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**LAND ADJOINING 80 WISBECH ROAD, LITTLEPORT,  
CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

RESEARCH ARCHIVE REPORT

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## RESEARCH ARCHIVE REPORT FOR EXCAVATIONS ON LAND ADJOINING 80 WISBECH ROAD, LITTLEPORT, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

### 1 INTRODUCTION

This report comprises the research archive for archaeological investigations (trial trench evaluation, open-area excavation and test-pitting) undertaken at land adjoining 80 Wisbech Road, Littleport, Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 5608 8732) (Fig. 1). The trial trench evaluation was undertaken by Archaeological Solutions Ltd (AS) during June 2005, this was followed by the open-area excavation and test-pitting between December 2007 and February 2008. The excavation was conducted in accordance with a specification prepared by AS (dated 18/02/05), following a brief issued by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning & Countryside Advice (CAPCA, dated 07/02/05). It follows the Evaluation Report (Grassam, Nicholson and Weston 2005), Interim Site Narrative (Greene 2008) and Post Excavation Assessment and Updated Project Design (Sparrow 2008), and anticipates the publication report.

All detailed feature descriptions are presented in the Evaluation Report (Grassam, Nicholson and Weston 2005) and the Interim Site Narrative (Greene 2008).

### 2 SITE NARRATIVE

#### 2.1 Overview

(Fig. 2)

The evaluation site was located in the western side of Littleport, on the northern side of Wisbech Road. A short transect fronts onto Wisbech Road. It is bounded to the north by Blackbank Drove and to the west by a modern housing development. It is bounded to the east by garden land to the rear of Nos. 74 and 76. Trench 6 revealed a considerable number of features which resulted in a targeted excavation area of c. 525m<sup>2</sup>, surrounding the trench to the east, west and south.

The archaeological programme revealed two phases of activity which were identified on the basis of datable artefactual evidence, the stratigraphic relationships between features and spatial and functional associations. The chronological phases are defined as follows:

- **Phase 1** – Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age
- **Phase 2** – Late Iron Age

Phase 1 (Fig. 3) comprised six pits which yielded a small amount of datable pottery and struck flint. Phase 2 (Fig. 3) features date to the Late Iron Age. These comprised two large intercutting ditches and one gully. A lack of datable material has resulted in a large proportion of the features remaining undated (Fig. 3). The majority of the undated features comprised postholes, pits and ditches. One sherd of Romano-British pottery was also discovered, but this appears to have been intrusive within an earlier feature. Several pieces of struck flint indicate a Neolithic presence at the site, although all the material is thought to have been residual within the Late Iron Age

features. Neolithic occupation is attested at Highfield Farm, Littleport, where small quantities of Neolithic pottery were discovered during excavations (Holt 2008).

## **2.2 Phase 1: Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age**

(Figs 3-5)

### *2.2.1 The location and delineation of Phase 1 activity*

The features attributed to Phase 1 were identified in Trench 6 (Grid Reference (GS) F3 – I20), at the evaluation stage of investigation. Pit F1020 (GS H9-10) was located along the eastern side of the trench, 9.56m from the southern end. Pit F1024 (GS G9-10) appears to have been associated with Pit F1020, as they both contained similar fills and were of a similar shape and profile; they also produced Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery. Although Pit F1022 (GS G11-H11) failed to yield any datable artefacts, the similarity of form and fill with F1020 and F1024 indicate they were contemporary features. The extent of Pit F1013 (GS G-H11) was not identified during the excavation and it was located 12.25m from the southern end of the trench. Pit F2050=F1018 (GS G11 – H10) was aligned roughly east-west and was located immediately north of Pits F1020, F1022 and F1024. Pit F1052 (GS H14-15) was the most northerly datable feature within Trench 6.

### *2.2.2 Phase 1 Features*

Pit F1020 was shallow, sub-circular and contained a fill (L1021) which appeared very similar to Inundation Layer L1012. A thumbnail flint scraper, along with Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery, was recovered from this feature. F1024 was located in the western side of the trench, with its eastern extent 0.88m west of F1020. F1024 contained a similar fill (L1025) to F1020. Pit F1022 did not produce any datable material, but its location and similarity of form and fill would indicate it was associated with F1020 and F1024. Environmental analysis of the fills of both F1020 and F1024 (L1021 and L1025) revealed only modern remains, suggesting the features may have been disturbed prior to excavation, or that the excavation of the features resulted in contamination.

Pit F1013 (GS G-H11) was located to the north of Pit F1024. The extent of the feature was not identified. Fill F1014 was similar to the fills of Pits F1020, F1022 and F1024. No pottery was recovered from within the fill of this feature; however a flint thumbnail scraper was indicative of a Bronze Age date. A small amount of charcoal was identified during analysis of the fill sample, indicating the fill may have contained the waste of a small-scale burning activity. An undated posthole (F1016) (GS G11) was located 0.25m to the south. There is no indication that these features are related as their forms and fills differ greatly.

Pit F2050=F1018 was located to the north of the three pits (F1020, F1022 and F1024). This feature yielded a considerable amount of prehistoric material (struck and burnt flint, daub and animal bone), but none of the finds were identifiable to a particular period. The similarity of fill, however, indicates the feature was open at the time the Inundation Layer L1012 was deposited, and was therefore contemporary with the Phase 1 features. A similar scenario is proposed for Pit F1052, north of Pit F2050. Though the feature only produced stuck flint, the similarity between the composition

of its fill and that of Inundation Layer L1012, indicate it was also contemporary with the Phase 1 features. Undated Pit F1054 (GS H12-13) was located to the south of F1052 and displayed a similar profile, although the fills differed, indicating F1054, being sealed by Inundation Layer L1012 was an earlier feature and therefore not assignable to a phase.

### *2.2.3 Discussion of Phase 1 features*

All six of the features assigned to Phase 1 may have been contemporary (F1020, F1024 and F1013) as they all contained a similar fill, which appears to have been the same as Inundation Layer L1012. Environmental sampling of the features produced only modern remains or small amounts of charcoal. Therefore the land-use of the site may not be closely determined. The results of the Fenland Survey (Hall 1996) show that the Bronze and Iron Age landscape surrounding Littleport would have largely consisted of peat fen, with the area north and east of the site covered in small tributaries of the Old Croft River. The archaeological investigations at this site indicate a slightly different situation; several water courses were identified on the site during the prehistoric period, suggesting the river and its tributaries extended into the area now occupied by the town of Littleport, and although it was a fen island, it was still affected by alluvial features. The site is located very close to the edge of the area affected by the river and its tributaries, this therefore suggests the edges of the fen island varied over time, and as a result, may have had an effect on the level of occupation in the area and its land-use. The evidence suggests that the site may not have provided a reliably dry environment, and was not suitable for long-term settlement, perhaps explaining the paucity of material recovered both periods. Soil analysis of the site indicated the majority of the features were sealed by Inundation Layer L1012, which is likely to have formed during the Iron Age (Macphail, this report).

The evidence recovered from this site contributes to the sparse understanding of prehistoric occupation of the area occupied by the town of Littleport (prehistoric finds have been recovered from sites outside the built-up area at Apes Hall, Butcher Hill and Highfield Farm, but none have been recorded within the town development). Finds recovered from excavations at Highfield Farm (Holt 2008) have indicated a significant prehistoric presence around Littleport, just 500m south of 80 Wisbech Road. Significant quantities of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery were recovered from the fills of ditches and pits, however a large proportion of the material was found to be residual within later features, or was found in spreads caused by later Anglo-Saxon and medieval ground disturbance (T. Lane Pers. Comm.). One sherd of pottery recovered from the Wisbech Road site may have displayed an omphalos base (although the possibility of it being uneven was not ruled out), this could compare to the styles of pottery recovered from Highfield Farm. The Highfield Farm report is awaiting completion and therefore the information regarding the prehistoric features remains sparse, hindering any comparisons between the profiles and fills. Despite this, crucial contrasts between the nature of the two sites can be drawn; the Highfield Farm site was located on considerably higher land, well within the fen island, whereas 80 Wisbech Road was situated close to the 0m AOD contour. Many more finds, and more evidence of occupation would be anticipated from the higher land as the conditions would have been more conducive to long-term settlement. Localised



concentrations of finds and features were identified at both Highfield Farm and 80 Wisbech Road, perhaps indicating a similar settlement pattern.

A considerable amount of Bronze Age evidence has been identified in Ely, c. 5.6km south-west of Littleport. It is possible the landscape at the time was more favourable for settlement around Ely, than Littleport. Excavations at Church Farm, Fenstanton (Chapman, Carlisle and Leigh 2005) revealed Neolithic to Iron Age occupation. The Bronze Age activity comprised a ring ditch of an early Bronze Age barrow and several pit groups. Late Bronze Age evidence comprised 17 sherds of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery, which were recovered from droveway ditches, a shallow pit and a tree bole. The features were not comparable to those identified at Wisbech Road, Littleport, therefore indicating an alternative method of land-use, possibly due to local conditions.

### **2.3 Phase 2: Late Iron Age**

(Figs. 3, 4 & 6)

#### *2.3.1 The location and delineation of Phase 2 activity*

Phase 2 features comprised two intercutting ditches (F2011 and F2015) and one shallow gully (F2056). F2015 (GS A4-5– N5) was located generally parallel to the southern boundary of the site, running roughly east to west across the width of the site. Ditch F2011 (GS B1-D1 – C15) cut Ditch F2015 in the south-western corner of the site and tapered to a terminus just less than 8m from the northern site boundary. Gully F2056 (GS B7-8 – C7-8) ran into (but did not cut) the western bank of Ditch F2011.

