THAMES VALLEY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

SERVICES

Land to the rear of Windyridge, Elizabeth Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation

by Tim Dawson

Site Code: WHO12/110

(SU 7447 8168)

Land to the rear of Windyridge, Elizabeth Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Evaluation

for Messrs Hunt, Wood and Murray

by Tim Dawson

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code WHO 12/110

July 2012

Summary

Site name: Land to the rear of Windyridge, Elizabeth Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 7447 8168

Site activity: Archaeological evaluation

Date and duration of project: 11th July 2012

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Tim Dawson

Site code: WHO 12/110

Area of site: *c*.0.17ha

Summary of results: No archaeological finds or features were encountered in the evaluation trenches. A deeper test pit showed a deep sandy deposit which might have potential for redeposited Palaeolithic material to have survived, overlying archaeologically sterile gravel though no Palaeolithic material has survived.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 13.07.12
	Steve Preston✓ 13.07.12

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Land to the rear of Windyridge, Elizabeth Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire
An Archaeological Evaluation

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Report 12/110

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at land to the rear of properties known as Willows, Windyridge and Dormers, Elizabeth Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 7447 8168) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Neil Boddington of Boddingtons Planning, Westfield House, 31 Shirburn Street, Watlington, Oxfordshire OX49 5BU on behalf of Messrs Hunt, Wood and Murray, c/o Windyridge, Elizabeth Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire.

Planning permission has been sought from South Oxfordshire District Council (appln no. P11/S0086) regarding the construction of four new houses in the land to the rear of Willows, Windyridge and Dormers. In order to inform the determination of the application, the implementation of an archaeological field evaluation has been requested, to define the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the application area.

This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist at Oxfordshire County Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Aiji Castle, Tim Dawson and James Goodall, assisted by Simon Collcutt on 11th July 2012 and the site code is WHO 12/110. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the south-western edge of Henley-on-Thames, *c*.2km west of the river Thames, which flows north past the town (Fig. 1). It consists of the back gardens, all grass lawns, belonging to three houses on the western side of Elizabeth Road (Fig. 2). The area lies on high ground which slopes gently downhill towards the north-east before starting to descend steeply down into Henley *c*.300m to the north-west of the site. The underlying geology is described as 5th (Black Park) Terrace Deposits being laid down by the ancient channel of the Thames which flowed between Caversham and Henley (BGS 1980). This was observed, albeit in a variety of guises, in the trenches excavated on site. The site has an area of *c*.0.17ha and is at a height of *c*.76m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The application site is located in an area of considerable archaeological potential, 360m north of the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Highlands Farm Palaeolithic Site (SAM 254). Some half a million years ago the River Thames flowed north-eastwards from Caversham, past St Albans to Clacton before joining the River Rhine somewhere beneath the present North Sea (Wymer 1961). From the effects of glaciation, river downcutting and land uplift in subsequent times the course of the Thames has been deflected southwards to its present course, leaving relict gravel terraces in its wake. Examination of 19th- and early 20th-century gravel workings at Highlands Farm to the south and Hernes Farm to the north recovered numerous flint tools of lower Palaeolithic date representing some of the earliest ancestral human presence in the British Isles, with Highlands Farm itself being especially prolific (Wymer 1968; 1999; Morigi *et al.* 2011).

Objectives and methodology

The aims of the evaluation are to determine the presence/ absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits within the area of development. This work was to be carried out in a manner which will not compromise the integrity of archaeological features or deposits which warrant preservation in-situ, or might better be excavated under conditions pertaining to full excavation.

The specific research aims of this project are:

to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

to determine if any prehistoric occupation or landscape features are present on the site.

to determine if there are later prehistoric, Roman, Saxon or medieval deposits present on the site; and

to determine if any Palaeolithic finds are present within any gravel deposits on the site.

These objectives were to be achieved by the excavation of three 7m-long trenches within the footprints of the proposed houses to expose the natural geology and any intrusive archaeological features. A test-pit was also to be dug at the western end of Trench 2 to enable the study of the underlying gravel geology by a quaternary specialist (Dr Simon Collcutt). All trenches were to be c. 1.6m wide. All potential archaeological features were to be hand-cleaned and excavated and spoil heaps were to be monitored for finds.

Results

Two of the trenches and the test pit were dug, under the supervision of an archaeologist, using a 1 tonne mini-digger with ditching bucket. However the third trench was hand-dug due to restricted access for the machine. The trenches ranged in length from 2.0m to 8.8m and in depth from 0.45m to 0.5m; all were aligned approximately west–east. The position of Trench 3 was moved *c*.3m to the west due to obstructions at its original position caused by a greenhouse and pond. (Fig. 3).

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 2.0m long and 0.45m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.10m of topsoil and 0.25m of subsoil (mid brown-grey silty sand) overlying natural geology, which was red-brown clay/sand with gravel and subangular flints (Fig. 4). No archaeological finds or deposits were present.

