Preston Brockhurst to Lee Brockhurst Transfer Main, Shropshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

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Preston Brockhurst to Lee Brockhurst Transfer Main, Shropshire: An Archaeological Watching Brief

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SUMMARY

A watching brief was carried out on the construction of a new water main from Preston Brockhurst and Lee Brockhurst, Shropshire on the section of the pipeline between the A49 trunk road and Lee Brockhurst pumping station. The watching brief was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in September 2002 on behalf of Severn Trent Ltd. The excavation of three reception/launch pits for direct-drilling on the pipeline route were monitored, these were sited between the A49 and the rear of the Lee Brockhurst pumping station. The watching brief was carried out to try and locate the remains of the Roman road which ran between Wroxeter (*Virconium*) and Chester (*Deva*). No remains of the Roman road were observed within these pits. A possible archaeological feature was encountered in the launch pit immediately to the rear of Lee Brockhurst pumping station. The feature may have been a ditch associated with a nearby field boundary. However, no datcable artefacts were recovered from its fill.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the findings of a watching brief carried out on the construction of one section of a new water main running between Preston Brockhurst and Lee Brockhurst, Shropshire. The watching brief was carried out on the section of the pipeline between the A49 trunk road and Lee Brockhurst pumping station by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in September 2002 on behalf of Severn Trent Ltd. The pipeline ran from a bore-hole (NGR SJ 5420/2475), east of Preston Brockhurst, to the rear of Lee Brockhurst pumping station (NGR SJ 5555/2755). The watching brief monitored the excavation of three reception/launch pits for direct-drilling on the pipeline route sited between the A49 and the rear of the Lee Brockhurst pumping station. This section is hereafter referred to as the site. The watching brief was carried out as it was considered likely that remains of the Roman road between Wroxeter (*Virconium*) and Chester (*Deva*) might be encountered during groundworks in this vicinity.

The monitoring was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by BUFAU (BUFAU 2002) and with guidelines contained within the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1999).

2.0 SITE LOCATION

The pipeline was approximately 3.5km long and located c.12.5km to the northeast of Shrewsbury (Figure 1). The pipeline ran from a borehole half a kilometre to the east of the village of Preston Brockhurst (NGR SJ 5420/2475) to a connection at Severn Trent Ltd's Lee Brockhurst Pumping Station (NGR SJ 5555/2755), crossing the River Roden immediately south of Lee Brockhurst village. The pipeline follows the line of

the A49 trunk road through open countryside for the majority of its course. The three reception/launch pits observed during the watching brief lay at the northern end of the pipeline route between the A49 and the rear of the Lee Brockhurst Pumping Station (Figure 2). Two of these pits, LP1 and LP2 were excavated in a field immediately to the east of the A49. The other pit, LP 3, was excavated on the grass verge of the A49.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

This part of northern Shropshire contains archaeological evidence of settlement and burial from later prehistory to the medieval period. Three Bronze Age barrows exist in the area around the pipeline, at Moreton Corbet, Preston Springs and near Lacon Hall (Figure 1). Several Bronze Age finds have been made in this area including a hoard found near Wixhill (Figure 1). An Iron Age hillfort, Bury Walls, lies two kilometres to the east of the pipeline's terminus at Lee Brockhurst pumping station (Figure 1).

