

**MAPLEDURHAM AD PLANT,  
OXFORDSHIRE.**

**NGR: SU 6780 7675**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**



January 2014  
Report No. 927

**Quality Assurance**

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Author: A. Hood.

Date: 13<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

Approved: R. King.

QA Checked: D. King.

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## **SUMMARY**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> January 2014 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological evaluation on land at Mapledurham, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 6780 7675). The works were commissioned by BSA Heritage on behalf of Mapledurham Estate.

The project comprised the excavation and recording of five trenches within a proposed development area.

The evaluation revealed a generally dispersed set of undated features, which comprised one possible ditch, two postholes and two possible pits, along with a probable late Medieval or Post-medieval gravel extraction pit and/or pond. The majority of these features are likely to represent former agricultural activity, although it is possible that the extraction pit/pond may have been related to a moated site, which was located immediately west of the site.

## GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

### Archaeology

For the purpose of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

### CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

### Medieval

The period between AD 1066 and AD 1500.

### Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site.

### NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

### OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level. (AOD Above Ordnance Datum).

### OS

Ordnance Survey.

### Post-medieval

The period between AD 1500 and AD 1900.

### Prehistoric

The period prior to the Roman invasion of AD 43, traditionally sub divided into; *Palaeolithic* – c. 500,000 BC to c. 12,000 BC; *Mesolithic* – c. 12,000 BC to c. 4,500 BC; *Neolithic* – c. 4,500 BC to c. 2,000 BC; *Bronze Age* – c. 2,000 BC to c. 800 BC; *Iron Age* – c. 800 BC to AD 43.

### Roman

The period traditionally dated AD 43 until AD 410.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Foundations Archaeology in January 2014 on land at Mapledurham, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 6780 7675). The works were commissioned by BSA Heritage on behalf of Mapledurham Estate.
- 1.2 The project was conducted in accordance with the approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), prepared by Foundations Archaeology (2013); IfA *Standards and Guidance on Archaeological Evaluation* (2008); and *MoRPHE*, issued by English Heritage (2006).
- 1.3 This report constitutes the results of the archaeological works.

## **2 PROJECT BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 It is proposed to construct an anaerobic digestion (AD) plant with access and associated development, including an electrical connection to the local electricity distribution network.
- 2.2 The site is currently part of an arable field, which contains a slurry lagoon at the south. It is bounded to the south and southwest by Park Wood, to the east by Pond Lane and to the north by other areas of the arable field (Figure 1). The overall site area totals approximately 3.5ha.
- 2.3 The underlying geology comprises Lambeth Group - clay, silt and sand overlaid by Winter Hill Gravel - sand and gravel (BGS online viewer).
- 2.4 An archaeological assessment of the site has been undertaken by BSA Heritage (2013). The results of this assessment are summarized below.
- 2.5 A number of chance finds recorded in the Oxfordshire HER suggest human activity from early Prehistory in the vicinity of the site.
- 2.6 Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age artefacts have also been recovered near Mapledurham.
- 2.7 The earliest possible features recorded within the study area are a series of cropmarks lying immediately east of the site. These sub-surface features have been noted from aerial photographs and their shape suggests they reflect remains of a Prehistoric or Roman field system (HER 15341).
- 2.8 A central double linear runs from northeast to southwest and is aligned with an extant lane to the south and 'Broad Street Shaw' to the north. This suggests that this element of the cropmarks reflects a Post-medieval route. Other linear marks to either side of this 'lane' may well be earlier and have the typical morphology or appearance of Roman or later Prehistoric field systems. There

are no marks indicative of dwellings or other domestic activity amongst these cropmarks.

