

**Little Paxton Quarry,
Diddington,
Cambridgeshire**

**Phase 3 Evaluation 1999
Fields 5-6 (North)**

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**LITTLE PAXTON QUARRY, DIDDINGTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE
PHASE 3 EVALUATION 1999
FIELDS 5-6 (NORTH)**

by
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1.0: SUMMARY

The archaeological potential of an area proposed for gravel extraction was tested by an evaluation involving targeted trial-trenching. Preliminary fieldwalking identified only a small number of flint artifacts indicating a low-level, episodic use of the landscape in the Neolithic-Bronze Age. Trial-trenching sampled two conjoined enclosures of Late Iron Age date, previously identified by aerial photography. Re-cuts of the enclosure ditches were recorded, together with evidence of internal structures, represented by post-holes. Other, mostly undated ditches and gullies, possibly of prehistoric date, were identified in the other areas trial-trenched, indicating a generally limited level of activity outside the focus of Late Iron Age activity.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of the testing of the artifactual content of the ploughsoil and trial-trenching within the southern parts of Fields 5-6 (hereafter called 'the site'), centred on NGR TL 20356598: Figs. 1 and 2) within the Phase 3 area at Little Paxton Quarry, Diddington, Cambridgeshire. The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of Aggregate Industries UK Limited in December 1999. The methodology adopted follows a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 1999), approved by the County Archaeology Office of Cambridgeshire County Council.

The results of air photograph analysis are described in a separate report (Air Photo Services 1998). The site was fieldwalked in two stages. The western part of the site (Field 5 north) was fieldwalked in 1998 (Dingwall and Jones 1998), and the eastern half of the site was fieldwalked in November 1999 (Bevan 1999). The results of previous trial-trenching within the Phase 3 area, to the south of the site, have been described separately (Dingwall and Jones 1998; Cuttler and Jones 1999).

The purpose of the evaluation was to define the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quantity of any archaeological remains on the site, in order to permit the formulation of an appropriate archaeological mitigation strategy. The objective of the testing of the artifactual content of the ploughsoil was to recover evidence of pre-Iron Age activity. The aim of the trial-trenching was to test the character of the identified crop-marked features (Fig. 2), the areas where the larger concentrations of finds were recovered from fieldwalking, and also those zones for which no archaeological information was available.

3.0: METHODOLOGY

A total of seven trial-trenches, each measuring 50m by 2m, was excavated (Fig. 2). Trench 1 was located to test the ditches and interior of two conjoined crop-marked enclosures. Trench 2, to the north, was sited to examine a group of possible pits recorded by aerial photography. Trenches 3-6 were located to test concentrations of crop-marked features of possible archaeological interest. Trench 7 was sited to test an area for which no archaeological information was available. A 360 degree excavator with a toothless ditching bucket was used to remove the ploughsoil, working under archaeological control. The machined horizons were manually cleaned as necessary to define features, or possible features, and a representative sample of the features, or possible features, present was hand-excavated.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, supplemented by plans (scale 1:50) and sections (scale 1:50), monochrome print and colour slide photography.

Testing of the artifactual content of the ploughsoil was achieved by hand-sorting with a trowel (because the ploughsoil was too wet for sieving) approximately 1 cubic metre of ploughsoil at both ends of each trench.

4.0: THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

This evaluation forms part of the third stage of the evaluation of the Phase 3 area within the overall quarry concession. The adjoining Field 5 (south) was evaluated in early 1998 (Dingwall and Jones 1998), and Field 6 (South) was evaluated in October 1999 (Cutler and Jones 1999). The Phase 1-2 areas of the quarry were evaluated in 1992 (Leach 1992 and Jones 1992). A series of excavations undertaken after that date in advance of quarrying (Jones and Ferris 1994, Jones 1995, Jones 1998, Jones forthcoming) has investigated settlement and activity dating from the Neolithic to the Romano-British periods. Neolithic activity is represented by clusters of small pits, possibly forming pit-circles (Area B: Jones 1995, fig. 3), and by flint artifacts found more widely within the ploughsoil. The Mid-Late Iron Age is represented by farmstead enclosures (Area B and Area E-F, Jones forthcoming), the latter examples located adjoining the southeastern boundary of the Phase 3 area, and by a probable Iron Age Square Barrow (Jones 1998). Early Romano-British activity was focused towards the north of the Phase 2 area (Areas E-F). Later Romano-British activity, mainly comprising a 'ladder' enclosure, was located in the south of the Phase 1-2 area (Jones and Ferris 1994).