A Roman road ran through this area. This road is known as Watling Street and was the main route between Wroxeter (*Viroconium*) and Chester (*Deva*). The Wroxeter-Chester Road is not, however, the same road as the other Roman Road known as Watling Street, which ran from London (Londinium) via St Alban's (*Verulamium*) to Wroxeter. The Wroxeter to Chester road acquired the same name at some date, but has been termed Watling Street (West) by Margary to avoid confusion (Margary 1973, 297 – 299). The course of the road has been traced for much of the distance between Wroxeter and Chester, its course around the area of the site is not, however, as certain (ibid, 297 – 299). The line of the Roman road can be traced from Chester to the village of Prees, six kilometres to the north of the site, after this point its course is less clear. It is possible that the course of the A49 between Linford Farm and the road to Wixhill reflects the line of the road, and this may be continued southwards toward the site by a lane running toward Weston Heath Coppice (Figure 1). The course of the Roman road is traceable from Wroxeter to Moreton Corbett, four kilometres to the south of the site (Figure 1). The Roman road is believed to have crossed the River Roden near Harcourt Mill (Figure 1), from this point the northward course of the road is less clear. It is argued by Margary (ibid, 299) that the road ran from this point to the line of the modern A49, joining the A49 at or near to the site (Figure 1). It has also been suggested that the course of the road may have lain to the east of this proposed line, as stones, thought to be Roman milestones, were found near the village of Moston in the early nineteenth century, and the remains of a Roman road were also found near the village during the draining of Moston Moor (ibid, 298). A section of the Roman road has been excavated at Roden 11km to the south of the site. Excavation showed that the road was constructed of gravel and was 0.30m thick and over 6.5m wide (ibid, 299).

The majority of the villages in the surrounding area were probably established by the start of the medieval period. This infers a quite intense level of settlement and farming activity in the Anglo-Saxon period. The placename of Daneswell which lies 2.5 kilometres to the east of the site, suggests that there may have been a Danish, non-Anglo-Saxon, element to the population of this area in this period.

There is also considerable evidence of medieval activity in the area around the pipeline. There are castles at Moreton Corbet and at Red Castle near Weston and several moated sites exist in the area. There was also a castle at the nearby town of Wem which was an important market town in the medieval period.

4.0 AIMS

The aim of the watching brief was to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the reception/launch pits, and to record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains affected by the works. All artefactual and ecofactual material recovered would be retained for conservation and future analysis. A specific aim of the watching brief was to locate remains of the Roman road between Wroxeter and Chester.

5.0 METHODOLOGY

The excavation of the three pits was carried out using a JCB 3CX mechanical excavator fitted with a 1m toothless ditching bucket. The three pits were approximately 2.2 to 2.4m long by 1.1m wide and were excavated to depths of 1.10m, 0.95m and 0.85m respectively. The three pits were excavated under archaeological supervision. A representative section of each of the pits was cleaned by hand and a full record of stratigraphic sequences, supplemented by drawings, was made. Deposits were recorded using *pro-forma* context and feature record cards; these records, combined with section drawings and photographs form the site archive and are currently stored at BUFAU.

6.0 RESULTS

6.1 Launch Pit 1

The first pit LP1 was excavated in a field east of the A49 trunk road and south of the pumping station (Figure 2). The pit was excavated to a depth of 1.10m below the modern ground surface. No archaeological deposits or features were observed. The earliest deposit encountered was a mottled orange and red sand (1002). This layer was encountered 0.52m below the modern ground surface and seemed to represent the underlying natural drift geology of the area. The sand layer was overlain by a 0.10m thick layer of mottled orange-brown silty sand (1001). This layer occurred at 0.40m below the modern ground surface and contained some small stones. It appeared to represent a plough-soil horizon at the interface between the natural sands and the topsoil. The topsoil (1000) was 0.40m thick and consisted of a mid-brown sandy silt containing some stones and infrequent flecks of charcoal. No finds were recovered from any of the strata encountered.

