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Archaeological Evaluation at Broomilees, near Melrose, Scottish Borders

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PROJECT SUMMARY SHEET (BLM06)

Client	Scottish Borders Council
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Summary

This report presents the findings of an archaeological field evaluation undertaken on the site of a proposed industrial development at Broomilees, near Melrose, Scottish Borders. Within the site a number of cropmarks were identified from oblique aerial photographs suggesting a number of linear and curvilinear features. Headland Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by Scottish Borders Council to conduct archaeological evaluations to further investigate these cropmarks.

The absence of any archaeological features across the identified cropmarks suggested that these were related to variations in the natural geology. However, the truncated remains of a cremation pit, containing prehistoric pottery fragments was found to the north of the transcribed curvilinear cropmark. The cropmark probably represents the remains of a circular ditch, truncated by modern agriculture and no longer visible as a sub-surface feature. The cremation pit is likely to relate to this feature.

A number of linear features were also recorded that are representative of cultivation and field improvement; these are not regarded as being of archaeological significance.

BROOMILEES, MELROSE, SCOTTISH BORDERS RESULTS OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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1.INTRODUCTION

Headland Archaeology was commissioned by Scottish Borders Council to undertake an archaeological field evaluation across a number of identified cropmarks within the proposed industrial site of Broomilees, near Melrose, Scottish Borders. The project was undertaken to ascertain whether there were any archaeological constraints associated with the identified cropmarks.

2. SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION (Figure 1)

The proposed development site is located on the west side of Melrose immediately north-west of the General Hospital and bounded to the north-east by the A6091 (NT 5308 3410). The field is rough pasture. The ground is fairly flat towards the east and dips down towards the centre of the site before rising up towards the western margins of the site. The cropmarks were transcribed for Scottish Borders Council by Ironside Farrar and comprised a number of linear features and a curvilinear feature located in the north-eastern margins of the proposed development site (Figure 3).

3.OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the field evaluation was to determine the presences or absence, quality, nature, extent and character of any buried archaeological remains associated with the pre-identified cropmarks. The results would be used to allow the client to make an informed decision regarding further mitigation works.

4.METHOD

The co-ordinates of the transcribed cropmarks were plotted into a field computer running penmap software controlling a Leica TCRA 805 total station. Four trenches were placed across the cropmarks to intersect the relevant linear features. One trench was extended and an additional three trenches excavated to gather more information on the nature of features identified.

Trial Trench Evaluation

A JCB 3CX mechanical excavator with a 1.6m wide flat bladed ditching bucket was used to excavate the trenches under direct archaeological supervision. The stratigraphy of the trenches was recorded using the Headland Archaeology Ltd standard method with all recording undertaken on *pro forma* record sheets. Colour print photographs were taken. The layout of the trenches and any features within them were recorded using a field computer running penmap software controlling a Leica TCRA 805 total station. Plans and sections of features were hand drawn at an appropriate scale.

5.RESULTS (Figure 2)

Seven trenches in total were excavated and one feature was recorded. All the trenches were 1.6m wide. The topsoil [001] comprised light grey-brown sandy silt with frequent rounded stones and pebbles and had an average depth of 0.30m.

The following summarises the results of the trenching. Full descriptions of trenches and features can be found in Appendix 1.

Trench 1

Beneath the topsoil [001] were the remains of three shallow linear features and one small pit. The natural subsoil comprised and orange brown sand and gravel.

The pit [003] was located directly to the east of one of the linear features (Figure 2). It was sub-rounded in plan and measured 0.41m by 0.35m with a depth of 0.08m (Plate 1). The pit had been disturbed by a dragged stone on its eastern side. The loose material disturbed by the stone was sampled and initial examination of the feature revealed large quantities of bone within the fill, thought to be human. Following consultation with Rory McDonald, Scottish Borders Council Archaeologist, the pit was excavated in its entirety and the contents 100% sampled.

The three shallow linear features ran in a NE-SW direction across the trench (Figure 2), and had varying widths between 0.60 and 1.20m, and shallow depths between 0.05 and 0.12m.

Trench 2

Below topsoil [001] the ploughsoil [002] comprised a light brown sandy silt with frequent rounded pebbles derived from the natural subsoil and had a varying depth between 0.20 and 0.60m. The natural subsoil comprised a light grey clayey silt, with frequent stones and patches of orange-brown gravels. Towards the eastern trench edge a large patch of rich dark brown clayey silt was found at a depth of 0.90m, probably associated with a wetter area, as the field appears to dip here. Further patches of the dark brown clayey silt were identified towards the centre of the trench.

