

HERITAGE NETWORK



LAND AT BLACKHORSE ROAD Letchworth, Herts.

HN468

Archaeological Monitoring Report



Land at
BLACKHORSE ROAD
Letchworth, Herts.

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Archaeological Monitoring Report

Prepared on behalf of North Hertfordshire Homes Ltd

by

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Report no.276

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Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by David Kaye, Geoff Saunders, Chris Turner and David Hillelson. Illustrations were prepared by David Kaye and Geoff Saunders, and the report was edited by David Hillelson.

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Summary

Site name and address:	Land at Blackhorse Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire		
County:	Hertfordshire	District:	North Hertfordshire
Village/town:	Letchworth	Parish:	Letchworth
Planning reference:	1/04/0232	NGR:	TL 23550 33950
Client name and address:	North Hertfordshire Homes Ltd, Town Hall, Broadway, Letchworth		
Nature of work:	Industrial development	Present land use:	Industrial
Size of affected area:	c.9200m ²	Size of area investigated:	c.9200m ²
Site Code:	HN468	Other reference:	n/a
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson
Type of work:	Monitoring & Recording	Finds location/Museum:	NHDC Museums
Start of work	17/09/2004	Finish of work	02/12/2004
Related SMR Nos:	n/a	Periods represented:	Unknown/Modern
Previous summaries/reports:	n/a		

Synopsis: As the result of an archaeological condition on the planning permission for the industrial redevelopment of land at Blackhorse Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, the Heritage Network was commissioned by the developers to monitor the groundworks.

Although the site is located within an area of known archaeological activity, the monitoring of the groundworks revealed only a series of postholes which yielded no archaeological artefacts.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of *North Hertfordshire Homes Ltd*, as part of a programme of archaeological work associated with building development on land at Blackhorse Road, Letchworth, Herts. The planning permission for the development (ref. 1/04/0232), granted by the North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC), has been subject to a standard archaeological condition, in accordance with the provisions of the Department of the Environment's *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16). The scope of the required work has been set out in a *Design Brief for Archaeological Monitoring and Recording* issued by the *County Archaeology Office* (CAO) of Hertfordshire County Council, acting as advisers to NHDC (ref. JS 11/05/04). A full specification for the work was contained in the Heritage Network's approved Project Design dated May 2004.

1.2 The site, centred on NGR TL 23550 33950, is located at the north-eastern end of the Blackhorse Road industrial area. The south-western half of the site is occupied by an existing brick warehouse (UMO Plant Ltd) which is to remain. The remainder of the site is being redeveloped to provide offices, workshops, and stores, together with vehicle parking and a yard area. The site lies adjacent to farmland on the north and east.

1.3 The site lies within *Archaeological Area no.94* (AA94), which defines an area of archaeological activity spanning the Neolithic to medieval periods in the District Local Plan. In particular, evidence for an extensive Bronze Age funerary complex has been recorded from aerial photographs and geophysics to the north-east of the site, and a major Iron Age enclosure to the south-west. The line of the Icknield Way runs parallel with and to the south of Blackhorse Road.

1.4 The aim of the present project has been to identify and record any archaeological features and deposits which were uncovered; and to retrieve artefactual and ecofactual elements to allow the date, character, and significance of the site to be assessed in accordance with the current published regional research agenda (Glazebrook 1997, Brown and Glazebrook 2000), subject to the limitations of reasonable safety and practicality.

1.5 The present report is intended to set the site in its archaeological and historical context, and complete the requirements of the planning condition.

2. Fieldwork

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 The site covers an area of approximately 9200m², and consists of an 'L' shaped plot of land (see Figure 2). The site is situated on ground which slopes gently from approximately 77.00mOD on the north-west site boundary to 71.50mOD on Blackhorse Road.

2.2 The underlying geology of the area is Upper Chalk.

METHODOLOGY

2.3 The timetable for the fieldwork followed the client's groundwork schedule.

2.4 Spoil from the various stages of groundwork on the site was regularly inspected for archaeological artefacts.

2.5 The archaeological monitoring focused on ground reduction across the study area, strip footings for the new building, and service trenches with associated soakaways.

2.6 All work was carried out in accordance with the detailed method statement contained in the Heritage Network's approved *Project Design*, and followed the relevant sections of the Heritage Network's *Operations Manual*.

RESULTS

Ground reduction

2.7 The development required the ground to be reduced within the footprint of the new building and along the route of the new access road.

2.8 The stratigraphy across the site was reasonably consistent with a layer of redeposited chalk over a layer of mid brown silt, beneath which lay the natural chalk geology.