6.2 Launch Pit 2

The second pit LP2 was positioned immediately to the rear of the pumping station (Figure 2). The pit was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.95m below the modern ground surface. The earliest deposit encountered in this pit was a mottled yellow-orange sand (2005) 0.60m below the modern ground surface (Figure 3). This sand layer seemed to represent the underlying natural drift geology of the area and is, therefore, equivalent to the layer 1002 encountered in LP1. This sand layer was cut by a negative feature (F200), observed in the east and west facing sections of LP2 and was not clearly visible during excavation (Figure 3). The precise nature of this feature is unclear as its full profile was not revealed by LP2. This feature, a probable ditch, was filled with a mid-brown sandy silt (2004) which occurred 0.60m below the modern ground surface (Figure 3). This deposit contained stones toward the base of the feature and contained a band of charcoal near the top of the feature, which was only visible in the east facing section (Figure 3). The west facing section of LP2 shows that the feature may have had a shallow U-shaped profile and was originally at least 1.5m wide (Figure 3, Plate 2). In the east facing section of LP2, F200 had a very irregular base (Figure 3). This suggests that F200 may have been re-cut several times. Lenses of lighter coloured material, visible in the east facing section of LP2, may indicate the location of the edges of re-cuts (Plate 3). These lenses were too slight for this to be certain and may simply represent variations within the deposit or root action. Overlying both F200 and the natural sand layer (2005) was a layer of mottled yellow-grey sand intermixed with occasional silty patches (2003). This layer was not visible in the east facing section of LP2, contained no stones or charcoal and occurred at 0.5m - 0.55m below the modern ground surface (Figure 3). It was overlain by a similar layer of mottled yellow-grey sand (2002) which contained one large stone (Figure 3). The two sand layers (2002 and 2003) were very similar in nature and it is possible that they actually represent part of the same layer. The upper sandy layer (2002) was overlain by a 0.25m – 0.30m thick layer of yellow-brown sandy silt (2001) which contained some small stones and occurred 0.20m below modern ground surface (Figure 3). This layer seemed to be a subsoil layer similar to the layer 1001 encountered in LP1. This was overlain directly by the topsoil which was a 0.20m thick mid-brown sandy silt (2000).

6.3 Launch Pit 3

The third pit LP3 was excavated on the eastern verge of the A49 (Figure 2). The pit was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.85m below the modern ground surface (Plate 4). No archaeological deposits or features were observed within the pit. The earliest deposit encountered was a red-brown sandy clay (3003) mottled with yellow sandy material (Plate 4). This layer occurred 0.40m below the modern ground surface and contained lots of stones. It was partially overlain by a layer of yellow sandy material which contained pockets of silt (3002) which seems to represent a dump of material. The sand layer (3002) and the northern part of the red-brown clay layer (3003) were both overlain by an uneven layer of red-brown sandy clay (3001). This layer occurred 0.18m below the modern ground surface and contained frequent stones and a fragment of clay pipe. This was overlain by topsoil which was 0.18m thick and contained a large piece of Tarmac.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

The archaeological monitoring of the three pits dug between the A49 and the rear of Lee Brockhurst pumping station did not identify any deposits relating to the Roman road. The A49 trunk road is heavily embanked in this area and this may reflect a Roman origin. Evidence outlined above (see Section 3) suggests that the course of the Roman road may have run half a kilometre to the east of the A49, from Wixhill through Weston Heath Coppice and Moston to Harcourt Mill, and would, therefore, not have passed through the site.

The possible ditch located in LP2 did not seem to be related to the Roman road. The feature appeared to run approximately east-west, this would have been perpendicular to the north-south alignment of the Roman road. The nature of feature is unclear as it was only seen in section. The east-west alignment of the possible ditch is similar to the alignment of the current field boundaries in the area. The ditch may, therefore, be related to this boundary system. The uneven base of the feature, as seen in the east facing section of LP 2, suggests that several re-cuts of the linear feature may be represented, implying several phases of activity. The date that this possible ditch, or ditches, was dug or was in use is unclear due to the fact that no artefactual material was recovered from the feature.

