SY 737884) was undertaken between the 13th and 15th March 1989 by the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. Of the four fields zoned for mineral extraction, two were recently ploughed and available for fieldwalking (Fig. 1b, fields A and B). These fields comprised c.8.26 ha., which formed c.46% of the agreed concession. Although the whole of field A is not to be affected by extraction, it was felt desirable to fieldwalk its entire area. The assessment was carried out on behalf of ARC Southern as requested by Dorset County Council and took the form of a fieldwalking exercise to test the archaeological potential of the proposed quarry area. As the fields had been ploughed not long before the exercise, and owing to poor weather conditions in mid-March, the level of the finds recovery would have been lower than average. Thus, the results presented below must be regarded as a minimal estimate of archaeological material present.

The following report outlines the current knowledge of the immediate environs of the study area and discusses the fieldwalking results. It is followed by a set of recommendations for further work.

2. Archaeology of the area

The fields concerned lie on the edge of heathland, the underlying geology consisting of sandy clay and ferruginous gravels of the Tertiary Reading Beds. They lie near to the village of West Knighton and may well have been under the plough since medieval times.

Information contained in the County Sites and Monuments Record shows that monuments or earthworks of prehistoric and historic date survive in the vicinity. These include Bronze Age round barrows, one, known as the Huck Barrow, in Knighton Heath Wood, and a second possible site, a kidney-shaped mound, just south of Empool Bottom (see Fig. 1b). A third barrow, slightly to the north, was almost destroyed in 1890 and contained a Middle Bronze Age burial urn beneath a central stone cairn (RCHM 1970, 445). The nearest evidence of Roman occupation comes from the southern margin of the village where Roman pottery and a quern-stone were found in 1941 (Fig. 1; RCHM 1970, 602). The remains of field banks and lynchets in the fields immediately north of the village may represent cultivation of medieval date, and the strip fields (narrow rig and furrow) surviving in the grounds of Lewell Lodge may be of medieval origin also.

3. The fieldwalking exercise

The principles of the fieldwalking method of archaeological evaluation have been outlined in the preliminary report for Woodsford Heath (BUFAU 1987, section 4.i). At West Knighton, the fields were gridded into 25m squares based on the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Each 25m square was examined for 20 mins. by one worker, who collected all introduced struck flint and any ceramic or metal materials. The team comprised five achaeologists and the exercise involved 12½ man days of work in the field.

4. The results

The finds from fieldwalking included a substantial assemblage of prehistoric flint artefacts and a small number of ceramic items dating from the post-medieval period. Figs. 2 and 3 show the distribution of struck flints and flint artefacts. The contoured diagrams (Figs. 2b and 3b) were achieved by summing four adjacent squares and allotting the total figure divided by four to the centre point common to the squares. From this data a trend surface plot was constructed following the principles of contouring. The find-spots of the diagnostic pieces have been mapped approximately at the centre of their respective find squares.

4. i Prehistoric A total of 522 struck flints, including 22 implements and cores were recovered (see Table below). The dark grey flint raw material was clearly distinct from the unworked, naturally occurring flint gravel present in the topsoil. The source of the former material is likely to be chalk deposits located a few km. to the west or south. The artefact types included scrapers, a piercer, a fabricator, a bifacially worked chopper and one arrowhead. No prehistoric pottery was found. As at Woodsford Heath, the assemblage gives an impression of homogeneity and the characteristics of the flakes and scrapers, and total absence of microliths or stone axe fragments suggest a Bronze Age date. The only arrowhead was a petit tranchet derivative; this is a well-known type among later Neolithic assemblages.

In both fields the flint items were concentrated in a series of clusters (Figs. 2b and 3b). In field A, one major concentration occupies the edge of the concession area, while in field B there are two main clusters, and a general increase in density towards the east. Whilst it would be inadvisable to interpret these surface concentrations in any detail, there is no doubt that levels of occurrence denote activity in the final Neolithic and/or earlier Bronze Age periods (c. 2200 to 1000 BC).

	cores	scrapers	other tools	arrow-head	retouched flake	flake	broken flake	worked piece	Total
Knighton:									
Field A	2	6	2	-	18	164	44	38	274
Field B	2	7	2	1	35	129	43	29	248
Totals	4	13	4	1	53	293	87	67	522

4. ii Romano-British and medieval No pottery, building material or other finds of Roman or medieval date were recovered.

4.iii Post-medieval The few items of post-medieval date comprised five pieces of clay roof tile, one piece of transfer-ware pottery and an iron nail. The relative paucity of these finds doubtless reflects the absence of any medieval to 19th-century buildings in the immediate vicinity. Although the fields were ploughed probably in the 18th and 19th centuries, little debris appears to have been introduced through manuring.

