

Comiston Roman Quest, Edinburgh: Archaeological Evaluation Report

Oasis ID: aocarcha1-161835

AOC Project 60068

October 2013



ARCHAEOLOGY

HERITAGE

CONSERVATION

Comiston Roman Quest, Edinburgh Archaeological Evaluation Report

On Behalf of:	Archaeology Scotland
National Grid Reference (NGR):	Fairmilehead Park: NT 24225 68835 Fairmilehead Knoll: NT 24755 68932
Oasis ID no:	aocarcha1-161835
AOC Project No:	60068
Planning Application No:	N/A
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Date of Fieldwork:	31 st August to 1 st September 2013
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This document has been prepared in accordance with AOC standard operating procedures.

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Summary

AOC Archaeology Group was commissioned by Archaeology Scotland to provide professional support to a community led archaeological project at the site of the proposed Roman fort at Fairmilehead. The work was undertaken with local community groups over a weekend during August 2013 and comprised a test pit survey with help from members of the public at various locations around the Fairmilehead area of Edinburgh. The test pits were located in two public parks, Fairmilehead Park and Fairmilehead Knoll, and volunteers' private gardens. The project aimed to look for evidence of an enclosure first depicted on Armstrong's 'Map of the Three Lothians' and subsequently recorded as a supposed Roman fort on the Ordnance Survey 1855 and 1885 mapping.

The test pitting survey revealed that the area had been largely truncated during the construction of the housing and the development of the area during the first half of the 20th century. A solitary flint flake attested to the prehistoric usage of the area, however no finds or features of Roman origin were revealed. A possible field ditch was reported at test pit 17 with large stones reported at test pit 11. No significant artefacts were encountered during the limited works.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 AOC Archaeology Group was commissioned by Archaeology Scotland to provide professional support to a community led archaeological project at the site of the proposed Roman fort at Fairmilehead. The work was undertaken with local community groups over a weekend during August 2013 and comprised a test pit survey with help from members of the public at various locations around the Fairmilehead area of Edinburgh. The test pits were located in two public parks, Fairmilehead Park and Fairmilehead Knoll, and volunteers' private gardens. The project aimed to look for evidence of an enclosure first depicted on Armstrong's 1773 'Map of the Three Lothians' and subsequently recorded as a supposed Roman fort on the Ordnance Survey mapping of the area.

1.2 Site location

- 1.2.1 The area investigated covered approximately 2 km north to south and 3 km east to west and was located in the Fairmilehead area of Edinburgh. Two public spaces, Fairmilehead Park and Fairmilehead Knoll were targeted for investigation with the rest of the test pits being excavated in volunteers' private gardens. The investigation area was centred on National Grid Reference NT 24560 68602 (Figure 1).
- 1.2.2 The investigation area sloped in general from south to north ranged in height from approximately 185 m OD in the north to 150 m OD in the south.

2 OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The objectives of the archaeological works were to assess the evidence of the supposed Roman fort as depicted on the antiquarian and Ordnance Survey mapping of the area and to assess the character, extent, condition, quality, date and significance of any buried archaeological remains within the investigation area through test pit trenching.

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The test pitting survey comprised the hand excavation of twenty 1 m² trenches. Six of these trenches were located in the public areas of Fairmilehead Park and Fairmilehead Knoll with the remainder being located in the various volunteers private gardens. Excavation was conducted in shallow spits until the first significant archaeological horizon or natural drift geology was reached. The excavated material was sieved to maximise artefact recovery. The test pits located in public areas were excavated under the supervision of professional archaeologists who were also hand to advise in the excavation of the test pits located in private gardens.
- 3.2 Alongside the excavation of the test pits a metal detector survey was carried out in the public areas.
- 3.3 The Edinburgh Archaeological Field Society completed a geophysical survey of three public areas.

4 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The landscape of the investigation area is rich in recorded prehistoric and Roman remains, discovered during antiquarian works. A possible prehistoric or Roman enclosure (NMRS Ref: NT26NW 15) has long been known of in the area. This enclosure is first recorded on Armstrong's 1773 'Map of the Three Lothians' (Fig 2) where it is depicted as a circular enclosure bisected by the road and is labelled as Oliver Cromwell's camp. Whyte (1792) describes it as "a rampart of a circular or rather oval form, intersected by the turnpike road. It is entire on the Morton (east) side, but not so on the others". The Old Statistical Account of 1791-9 also notes "the vestiges of a very large and ancient encampment". At the time of the 1st and 2nd editions of the Ordnance Survey mapping in 1855 and 1895 (Fig 3 & 4) the site of a supposed Roman camp is noted but no earthworks are depicted. The Ordnance Survey Name Book of 1852 suggests that the site was recorded as Roman due to its proximity to the possible Roman road of Buckstone Terrace Alternative(s) Fairmilehead; Comiston Road.