#### *2.3.2 Phase 2 features*

Ditch F2015 (as stated in section 2.3.1) ran the width of the site on a roughly east to west alignment. The western portion of the ditch measured up to 1.51m wide and became gradually narrower, so that the eastern section of the ditch measured just 0.46m in width, thereby losing over two thirds of its width. The meandering course of this ditch may suggest that it was a naturally formed gully, the fact that it cut Pit F2064 (GS L5) and Gully F2009 (GS A8-E1) suggests it was intentionally created. An area of erosion close to excavated segment D (GS L5) may suggest that the ditch was used as a watering hole for stock, or utilised by humans for domestic activities; this is however, highly speculative. Excavated segment G identified that the ditch was cut by a small posthole (F2078; GS K5). The posthole was located on the northern bank of the ditch which had a much more stepped side than the southern bank.

The top of the western extent of Ditch F2015 was cut by a large sub-rectangular pit (F2066; GS A4-6) and F2015 was only visible at the very base of the section. No finds were recovered from F2066, and therefore its function remains unknown.

Ditch F2015 produced one sherd of Late Iron Age pottery and struck flint from Segment E (where it was cut by Pit F2066). Struck flint and animal bone were recovered from Segment A.

Two sherds of Late Iron Age pottery were recovered from Ditch F2011 (L2012). A quartz pebble hammer (Fig. 7) was also recovered. The pebble hammer has been dated to between the Mesolithic and Bronze Age (Martin Tingle, Section 3.1). One possibly residual, Neolithic flint blade was also recovered from this ditch. Butler (2005) suggests that Iron Age communities continued to use flint implements, despite the increasing popularity of metal. It has also been suggested that, rather than expend time creating flint implements which may have been used for simple activities, items which had been originally created during earlier prehistoric periods were re-used (Butler 2005). It is possible this flint originated onsite within an earlier feature but that the Late Iron Age inhabitants discovered the item and put it to opportunistic use. A similar scenario is possible for the hammer. However, both items could have been residual.

Soil samples were taken from both Ditches F2011 and F2015 for environmental analysis. Unfortunately the only evidence identified within the fills comprised charcoal and modern roots, as well as evidence of modern buttercup.

A loomweight was recovered from Layer L1004 of Trench 5, during the evaluation phase. This has been dated to the Middle Iron Age to Roman period and therefore is likely to have been deposited during Phase 2. As it was not recovered from an archaeological feature, the deposition context remains unclear, however its location within a layer may suggest it was deposited accidentally (i.e. it was lost). Trench 5 was sterile of features and finds, however the presence of the loomweight onsite may indicate textile manufacture in the area.

### *2.3.3 Discussion of Phase 2 features.*

Little can be deduced from the Phase 2 features and finds; it was suggested in the Site Interim (Greene 2008) that the ditches may have formed an enclosure; however Ditch F2011 cut Ditch F2015 indicating F2015 would have been infilled, and probably disused, prior to the creation of F2011. The two ditches therefore probably represent separate site drainage or field systems.

The finds recovered from these features indicate Late Iron Age activity at the site, and may hint at domestic refuse disposal; however the small nature of the finds assemblage limits the interpretation and understanding of the Iron Age occupation of the site. The small flint assemblage, combined with the quartz pebble hammer, may suggest that the Late Iron Age inhabitants curated older tools. However, it was noted in section 2.3.2 that due to the small quantity of finds recovered from Ditch F2011, the material could have been residual. Excavations at Prickwillow Road, Ely (Atkins and Mudd 2003) identified Late Iron Age gullies. Their similarity with the Littleport ditches lies in their lack of pottery – they produced only five sherds. The lack of finds within the ditches may be a result on onsite activities, such as agriculture or site drainage, which are unlikely to have produced little, preservable, material waste.

## **2.4 Undated Features**

(Figs 3, 4 & 7)

### *2.4.1 The location and delineation of undated features*

The vast majority of the features remain unphased. Several of the undated features are likely to have been natural depressions, filled in during a period of inundation on the site, or they could have been variations in the natural soil geology of the site (Greene 2008).

### *2.4.2 Undated features*

#### *Trench 6 feature cluster*

Postholes F1056 (GS H12), F1016 (GS G11) and F1030 (GS G10) were located along the western side of the trench and extended beyond the trench wall. They were very similar in form and fill. These might have represented a fence line, and were possibly associated with several other postholes identified to the south, along the trench wall. The postholes would have been created once the pits and gullies had fallen into use, as the projected course of the fence would have run through many of the features.

Gully F1050 (GS G7), aligned east to west, was situated 0.08m to the south of Large Pit F1032 (GS F7-8). The fill produced a small amount of charcoal, indicating the deposit was related to a small-scale burning event. Gully F1048 (GS G7) was located to the south of this feature but does not appear to be associated with F1050 as it runs along a south-west to north-east alignment.

Large Pit F1054 (GS H12-13) was located to the north of the three postholes, on the western side of the trench. Struck flint, possibly indicating a prehistoric date of creation was recovered from the fill.

Closer to the southern end of the trench, a dense cluster of features was located between Gullies F2082 and F1081. Gully F1081 (GS G-H6) was a meandering feature, and may have been created through natural processes; the only finds to be recovered were a small amount of animal bone. This feature may have been cut by Pit F1083 (GS G5-6 – H5-6), but the relationship between the two features was unclear. The gully was also cut by Pit F1085 (GS G6), which had a similar fill and produced no finds. A small posthole abutted Pit F1083.

To the north of these features, Pit F1070 (GS G6-7) was cut by two postholes (F1068 (GS G6) and F1066 (GS G6)) that followed the edges of the pit, possibly indicating that they may have been created when the feature was still visible within the landscape.

Pit F1032 (GS G7-8) was a large shallow feature, which produced daub, struck and burnt flint and animal bone indicative of a prehistoric date. This feature was cut by Posthole F1038 (GS F8) which did not produce any finds.

Postholes F2058 (GS J-K13), F2062 (GS K14-15) and F2068 (GS L15-16) appear to have been associated: all three were of a similar size and may have formed a curved

fence boundary. None of the postholes yielded any finds therefore interpretation cannot link them to landuse or a particular combined function. The remaining features within this trench comprised pits and very narrow and shallow gullies, none of these were stratigraphically associated and therefore they offer little further investigative potential.

#### *The remaining undated ditches and gullies*

Curvilinear Ditch F2009 (GS A8-E1), aligned north-west to south-east, was located in the south-western corner of the site. The extent of the ditch was not identified, as it extended beyond the site boundary. No finds were recovered; however it was cut by Ditches F2015 and F2011 indicating it was in use before the Late Iron Age. It is possible that this feature represented a prehistoric enclosure ditch, but a lack of associated features and its extension beyond the site boundaries, hinders further interpretation.

Gully F2082<sup>1</sup> (GS G-H9) was very shallow, indicating it had been truncated by later disturbance. The extent of the feature to the west was not discovered during excavation; it is not possible to identify its relationship with Ditch F2011. F2082 was cut by Undated Posthole F1028 (GS H9). A series of flint flakes were recovered from this feature indicating a prehistoric date. The diagnostic qualities of the assemblage were limited but indicate possible Early Neolithic date. It is thought that small-scale retouching or basic blade production occurred onsite.

#### *The remaining undated pits and postholes*

It was suggested during the excavation that many pits seemed to be aligned with Ditches F2011 and F2015 (Greene 2008). Further analysis indicates this was not the case, as they do not appear to have been created in relation to each other. Several of the pits were of a similar form but were interspersed with irregular features. Iron Age pit alignments were often formed by sub-rectangular or circular pits, located along a ditch or aligned on their own. Excavations at St. Ives, Cambridgeshire (Pollard 1996) show that the pits were often located on strict alignments and did not change course.

Very few of these pits produced any finds; however Pit F2084 (GS C-E19) in the north-western corner of the site, yielded a very small amount of wood (6g) as well as struck flint. The flint tool has been classified as a denticulate or scraper, of which one edge had been retouched to form a blade (Peachey, section 3.1). This implement has been assigned a very tentative Early Neolithic date. The absence of other datable material from this feature hinders a firm chronological phasing of the pit. The small quantity of the wood prevented further analysis; as such no firm chronological date could be attributed to this feature. This feature was located directly north of Ditch F2011, but very little can be deduced about the potential relationship between the two features.

Pit F2019 (GS J5-6 – K5-6) may have been associated with Postholes F2022 (GS K5-6) and F2078 (GS K5), which flanked the south-eastern side of the pit. Pit F2078 cut

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<sup>1</sup> This feature was excavated during the trial trench evaluation as F1026, L1027

Ditch F2015 indicating these features were created at some point following the Late Iron Age.

### **3 ARTEFACT AND ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS**

#### **3.1 Flint**

*Andrew Peachey*

Excavations produced a total of 14 fragments (89g) of struck flint, of which three (13g) were present in the subsoil. The excavation assemblage includes a scraper or denticulate, two blades and a variety of flakes, possibly produced in the (Early?) Neolithic period. A sparse scatter of small secondary and tertiary flakes were also recovered from Trench 6, prior to the excavation, and included two core fragments and a number of small scrapers.

##### *Methodology & Terminology*

The flint was quantified by fragment count and weight (g), with all data entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that will be deposited as part of the archive. Flake type (see 'Dorsal cortex,' below) or implement type, patination and colour were also recorded as part of this data set.

The term 'cortex' refers to the natural weathered exterior surface of a piece of flint, and the term 'patination' to the colouration of a flaked surface exposed by human or natural agency. Dorsal cortex is categorised after Andrefsky (2005, 104 & 115) with 'primary flake' referring to those with cortex covering 100% of the dorsal face; 'secondary flake' with 50-99%; 'tertiary' with 1-49% and 'non-corticated' to those with no dorsal cortex. A 'blade' is defined as an elongated flake whose length is at least twice as great as its breadth, often exhibiting parallel dorsal flake scars (a feature that can assist in the identification of broken blades that, by definition, have an indeterminate length/breadth ratio).

