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Excavations at Bromfield, Shropshire 1991
An Interim Report

by
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the latest results of an ongoing process of archaeological monitoring and excavation begun in 1965 with the opening of the Bromfield quarry. Numerous cropmark sites within the threatened area, including those of several ring ditches, a small enclosure and a Roman marching camp, have been identified by aerial photography since the early 1950s. These, together with several upstanding barrows on the nearby golf course, have led to the claim that Bromfield is "the foremost archaeological site in the Border" (Stanford 1985, 1). Archaeological investigation in advance of gravel extraction was begun by Stan Stanford, who continued his invaluable work until 1981 when responsibility for the monitoring was taken over by Shropshire County Council with the assistance of Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

The latest excavation was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Shropshire County Council within a large arable field immediately to the south of the present quarry face, between September and November 1991. The focus of the work was on three postulated ring ditches (Fig. 1, B9, B10 and B13) and a section of the marching camp ditch, all of which would eventually be destroyed by the advancing quarry. Funding was provided by English Heritage and Plymouth Estates.

2.0 THE SITE

2.1 Location (Fig.1)

Bromfield quarry (SO 485775) is located on a gravel terrace 3km to the northwest of Ludlow, and is bounded to the northeast by the Shrewsbury to Hereford railway and to the southwest by the River Onny. The fluvio-glacial gravels include bands of sand and clay. They form a tongue of land between the Rivers Onny, Teme and Corve, and are bounded by the 91m contour with the eastern fringes of the Welsh uplands rising to the west.

2.2 Previous Work - Towards a Chronology for the Site

The earliest evidence for activity at the site has come from two shallow pits, one of which produced sherds from several Neolithic pots and a radiocarbon date which suggested mid-4th millenium occupation (Stanford 1982, 283). Other early features produced Beaker sherds including some from a shallow hollow predating the barrow B15.

Calibrated dates from a layer of charcoal associated with two unurned cremations under the remains of barrow B15 lie between 1945 and 1725 BC (Stanford 1991, 35). A pit from a small adjacent cremation cemetery produced a calibrated date of 1400 BC.

Barrow B15 lies within an extensive barrow cemetery lying between the Rivers Teme and Corve. Five of the barrows are still visible as upstanding monuments while a sixth was still visible in 1885. The crop marks of ring ditches, suggesting the presence of a further 14 barrows, have been identified from aerial photographs. It is possible that the central mounds of several of these may also have been standing until the advent of the mechanical plough in comparatively recent times. The recent excavation of B8 (Leach 1989) indicated that the centre of the feature had been robbed, suggesting that there must have been something visible, such as a mound, when the robbing took place.

Until the recent excavations there was nothing to suggest that any of the ring ditches or barrows belonged to any period other than Early Bronze Age. In 1852 Bronze Age pottery was recovered from a barrow cut through during the construction of the railway, and in 1885 Charles Fortey found cremated bones and a bronze knife near Butts Farm Barrow (B1) and a large urn from the top of barrow B5 (Fortey 1885)

Two other barrows had been excavated prior

to the recent work. No grave was identifiable from the badly eroded remains of B20 and no pottery was recovered from the central cremation grave within B7, although several satellite burials included four urned cremations (Stanford 1982).

Approximately 30m to the west of B7 was a cemetery (C1) containing over 130 cremation pits (Stanford 1982). Calibrated radiocarbon dates suggest that the cemetery was used for 400 years between the earliest dated grave (1270 BC) and the latest (870 BC) (Stanford 1991, 35). Each grave appears to have contained only a token of the cremation, and about a quarter contained some pottery.

The next phase of activity at the site is represented by a small rectangular Iron Age enclosure (E2) excavated by Stan Stanford between 1978 and 1980. Within the enclosure were several posthole structures which may have represented the farmstead of a small family unit, possibly dating to the third century BC (Stanford 1991, 56 and forthcoming).

The Roman marching camp (E1) presumably belongs to the Roman conquest period between AD 48 and AD 75. It was first identified from the air by Professor St. Joseph and segments of its ditch have been examined through excavation by Graham Webster in 1956, Stan Stanford (Stanford 1968) and BUFAU. These investigations have established its size (20.5 acres or 8.3 hectares) although, until the recent excavation, no finds had been recovered and no entrances or internal features had been identified .

During the post-Roman period the Iron Age farmstead enclosure appears to have been reused as an Anglo-Saxon Christian cemetery. Traces of up to thirty one graves were identified by Stan Stanford, three of which contained grave goods. Stanford believes that the cemetery was in use between AD 650 and AD 750 (Stanford 1991, 113-115 and forthcoming).

3.0 THE EXCAVATION

3.1 Objectives

The broad objective of the current excavation was to respond to the threat posed by future gravel extraction to three circular cropmark features, presumed to be the ring ditches of ploughed-out Bronze Age round barrows (Figs. 1 and 2: B9, B10 and B13) and a section of the marching camp ditch. The Roman marching camp and two of the ring ditches (B9 and B10) are designated as scheduled ancient monuments (County No. 202).

The detailed objectives of the excavation are described in a pre-excavation research design (Watson 1991b). With regard to the ring ditches it was hoped to provide evidence for their precise nature and date. It would then be possible to make a comparison with the previously excavated examples (B7, B8, B15 and B20) both in terms of their relative chronology and function. In particular it was intended:-

1) To provide information relating to their absolute and relative chronology; especially to provide further C14 dates to add to the seven already obtained from previous excavations. It was hoped that this would help place the barrow burials within the overall funerary sequence. In addition, the recovery of a further ceramic assemblage would assist the development of a detailed pottery sequence for the site. Samples would also be collected with a view to obtaining thermoluminescence dates.
2) To provide evidence for the nature of their construction. The excavation of the ring ditches B7 and B8 suggested that they may have had a chordal or segmental plan. B7 and B20 were also shown to share a common diameter.
3) To provide evidence for the original form of the monuments. During previous excavations it was possible to make an assessment of the original height and size of the barrow mound based on an estimate of the spoil produced by the barrow ditches. The excavation of B8 also provided evidence for a stake circle or palisade within its ditch.
4) To provide further evidence for funerary practices. Previous excavations have suggested that these varied widely with the identification of a pre-burial funerary pyre (B15), a single primary burial (B7), a double primary burial (B15) and secondary or satellite burials (B7 and B15). Variations in barrow form and associated burial practice were also identified during the 19th-century

investigations and during excavations elsewhere in the region (eg Holt, Hereford and Worcester (Hunt *et al* 1986); Meole Brace near Shrewsbury (Cooper and Leach 1990); Sharpstones Hill near Shrewsbury (Barker *et al* 1991); Trelystan, Powys (Britnell 1982); and Four Crosses, Powys (Warrilow *et al* 1986)). Further evidence from Bromfield would provide a valuable addition to this corpus of material.

5) To undertake a programme of environmental sampling. Little information relating to the contemporary Bronze Age environment yet exists at Bromfield and it was hoped that sampling of the major features would help fill the gap. It was also intended to obtain appropriate samples for answering specific questions relating to soil micro-morphology and geochemical composition.

Excavation of the Roman marching camp has hitherto been restricted to small scale sectioning of the perimeter ditch. The present excavation provided the opportunity for:-

1) The excavation of a substantial length of the ditch. This would provide additional information concerning its construction and perhaps provide evidence for 'gangwork'.
2) The excavation of a substantial sample of the interior. This might provide evidence for internal structures or features.
3) The recovery of artifacts which might provide an opportunity for assessing the date of the establishment of the marching camp and, along with the identification of internal features, the duration of its occupation.

3.2 Method

Previous archaeological monitoring and salvage excavation at Bromfield has been carried out following the removal of the ploughsoil by the quarry machinery immediately prior to gravel extraction. Inevitably, this has led to some truncation or other damage to archaeological deposits prior to excavation. The current excavation provided the opportunity to mechanically remove the ploughsoil under careful archaeological supervision well in advance of quarrying.

Three areas were selected for excavation, corresponding with the three circular cropmarks. In the event the easternmost cropmark (B13) proved to be illusory despite careful inspection (Fig 2, Trench III). The remaining two were soon shown to have been created by the suspected underlying ring ditches (B9 and B10). In order to achieve the excavation objectives a substantial area was opened up around each of the exposed ring ditches (at least 10m and up to 25m from the outer edge of each ring ditch). Trench I (B10) covered an area of 1600 square metres and Trench II (B9) covered approximately 2030 square metres. In Trench II a 47m stretch of the marching camp ditch was exposed and, combining the two trenches, a total of 3250 square metres of the interior of the camp was examined.

Following the removal of the ploughsoil, which was up to 0.4m thick, the underlying natural sands, gravels and clayey silts were cleaned using hoes and yard brooms in order to facilitate the definition of the archaeological features. The bands of clayey silts within the natural gravels suggested the former presence of periglacial channels. In all cases the archaeological deposits took the form of negative cuts together with their fills. It was noticable that the definition of these features varied considerably depending on the weather conditions, and it was perhaps fortunate that the excavations were conducted during both a dry spell (September) and a wet one (October).

A 90% sample of both ring ditches was excavated, leaving eight 0.5m-wide baulks in the case of B10 (F2) and twelve 1m wide baulks in the case of B9 (F3). Approximately 66% (31m) of the exposed marching camp ditch was excavated, with eleven, regularly spaced, recorded sections. The remaining archaeological features were either fully or sample excavated.

An extensive sample of other shallow features, filled with silt and gravel and presumed to be of natural origin, was also investigated.

3.3 Results

TRENCH I (Fig. 3)

The Ring Ditch (F2)

The smaller of the two ring ditches investigated was located slightly to the northeast of the centre of Trench I. It cut two small pits with bowl-

shaped profiles (Fig. 3: F6 and F39). The larger of the two (F6) was 1.2m deep and had two distinct fills. The upper fill (1008) consisted of a thin layer of silt and charcoal and the remaining fill was composed of a lighter brown sandy silt with occasional charcoal flecks. The feature contained no artifacts although samples were collected for radiocarbon dating. There was no evidence to suggest that the second pit (Fig. 3: F39) was archaeological in origin and it may have been a former tree root pit. The same may be true of a shallow feature to the east (F40).

The ring ditch itself (F2, Plate 1) was just under 10m in diameter (from outer lip to outer lip) and between 1.1m and 1.9m wide. It was of somewhat irregular plan, creating a slightly lobed appearance. It also varied considerably in profile, although it was generally an irregular U-shape with a flattish base and a depth of up to 0.9m (Fig. 7 and Plate 2).

The lowermost fill consisted of a mixture of gravel and sandy silt (1027) up to 0.25m thick. This was overlain by a sandy silt (1026) up to 0.3m thick with only the occasional small lens of gravel. The upper fills included a second deposit of silt, gravel and pebbles tipping into the ditch from its inner edge. The coarser material, consisting of rounded pebbles and cobbles (1020), appears to have accumulated at the bottom of the partially silted-up ditch, while the smaller pebbles and peagrit (1002) were visible as a band around the inner edge of the unexcavated ditch fill. Both deposits were carefully cleaned and recorded (Plate 3) in case any stuctural evidence could be identified (comparable to that suggested by the upper pebble fill of B8 (Leach 1989)). The uppermost fill was a thin deposit of silt (1001). The only finds were two sherds of undecorated coarse pottery from the uppermost fill on the north side of the ditch. Control samples of the ditch fill were collected for environmental assessment.

The Central Grave (F4) (Fig. 4)

A sub-rectangular grave (F4) was located centrally within the ring ditch. The cut for the grave was 2.6m long, 1.1m wide and 0.54m deep. Its long axis was orientated north-northeast – south-southwest. The sides of the cut were steep to vertical and it had a flat base. The primary fill (1031) was a grey-brown silty sand mixed with a coarse grey sand. Within this deposit was an irregularly shaped linear depression aligned along the eastern edge of the grave, measuring up to 2.1m long, 0.45m wide and 0.2m deep (Plate 4). The depression was narrower (0.22m) at its northern end and broader at its southern end, suggesting the shape of a body. The sand and silt around the sides and much of the base of the depression had become stained dark brown to black to a depth of several millimetres (1030). The staining was extensively sampled (Plate 5) and, hopefully, a geochemical analysis of its composition will assist in determining its origin. Three artifacts (an iron bracelet, a small spherical copper object, posibly a pendant, and a small iron object subsequently identified as a La Tène I iron brooch (see page 8, below)) were recovered from just above the staining, slightly to the north of the central area of the depression. The depression was filled with a brown sandy silt (1029) and the upper fills of the grave consisted of sandy silts mixed with coarse sand and gravel (1028 and 1003).

