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**Frog Lane, Shepton Mallet:
An Archaeological Evaluation 1995**

by

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1.0 Summary

An assessment of the archaeological potential of land at Frog Lane, Shepton Mallet, Somerset was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in May 1995, to comply with a requirement for a local authority planning consent. This was achieved primarily by trial trenching, data from which was interpreted in the context of available documentary sources for the locality, including map evidence and previous archaeological discoveries.

Small quantities of residual Roman and medieval material (primarily ceramics) were recovered, and there was some evidence for small-scale stone extraction - most of which probably occurred in post-Roman periods.

2.0 Introduction

This report documents the results of a site evaluation of c 0.4ha. of a pasture paddock flanking the west side of Frog Lane, Charlton, centred on ST 633428. The work was undertaken by B.U.F.A.U. on behalf of D.L. & S.M. Dennett, following a recommendation from the Environment Department of Somerset County Council that in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (1990), an archaeological assessment be a requirement of planning consent for development on this site. No detailed brief was provided but the investigation was undertaken in accordance with guidelines provided by Somerset County Council: *General Specification for Archaeological Work in Somerset* (March 1995).

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine location, extent, date, character, significance and quality of any archaeological remains which may survive or be affected by development, and provide the basis for any recommendations which might be appropriate relating to their future.

3.0 The Site

Frog Lane lies within the hamlet of Charlton, now on the outskirts of Shepton Mallet, Somerset, a little over 1km. to the east of the town centre. The area is founded upon massive and almost horizontally bedded formations of Jurassic Lower Lias limestone, which lie against the southern flanks of the older palaeozoic rocks of the Mendip Hills to the north. Charlton, at around 150m above sea level, lies close to the source of the River Sheppey at Douling, and the course of a small tributary stream from the south is closely followed by Frog Lane to its junction with the main road to Frome (A361), at the stream's confluence with the river (Fig.1).

Charlton is first mentioned in the Domesday Book (*Cerletone*) as a separate manor from Shepton; both formerly belonging to Glastonbury Abbey. The hamlet was probably centred on the crossing of the Fosse Way and Frome Road - a medieval earthwork was recorded and trial trenched at Brewery Lane in 1987 (Ellis 1987), but was subsequently destroyed without further investigation by housing development. Frog Lane, giving access to Bullimore Farm and Whitstone Hill to the south, may also

have originated in the medieval period. Immediately to the west lie the extensive remains of a Romano-British roadside settlement flanking Fosse Lane, formerly the Fosse Way, the major Roman road from Bath to Ilchester and ultimately Exeter. This settlement has been the subject of a series of recent archaeological investigations (Fig. 1 (3), Leach 1991, etc.), including evaluations undertaken by BUFAU. in the Mendip Business Park immediately adjacent and to the west of Frog Lane (Fig.1,(2)). The most recent (Leach 1992 & 1994) suggest that remains of that settlement extend sparsely as far as the eastern boundary to the Business Park. This evidence and the potential for Frog Lane's medieval origins, justify the requirement for an archaeological evaluation.

4.0 Methodology

Documentary Sources

No specific entry for Frog Lane is recorded in the Somerset County Sites and Monuments Record. The earliest available map sources comprise the Tithe apportionment map of 1840 and the First Edition Ordnance Survey sheet 1888, scale 1:2500 (Somerset County Record Office). Both sources indicate that in the 19th century this area was divided into small fields and paddocks enclosed by drystone walls belonging to Sunnyside Farm, and contained one or two small outbuildings, one of which has now been incorporated into 'Meadow View'. The stream now forming the eastern boundary to the site beside the lane, originally ran further west within the southern enclosures before passing beneath the road.

Field Assessment

At the time of the evaluation the area comprised a single elongated enclosure of permanent pasture aligned approximately north-south beside Frog Lane and crossed by a modern drive giving access to 'Meadow View'. Earlier east-west field boundaries had been removed and the stream course straightened to run alongside the lane. No surface features of historic significance survived and it was not possible to undertake field collection of any artifacts which may have been present in the topsoil. Geophysical survey was not considered to be an appropriate technique for investigation here, given the size of the study area and the scale of known recent disturbances.