- 2.9 HER 26229 relates to the find of a single Roman bronze coin and is located close to the cropmarks, north of the site. However, the grid reference given is actually vague and the find was apparently made in a back garden of '4 Chase Close'. It is likely that the find was some distance away and so does not support a Roman date for the cropmarks in itself (Berkshire Archaeological Journal 1966). However, under HER 4064, which is a Medieval moat lying immediately west of the site, it is noted that a AD295 Roman coin was recovered during investigation of that site in the 1970s. Roman coins were also recovered during dredging at Mapledurham Lock in 1910 (HER 8018).
- 2.10 As noted above, HER 4064 records an extant moated site, immediately west of the site in Park Wood. The feature consists of a central island surrounded by a water-filled ditch forming a square enclosure. Such sites tend to be Medieval in origin, however, investigation in 1970 found predominantly Post-medieval remains including chalk walling, a brick floor and roof tiles.
- 2.11 Documentary references suggest that Mapledurham itself had a deer park, however, the boundary of the park is not known. Away from Mapledurham itself, at least two of the nearby listed houses are thought to have Medieval origins as cruck-built open hall houses. These Medieval survivals are the Grade II listed Mill Farmhouse, circa 700m north of the site and Pithouse Cottages, approximately 1km to the northeast of the site (HER 7711 and Site A).
- 2.12 The Oxfordshire HER records further Grade II listed buildings in the vicinity, most of which are 17th century or later. HER 26238 records the findspot of a gold Post-medieval coin north of the site.
- 2.13 A large number of listed buildings are concentrated west of the site, at Mapledurham itself. These include the Grade I listed 13th century Church of St Margaret and late 16th century Mapledurham House (HERs 12400 & 1970).
- 2.14 Analysis of the available cartographic records has indicated that the site and the surrounding area were predominately park or agricultural land in the Post-medieval period.
- 2.15 The site therefore contained the potential for the presence of archaeological features, predominately relating to the Prehistoric, Roman, Medieval and Post-medieval periods. This did not prejudice the evaluation against deposits dating to other periods.

### **3 AIMS**

- 3.1 The aims of the evaluation were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits in order to provide sufficient

information to establish the location, date, character, extent, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains.

3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:

i) to define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible;

ii) to attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site;

iii) to recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples;

iv) to determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence and the forms in which such evidence may be present;

v) to define any research priorities that may be relevant, should further field investigation be required.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

4.1 The WSI required the excavation of six trenches within the development area. However, subsequent to the approval of the WSI, it was advised that the proposed drainage pond, located at the northwest of the site, would not form part of the development and, as such, it was not necessary to excavate the trench targeted on this area. In the event, a total of five 30m by 1.6m trenches were excavated within the site, as shown in Figure 2. Due to on-site constraints, it was necessary to amend the locations of Trenches 1 and 2. All amendments to the trenching methodology were agreed with the archaeological representative of BSA Heritage.

4.2 Non-significant overburden was removed, under constant archaeological supervision, to the top of the archaeological deposits or the underlying natural deposits, whichever was encountered first. This was achieved through the use of a JCB type mechanical excavator, equipped with a toothless grading bucket. Spoil tips were scanned for finds.

4.3 All excavation and recording work was undertaken in accordance with the WSI and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

4.4 Due to severe flooding, it was not possible to excavate ditch [102] and, as such, this feature was recorded in plan only. Any amendments to the approved investigation methodology were agreed on site with the archaeological representative of BSA Heritage.

