

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRENCH EVALUATION  
ON LAND WEST OF OLD EXETER ROAD,  
NEWTON ABBOT, DEVON**

**by**

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**Exeter Archaeology**

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## **Contents**

### Summary

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Archaeological and historical background	1
3.	Aims	1
4.	Method	1
5.	Results	2
	5.1 Trench 1	2
	5.2 Trench 2	2
	5.3 Trench 4	3
	5.4 Trench 6	3
6.	The finds	3
7.	Discussion	4
8.	Conclusion	4
9.	Archive	5
	Acknowledgements	5
	Sources consulted	5
	Appendix 1: Trench descriptions	

## **List of illustrations and plates**

- Fig. 1 Location of site.
- Fig. 2 Location of trenches showing archaeological features.
- Fig. 3 Trench 1 plan
- Fig. 4 Trench 1 sections
- Fig. 5 Trench 2 plan and sections
- Fig. 6 Trench 4 plan and section
- Fig. 7 Trench 6 plan and section

- Plate 1 View of ditch 203
- Plate 2 View of ditch 108
- Plate 3 General view of Trench 1, including ditch 108
- Plate 4 View of ditch 108

## Summary

An archaeological trench evaluation on land west of Old Exeter Road, Newton Abbot (SX 853 730) was undertaken by Exeter Archaeology during September 2007. The site is in an area with the potential for prehistoric and Romano-British archaeological deposits.

Eight trenches, totalling 455m in length were excavated to provide a sampled coverage of the proposed development area. A total of six dispersed largely undated ditch features and a single posthole were present on the site. Three of the ditches and the posthole, located towards the northeast corner of the site, were of probable prehistoric origin. The remaining ditches were of probable medieval or later date with one dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A single sherd of prehistoric pottery was recovered from the topsoil in the vicinity of the supposed prehistoric ditches.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report was commissioned by Hives Planning on behalf of WBB Minerals and sets out the results of an archaeological trench evaluation undertaken by Exeter Archaeology (EA) in September 2007 on land on land west of Old Exeter Road, near Newton Abbot, Devon (SX 853 730). The evaluation was undertaken to provide supporting information for a planning application for the relocation of Newton Abbot Rugby Football Club (Teignbridge District Council Application No. 05/03537/MAJ). The work was instigated following consultation by TDC with the Devon County Historic Environment Service (DCHES).

The proposed development site comprises eight fields covered with undisturbed pasture land. The site slopes moderately down from around 10mOD onto flat ground 5mOD from the southwest to the northeast (fig,1).

## 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

An archaeological desktop assessment was undertaken by Exeter Archaeology in 2005 (Report no. 05.30). This covered a much broader development proposal but included the proposed site for the relocation of the rugby club as area D. Despite being subject to some modern disturbance through the construction of a SWW pipeline, it was concluded that the area was one of the least disturbed of the five areas considered in the report. In the light of previous fieldwork in the vicinity it is thought that there is some potential for the survival of prehistoric and Romano-British deposits. Field names to the west of this site are indicative of prehistoric settlement and it was thought that the fields defined by the present hedgebanks could have been laid out in the medieval period.

## 3. AIMS

The aim of the evaluation was to determine the presence or absence of archaeological features or deposits within the area to be affected by proposed development and if located, to establish their date, character, function and extent. The results of the work will be used to determine whether further archaeological work or other mitigation would be needed as a condition of planning permission.

## 4. METHOD

The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a method statement produced by EA (Weddle 2007) submitted to and approved by the Development Control Archaeologist, Devon County Council prior to commencement on site.

Eight trenches, each 1.8m wide and with a total length of 455m were excavated using a tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. All machining was carried out under the supervision of EA archaeologists. The trenches were sited to provide representative coverage across the site (Fig. 2).

Excavation continued until either natural subsoil or archaeological deposits was exposed, at which point machining ceased. All trenches were then cleaned by hand, and archaeological features and deposits investigated.

All features and deposits were recorded using the standard EA recording system, comprising context record sheets and individual trench recording forms. Sections and plans for each trench were drawn at either 1:10 or 1:50 as appropriate. A detailed black and white print and colour digital photographic record was made. Registers were maintained for photographs, drawings and context sheets on *pro forma* record sheets. Finds were labelled and bagged on site and taken to the EA offices for processing.

## 5. RESULTS

All trenches were excavated through a simple stratigraphy of topsoil and subsoil onto natural subsoil. Trenches 3, 5, 7 and 8 were devoid of any archaeological features or deposits. The remained trenches contained archaeological features that are described below. Detailed context descriptions for each trench are set out in Appendix 1.

### 5.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 3 and 4, Plates 3 and 4)

This trench was a total of 90m long in a 'T' shaped formation. It was excavated onto natural subsoil (102) that comprised sandy clay with patches of degraded shillet at a depth of 0.66m. The trench contained two ditch features (105 & 108) and a single posthole (103). A single sherd of prehistoric pottery was recovered from the subsoil (101).

Ditch 108 was located towards the northern end of the trench. The ditch, which was aligned northwest to southeast, had a steep sided 'V' shaped profile measuring 1.33m wide and 0.80m deep that cut into natural subsoil 102. The ditch contained three fills with the upper fill (111) sealed by subsoil 101. No finds were recovered.

