

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

Hilly Fields, Upper Holway, Taunton

Archaeological Field Evaluation 1998

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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by
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Summary

Romano-British settlement evidence was found on the higher ground on the site in the form of shallow linear gullies and ditches. The evidence came from an area 100m distant from the Romano-British ditch located in 1997. Attempts to define the extent and survival of the latter indicated truncation by plough damage and produced further evidence of damage by quarrying. Prehistoric activity was suggested by finds of flint and chert debitage and by two further features in the north-west of the field, to be added to those found in 1997.

1.0: Introduction

1.1: An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Hilly Fields, Upper Holway, by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in April 1998. The work was undertaken on behalf of C G Fry and Son Ltd as part of a condition attached to planning permission, and in accordance with the *General Specification for Archaeological Work in Somerset*, Somerset County Council 1995.

1.2: The site lies on a south west-facing hilltop and hillslope to the east of Taunton, Somerset at NGR ST241237. Roman coins and possible cremations were found in the 19th century, while a number of sites ranging in date from prehistoric to medieval were found during construction of the M5 motorway to the south-east in the 1970s.

1.3: Previous work by Wessex Archaeology in an earlier field evaluation (Wessex Archaeology 1997) had established three foci of archaeological interest:

- * a short length of ditch containing large quantities of Romano-British pottery, daub from the walls of buildings, and stone roof slates. However, no evidence of occupation was found nearby,
- * evidence of prehistoric activity in the form of two gullies,
- * well-preserved palaeo-environmental remains beside the Black Brook.

This initial work had also established the presence of extensive post-medieval quarrying. Prehistoric flint implements and flakes, and Iron Age and Roman pottery were found in later contexts and in the topsoil and subsoil.

1.4: The aim of the evaluation was to further assess the degree of survival of archaeological remains and to locate settlement and activity features with, if possible, greater sharpness. This was to be achieved by means of further trial trenching according to a

specification for Stage 1 of an archaeological programme of works prepared by Somerset County Council's Environment and Property Department (SCC 1998).

1.5: Seven trenches were excavated by machine under supervision to reveal archaeological or natural horizons. The trenches were numbered 1-7, and to distinguish this group from those excavated in 1997 the latter are numbered W1-W5 in this report. Field records were made by means of 1:20 and 1:50-scale drawn sections and plans, by photography, and by written pro-formae. Features and layers were numbered from F100 and 1000 respectively in Trench 1, and F200 and 2000 in Trench 2 etc. Archaeological features were sampled by hand excavation. All flint finds and prehistoric and Romano-British pottery were collected, while post-medieval material was only collected from features, its presence elsewhere being noted. Features, ie pits, ditches, walls etc, are distinguished with the prefix F, as is also the case with features found in 1997 which are referred to again in this report.

1.6: The work was undertaken during and following a period of heavy rain. The hilltop trenches tended to fill with water soon after machine excavation, at depths below about 0.6m. A clear record of the archaeology was made difficult by flooding and by standing rain water.

2.0: Results

2.1: Trench 1 (Figs 1 and 3)

Trench 1 was cut to the north of Trench W5 in an attempt to locate further evidence of the prehistoric features originally found there. The trench was excavated to a natural surface of red orange clay which was located 0.4m below the surface at the north end of the trench and 0.95m below ground level at its south end. Over most of the trench, the orange clay lay beneath a layer of stones, 1005, in sandy clay. This was in turn sealed by a layer of sandy red/brown clay containing stone and charcoal, 1004, and by a layer of sandy brown clay and stone, 1003, sealed beneath topsoil, 1002. A feature, F100, filled with dark stained clay with much charcoal, 1006, was sealed beneath 1005 (Fig 3).

No finds were located in F100. Flint flakes and three fragments of daub were found in 1005. Post-medieval pottery and fragments of slate were found in layer 1003. There was no evidence of features similar to, or at the same level as, F5005 and F5007 in Trench W5.

