A5 Nescliffe Bypass, Nescliffe, Shropshire Telford's Drain

Archaeological Recording 2002

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by
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1.0: SUMMARY

Archaeological recording was undertaken to investigate the line of Telford's Drain, (centred on NGR SJ 375211) in advance of the construction of the A5 Nescliffe Bypass. The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit under commission from Balfour Beatty Ltd. The archaeological recording, undertaken in two stages revealed the line of a circular cement drain, pre-fabricated in sections. Most of the original drain had been removed, and replaced with a pipe, forming a field drain. Towards the northeastern part of the new bypass corridor a length of Telford's original drain, of drystone construction, survived *in situ*.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of the archaeological recording of Telford's Drain, in advance of construction of the A5 Nescliffe Bypass (centred on NGR SJ 373206, Fig. 1). The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Balfour Beatty Construction, with advice from Babtie Ltd.

The evaluation adhered to a method statement (Babtie 2002).

The site, known as ' Telford's Bump' or 'Telford's Drain', is located to the south of Wolfshead Farm in a 2ha. area of peat bog at Lin Can Moss, where the drain was identified as crossing the course of the new Bypass (Fig. 2). The drain (Shropshire SMR 08035) was a northeast-southwest aligned culvert constructed in 1819 by Thomas Telford during improvements to the Holyhead road which became a mail coach road between Ireland and London.

The culvert consisted of a drain set within a box culvert of drystone construction. Sandstone sumps were located at either end, to the northeast and southwest (Plate 1) of the Bypass. The drain was likely to have conformed to similar designs for an enclosed box culvert-type and would have been built in local sandstone using a 'cut and fill' construction. A modern concrete drain was visible above ground-level, following the approximate alignment of Telford's Drain.

The aims of the archaeological fieldwork were to identify and record the surviving remains. In particular, it was intended to:

- identify and record the design and construction of the drain
- establish the nature of any remains or negative evidence for such remains
- determine, or confirm the general dating and phasing of the remains identified

3.0: METHODOLOGY (Fig. 3)

It was originally intended that two trenches, each measuring 2m by 15m, were excavated across the line of the drain, with a further trench measuring 30m in length being cut along the line of the drain, to expose the drain in plan and in section, following selective hand-cleaning. In the event, the proposed methodology had to be modified due to the high water table, and the instability of the surrounding peat bog. The existing ground-level drain also continued to carry water. Excavation during the first stage of fieldwork was therefore limited to three trial-trenches cut at right angles to the existing drain, placed as far apart as possible. Trench 1 measured approximately 2m x 15m, Trench 2 approximately 2m x 8m and Trench 3 approximately 2m x 8m.

The second stage of archaeological recording involved the machine excavation and hand-cleaning of two further trial-trenches (4-5) cut across the line of the drain, towards the northeastern edge of the Bypass. These trenches were dug following removal of an overhead electricity line which had prevented earlier investigation of this better-drained area, on the northern margin of the peat bog. Trenches 4-5 measured 10m and 5.5m in length, and a minimum of 2m in width.

Recording was by means of pre-printed pro-formas for contexts and features, supplemented by scale plans and sections, colour slide and monochrome print photography. Subject to approval of the landowner it is intended that the project archive will be deposited with Shropshire County Council.

4.0: RESULTS (Fig. 3)

Trenches 1-3

The orange/yellow sand subsoil (1001) was revealed at a depth of approximately 2m below ground level in Trench 1 (Fig. 4, S.1). Overlying the subsoil (1001) was a deposit of peat (1000) approximately 2m in depth. A sump (not illustrated) excavated to the north of Trench 1 revealed that the peat could reach depths of up to 5m at some points in the bog.

At a depth of approximately 0.5m below ground level was a pre-cast cement channel (Plate 2), composed of aggregate material (F102) was bedded into the peat. The channel, aligned southwest-northeast, was made up of sections which slotted into one another. Each measured approximately 0.5m in length by 0.35m in width by 0.25m in height. The profile was U-shaped. The channel had been sealed by a layer of concrete (1004), 0.2m deep. Wooden planking (1005) had been used to form the sides of the trench into which the concrete had been poured. The concrete formed a bedding layer for the existing drain (F100, Plate 3) which is partially visible above ground running roughly east to west through the bog. Drain F100 was made up of concrete sections, 0.9m in length and 0.3m in diameter, which were slotted together.

A similar sequence was recorded in Trenches 2 and 3 (not illustrated).

Trench 4

This trench was located on the western edge of the temporary haul road, approximately 10m east of Trench 1. The trench measured 5m in length and 2m in width with a maximum depth of 1.30m. This trench was outside of the peat bog, and in slightly higher ground. The lowest layer recorded was a yellow-grey silty sand (2004), approximately 0.40m deep, which was sealed by a layer of brownish-yellow, silty-sand (2005). This layer was truncated by an irregularly-shaped cut (F201), measuring roughly 0.50m wide by 0.30m deep, recorded at an approximate depth of 0.3m below the modern ground surface. The cut contained broken pieces of the pre-cast drainage channel seen in the evaluation. Overlying both feature F201 and layer 2005 was a 0.30m deep layer of silty peat topsoil (2000). Due to the trench being on the edge of the haul road the passage of heavy machinery had significantly disturbed the remains of the drain.