External Features

Apart from a modern water pipe (F5), which ran from west to east across the northern part of Trench I, the clearest archaeological features outside the ring ditch were two parallel linear features crossing the eastern half of the trench from the northeast to the southwest. The southeastern feature (F7) was more clearly defined and could be traced from the eastern baulk to the southern baulk of the trench. Four 2m lengths were excavated at 4m intervals. It proved to have a fairly consistant U-shaped profile up to 0.7m wide and 0.4m deep. The silt and gravel fill (1013) appeared to overlap the northwestern edge of the feature, partially obscuring it in plan prior to excavation. The only find was a small sherd of decorated prehistoric pottery, possibly Beaker. The northwestern linear feature (F18/F20) was poorly defined and appears to have been severely truncated by recent ploughing. A 24m stretch was identified originating in the northeast corner of the trench and petering out in the central area so that the precise relationship with the ring ditch was not clear. It was thought, however, that the linear feature was later in date. It was sectioned in two

places and was found to be very shallow (less than 0.05m deep) with steep sides and a flat base.

Several other silt- and gravel-filled 'pit-like' features were sample excavated. None produced any evidence for having a man-made origin. A small group near the northern edge of the trench (F13-F16) had a similar appearance to a group of small pits in the southern area of Trench II (Fig. 5) which still contained the decaying root debris from a former tree. A similar origin may account for three larger pits in the northwestern corner of the Trench (F41-43) which were at first thought to resemble the cuts for inhumation graves. The absence of any charcoal, staining or artifacts suggests that a natural origin (perhaps tree throw hollows) is a more likely explanation for these and several other features investigated.

TRENCH II (Fig.5)

The Ring Ditch (F3)

The larger of the two ring ditches investigated was centrally located within Trench II. The inner edge of its eastern side cut two small pit-like features (F31 and F32). Both may be of natural origin although the fill of the northernmost of the two did contain charcoal flecks.

The ring ditch was up to 23m in diameter (from outer lip to outer lip) and varied between 1.1m and 1.8m wide and 0.7m and 1.0m deep (Plate 6). Unlike the smaller ring ditch it was fairly regular in both plan and profile throughout its circumference. In profile it had the appearance of an inverted bell with steep lower sides and more gradually sloping upper edges (Fig 6; Plates 7 and 10). The base was generally flat and varied between 0.3m and 0.5m wide.

The lower fills were primarily a mixture of sandy silts and coarse gravels (2017, 2018 and 2021) with occasional tips of finer gravel (2020) (Fig 6). The upper fill of reddish-brown sandy silt (2002) suggested a subsequent, more gradual, infilling. The only artifacts recovered were a single flint waste flake and a small fragment of pottery from the southeastern side which, however, may have originated from a nearby later feature (F27/29). Control samples were collected for environmental assessment and it may be possible to obtain a radiocarbon date from a small concentration of charcoal flecks (2012) from the silty fill on its southern side.

The Central Feature (F22)

The ring ditch defined a circular enclosure within which was cut a large 'boat-shaped' feature (F22), 14m long, up to 4m wide and up to 1m deep (Fig 6; Plate 8). This feature was more or less centrally positioned with its long axis orientated north - south. Approximately 70% of the feature was excavated. Its terminals were rounded in plan and it had gradually sloping sides (at approximately 45 degrees) with a flat base up to 2.2m wide.

The lower fills were composed of sandy silts and gravels (2055, 2054 and 2034) with the coarser material, including pebbles and occasional cobbles (2033) forming a central band along the base of the feature. This was presumably the result of a natural sorting of the material which found its way into the open ditch. The subsequent infilling appears to have been a much more gradual process, represented by several distinct horizons of fine silt with some sand, and varying in colour from a grey brown (2032) through yellow brown (2015 and 2014) to a reddish brown (2013). The lowermost of these silts (2032), which was concentrated towards the southern end of the feature, and a lens (2016) within 2015 from the central area, contained frequent flecks of charcoal. It should be possible to obtain radiocarbon dates from samples collected from these silts. No features were cut into the base or sides of the feature and no artifacts were recovered from its fills. Soil samples were collected from the various fills for environmental assessment and, hopefully, a morphological analysis of soil samples taken from the upper silt fills will clarify the nature of the silting process.

The Cremation Pit (F8)

A small, circular cremation pit was located approximately mid-way between the northwestern edge of the central feature and the inner edge of the northern side of the ring ditch. The pit was 0.5m across and 0.15m deep and was packed full of cremated human bone and charcoal (Plate 9). There was no evidence for *in-situ* burning. Several fragments of the cremated bone (up to 30mm long) should be identifiable. It should also be possible to obtain a radiocarbon

date from the 100% sample collected following the careful removal of the remaining cremated bone. The remainder of the deposit may be examined for environmental evidence.

The Marching Camp Ditch (F1)

The northeastern side of the ring ditch was clipped, and quite clearly cut, by the marching camp ditch which was orientated northwest - southeast across the centre of the trench. It had a regular, inverted bell-shaped profile (similar to that of the ring ditch) and varied between 1.4m and 2.0m wide and 0.2m and 0.25m deep (Plate 10).

The primary fill (2010) consisted of a fine yellow-brown silt with some sand. Lenses of lighter, greyer silt associated with lines of iron staining suggested the presence of decayed turf. A soil sample of this material was collected for morphological analysis which might test this hypothesis. This primary fill varied between 0.1m deep, filling only the very bottom of the ditch at the southeastern end, and 0.55m deep, filling 75% of the feature at its northwestern end. The upper fills consisted of sandy silts and gravels (2009, 2008, 2007 and 2001) although only the uppermost fill (2001) was apparent within the northwestern half of the excavated section. The only finds were several fragments of iron slag and a flint waste flake from the lower silt (2010) within the central area of the excavated section.

The Ovens
(F23/24, F25/26, F27/29/30, and F28)

The inner edge of the eastern side of the ring ditch was clipped by the cut for a 'figure-of-eight' oven (F27/29). Two similar ovens (F23/24 and F25/26) clipped the northern and eastern edges of the central feature (F22). A fourth oven (F28) was located 21m to the south of F27/29 close to the southern edge of the excavation.

The three ovens within the ring ditch were located between 3.5m (F27/29) and 5m (F23/24) within the marching camp ditch, running parallel to it. They were presumably cut into the rear of the rampart although no trace of the rampart make-up was evident. Allowing for the probable slight truncation of the marching camp ditch, this would suggest that the base of the rampart itself would have been between 3m and 3.5m wide.

The northernmost of the ovens (F23/24, Plate 11) was 3.4m long and each of its two lobes was 1.8m wide. Its long axis was orientated northwest-southeast. The northern lobe (F23) was 0.55m deep with vertical sides and a flat base. Its southwestern side was slightly undercut suggesting the beginnings of a partially 'domed' roof. The lowermost fill of this compartment consisted of a thin layer of charcoal (2024) sealed beneath a 'dome' of burnt orange-red clayey silt (2023). This was presumably the enclosed oven part of the feature, the burnt silt possibly representing the collapsed and scorched remains of turfs forming the upper part of the oven roof. The southern lobe, which may have formed the rake hole, was slightly deeper (0.75m) with gradually sloping sides and a thick deposit of mixed charcoal and gravel (2026). A considerable quantity of charcoal (2028), forming several distinct layers, was located in the area of the saddle between the two compartments. The upper fill of both compartments consisted of a yellow brown sandy silt and gravel (2019).

The central oven of the ring ditch group (F25/26) was located 2m to the southeast of the northern oven and was orientated approximately at right angles to it. Its total length was 3m and its western lobe (2m across) was slightly larger than the eastern one (1.6m). The functional distinction between the two lobes was not so clear, although the eastern compartment had a similar slight undercut on its eastern side, and its location, which would have been buried in the back of the rampart, would suggest that this side was the oven proper. Its lowermost fills (2030 and 2039) consisted of a series of thin charcoal layers each presumably representing a separate firing. In some cases individual spars of wood could be distinguished. The western compartment contained a more mixed deposit of clayey silt with charcoal flecks (2038). The upper fill of both compartments was composed of a mixed sandy silt and gravel (2029) comparable with that encountered in the northern oven.

The southernmost oven (F27/29, Plate 12) of the ring ditch group was located 5m to the southeast of the central oven. It appeared to cut an earlier circular pit (F30) which may have been natural in origin. The oven itself was 3.8m long

and was orientated northwest-southeast. Its southeastern compartment (F27), which cut the inner edge of the ring ditch, was considerably deeper (0.75m) than the northwestern compartment (0.45m deep). Alternating deposits of charcoal (2041) and what appeared to be decayed turf (2036 and 2043) at the bottom of the southeast compartment suggested that this may have been the oven proper, again covered with a turf roof and dug into the rear of the rampart. The northwestern compartment (F29) may have served as the rake hole.

The fourth oven (F28, Plate 13) was 21m to the south of the ring ditch group. Unlike the other three it was also located some distance away from the marching camp ditch (17m). Its northwestern lobe formed a fairly regular circle, 1.5m across. The southeastern lobe was more irregular in plan, 2m by 1.8m, and presumably formed the rake hole. A thin layer of charcoal (2045) at the bottom of the feature was overlain by a clayey silt with occasional small pebbles (2042).

The charcoal deposits in all the ovens were extensively sampled for botanical analysis. The only find was an iron nail from the charcoal (2024) within the northwestern compartment of the northernmost oven (F23/24).

Other Features

The modern water pipe (F5), identified in Trench I, also crossed Trench II from west to east. The only other features which were clearly of archaeological origin were two linear features crossing the centre of the Trench (F33 and F44). Their orientation, northeast-southwest, matched that of the two similar features recorded in Trench I (F7 and F18/20). Neither wasparticularly well defined and they were only clearly visible in damp conditions. The western feature (F44) was traced as a broad irregular band of sandy silt extending from the central area of the ring ditch (F3) where it intersected with the central feature (F22). It effectively 'disappeared' into an area of natural clayey silt in the southwest corner of the trench. The eastern feature (F33) was traced from a similar area of natural clayey silt in the northeast corner of the trench to almost as far as the southern edge of the excavation. It proved to be a very shallow feature, 0.03m deep, filled with a sandy silt.

Several other features were partially excavated, including a group of small pits in the southern area of the Trench. Several still contained decaying root material indicating that they were formed by the roots of a former tree, which, from aerial photographic evidence, was still standing as recently as the late 1950s. The root activity from this tree had in fact resulted in a wide area of disturbance, including that to the uppermost fills of the southern sides of the ring ditch (F3), and of the central feature (F22). The observations made of the small pits created by this tree may be relevant to the interpretation of numerous other small, silt-filled features identified in both trenches. Examples tested in Trench II, which might also have been formed by former vegetation root systems include the small pits F34 – F38.

3.4 Discussion

The archaeological features have provisionally been assigned to four main periods of activity. Each period is discussed in relation to the identified objectives outlined in Section 3.1 above.

PERIOD I - The Bronze Age Ring Ditch (F3) and Associated features

The larger of the two ring ditches investigated was clearly prehistoric in date (its northeastern edge was clipped by the ditch of the Roman marching camp). The ditch is presumed to be Early Bronze Age on morphological grounds. Hopefully, this will be clarified following the processing of radiocarbon dates from charcoal samples collected from several contexts. Unfortunately, no prehistoric ceramic material was recovered from either the fill of the ring ditch or from associated features.

The regular, circular plan suggested that, unlike B7 and B8, the ditch did not have a chordal or segmental layout. Its diameter (23m) and width (up to 1.8m) were remarkably similar to that of B8 although the later had clearly suffered more severe truncation. This hints at the possibility that the two features were 'staked out' to a common plan, as suggested for B7 and B20 (Watson 1991). The inverted bell-shaped profile of the ditch suggests that its lower half filled up rapidly, with gravel and sand eroding off the

sides. The sides subseqently became more stable and eroded more gradually, creating the more gently sloping upper edges. The fill towards the top was also noticably siltier. This suggests that the original profile of the ditch was a steep-sided V-shape with a flat base and that, following the initial infilling, the ditch remained visible as a shallow depression for some time.

The interpretation of the original form of the monument as a whole is rather more difficult. Much depends on the nature of the chronological relationship between the ditch and the central feature (F22). If a barrow mound existed the quantity of material from the ditch would have been sufficient to create only a relatively small feature, perhaps a disk barrow or a very low saucer barrow. However, the fills of the central feature suggest that, although initially it partially infilled rapidly with weathered natural sand and gravel, it then evidently remained as an open depression which only gradually silted up over a period of perhaps hundreds of years. There was no evidence for any barrow construction material in its upper fills which would suggest that if it had been earlier than a postulated barrow mound, it would have had to have completely silted up before the ring ditch was excavated and the barrow constructed. The only coarse material within the upper fills of the feature was at its northern end, and it is suggested that this was deposited within what may still have been a shallow depression during the construction of the Roman ovens. It may be that the central pit was a much later, but pre-Roman, feature which had cut through a postulated barrow mound. However, it seems far more likely that it was associated, and more or less contemporary, with the excavation of the ring ditch. The situation may be clarified should it be possible to obtain radiocarbon dates from the small quantity of charcoal collected from within the lower fills of the central feature and the ring ditch.