##### *Raw materials*

The flint varies considerably in colour from mid grey to pale-mid brown to very dark olive brown and is not of particularly high quality. The flint also demonstrates varying degrees of light to moderate patination that is probably a reflection of post-deposition exposure or re-deposition. Only limited quantities of moderately abraded/battered, pale grey and white cortex are present in this flint assemblage suggesting the flint may have been collected from nearby surface gravels.

##### *Composition & Technology*

The single tool present in the excavation flint assemblage comprises a denticulate or scraper recovered from Pit F2084 (L2085) (22g). One edge of this implement has been retouched to form a blade, which is furthermore serrated or notched. It is unclear if this is: the result of heavy wear on an originally 'smooth' blade (a scraper); the original intended result (a denticulate); or if the artefact evolved through wear (from one type to another), without any deliberate human agency. The non-blade side of this implement is more opaque and matt than the blade with traces of cortex around



the blunt edge, thereby suggesting that this implement was manufactured from a relatively large flake blank rather than a specific core. A similar example in technology and profile was recorded in an Early Neolithic context at Spong Hill (Healy 1988, 56: L73).

The evaluation flint assemblage includes two end scrapers in Pit F1013 (L1014) and a side scraper in Posthole F1034 (L1035) of similar manufacture to that recovered from the excavation. Contrastingly, Gully F1026 (L1027) and Posthole (F1032) L1033) produced small button scrapers manufactured from flakes, typically associated with the Bronze Age.

Further implements recorded in this assemblage include blades in Late Iron Age Ditch F2011 (L2012) (1g) and Subsoil L2003 (4g). Both blades are narrow, less than 30mm in length and display dorsal scars. The example in Ditch F2011 displays moderate patination all over and is probably residual while the remaining example is unstratified in the subsoil. These blades were probably produced in the Neolithic period but this cannot be confirmed. Further fragments of blades and of multi-platform cores were recovered from Sand Layer L1009 of the trial trench evaluation, but are not substantial or diagnostic enough to allow any further chronological definition.

The remaining struck flint in the assemblage comprises a series of conchoidal flakes, with a small concentration in Linear F2082. Linear F2082 (L2083) contains unpatinated examples of three tertiary flakes (12g) and single primary, secondary, and uncorticated flakes (5g, 2g & 19g respectively). Further single examples of uncorticated and tertiary flakes were recorded in Ditch F2015 (L2016) (4g & 8g respectively); and a single uncorticated flake was recovered from Pit F2060 (L2061) (3g). An additional heavily patinated tertiary flake was also recovered from Subsoil L2003 (9g). The trial trench evaluation also produced low quantities of small secondary and tertiary flakes, at least two with partially retouched edges, in Pit F1070 (L1071) and Stakehole F1072 (L1073), however these flakes appear to occur in isolation and the assemblage from the trial trench evaluation did not include any small concentration comparable to those from the excavation. The limited quantity and diagnostic qualities of this assemblage do not allow for any firm conclusions, but it may be tentatively suggested that this assemblage represents a low degree of (Early?) Neolithic, and possibly Bronze Age activity, that may have included very limited retouching or basic blade production on or near the site.

### **3.2 Pottery**

*Peter Thompson*

The investigations recovered 66 sherds weighing 511 grams (57 sherds (395g) from the evaluation, plus 9 sherds (116g) from the excavation). The pottery from the evaluation is in poor condition; being friable with abraded surfaces and some rounded edges, although the sherds from F1001, probably all from the same vessel, had relatively fresh breaks. The sherds have smooth surfaces. Fabrics are varied but mainly comprise flint and or grass temper, quartz sand, calcite and grog are also present.

There is limited diagnostic evidence. F1001 contained a flat base with quite profuse flint tempering on the underside, which has been noted in some areas as a Late Bronze



Age trait. Two conjoining body sherds showing the beginning of an angle turn suggest a carinated shoulder, possibly for a *situla* profile. This is a characteristic of the Post Deverel-Rimbury and Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age periods. A curving body sherd, indicative of a small bowl or possibly a cup, from Pit F1020 might also suggest a Late Bronze Age date. The pottery assemblage can only be broadly defined as later prehistoric in date, but is likely to be late 2<sup>nd</sup> to mid 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.

### *Fabrics*

- F1 – Dark grey with some patchy slight oxidation to the outside surfaces. Temper comprises finely crushed white (burnt?) angular flint less than .3 cm across. Rare grass/chaff marks are evident on some external surfaces but were not noted within the fabric temper. Surfaces are also smoothed.
- F1a – Mottled buff and grey with rare to sparse angular flint up to 0.04 cm across, rare rounded quartz and rare grass.
- F2 – Friable grey fabric with patches of bright orange from oxidisation or possibly staining. Fabric comprises moderate to common grey quartz up to 1mm across and rare to sparse grass temper noted mostly on the outside surfaces.
- F2a – Grey fabric containing sand, large burnt organic and fine white calcitic material.
- F3 – Mottled grey and buff containing moderate voids from burnt out organics and sparse sub-rounded pale brown grog

Feature	Context	Feature Type	Quantity	Date	Comment
-	L1001	Peat Layer	50x 372g F1	Prehistoric	Probable carinated shoulder and flat base
-	L1009	Sand Layer	4x5g F2	“ “	
F1020	L1021	Pit	1x15g F1a	“ “	Curving body sherd probably to a small bowl or cup
F1024	L1025	Pit	1x2g F3	“ “	-
F1050	L1051	Stakehole	1x1g F2a	“ “	-

*Table 3: Prehistoric pottery data*

As noted above, the excavation produced 9 sherds of abraded pot weighing 116g. One sherd is possibly baked or hardened clay. The majority of the assemblage is heavily abraded and comprises later prehistoric ceramics, as well as one Roman sherd.

Feature	Context	Feature Type	Quantity	Date	Comment
-	L2003	Subsoil	1x9g RSO 2x50g PSSW 1x10g POW 1x3g PGSW	Roman	RSO: Roman Oxidised ware SSW: Prehistoric Sandy Shelly Ware PGW – Prehistoric organic tempered ware PGSW – Prehistoric grass and sand tempered ware
F2011	L2012	Ditch	1x3g PFS 1x15g POW?	Late Iron Age?	PFS - Prehistoric flint and sand tempered ware POW – Prehistoric organic ware?
F2015	L2016	Ditch	1x23g PFOG	Late Iron Age	PFOG – Prehistoric flint, organic and grog temper.
F2082	L2083	Gully	1x3g PFSW	Iron Age (Late?)	PFSW: Prehistoric fine Flint and sand tempered ware

Table 4: Pottery data

L2003 contained 5 abraded body sherds. One is a Roman oxidised sandy ware; the other four (two thick sherds with coarse sand temper with sparse shell and flint, and two with grass temper, one also containing sand) are of Late Iron Age appearance but could be contemporary with the Roman sherd. L2011 contained a probable Late Iron Age small upright rim, which is in fairly good condition. It is slightly expanded externally, with smoothed surfaces and contains flint and sand temper with a little grass. Accompanying this was a piece of pot or baked material with a profusion of burnt out voids probably from organics but possibly shell. It has no fired surfaces and the abundance of inclusions suggests it is not actual pot. L2016 contained a Middle to Late Iron Age abraded base in mixed fabric of flint, organics and a little grog and sand. There is a hint of upward curvature of the base to an omphalos form but not enough survives to enable a definitive conclusion and it might simply be slightly uneven. L2083 contained a probable Late Iron Age small abraded body sherd in fine flint and sand also containing a small amount of grass.

### 3.3 Daub

*Andrew Peachey*

A total of 33 fragments (173g) of daub were recovered from seven contexts during the evaluation. All the fragments are poorly preserved and highly rounded through attrition and abrasion. The fragments exhibit varying states of oxidisation probably dependent upon the degree of exposure and weathering they have been subjected to rather than burning or firing. The average fragment weight is low at 5.24g.

Feature	Context	Frequency	Weight (g)
-	L1002	6	39
-	L1009	15	42
-	L1012	7	53
F1018	L1019	1	1
F1026	L1027	1	23
F1032	L1033	2	10
F1036	L1037	1	5
<i>Total</i>		<i>33</i>	<i>173</i>

*Table 5: Daub data*

### **3.4 The loomweight**

*Nina Crummy*

During the evaluation a fragment from the apex of a fired clay loomweight, broken across a perforation, was recovered from Layer L1004 within Trench 5. The fabric is a sandy clay containing some inclusions of sandy grit and flint pebbles. It was fired hard and is mainly grey, both internally and externally, but with some brown patches. Maximum surface dimensions are 60 by 55 mm and it weighed 145 g. The precise form of the loomweight is not clear, but it is likely to be of the triangular form used from the Middle Iron Age into the first decades after the Roman conquest.

### **3.5 The quartzite pebble hammer (Fig. 7)**

*Martin Tingle*

This artefact is probably a pebble hammer; a prehistoric shaft hole implement formerly known as a pebble macehead. The fragmentary example from Littleport exhibits the characteristics of a pebble hammer being made from a quartzite type rock, possessing an hour glass perforation and showing marks of battering on its surviving end. While they are often made from circular pebbles with the perforation at the centre, this example would appear to have utilised an oval pebble and consequently, when complete, it might have resembled an ovoid macehead.

Pebble hammers appear to date from the Mesolithic, although they may have continued in use through the Neolithic and even into the Bronze Age (Rankine 1951, 53; Roe 1979, 36). The presence of this example in an Iron Age context may simply result from chance, although there are numerous examples of these distinctive artefacts appearing, apparently as curated objects, in much later periods, including the Iron Age (Crummy 2004, 12; Roe 1979, 36).