The on-going programme of excavation is intended to determine the changing function and economy of the area, in particular focusing upon the potential for future comparison of the structural and economic data from the four discrete Iron Age foci. Integrated analysis of settlement patterning is also intended to contribute towards a broader, multi-period, landscape-based study of changes in settlement in the Great Ouse valley.

5.0: RESULTS

5.1: Field 6 (North). Trenches 1-3

Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Trench 1 was aligned north-south. The subsoil in this trench comprised a yellow-orange sand-clay (1001), recorded at a depth of 0.25m below the modern surface. A number of features was recorded cutting the subsoil, for simplicity described here from south to north. The southernmost feature identified was a northwest-southeast aligned ditch (F100). It measured 1m in width and 0.6m in depth. It was backfilled with a dark grey sand-clay-silt (1002). This backfilled ditch was truncated by a pit (F101), partly recorded within the trench, which measured 0.35m in depth. The pit was backfilled with grey-brown sand-silt (1003). Running to the east of ditch F100 was a band of grey-brown sand-silt (1017). This might represent the western terminal of an unexcavated ditch.

Two roughly-parallel ditches (F102-3), aligned southwest-northeast may have formed a right-angle with ditch F100, although the point of intersection lay mostly outside the trial-trench. The southernmost of these two ditches (F103) measured 1.4m in width and 0.6m in depth. It was backfilled with brown-black silt and sand-silt (1012 and 1005). The northernmost ditch of the pair (F102) measured 0.9m in width and 0.8m in depth. It was backfilled with a brown-black sand-silt (1004), sealed by a brown sand-silt (1011). To the north of ditch F102 was a group of circular, unexcavated possible post-holes (1013-1016), measuring between 0.2m to 0.6m in diameter. Some of these possible features appeared to contain traces of stone packing.

Further to the north were three intersecting features (F104-6). The largest of these features was east-west aligned ditch F106, which measured 4.5m in width. Its uppermost, excavated, fills comprised yellow-brown sand-silt (1008-9), becoming darker with depth. This feature was not fully excavated. A curvilinear gully (F105) was recorded to the south of the former feature. Feature F105 was vertically-sided, with a flat base. It was backfilled with brown sand-silt (1007). This feature truncated a southwest-northeast-aligned gully (F104), backfilled with brown sand-silt (1006).

The northernmost feature identified was an east-west aligned ditch (F107) just to the north of the centre of the trench. This ditch was flat-based, and measured a maximum of 2.2m in width and 0.4m in depth. It was backfilled with grey-brown silt-sand-clay (1010). A number of possible archaeological features (not illustrated), tested by hand-excavation in the north of the trench, was found to be plough-marks.

The subsoil and the backfilled features were sealed by the ploughsoil (1000).

Features F102 (1004), F103 (1005), F105 (1007) and F106 (1002 and 1009) contained Late Iron Age pottery. Feature F104 (1006) contained pottery which was undatable.

Trench 2 (Not illustrated)

Trench 2 was aligned east-west. The subsoil was a yellow-orange sand-clay (2002), recorded at a depth of between 0.3m (western end of trench) and 0.4m (eastern end of

trench). The subsoil was overlain by 0.15 m of a light brownish-yellow alluvial clay (2003). This deposit was cut by a field drain (F200). The field drain and layer 2003 were sealed by the ploughsoil (2000).

No finds were recovered from this trench, and no archaeological features were identified.

Trench 3 (Not illustrated)

Trench 3 was orientated north-south. The subsoil, a yellowish clay-sand (3002), was located at a depth of 0.3m below the modern surface. Towards the southern end of the trench the subsoil was more silty in composition. The only features identified in this trench comprised a field drain (F300), and several parallel plough-furrows. The subsoil, the field drain and plough furrows were sealed by the ploughsoil (3000). No archaeological features were identified in this trench.

The only find recovered was a sherd of Roman pottery from field drain F300. No archaeological features were identified.