If the two features are contemporary it is difficult to see how there could have been any form of a barrow mound. The upcast from the ditch and perhaps from the central feature was, perhaps, used for the construction of a bank either on the inside or the outside of the ditch. The central feature would then have remained as a large open depression within this ringwork. No direct parallel for this arrangment appears to exists elsewhere in the West Midlands or Welsh Marches although a ringwork (but with no central feature) was recorded on the top of the nearby Titterstone Clee by St.J.O'Neill in 1932 (St.J.O'Neill 1934, 106-110).

If this interpretation of the original form of the monument is correct, and if the feature does belong to the Early Bronze Age, it would again stress the lack of uniformity in contemporary ritual and burial practice as evidenced by the handful of excavations that have been carried out on similar monuments in the area. Unfortunately there was little evidence for either the date or function of the central feature. It did not contain any artifacts nor was it associated with any feature that might have suggested a primary burial. The cremation pit (F8) is perhaps a more characteristic feature of this form of monument, although its location suggests that it is either a satellite or a secondary feature.

The final objective outlined in section 3.1 aimed at providing an assessment of the contemporary Bronze Age environment. Although numerous control samples were collected from various contexts, their potential for providing detailed information would appear to be low. An assessment of the samples will shortly be conducted.

PERIOD II - The Iron Age Barrow

The smaller of the two ring ditches (F2) had no stratigraphic relationship with either the Roman marching camp or the larger ring ditch (F3). The presence of iron artifacts within an inhumation grave formerly under an apparent barrow initially led the author and many others to suspect that the monument was a Saxon barrow burial. However, an examination of the iron by staff at the Ancient Monuments Laboratory (HBMC) indicated an Iron Age date and X-rays taken of the unidentified iron objects suggested that they may be fragments of an Iron Age brooch (Glynis Edwards, pers. comm.). This has subsequently been confirmed by Don Mackreth who has identified the two fragments as belonging to a La Tène I brooch (pers. comm.). Analysis of the composition of the copper alloy object also suggests a probable Iron Age date for this object (AML pers. comm.). Also of interest are the

traces of textile identified on several of the iron objects (see Appendix). Apart from the Arras Culture barrow burials of Eastern Yorkshire (which belong to a well-defined group with a limited distribution), Iron Age barrows associated with inhumation burials are extremely rare, and when they have been reported a detailed consideration has been prevented by poor records (Cunliffe 1991, 499; Whimster 1981, 33-34). Possible exceptions include a barrow at Beaulieu Heath, Hants. (Piggott 1953), and Whittlesford, Cambs. (Fox 1923). Whimster has suggested that any such evidence must, without exception, be treated with caution (Whimster 1981, 33). However, it seems that the exception has now been found at Bromfield! The wider implications are considerable and will be discussed at a later date.

Apart from the question of chronology the apparent construction of the ring ditch differs from other excavated examples at Bromfield. The irregular plan and profile of the ditch suggests that it was excavated as a series of small quarries rather than as a regular circular or segmental feature. It is likely that the monument originally took the form of a small bowl barrow. It should be possible to calculate the original dimensions of the mound from the quantity of spoil diplaced from the ditch (assuming that this was all used in the mound construction). The fill of the ditch suggests that it initially filled rapidly, the coarse material (1027) presumably originating from the ditch sides and the barrow mound. The subsequent finer silting (1026) suggests that the mound soon stabilised and the ditch filled more gradually. The coarse material in the upper part of the fill (1002 and 1020) suggests that the remnant of the mound was finally levelled quite rapidly and the material redeposited in what was left of the ditch. This may have been a deliberate attempt to remove an obstacle to agriculture and level the field in relatively recent times.

A detailed interpretation of the precise nature of the burial practice is hampered by the absence of any surviving skeletal or other organic material. However, it seems likely that the shape of the depression within the primary fill was created directly by the decayed corpse, suggesting that a coffin was not present. If this was the case then it seems likely that the associated stain was caused by the decaying body tissue and perhaps some form of shroud. Hopefully, this will be clarified by a geochemical analysis of the stain.

PERIOD III - The Roman Marching Camp

The Roman marching camp belongs to a third phase of activity on the site. It clearly cuts and therefore post-dates the larger of the two ring ditches (F3). The initial objective was to examine a reasonably long stretch of the ditch to recover evidence for its construction and subsequent disuse. Although the section that was excavated proved to be reasonably well preserved, there were few irregularities in either its plan or profile that might have suggested 'gangwork'. The primary fill of what appeared to be decayed turf (2010) suggests that part of the rampart may have been deliberately pushed back into the ditch soon after the abandonment of the camp. A similar slighting of the defences was suggested by Stanford during excavations on the southwestern side of the camp (Stanford 1968, 196). This event would appear to have preserved the original V-shaped profile of at least the lower part of the ditch. The upper edges of the ditch, particularly in the southern half of the excavated section, had a more gradual slope, suggesting that the upper part was left open to erode and silt naturally.

The only finds were several fragments of iron slag which suggested the presence of small-scale smithing activity. There was nothing to indicate the date of the occupation although this is likely to have been during one of the numerous military campaigns into Wales between AD 48 and 75 (Jarrett 1969, 123; Stanford 1985, 4).

As noted above, the positioning of the ovens suggests that they were cut into the rear of the rampart, indicating that the base of the rampart was between 3m and 3.5m wide. A similar location has been identified for cooking facilities elsewhere in Roman forts (Jarrett 1969, 165). It may be that such a location was chosen to maintain a safe distance between the cooking area and the temporary accommodation. In some instances the equal spacing of the ovens suggests that each may have served a different army unit (S. Esmonde Cleary, pers. comm.). In the case of Bromfield, the apparent clustering of the ovens in the southeast corner of the camp suggests that a distinct cooking area may have existed. The

identification of several firing episodes within the ovens further suggests that Bromfield was not simply an overnight camp. It is possible that it was used as a temporary military base, perhaps for as long as a full campaigning season lasting several months.

A botanical assessment will shortly be undertaken of the samples taken from the charcoal deposits within the ovens. Hopefully, a full analysis will contribute to the recent discussion on the origin of the grain supplied to the military zone (Jones 1990). It has been suggested that local supplies of grain were of considerable importance (Manning 1975) although an examination of evidence from York (Kenward and Williams 1979) and Caerleon (Helbaek 1964) suggests that grain was being imported, either from Southern Britain or continental Europe.

PERIOD IV - The Medieval/Post Medieval Field System

The final phase of activity appears to be represented by the four, shallow parallel ditches orientated northeast - southwest. A similar orientation can be seen for the fields in this area on an 18th/19th-century estate map (located in the office of the Plymouth Estate at Bromfield). It is noticeable that one of these field boundaries (F18/20) appears to incorporate the smaller ring ditch (B10), suggesting that the barrow mound may still have been visible when the field bounday was established.

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APPENDIX

ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

CONSERVATION FINDS LIST

Site BROMFIELD **AML Site No** 2279 **Sheet** 1 **of** 1

AML No	Context	Material	Description	X-Ray No	Comments
912074	[1031] F4	copper alloy	object	A8507	XRF to find out composition to see if this would give any indication of date. Analysis form attached.
912075	[1029] F4	iron	brooch fragment	A8507	Area of mineral preserved textile under the spring, covered with soil. On top of spring and over the bow mineral preserved fibres which do not appear to be spun.
912076	[1029] F4	iron	brooch? fragment	A8507	Possibly foot. Mineral preserved textile and fibres similar to that on 912075.
912077	[1029] F4	iron	bracelet fragments	A8507	Join together, and also with 912078. Attached with HMG (cellulose nitrate) adhesive.
912078	[1029] F4	iron	bracelet fragment	A8507	Joins with 912077. Mineral preserved textile on outside of curve. Attached with HMG (cellulose nitrate) adhesive.

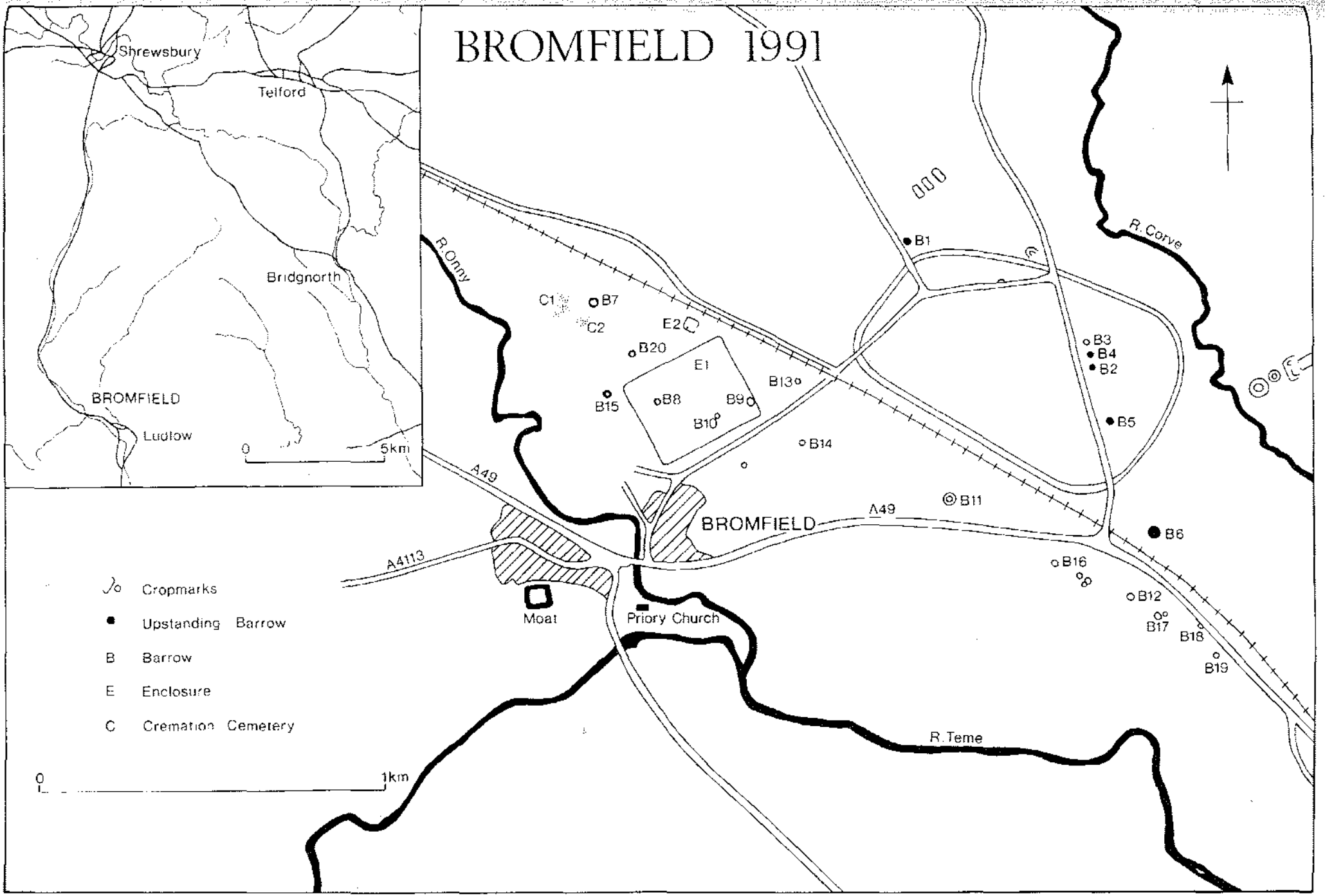

BROMFIELD 1991
Shrewsbury
Telford
Bridgnorth
BROMFIELD
Ludlow
0
5km
R. Onny
R. Corve
R. Teme
A49
A4113
BROMFIELD
Moat
Priory Church
B1
B2
B3
B4
B5
B6
B7
B8
B9
B10
B11
B12
B13
B14
B15
B16
B17
B18
B19
B20
C1
C2
E1
E2
Cropmarks
Upstanding Barrow
B Barrow
E Enclosure
C Cremation Cemetery
0
1km