2.9 Posthole group [28] was observed cut into the natural geology on a south-east to north-west alignment across the footprint of the new building and the new access road. The group consists of 14 sub-circular and sub-ovoid postholes of varying sizes. The postholes were fairly consistent in profile with moderately steep sides and slightly rounded bases. The firm, dark brown, silty clay fills of the postholes yielded no datable artefacts. A modern pipe trench cut through at least three postholes in the group. The postholes may represent a post-built structure, but the lack of archaeological artefacts recovered from them makes the function and date of such structure uncertain.

2.10 Three further postholes, [11], [26], and [27] to the north-west of group [28], were observed cut into the natural geology. The compact, brown, sandy silt fills yielded no datable artefacts.

2.11 A large area of disturbed ground was observed to the south of posthole group [28] and two modern pits were observed to the east of the group. A further large area of disturbed ground was observed in the eastern corner of the building footprint.

Ground Reduction data:

Context Number	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)	Level (mOD)
01	Cut	Sub-circular cut feature with steep straight sides and a slightly rounded base. Posthole, part of group [28].	Diameter: 0.52 Depth: 0.42	75.67
02	Fill	Firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay with frequent small flint and chalk fragments, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [01].	Diameter: 0.52 Depth: 0.42	-
03	Cut	Sub-circular cut feature with moderately steep straight sides and a slightly rounded base. Posthole, part of group [28].	Diameter: 0.32 Depth: 0.11	75.75
04	Fill	Firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay with frequent small flint and chalk fragments, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [03].	Diameter: 0.32 Depth: 0.11	-
05	Cut	Banjo shaped cut feature, with moderately steep concave sides and a slightly rounded base. Posthole with spur, part of group, [28].	Length: 0.56 Width: 0.29 Depth: 0.11	75.94
06	Fill	Firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay with frequent small flint and chalk fragments, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [05].	Length: 0.56 Width: 0.29 Depth: 0.11	-
07	Cut	Sub-ovoid cut feature with steep concave sides and a slightly rounded base. Posthole, part of group [28].	Length: 0.39 Width: 0.26 Depth: 0.16	75.91
08	Fill	Firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay with frequent small flint and chalk fragments, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [07].	Length: 0.39 Width: 0.26 Depth: 0.16	-
09	Cut	Sub-ovoid cut feature with steep slightly concave sides and a flat base. Posthole, part of group [28].	Length: 0.34 Width: 0.27 Depth: 0.12	75.88
10	Fill	Firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay with frequent small flint and chalk fragments, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [09].	Length: 0.34 Width: 0.27 Depth: 0.12	-
11	Cut	Sub-circular cut feature with slightly concave stepped sides and rounded pointed base. Posthole.	Diameter: 0.40 Depth: 0.19	77.20
12	Fill	Compact, brown (10YR 4/3), sandy silt with frequent chalk fragments, very occasional charcoal flecks and sub-angular flints, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [11].	Diameter: 0.40 Depth: 0.19	-
13	Feature	Sub-circular cut feature with a firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay fill. Posthole, part of group [28].	Diameter: 0.23	75.97
14	Feature	Sub-circular cut feature with a firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay fill. Posthole, part of group [28].	Diameter: 0.36	75.99

Context Number	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)	Level (mOD)
15	Feature	Sub-circular cut feature, cut by modern service trench, with a firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay fill. Posthole, part of group [28].	Diameter: 0.16+	76.07
16	Feature	Sub-circular cut feature, cut by modern service trench, with a firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay fill. Posthole, part of group [28].	Diameter: 0.28+	76.21
17	Feature	Sub-circular cut feature, cut by modern service trench, with a firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay fill. Posthole, part of group [28].	Diameter: 0.39	76.11
18	Cut	Sub-ovoid cut feature with steep straight sides and a flat base. Posthole, part of group [28].	Length: 0.61 Width: 0.55 Depth: 0.23	76.55
19	Fill	Firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay with frequent small flint and chalk fragments, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [18].	Length: 0.61 Width: 0.55 Depth: 0.23	-
20	Cut	Sub-ovoid cut feature with steep concave sides and a rounded base. Posthole, part of group [28].	Length: 0.21 Width: 0.16 Depth: 0.07	76.60
21	Fill	Firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay with frequent small flint and chalk fragments, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [20].	Length: 0.21 Width: 0.16 Depth: 0.07	-
22	Cut	Sub-ovoid cut feature with steep straight sides and a flat base. Posthole, part of group [28].	Length: 0.20 Width: 0.17 Depth: 0.06	76.59
23	Fill	Firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay with frequent small flint and chalk fragments, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [22].	Length: 0.20 Width: 0.17 Depth: 0.06	-
24	Cut	Sub-circular cut feature with shallow concave sides and a rounded base. Possible posthole with only base surviving, part of group [28].	Diameter: 0.29 Depth: 0.04	76.55
25	Fill	Firm, dark brown (10YR 3/2), silty clay with frequent small flint and chalk fragments, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [24].	Diameter: 0.29 Depth: 0.04	-
26	Feature	Sub-circular cut feature with a compact, brown (10YR 4/3), sandy silt fill. Posthole.	Diameter: 0.25	76.30
27	Feature	Sub-circular cut feature with a compact, brown (10YR 4/3), sandy silt fill. Posthole.	Diameter: 0.19	76.35