2.2: Trench 2 (Figs 1 and 3)

Trench 2 was cut to the south of Trench W5 with the same aim as for Trench 1. It was excavated to a surface of natural clay at a depth of 0.6m at the east end of the trench and 0.8m at the west end. This was overlain by a layer of sandy red clay, 2004, which was overlain by sandy brown clay, 2003, beneath the topsoil, 2002. These layers were the same as layers 1002-4 in Trench 1, with no evidence of the stony layer 1005. At one point a 0.08m deep band of red redeposited natural clay, 2008, was seen directly below topsoil over a length of 2.4m. A shallow pit, F200, was seen lying partly beneath the section (Fig 3). This was filled with dark clay and stone, 2005, and with lenses of clay with dense charcoal, 2006, and pure red clay, 2007. Above F200, a concentration of stones was clear in 2004.

Two small fragments of Romano-British greyware pottery came from a cleaning layer. Two small flint flakes were found in F200 in layer 2004.

2.3: Trench 3 (Figs 1-3)

The major focus of work in 1998 was a long trench cut along the high ground to the north of the site. A second trench was cut at right angles to the first running to its south. Prehistoric evidence was confined to flint flakes found in the topsoil and in cleaning layers, with no definitely attributable features. The evidence divided into two phases of activity.

Phase 1: Romano-British

A group of ditches and gullies were located towards the west end of the trench. These lay in an area 16m wide defined by two shallow ditches, F305 and F310 (Figs. 2 and 3). To the west, F305 was filled with a layer of gritty sandy mid brown clay, while F310 to the east was filled with a brown sandy clay with stone and charcoal. Close to F305, a U-profiled gully, F303, was traced for 3.5m (Fig 3). This cut a shallower gully, F304 (Fig 3), which terminated within the excavation, and was itself cut by a stone-filled feature, F302, which was not clearly defined. Both features contained sandy clay with charcoal flecks, grey brown in F303, layer 3007, and grey in F304, layer 3008. Three other slight features were seen, F300, F301 and F309, none more than 0.05m deep and all filled with a sandy grey brown clay. All these features lay at a depth of c. 0.6m beneath a band of grey stony subsoil, 3003, underlying topsoil, 3002.

Romano-British pottery was found in F300, F301 and F305. Sherds of a Black-burnished 3rd or 4th-century 'dog bowl' vessel came from F300, while greyware sherds were found in F301. The sherds from F305 were undatable within the Roman period. Part of a Romano-British copper alloy ear probe was found in F301. Third or fourth-century Black-burnished and greyware pottery came from an initial cleaning layer. A small sherd of shell-tempered pottery of late Iron Age date came from F302. Flint flakes were found in F301 and F305, and also in an overall cleaning layer.

Phase 2: Post-medieval

Part of a quarry pit, F312, was located at the west end of the trench. This was clear on the surface as layers of pale cream and purple clay. Machine excavation to a depth of 1.2m revealed similar banded deposits. Two parallel ditches F307/F313 and F308/F314 lay to its east, continuing south in the southern arm of the trench (Figs. 2 and 3). These were cut from the topsoil through the subsoil layer. Their fills were of dark claysoil with charcoal and slate fragments. A tree root, F311, ran in to F307.

A pit or ditch, F306 (Fig 3), lay to the north of the ditches in the area of Romano-British features, where there was also a feature, F315, seen only in section which contained dark sandy clay and charcoal. This latter was cut from a higher level than the Romano-British features, from an otherwise unrecognised horizon within the subsoil layer 3003.

Post-medieval pottery was found in F306, F307 and F308, and was also found in an overall cleaning layer. The diagnostic post-medieval pottery comprised sherds from feathered slip-wares, green-glazed pancheons, and white-slipped earthenwares and suggested an 18th-century date. F307 contained clay pipe fragments, ceramic tile fragments, slate, coal, oyster shells and bone. A clay pipe bowl with a rouletted rim is likely to date to the 18th century. Romano-British pottery was also present. F308 contained brick, bone, clay pipe, a post-medieval metal cap, and an iron spike.