5. Recommendations

(a) Although less than half of the concession area has been examined by fieldwalking, it is felt that the results are representative of the whole. Thus, no further fieldwalking is recommended.

(b) In the light of the results from excavation and monitoring at

Woodsford Heath, further evaluation by geophysical survey is not deemed necessary.

(c) The concentrations of flintwork indicate the possible presence of below-ground features, probably of earlier Bronze Age date. Trial trenching prior to topsoil stripping is not recommended, but a full watching brief should be instituted during topsoil stripping, and sufficient time for surface examination between topsoil and subsoil stripping should be allowed. It is understood that a two-stage pre-extraction overburden stripping procedure would permit this.

(d) A more detailed excavation option should be borne in mind, dependent on any results during topsoil stripping.

Reference

RCHM 1970. Royal Commission for Historical Monuments. Dorset Volume II, part 3. HMSO, London.

Acknowledgements

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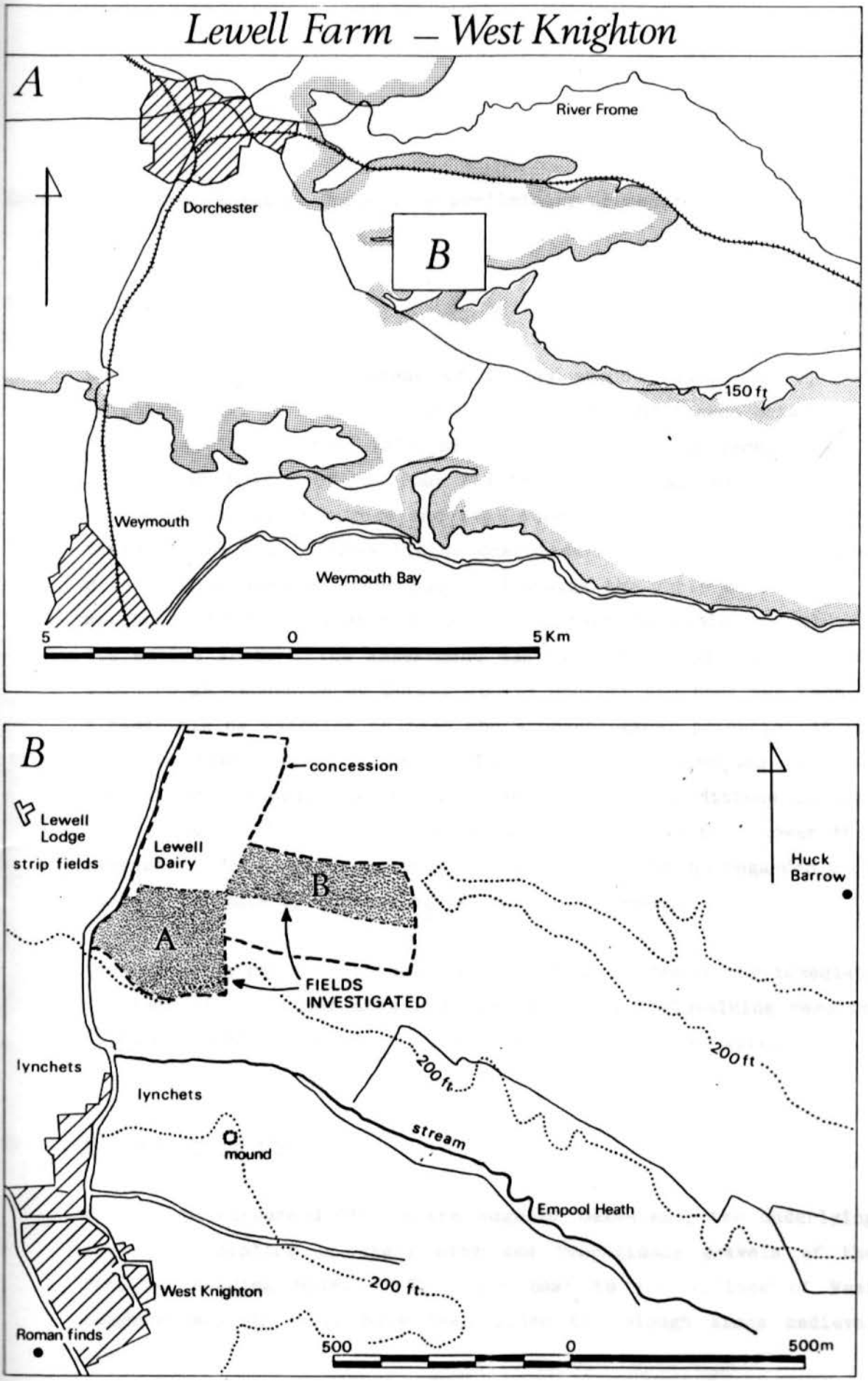
Lewell Farm – West Knighton
A
River Frome
Dorchester
B
150 ft
Weymouth
Weymouth Bay
5
0
5 Km
B
concession
Lewell
Lodge
strip fields
Lewell
Dairy
B
A
FIELDS
INVESTIGATED
Huck
Barrow
200 ft
lynchets
lynchets
200 ft
stream
mound
Empool Heath
West Knighton
200 ft
Roman finds
500
0
500m