Trench 5 (Fig. 5, Plates 4-6)

Trench 5 was excavated on the eastern edge of the haul road, in the much higher ground towards the outside edge of the haul road. This trench measured 5.50m in length and was stepped in from 2.5m in width to 1.15m at the base. The trench was excavated to depth of 2.10m. The lowest layer recorded in this trench was a yellow gravelly-sand (2003), which measured 1.55m in depth, and was recorded at a depth of 0.65m from the modern ground surface. This layer was truncated by a cut (F200), backfilled with orange sand, recorded at a depth of 0.5m below the modern ground surface. In the base of the cut was a rectangular drain, hollow in section, constructed of rectangular blocks of dressed stone. Each of the stone blocks measured 0.50 m in length, 0.25m in depth and 0.35m wide. The blocks were bonded together with puddled clay to ensure it was watertight. The drain crossed the trench obliquely, following the same alignment as the modern drain (see above). This part of Telford's Drain is still active, although it has been slightly damaged by tree roots. The cut was overlain by a shallow layer of brown-yellow, gravelly-sand (2001) which was sealed in turn by the brown silty topsoil (2000).

5.0: DISCUSSION

Telford's original Drain was only recorded in Trench 5, on the higher ground, away from the peat bog. As recorded in Trench 5, the construction materials of Telford's Drain were similar to those employed in the soakaways recorded on either side of the Bypass, and it may be reasonably concluded that these features were contemporary. It may be assumed that within the peat bog Telford's original construction may have sunk or otherwise ceased to function, and the drain may have been replaced in the 20th century with the pre-cast concrete drain, visible at the time of recording above ground level.

6.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork was sponsored by Balfour Beatty Construction, and was supervised by Helen Martin, and by Kate Bain who undertook the watching brief. The project was managed for BUFAU by Alex Jones who edited this report. The illustrations were prepared by John Halsted. The work was monitored by John Mullis on behalf of Babtie on behalf of Balfour Beatty Construction. Thanks are due to the management and staff of Balfour Beatty for their help and co-operation.

7.0: REFERENCES

Babtie, 2002. 'A5 Nesscliffe Bypass - Method Statement for Archaeological Excavation of 'Telford's Drain'.

Bain, K 2002 *A5 Nescliffe Bypass, Archaeological Watching Brief 2002.* BUFAU Report No. 901.01.

