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**Land off Barkby Road,
Syston, Leicestershire:
an archaeological evaluation
2003**



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by
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Client: John Samuels Archaeological Consultants
on behalf of
William Davis Ltd and Hallam Land Management Ltd

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Land off Barkby Road, Syston, Leicestershire: an archaeological evaluation 2003

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out of land off Barkby Road, Syston, Leicestershire (NGR SK 6340/1108), in September 2003. The work was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology on behalf of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (JSAC), acting for William Davis Ltd and Hallam Land Management Ltd. The evaluation was required by the Planning Archaeologist, Leicestershire County Council, in response to a planning application for a proposed residential development and an associated balancing pond (Planning Application No. T/01/2462/2).

A previous desk-based assessment of the site by JSAC (JSAC 745/00/02) found no evidence for possible archaeological features on the site itself. However a number of cropmarks which may indicate the presence of a prehistoric or Roman enclosure and a trackway were found to exist in the vicinity of the site. A geophysical survey of the site was carried out as part of the assessment and although a number of geophysical anomalies were detected only one anomaly was likely to be of possible archaeological origin.

A total of thirteen trial trenches were excavated during the evaluation, five of which were designed to investigate geophysical anomalies. No evidence of archaeological features or deposits was found. The only finds were two sherds of late post-medieval pottery which were recovered from the topsoil. The evidence from the evaluation suggests that the cropmark features in the vicinity of the site did not extend into the site itself. The site appears to have been located away from the historic core of the medieval village of Syston, in an area which may have been given over to agriculture. A shallow layer of subsoil recorded in most of the trenches may be interpreted as the remains of an earlier ploughsoil. Two trenches at the southernmost extent of the site contained evidence of alluvial deposition in natural hollows and palaeo-channels, which are likely to be associated with the presence of a brook nearby.

1.0 Introduction

The following report describes the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology of land off Barkby Road, Syston, Leicestershire (hereafter referred to as the site, Fig. 1) in September 2003. The work was carried out for John Samuels Archaeological Consultants, acting on behalf of William Davis Ltd and Hallam Land Management Ltd who have applied for planning permission for a proposed residential development of the site (Planning Application No. T/01/2462/2). The site had previously been the subject of a desk-based assessment (JSAC 745/00/02) which incorporated the results of a geophysical survey carried out by GSB Prospection (GSB 2001/29). Although a number of geophysical anomalies were detected, these could be of

natural or modern origin, with only one anomaly likely to be of possible archaeological origin. The evaluation was recommended by the Planning Archaeologist, Leicestershire County Council to further assess the archaeological potential of the site.

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a specification prepared by John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (JSAC 745/03/02) and approved by the Planning Archaeologist, Leicestershire County Council. The guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994, revised 2001) were followed.

2.0 Site location and description

The site, which comprises approximately 14ha of land, lies to the east of the village of Syston, Leicestershire (NGR SK 6340/1108, Figs. 1 and 2). The site is bisected by the Barkby Road and mainly consists of cultivated, arable land to the north of the road and rough pasture to the south of the road. The soils are red coarse and fine loam over clayey soils (JSAC 745/03/02).

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

A full assessment of the historical and archaeological background to the site can be found in the desk-based assessment (JSAC 745/00/02) and is only summarised here.

A number of cropmarks, which may indicate the presence of a prehistoric or Roman enclosure and a trackway, lie in the vicinity of the site. Syston probably originated in the Saxon period, when it was a settlement of some size and is first mentioned in Domesday Book where it is described as a substantial manorial holding. The medieval core of the village is likely to have been around the church which is situated northwest of the Leicester to Melton road. The site is located in the open fields of Syston which were enclosed by Parliamentary act in 1778. Vestigial medieval and post-medieval ridge and furrow are widespread in the parish. By the end of the 19th century the village population had increased substantially and boot manufacture and gypsum quarrying were the main sources of local employment.

The desk-based assessment also incorporated the results of a geophysical survey of the site, undertaken by GSB Propection (Fig. 3). Although a number of geophysical anomalies were detected, with one possible exception, these were interpreted as likely to be of non-archaeological origin.

