

**Barton Quarry, Barton-under-
Needwood, Staffordshire
An Archaeological
Watching Brief
2003**

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CONTENTS

	<i>Summary</i>	1
1.0	Introduction	1
2.0	Site location	1
3.0	Archaeological/Historical Background	1
4.0	Aims and methods	2
5.0	Results	2
5.1	Section description	3
6.0	Discussion	3
7.0	Acknowledgements	4
8.0	References	4

FIGURES

1	Site location map
2	Location of archaeology

PLATES

1	Waterlogged organic deposits
2	Alignment of piles
3	Excavation of pile
4	Excavated pile

Barton Quarry, Barton-under-Needwood, Staffordshire: An Archaeological Watching Brief 2003

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Birmingham Archaeology in September/October 2003 on the site of Barton Quarry National Grid reference SK 200155. The work was commissioned by Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd. on behalf of Hanson Aggregates in order that archaeological observation be provided during the current phase of topsoil stripping. The topsoil strip revealed only two discrete features of archaeological significance. Firstly, the remains of a linear alignment of eight wooden stakes or piles in total some 5.00m in length, which was oriented toward a large riverine deposit, situated at the eastern boundary of the stripping operation. Secondly, a surface feature of about 1.00m in diameter containing burnt bone and charcoal.

1.0 Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology in September/October 2003, during topsoil stripping in advance of gravel extraction at Barton Quarry, Barton-Under-Needwood, Staffordshire. The area of the watching brief was located at National Grid reference SK 200155 at which point the River Trent runs close by to the east (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd. on behalf of Hanson Aggregates in order to provide archaeological observation and recording of any features found during topsoil stripping.

The watching brief was carried out in accordance best practice and the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (1999).

2.0 Site location (Fig. 1)

The site lies to the west of the River Trent on gravels and glacial sands forming a flat terrace. It is located approximately 1km to the north of the confluence with the River Tame approximately 7km southwest of Burton-upon-Trent, with the nearest settlement at Alrewas, 3km to the west. The site is on flat ground and was formerly used as agricultural land. Through the centre of the area where topsoil stripping occurred lies the course of a remnant channel which flowed from the northwest towards the Trent (Fig. 2).

3.0 Archaeological background

The site is situated within the rich archaeological landscape within the river valleys of southeast Staffordshire. Much of the known archaeological remains encountered were recorded on the gravel terracing and alluvial deposits of the Rivers Trent, Tame and

Mease. Much of the information on past settlement and land use in the area has been obtained from aerial photographs although important excavations have been undertaken, for which see references in Bain (2002).

Evidence for human settlement activity in the area ranges from the Lower Palaeolithic through to the Roman-British period, with some significant sites indicating a level of continuous occupation beginning in the Neolithic period.

4.0 Aims and methods

The aim of the watching brief was to provide archaeological observation and recording of any features found during the stripping of topsoil, prior to the extraction of gravel from the area. In the event that archaeological remains might be observed during the course of the watching brief these would be identified and recorded by means of pre-printed pro-forma sheets for contexts and features. These would be supplemented by plans (at 1:20 and 1:100), sections (at 1:10 and 1:20), and monochrome and colour print photography, which, together with any recovered artefacts and environmental evidence, would form the site archive. Where no archaeological deposits were identified a record of the stratigraphy was made. The archive is currently stored at the offices of Birmingham Archaeology. In the event of a significant discovery, an appropriate course of action would be decided upon in consultation with the relevant authorities.

The topsoil was stripped by a 360° tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothed bucket and the spoil transported from the site by articulated dump trucks. In addition, a bulldozer bladed the surface. The stripping of soil was monitored by an appropriately qualified archaeologist over the course of the whole phase of stripping on a number of visits agreed by all parties prior to the start of the operation.

5.0 Results

The topsoil strip and removal of the underlying B-horizon by the means described above exposed the underlying sand and gravel beds. For the most part the maximum depth attained at this stage was between 0.30m - 0.50m below the modern surface. This depth increased as the operation moved eastwards, closer to the River Trent, and at the boundary of the operation the depth of overburden reached 2.00m.