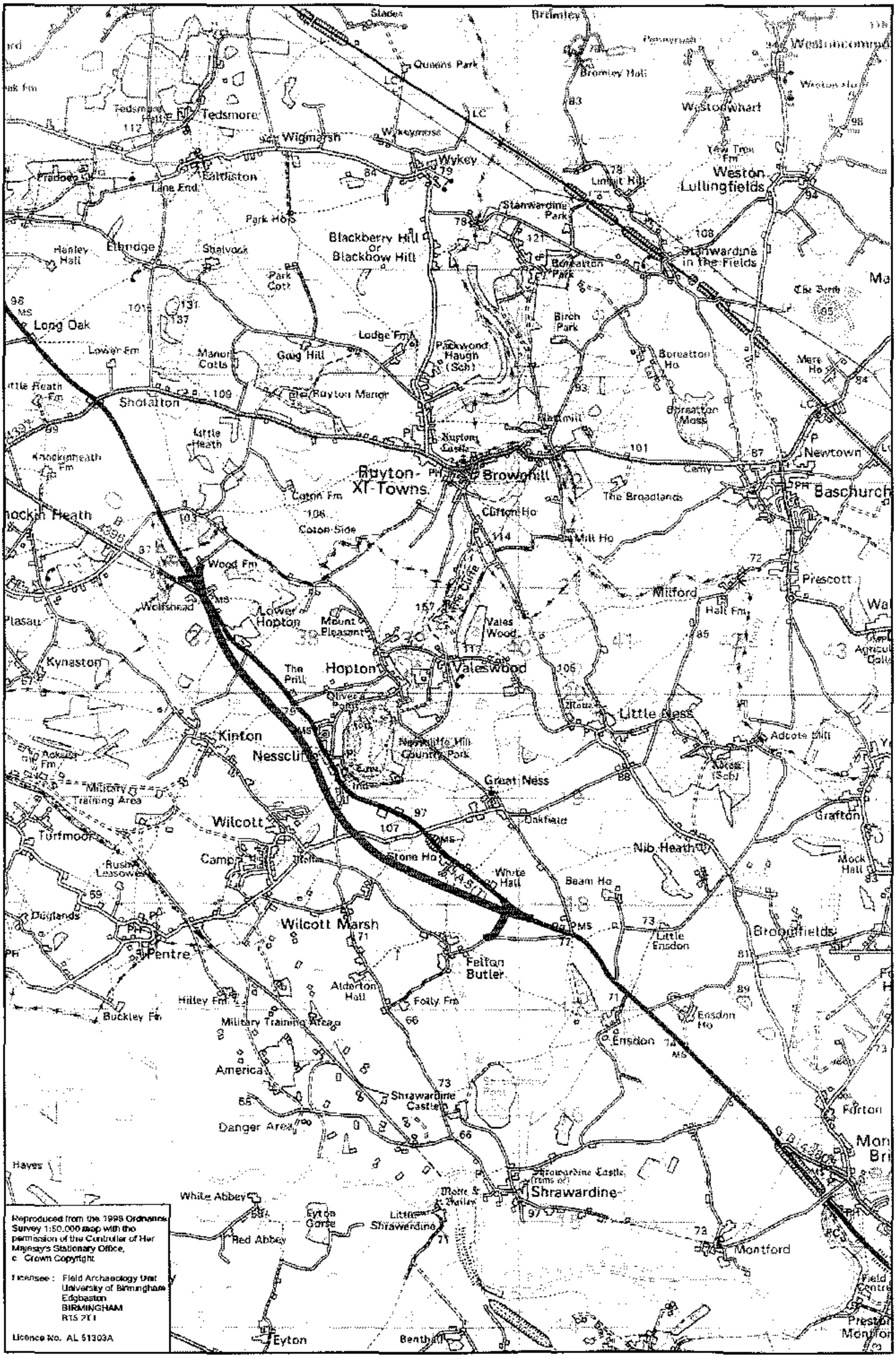

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Fig.1