Trial trenching was employed as the most effective method to test the archaeological potential of the site, focussing upon areas where specific development was proposed. A total of six trenches were cut at intervals along the whole area (a c 4% sample), the majority across the long axis of the site (Fig.2). A mechanical excavator (JCB) was used to remove topsoil and recent overburden and expose horizons where archaeological remains might be anticipated to survive above the underlying natural bedrock formation. These trenches (I-VI) were cut 2m wide and between 10 and 14m long with a ditching bucket; further excavation and recording being continued by hand. Pro-forma written records, photographs and scale drawings were employed to record all features and deposits encountered, and portable finds were collected according to identified single stratigraphic contexts. That archive represents the evidence upon which this report was compiled.

5.0 Trial Trenching Results

Trench I: removal of c 0.25m. of turf and topsoil (1000) within a 12x2m area south of the access to 'Meadow View' revealed a surface of weathered and recently disturbed bedrock inclined gently to the east. No finds or deposits of archaeological significance were present.

Trench II: up to 0.40m. of modern topsoil and overburden (2000 & 2001) were removed from an area 13 x 2m, parallel and adjacent to a recently levelled field boundary (Fig.3). Beneath these levels were deposits which were excavated and recorded by hand, and sealed the bedrock. To the east a shallow cut partly into bedrock contained waterlogged stony clay and gravel (2005) which was not removed. Upslope to the west a more compact stony clay with bands of charcoal (2003) contained a few sherds of Roman and medieval pottery. This merged into a disturbed area of larger stone blocks and roughly pitched stone up to 0.30m thick (2002 & 2004), associated with a slightly larger group of medieval pot sherds, some animal bone and a few pieces of Roman pottery. This deposit was semi-waterlogged towards the bottom above an almost horizontal or slightly concave bedrock surface.

Trench III: between 0.30 and 0.40m of topsoil and disturbed subsoil layers (3000-3002) were removed by machine from an area 14 x 2m, almost parallel and to the south of Trench II. Remnants of the lower horizon (3002) were removed by hand to reveal a weathered bedrock surface across the centre of the trench, and further deposits at its east and west ends. The disturbed remains of a small drain (F300) comprising a few vertical stone lining slabs, and a mixture of Roman, medieval and post-medieval material (primarily pottery) were recovered from this deposit. To the east a thin layer of clay soil with some stone, animal bone and scatters of Roman pottery (3003) thickened to a maximum of c.0.20m above a gently sloping bedrock surface before being cut away by modern disturbance. To the west a deposit of stony clay with many small-medium fragments of stone but no other finds (3004), lay within a shallow N-S. cut (F301) into bedrock which continued beyond the bounds of the trench.

Trench IV: a machine cut 10 x 2m was made into the bank slope bounding the site to the west, at a point where an access road from the Persimmon Homes development to the north west is projected (Fig.1 (1)). Up to 0.50m. of modern topsoil and dumped overburden (4000, 4001 & 4006) were removed at the western end of the trench. This revealed the truncated remains of a shallow ditch (F400) aligned approximately NW-SE and cut partly into bedrock and through a shallow layer of stony clay (4005) upon the horizontal bedrock. Within the ditch fills (4002 & 4004) were a few sherds of Roman pottery and fragments of animal bone. Further east and down slope the stony clay deposit (4005) was cut away by more recent disturbance, which also exposed the bedrock as a series of shallow steps. Patches of stony clay soil against the lower step (4003) contained a few sherds of Roman and medieval pottery.

Trench V: a machine cut 14 x 2m to the north of Trench IV, removed up to 0.50m of topsoil, subsoil and loose stone rubble (5000 - 5002) from its western end. The full depth of the lower rubble (5002) was not revealed, but it terminated east against an upstanding step of horizontal bedrock. At this point the rubble was cut into by a large shallow depression (F500) containing further rubble and clay (5003), among which was a substantial deposit of early 19th-century wine bottles, fine earthenwares and some animal bone. Beyond the platform of bedrock the rock was stepped down towards the east and masked by shallower deposits of stony clay soil and rubble (5004) containing some medieval pottery.

Trench VI: a machine cut made at the northern end of the site was of two arms; the east-west arm 12 x 2m with an extension of 6m to the south. Removal of topsoil and subsoil (6000 & 6001) revealed a gently sloping and slightly stepped surface of weathered bedrock to the west, from which a sparse scatter of Roman, medieval and post-medieval finds were recovered in cleaning. At the junction with the southern arm a much larger step marked the limit of a deep and very mixed deposit of loose stone rubble with stony clay (6002). This was machined to a depth of over 1m at one point but without encountering bedrock. A few finds of mainly medieval and post-medieval date were recovered during this process.