## 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- 5.1 A detailed description of all contexts identified during the course of the project is presented in Appendix 1. A summary discussion is given below.
- 5.2 The natural gravel and clay substrates were encountered at an average depth of 0.37m (97.35m OD) below Modern ground; these were directly overlaid by a silt-sand-gravel ploughsoil. Visibility was generally very good, although most of the trenches flooded soon after machine excavation. The lack of intact subsoils, along with the intermittent occurrence of plough-scores in the top of the natural deposits indicated that the site had most probably been subjected to a degree of plough damage.
- 5.3 **Trench 1** contained a single undated probable ditch [102], which most likely represented an agricultural drainage or boundary ditch.
- 5.4 **Trench 2** was located at the southeastern edge of a large sub-circular cut feature [202], which was visible as a shallow, partially flooded depression within the agricultural field. Partial mechanical excavation of the fill (203) of this feature yielded a fragment of brick and occasional charcoal flecks. The feature therefore most likely dated to the later Medieval or Post-medieval periods and possibly represented a former gravel extraction pit and/or pond. It is possible that feature [202] was related to the moated site, which was located approximately 40m to the southwest of Trench 2.
- 5.5 **Trench 3** contained two undated postholes [303]/[305] and an undated small pit-like feature [307]. The postholes were fairly similar and possibly represented part of a former fence-line. Feature [307] was relatively shallow and it did not contain any artefacts or charcoal. It was not certain, therefore, if the feature was the base of a pit or, alternatively, a root-hole. Given its location, along the line of the possible fence, it seems most likely that it represented evidence for a former fence-line hedge.
- 5.6 **Trench 4** was not excavated.
- 5.7 **Trench 5** contained part of a feature [502], which did not contain any artefacts or charcoal and it was uncertain if it represented a possible pit or a natural feature, such as a tree-throw hole.
- 5.8 **Trench 6** did not contain any features or artefacts.
- 5.9 There was a paucity of artefacts within the trenches; a brick fragment from fill (203) and a piece of tile from ploughsoil (501) were the only finds. There was also a general lack of charcoal within the evaluated area, although, occasional charcoal flecks were present within the fill (203) of pit [202].
- 5.10 The evaluation has identified the presence of a generally dispersed set of undated features, which comprised one possible ditch, two postholes and two possible pits, along with a probable late Medieval or Post-medieval gravel extraction pit and/or pond. The majority of these features are likely to



represent former agricultural activity, although it is possible that the extraction pit/pond may have been related to the moated site, which was located immediately west of the site.

- 5.11 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology, but will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course. A short note will be submitted for publication in the relevant local archaeological journal and an OASIS form will also be submitted to ADS.

## **6 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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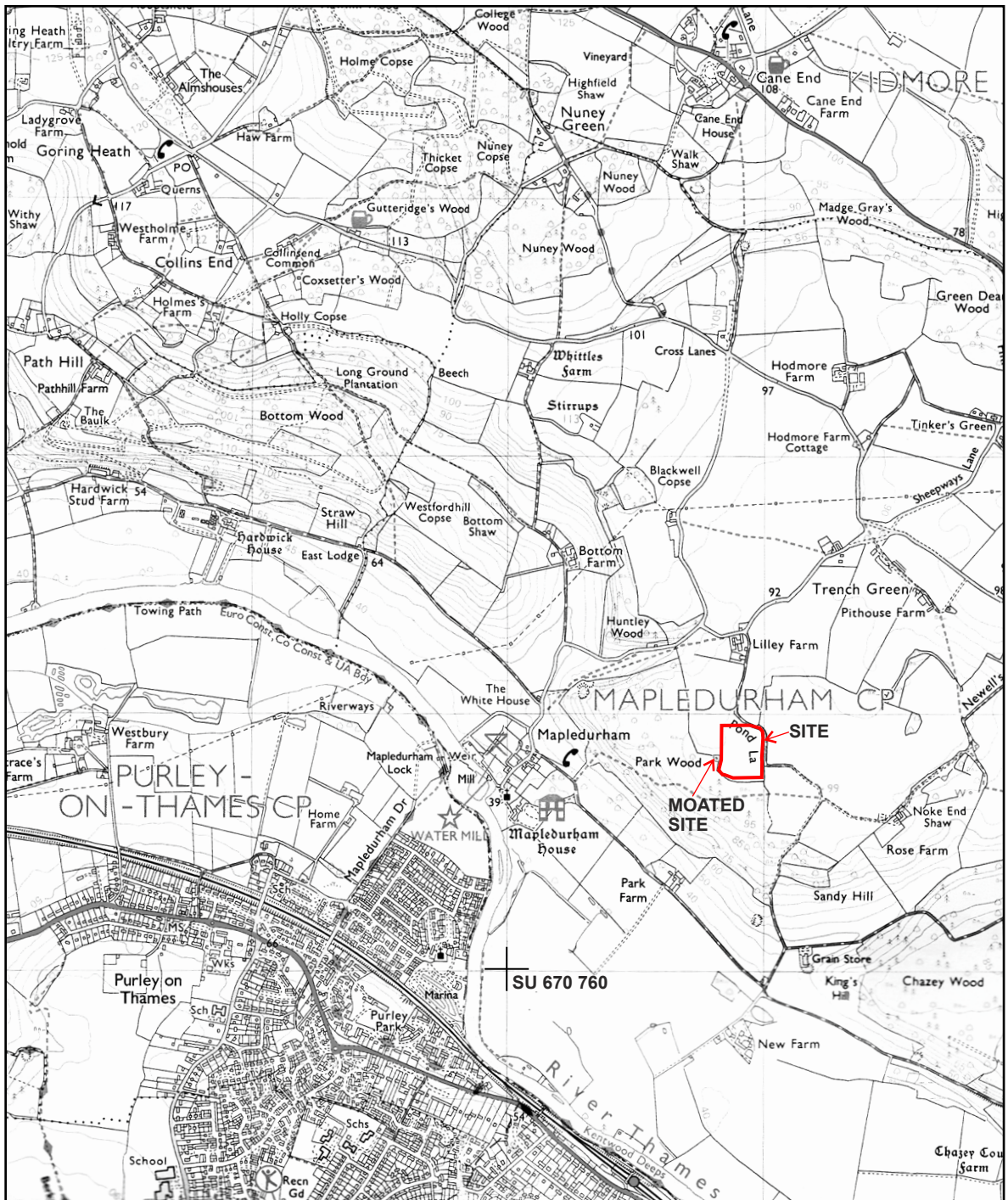
Institute for Archaeologists. 2008. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation*. Unpublished.

