

**Five Tunnels, Redditch,
Worcestershire:**

**An Archaeological
Watching Brief 2001**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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by
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1.0 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in August, 2001 during a rehabilitation scheme that involved the installation of stone revetment within the bank of a weir pool and the lowering of a section of banking along the River Arrow in Redditch, Worcestershire (centred on NGR SP 05200 68860). The site is adjacent to the precinct boundary of the medieval Abbey of Bordesley (WSM00010). Layers relating to modern landscaping and revetments were recorded. The watching brief was commissioned by Mark Ross Landscape Architects, on behalf of the Environment Agency, and carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) during August, 2001.

No features or artefacts of archaeological interest were observed during the groundworks.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during groundworks on the eastern bank of the River Arrow in Redditch, Worcestershire, at Five Tunnels (centred on NGR SP 05200 68860; Figs. 1 and 2). Groundworks were designed to strengthen the bank around a weir pool preventing further erosion (Reed 2001). Bordesley Abbey (WSM00010, SAM 261) lies to the west of the site and this watching brief was undertaken following a recommendation from the Planning Advisory Section of Worcestershire Archaeology Service. The watching brief was commissioned by Mark Ross Landscape Architects, on behalf of the Environment Agency, and carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) during August, 2001. The work was conducted in accordance with a brief issued by Worcestershire County Council (Glyde 2000) and a scheme of investigation prepared by BUFAU (Cutler 2000).

3.0 Site location and historical background (Fig. 2)

The site lies at the northern edge of the Redditch conurbation, on the east bank of the River Arrow. Immediately to the north of the works is a modern weir and sluice. To the east and south of the site is open grassland.

As part of the programme of works a sites and monuments records search was undertaken of all monuments within 600m of the site. The precinct boundary of Bordesley Abbey lies 350m to the west. Bordesley Abbey is the remains of a Cistercian Abbey founded by 1141. By 1332 the community of monks at the abbey had grown to 60, and when the abbey was dissolved in 1538 the community had declined to 20 monks (Worcestershire Sites and Monuments Record). The river would have provided a valuable resource for the abbey and there is evidence within the surrounding landscape of water management schemes such as fishponds, leats (WSM03888), millponds (WSM03889) and water mills (WSM03890, WSM07248).

Medieval ridge and furrow (WSM03891) is recorded locally, whilst 250m southwest of the site lies an industrial area associated with the abbey (SMR Ref. WSM07247).

4.0 Aims and methodology

The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to record any archaeological remains uncovered during the course of groundwork, and to recover any artifactual and environmental material, in order to contribute to an understanding of the nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains within the area.

The groundworks were carried out by a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a 0.9m wide, toothless ditching bucket. Sandbags were laid along the top of the weir and on the riverbed to provide a revetment. Water between the banks and the revetment was then drained using pumps. The bank was cut back to form a 1.8m-wide shelf, 0.3m below the top of the weir.

An archaeologist from BUFAU attended the site throughout the groundworks. Even where no archaeological deposits were identified the stratigraphy was cleaned and recorded. Archaeological features were recorded on pre-printed *pro-forma* record cards for features and contexts, supplemented by colour-print photographs. Plans and sections were drawn at appropriate scales. The site archive is currently held at BUFAU.

5.0 Results and discussion (Fig. 3)

The natural ground surface consisted of red clay (1004) exposed at the water level. This was overlain by mixed clay (1003), 0.8m in depth and containing large quantities of pebbles, which in turn was sealed by grey clay (1002), 0.3m in depth with a few pebbles within the matrix. A layer of reddish-grey clay (1001), measuring 0.2m in depth sealed the grey clay (1002), which was overlain by topsoil (1000), measuring 0.2m in depth.

A cut (F1) in the natural was filled by deposits (1005 and 1006) containing modern brick fragments. Red clay (1009), measuring 0.8m in depth had been used to build up the bank. The groundworks revealed that a short stretch of banking abutting the eastern end of the weir contained modern building debris and appeared to relate to the construction of the weir. The remainder of the banking consisted of exposed layers of natural clays.

No evidence of activity earlier than the 19th century was observed. An area of disturbance recorded around the weir (F1) was probably related to the weir construction. Natural deposits some distance from the weir proved to be devoid of archaeological features.