One rubble and one ceramic drain were recorded running in a NE-SW direction.

Trench 3

Below the topsoil [001] the ploughsoil [002] comprised a light brown sandy-clay silt with frequent rounded pebbles derived from the natural subsoil, and had a varying depth between 0.1 and 0.2m. The natural subsoil comprised a light orange-brown clayey silt.

No archaeological features or finds were recorded.

Trench 4

Below the topsoil [001] the ploughsoil [002] comprised a light brown-grey clayey silt with occasional rounded pebbles, and had a varying depth between 0.2 and 0.3m. The natural subsoil comprised a red-brown silty clay.

Three linear field drains were recorded running in E-W, NE-SW and NW-SE directions.

Trench 5

Below the topsoil [001], the ploughsoil [002] comprised a light grey-brown sandy silt with frequent small rounded stones and pebbles, and had an average depth of 0.05m. The natural subsoil comprised a light brown sandy silt with frequent sub-rounded stones, becoming more gravely and changing to a grey-brown clayey silt towards the south-western trench edge.

No archaeological finds or features were recorded.

Trench 6

Below the topsoil [001], the ploughsoil [002] comprised a light grey-brown sandy silt with frequent small rounded stones and pebbles, and had a varying depth of 0.20 and 0.30m. The natural subsoil comprised a mid brown clayey silt with occasional small sub-rounded stones, with occasional patches of sand and gravel, and changing to a light brown sandy gravel towards the south-eastern trench edge.

No archaeological features or finds were recorded.

6.THE CREMATED REMAINS (*Dave Henderson*)

A small quantity (402g) of cremated bone was recovered from context [004]. A brief inspection indicated that a single individual was represented in the assemblage; an adult male (estimated from skull fragments), possibly of over 50 years-old (estimated from spinal degeneration). Fragments from all other areas of the skeleton were represented, indicating complete recovery of the remains from the pyre, but the small total quantity (an adult cremation will yield around 1.5 – 2kg of ash) suggests that the deposit has been truncated.

7.THE POTTERY (*Julie Franklin*)

The pottery consists of a rim sherd, smaller body sherd and several fragments from the same coarse, hand formed pot (Plate 2). The fabric varies from grey to pale orange, with frequent large stone inclusions, up to 6mm. The rim is simple and upright with an internal bevel. Its small size and lack of diagnostic features make it hard to date, but similar pottery is known from later prehistory. A late bronze age or iron age date would be consistent with fabric and form.

8.DISCUSSION

The trenches were situated based on the location of cropmarks transcribed from an aerial photograph. However, as can be seen from the buildings to the top and right of the site (Figure 3), the oblique angle of the photograph means that the cropmarks cannot be that accurately located.

Given this, it is suggested that the cropmarks may be a reflection of the field drainage identified in a number of the trenches (Figure 2).

The absence of any archaeological features across the identified curvilinear cropmark may suggest that this is a reflection of the variable geology. Within the field there are varying

depths of soil over differing types of natural subsoil. Towards the east the topsoil overlies the natural subsoil of sand and gravel, while towards the centre of the field where the ground dips down the topsoil overlies a deep ploughsoil over a natural subsoil of silty clay. Here a very dark brown silty clay is found in patches and appears to be the result of pooling of water at the base of the slope. Further upslope to the west, the topsoil overlies a thin ploughsoil and the natural subsoil comprises sandy silt.

The aerial photographs (Figure 3) show this change in the geology in the eastern part of the site, immediately south of the curvilinear cropmark. This is reflected in the trenches as the subsoil changes from sand and gravel to silty clay at the south end of Trench 1 and at the west end of Trench 5. It is unclear whether this cropmark represents the ploughed out remains of a circular monument, no longer visible as a sub-surface feature or is a geological anomaly reflecting the variability of the substrata.

The evaluation uncovered a cremation pit in the north-eastern part of the site, located to the north of the curvilinear cropmark. In addition, the evaluation has identified a number of linear features. It is likely that the remains of the linear features are representative of cultivation or field improvement and are not considered to be archaeologically significant.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation suggests that any archaeological remains have been truncated by modern agriculture. Similarly, the cremation-pit identified in the north-eastern part of the site has suffered significant damage.