## **7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

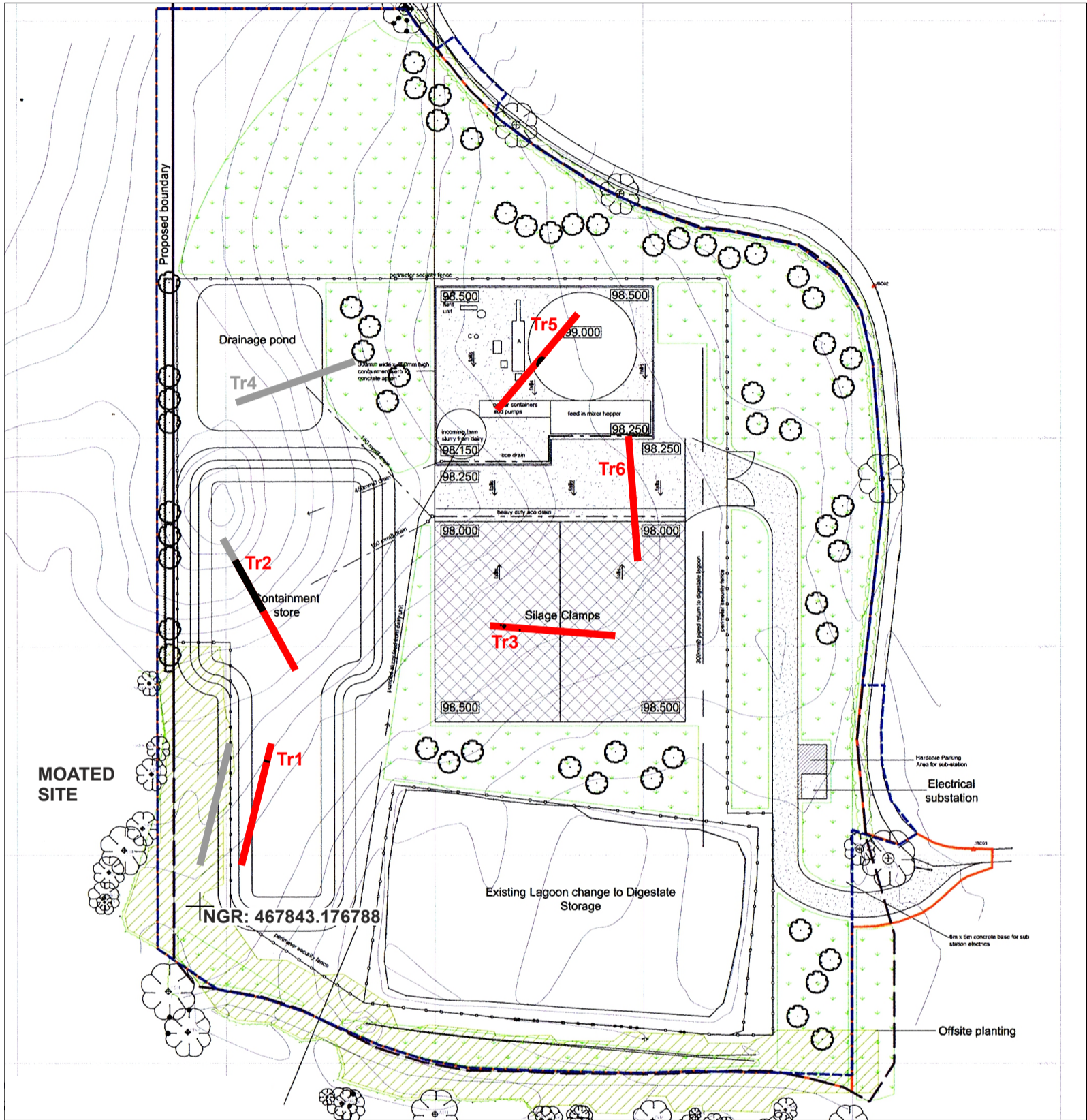
Foundations Archaeology would like to thank Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Council and Ben Stephenson of BSA Heritage for their help during the course of the project.