Trench 2 (Pl. 1)

Trench 2 was 8.8m long and 0.5m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.15m of topsoil and 0.23m of subsoil, overlying natural geology (as in Trench 1). No finds were recovered and no archaeological features were present. A test pit was excavated at 3.4m from the west end of the trench to a depth of 1.8m. A report on this forms Appendix 2.

Trench 3 (Pl. 2)

Trench 3 was 7.0m long and 0.45m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.12m of topsoil and 0.25m of subsoil overlying natural geology which here was gravel in a silty sand matrix. Areas of root disturbance of the gravel surface were noted bit no finds were recovered and no archaeological features were present.

Finds

No finds of archaeological interest were present in any of the trenches or spoilheaps.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this evaluation the site has no archaeological potential for periods later than the Palaeolithic. Gravel deposits present at 1.7m below the modern ground surface match those noted at Highland Farm and do not appear to be *in-situ* river gravels but have been disturbed. These deposits appear to be

archaeologically sterile. The sandy deposits overlying these, however, potentially represent collapsed bank and while again not *in- situ* could possess the potential to contain meaningful secondary assemblages of Palaeolithic material, even though no finds were recovered here. It seems improbable that organic materials would have survived to enhance the importance of any stone tool assemblage.

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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

Trench	*Length (m)*	*Breadth (m)*	*Depth (m)*	*Comment*
1	2.0	1.6	0.45	0–0.10m topsoil; 0.10–0.35m subsoil; 0.35m+ natural geology gravelly clay/sand
2	8.8	1.6	0.50 (TP 1.8m)	0–0.15m topsoil; 0.15–0.38m subsoil; 0.38m+ natural geology gravelly clay/sand. Test Pit 3.4m from west end is described in Appendix 2. **[Pl. 1]**
3	7.0	1.6	0.45	0–0.12m topsoil; 0.10–0.37m subsoil; 0.37m+ natural geology gravelly clay/sand **[Pl. 2]**

APPENDIX 2: Lithostratigraphy and assessment of Palaeolithic potential

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REAR OF 'WINDYRIDGE' ELIZABETH ROAD HENLEY-ON-THAMES OXFORDSHIRE

(Site Ref. 12e117ev)

PLEISTOCENE ISSUES

Produced by Oxford Archaeological Associates Limited
under the direction of

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MA(Hons) DEA DPhil FSA

Commissioned by
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Limited

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1. Introduction

1.1 In July, 2012, Dr. S. Ford (Thames Valley Archaeological Services Limited) commissioned Oxford Archaeological Associates Limited to provide technical support on Pleistocene issues arising at a housing development site at the rear of 'Windyridge' (NGR SU 7448 8165), Elizabeth Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. Accordingly, on the 11th July, Dr. S.N. Collcutt (OAA) attended the site and observed exposures in the three TVAS trial trenches. Figure 1 shows the approximate positioning of the trenches in relation to the footprints of the existing buildings; in the event, these locations were slightly adapted to reflect actual site condition (cf. main TVAS report). The present report documents the Pleistocene geological contexts and geoarchaeological implications.

2. Background

2.1 The underlying geology of the area consists of Chalk, overlain by Middle Pleistocene gravels of the Black Park Member of the Maidenhead Formation (Gibbard 1999), considered to be late Anglian (MIS 12) in age. The gravels are disposed in a wide palaeometachannel form (often known as the 'Caversham Ancient Channel'), which once carried the then braided Thames from Caversham to Henley. The present outcrop has a surface altitude of approximately 76 m AOD.

2.2 The nearest significant known Pleistocene site (portions of which are now a Scheduled Monument and SSSI) lies at Highlands Farm (a former gravel pit), some 400 m southwest of the present development proposal site at Elizabeth Road. Gibbard (1984:22) summarised the local geology as follows:

> [...] *The deposits were exposed in old workings at Highlands Farm (SU743813: 76 m OD) and comprised stratified fine to medium gravel and current-bedded sand, cryoturbated in the upper 40 cm and overlain by 30 cm of faintly banded, red-stained light brown silt. Pebble counts indicate that the gravel should be correlated with this unit* [Black Park Gravel]. *Observations of steeply dipping strata in sections in this pit by R.R. Inskeep (personal communication) and Wymer (1961, 1968) showed evidence for large-scale collapse of the deposits into bedrock solution cavities in places. That at least some of the collapse was post-depositional was shown by a large thickness of the silt, mentioned above, filling a funnel-shaped hollow in the gravels, at least 3 m deep and 6 m wide at one place. The gravels comprised a lower course subunit about 3 m thick containing sarsens and coarse flints and a finer upper subunit about 1.5 m thick of medium to fine gravel, both subunits interstratified with current-bedded sand.* [...]