8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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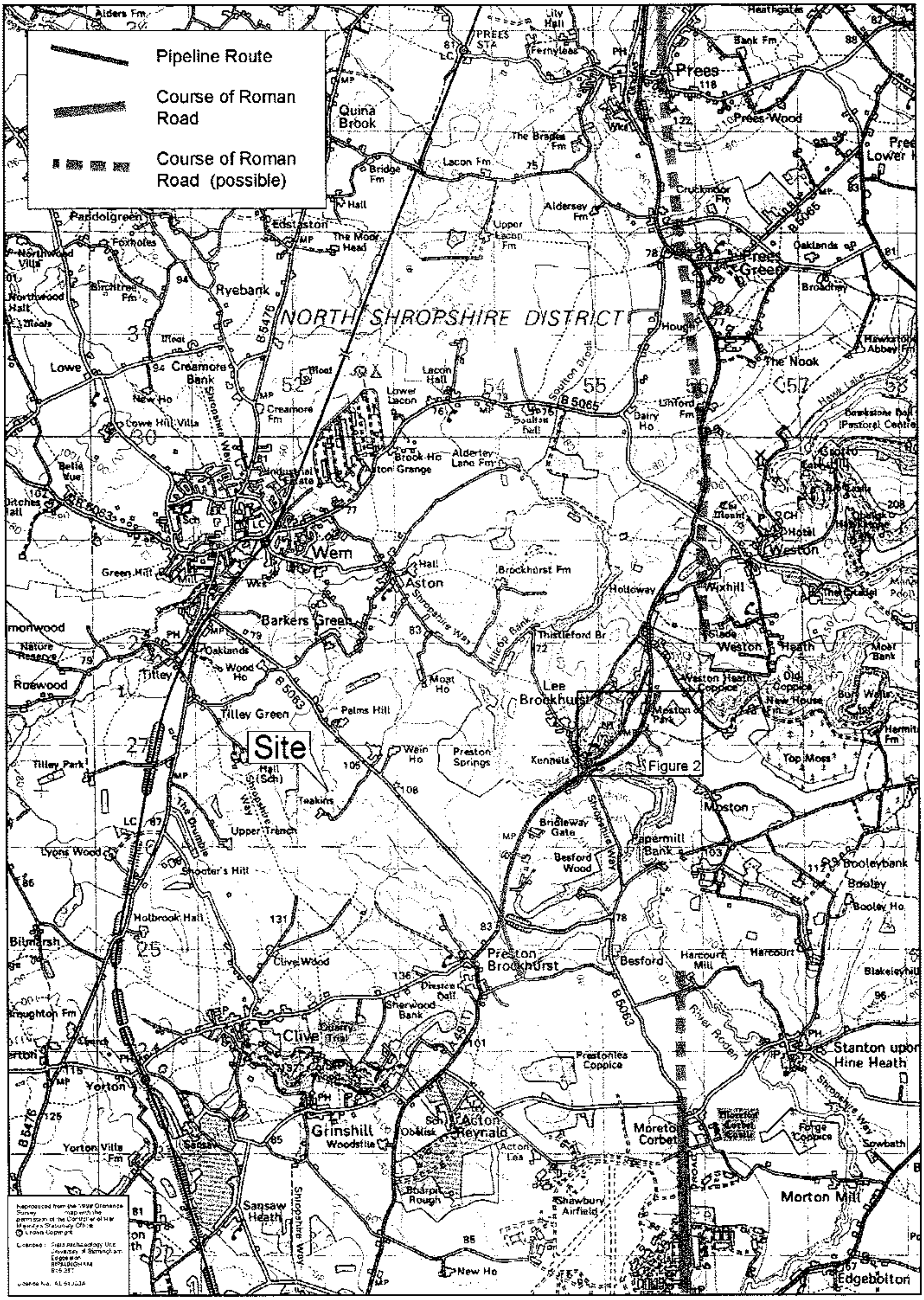
9.0 REFERENCES

BUFAU 2002 *Preston Brockhurst to Lee Brockhurst Transfer Main: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

IFA 1999 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* Institute of Field Archaeologists, London

Margary, I.D. 1973 *Roman Roads in Britain* London



Pipeline Route
Course of Roman Road
Course of Roman Road (possible)
NORTH SHROPSHIRE DISTRICT
Site
Figure 2
Prees
Prees Green
Wem
Aston
Barkers Green
Tilley
Tilley Green
Lee Brockhurst
Weston
Moston
Preston Brockhurst
Clive
Grinshill
Acton Reynald
Moreton Corbet
Stanton upon Hine Heath
Shawbury Airfield
Morton Mill
Edgebolton
Sansaw Heath
Yorton
Shropshire Way
B 5063
B 5065
B 5476
River Roden