Figure 1

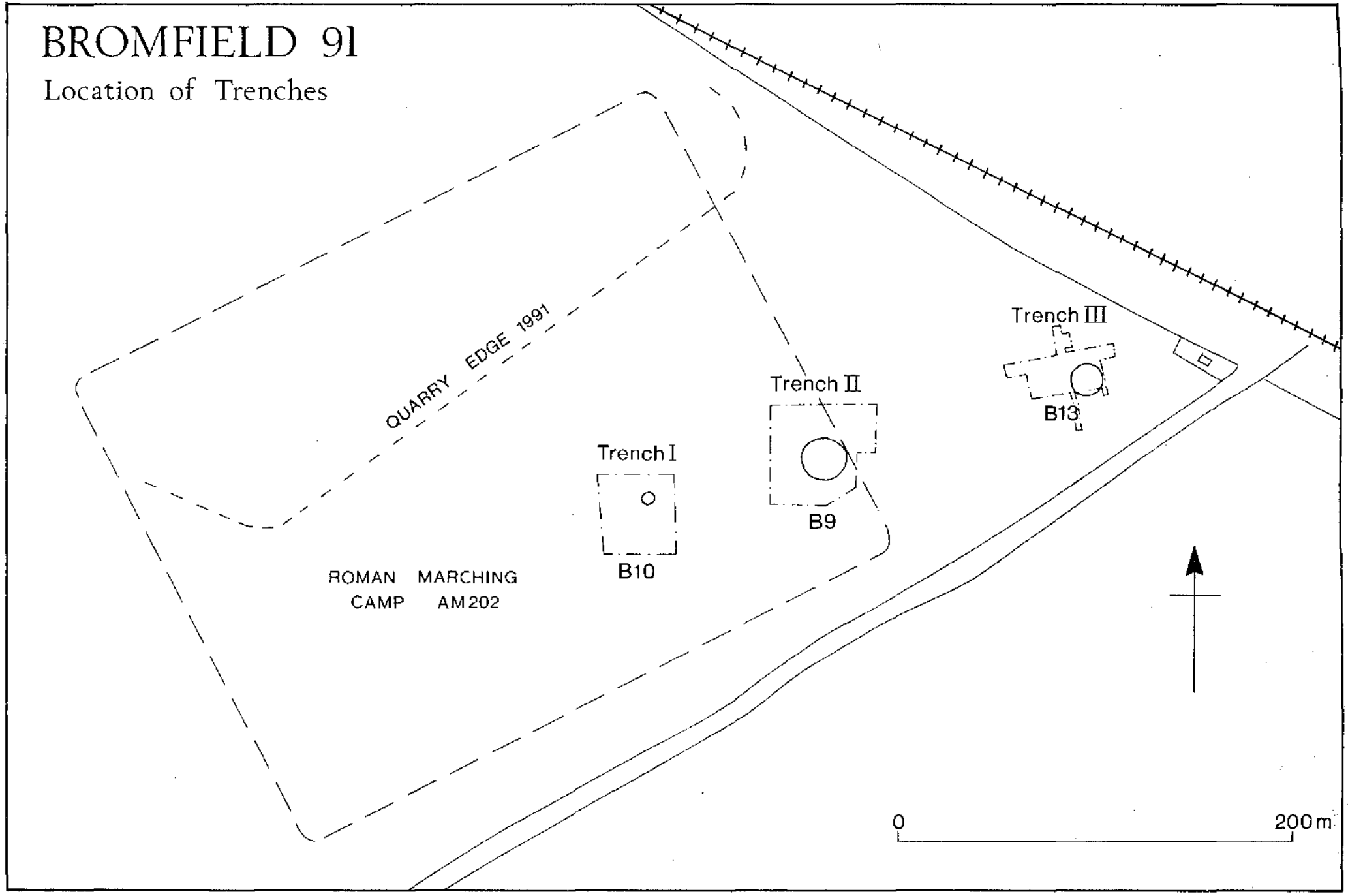

BROMFIELD 91
Location of Trenches
QUARRY EDGE 1991
Trench I
B10
Trench II
B9
Trench III
B13
ROMAN MARCHING
CAMP AM202
0
200m

Figure 2

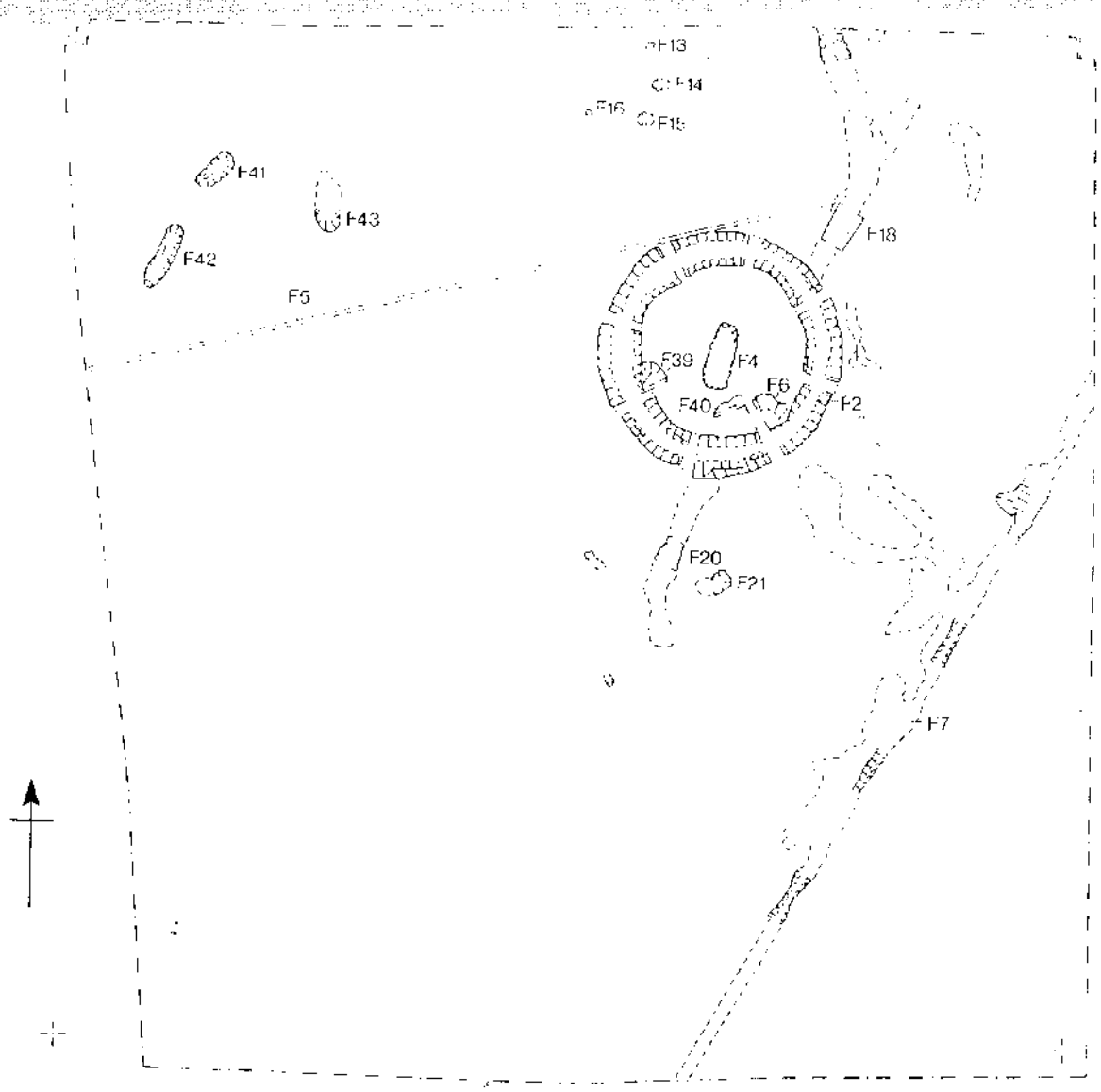

F13
F14
F16
F15
F41
F43
F42
F5
F18
F39
F4
F6
F40
F2
F20
F21
F7
TRENCH 1
0
10m

Figure 3

BROMFIELD 1991

F4 Inhumation Grave (B10)