**APPENDIX 1: The Stratigraphic Data**

CXT	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	CUTS/LATER THAN	CUT BY/EARLIER THAN
				<b>Trench 1: 30m by 1.6m;</b> natural (at average 97.34m OD) = light orange brown gravel.		
101	na	na	0.36	Ploughsoil; dark brown silt sand, which contained frequent gravel.	nat.	na
[102]	1.56	0.42	?	West-northwest - east-southeast aligned probable ditch. Not excavated. Contained fill 103.	nat.	103
103	1.56	0.42	?	Fill of ditch [102]; dark brown clay sand gravel. Not excavated.	[102]	101
				<b>Trench 2: 30m by 1.6m;</b> natural (at average 96.33m OD) = light orange brown gravel, which contained occasional patches of light orange clay.		
201	na	na	0.37	Ploughsoil; dark brown silt sand, which contained frequent gravel.	nat.	na
[202]	14.2	1.57	0.73	Substantial cut feature with a wide, sloping profile. Contained fill 203. The feature extended beyond the limit of excavation at the north end of the trench and comprised a large sub-circular depression within the field.	nat.	203
203	14.2	1.57	0.73	Fill of feature [202]; beige brown clay sand, which contained occasional charcoal flecks and a fragment of cherry-red brick.	[202]	201
				<b>Trench 3: 30m by 1.6m;</b> natural (at average 97.61m OD) = orange brown gravel.		
301	na	na	0.38	Ploughsoil; dark brown silt sand, which contained frequent gravel.	nat.	na
302				Void.		
[303]	0.42	0.39	0.14	Sub-circular posthole with a shallow, rounded profile. Contained fill 304. Equivalent to posthole [305].	nat.	304
304	0.42	0.39	0.14	Fill of posthole [303]; dark brown silt clay, which contained frequent gravel. Equivalent to fill 306.	[303]	301
[305]	0.41	0.32	0.06	Sub-circular posthole with a shallow profile. Contained fill 306. Equivalent to posthole [303].	nat.	306
306	0.41	0.32	0.06	Fill of posthole [305]; dark brown silt clay, which contained frequent gravel. Equivalent to fill 304.	[305]	301
[307]	0.94	0.85	0.27	Sub-oval cut feature, possibly a pit, which had a rounded profile. Contained fill 308.	nat.	308
308	0.94	0.85	0.27	Fill of feature [307]; dark brown plastic silt clay, which contained frequent gravel.	[307]	301
				<b>Trench 4:</b> not excavated.		
				<b>Trench 5: 30m by 1.6m;</b> natural (at average 97.66m OD) = orange brown gravel.		
501	na	na	0.39	Ploughsoil; dark brown silt sand, which contained frequent gravel and a single fragment of unglazed ceramic tile.	nat.	na
[502]	2.78	1.03	0.36	Cut feature, possibly a pit, with a rounded profile. Contained fill 503.	nat.	503
503	2.78	1.03	0.36	Fill of feature [502]; mid brown sand silt gravel.	[502]	501
				<b>Trench 6: 30m by 1.6m;</b> natural (at average 97.83m OD) = orange brown gravel.		
601	na	na	0.33	Ploughsoil; dark brown silt sand, which contained frequent gravel.	nat.	ns
				No features were present within the trench.		