Fig 2: Extract from Armstrong 1773



Fig 3: Extract from Ordnance Survey 1855



Fig 4: Extract from Ordnance Survey 1885

- 4.2 There are two known Scheduled Monuments with close proximity to the investigation area: the Caiy Stone (NMRS Ref: NT26NW26; SM 1155) and the Galachlaw Cairn (NMRS Ref: 26NW15; SM 3988) a prehistoric burial cairn. Further prehistoric burials were recorded during construction work at Oxgangs Road in the 18th and 19th century (NMRS Ref: NT26NW 24). The burials were recorded as being interred within stone cists, some with urns, both characteristics of prehistoric burials. In addition, isolated prehistoric burials have been identified in the surrounding area (NMRS Ref: NT26NW 25).
- 4.3 The development of the Fairmilehead area from farmland into residential housing in the second half of the 20th century is shown on the 1934 and 1947 Ordnance Survey mapping (Fig 5 & 6). In 1934 housing is strung out along the existing roads but by 1947 large scale housing developments with new streets being are starting or planned for the farmland.



Fig 5: Extract from Ordnance Survey 1934



Fig 6: Extract from Ordnance Survey 1947

5 RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The archaeological test pit survey was undertaken between the 31st August and 1st September 2013. Overall weather conditions were generally dry and archaeological visibility was good. A total of 20 test pits were excavated; 7 located in public areas of Fairmilehead Park and Fairmilehead Knoll and a further 13 excavated in volunteer's private gardens.

5.2 Fairmilehead Park and Fairmilehead Knoll

5.2.1 The excavation of trenches 1 - 3 in Fairmilehead Park exposed a thin topsoil of light brown humic sandy silt with occasional stone between 0.2 m and 0.3 m thick (Plate 1). This lay directly upon the bedrock surface. The finds recovered from the test pits and metal detector survey in this area were mostly of 19th to 20th century pottery and glass. The exception to this was a flint flake from test pit 3 hinting at a prehistoric presence in the area, however no other evidence of prehistoric activity was revealed. No archaeological features were identified in any of the trenches.

5.2.2 Trenches 4 - 7 in Fairmilehead Knoll again exposed a thin topsoil of light brown humic sandy silt with occasional stone between 0.15 m and 0.28 m thick. This lay directly upon the bedrock surface. The finds recovered from the test pits and the metal detector survey were again mainly of 19th and 20th century pottery and glass. The solitary find of interest from these excavations was that of a lead musket or pistol ball found during the metal detector survey of the Knoll.

5.2.3 The thin topsoil lying directly upon the bedrock in both of these areas is suggestive of these areas having been stripped at some point in the recent past, most likely during the construction of the surrounding housing in the mid 20th century.



Plate 1: Test pit 1 post-excavation

5.3 Test Pits in Volunteer's Gardens

- 5.3.1 The test pits excavated by volunteers in their gardens produced evidence of the 19th and 20th century occupation and development of the Fairmilehead with large amounts of modern pottery and glass being recovered.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The test pit survey of the Fairmilehead area revealed evidence of the 19th and 20th century development of the area with large amounts of modern pottery and glass being recovered from the trenches. No trace was identified for either Roman artefacts or in situ structural evidence for the fort, by the survey, geophysical survey or metal detecting survey. However, the test pit survey demonstrated that the area had been severely truncated during the housing estate construction in the mid to late 20th century with few undisturbed deposits being recorded in the test pits. If a fort or camp had existed in this area, the works suggest that much of it could have been removed by subsequent development. The possible feature in test pit 11 at 8 Fairmile Avenue may warrant future investigation given its proximity to the old Roman Road and the limited area excavated.
- 6.2 However, evidence of prehistoric activity was identified in the form of a solitary flint flake recovered from Fairmilehead Park. This flake, although not associated with a parent feature, does demonstrate prehistoric activity in the area.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 AOC Archaeology Group and Archaeology Scotland would like to thank all of the volunteers who made such a memorable weekend possible. This includes both residents who allowed access to their gardens and those who excavated the test pits. Thanks also go to John Lawson the City of Edinburgh Council Archaeologist, the Edinburgh Archaeological and Field Society, Fairmilehead Parish Church, The Scottish Detector Club, speakers Mr George Haggarty, Dr Rebecca Jones and The Antonine Guard. Finally thanks go to our funder, the Heritage Lottery Fund and to all those who contributed to our Crowdfunding initiative and to our sponsor, Barefoot Wines.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

8.1 Bibliographical references

Whyte, T (1792) 'An account of the parish of Liberton in Mid-Lothian, or County of Edinburgh', *Archaeologia Scotica*, vol.1, p292-388

Ordnance Survey (Name Book) *Object Name Books of the Ordnance Survey* (6 inch and 1/2500 scale)