Figure 1

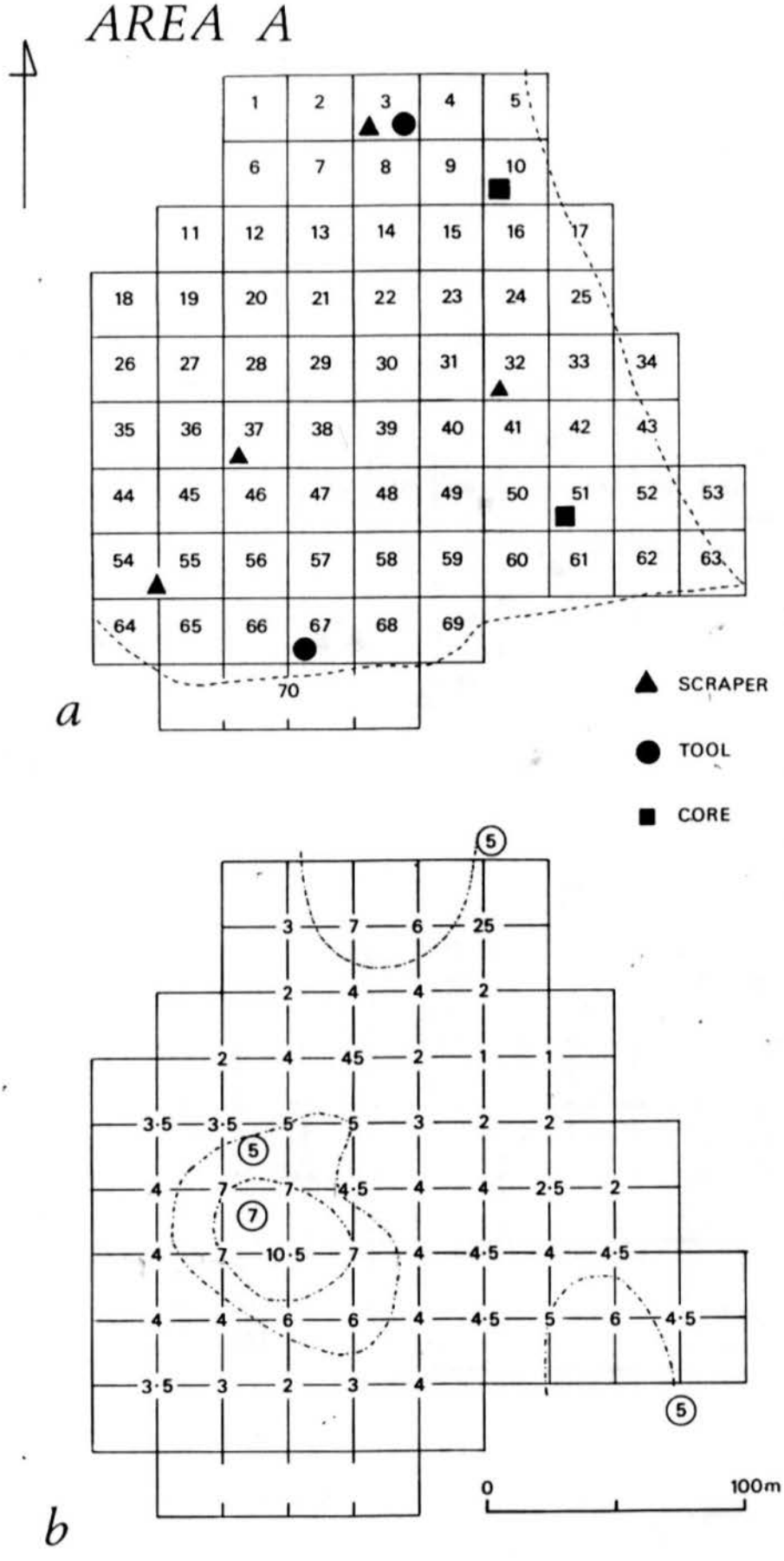
AREA A
1 2 3 4 5
6 7 8 9 10
11 12 13 14 15 16 17
18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25
26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34
35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43
44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53
54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63
64 65 66 67 68 69
70
a
SCRAPER
TOOL
CORE
5
3 7 6 25
2 4 4 2
2 4 45 2 1 1
3·5 3·5 5 5 3 2 2
5
4 7 7 4·5 4 4 2·5 2
7
4 7 10·5 7 4 4·5 4 4·5
4 4 6 6 4 4·5 5 6 4·5
3·5 3 2 3 4
5
0
100m
b