The Phase 1 Romano-British evidence suggested enclosure features and perhaps structures in the form of F303 and F304 although these lacked dating evidence. The intercutting of F303, F304 and F302 suggested that a succession of activities had occurred. The two post-medieval ditches were traced running parallel for over 32m. These may have been ditches set on either side of a field boundary bank. There was some evidence of the latter in the root hole, F311, and in some slight surface staining between the ditches in the southern trench arm.

2.4: *Trench 4* (Fig 1)

Trench 4 was cut across part of a hollow and up its north lip to establish its function. The hollow lies to the north-west of Trench W4 covering about 30m by 40m at the crest of the hill. Excavation showed natural red-orange clay lying beneath a sandy subsoil and topsoil, as elsewhere. In the south part of the trench within the hollow area was a wall, F400, formed of a double thickness of bricks. Three courses were recorded with further courses continuing below, the uppermost lying directly beneath the topsoil. To the north of the wall was natural orange clay and to its south a mixed layer of clay and soil, 4004, with a layer of white degraded stone, 4005, seen in a machine sondage at 0.6m depth from the ground surface. At the east termination of the wall was the commencement of a curve and then an area of disturbed brick. This lay within an irregular cut, F401, into the natural clay filled with dark grey sandy material, 4006.

Post-medieval pottery was found in the pit and in the area to the south of the brick wall. The wall may be part of a brick building, or a revetment, perhaps alongside a ramp, or part of a drainage feature. Whatever its function the structure appears to date from the late 19th or early 20th century.

2.5: *Trench 5* (Fig 1)

This trench was cut to the west of Trench W4 to establish, if possible, the location and function of the ditch, F407, found previously in Trench W4. The natural surface of orange clay lay beneath a subsoil and topsoil, 5002 and 5003, with no evidence of the ditch. A ceramic land drain crossed the trench.

2.6: *Trench 6* (Fig 1)

Trench 6 was cut between Trenches 7 and W4, also to locate ditch F407. Machine excavation revealed a pale clay layer with stone and charcoal, 6004, lying beneath a red clay

and stone subsoil, 6003, to a depth of 0.85m from the base of 6003 at a depth of 0.4m. Layer 6004 was uniform but of lighter colour than the natural clay seen elsewhere. There was no evidence of ditch F407. This, and the absence of any evidence of the natural surface, suggested that the trench had been cut across a borrow pit. Uniform fills, resembling natural clay, were seen in the fills of borrow pits excavated in 1997. The east end of the borrow pit possibly lay within the trench but would anyway have been located between Trenches 6 and 7.

A sherd of late Iron Age or early Roman pottery and a number of flint flakes came from an initial cleaning layer.

2.7: *Trench 7* (Figs 1 and 3)

Trench 7 was also cut to clarify the location and function of the Romano-British ditch, F407, found in Trench W4. The trench was excavated to a natural horizon of orange clay. This was seen to be sealed by a subsoil of sandy clay with stones, 7003, beneath a dark brown humic topsoil, 7002.

A ditch, F700, was cut into the natural surface. It was 0.42m wide by 0.16m deep with a sloping-sided profile. Its fill of clay contained quantities of charcoal, 7004. The ditch was sealed beneath 7003 and was aligned on F407 in Trench W4. A sherd of Black burnished Romano-British pottery was found in the fill together with fragments of daub. Although considerably smaller, this and its fill suggested that F700 represented a continuation of the ditch feature F407. The decrease in ditch size might be explained by truncation through ploughing.

3.0: **Finds**

3.1: *Flint and chert*

A total of 26 flakes of flint and chert came from Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 6. One flake in Trench 6 may have been used as a blade.

3.2: *Pottery*

One or possibly two sherds of late Iron Age pottery were found. Diagnostic Romano-British pottery in the total collection of 16 sherds was later Roman in date. The post-medieval pottery collection of 25 sherds was 18th-century or earlier in date.