Later prehistoric cremations are commonly found throughout the Scottish Lowlands and recent work at Straiton Quarry (Stronach, Sheridan & Henderson 2006) suggests that cremation cemeteries can be large with the cremations widely dispersed. For this reason, we would recommend a monitored topsoil strip of the whole site in advance of development.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rory McDonald monitored the work on behalf of Scottish Borders Council. Thanks to TJS Plant Hire for providing the plant.

11. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Stronach, S, Sheridan, A & Henderson, D 2006 A Bronze Age Cremation Cemetery at North Straiton, Fife. *Tayside & fife Archaeol J* Unpublished Report

APPENDIX 1: Registers

1.1 Trench Register

All trenches are 1.60m wide

Trench No.	Description	Length (m)	Av. Topsoil Depth (m)	Max Depth (m)
1	Four linear features on NE-SW axis. Probable plough-related features, or furrow bases. Range between 0.40 and 1.20m in width. All very shallow with depths between 0.05 and 0.12m. Small pit [003].	35	0.30	0.30
2	One rubble field drain orientated E-W, and one ceramic field drain orientated NE-SW. Occasional patches of dark brown clayey silt indicates a wetter area. No archaeological finds or features were recovered.	25	0.30	1
3	No archaeological finds or features were uncovered.	25	0.30	0.50
4	Three linear field drains, on E-W, NE-SW and NW-SE axis. No archaeological finds or features were recovered.	25	0.30	0.50
5	No archaeological finds or features were recovered.	27	0.30	0.35
6	No archaeological finds or features were recovered.	15	0.30	0.65
7	One ceramic field drain, on a NE-SW axis. No archaeological finds or features were recovered.	14	0.30	0.40

1.2 Context Register

Context No.	Trench No.	Description
001	All	Turf and Topsoil
002	All	Plough soil
003	1	A sub-oval cut of a small, shallow pit. Has a length of 0.41m, a width of 0.35m and reaches a shallow depth of 0.08m. Filled by (004).
004	1	A mid to dark brown sandy silt fill of small pit [003]. It contains frequent fragments of burnt bone and occasional flecks and lumps of charcoal.

1.3 Photograph Register

Shot No.	Trench No.	Direction Facing	Description
1		N	General view of Site
2		N	General view of Site
3		E	General view of Site
4		SE	General view of Site
5	1	N	Pre-ex view of Pit [003]
6	1	N	South facing half-section of pit [003]
7	1	NW	General view of Trench 1

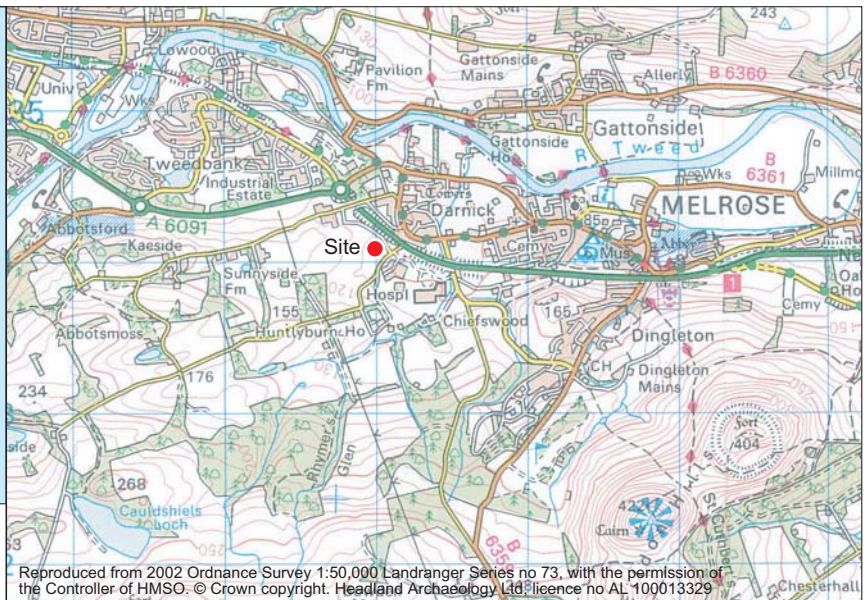
8	2	W	General view of Trench 2
9	3	SE	General view of Trench 3
10	4	W	General view of Trench 4
11	1	NW	General view of Trench 1 extension
12	5	SW	General view of Trench 5
13	6	NW	General view of Trench 6
14	7	SW	General view of Trench 7
15	1	N	Post-ex view of pit [003]