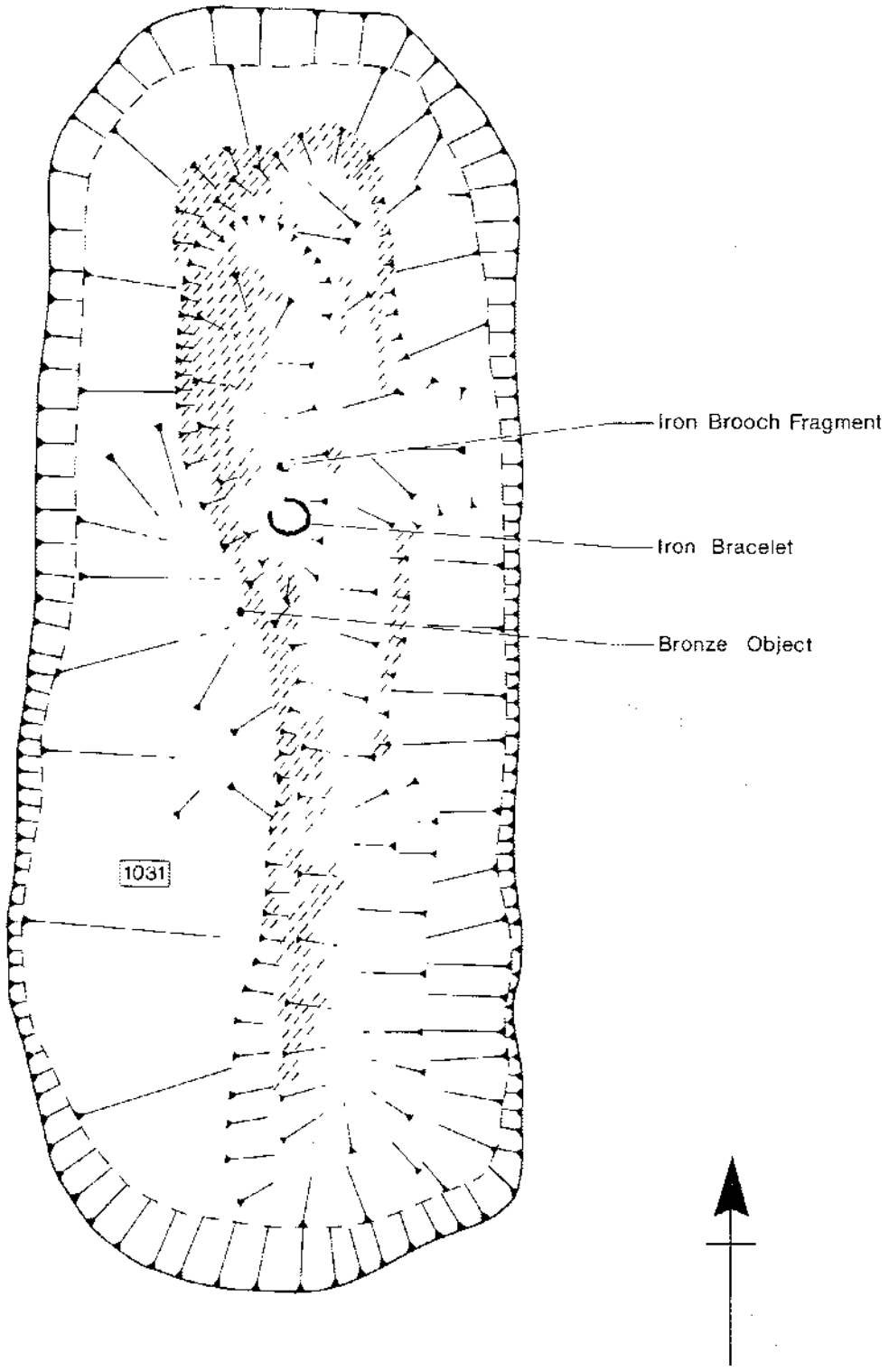


Figure 4

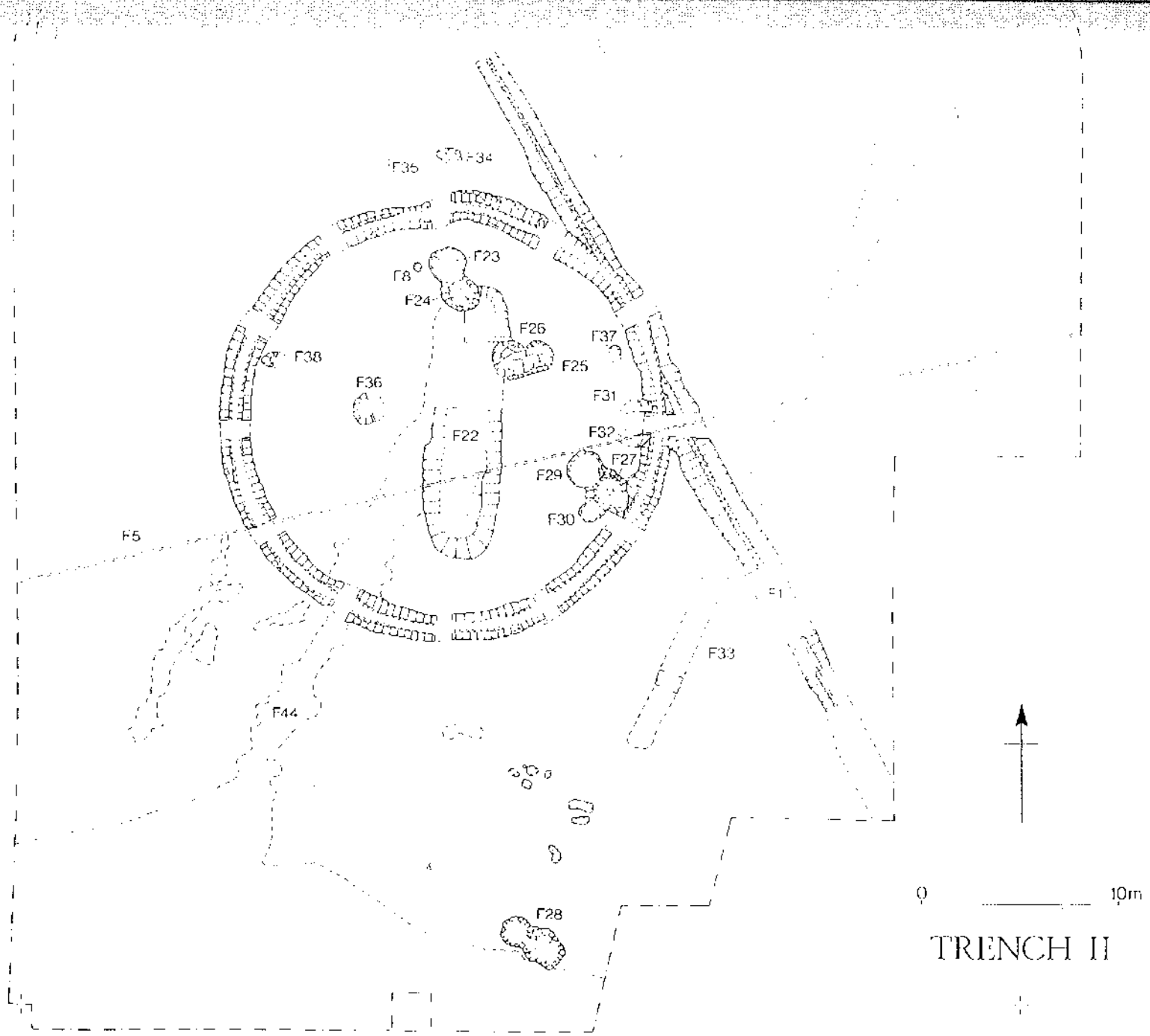
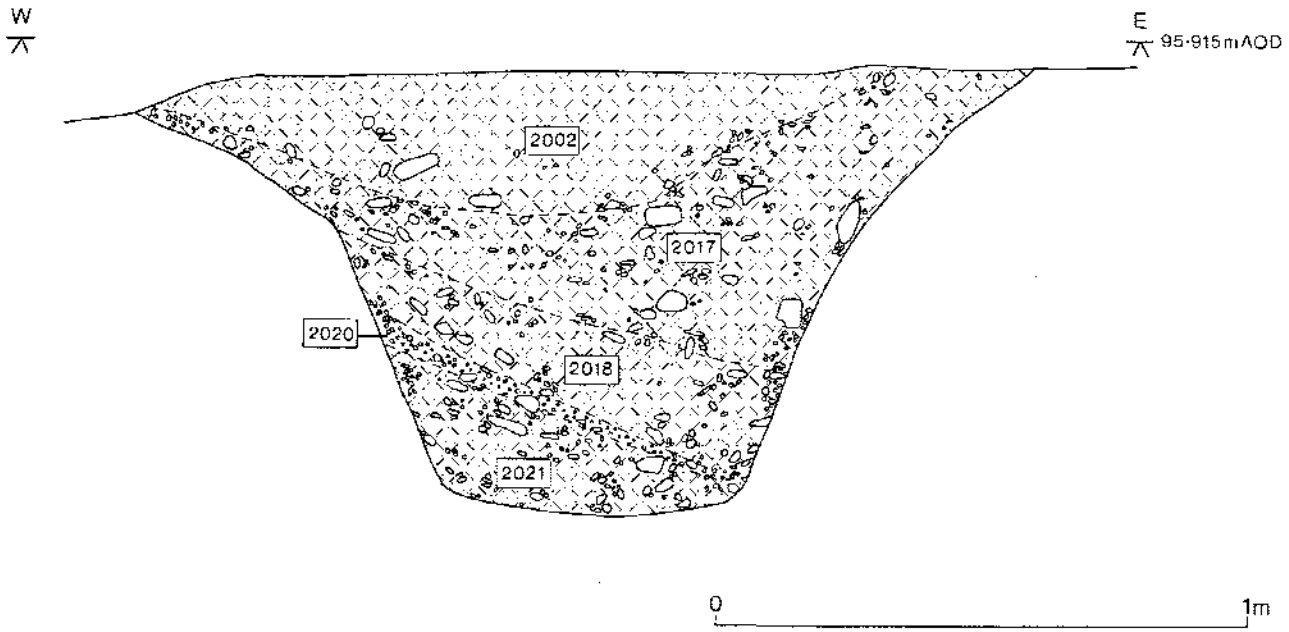

F35
F34
F23
F8
F24
F26
F37
F38
F25
F36
F31
F22
F32
F27
F29
F30
F5
F1
F33
F44
F28
0
10m
TRENCH II

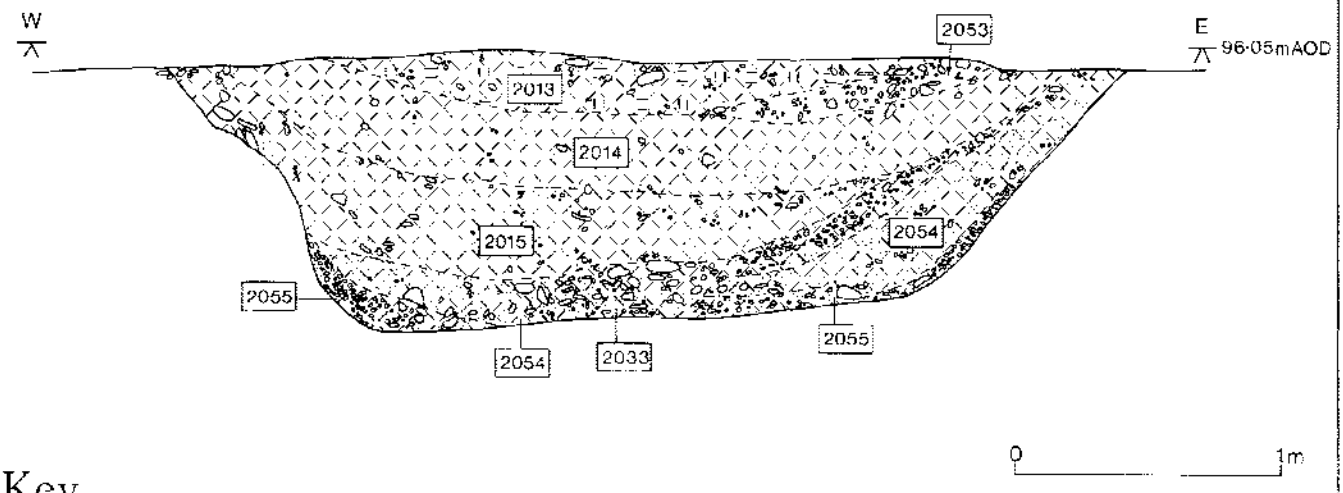
Figure 5

BROMFIELD 1991 Sections

F3 Ring Ditch (B9)



F22 Central Feature (B9)



Key

Silt

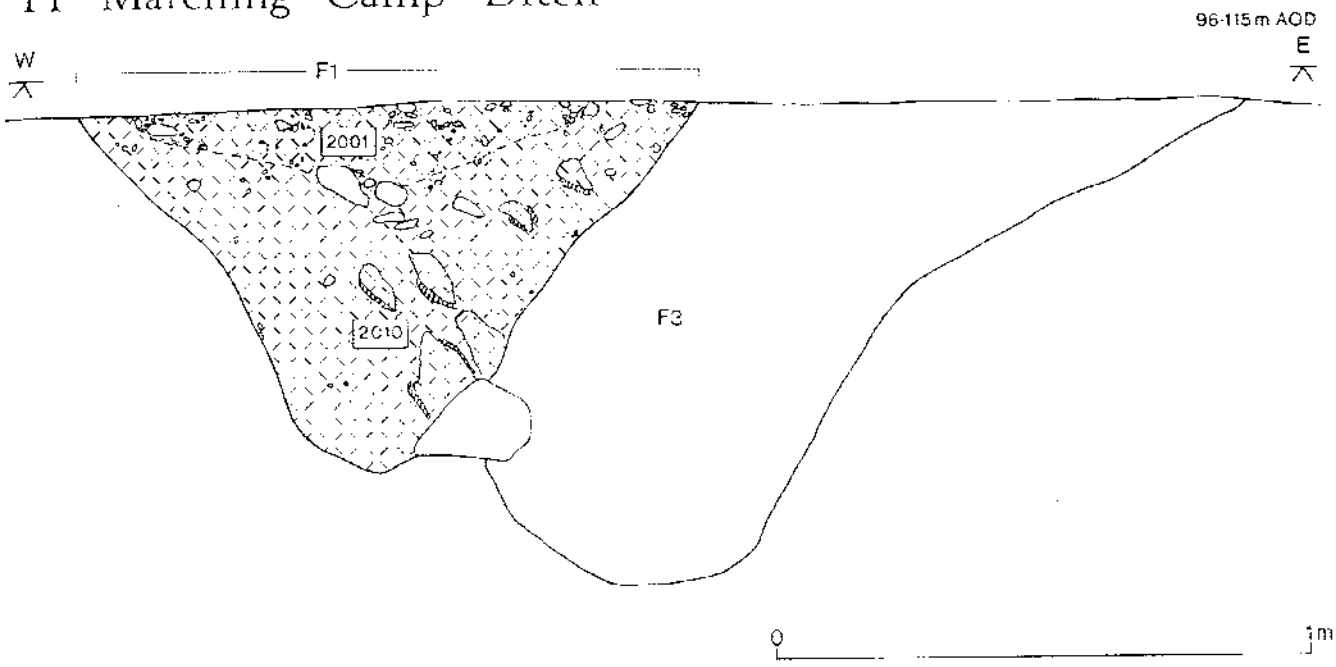
Clay

Sand

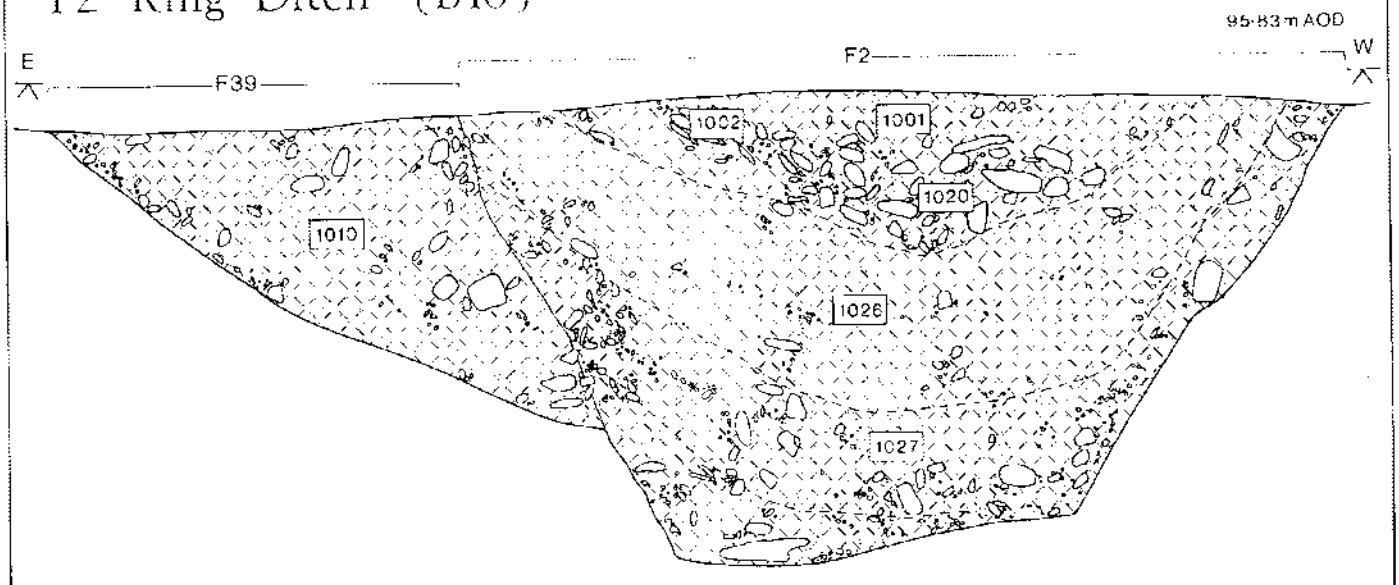
Figure 6

BROMFIELD 1991 Sections

F1 Marching Camp Ditch



F2 Ring Ditch (B10)