Footings Trenches

2.12 The external footings trenches for the new building measured approximately 0.6m wide by 1.5m deep, the internal footings measured approximately 0.4m wide by 1.5m deep. No archaeology was observed within the footings trenches.

2.13 The disturbed ground in the east corner of the building footprint was investigated during the excavation of the footings and a maximum depth of 2.8m below existing ground level was noted for the disturbance.

Service Trenches and Soakaways

2.14 A total of seven soakaways were excavated, four of which measured 4.5m square by 2.9m deep, the remaining three measured 3.4m square by 3.9m deep. The majority of the service trenches were excavated through ground which had already been inspected during the ground reduction for the building and access road, with the exception of a short stretch close to the Blackhorse Road frontage.

2.15 A linear cut feature [29] was observed cut into the natural geology within Soakaway 3 on a north – south alignment. The feature was ‘U’ shaped in profile, had a width of approximately 1.4m and extended 1.5m below the existing surface. Its fill of silt and redeposited chalk contained CBM fragments and plastic.

2.16 Two possible postholes, [31], and [33], were observed in the service trench close to the Blackhorse Road frontage cut into the natural chalk geology. The larger posthole [31] had a diameter of 0.56m and a depth of 0.44m, the smaller posthole had a diameter of 0.20m and a depth of 0.30m. Both postholes had steep straight sides, the larger had a flat base, the smaller had a rounded ‘V’ shaped base. The mid yellowish brown silt fills of the features yielded no datable artefacts.

Service Trench and Soakaway data:

Context Number	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)	Level (mOD)
29	Cut	Linear cut feature with a ‘U’ shaped profile observed in soakaway. Probable modern ditch.	Length: 4.50+ Width: 1.50	-
30	Fill	Redeposited silt and chalk with CBM and plastic. Fill of [29].	Length: 4.50+ Width: 1.50	-
31	Cut	Sub-circular cut feature with steep straight sides and a flat base. Posthole.	Diameter: 0.56 Depth: 0.44	-
32	Fill	Yellowish brown (10YR 5/6), silt with occasional chalk inclusions, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [31].	Diameter: 0.56 Depth: 0.44	-
33	Cut	Sub-circular cut feature with steep straight sides and a slightly rounded ‘V’ shaped base. Posthole.	Diameter: 0.20 Depth: 0.30	-
34	Fill	Yellowish brown (10YR 5/6), silt with occasional chalk inclusions, and pea grit at base of feature. Fill of [33].	Diameter: 0.20 Depth: 0.30	-

Finds concordance

2.17 During the fieldwork artefacts dating to the 19th and 20th centuries, including pottery and CBM were observed in the overburden and in the fill of linear [29]. No artefacts predating this period were observed on the site.

3. Discussion

3.1 Despite the location of the site in an area of known archaeological activity spanning the Neolithic to medieval periods, the monitoring of the groundworks failed to identify any significant archaeological remains on the site.

3.2 Posthole group [28] may represent the remains of a post-built structure, however the lack of any archaeological artefacts recovered from the postholes or the vicinity of the possible structure mean that its form, function, and date remain unclear.

3.3 Five further postholes were observed during the groundworks, which also failed to yield any archaeological artefacts.

3.4 The modern overburden across the site appears to have been deposited directly onto the former plough soil, indicating that the more recent activity would have protected any potential earlier stratigraphy. It would appear, however, that the site lies outside the focus of archaeological activity recorded elsewhere along Blackhorse Road, and in the vicinity.

Conclusion

3.5 The monitoring of the present groundworks has demonstrated that recent activity on the site has not significantly disturbed the earlier stratigraphy. This suggests that the lack of significant archaeological features and deposits, or artefact assemblages, reflects a genuine lack of archaeological activity on the site.