Posthole 103 was located to the south of ditch 108. It measured 0.23m wide, 0.11m deep and contained a single dark grey silt clay fill with frequent charcoal inclusions. The posthole contained no finds.

Ditch 105 was located within the east to west part of the trench. It was aligned north to south and measured 1.25m wide and 0.50m deep with a concave profile that cut through subsoil 101. The ditch contained two silt clay fills (106, 107). The ditch contained no finds.

### 5.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 5, Plate 1)

This trench measured 70m long and was excavated on flat ground into natural subsoil (202) at a depth of 1m. The trench contained two ditch features (203 & 205) that cut into the natural subsoil 202.

Ditch 203 was located towards the northwest end of the trench. It was aligned northeast to southwest and measured 0.79m wide and 0.34m deep with a steep sided, concaved based profile. Ditch 203 contained a single mid grey clay fill (204). No finds were recovered.

Ditch 205 was located towards the southeast end of the trench and comprised a northeast to southwest aligned feature with moderately sloping sides and a concave base measuring 1.18m wide and 0.27m deep. It contained a single homogenous silt clay fill (206). No finds were recovered.

### 5.3 Trench 4 (Fig. 6, Plate 2)

This trench was 90m long and was located on ground that sloped moderately to the north. It was excavated onto natural subsoil depth of between 0.55 and 1.10m. The trench contained a single ditch feature (403).

Ditch 403 was located towards the middle of the trench. The ditch was aligned northeast to southwest and measured 0.70m wide and 0.19m deep. It contained a single silt sand fill (404) that cut through the subsoil (401). No finds were recovered.

### 5.4 Trench 6 (Fig. 7)

This trench was located on land that sloped moderately to the southwest. The trench was excavated onto natural subsoil (602) at a depth of between 0.37 and 0.65m. The trench contained a single ditch (603).

Ditch 603 was aligned northeast to southwest and measured 0.38m wide and 0.08m deep. The ditch had a shallow concave profile and contained a single mid grey brown sand clay fill (604). Fill 604 contained a single fragment of possible firedog dated to the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## 6. THE FINDS

A small assemblage of finds dating largely from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century to the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century was recovered. A single sherd of prehistoric pottery was the exception. These are itemised in Table 1 below. There were five pottery sherds representing five vessels, with a total weight of 116g. The prehistoric pottery from the subsoil in trench 1 (101) is a vein quartz tempered body sherd of possible Neolithic or Bronze age date. Context 201 produced a sherd of ?chert tempered cooking pot, 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century in date. Contexts 201 and 601 produced sherds of Totnes-type medieval and post medieval pottery. Context 200 produces a sherd of south Somerset sgrffito pottery. This was dated to the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The only other find was a fragment of possible firedog from context 604, probably dating from the late 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Table 1. Finds listing (weight is in grams).

Context	Trench	Context type	Prehistoric pottery		Medieval		Post-medieval pottery		Firedog	
			No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.	No.	W
101	1	Subsoil layer	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
200	2	Topsoil layer	-	-	-	-	1	14	-	-
201	2	Subsoil layer	-	-	-	-	1	64	-	-
501	5	Subsoil layer	-	-	1	6	-	-	-	-
601	6	Subsoil layer	-	-	1	6	-	-	-	-
604	6	Ditch fill	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	230
<b>Totals</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>230</b>

## 7. DISCUSSION

The results of the evaluation indicate that the site is covered with a relatively undisturbed, consistent and simple stratigraphy of topsoil and subsoil overlying a silty to sandy clay natural subsoil at a depth of between 0.55 and 1.10m.

The trenches exposed features that principally consisted of dispersed ditches. Although largely undated, these features can, based on morphology and stratigraphic positioning be roughly attributed to an era.

Ditch 108 in trench 1 was undated. However, the stratigraphic positioning under the subsoil, regular 'V' shaped profile and light grey clay rich homogenous fills are characteristics indicative of those prehistoric in date. The dimensions indicate that it would have been a fairly substantial feature likely to have been used as a drainage ditch in an area most liable to wet conditions. Its location parallel to the adjacent stream and flood plain may also suggest that it functioned as a boundary ditch bordering marginal land.

Posthole 103, located to the south of ditch 108, was an isolated undated feature but was also sealed by the subsoil layer. This may also suggest it to be of prehistoric date. This interpretation can also be supposed of the two undated ditches, 203 and 205 in trench 2 that are likely to have had a land management or divisional purpose.

The single sherd of prehistoric pottery recovered from the subsoil of trench 1, though not from a feature, suggests the presence of prehistoric activity in the vicinity of this part of the site.

The remaining ditches, 105, 403 and 603 are all likely to be medieval or later agricultural features.

While ditch 603 is dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century, ditches 105 and 403 contained no dating evidence. However, both the ditches are likely to be post-medieval or later in date when considering the nature of the fill composition and the fact that they cut through the subsoil layer.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The evaluation has established that the site is relatively undisturbed with archaeological features surviving from c.0.55m below the surface. The densities of features throughout the site were sparse with the evaluation results suggesting the presence of large areas devoid of significant pre-modern activity.