The area between the abbey and the River Arrow was used extensively during the medieval period. Evidence of water management schemes recorded in the Sites and Monuments register suggested possible activity in the immediate vicinity of the site. It seems likely however that modern landscaping and works associated with the construction of the weir would have destroyed any earlier archaeological features.

6.0 Acknowledgements

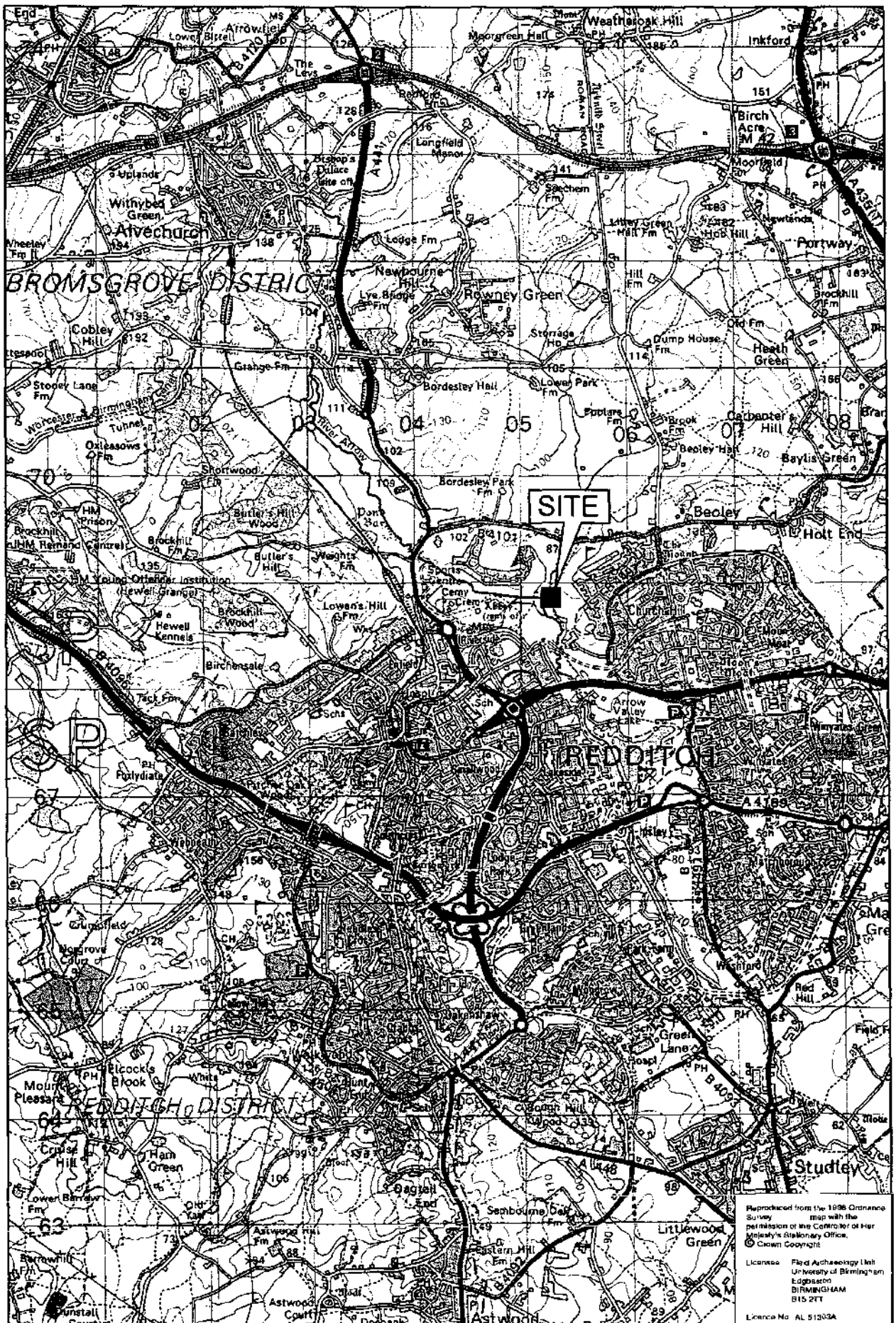
The watching brief was carried out by Roy Krakowicz and managed by Richard Cuttler, who also edited this report. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. Thanks are due to Julia Mussett from Mark Ross Landscape Architects who monitored the project on behalf of The Environment Agency. Thanks are also due to Deborah Overton from the Sites and Monuments Record.