1.4 Sample register

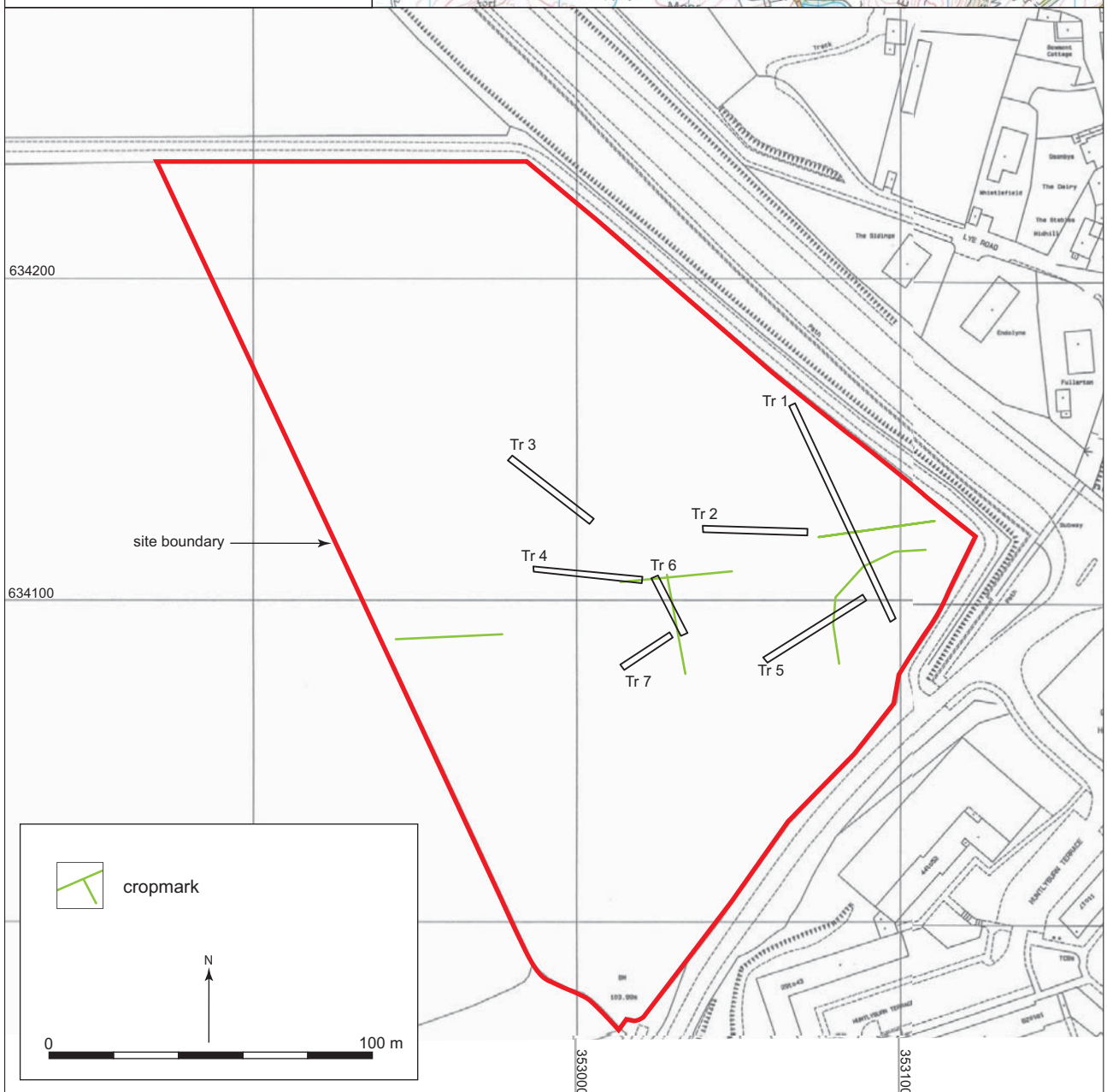
Sample No.	Context	Description
1	004	A mid to dark brown sandy silt with frequent fragments of burnt bone and occasional flecks and lumps of charcoal.