However, the presence of possible prehistoric ditches and posthole features located towards the northeast corner of the proposed development site are more significant as an area of archaeological interest.

The proposed development plan indicates varying degrees of ground works throughout the site. These range from excavating up to three meters depth to building up the current levels by around two meters. With reference to this and considering the results of the evaluation two initial areas

of potential high impact on archaeological deposits are apparent. These comprise a proposed pond and a wetland feature located in the northeast corner of the site. These are either overlying or are in the vicinity of the possible prehistoric features exposed in trenches one and two. In addition to this, any topsoil stripping also has the possibility of exposing additional archaeological features or deposits. The potential for further evidence of prehistoric activity in these general areas is therefore a factor to consider with regard to the impact of future development.

## 9. ARCHIVE

A fully integrated site archive had been prepared and is currently held by Exeter Archaeology at their premises at The Custom House, The Quay, Exeter, EX2 4AN. This will be deposited at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter under the accession number 205/2007

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by Hives Planning on Behalf of WBB Minerals. The fieldwork was undertaken by Simon Hughes, J. Bell and P. Jones. The report illustrations were prepared by J. Reed & N. Goodwin.

## SOURCES CONSULTED

Weddle. P, 2007, *Project design for an archaeological trench evaluation on land west of Old Exeter Road, Newton Abbot, Devon*. Unpublished EA document.



APPENDIX 1: Trench descriptions

Trench No.	1	Length	90m	Orientation	N-S/E-W
Context No.	Depth	Description		Interpretation	
100	0-0.45m	Dark grey brown loose silt loam with occasional sub angular stone <0.05m inclusions.		Topsoil	
101	0.45-0.66m	Light grey brown friable sand clay with moderate degraded shillet fragment and occasional sub angular stone <0.04m inclusions		Subsoil	
102	0.66m+	Mid yellow to mid grey friable sand clay and degraded shillet with moderate sub angular stone inclusions.		Natural subsoil	
103	0.66-0.77m	Round cut, steep sided and flat based measuring 0.23m wide and 0.11m deep.		Post hole	
104	0.66-0.77m	Very dark grey friable silt clay with frequent charcoal and occasional sub sound stone <0.10m inclusions.		Fill of 103	
105	0.63-1.09m	Linear cut, moderate sloping sides and concave base, measuring 1.25m wide and 0.50m deep. North to south aligned.		Ditch cut	
106	0.63-1.15m	Mid to light grey friable silt clay with common weathered shillet inclusions.		Fill of 105	
107	1.05-1.15m	Mid grey brown friable silt clay with common poorly sorted sub angular stones <0.40m (some heat affected), and charcoal inclusions.		Fill of 105	
108	0.74-1.54m	Linear cut, steep side concave base 'V' shaped profile, measuring 1.33m wide and 0.80m deep. Northwest to southeast aligned.		Ditch cut	
109	1.23-1.54m-	Mid grey firm silt clay with occasional sub angular stone <0.03m inclusions.		Fill of 108	
110	1.08-1.23m	Mid brown firm silt clay		Fill of 108	
111	0.74-1.08m	Mid grey brown firm silt clay with occasional sub angular stone <0.04m inclusions.		Fill of 108	

Trench No.	2	Length	70m	Orientation	NW-SE
Context No.	Depth	Description		Interpretation	
200	0-0.65m	Dark grey brown loose silt loam with frequent poorly sorted sub angular to sub rounded stone inclusions		Topsoil	
201	0.65-0.95m	Yellowish brown friable silt clay with moderate sub angular stone and occasional manganese inclusions.		Subsoil	
202	0.95m+	Yellowish brown firm silt clay		Natural subsoil	
203	0.76-1.10m	Linear cut, steep side concave base 'V' shaped profile, measuring 0.79m wide and 0.34m deep. Southwest to northeast aligned.		Ditch cut	
204	0.76-1.10m	Mid grey firm clay with occasional sub round stone and manganese fleck inclusions.		Fill of 203	
205	0.64-0.91m	Linear cut, moderate sloping sides concave base, measuring 1.18m and 0.27m deep. Northeast to southwest aligned.		Ditch cut	
206	0.64-0.91m	Mid grey friable silt clay with occasional sub angular stone <0.04m, heat affected clay fleck and manganese fleck inclusions.		Fill of 205	

Trench No.	3	Length	5m	Orientation	NW-SE
Context No.	Depth	Description		Interpretation	

APPENDIX 1: Trench descriptions

300	0.37 – 0.53m	Dark olive-grey firm silty clay with moderate lias rubble and occasional charcoal.	Modern make-up layer.
301	0.53m+	Olive firm silty clay	Natural subsoil
302	0.34 – 0.37m	Red stone chippings.	Modern levelling layer.
303	0.10 – 0.34m	Abundant roughly faced lias blocks and rubble and moderate brick fragments and crushed mortar.	Modern demolition deposit/make-up layer.