The hammer is made from a pale white translucent quartzite which has pinkish veins that are clearly visible in the broken sections. Only one pebble hammer from Cambridgeshire (a greywacke example from Fen Ditton) has been ascribed to a specific petrological group, thought to derive from Cornwall (Crummy, 2004, 12). Most, like the Littleport example, are quartzite and probably derive from local drift deposits (Rankine 1951, 53). In general pebble hammers are distributed in the south and east of England, although the concentrations in East Anglia and Sussex (identified by Rankine) seem less obvious, as more have been found (Roe & Radley 1968, 169; cf Rankine 1951, 55 & Roe, 1979 fig. 15). A recent example from Gamlingay has

been linked to a general cluster of pebble hammers centred on Cambridge, to which the Littleport example could also be ascribed (Crummy, 2004, 12).

### **3.6 Animal bone**

*Carina Phillips*

Sixteen fragments of animal bone were recovered from ten contexts during the evaluation. Erosion had affected most of the fragments, causing brittleness resulting in some fragmentation. Some bone (from L1010 and L1080) exhibited a dark and eroded appearance caused by the bone lying in a waterlogged anaerobic environment. Cattle (*Bos sp.*) bones were present in the highest numbers accounting for ten of the bone fragments. Sheep/goat (*Ovis sp./Capra sp.*) was the only other domestic species to be identified in the assemblage, represented by part of one femur. A metatarsal belonging to a Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*) was the only wild species present in the assemblage. The remaining bone was unidentifiable to species. There was no evidence of butchery on any of the bone. Cattle and sheep/goat are the most common species to be found on archaeological sites, due to their importance as meat, milk and wool producers. Red deer are likely to have been exploited for their meat, skins and antler and have been found on numerous prehistoric sites. Woodland/forest environment is their preferred habitat suggesting this may be situated close to the site.

Excavation of the site revealed animal bone within two Late Iron Age features. The bone is of moderate condition, with little surface erosion, but some modern fragmentation. Only six fragments of bone form the animal bone assemblage. Cattle (*Bos sp.*) is the only species to be identified in the assemblage; one bone exhibited evidence of butchery. The assemblage is of limited potential, due to the small number of bone fragments.

### **3.7 Shell**

*Carina Phillips*

Only three small fragments of unidentifiable shell were hand excavated from F2070 (L2071).

### **3.8 Evaluation charred plant macrofossils and other remains**

*Val Fryer*

Samples for the extraction of the plant macrofossil assemblages were taken from the fills of stake- and postholes, pits, gullies and a tree throw hole, and thirty three were submitted for assessment.

The samples were bulk floated by Archaeological Solutions, and the flots were collected in a 500 micron mesh sieve. The dried flots were scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x 16. Modern contaminants including fibrous and woody roots, seeds and arthropod remains were present in all samples.

Of the thirty three samples assessed, sixteen contained nothing but modern plant and arthropod remains. The assemblages from a further fourteen samples contained a very low density of small charcoal fragments, many of which were heavily abraded. Only three assemblages contained identifiable charred plant remains, namely single pieces

of possible heather (*Ericaceae*) stem (from samples 25 and 29), and a spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta*) glume base from sample 31. All were from undated contexts. The assemblage from sample 37 contained a high density of de-watered plant macrofossils of wetland/aquatic and scrub species, but it is assumed that all are modern in origin.

In summary, the density of plant macrofossils is exceedingly low, and the few charred remains recorded are all possibly present as accidental inclusions within the contexts. It would appear that the potential for further plant macrofossil sampling in this area is extremely low, although specialists should be consulted prior to the commencement of any further excavations.

Sample No.	Feature No.	Context No.	Feature type	Phase	Contents
1	F1087	L1088	Stakehole	-	All modern
2	F1085	L1086	Post hole	-	All modern
3	F1081	L1082	Gully	-	Charcoal <2mm
4	F1062	L1063	Stakehole	-	Charcoal <2mm
5	F1064	L1065	Stakehole	-	Charcoal <2mm
6	F1066	L1067	Stakehole	-	All modern
7	F1070	L1071	Pit	-	Charcoal <2mm
8	F1068	L1069	Stakehole	-	All modern
10	F1093	L1094	Pit/post hole	-	All modern
11	F1072	L1073	Stakehole	-	All modern
12	F1074	L1075	Stakehole	-	All modern
13	F1058	L1059	Pit	-	All modern
14	F1046	L1047	Stakehole	-	Charcoal <2mm
15	F1040	L1041	Post/stake hole	-	All modern
16	F1040	L1041	Post/stake hole	-	Charcoal <2mm
17	F1050	L1051	Stakehole	Phase 1	Charcoal <2mm
18	F1044	L1045	Stakehole	-	All modern
19	F1042	L1043	Stakehole	-	Charcoal <2mm
20	F1036	L1037	Pit/post hole	-	All modern
21	F1034	L1035	Post hole	-	All modern
22	F1032	L1033	Pit	-	Charcoal <2mm
23	F1026	L1027	Gully	Phase 2	Charcoal <2mm
24	F1022	L1023	Pit	-	All modern
25	F1028	L1029	Post/stake hole	-	?Heather stem
26	F1020	L1021	Pit	Phase 1	All modern
27	F1024	L1025	Pit	Phase 1	All modern
28	F1030	L1031	Post/stake hole	-	All modern
29	F1056	L1057	Stakehole	-	?Heather stem
30	F1054	L1055	Pit	-	Charcoal <2mm
31	F1018	L1019	Pit	-	Spelt glume base
32	F1013	L1014	Pit	-	Charcoal <2mm
33	F1052	L1053	Pit	-	Charcoal <2mm

37	F1077	L1078	Tree throw	-	Charcoal <2mm
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Table 6: Evaluation charred plant macrofossil data

### 3.9 Excavation charred plant macrofossils and other remains

Ruth Pelling

#### Introduction

Samples of deposits were taken for the extraction and evaluation of charred plant remains. Features excavated included ditches, gullies and linear features of Late Iron Age to Roman date. Two samples, both from Late Iron Age ditch fills, were processed by bulk water flotation and resultant flots collected onto a 500µm mesh. Samples were submitted to the author for the examination of any charred plant remains present with the intention of evaluation the sites potential to produce charred material given future excavation.

#### Evaluation Method

Processed flots were evaluated by scanning under a binocular microscope at x10 to x20 magnification. Any charred seeds and chaff were provisionally identified and quantified. The presence of charcoal was noted with an approximation of abundance. Results were entered into an Excel spreadsheet.

#### Evaluation Results

Both flots consisted largely of recent roots and silt, with occasional fragments of indeterminate charcoal. A single recent seed of *Ranunculus acris/repens/bulbosus* (buttercup) was present in sample 2 (context 2016).

#### Discussion

There is no evidence from the samples examined for the presence of charred plant remains in any quantity on the site. The presence of charcoal would suggest preservation of charred remains is possible.

Sample No.	1	2
Context No.	L2012	L2016
Feature No.	F2011	F2015
Feature Type	Ditch	Ditch
<b>Tree/shrub macrofossils</b>		
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	+	-
<i>Quercus</i>	+	-
<b>Other plant macrofossils</b>		
<i>Ranunculus acris/repens/bulbosus</i>	+	-
Charcoal	+	+
Sample volume (litres)	10	10
Volume of flot (ml)	70	30
% flot sorted	100%	100%

Table 7: Plant macrofossils (Excavation)



### 3.10 Soil

*Richard I. Macphail*

#### *Introduction*

The site was visited on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2007 in order to evaluate the soils and sediments present and to suggest future geoarchaeological sampling protocols with Gary Brogan (Project Manager; Archaeological Solutions). Machining was underway during the visit. Bronze Age features and artefacts were present in Trench 6, on the highest ground, in the southernmost part of the site; this is believed to be the approximate position of the fen edge (Gary Brogan, pers. comm.). To the north, wetland deposits (humified peat) are reportedly approximately 1m thick, over a mineralogenic substrate (Trenches 1-5 and 7). Exposed peaty topsoils and a feature fill and associated soil profile in a reopened part of Trench 6 were examined (Figs. 1 and 2); one monolith and two bulk samples were collected (Goldberg and Macphail 2006; Hodgson 1997).

#### *Results*

##### Local soils

Peaty topsoils thicken northwards (from 30-50cm in the current machined area). These presumably develop into earthy eutro-amorphous peat soils of the Adventurers soil series (included within the Downholland 1 soil association, formed in marine alluvium and fen peat), which dominate the low ground to the east, north and west sides of Littleport 'island' (Hodge *et al.* 1983). Although Littleport is located on superficial deposits, such as Boulder Clay, over Kimmeridge Clay (Gary Brogan, pers. comm.), and has a general mapped cover of stagnogleyic argillic brown earth soils (Ashley soil association; Hodge *et al.* 1983), the exact nature of the fen edge soils in the area of Trench 6 has not yet been determined (see below).

Machining through the humic (peaty) topsoil exposed dark grey gleyed silty clay (L1012), which contained Bronze Age artefacts and apparently sealed and infilled Bronze Age features (Table 8). Layer L1012 also overlaid a gleyed and ochreous mottled subsoil, L1009. A 30cm long monolith (M1) was collected through contexts L1012 and L1009, as a preliminary sampling exercise to record the soil stratigraphy at the southern end of Trench 6. Two complementary bulk soil samples were also collected (Table 8).

#### *Discussion*

Fen and fen edge soils associated with archaeological sites of Cambridgeshire have been studied by French (French 2003, Chapters 8 & 9), who recorded palaeosols sealed by fen peat. The site apparently has a similar palaeosol sealed by a fen peat, which thickens to the north.