4. Sources Consulted

Hillelson, D. 2004. *Land at Blackhorse Road, Letchworth, Herts. Archaeological Project Design* Heritage Network May 2004

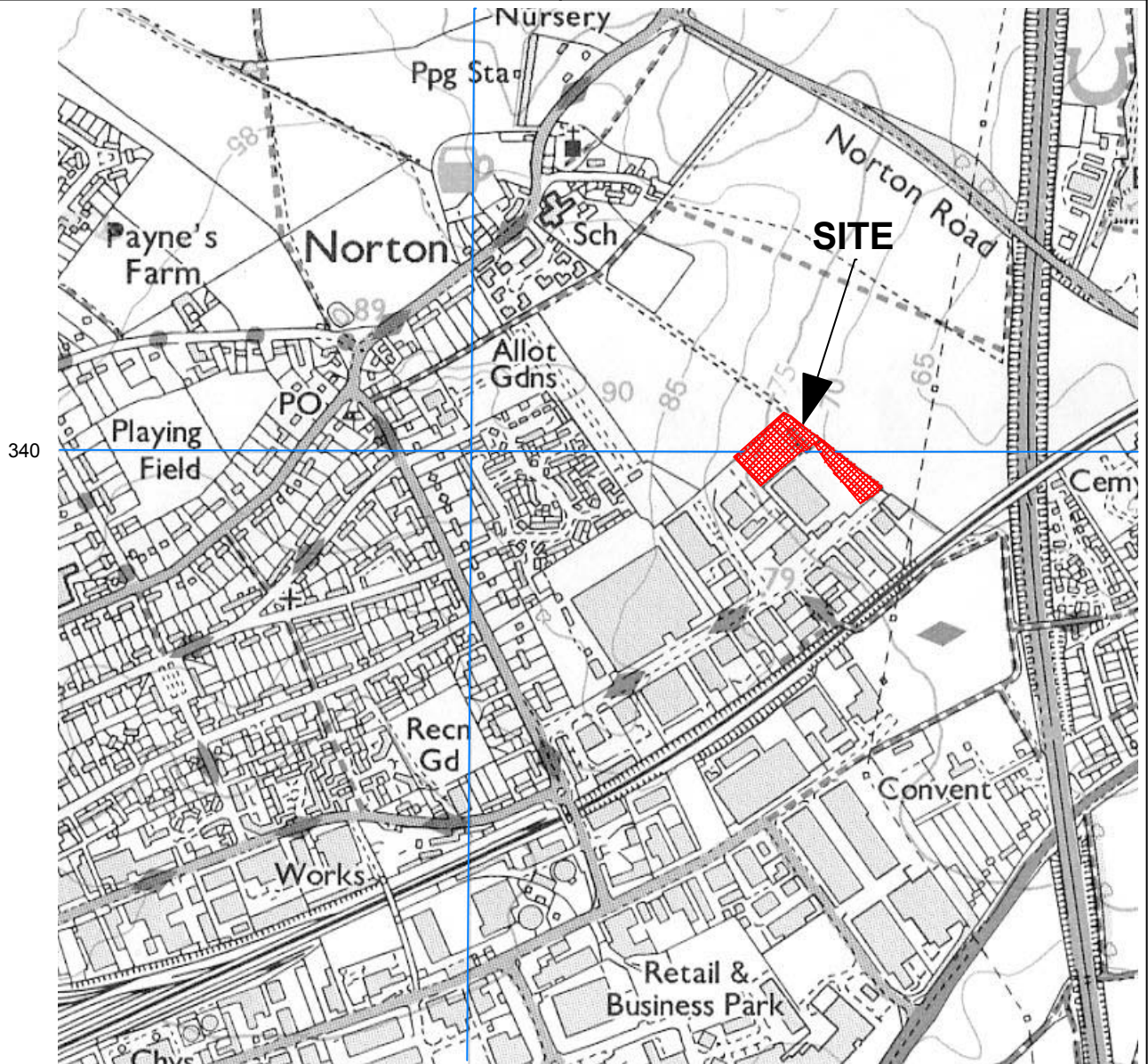
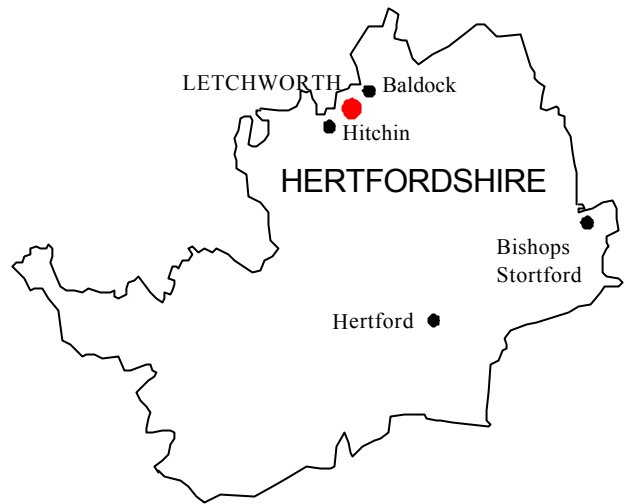
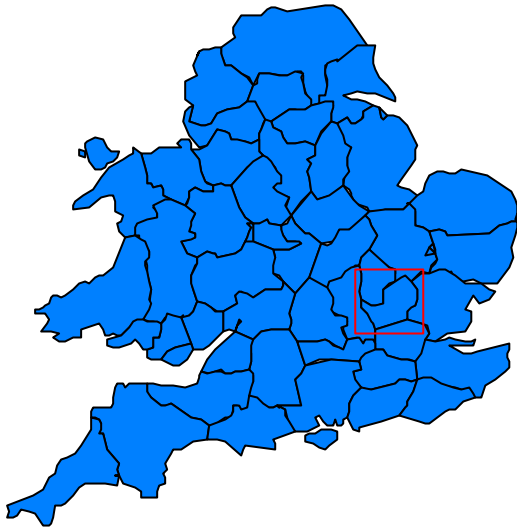
Smith, J. 2004. *Design Brief for Archaeological Monitoring and Recording of land at Blackhorse Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire*. Hertfordshire County Council.