Trench No.	4	Length	90m	Orientation	NW-SE
Context No.	Depth	Description	Interpretation		
400	0-0.49m	Mid to dark brown loose silt loam with occasional sub angular stone <0.04m inclusions.	Topsoil		
401	0.49-0.54m	Light grey brown loose silt sand with rare sub angular stone <0.04m inclusions.	Subsoil		
402	0.54m+	Light yellow grey firm to loose sand clay to sand	Natural subsoil		
403	0.54-0.63m	Linear cut. Moderate sloping sides and concave base, measuring 0.70m wide and 0.19m deep. North to south aligned.	Ditch cut		
404	0.54-0.63m	Mid grey brown friable silt sand with occasional stone <0.05m inclusions.	Fill of 403		

Trench No.	5	Length	45m	Orientation	N-S
Context No.	Depth	Description	Interpretation		
500	0-0.38m	Mid grey brown friable silt loam	Topsoil		
501	0.38-0.55m	Light grey brown loose silt sand with rare sub angular stone <0.04m inclusions.	Subsoil		
502	0.55m+	Grey brown friable silt clay with manganese fleck inclusions.	Natural subsoil		

Trench No.	6	Length	110m	Orientation	NE-SW
Context No.	Depth	Description	Interpretation		
600	0-0.46m	Dark grey brown loose silt loam with occasional sub angular stone <0.04m inclusions.	Topsoil		
601	0.46-0.65m	Mid brown friable clay sand with occasional sub angular poorly sorted stone <0.40m inclusions.	Subsoil		
602	0.65m+	Mid to light yellow grey to grey brown firm to loose clay to coarse sand with occasional sub angular stone <0.30m inclusions.	Natural subsoil		
603	0.65-0.73m	Linear cut. Moderate sloping sides and concave base, measuring 0.38m wide and 0.08m deep. Northwest to southeast aligned.	Ditch cut		
604	0.65-0.73m	Mid grey brown friable sand clay with occasional manganese and sub rounded stone <0.10m inclusions.	Fill of 603		

Trench No.	7	Length	65m	Orientation	NE-SW
Context No.	Depth	Description	Interpretation		
700	0-0.30m	Grey brown loose silt loam	Topsoil		
701	0.30-0.55m	Grey brown loose silt clay	Subsoil		
702	0.55m+	Grey to brown firm sand clay	Natural subsoil		

APPENDIX 1: Trench descriptions

<b>Trench No.</b>	8	<b>Length</b>	1.5m	<b>Orientation</b>	NW-SE
<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Depth</b>	<b>Description</b>		<b>Interpretation</b>	
800	0-0.20m	Mid greyish brown loose silt loam		Topsoil	
801	0.20-0.80m	Yellow to brown compact silt clay with frequent manganese fleck inclusions.		Subsoil	
802	0.80m+	Yellow to brown compact clay with occasional gravel inclusions.		Natural subsoil	



Fig. 1 Location of site. Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey® mapping with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Exeter City Council 100025458. Scale 1:25000.