3.3: *Other finds*

A small number of clay pipes, metal objects, bone, shell and stone were collected as well as a few fragments of daub.

4.0: Discussion

Two further features (from Trenches 1 and 2) were added to the possible building gullies found in 1997. Both lay at a greater depth than those found in 1997 as did the overall natural surface. This is unlikely to have been a factor of plough truncation and it would appear that the gullies found in Trench W5 may have lain on a slightly raised tongue of land running towards the Black Brook.

The presence of pottery and flint in both evaluations is an indication of prehistoric activity over a wider area than simply this north-west corner of the site. However, no focus of activity has been located.

The evidence strongly suggests that considerable truncation of earlier ground surfaces has taken place. Ditch F700 in Trench 7, if the same as F407 in Trench W4, appears to have lost over 0.4m of its original depth, with its width decreased from 2m to less than 0.5m. Ditch F407 in Trench W4 had itself been truncated since the building and occupation materials in its fills was not replicated by any adjacent surface features. In Trench 3 the double post-medieval ditch line can be interpreted as having run either side of a former field boundary which has now wholly disappeared, again probably as a result of ploughing.

Extensive clay quarrying has been observed in both evaluations in the form of large-scale quarry pits. This activity was dated in 1997 in one case to the 18th century or earlier. Later activity is suggested by the features found in Trench 4. Quarrying may also have been the reason for the abandonment of the field boundaries F307/F308 in the 19th century, although a period of recent ploughing has also been suggested. Quarry pit F600 lay beneath a subsoil possibly resulting from ploughing. On balance the evidence suggests that the winning of clay on this site was followed by a period of deep ploughing. This may have led to the hillwash deposits seen in Trenches 1 and 2.

This hypothesised period of recent deep ploughing does not appear to have been the agent damaging the Romano-British and earlier activity on the site since there is little evidence, in the form of large sherds for example, of material having been recently disturbed. Damage to the Roman archaeology must also be attributed to earlier ploughing episodes in the medieval period.

In these circumstances, survival, however partial, of Roman land surfaces may be a matter of chance. The areas located in Trench W4 and Trench 3 may not represent core occupation areas but might simply have survived because they were protected by a plough headland or by a boundary. The archaeology in Trench 3 for example might well have survived in the lee of a long-standing boundary marked by F307 and F308.

5.0: Recommendations

5.1: Despite the trench limits, and the problems of flooding during the evaluation, sufficient was seen to suggest the survival of further Romano-British and possibly Iron Age features. To better appreciate their layout a more extensive soil strip, sampling and recording exercise under archaeological conditions is required in the area of Trench 3

5.2: The best evidence of Romano-British occupation found to date has come from the short length of ditch, F407, excavated in Trench W4. Efforts to expand comprehension of this evidence were largely unsuccessful in 1998 and much has been lost by quarrying. Nevertheless, further remains of this occupation may well survive in the locality and further more extensive investigations, as outlined in 5.1 above, should be undertaken here.

5.3: A third focus of archaeological attention is towards the north-west corner of the field, and in particular along the eastern margins of the Black Brook. Some of these remains may lie at a sufficient depth to suggest that they could be protected from development. If not, a similar archaeological recording policy should be adopted here as for 5.1, but targeted more specifically upon any areas of unavoidable below-ground disturbance required as part of the development.

5.4: From two phases of archaeological evaluation on this site it would appear that Romano-British and possibly earlier prehistoric settlement remains survive extensively, if intermittently across the north and eastern part of the development site. To appreciate and preserve this information areas within this zone should be targeted for further investigation prior to development on the lines suggested in 5.1, or those procedures applied more specifically to locations such as building plots, access roads, or mains services.