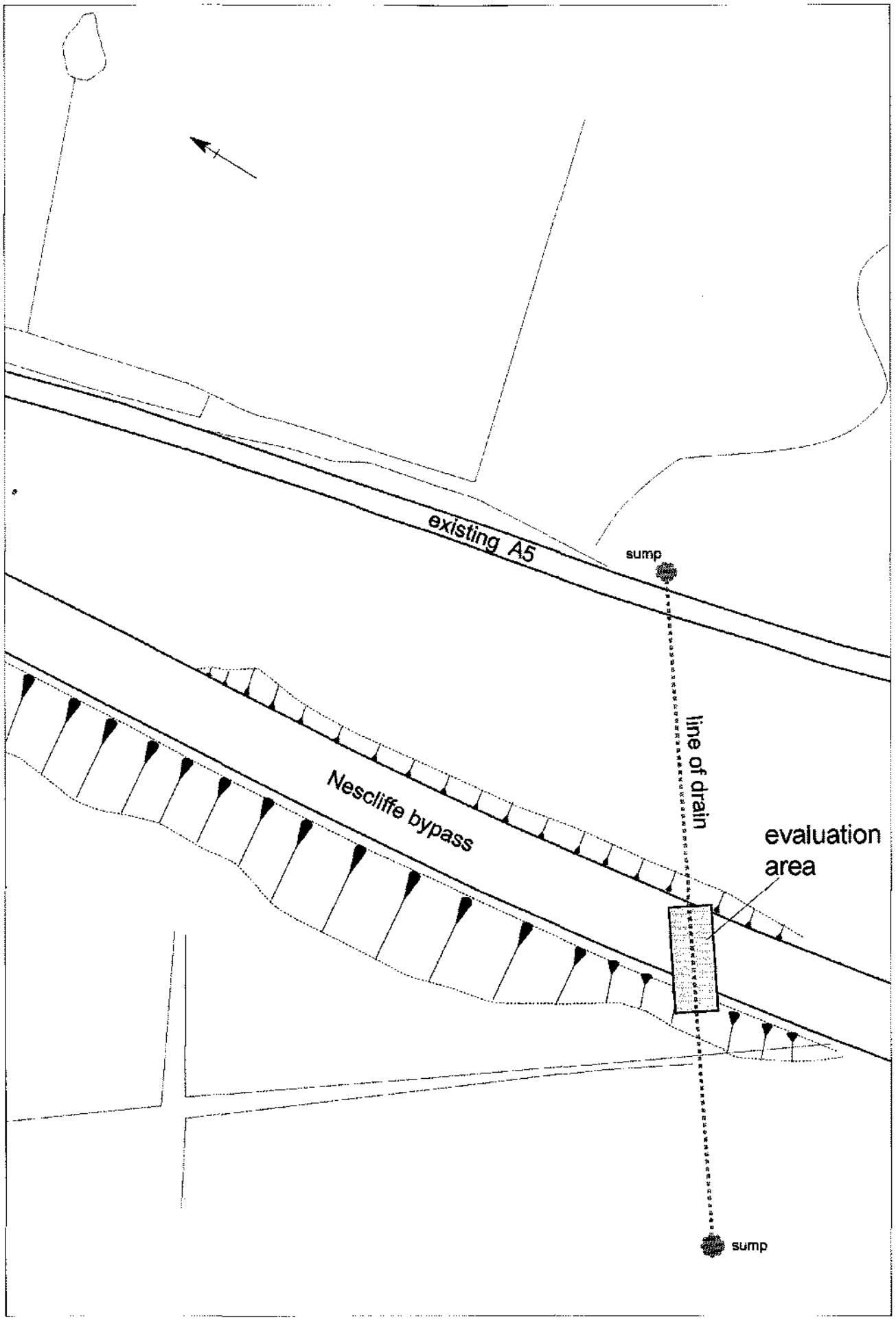
existing A5
sump
line of drain
Nescliffe bypass
evaluation
area
sump