5.2: Field 5 (North). Trenches 4-7

Trench 4 (Fig. 4)

Trench 4 was aligned east-west. The yellow silt-sand-gravel subsoil (4002) was exposed at a depth of 0.30m below the topsoil (4000). Towards the western end of the trench was a northwest-southeast-aligned curvilinear ditch (F401), cutting the subsoil. This ditch measured 1.70m in width and 0.15m in depth. It was backfilled with yellow-brown sand-silt (4001). Towards the western end of the trench was a north-south aligned ditch (F400). This feature had irregularly-shaped sides, and a fairly flat base. It measured 0.45m in width and 0.28m in depth, and was backfilled with light brown clay silt (4003). Possible feature F402, notably irregular in plan, was tested by hand-excavation, and found to be a variation in the composition of the subsoil. The subsoil (4002) and the backfilled features were sealed by the ploughsoil (4000).

No finds were recovered from this trench.

Trench 5

Trench 5 was aligned north-south. The subsoil horizon in this trench comprised a yellow-orange sand-clay (5001), recorded at a depth of 0.28m below the modern surface. An east-west-aligned ditch (F500) was located at the northern end of the trench. The feature measured 0.9m in width, and 0.2m in depth. It was backfilled with yellow-brown silt-sand (5002). A northwest-southeast-aligned gully (F501) was also located towards the northern end of the trench. This feature measured 0.5m in width and 0.25m in depth. It was backfilled with mid grey-brown silt-sand and gravel (5003). The only other feature identified was a plough-furrow (not numbered) at the southern end of the trench. The subsoil and the infilled features were sealed by the ploughsoil (5000).

No finds were recovered from this trench.

Trench 6 (Fig. 4)

Trench 6 was orientated east-west. The subsoil, comprising a yellow-orange clay-sand (6004), was recorded at a depth of 0.3m below the modern surface. The subsoil was cut by three features (F600-F602). Two parallel linear features (F601-2) at the eastern end of the trench may be interpreted as field drains. A third, north-south-aligned feature (F600), located at the western edge of the trench (F600), measured 2.9m in width and 0.2m in depth. It was backfilled with yellow-grey silt-sand (6003). This feature may be interpreted as an infilled field boundary. The subsoil and the backfilled features were sealed by the ploughsoil (6000).

No finds were recovered from this trench.

Trench 7 (Fig. 4)

Trench 7 was aligned north-south. The subsoil, a light yellow clay sand (7001), was uncovered at a depth of 0.30m below the modern surface. The subsoil (7001) was cut by two circular features (F701 and F702), both located towards the centre of the trench, and by a gully (F700) located in the south of the trench. Feature F701 was an irregularly-shaped pit, 1.10m in diameter and 0.30m in depth, with a rounded base. It was backfilled with a yellow-grey sand silt (7003). Feature F702 was a steep-sided, oval pit, measuring 1.15m in diameter and 0.35m in depth. It was backfilled with a light yellow-grey sand silt (7004) and dark brown sandy silt (7005). A curvilinear gully (F700) in the south of the trench was aligned east-west and measured 0.6m in width and 0.1m in depth. It was backfilled with a brown-grey silt-sand-gravel (7002). The subsoil (7001) and the backfilled features were sealed by the ploughsoil (7000).

Feature F701 (7003) contained pottery of possible Late Iron Age date.

5.3: Testing the artifactual content of the ploughsoil

Conditions for testing the artifactual content of the ploughsoil were very poor during the evaluation. Probably for this reason no finds of prehistoric or Roman date were recovered from the ploughsoil. The low density of finds from fieldwalking and trial-trenching should be noted. Equally, in Trench 1, the locations tested lay outside the crop-marked enclosure, outside the areas where finds densities could be expected.

5.4: Charred plant remains

20 litre samples were collected from features F100 (1002), F102 (1004), F103 (1005), F600 (6003), F601 (6001), F602 (6002) and F702 (7004). The samples were processed using water flotation, and the flots (the material which floats on the water's surface) were sieved. Insufficient material was recovered from flotation to justify a scan of the flots.

6.0: DISCUSSION

6.1: Trench 1 (Figs. 2-3)

Fieldwalking recorded small scatters of flint finds from the site, suggesting only occasional activity in the Neolithic-Bronze Age, although the presence of a number of scrapers suggested settlement in the vicinity. No features of this date were identified by trial-trenching.