7.0 References

Cuttler, R. T. H. 2001. *Five Tunnels, Redditch, Worcestershire. Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

Glyde, M. 2000. *Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Work on the Five Tunnels, Redditch River Rehabilitation Scheme near Boresley abbey, Redditch, Worcestershire.* Planning Advisory Section, Worcestershire Archaeological Service.

Reed, W. 2001. *Five Tunnels Redditch - River Rehabilitation Works, Archaeological Watching Brief.* Environment Agency.



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Fig.1

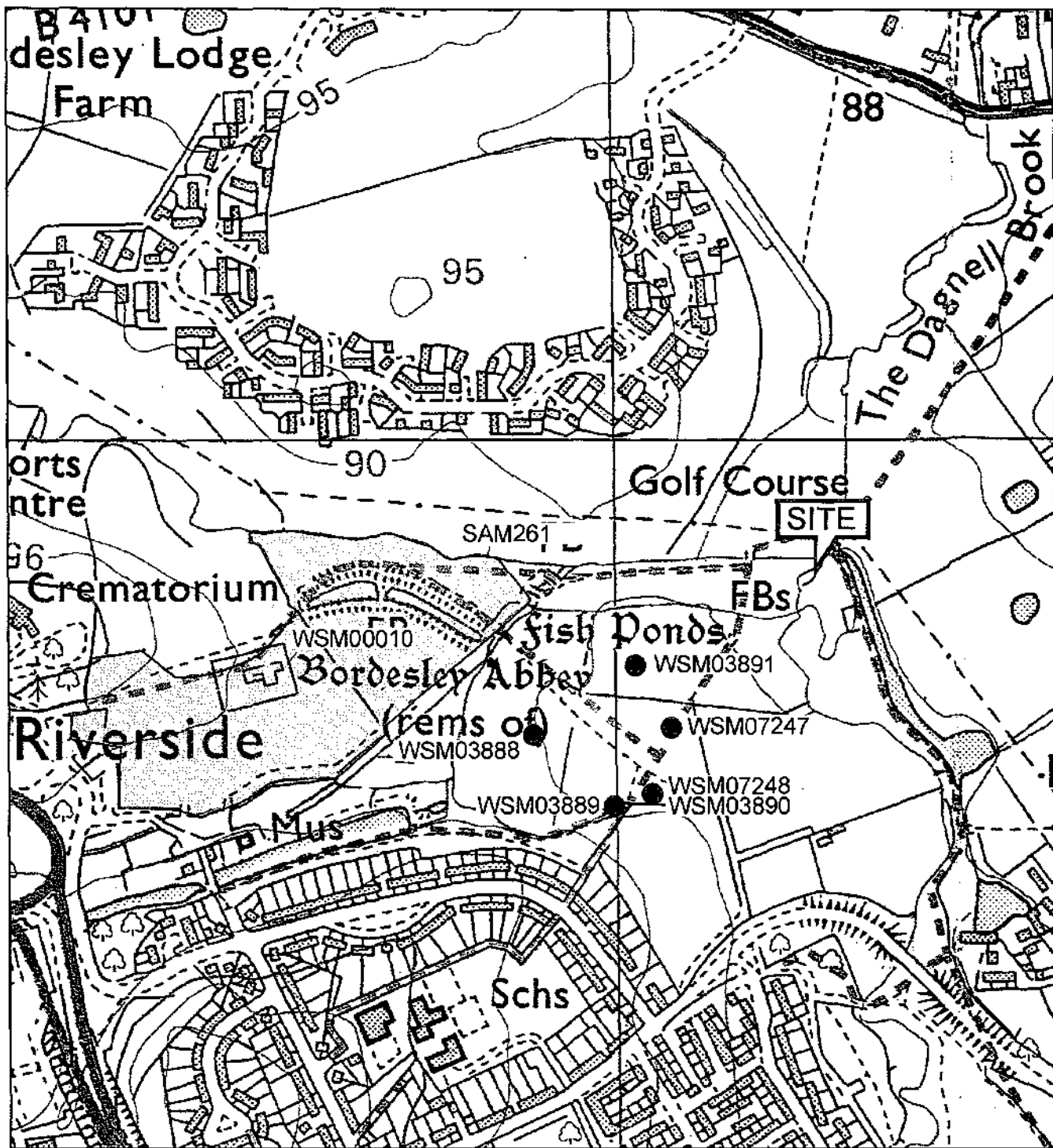


Fig.2

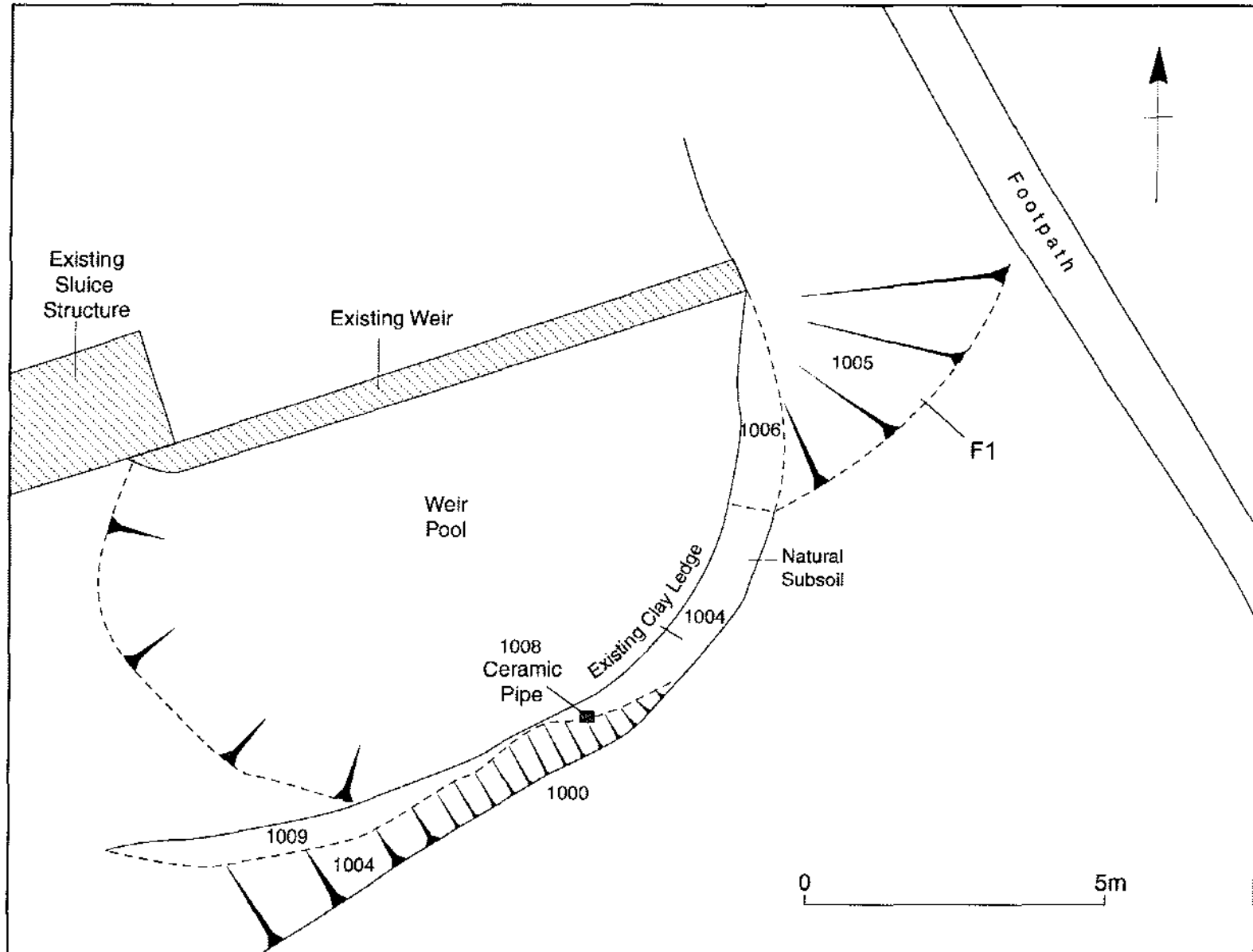


Fig.3