Fig. 2

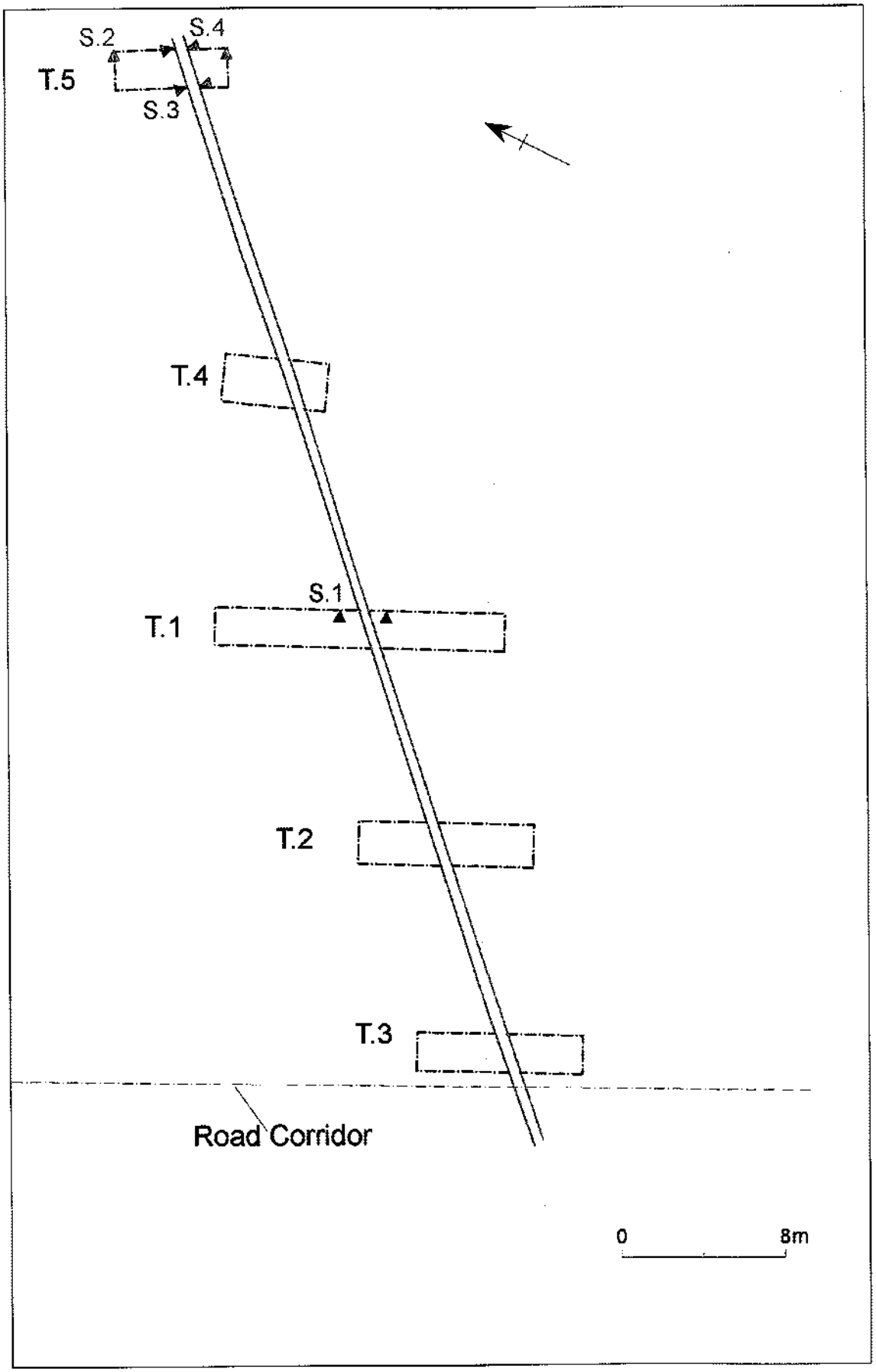

Fig. 3

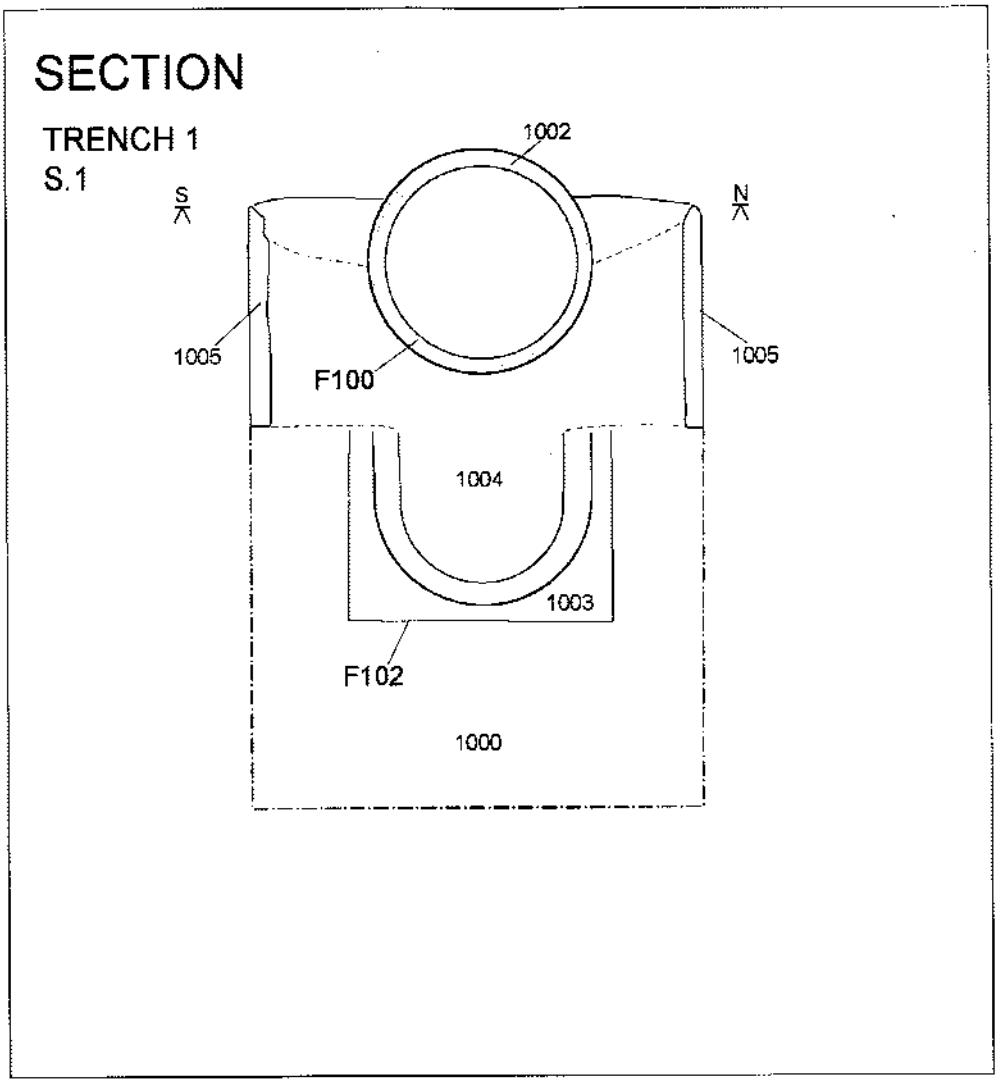
SECTION
TRENCH 1
S.1
S
N
1002
1005
1005
F100
1004
1003
F102
1000