4.0 Aims

The aims of the evaluation were:

- to assess the presence/absence and the nature, date, density, extent, function and state of preservation of archaeological remains on site.
- to assess the site's archaeological potential to contribute to our understanding of the development of land use and human habitation in the region.
- to formulate a strategy, in liaison with the planning archaeologist, to determine the best method to mitigate the impact of the proposed development upon any archaeological remains exposed.

5.0 Method

The evaluation involved the excavation of 13 trenches (Fig. 3). Each trench was approximately 1.6m wide. Trenches 2–5, 7, 8, 10, 12 and 13 were 50m long, whilst Trenches 1 and 6 were 30m long. Trench 9, which was 'L'-shaped, was 40m long and Trench 11 was 10m long. Trenches 1, 4, 6, 9 and 11 were targeted on geophysical anomalies and the remainder were randomly placed in order to test blank areas. The locations of the trenches to be excavated were surveyed in using a total station.

The trenches were excavated using a 360 degree mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision. Excavation was to the top of the natural geology. Features or deposits of possible archaeological origin were cleaned by hand and then manually excavated. Their location was recorded in plan, even where the possible features and deposits proved to be of natural origin.

All recording was using *pro forma* context and feature cards. Monochrome and colour print and colour slide photography was supplemented by section drawings at scales 1:10 and 1:20 and plans at scales 1:50 and 1:20. The evaluation was allocated a Leicestershire Museums accession number (X.A.191.2003) and the site code was BRS 03. The site archive is currently stored at Birmingham Archaeology and will be deposited with an appropriate repository, subject to consent from the landowner, within a reasonable period following completion of the project.

6.0 Results (Fig. 3)

6.1 Area 1: Trenches 1-2

In both trenches the natural geology (1002 and 2002) lay at a depth of approximately 0.3m below the present ground level. It consisted of grey/brown sand with gravel and patches of red clay. Sealing the natural geology was a layer, 0.10m deep, of mottled orange/grey subsoil (1001 and 2001), which was, in turn, overlain by a layer of loose mid to dark brown sandy silt topsoil (1000 and 2000), between 0.3m and 0.4m deep.

No archaeological features or deposits were observed in either trench.

6.2 Areas 2 and 3: Trenches 3-8

In these trenches the natural subsoil (3002, 4002, 5002, 6002, 7002 and 8002) lay at depths of between 0.3 and 0.4m below the present ground level. The natural geology consisted of mixed bands of grey, brown/orange sand and gravel and patches of red clay. The natural geology was sealed by a layer of mottled orange/grey subsoil (3001, 4001, 5001, 6001, 7001 and 8001), between 0.10m and 0.15m in deep. The subsoil was overlain by loose mid to dark brown sandy silt topsoil (3000, 4000, 5000, 6000, 7000 and 8000) which was between 0.3m and 0.45m deep.

No archaeological features or deposits were observed in these trenches.

6.3 Area 4: Trenches 9-13

In Trenches 9-11 the natural geology (9002, 10002 and 11002) lay at a depth of approximately 0.3m below the present ground level. It consisted of mixed bands of grey, brown/orange sand and gravel and patches of red clay. This was sealed by a mottled orange/grey subsoil (9001, 10001 and 11001), up to 0.10m deep. This was, in turn, overlain by a loose mid to dark brown sandy silt topsoil (9000, 10000 and 11000), 0.3m deep.

Trenches 12 and 13 (Fig. 4) differed, in their stratigraphy, from all the aforementioned trenches. In both trenches the natural sand and gravel geology (12002 and 13002) lay at a depth of 0.3m below the present ground level, in places. Overlying the natural subsoil in both trenches, in places, were deposits of greenish brown silty clay (12001 and 13001). This varied in depth, but was at least 1.2m deep in a machine excavated sondage in Trench 12. Contexts 12001 and 13001 appeared to fill possible linear hollows, which were generally orientated northwest to southeast. Contexts 12001, 13001 and the natural geology were sealed by mid to dark brown topsoil (12000 and 13000) which was approximately 0.3m to 0.4m deep.

No archaeological features or deposits were encountered in any of the aforementioned trenches.