Monolith	Suggested Thin section	Bulk samples	Context and brief description
			<i>Small and shallow box excavation within Trench 6; machined down/topsoil removal to ~30cm</i>
M1 (0-30cm)	M1A (0-8cm)  M1B (14-22cm)	L1012	0-18cm (L1012): dark grey (5Y4/1) moderately weak silty clay, with many fine faint (pale ochreous) mottles; essentially stone-free, with flint and pot artefacts present (Gary Brogan, pers. comm.); moderately well developed medium prisms; common fine roots; abrupt mainly smooth boundary.
M1 (0-30cm)	M1B (14-22cm) M1C (22-30cm)	L1009	18-32+cm (L1009): brownish yellow (10YR6/8) moderately weak silty clay/clay loam(?), with very many fine distinct (grey) and few distinct (ochreous) mottles; ochreous mottles become more common below 30cm; few fine roots; poorly formed medium-coarse prisms.

Table 8: Brief soil descriptions and samples

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## PLATES



Plate 1: Site during machining, view N towards fen



Plate 2: Site under excavation, view S towards higher ground





Plate 3: Location of column sample taken from Test Pit 1, showing sequence (upwards from base) of natural Kimmeridge Clay, alluvial silt, lower peat, upper peat, subsoil and topsoil.



Plate 4: Shallow late Bronze Age/ early Iron Age (Phase 2) Pits F1020, F1022 and F1024, view S





Plate 5: Late Iron Age (Phase 3) Ditch F2015 (Seg. C), view E



Plate 6: Late Iron Age (Phase 3) Ditch F2011 (Seg. A), view S

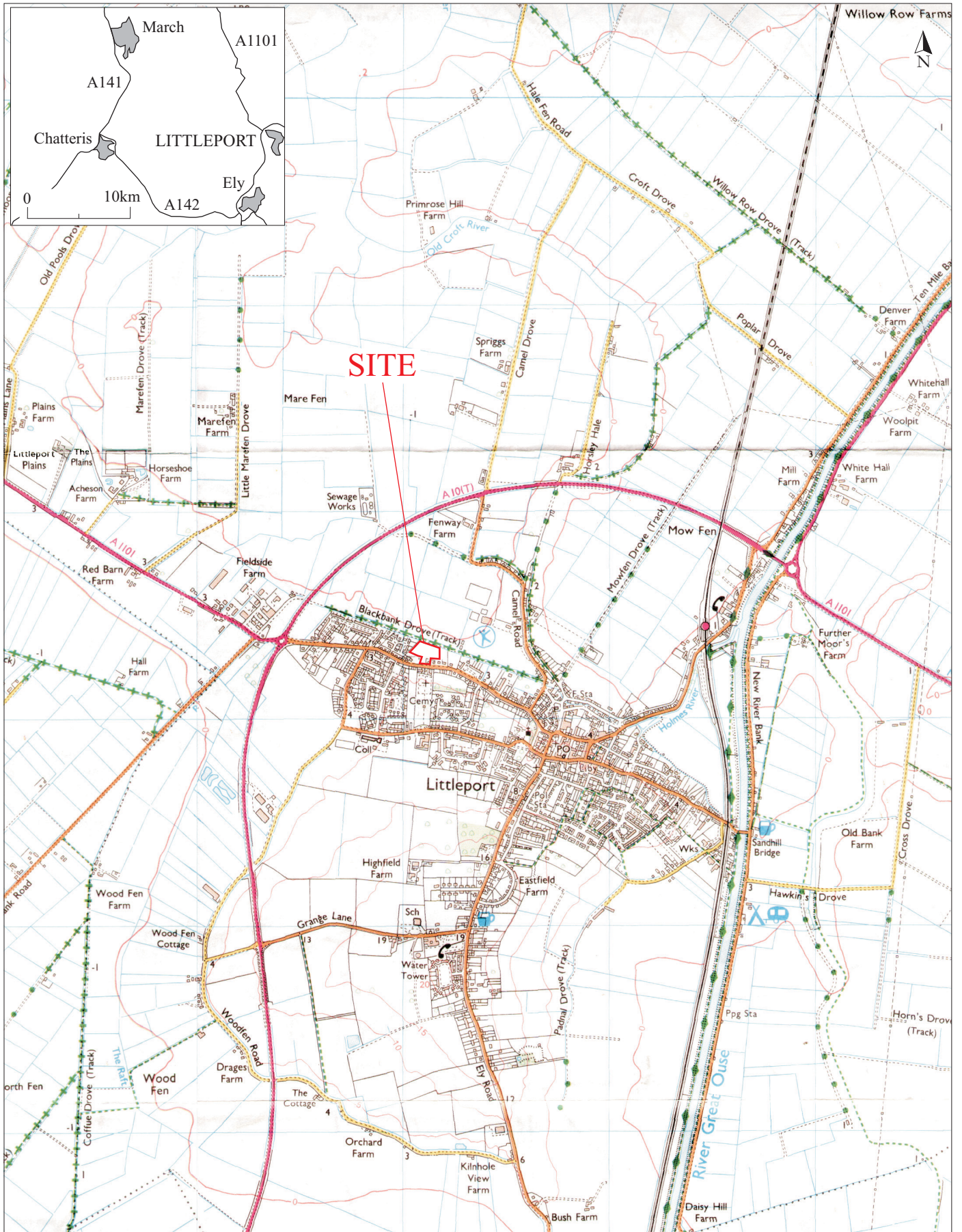


Plate 7: Late Iron Age (Phase 3) Ditch F2011 (Seg. B), view N



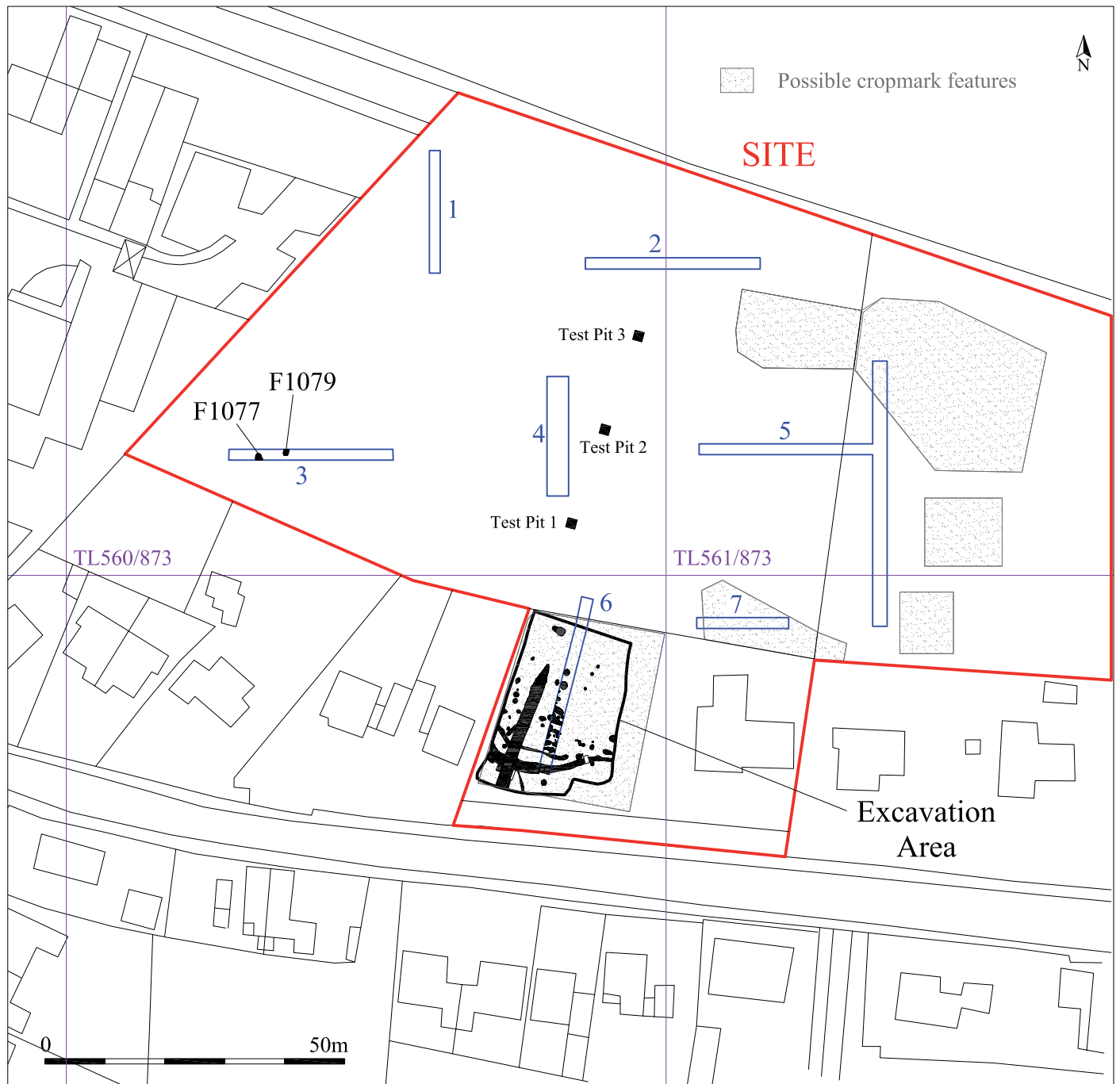
Plate 8: Residual/ curated Mesolithic/ Neolithic quartzite pebble hammer found in terminus of late Iron Age (Phase 3) Ditch F2011





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**Fig. 1 Site location plan**  
 Scale 1:25,000 at A4



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**Fig. 2 Detailed site location plan**  
 Scale 1:1000 at A4