References

SCC 1998 *Specification for an archaeological programme of works: Stage 1*, Somerset County Council

Wessex Archaeology 1997 *Land at Hilly Fields, Upper Holway, Taunton*, Wessex Archaeology report ref 43878

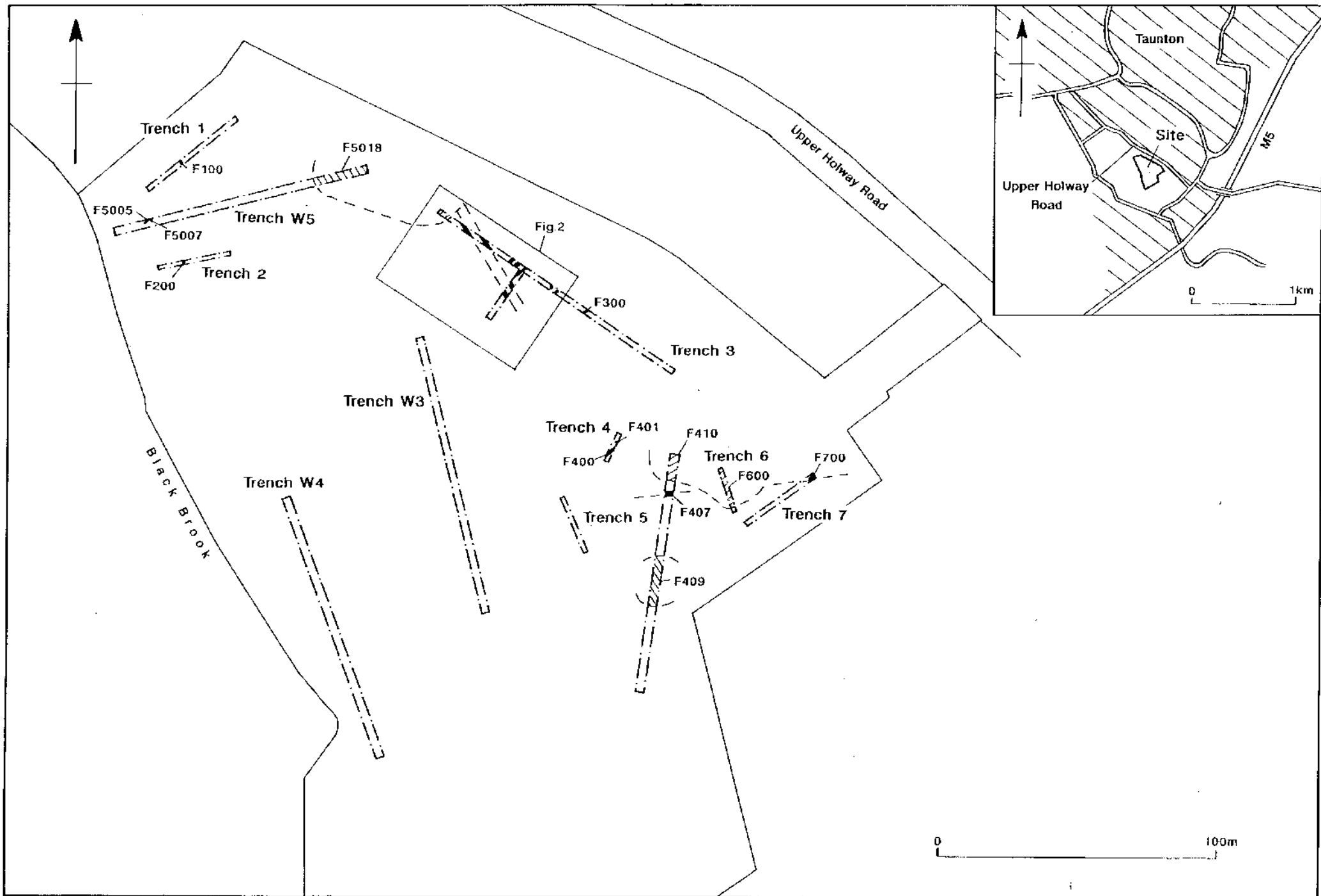