Figure 1

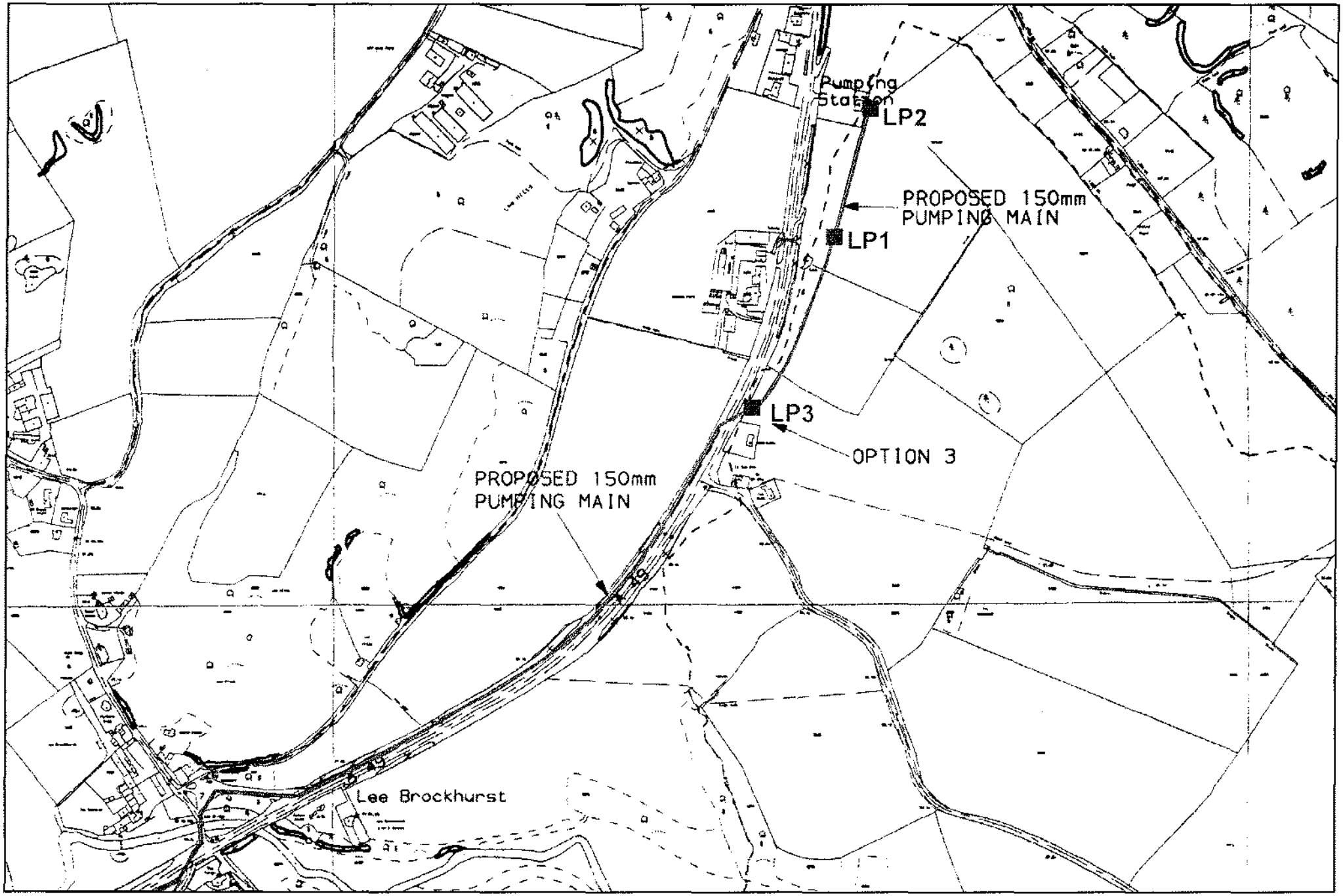
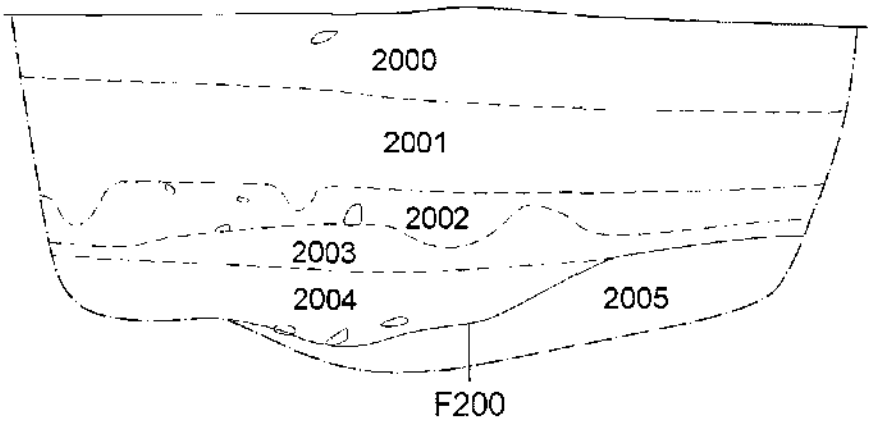