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**Site Code: MEO13**  
**Accession Code:**  
**FIGURE 1: Site Location**



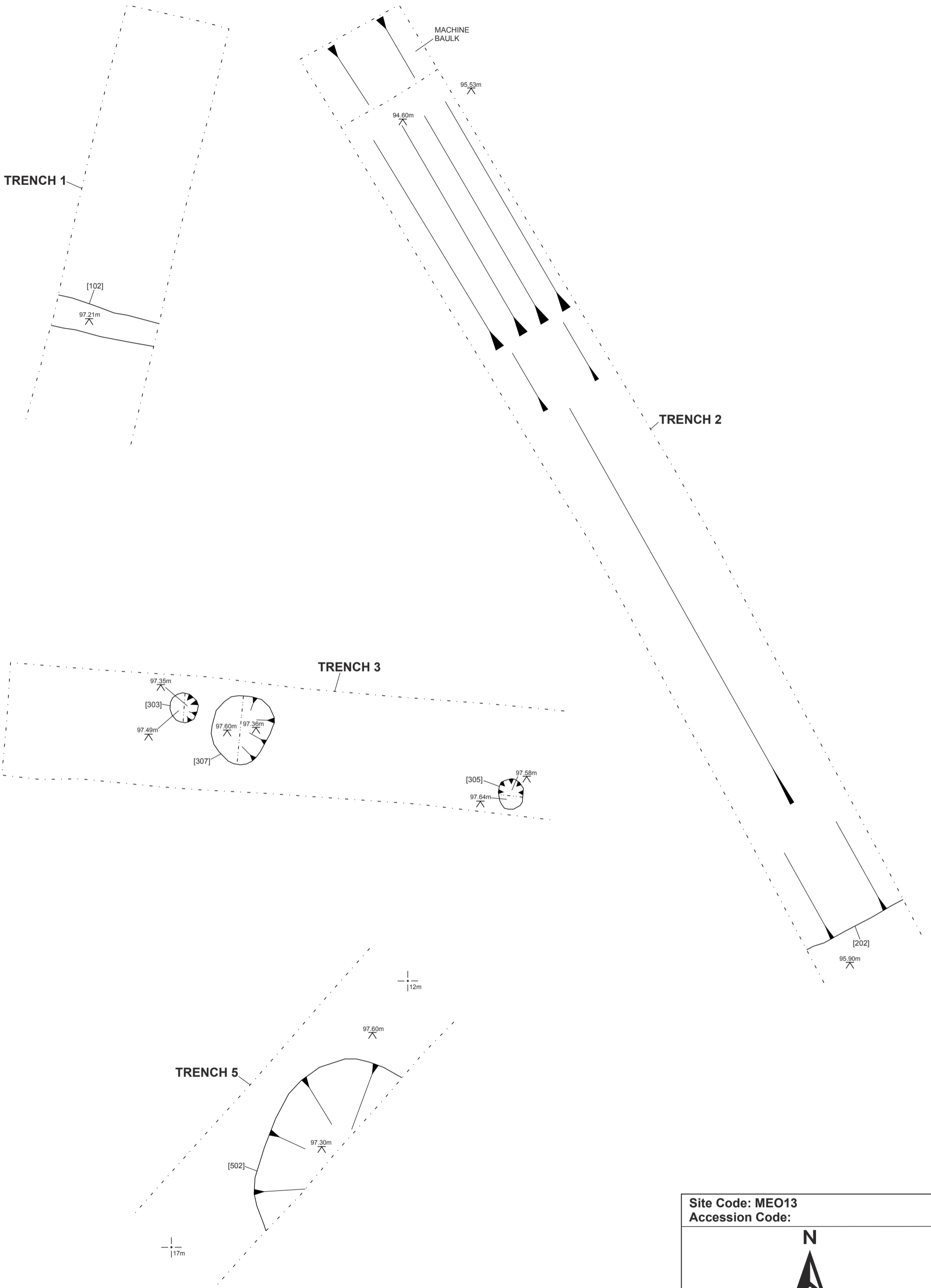
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**Site Code: ME013**  
**Accession Code:**