5. Schedule of Site Visits

Date	Staff	Hours	Comments
17/09/04	GIS	1	Initial visit to inspect ground clearance
27/09/04	DGK	1	Monitor tree removal
29/09/04	DGK	9	Monitor ground reduction, building footprint
30/09/04	DGK	9	Monitor ground reduction, building footprint
01/10/04	DGK/GIS	9	Monitor ground reduction, excavate and record features
04/10/04	DGK/GIS	4	Monitor ground reduction, excavate and record features
07/10/04	DGK	8	Monitor ground reduction, access road
08/10/04	DGK	5	Monitor ground reduction, access road
20/10/04	GIS	1	Monitor ground reduction, access road
21/10/04	DGK	1	Monitor ground reduction, access road
22/10/04	DGK	9	Monitor ground reduction, access road
25/10/04	GIS	1	Inspect ground reduction, access road
26/10/04	CT	2	Monitor soakaways 1, 2, and 3
27/10/04	CT	1	Monitor soakaway 4
01/11/04	DGK	1	Inspect retaining wall
08/11/04	GIS	3	Monitor drainage and footings
09/11/04	DGK	1	Monitor footings
11/11/04	DGK	1	Monitor footings and drainage
12/11/04	DGK	1	Monitor drainage
12/11/04	DGK	2	Monitor soakaway 5
15/11/04	DGK	1	Monitor drainage
17/11/04	DJH	1	Monitor drainage
23/11/04	DJH	1	Monitor drainage
24/11/04	DJH	2	Monitor drainage
01/12/04	DJH	1	Monitor soakaway 6
01/12/04	DJH	1	Monitor soakaway 6
02/12/04	DJH	1	Monitor soakaway 7

6. Illustrations

Figure 1	Site location
Figure 2	Site layout
Figure 3	Site detail (a)
Figure 4	Site detail (b)
Figure 5	Sections