6.0 Interpretation and Context

With the exception of Trench I, all the excavations produced finds and evidence of some human activity in this area from time to time, between the Roman period and the present day.

The only probable feature of Roman date was the truncated ditch (F400), just extending into the site from higher ground to the north west and heading towards the stream. This was much disturbed by modern landscaping, and to judge from the present configuration of the lower ground to the east is unlikely to survive elsewhere on the site. This feature contained some animal bone, a little pottery of mainly 2nd-century type, and may represent an enclosure boundary which extended from the core of the Roman settlement further west. One other incompletely surviving deposit of similar date occurred in the lower end of Trench III (3003). This lense of silty clay and stone may represent the lower part of deposits dumped or washed downslope towards the western margin of the stream, once again originating from the Fosse Lane settlement.

The pre-1990 stream course itself was just seen at the eastern extremity of Trench II, but the remains of a rough stone platform? (2003/4), semi-waterlogged at the foot of a gentle bedrock slope from the west, suggests that an earlier stream course lay rather further to the west in medieval times. Conceivably, this feature represents a hardstanding beside, or the site of a causeway across, the stream bed, but any surrounding context has probably been lost to later disturbances, particularly to the east and west

Trenches III to VI all contained evidence for small-scale stone extraction, notably in V and VI. The relatively sparse finds associated with the debris from this process indicate that much of it occurred in the post-medieval period, although it may mask earlier episodes. The mixture of Roman, medieval and later finds from deposits within these trenches suggest that *in situ* remains of any earlier structures or deposits are unlikely to survive over much of the site. Quarrying has probably removed all primary evidence of Roman or medieval occupation in this locality, except for the residual collection of datable finds (mainly pottery) which testify to former activity of those periods.

The character and quantity of Roman and medieval finds support suggestions that the Romano-British settlement did indeed extend out as far as the Frog Lane stream, and that the medieval hamlet of Charlton had developed along this lane by the 12th or 13th centuries (Leach, forthcoming). What little *in situ* evidence remains is now severely disturbed and truncated by subsequent stone extraction (mainly 18th/early 19th century?), and by more recent landscaping of the whole site.

7.0 Implications and Recommendations

The evaluation at Frog Lane was of sufficient scope to demonstrate that only a few features and deposits of low archaeological interest or potential survive on this site. Evidence of former Roman and medieval activity has been usefully demonstrated here, but surviving *in situ* remains are now both slight and severely disturbed, and thus unlikely to yield any more of value. Large parts of the site have been affected by relatively minor stone working (much of it in the post-medieval period), and other areas have been disturbed down to bedrock levels by more recent landscaping. Both activities have resulted in the survival of only very mixed deposits, though containing some residual archaeological material, over a very large proportion of the site.

In these circumstances it is unlikely that any additional information of significant archaeological value is now obtainable here. In the event of future development on this site, no further investigations are therefore recommended.

8.0 Acknowledgements

This report and the site evaluation were commissioned by D.L. and S.M. Dennett, of 'Meadow View', and directed by Peter Leach. The field investigation was undertaken by Joanne Barnett, Anthony Butler, Frank Giecco, John Halstead and Dee Leach, and the report prepared with the assistance of Joanne Barnett, Frank Giecco, John Halstead and Ann Humphries.