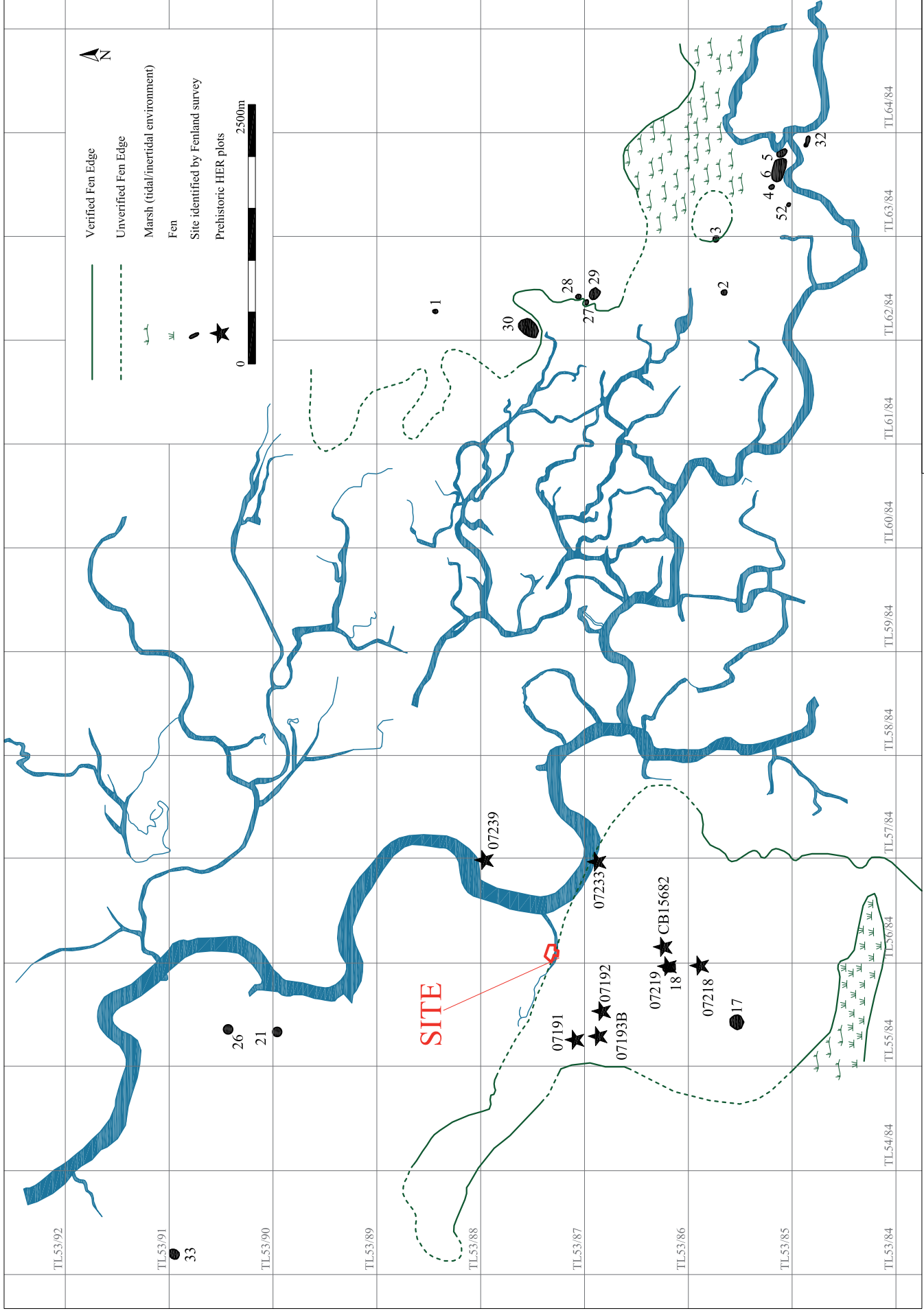
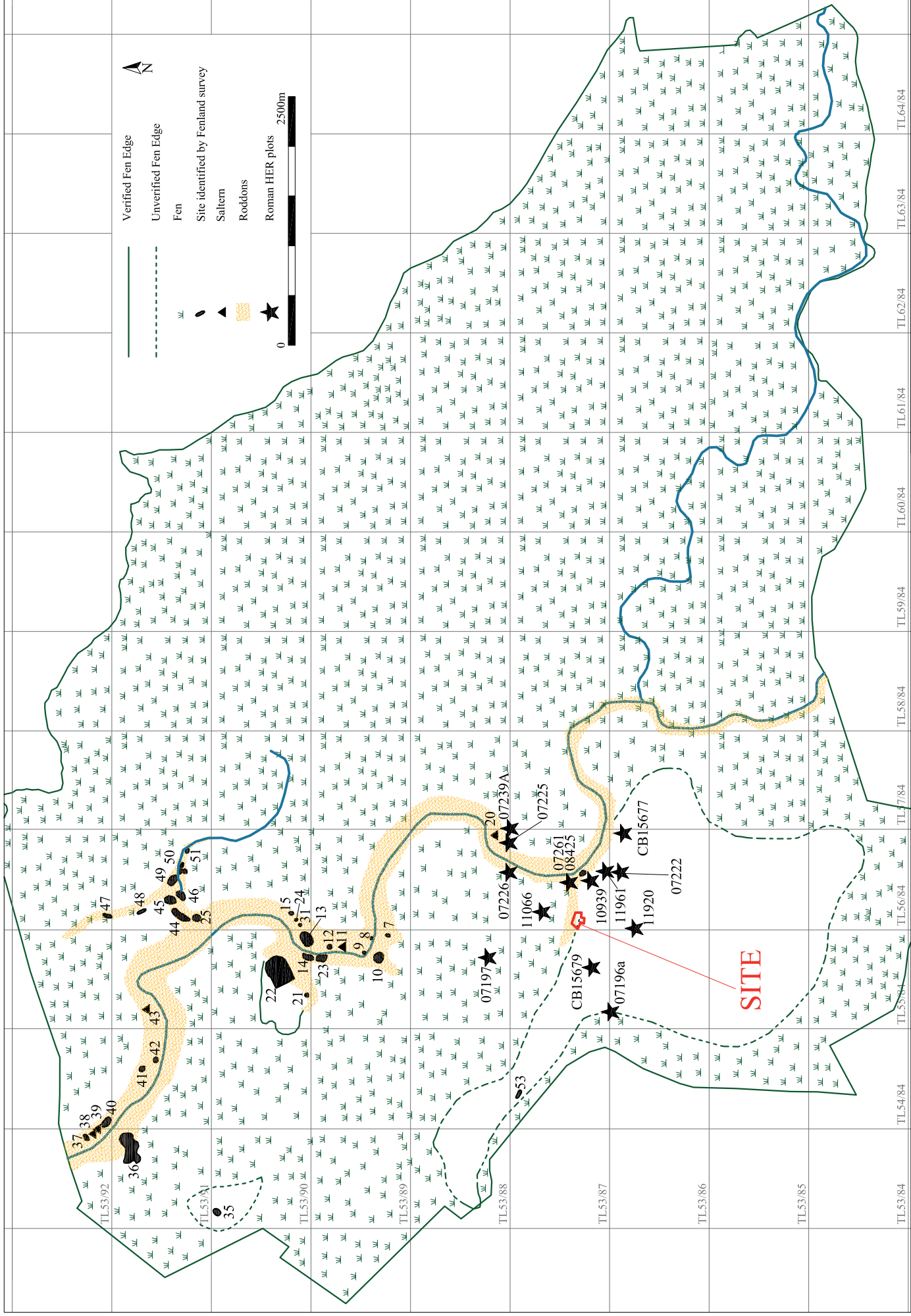


Fig. 3a Prehistoric Littleport

Scale 1:50,000 at A4

\*Based on the Fenland Survey (Hall 1996, 23, fig. 11)





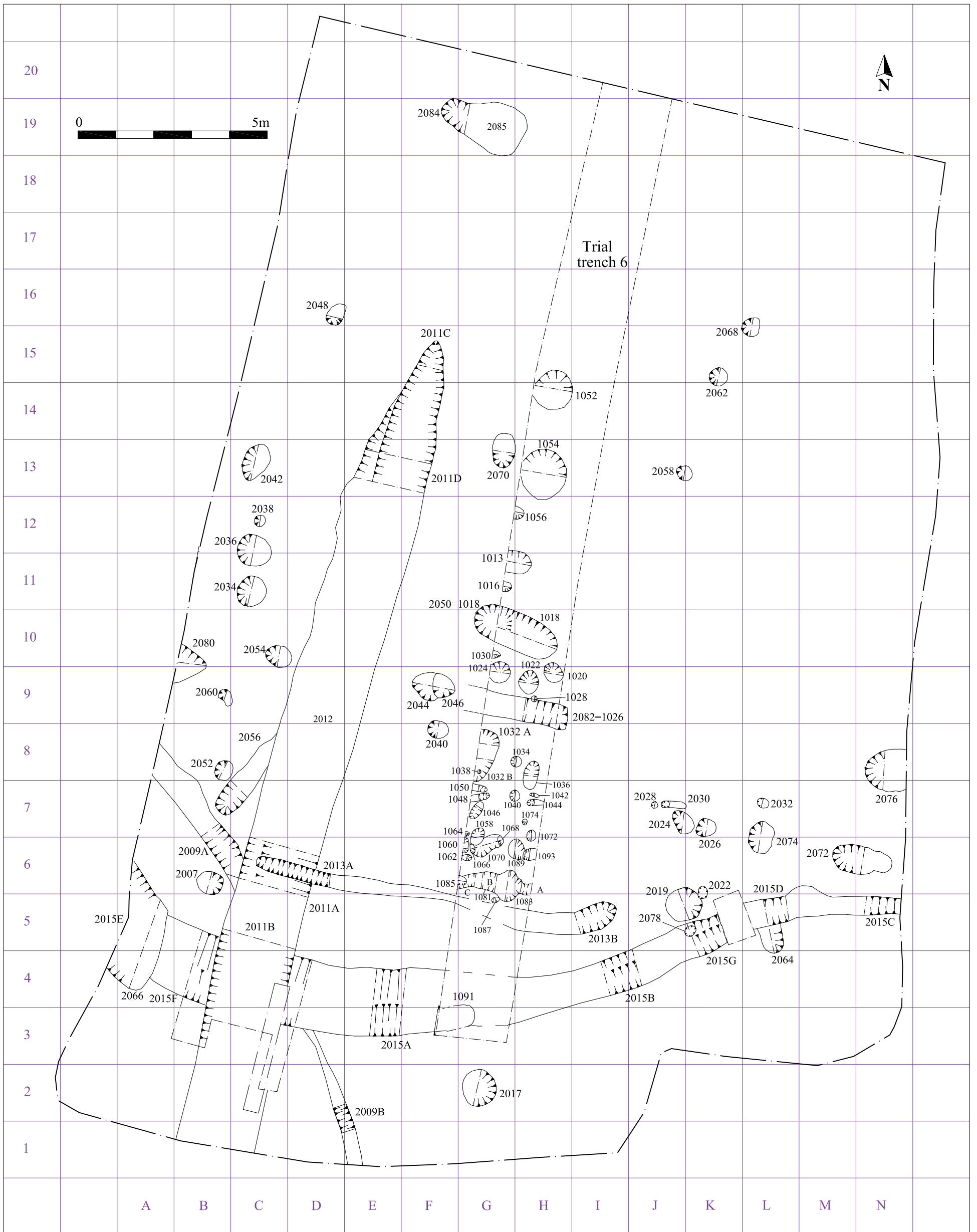
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**Fig. 3b Roman Littleport**