TL

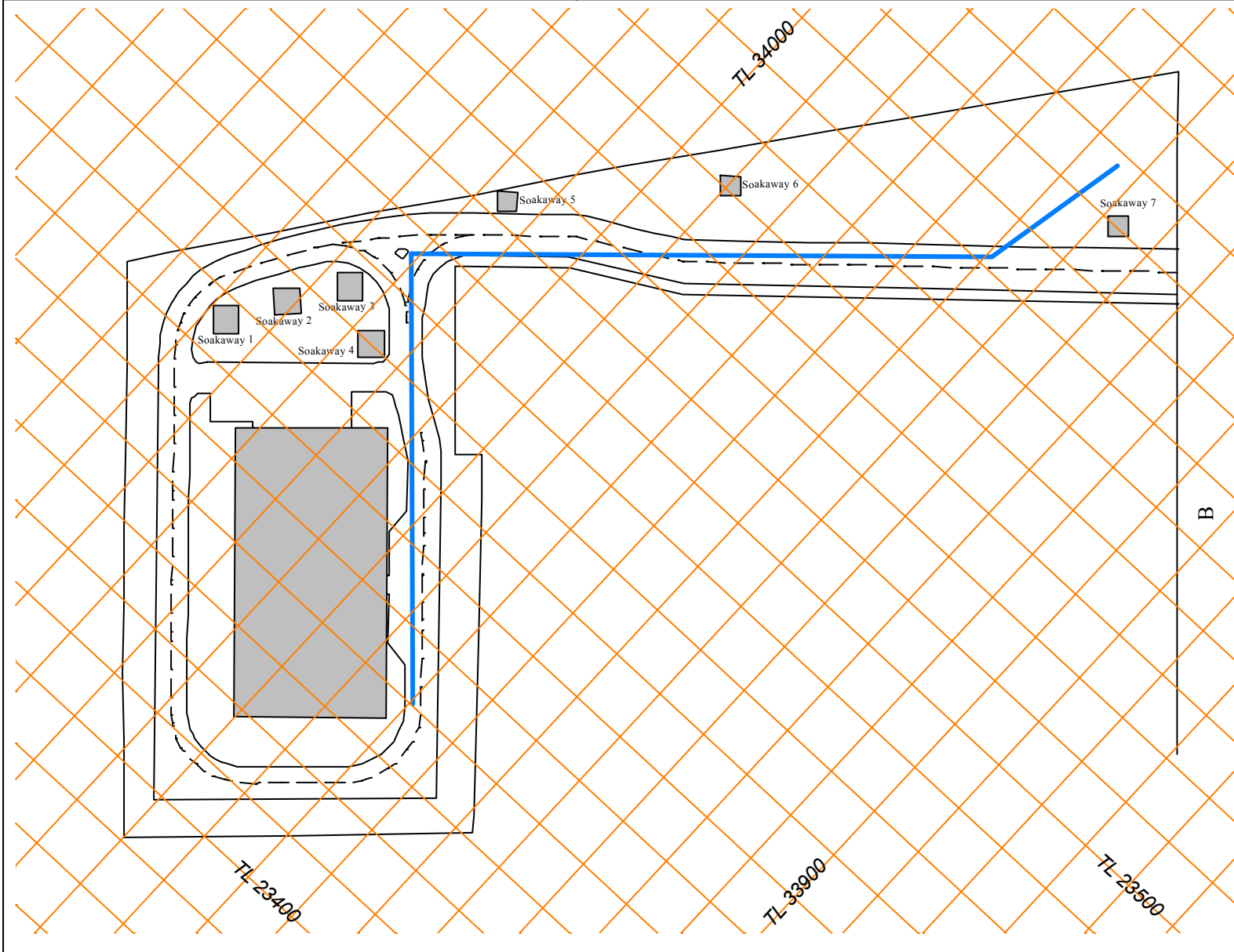
230

Site Location

Scale 1:10000

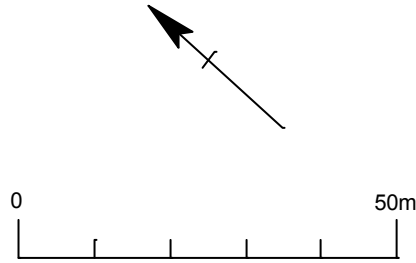
Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office, Licence no.AL100014861