Pumping Station
LP2
PROPOSED 150mm PUMPING MAIN
LP1
LP3
OPTION 3
PROPOSED 150mm PUMPING MAIN
Lee Brockhurst

Figure 2

LP2

West facing section



East facing section

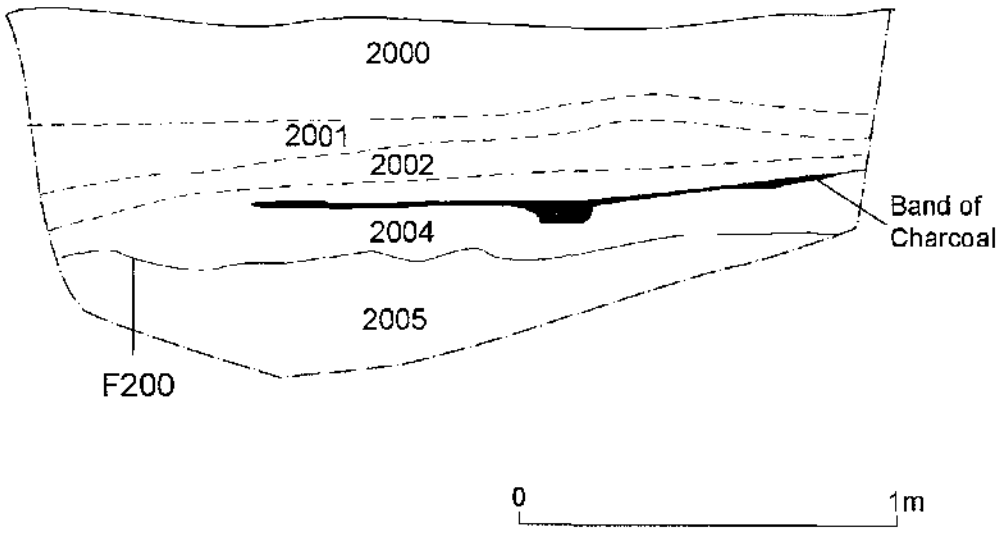


Figure 3

Plate 1

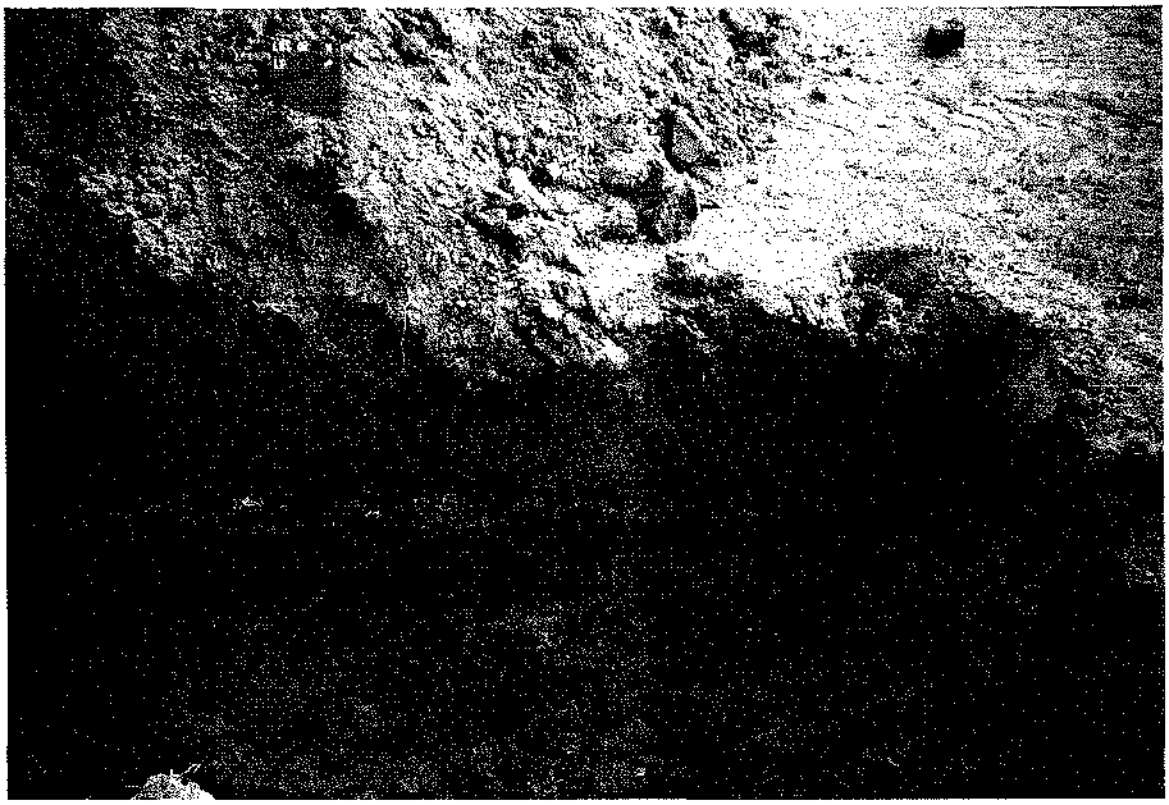