The largest groups of features identified was in Trench 1, located to test the two conjoined enclosures recorded by aerial photography. Unlike the concentration of Mid-Late Iron Age enclosures excavated to the south (Area E/F, Jones forthcoming), and to the southwest (Area B, Jones 1995), the crop-marked enclosures in Field 6 (North) appeared not be associated with other feature-groups, with the possible exception of the double-ditched ?droveway to the east, and a cluster of features identified by aerial photography along the extreme eastern edge of the field. One possible similarity, however, may be noted between the conjoined enclosures within the site, and the enclosures previously excavated in Field 2. The crop-marked ditch dividing the interior of the Field 6 (North) enclosure could define an annexe, possibly for livestock, and similar features were found in enclosures E1 and E4 in Field 2.

The features identified in Trench 1 broadly correlated with the crop-marked features. Ditch F107 in the north of the trench probably formed the northern ditch of the northernmost of the conjoined enclosures recorded by aerial photography. Ditch F100 may represent the 'central' division of the crop-marked enclosures, although the alignment of the crop-marked and excavated ditches differed. In addition to the crop-marked features, further features, including other ditches, pits and possible post-holes were also identified in Trench 1. Ditches F102-3 and features F104-6 were not identified by aerial photography, nor, of course, was possible post-hole group 1013-6. The identification of inter-cutting, or intercepting, ditches cut on different alignments indicates that more than one phase of activity is represented here. However, the small collection of pottery from the evaluation cannot distinguish these different phases of activity chronologically.

An important discovery in Trench 1 was the identification of possible structures, represented by post-holes, and by gullies F104-5. The vertically-sided and flat-based profiles of the latter two features, and in particular the curvilinear alignment of feature F105 suggest that these features could have defined hut circle walls. The provisional identification of this group of structural features is of considerable significance, since few traces of Iron Age buildings have been identified at Little Paxton, because of the intensity of modern ploughing.

6.2: Trenches 2-7 (Figs. 2 and 4)

Archaeological features and deposits within the remaining trenches examined (2-7) were more sparse, and dating evidence was mostly absent. Trenches 2-3 and 6 were positioned to intercept crop-marked features which could not be identified, and it is possible that the slight features identified by aerial photography were variations in the composition of the ploughsoil.

Correlation with the crop-mark evidence was recorded in Trenches 4-5. The north-south aligned crop-marked feature intercepted by Trench 4 may be represented by feature F400, although this is admittedly possibly too small to be identified by aerial photography. The east-west-aligned crop-marked feature sampled by Trench 5 may be represented by feature F500, and the crop-marked feature cutting the trench diagonally may also have been identified by trial-trenching (F501). However, Trench 7 identified two pits (F701-2) and a gully (F700), in an area where no crop-marked features were recorded.

No trace of the Iron Age or Romano-British ditched field systems recorded in Field 5 (South) could be recorded within the adjoining area of the site, the evaluation may have contributed to an understanding of the extent of these field systems.

The absence of a B-horizon soil within the site, recorded extensively immediately to the south of the site, was another notable feature of the evaluation. The alluvial deposits recorded extensively to the south of the site were not recorded. Measuring only 0.3m in depth, the ploughsoil was notably shallow within the site (within the Phase 1-2 areas, depths of up to 0.45m were recorded), and little trace of plough disturbance was recorded within the subsoil.

7.0: IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS

7.1: Implications

With the exception of the cropmarked features identified in Trench 1, the evaluation (fieldwalking and trial-trenching) has demonstrated a relatively low level of activity within the site. The flint scatters recorded by fieldwalking may derive from features obliterated by plough truncation, as recorded elsewhere at Little Paxton, although some features of early prehistoric date may be identified in a subsequent phase of fieldwork.

Although only a relatively low density of archaeological features was identified away from Trench 1, it is nevertheless important that these areas are investigated and recorded in advance of gravel extraction. The pits located in Trench 7 represent a very small focus of prehistoric activity which is not recorded from the air photograph evidence. The crop-marked features sited to the east of Trench 1 (not tested by trial-trenching) are probably the sole survivors of a settlement area, otherwise mostly quarried away.

In the context of a multi-period, landscape-based project such as Little Paxton, investigation of intra-settlement areas has some merit. Investigations in Field 5 to the south of the site identified important feature groups of early prehistoric date, away from the main settlement complexes identified by the cropmarked and evaluation evidence, together with field boundaries of Iron Age and Romano-British date.