Figure 1



KEY

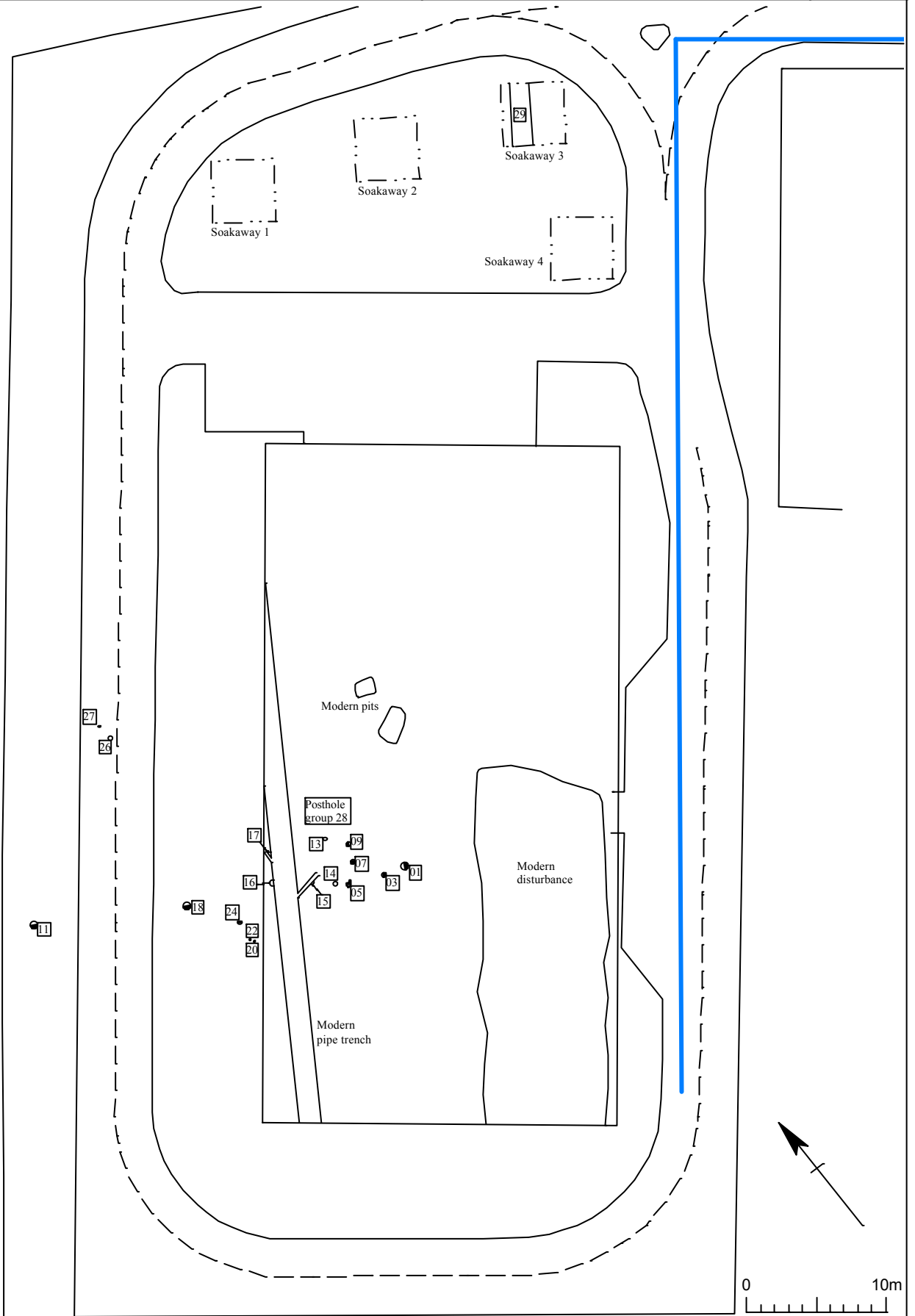
- Service trench
- Building footprint



Site layout

Scale 1:1000

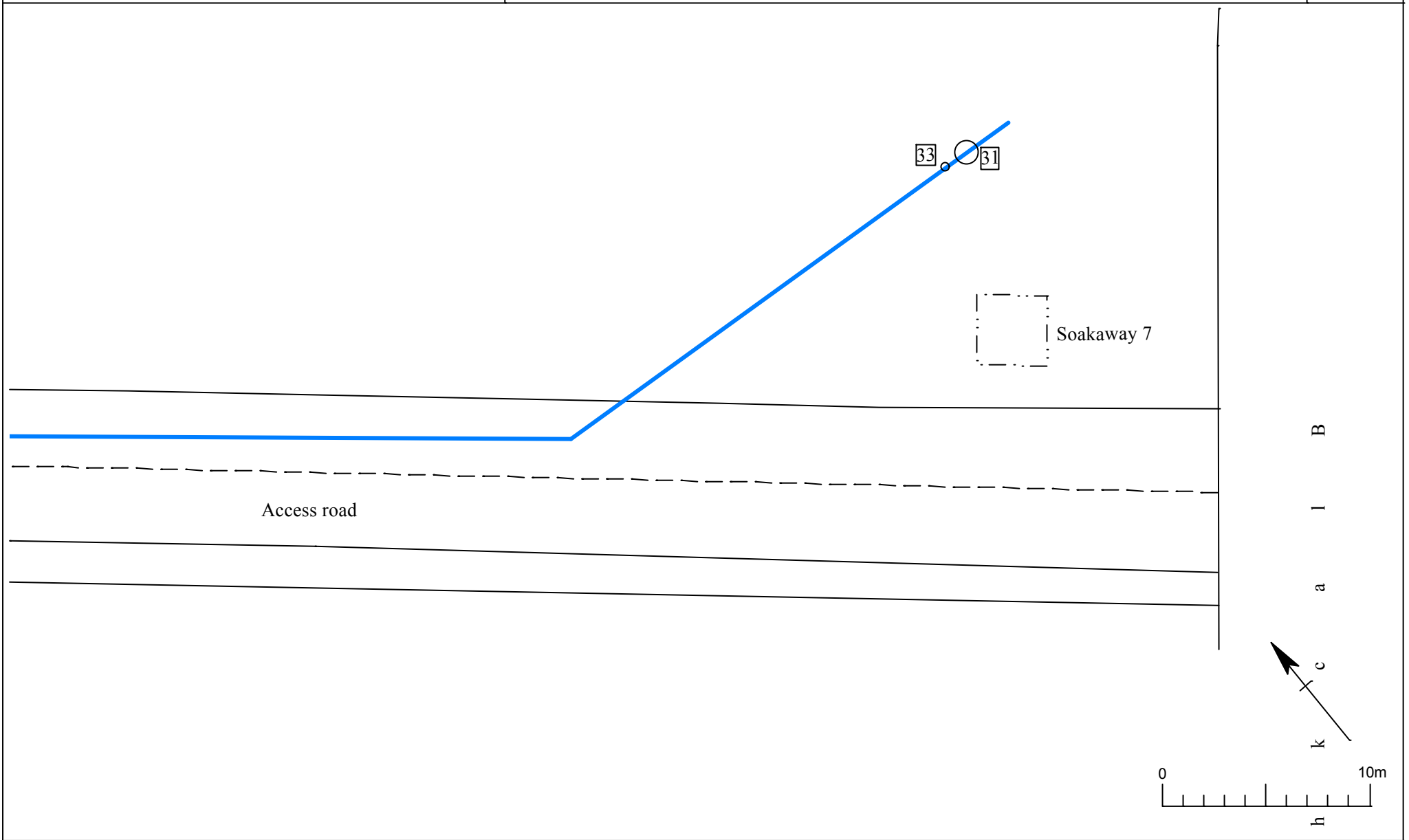
Figure 2



Site detail (a)

Scale 1:400

Figure 3

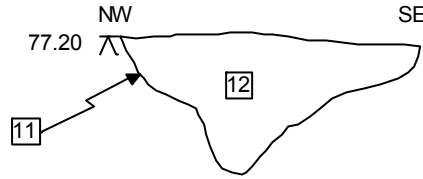


Site detail (b)

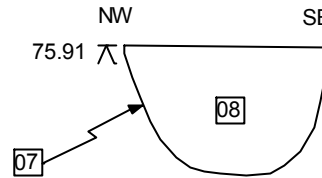
Scale 1:250

Figure 4

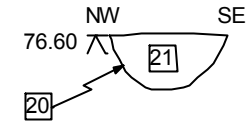
South-west facing section through posthole [11]



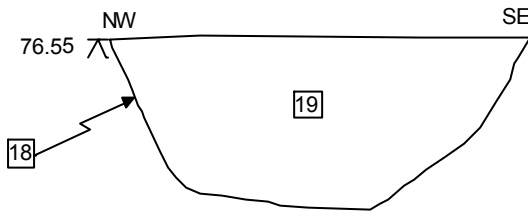
South-west facing section through posthole [07]



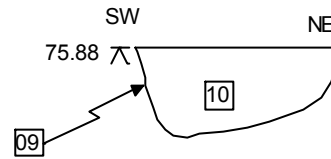
South-west facing section through posthole [20]



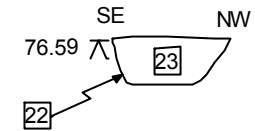