Fig. 1

Trench 3 , West End

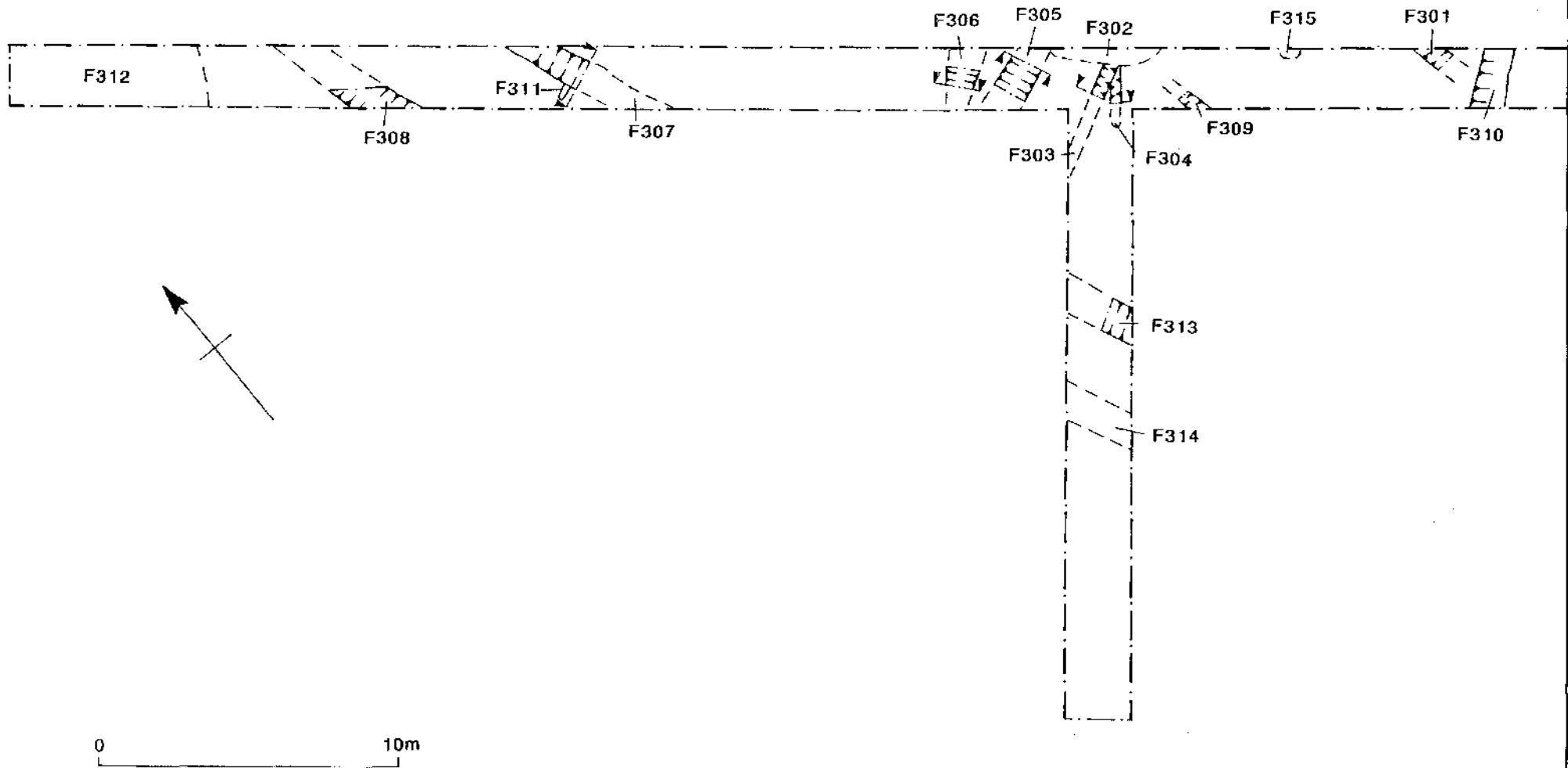


Fig.2

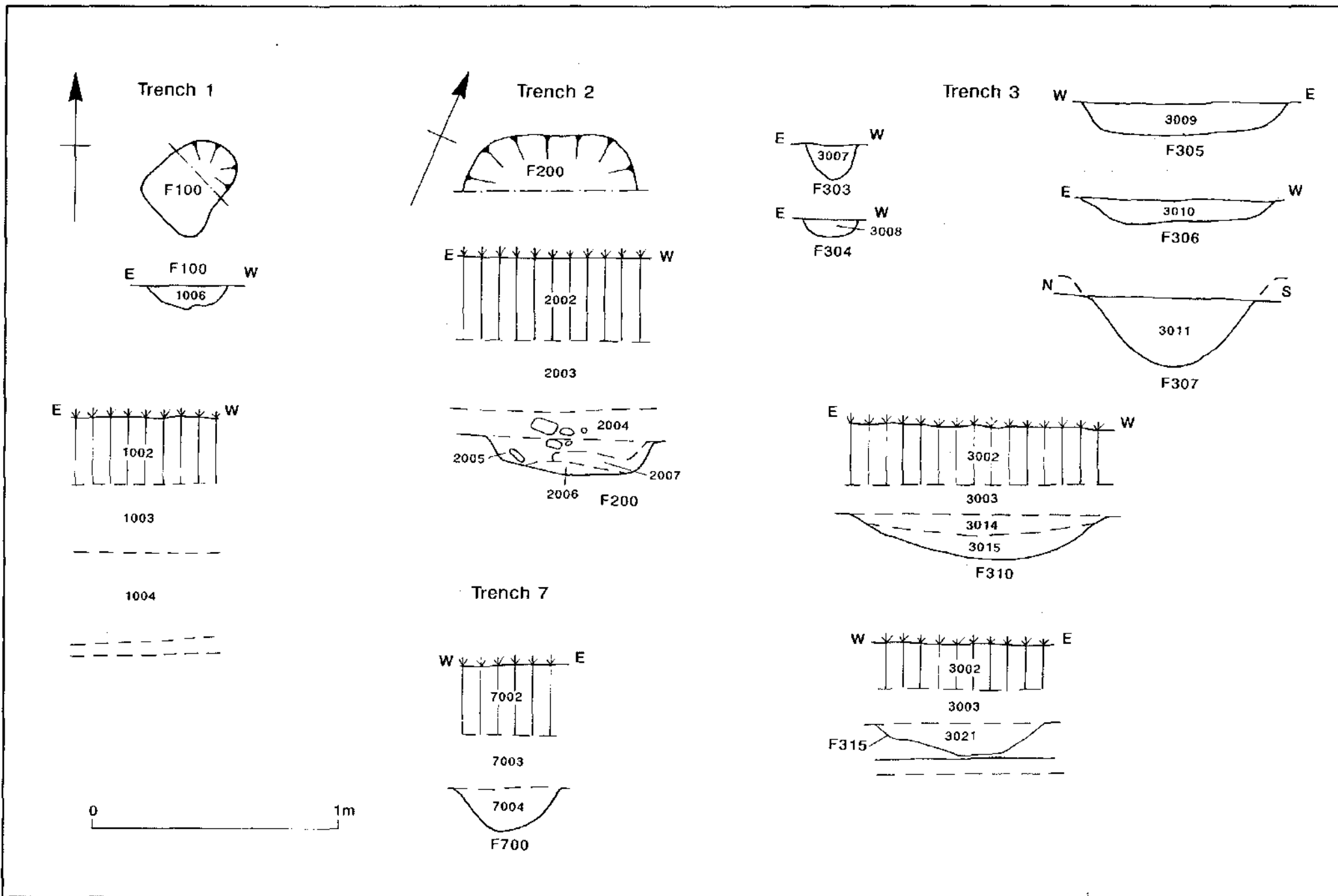


Fig.3