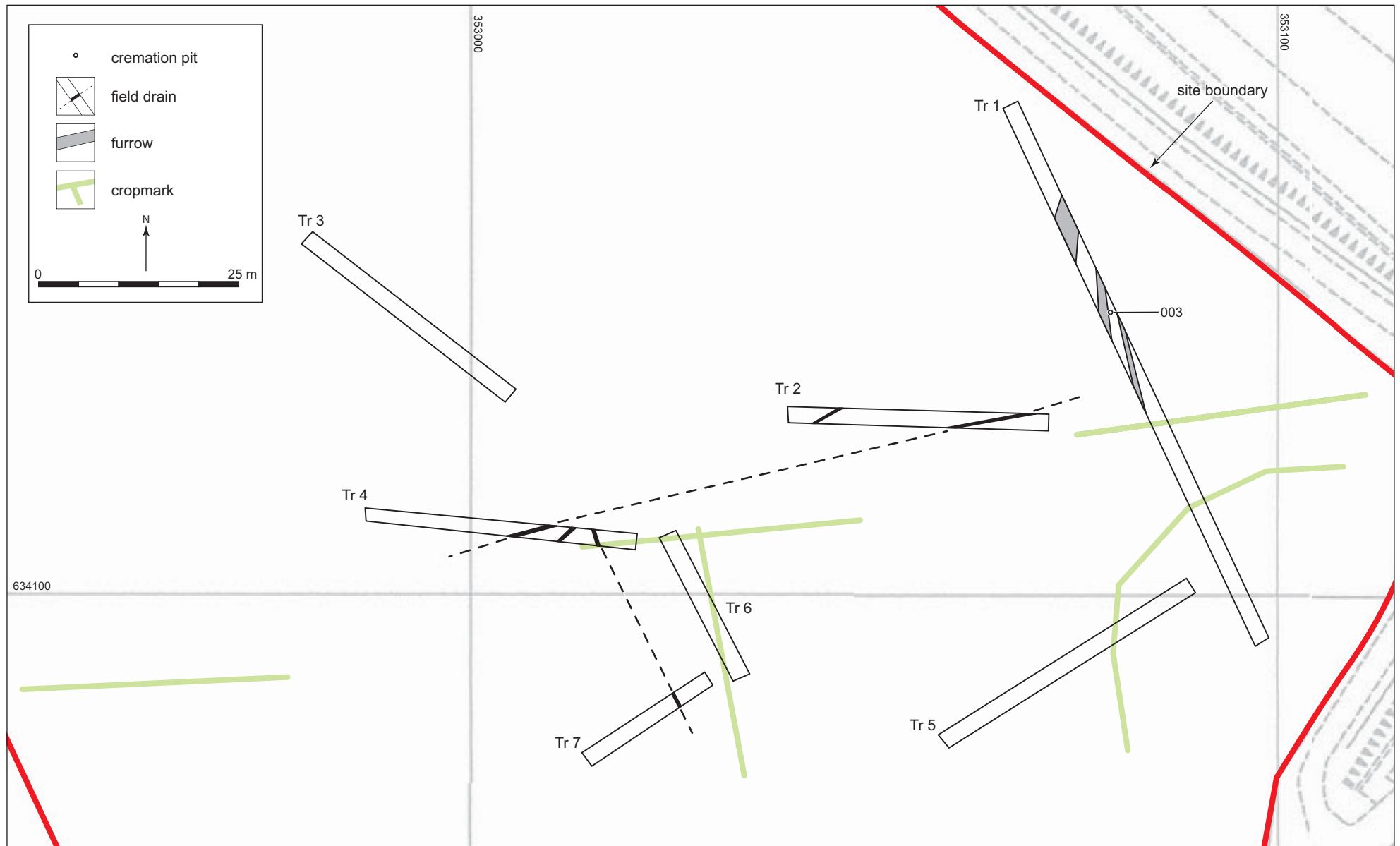
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BLM06 - Figure 1: Site location showing trenches and cropmarks



BLM06 - Figure 2: Detail of treches



BLM06 - Figure 3: Rectified aerial photograph showing trench and cropmark locations



Plate 1: Close view of cremation pit [003]



Plate 2: Detail of rim sherd recovered from the cremation pit [003]



Plate 3: North facing view of site



Plate 4: North west facing view of trench 1



Plate 5: West facing view of trench 2



Plate 6: South east facing view of trench 3



Plate 7: West facing view of trench 4



Plate 8: South west facing view of trench 5



Plate 9: North west facing view of trench 6



Plate 10: South west facing view of trench 7