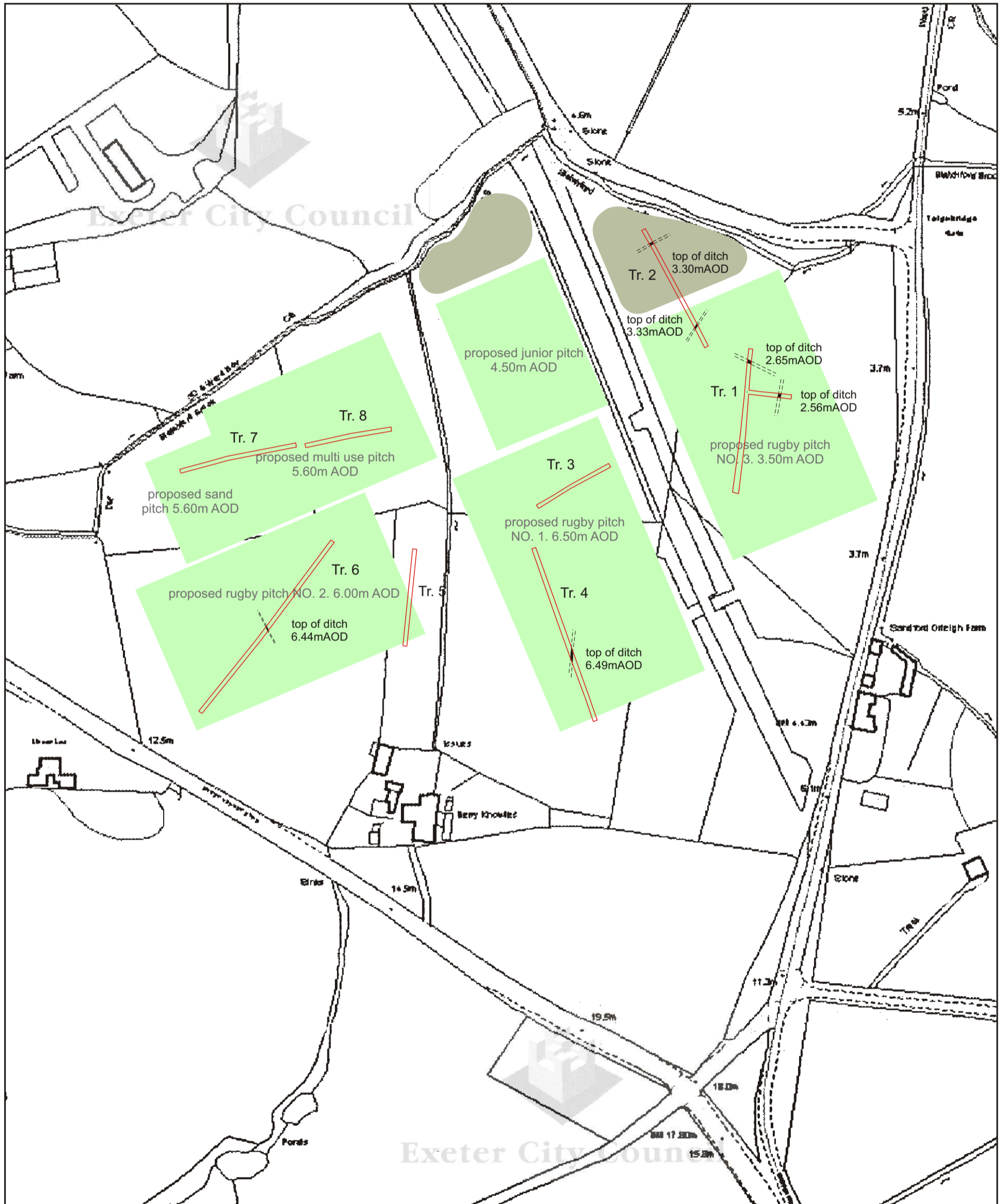


Fig. 2 Location of trenches. Scale 1:2000. Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. Exeter City Council 100025345.

Trench 1  
Plan

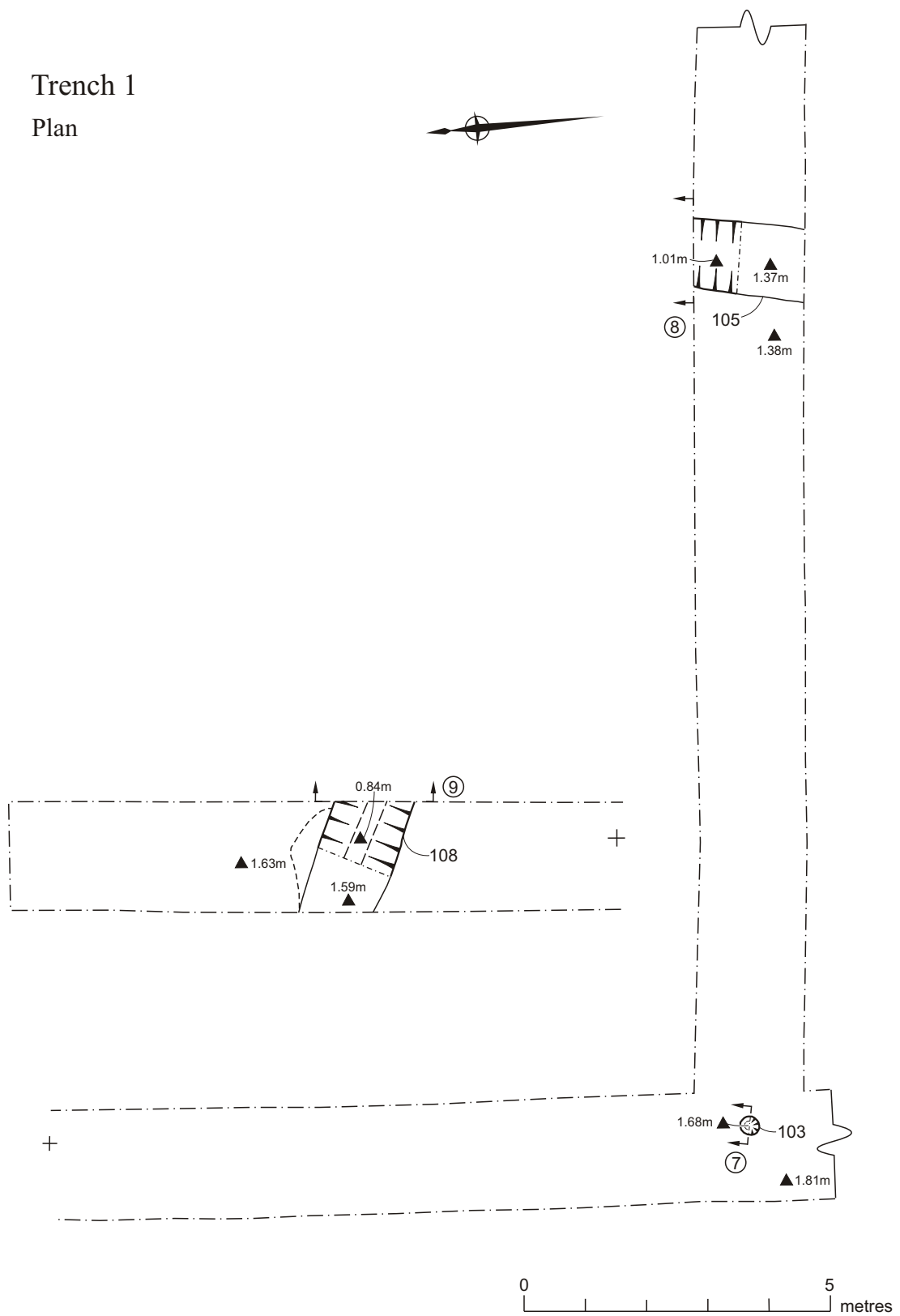
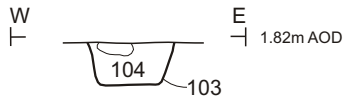