= PROPOSED TRENCH LOCATION  
 = ACTUAL TRENCH LOCATION  
 = FEATURE

N

0m  50m

**FIGURE 2: Trench Locations**

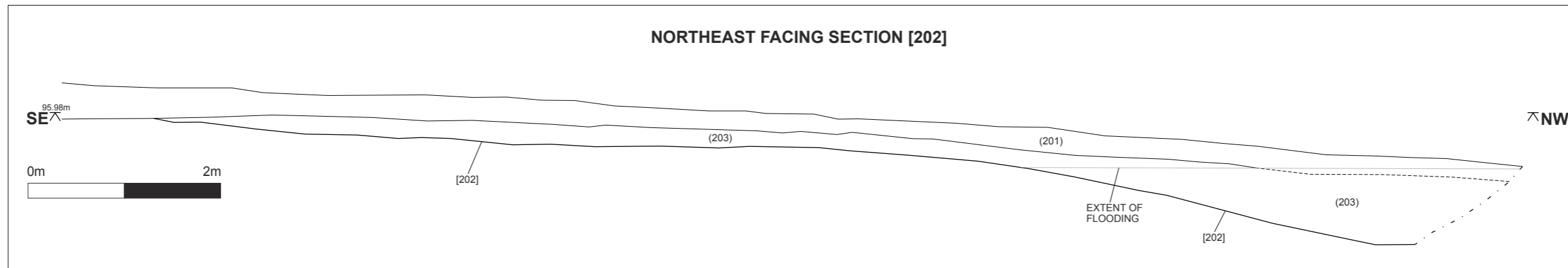


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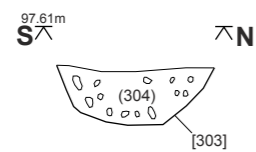
N

0m 2m

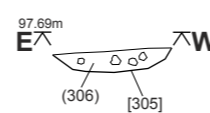
**FIGURE 3: Trench Plans**



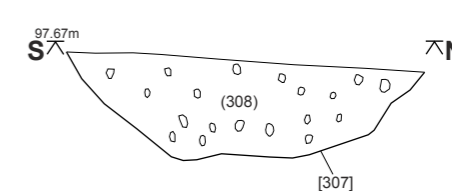
**EAST FACING SECTION [303]**



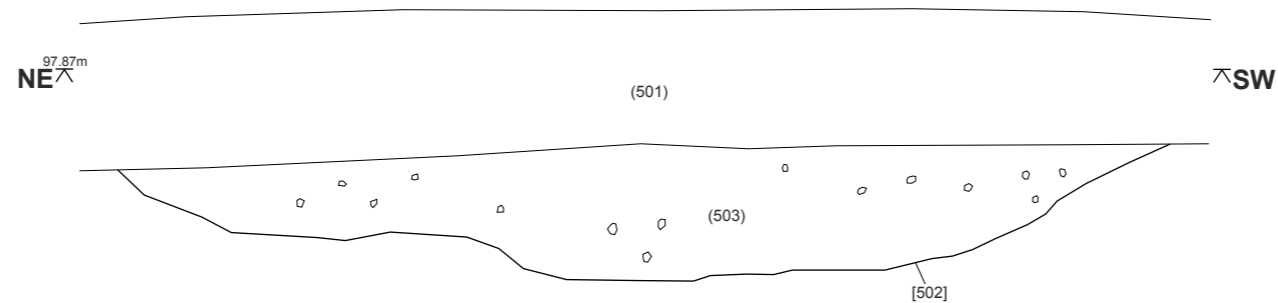
**NORTH FACING SECTION [305]**



**EAST FACING SECTION [307]**



**NORTHWEST FACING SECTION [502]**



<b>Site Code: MEO13</b> <b>Accession Code:</b>
<b>FIGURE 4: Sections</b>