7.0 Finds

The only finds recovered were two sherds of late post-medieval pottery from the topsoil (8000), Trench 8.

8.0 Discussion

The deposits of silty clay (12001 and 13001), that were recorded in Trenches 12 and 13, are most likely to have been the result of alluvial deposition in natural hollows and channels. Pertinent to this, may be the fact that Barkby Brook runs along the western edge of the field in which Trenches 12 and 13 are located. In addition, visible on the surface of the field are a number of linear hollows, which may indicate the presence of palaeo-channels associated with the brook. The brook may also have formerly run in a much larger channel. If this area of the site was characterised in the past by the presence of streams and by flooding from a larger channel, then it could have been an unfavourable location for settlement and/or cultivation. In this regard it may be significant that the shallow layer of subsoil encountered in all the other trenches, and which may be interpreted as an earlier ploughsoil, was absent in Trenches 12 and 13.

The absence of any archaeological features which corresponded with the geophysical anomalies, which Trenches 1, 4, 6, 9 and 11 were designed to investigate, may be due to the anomalies arising from natural variations within the topsoil or the natural subsoil. A north-south aligned linear geophysical anomaly, which Trenches 9 and 11 were designed to intersect, and which corresponded with a slight linear hollow visible on the surface of the field. No evidence of this linear hollow was visible within the trench. This linear hollow was a surface feature, which could possibly mark the location of a former hedgeline.

The lack of archaeological features and deposits within the site may be explained by its location away from the historic core of the medieval village of Syston, in an area, that may have been given over to agriculture. Although no evidence of ploughing in the form of furrows cutting the natural geology were present, the shallow layer of subsoil noted in all of the trenches, apart from Trenches 12 and 13, may have been the vestigial remains of earlier ploughing activity. The evidence from the evaluation suggests that the cropmark features in the vicinity of the site did not extend into the site itself. A marked lack of finds from the trenches, or of surface artifact scatters, may again be due to the site's peripheral status in relation to the historic settlement at Syston. The evaluation has served to confirm that the site has little archaeological potential.

9.0 Acknowledgements

The evaluation was supervised by Helen Martin with the assistance of Ellie Ramsay, Chris Hewitson and Bob Bracken. The surveying was carried out by Richard Cuttler and Bob Bracken. This report was written by Helen Martin and edited by Laurence Jones who also managed the project on behalf of Birmingham Archaeology. Thanks are due to Simon Mortimer who monitored the site on behalf of John Samuels Archaeological Consultants and to Richard Knox who monitored the site on behalf of Leicestershire County Council.

10.0 References

GSB Prospection 2001 *Barkby Road, Syston, Leicestershire*. GSB Prospection Report 2001/ 29

JSAC 2001 *An Archaeological Assessment of Land off Barkby Road, Syston, Leicestershire*. JSAC 745/00/02

JSAC 2003 *A Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation of land off Barkby Road, Syston, Leicestershire*. JSAC 745/03/02