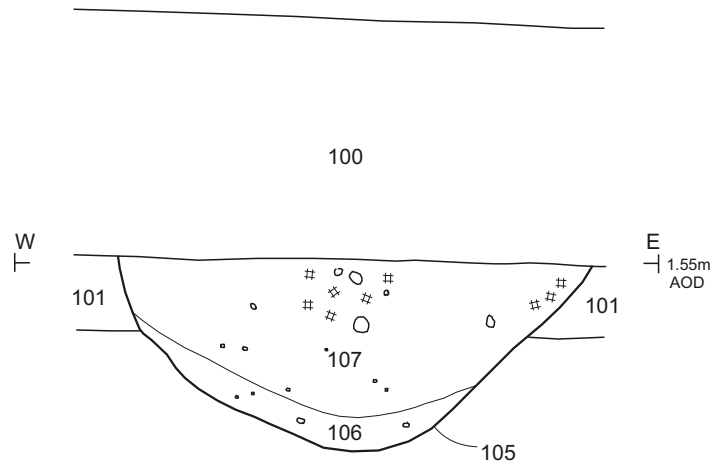
Fig. 3 Trench 1, plan. Scale 1:100.

# Trench 1

## Section 7



## Section 8



## Section 9

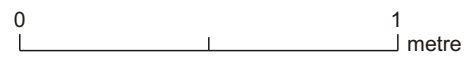
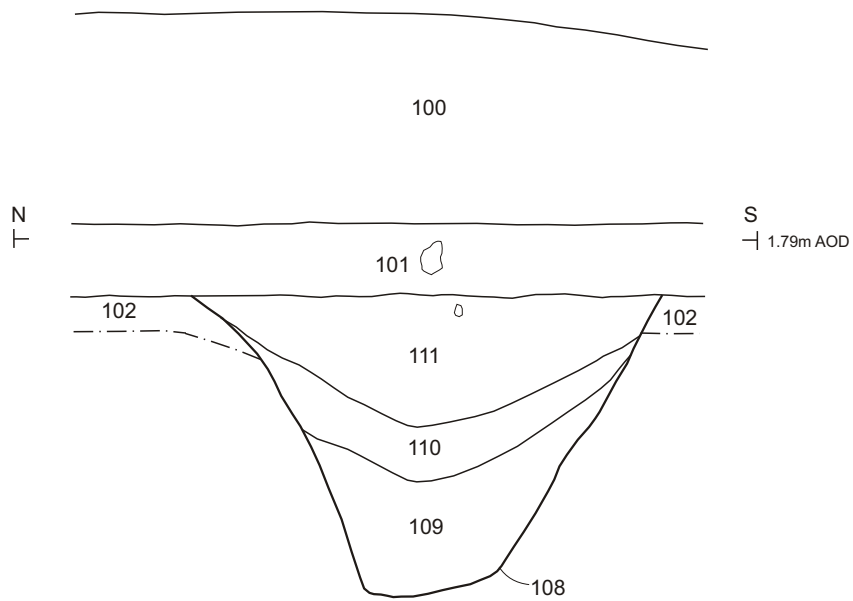
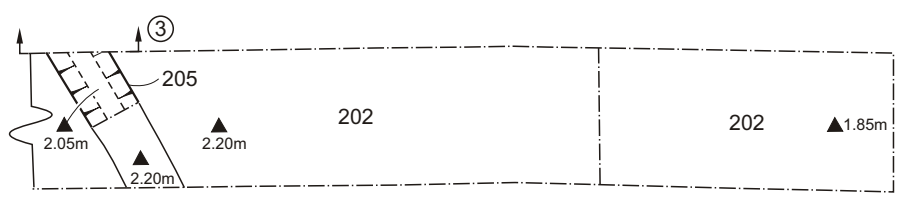
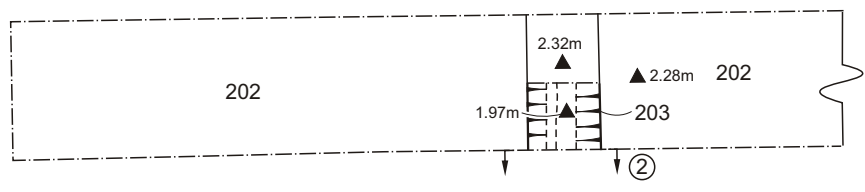
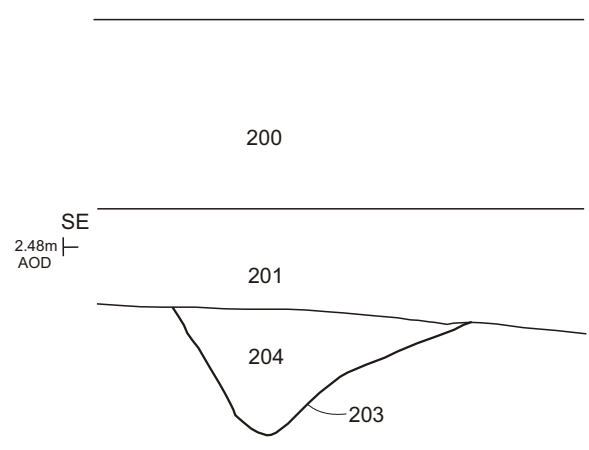


Fig. 4 Trench 1, sections. Scale 1:20.