The further investigation and reporting of the Iron Age settlement focus identified in Trench 1 is clearly complementary to the study of the other Iron Age complexes within the remainder of the quarry, providing an opportunity to compare the evidence from this small Late Iron Age settlement focus with the larger, probably

contemporary, settlements found to the south and the southeast. Detailed investigation of the Trench 1 crop-marked complex will also contribute to a wider understanding of the exploitation of the later prehistoric landscape, and, on a larger scale, to the comparison of the evidence from Little Paxton with other river valley environments on a regional basis.

7.2: Proposals

None of the remains identified merits preservation *in situ*. A strategy for their preservation by record (excavation followed by post-excavation analysis and publication) is proposed below. For the purpose of formulating proposals, the site is divided into two zones:

ZONE A: Around Trench 1/crop-mark complex in the southeast of site (area measuring approximately 80m by 100m). This zone should be stripped of topsoil under archaeological control preparatory to an area excavation, which will involve hand-sampling of the identified features, following a strategy to be agreed with the County Archaeology Office.

The excavation would be followed by post-excavation assessment of the results, followed by full analysis and reporting of the evidence (both stages to be undertaken concurrently with the results of other work in the Phase 3 area).

ZONE B: The remainder of the site (part will be topsoiled in 2000, and the extreme western edge of Field 5 (North) will be topsoiled in 2001). Although evaluation has identified a generally low density of archaeological features, and artifact scatters, the archaeological potential of this area should not be written off.

A watching brief during the topsoiling operation is proposed for this zone, together with a targeted recording brief, to identify, plan, record and sample any archaeological features present.

8.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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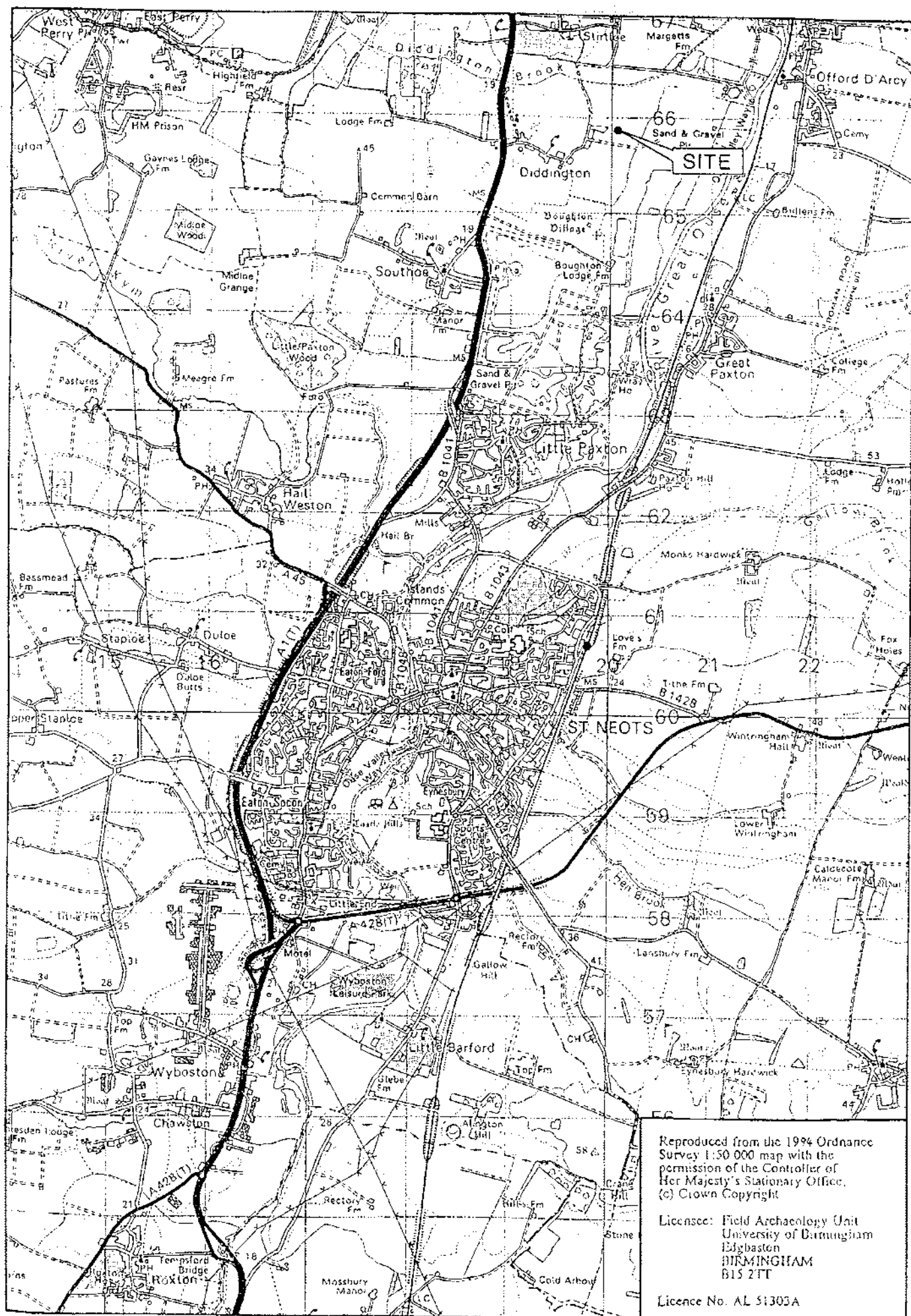