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Fig.1

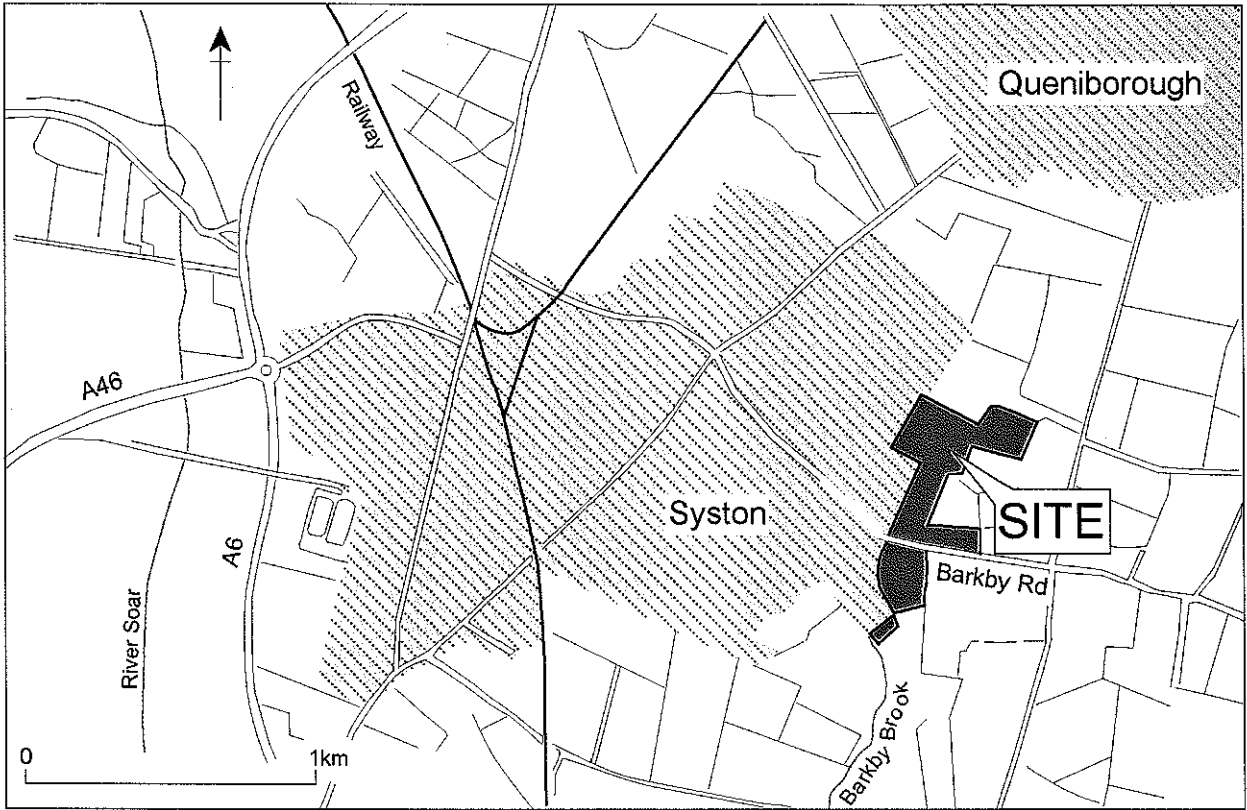


Fig.2

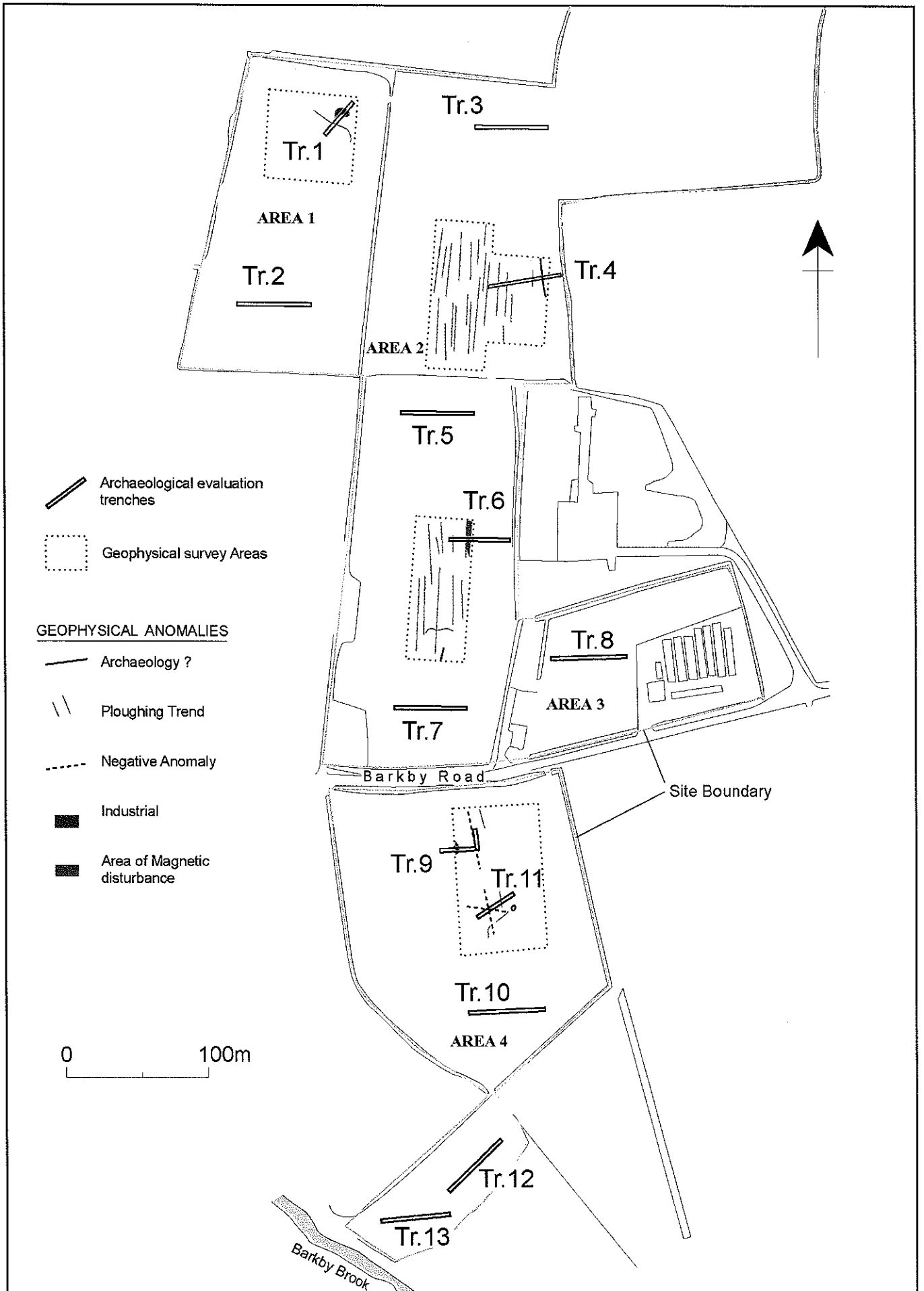


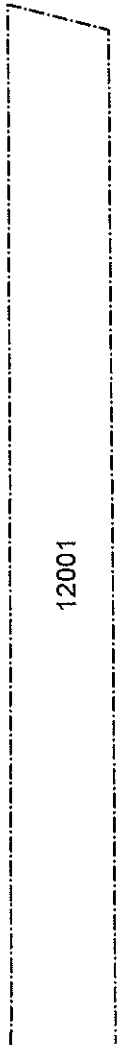