9.0 References

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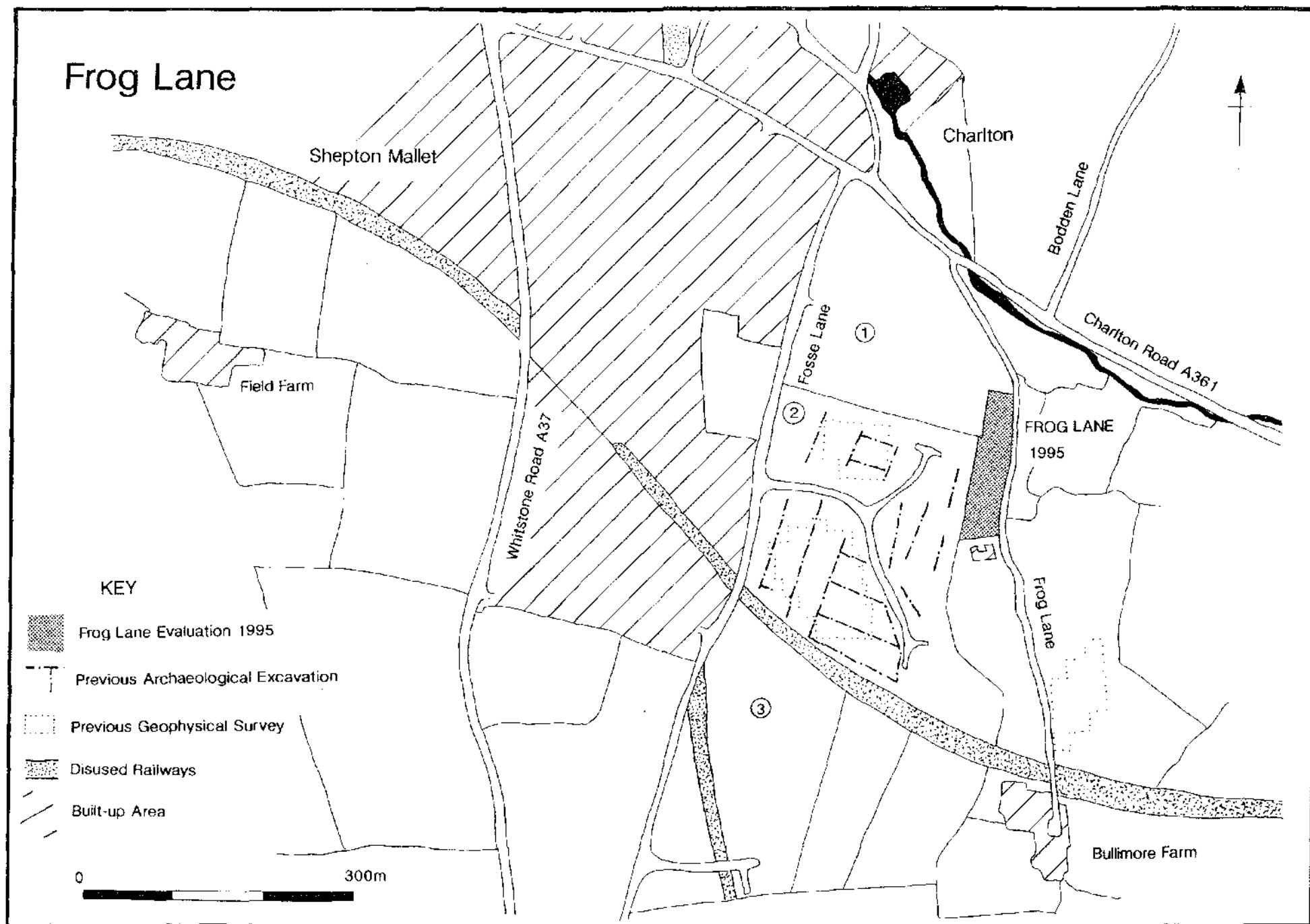