Figure 2

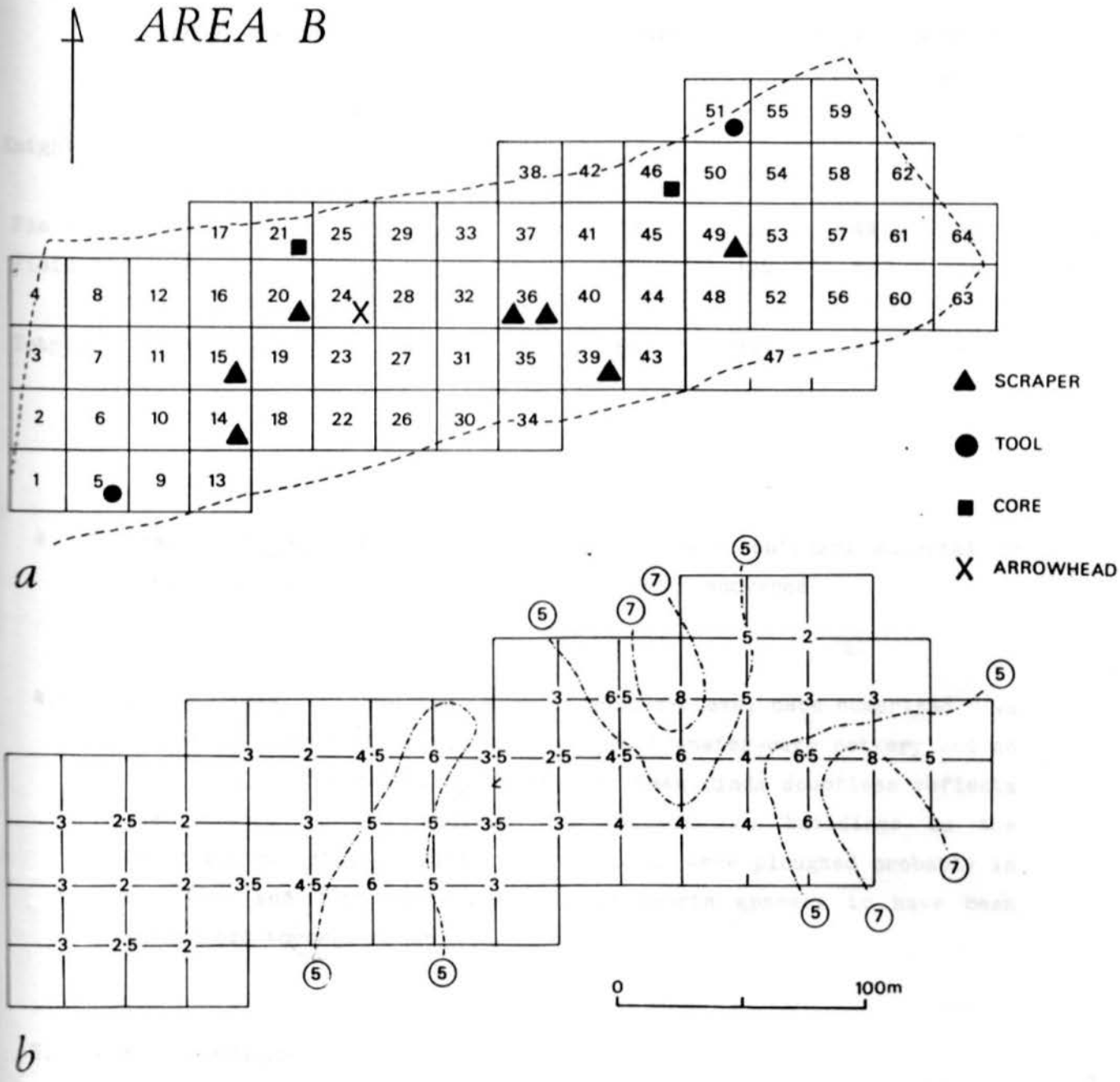

Figure 3