OSA (1791-9) The statistical account of Scotland, drawn up from the communications of the ministers of the different parishes, in Sinclair, J Vol.19, p591

8.2 Cartographic references

1773 Armstrong, M. Map of the Three Lothians

1855 Ordnance Survey Edinburghshire Sheet 6

1885 Ordnance Survey Edinburghshire Sheet 6

1934 Ordnance Survey Edinburghshire Sheet VII.NE

1947 Ordnance Survey Edinburghshire Sheet VII.NE

APPENDIX 1: Photographic register

Digital Photographic Register

Frame	Description	From
1	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 1	N
2	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 2	N
3	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 3	S
4	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 4	N
5	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 5	W
6	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 6	N
7	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 7	S
8	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 8	N
9	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 9	S
10	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 10	N
11	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 11	S
12	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 12	N
13	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 13	E
14	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 14	S
15	Post-excavation shot of Test pit 16	W

APPENDIX 2: Trench Descriptions

Trench 1

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Top-soil Depth</i>	N/A
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.15 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Not reached
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, Glass, Slag

Trench 2

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Top-soil Depth</i>	0.20 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.20 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Bedrock
<i>Finds</i>	None

Trench 3

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Top-soil Depth</i>	0.30 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.30 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Bedrock
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, Glass, Lithic

Trench 4

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Top-soil Depth</i>	0.15 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.15 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Bedrock
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, clay pipe, glass, CBM, Iron

Trench 5

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	0.22 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.22 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Bedrock
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, CBM, Iron

Trench 6

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	0.25 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.25 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Bedrock
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, Glass, Iron, CBM, Plastic

Trench 7

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	0.28 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.28 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Bedrock
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, glass, iron

Trench 8

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	0.30 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.30 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Orange clay
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, Glass, Stone, Button, Shale

Trench 9

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	0.30 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.30 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Shaly bedrock
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, glass, iron

Trench 10

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	0.13 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.13 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Bedrock
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, glass, iron, clay pipe, quartz, CBM

Trench 11

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1.5 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	N/A
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.50 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Large stones possible bedrock
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, glass, slag

Trench 12

<i>Dimensions</i>	1m by 1m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	N/A
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	Not recorded
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Not reached
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, glass, copper, plastic, slag.

Trench 13

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	N/A
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.30 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Not reached
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, glass, copper alloy

Trench 14

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	0.40 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.40 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Not reached
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, glass, copper alloy, slag

Trench 15

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	N/A
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.15 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Not reached
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, glass

Trench 16

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	N/A
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.75 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Not reached
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, glass

Trench 17

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	0.30 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.70 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	possible field ditch
<i>Subsoil</i>	Not reached
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery

Trench 18

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 0.5 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	0.25 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	0.30 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Not reached
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, glass, clay pipe, stone

Trench 19

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	1 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	1 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Sand, light brown
<i>Finds</i>	Pottery, glass, iron, CBM, bone

Trench 20

<i>Dimensions</i>	1 m by 1 m
<i>Depth of Topsoil</i>	0.75 m
<i>Depth of Excavation</i>	1.35 m
<i>Significant Features</i>	None
<i>Subsoil</i>	Not reached
<i>Finds</i>	CBM, Stone, Iron, Pottery, Bone, Slag

APPENDIX 3: Finds Register

Test Pit	Material	Description
1	Pottery Glass Slag	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, brown glazed red fabric earthenware, brown glazed relief decorated with cream fabric Clear window glass Slag
2		
3	Pottery Glass Lithic	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, brown glazed and unglazed red fabric earthenware, Blue & white patterned, relief decorated white earthenware. Clear bottle & window glass, green bottle glass Flint flake with cortex
4	Iron Clay pipe Glass CBM Pottery	Iron nails Clay pipe stem Clear window & bottle glass, Green bottle glass Ceramic drain pipe Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, White & brown striped earthenware, Brown and unglazed red fabric earthenware, Blue & white patterned earthenware.
5	CBM Iron Pottery	Ceramic drain pipe Iron nails Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, unglazed red fabric earthenware
6	Pottery CBM Glass Iron Plastic	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, Brown glazed red fabric earthenware, Blue & white patterned earthenware Brick fragment Clear window and bottle glass Iron nails Handle from screwdriver or similar tool
7	Glass Iron Pottery	Clear window & bottle glass, Brown bottle glass Iron nail, Iron objects Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, Brown glazed earthenware
8	Pottery Glass Slag Stone Shale Pewter	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, Blue & white pattern earthenware, Brown glazed and unglazed red fabric earthenware, Stoneware bottle stamped _itken & Co, _lkirk Clear window glass sherds, blue glass fragments, Green bottle glass Slag Unworked quartz pebble, halved sandstone pebble Shale Pewter button with concentric circular decoration
9	Pottery Glass	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, blue & white patterned earthenware, Brown glazed and unglazed red fabric earthenware Clear window glass, clear & green bottle glass