Fig. 4

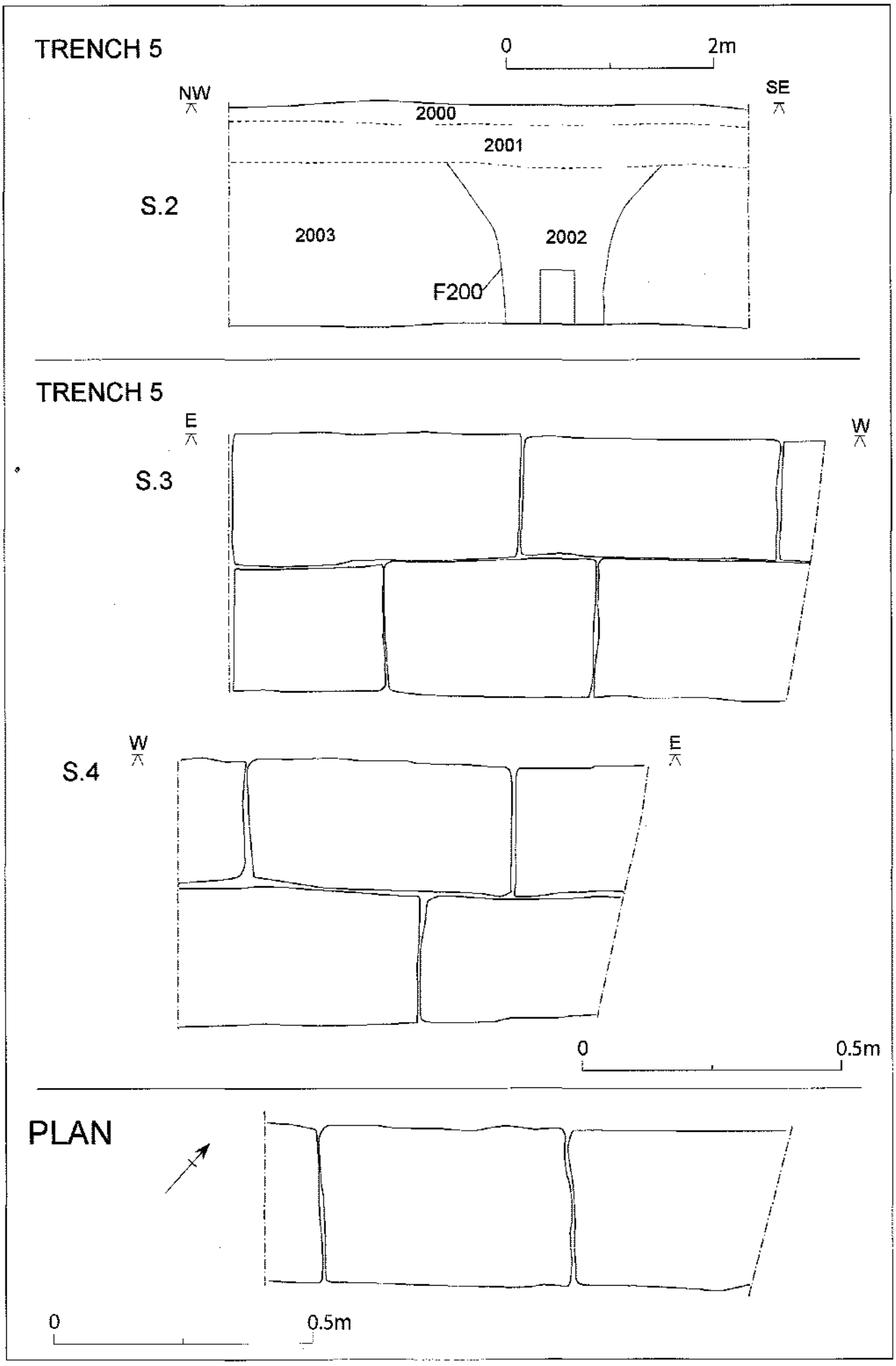
TRENCH 5
0
2m
NW
SE
2000
2001
S.2
2003
2002
F200
TRENCH 5
E
W
S.3
W
E
S.4
0
0.5m
PLAN
0
0.5m