FIGURE 1

FROG LANE 1995

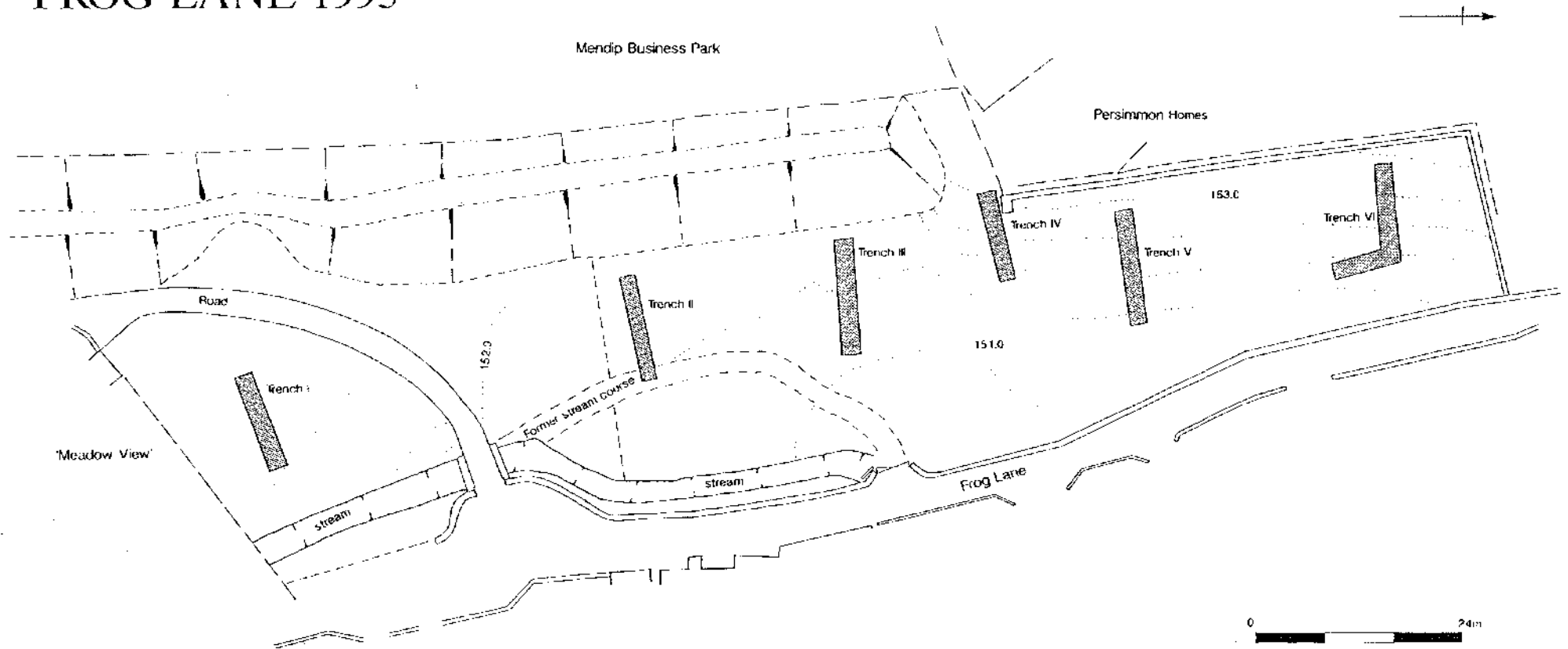


FIGURE 2

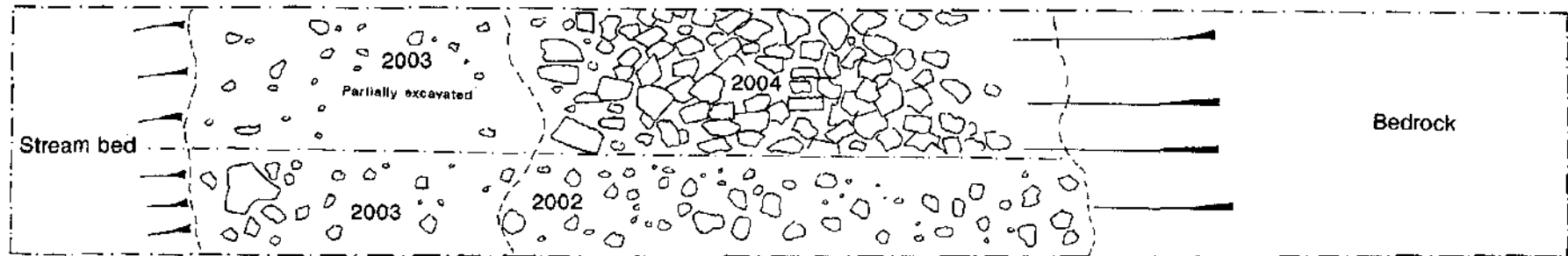
FROG LANE 1995

TRENCH II

PLAN

E

W

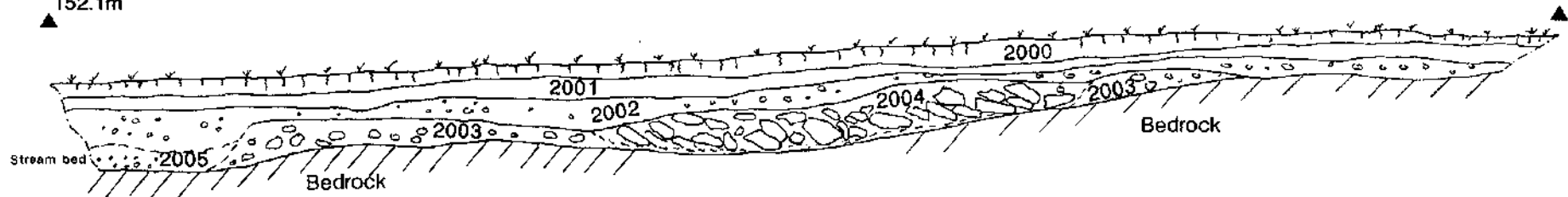


SECTION

E

W

152.1m



0 3m

FIGURE 3