During the period of the watching brief the visible surface, subsequent to stripping was very compacted and generally quite homogenous in appearance. Since the method of stripping involved the use both of an excavator and a bulldozer as well as three dumpers this was to be expected. It was observed, however, that a former streambed in the gravels oriented northwest – southeast bisected the area of the operation. This ran towards the River Trent. Also, in the deepest excavated area, closest to the River Trent where the section measures 2.00m in depth, there was a significant deposit of waterlogged organic material (Plate 1). This appears to derive from a former bed of the River Trent, perhaps a

meander, or from the confluence of the palaeo-channel discussed above. The modern waterway closest to this point has formed a series of ponds. These may have developed after the meander was isolated and subsequently, naturally infilled.

A linear arrangement of eight wooden piles, in total 5.00m in length, was observed, oriented from the southwest to the northeast, towards the eastern section. This is also the easternmost boundary of the current topsoil stripping operation. The arrangement of piles leads directly towards the edge of the waterlogged organic deposit which suggests perhaps a former jetty located on the bank of the river (Plate 2). An example of one of these piles was excavated and recorded by photograph (Plates 3 & 4). It was set into the gravels to a depth of 1.30m and was heavily waterlogged. At this point the surface of the gravels was some 1.60m below the modern surface. Each pile measured 0.10m square.

At a distance of 350m west of the eastern boundary and approximately 100.0m north of the southern boundary an area of dark grey silty clay about 1.00m in diameter was observed. The surface of this feature showed evidence, albeit minimal, of charcoal flecking and burnt bone fragments. These fragmentary artefacts appeared only at the surface, pressed into the deposit and are likely to derive perhaps from an open hearth. A photographic record was made.

The topsoil is a dark brown sandy silt matrix with small gravel content. Below it a number of amorphous, naturally occurring features were observed. These most likely derive from animal activity or vegetation.

The watching brief revealed little evidence of significant archaeologically derived features cutting the sand and gravel layers, with two exceptions which are discussed above. In addition to those, however, a series of field drain fragments were observed and photographed, and the two sherds of post-medieval ceramic were also noted.

5.1 Section description. Edge of operation closest to the River Trent

0.00m - 0.70m topsoil. Grassy, blocky, slightly sandy silt. Dark brown.

0.70m - 1.50m slightly sandy silty clay. No pebbles or gravel. Red brown.

1.50m - 1.70m grey brown clay with iron mottling.

1.70m - 2.00m blue black organic silty clay. Significant amount of reed fragments, well preserved.

This profile overlies grey-blue sandy gravel beds.

6.0 Discussion

The removal of topsoil over the majority of the area was expedited without the exposure of any artefacts of archaeological significance, with the exception of a 5.00m long alignment of wooden piles and a 1.00m diameter area of grey silty clay with fragmentary burnt bone and charcoal flecking. Despite the fact that little of archaeological significance was observed, it is without doubt that the wider area is a very significant

landscape and the potential for future recovery of archaeological information remains high.

7.0 Acknowledgements

Dr Andy Richmond commissioned and monitored the project on behalf of Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd. Thanks are due also to Roy Bishop, Quarry Manager for Hanson Aggregates, for his assistance and co-operation. Mark Hewson and John Halsted carried out the watching brief. Mark Hewson wrote this report. Gary Coates managed the project and Alex Jones edited the report. John Halsted prepared the illustrations and plates.

8.0 References

Bain, K 2002 Scheduled Ancient Monument ST No. 221, Newbold Quarry,
Barton-under-Needwood, Staffordshire: An Archaeological Watching Brief.
Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999 *Standard Guidance for Archaeological
Watching Briefs.*