Fig. 5

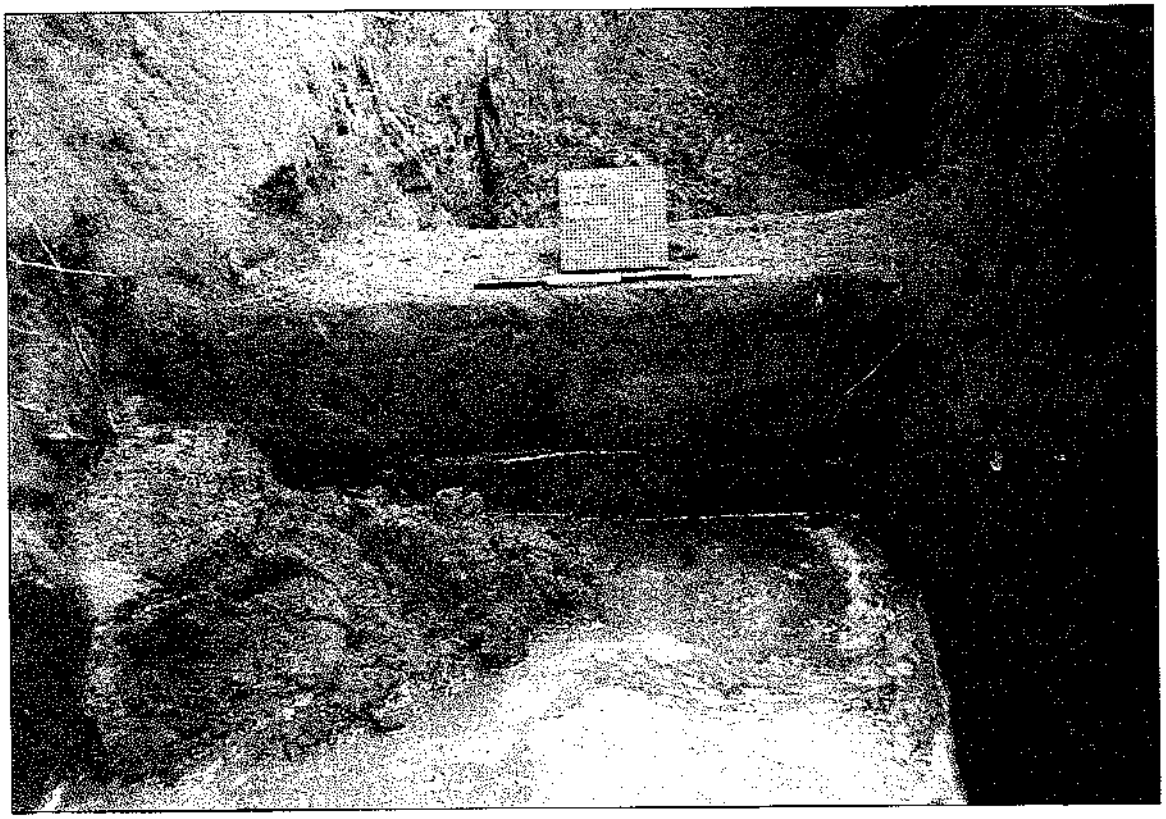

Plate 1

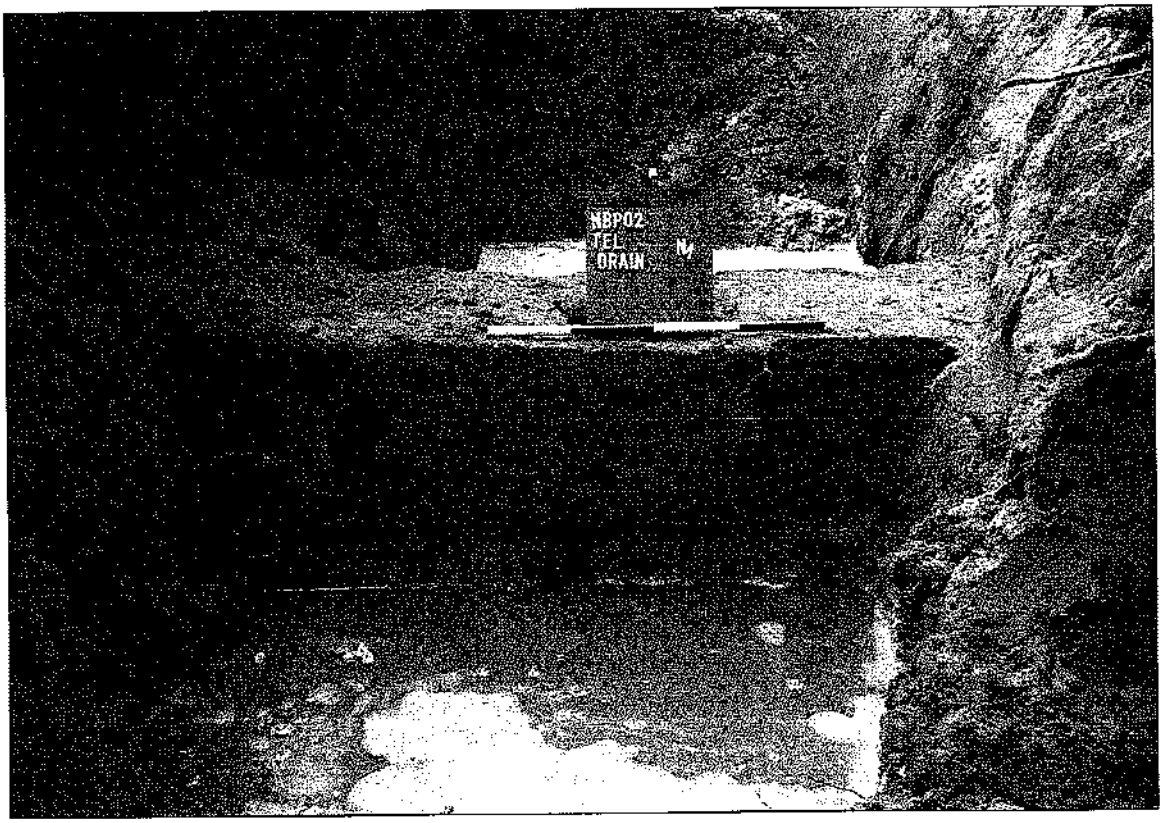