Trench 2  
Plan



Section 2



Section 3

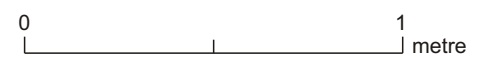
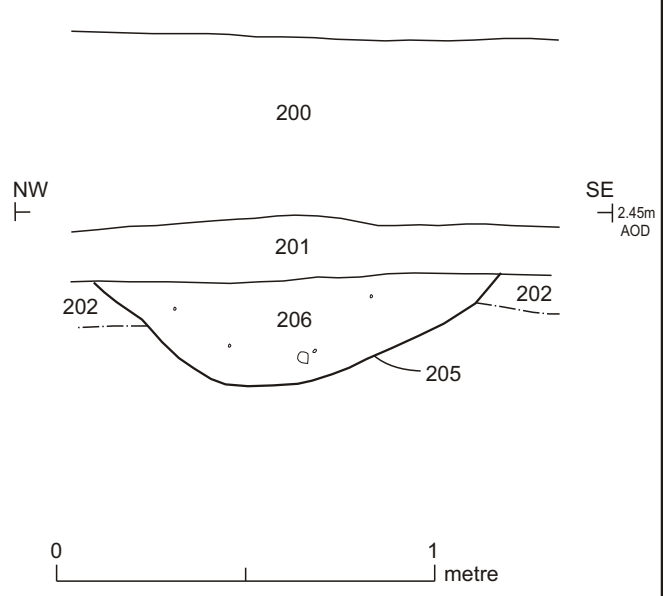


Fig. 5 Trench 2, plan and sections. Scales 1:100 and 1:20.