Key

Silt

Silt and Iron staining (? Turf)

Sand

0 1m

Figure 7

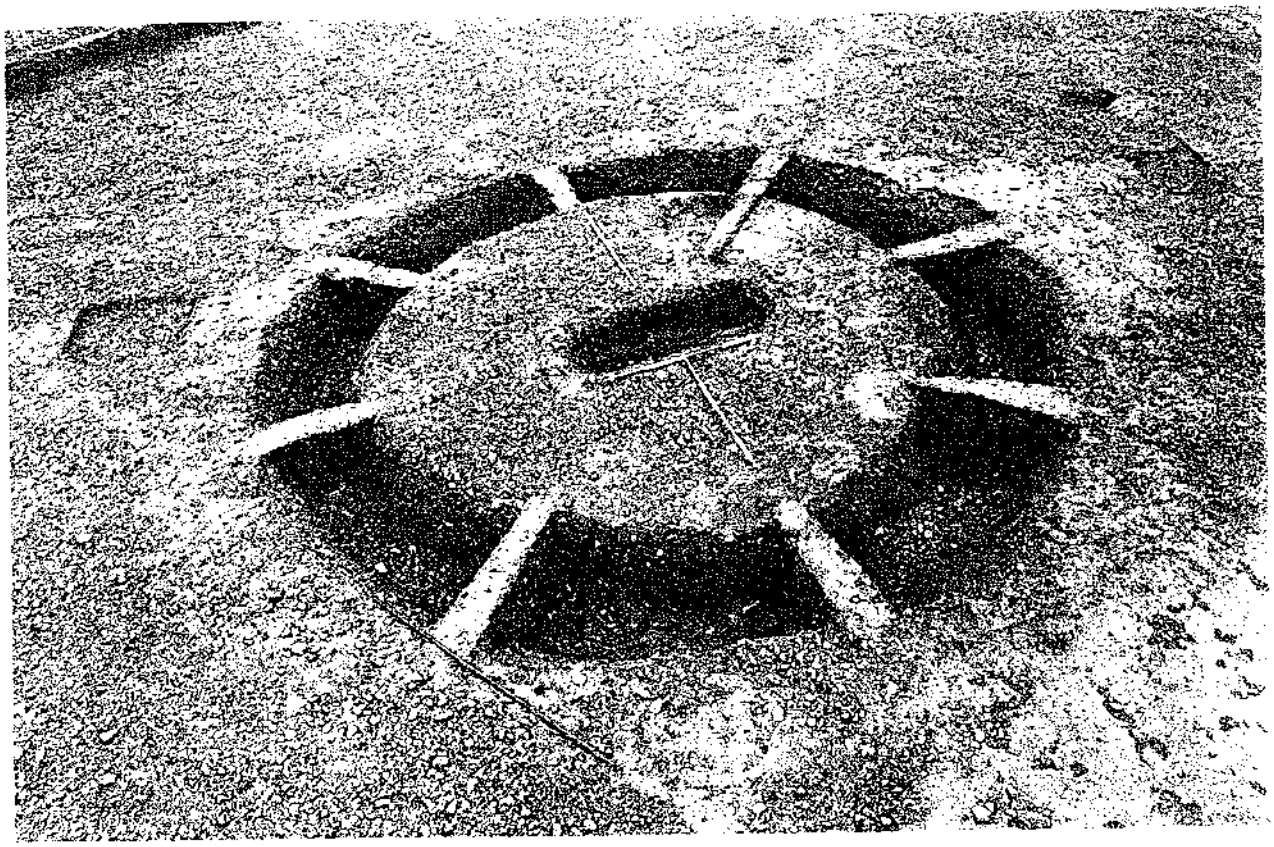


Plate 1 Ring ditch B10 (F2) - looking southeast

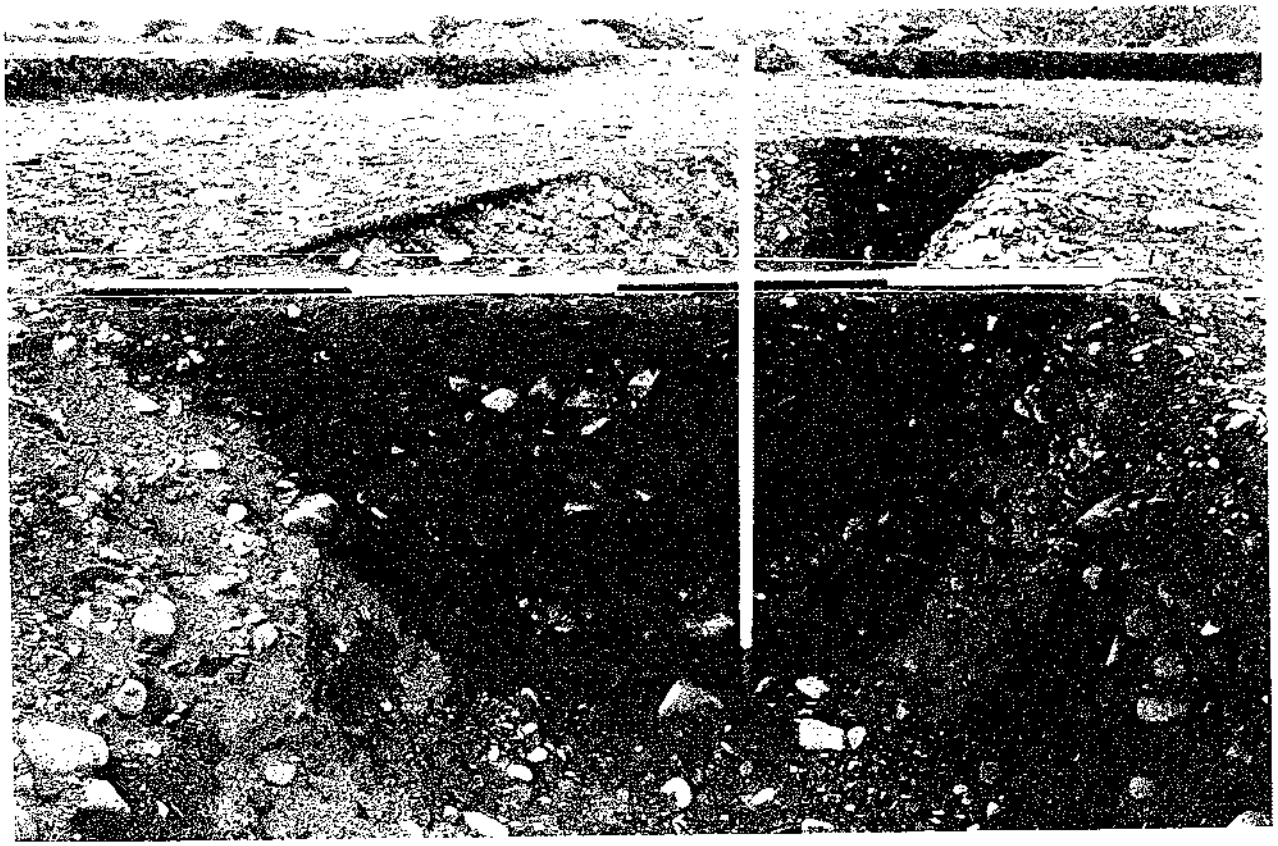


Plate 2 Ring ditch B10 (F2) section looking northeast

Plate 3 Ring ditch B10 (F2) - cobble fill (1020) looking northwest

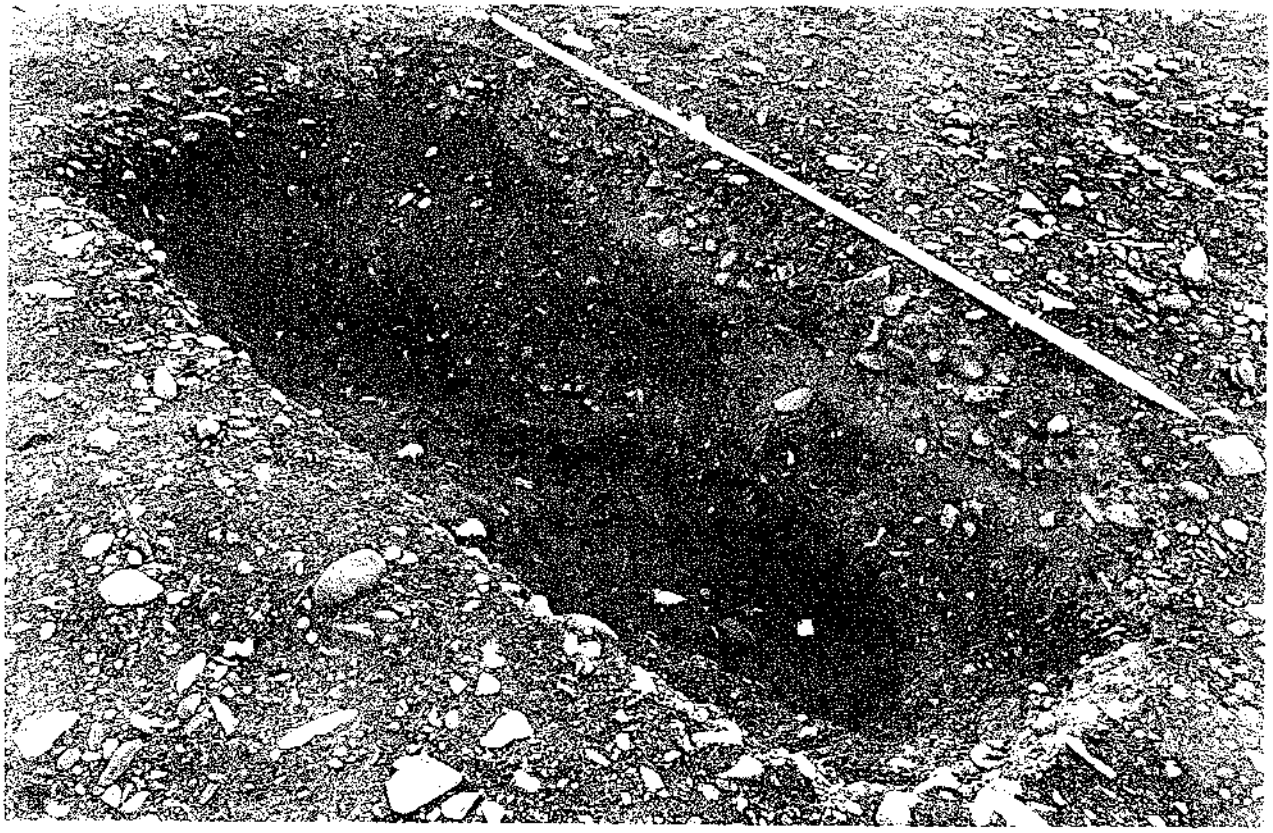


Plate 4 B10 central grave (F4) - staining (1030) with bracelet in-situ looking southwest.