FIG.1

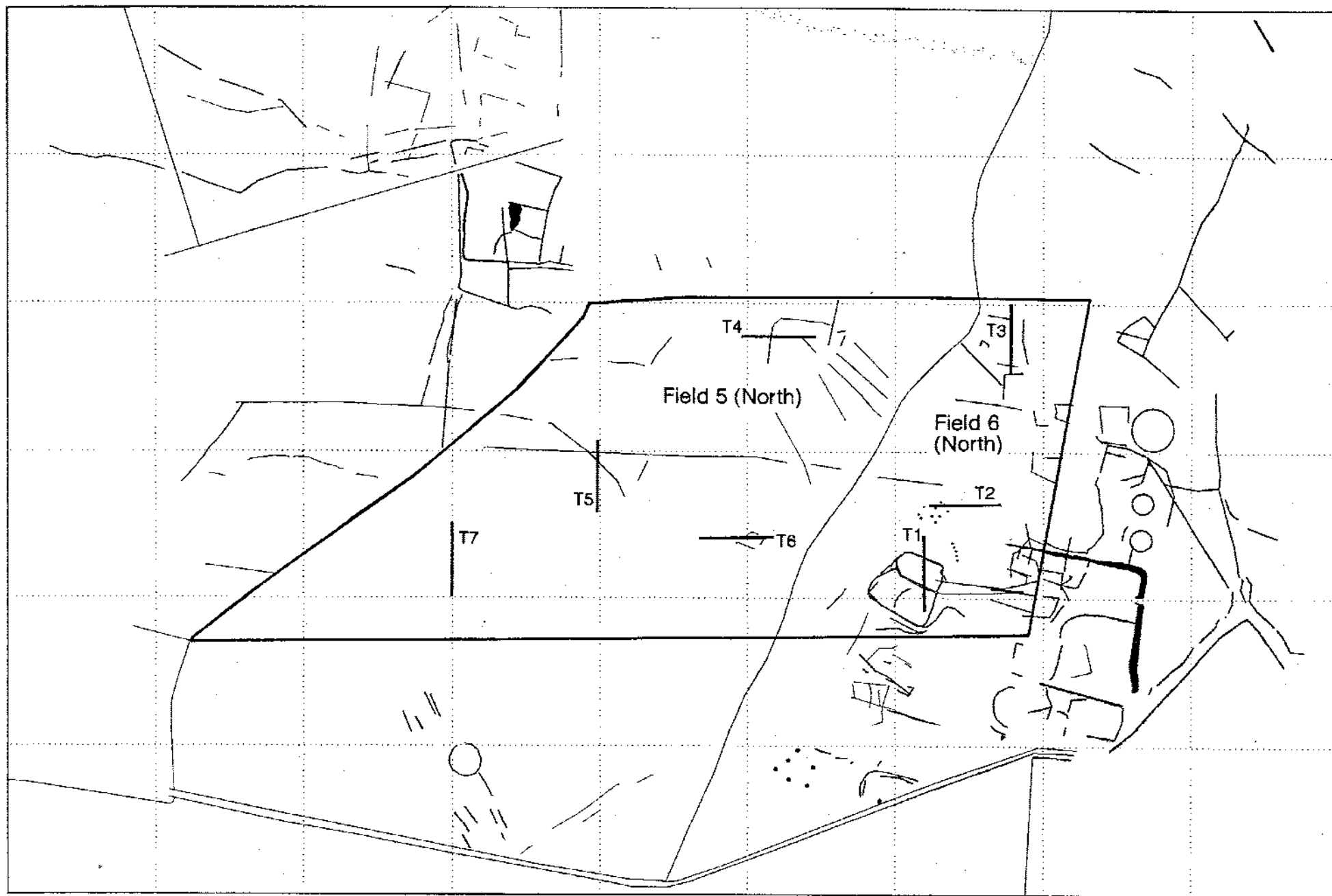