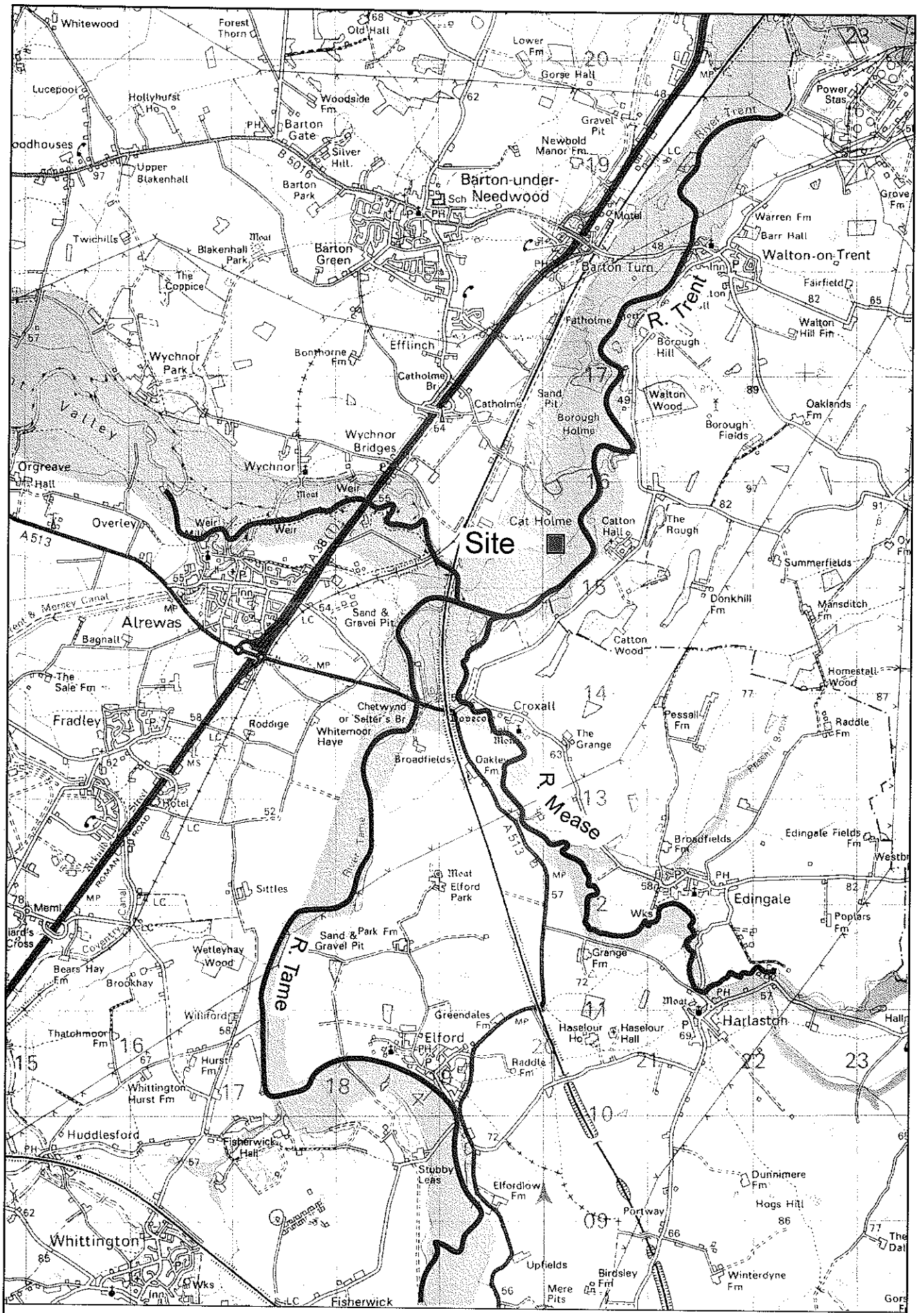


Fig.1

 Alluvium

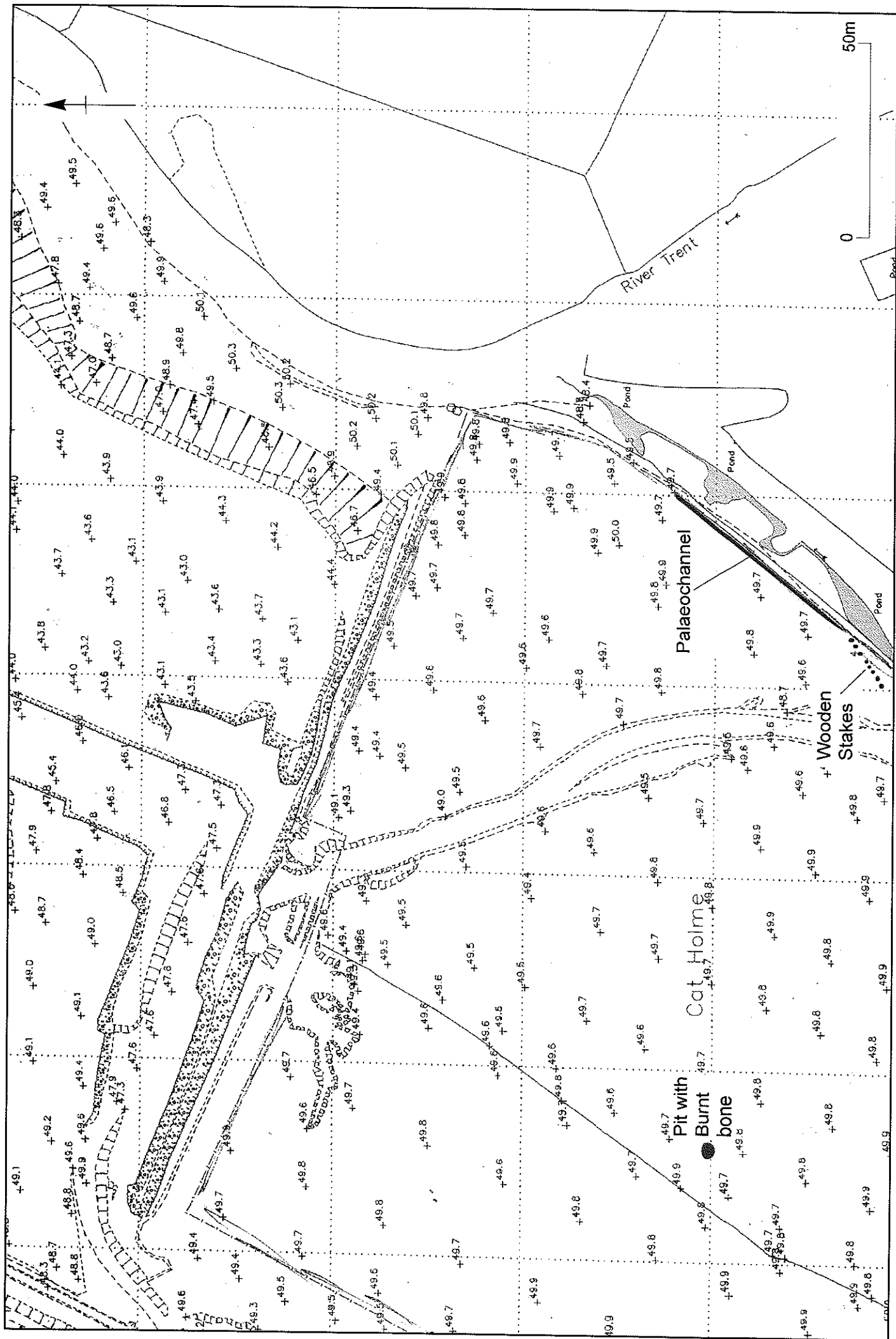


Fig.2