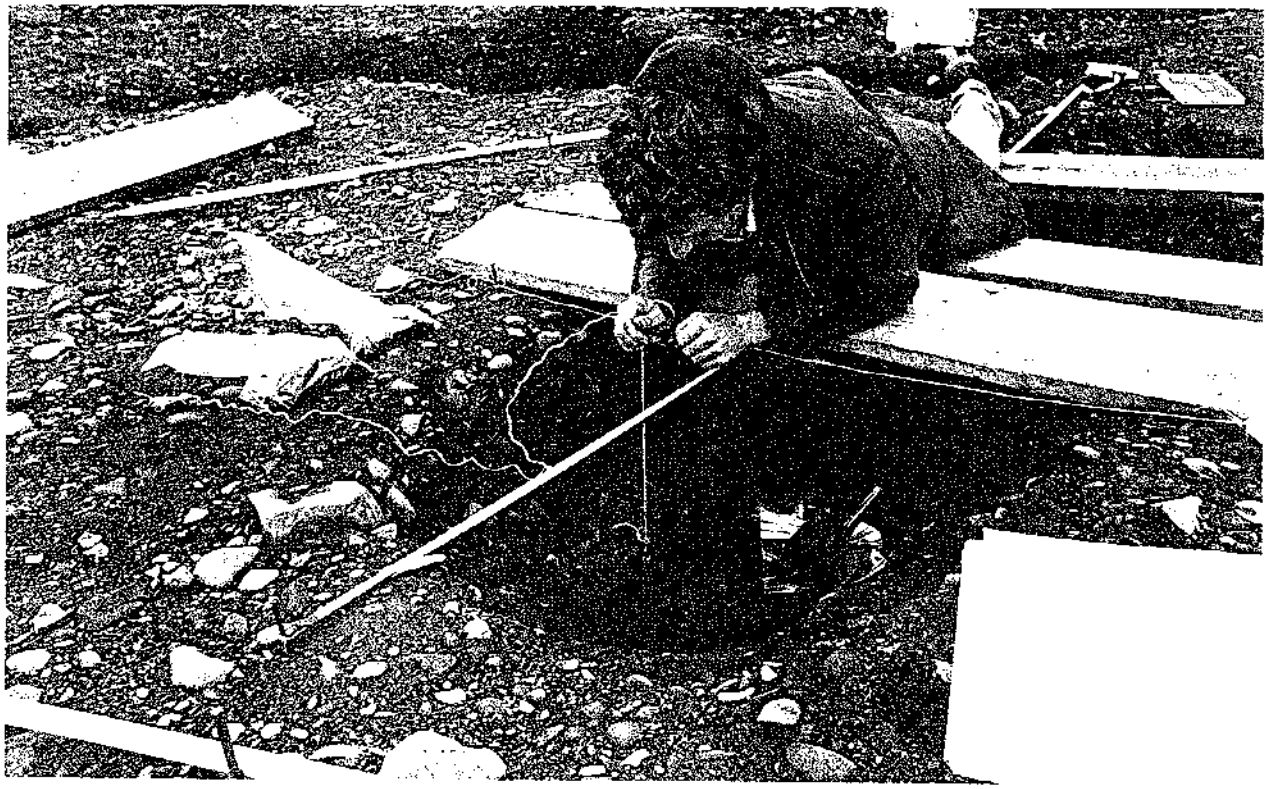


Plate 5 B10 central grave (F4) sampling in progress looking southeast

Plate 6 Marching camp ditch (F1) and ring ditch B9 (F3) - looking south

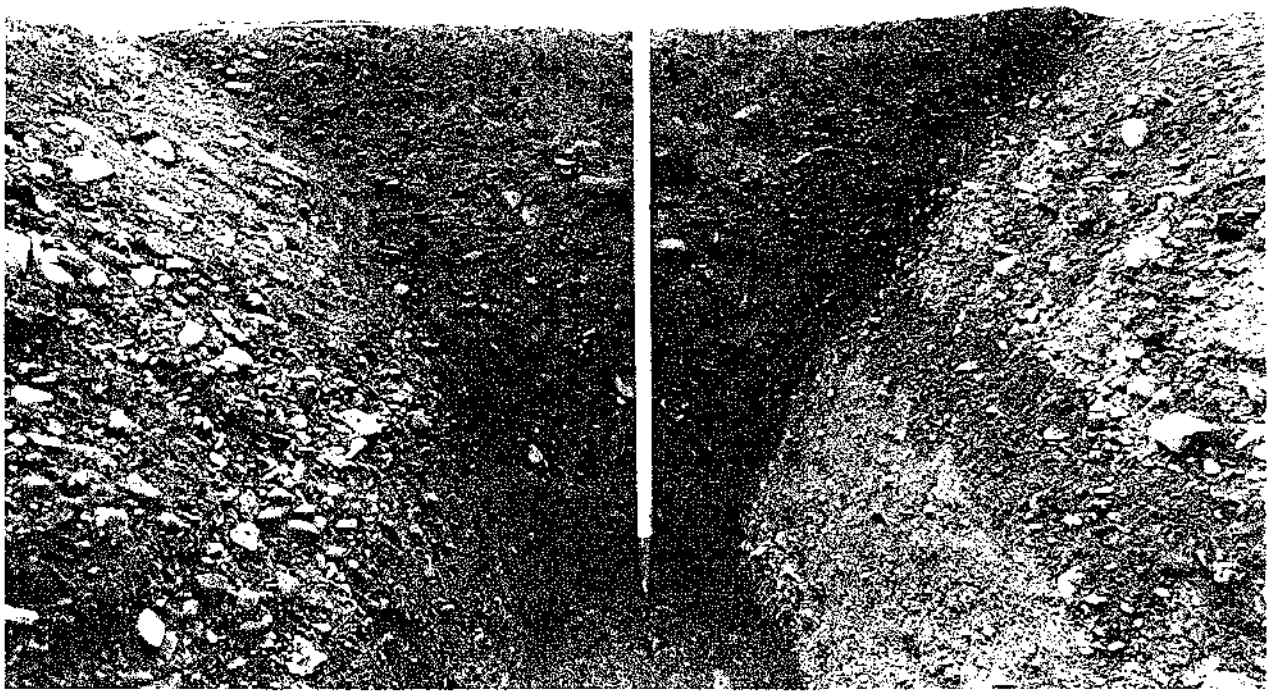


Plate 7 Ring ditch B9 (F3) - looking north

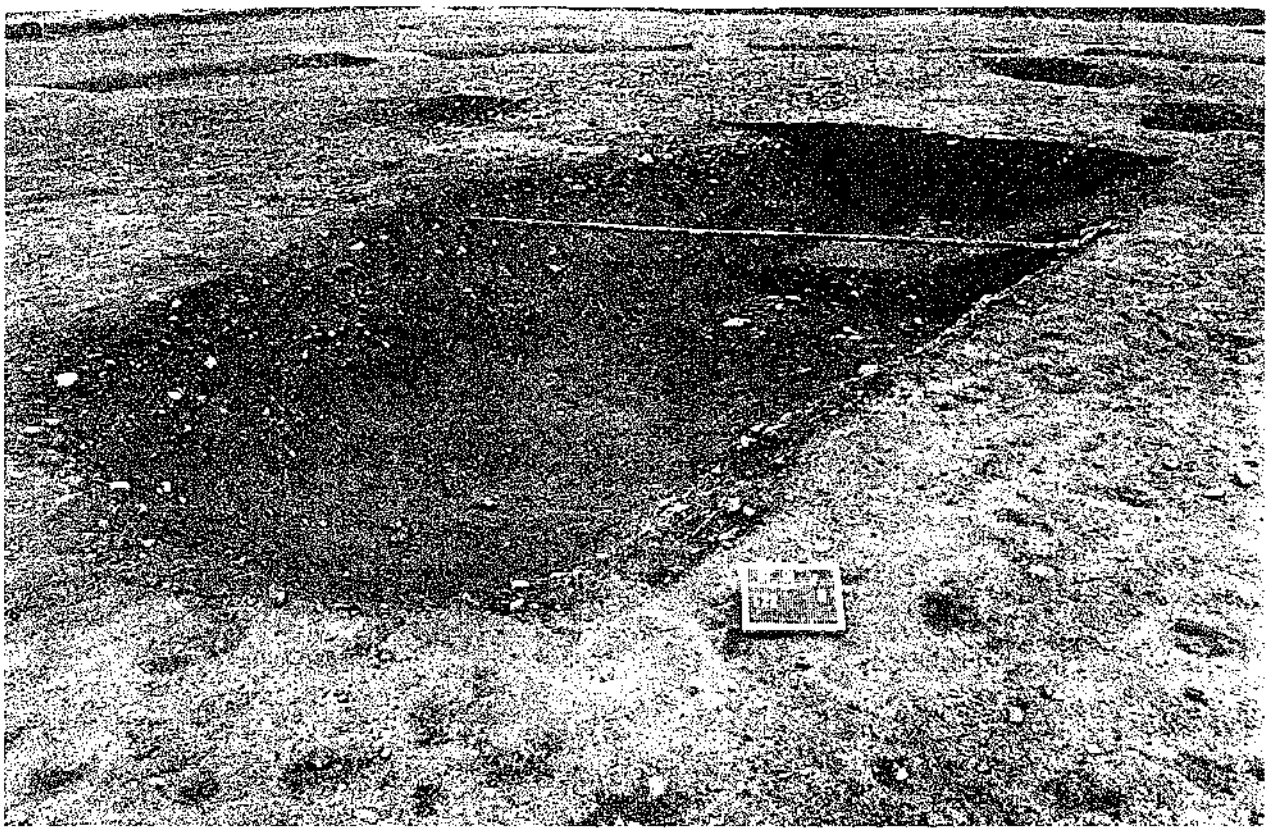


Plate 8 B9 central feature (F22) - looking northwest

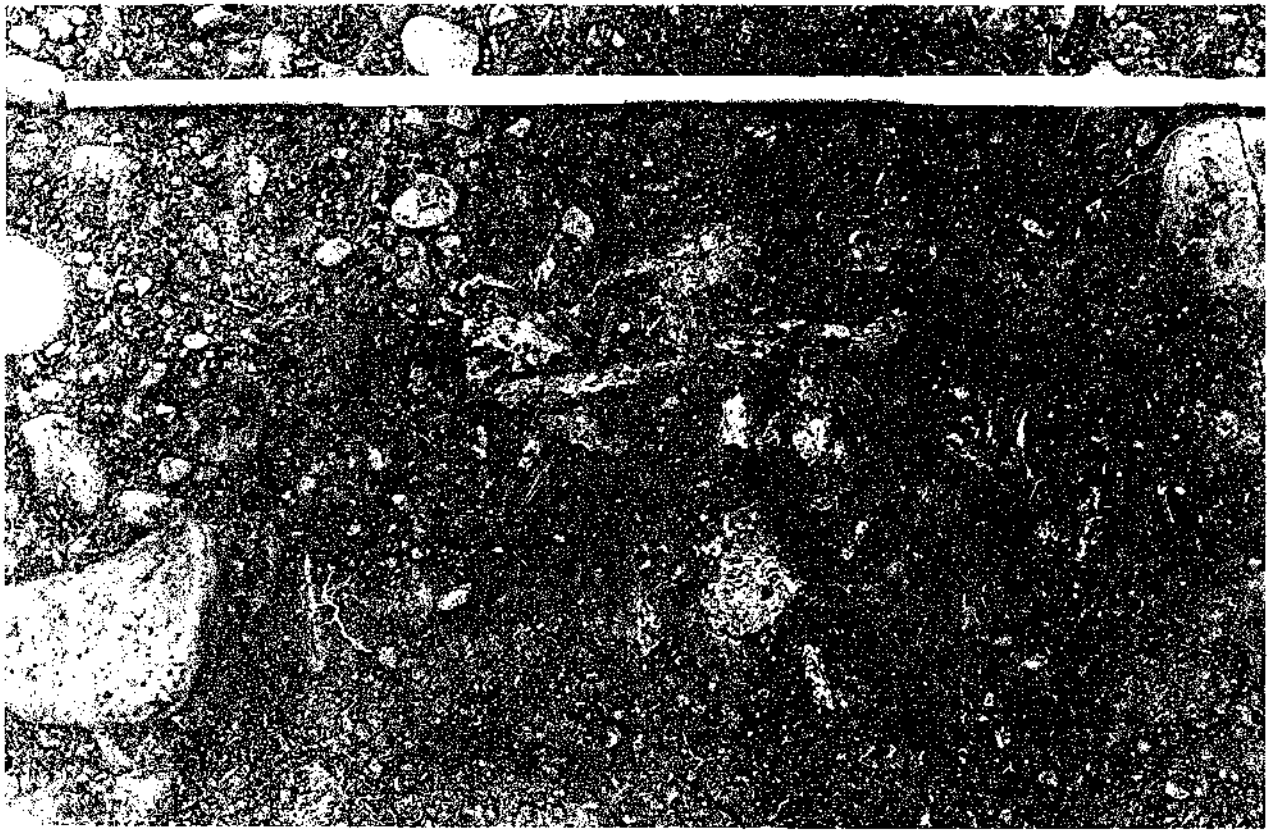


Plate 9 B9 cremation pit (F8) looking north