FIG. 2

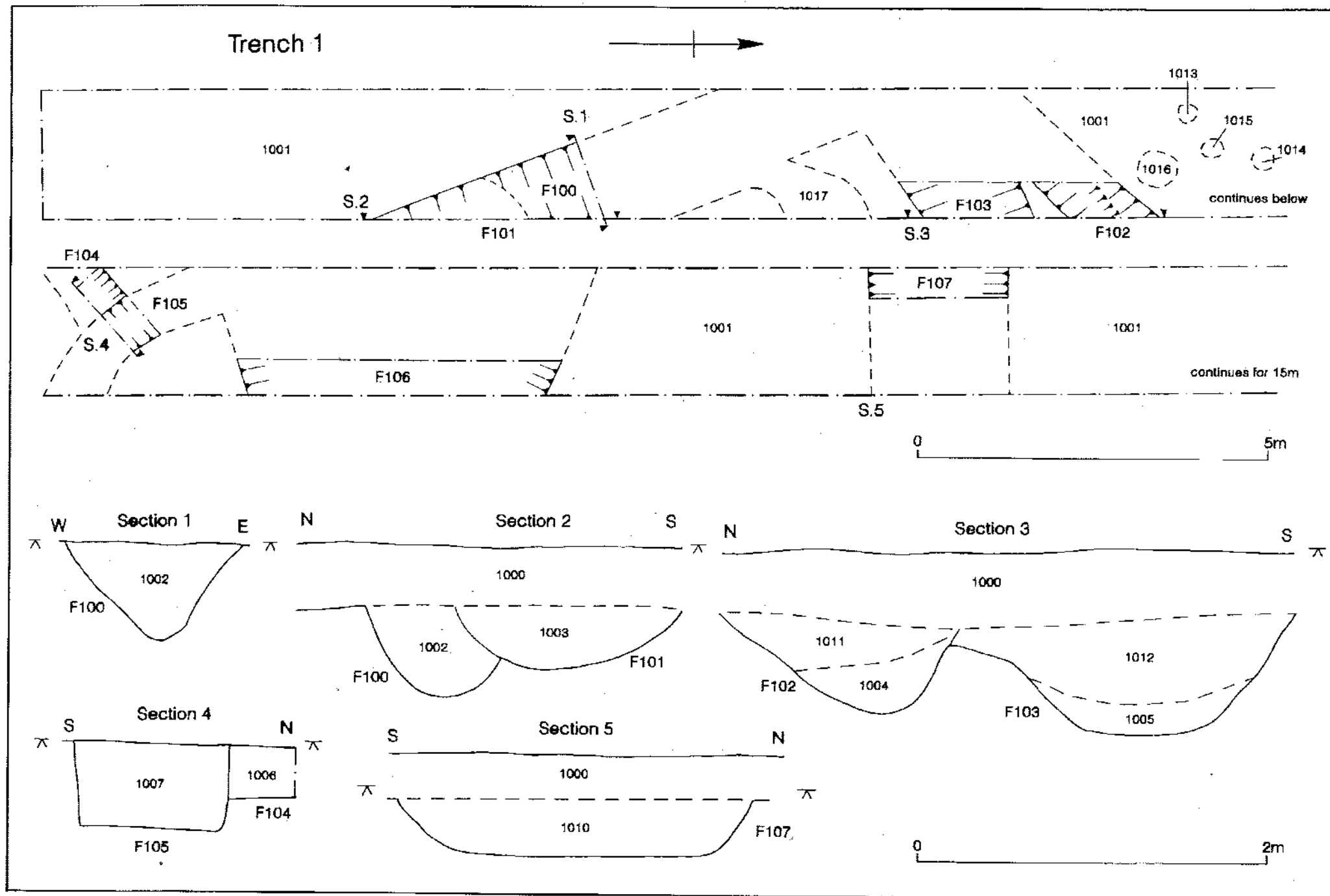