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3

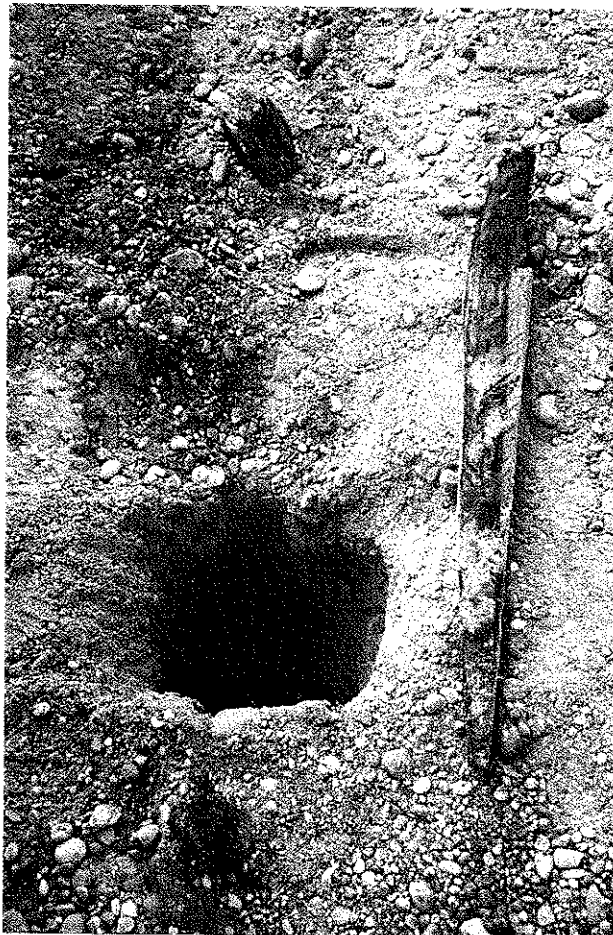


Plate 4