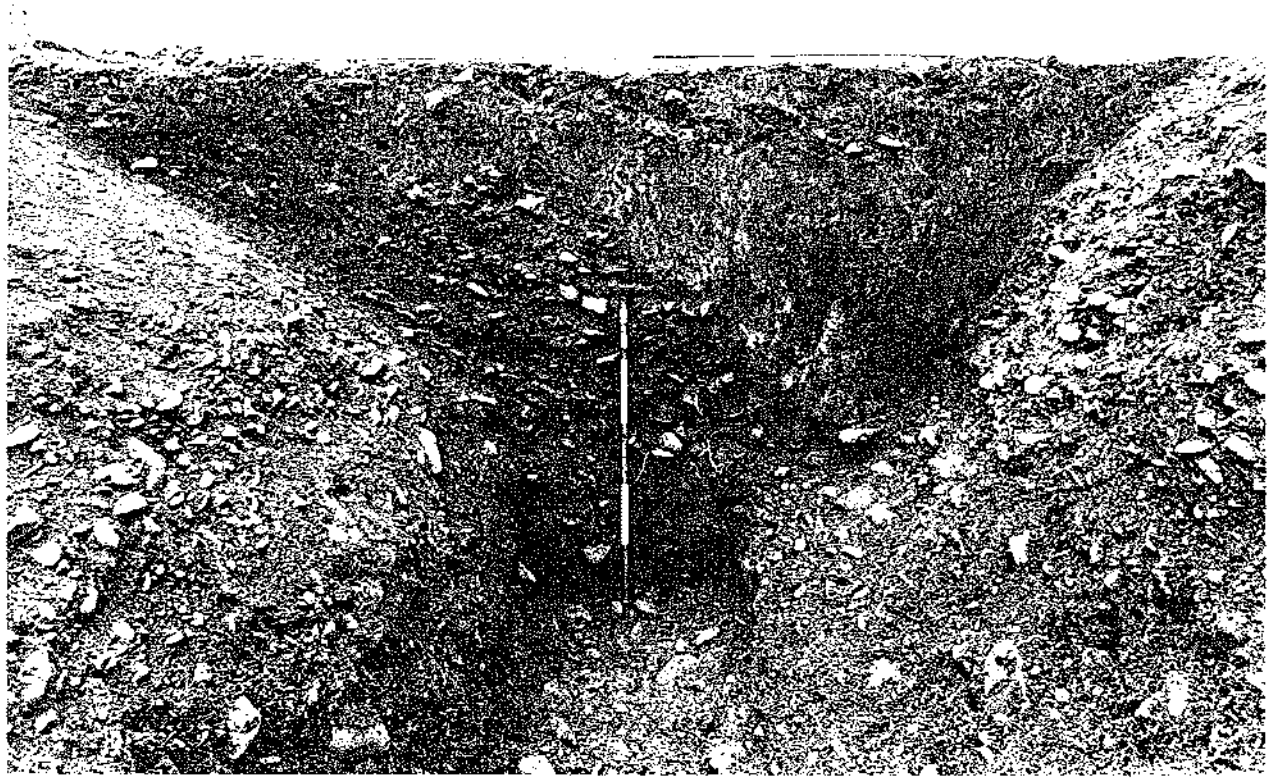


Plate 10 Section through marching camp ditch (right) and through ring ditch B9 (left) - looking southeast

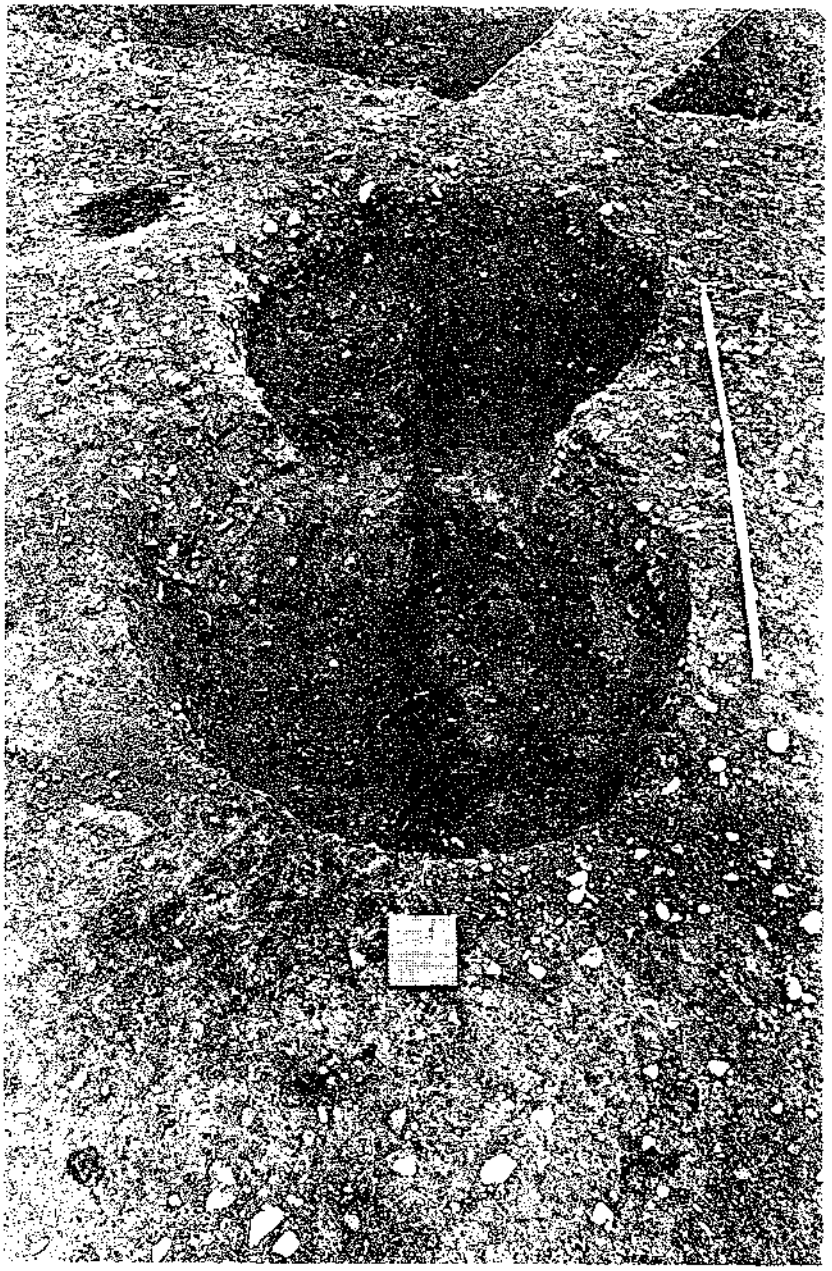


Plate 11 Roman oven (F23/24) partially excavated - looking northwest

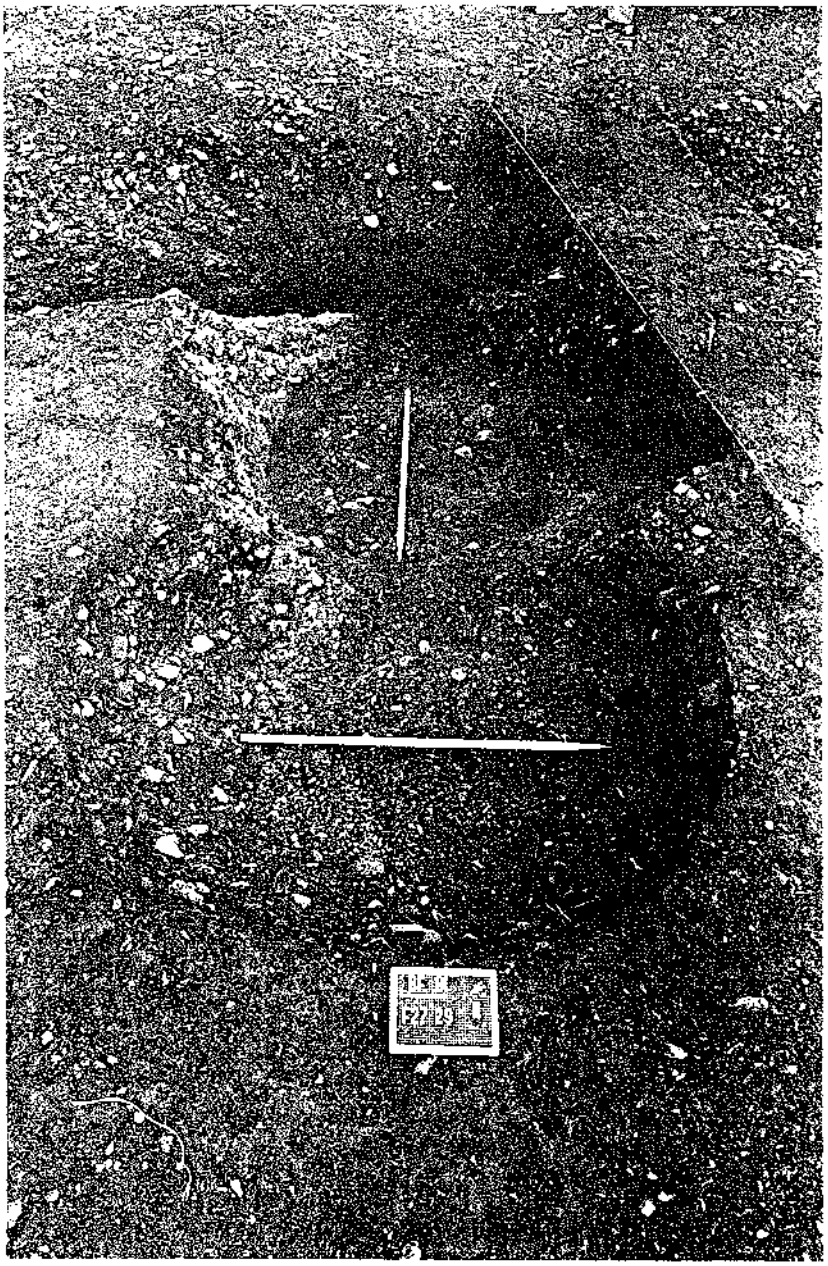


Plate 12 Roman oven (F27/29) - looking southeast

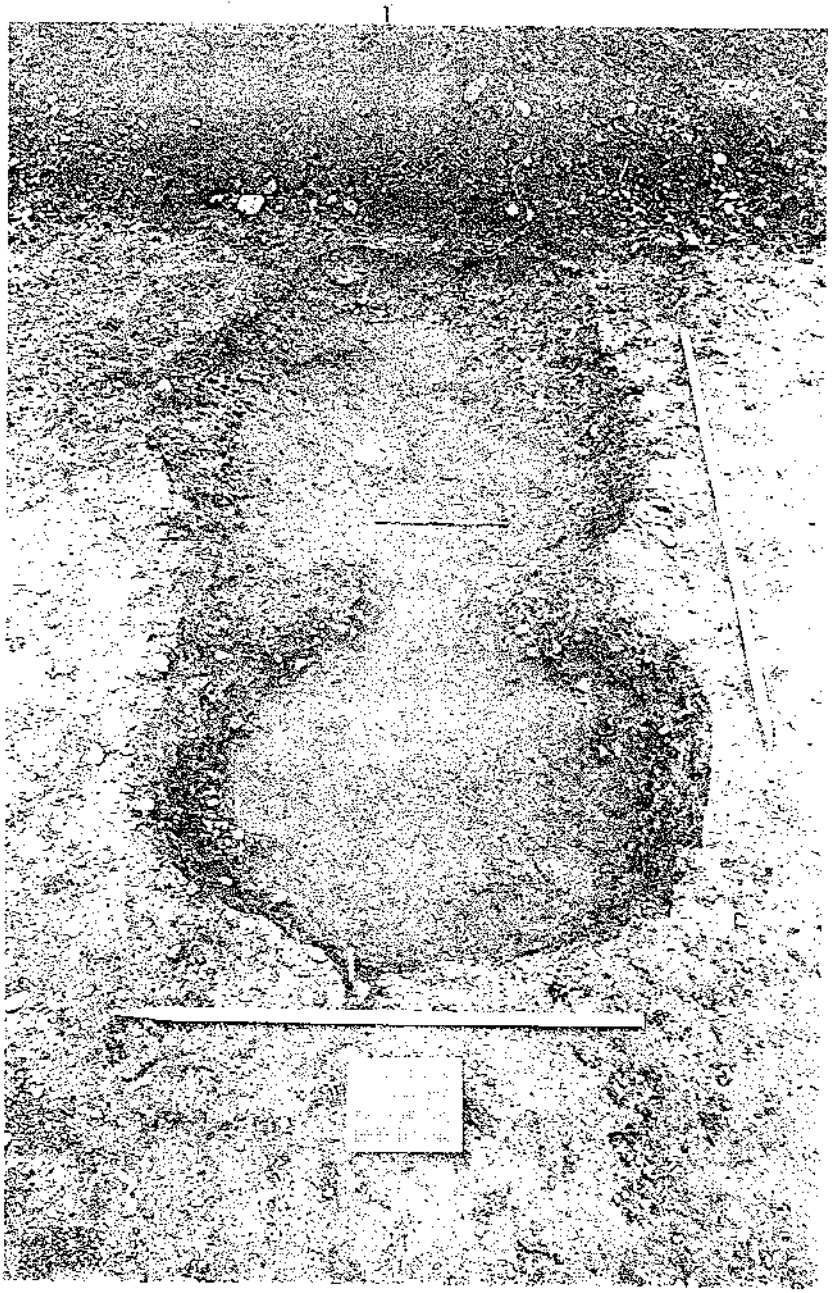


Plate 13 Roman oven (F28) looking southeast