FIG.3

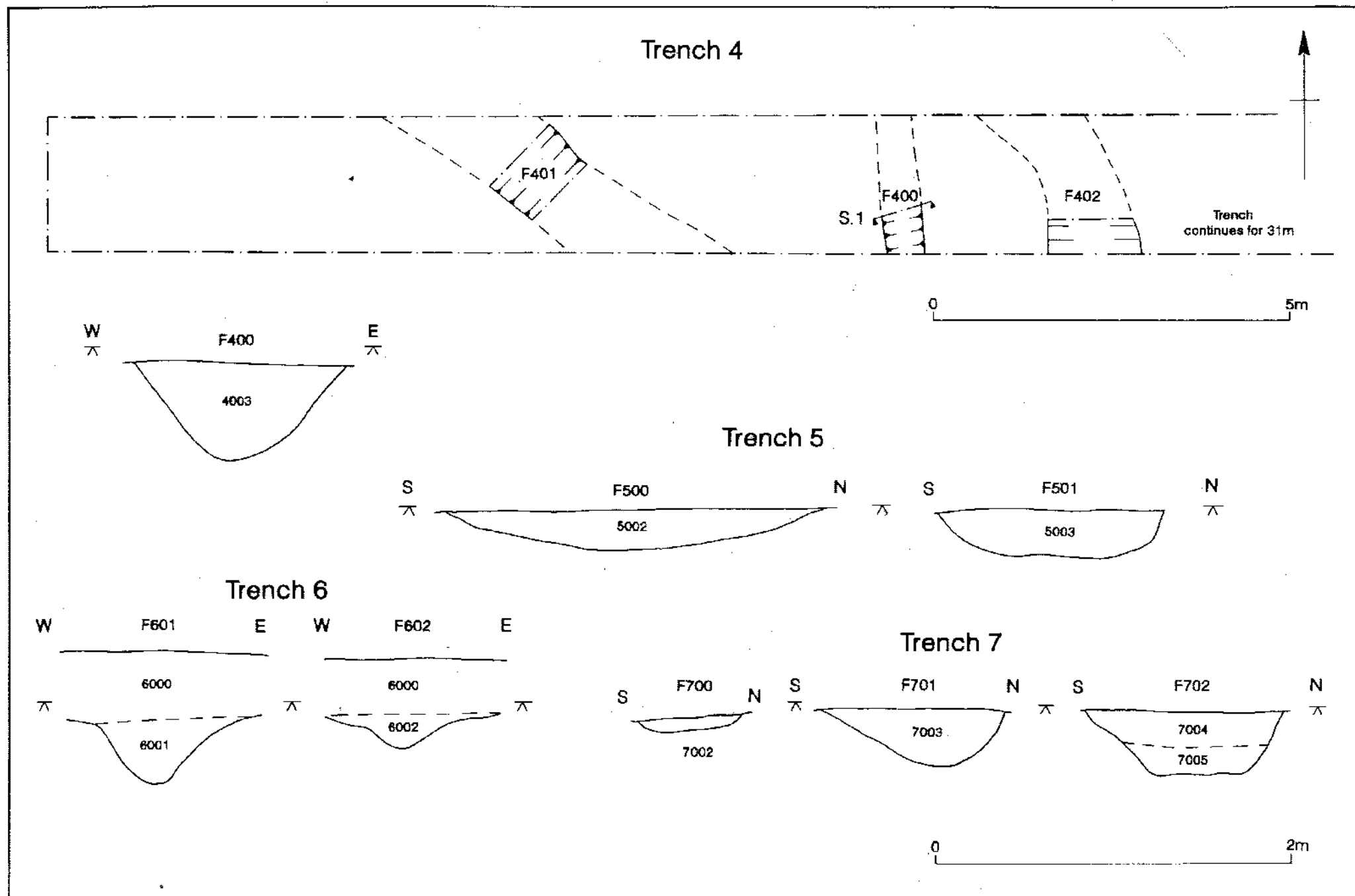


FIG.4