Test Pit	Material	Description
	Clay Pipe Iron	Clay pipe stem Iron Nail
10	CBM Pottery Clay pipe Glass Quartz Iron Slag	Red flat roof tile Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, Blue & white patterned earthenware, unglazed red fabric earthenware Clay pipe stem Clear window glass, Green bottle glass body sherds Unworked quartz pebble Iron nail Slag pieces
11	Pottery Glass Slag	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, Blue & white patterned earthenware, Unglazed red fabric earthen ware Clear & green bottle glass Slag pieces
12	Pottery Glass Copper Plastic Slag	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware Clear & brown bottle glass Copper coin (2 pence) Bottle stopper and wire caps Slag pieces
13	Pottery Glass Copper alloy	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, Blue & white patterned earthenware. Window glass and security glass Copper alloy object (Electrical connector?)
14	Pottery Glass Copper alloy Slag	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware, brown glazed & unglazed red fabric earthenware, Red glazed buff fabric earthenware Clear bottle & window glass, Green bottle glass Light bulb connection, Foil object Slag pieces
15	Pottery Glass	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware some with blue & white pattern & brown flower pattern, Brown glazed red fabric earthenware Clear window and bottle glass
16	Pottery Glass	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white earthenware rim and body sherds, Sherds with blue fern pattern Green bottle glass
17	Pottery Glass	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white glaze earthenware some with blue & white pattern and one with red pattern, Brown glazed and unglazed red fabric earthenware. Clear window and bottle glass
18	Pottery Glass Clay Pipe Stone	Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white glaze earthenware, Blue & white pattern earthenware, Brown glazed and unglazed red fabric earthenware Clear and green window glass Clay pipe stem Unworked quartz pebble, halved pebble
19	Glass Iron CBM Pottery	Clear window and bottle glass, Green bottle glass Iron nails Brick fragments Mixed 19 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white glazed earthenware, Blue & white pattern earthenware, Brown glazed and unglazed red fabric earthenware

Test Pit	Material	Description
	Slag Bone	Slag/cinder/coal Sheep incisor
20	CBM Stone Pottery Bone Cinder	Ceramic drain pipe, Ceramic tile Moulded stone fragment, roof slate fragments, Iron nails, Iron objects Mixed 18 th / 20 th century pottery: Standard white glazed earthenware, Blue & white pattern earthenware, Brown glazed and unglazed red fabric earthenware, Patterned earthenware Animal bone Cinder
Metal detector finds from Fairmilehead Park	Coins Steel Iron	1, 2, 5, 10 and 20 pence coins Drinks can ring pull, Foil object Unidentified objects
Metal detector finds from Fairmilehead Knoll	Iron Coins Lead Copper alloy	Iron nails 1, 2 and 10 pence coins Lead shot Electrical component

APPENDIX 4: Discovery & Excavation in Scotland (DES) Entry

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	City of Edinburgh Council
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME	Comiston Roman Quest
PROJECT CODE:	AOC 60068
PARISH:	Edinburgh
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Jamie Humble
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	AOC Archaeology Group
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Archaeological Test pitting survey
NMRS NO(S)	None
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	None
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	None
NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)	Fairmilehead Park: NT 24225 68835, Fairmilehead Knoll: NT 24755 68932
START DATE (this season)	31 st August 2013
END DATE (this season)	1 st September 2013
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)	None
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	<p>AOC Archaeology Group was commissioned by Archaeology Scotland to provide professional support to a community led archaeological project at the site of the proposed Roman fort at Fairmilehead. The work was undertaken with local community groups over a weekend during August 2013 and comprised a test pit survey with help from members of the public at various locations around the Fairmilehead area of Edinburgh. The test pits were located in two public parks, Fairmilehead Park and Fairmilehead Knoll, and volunteers' private gardens. The project aimed to look for evidence of an enclosure first depicted on Armstrong's 'Map of the Three Lothians' and subsequently recorded as a supposed Roman fort on the Ordnance Survey 1855 and 1885 mapping.</p> <p>The test pitting survey revealed that the area had been largely truncated during the construction of the housing and the development of the area during the first half of the 20th century. A solitary flint flake attested to the prehistoric usage of the area, however no finds or features of Roman origin were revealed. Neither archaeological features nor significant artefacts were encountered during the limited works.</p>
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	None
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	None
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Archaeology Scotland
ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:	Edgefield Road Industrial Estate, Loanhead, Midlothian, EH20 9SY
EMAIL ADDRESS:	admin@aocarchaeology.com
ARCHIVE LOCATION (intended/deposited)	Archive to be deposited in NMRS



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