Fig.3

Tr.12

Plan

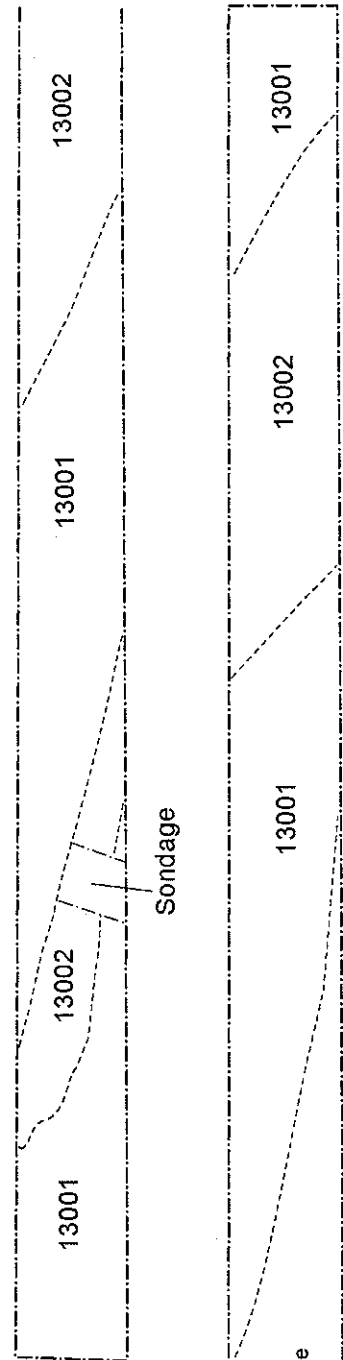


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Tr.13

Plan



continued from above

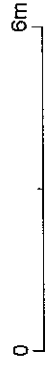


Fig.4