South-west facing section through posthole [18]



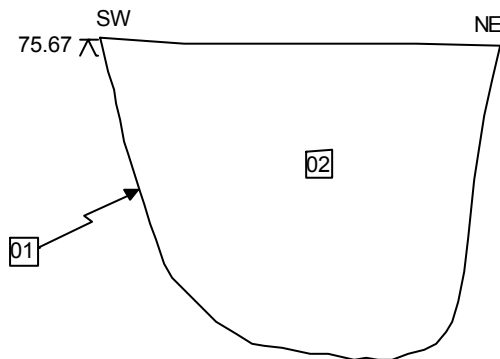
South-east facing section through posthole [09]



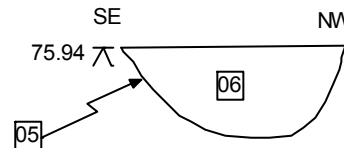
North-east facing section through posthole [22]



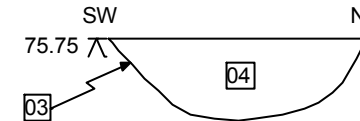
South-east facing section through posthole [01]



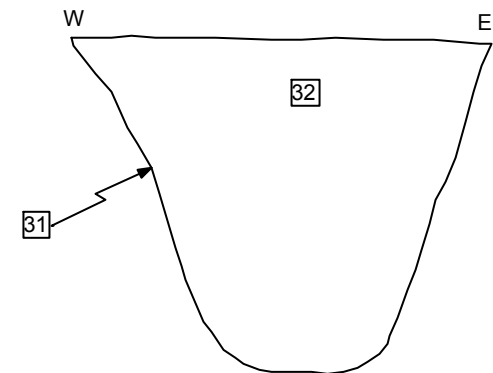
North-east facing section through posthole [05]



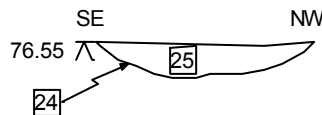
South-east facing section through posthole [03]



South facing section through posthole [31]



North-east facing section through posthole [24]



South facing section through posthole [33]