Plate 2

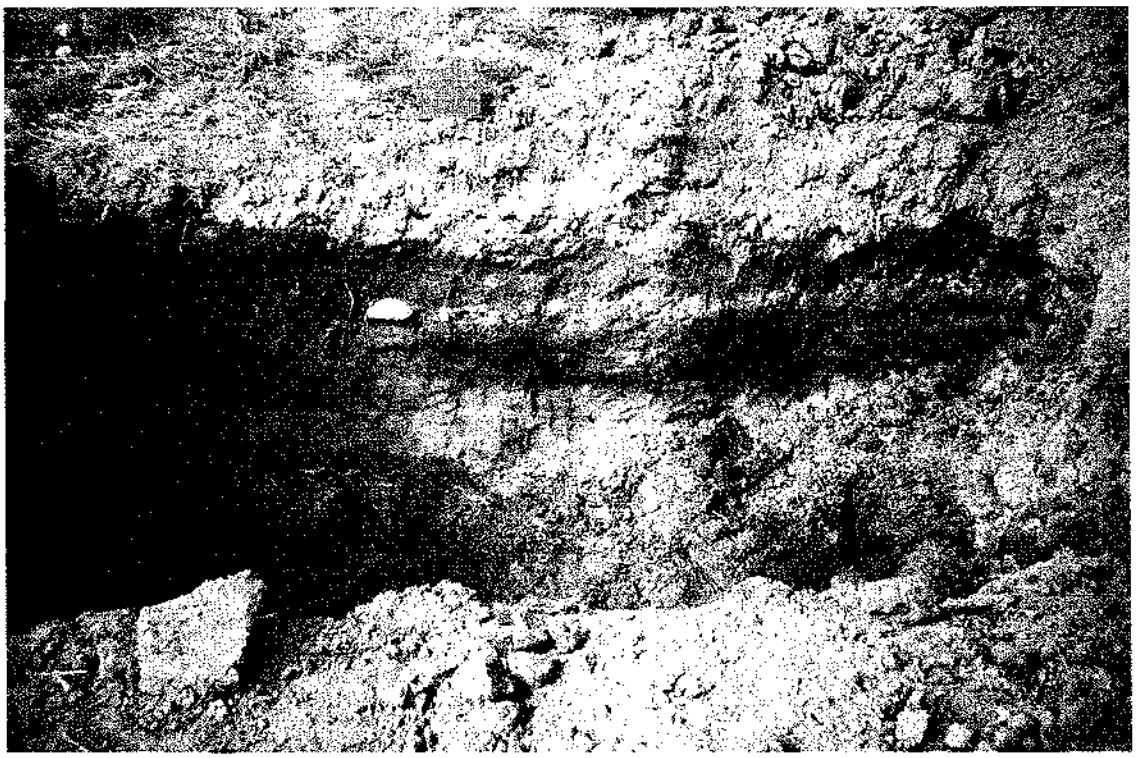


Plate 3

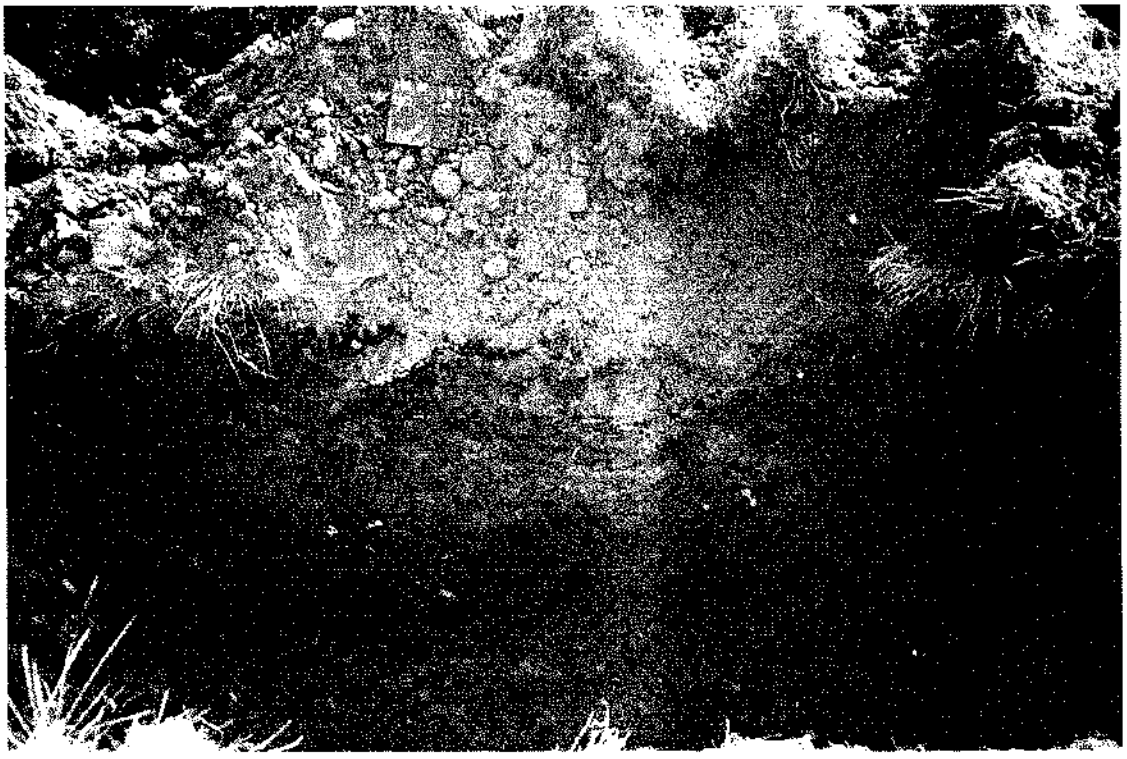


Plate 4