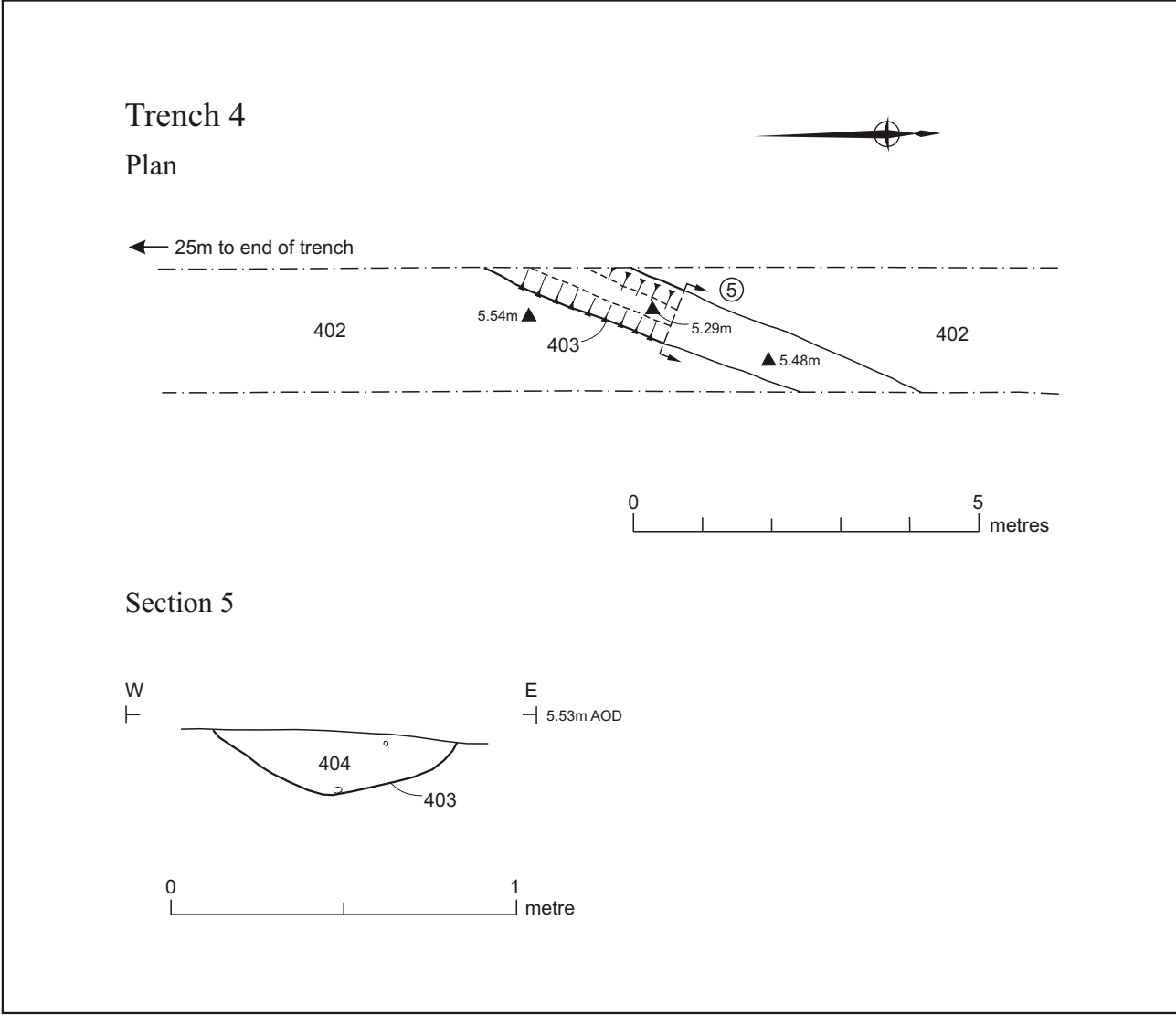


Fig. 6 Trench 4, plan and section. Scale 1:100 and 1:20.

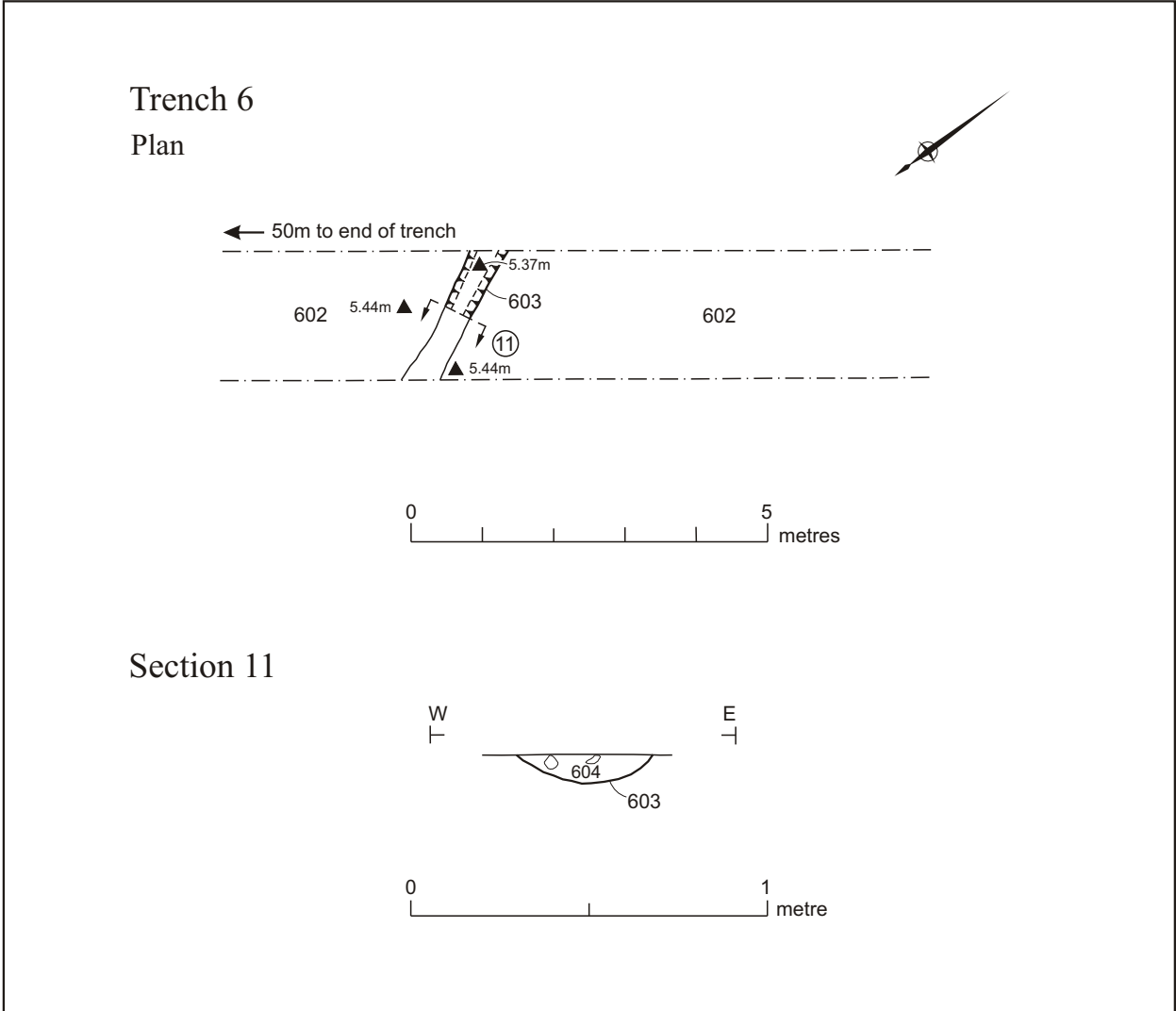


Fig. 7 Trench 6, plan and section. Scale 1:100 and 1:20.



Plate 1 View of ditch 203, looking southwest. 1m scale.



Plate 2 View of ditch 403, looking northeast. 1m scale.



Plate 3 General view of Trench 1, including ditch 108, looking north-east.



Plate 4 View of ditch 108, looking east-south-east. 1m scale.