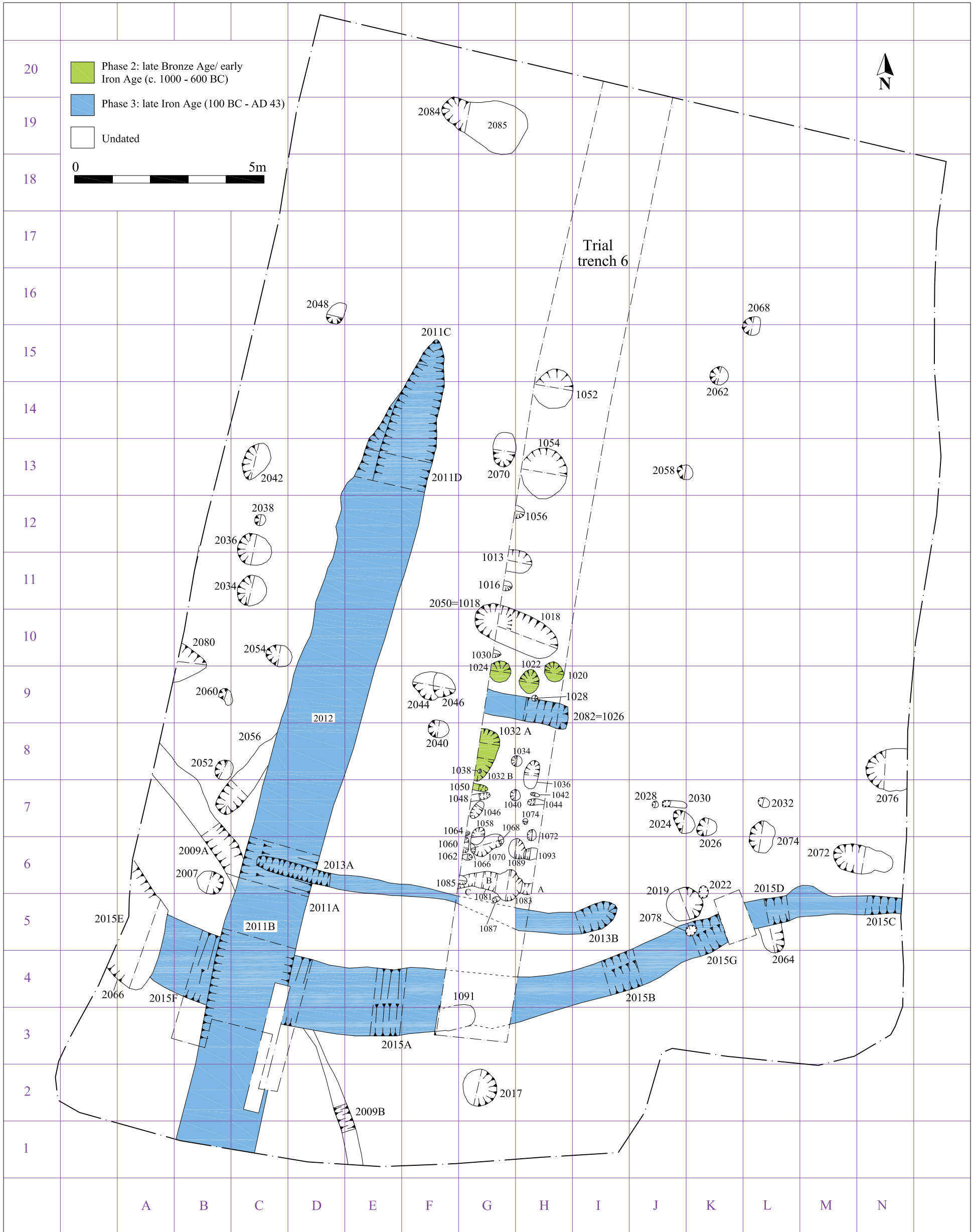
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'Based on the Fenland Survey (Hall 1996, 24, fig. 13)



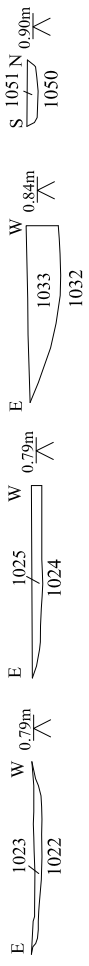


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 Fig. 4 All features plan  
 Scale 1:100 at A3

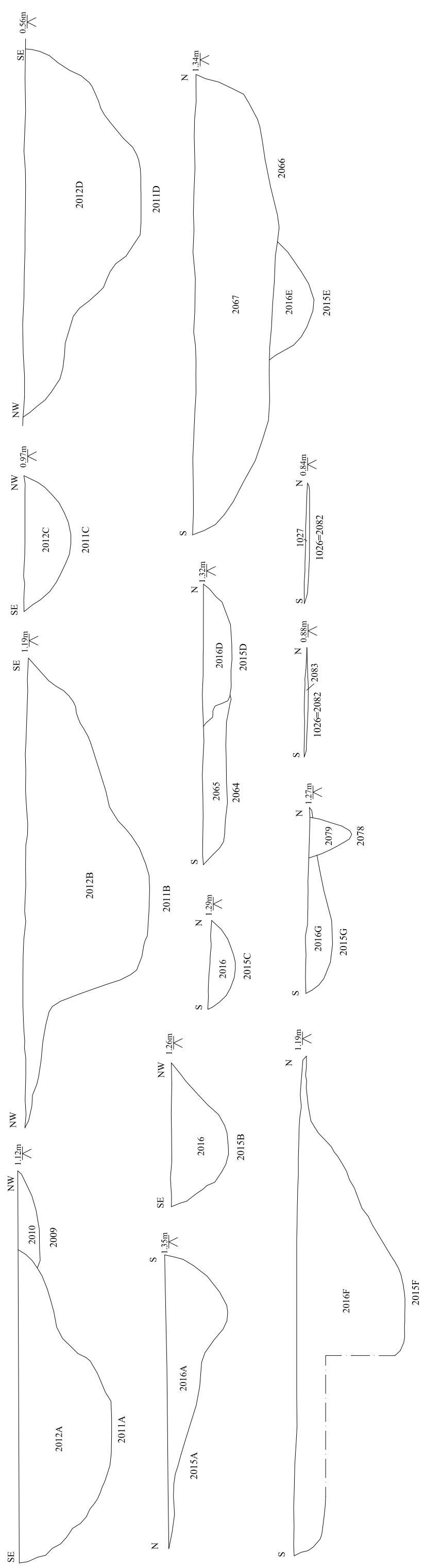


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**Fig. 5 Phase plan**  
 Scale 1:100 at A3