Plate 2

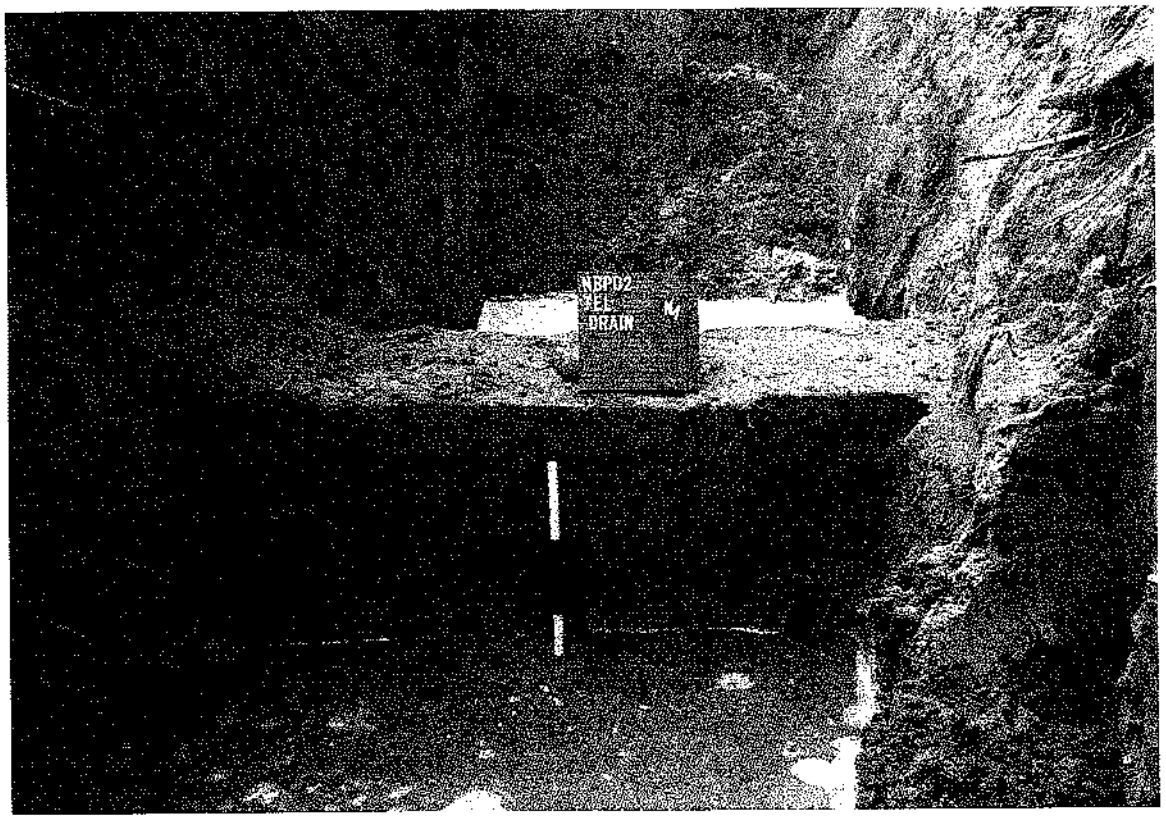

Plate 3

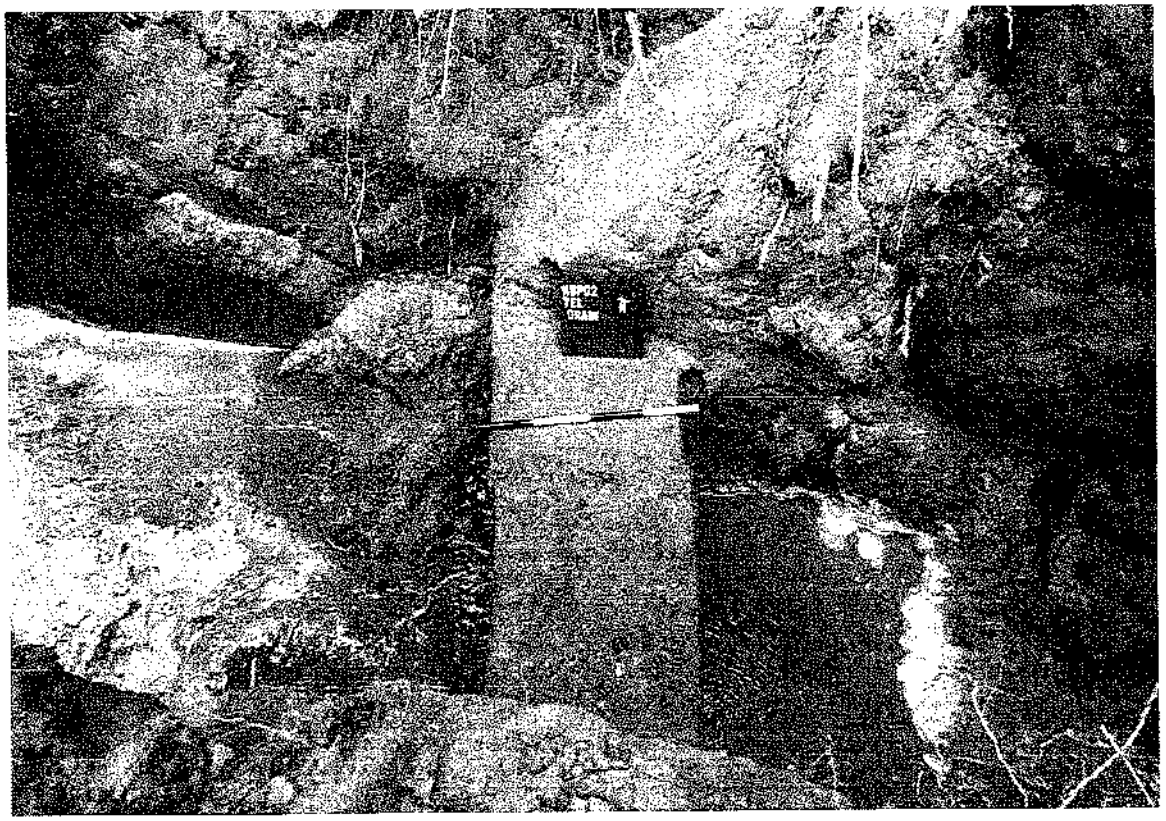

Plate 4