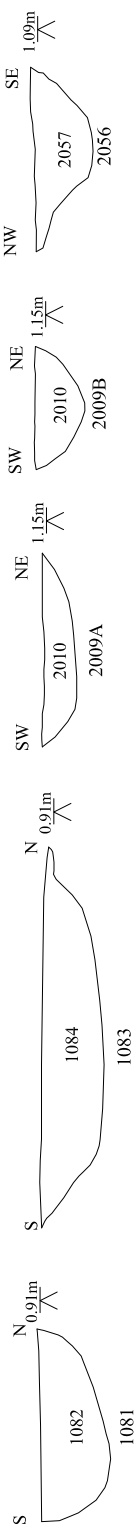
Phase 2 pits



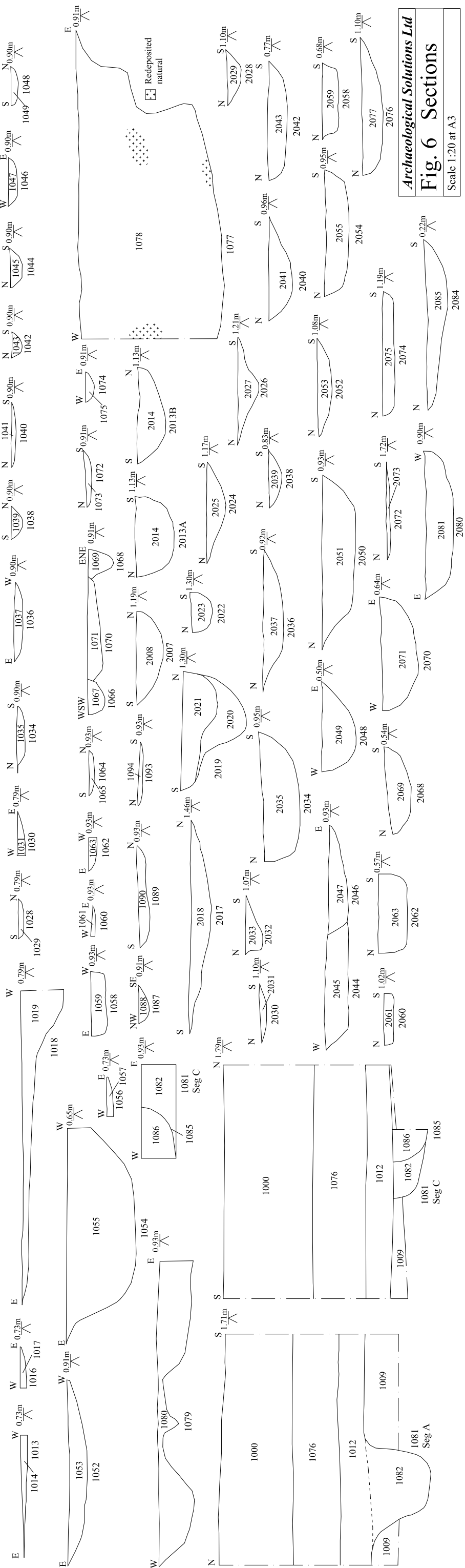
Phase 3 ditches and gullies

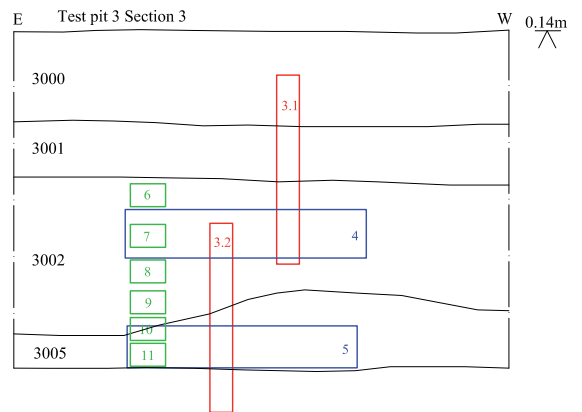
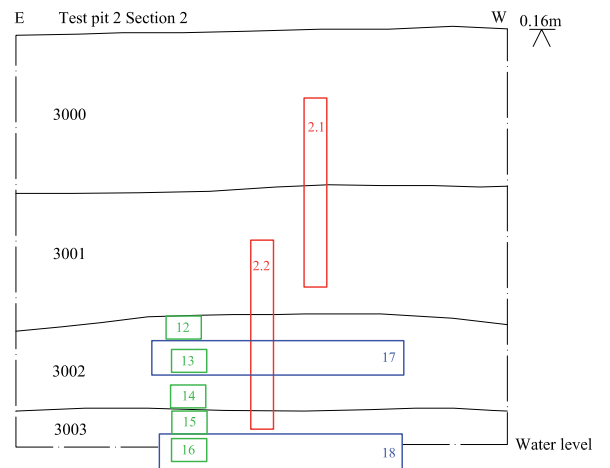
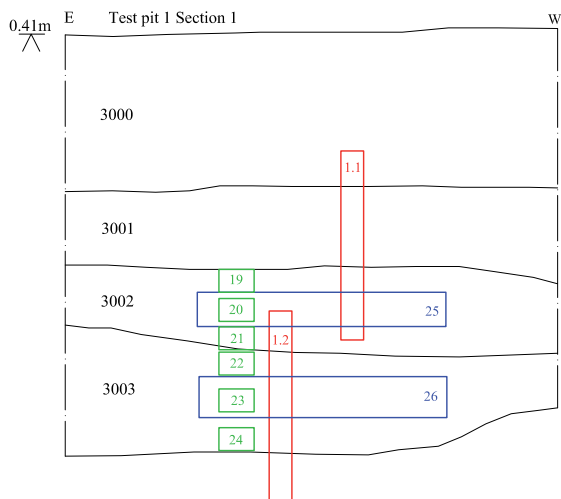


Undated ditches and gullies



Undated pits and postholes





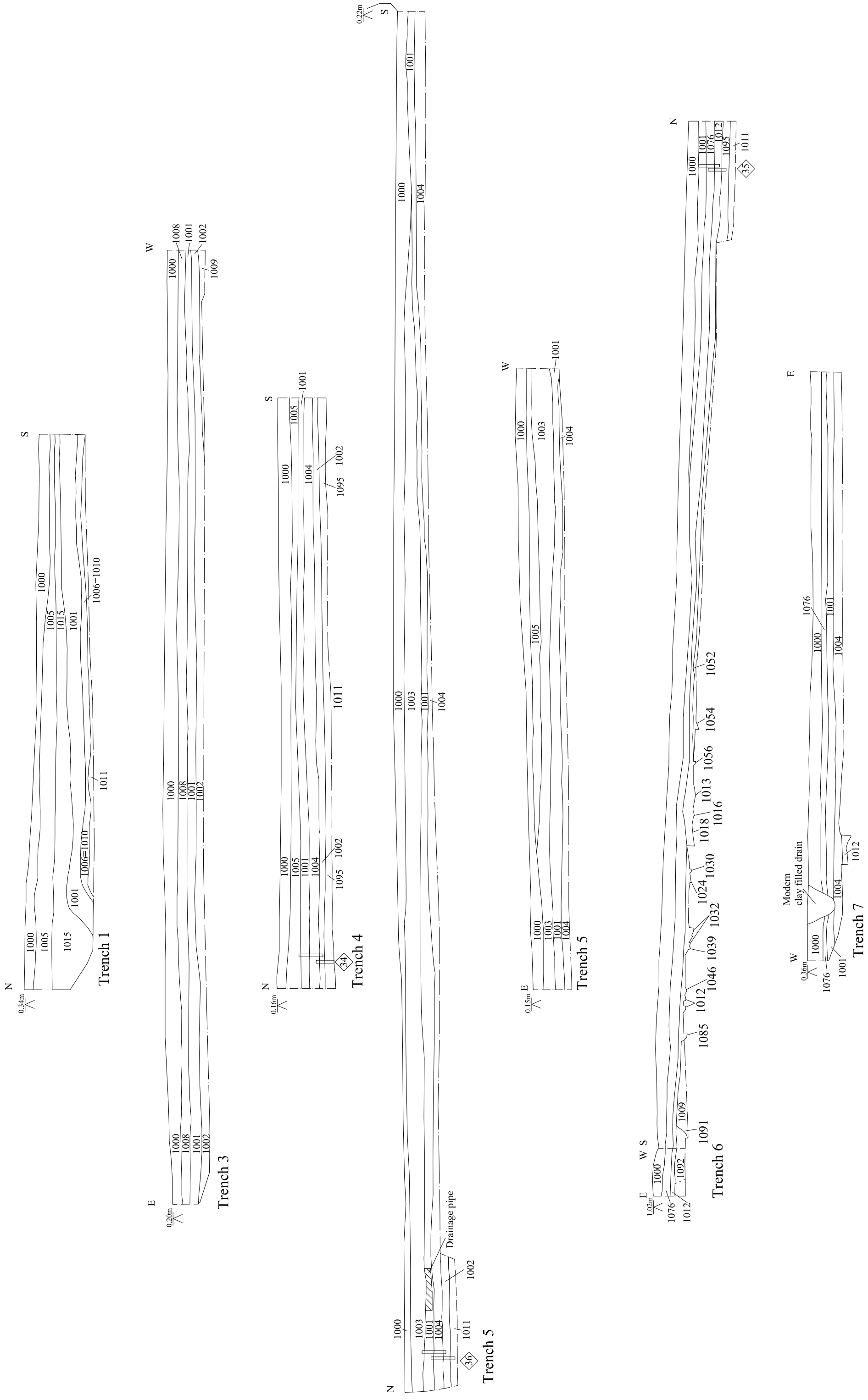
Bulk sample  
 Column sample  
 Letterbox sample



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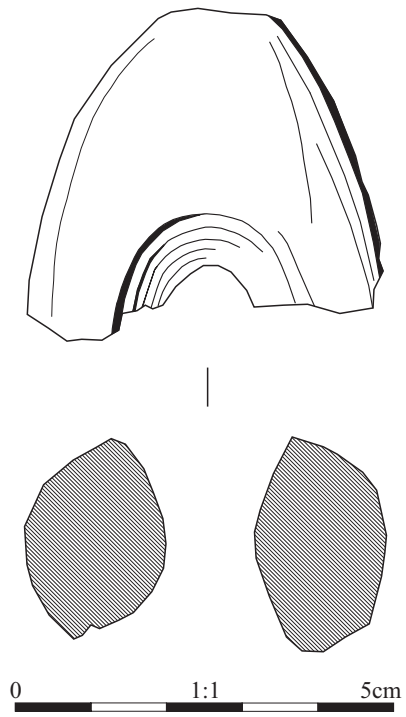
**Fig. 7 Sections of Test Pits 1 - 3**

Scale 1:20 at A4



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**Fig. 8 Sections of trenches 1-7**  
 Scale 1:100 at A3





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<b>Fig. 9</b> Quartzite hammer stone
Scale 1:1 at A4