2.3 Gibbard also noted that samples of the Black Park Member in general contained 75-89% angular flint and only 3-9% more rounded flint, with the figures for these two components at Highlands Farm itself being 81.26% and 5.13%; there were small components of vein quartz and quartzites but Gibbard did not mention 'sarsen' (well lithified sandstone) in his samples.

2.4 The Lower Palaeolithic archaeological material from Highlands Farm has been the subject of much discussion (cf. Wymer 1956, 1968, 1999; Roe 1981; McNabb 2007). Most authorities are agreed that there is material from several different assemblages, probably from quite a wide time range. However, citing Roe (1981:148): "*Certainly there is no stratigraphic order to the different sets of implements* [i.e. typological groupings] *as they now lie in the gravel*". Most of the flint artefacts appear rolled or very rolled and are relatively large. It is nevertheless the case that unusually high concentrations of lithics have been recorded from some locations within the former pit ("over sixty artefacts per cubic yard" in one case, Wymer 1956), suggesting that some of the original (primary)

sites were geographically very close, either on river banks or on seasonally exposed gravel/sand banks within the braided metachannel itself.

3. Elizabeth Road Lithostratigraphy

3.1 The uppermost deposits in each of the three trial trenches consists of topsoil (slightly stony dark loam, becoming stonier downwards) to a depth of c.30 cm or less, over a further 10 cm stony transitional zone, over very stony (fine to medium gravel) coarse to medium light pink-brown sand, with incomplete clast-support and totally lacking in fine structure or coherent clast orientation (clasts commonly lying with the major axis vertical) but grossly homogeneous overall.

3.2 Excavation ceased at this level in Trenches 1 and 3 but a deeper section was developed at the western end of Trench 2 (SW corner at SU 74477 81696 ± 5 m). In T2, the very stony sand (described above) continues to a depth of 80 cm and remains homogeneous throughout. It is noteworthy, both that this unit completely caps all lower material and that coarser sands are nowhere present in the underlying material, showing that this upper unit is not merely the result of reworking of the main sequence.

3.3 There then follows a relatively complex sequence of very well compacted deposits, reaching a depth of 170-180 cm; this will be referred to here as the middle gravelly interval. Most units are dominated by fine to medium gravel (1-5 cm diameter) but the matrix components vary between individual units, sometimes clayey silt, sometimes clayey sand and sometimes only clean flint grit; colours are within the reddish brown range. Whilst these units (often only each only 10-15 cm thick) appear quite discrete, there is very little internal fine structure (no laminations, cross-laminations, imbrication or grading). Gravel clasts, although lying dominantly near-horizontally in the main plane, also show not infrequent higher-angle orientations. The gravel clasts in this sequence are dominantly flint, although there is a noticeable sarsen content. The forms show both strongly edge-rounded but angular types (flint fragments) and completely rounded pebbles (mostly globular rather than elongate or platy, particularly in the flint examples but also even in the sarsen), in varying proportions (depending upon the individual bed) but always with a noticeable component of pebbles and sometimes with the latter dominant. The surfaces of the pebbles may be very smooth, chattering being generally quite weak or absent and lithophage cavities very rare; no dark/black-stained pebbles were noted. At intervals in this gravelly sequence, there are also almost stone-free, very compact silty sand units, completely lacking in fine structure (no sign of laminations or cross-bedding) but with wavy internal cleavage and slightly crinkled boundaries.

3.4 In some of the exposures in T2, the middle gravelly interval appears as a set of more or less tabular units, which clearly show at least some of the characteristics of the original depositional sequence (cf. Fig.2). However, on other faces, boundary contortion increases generally and the units may even be thrown into major convolutions with an amplitude of c.100 cm (cf. Fig.3). The convolution structures do not affect the overlying cap of very stony sand.

3.5 The lowest exposure, reaching 190-200 cm, referred to here as the lower gravel, consists of medium to coarse-medium gravel. The observed structure is always clast-supported, with close interlocking in the dominantly angular clasts; the latter are less edge-rounded than above and predominantly of flint with a rare quartzite component. The incomplete matrix appears infiltrational and is of clayey, gritty sand. There are no obvious bedding structures in the thin interval exposed.

4. Discussion

4.1 The lower gravel at Elizabeth Road appears to match the standard description of the (main, lower) gravels at the Highlands Farm site. It is reiterated that this material does not occur at Elizabeth Road higher than 1.7 m below the modern surface.

4.2 The middle gravelly interval definitely has the characteristics of a variable-flow fluvial regime. Whilst the matrix can be poorly sorted in some units (suggesting rapid deposition), none of these units seems at all likely to be a sub-aerial mass-movement deposit (debris flow, solifluction/gelifluction, etc.).

4.3 This having been said, the whole interval appears over-compacted and there is no surviving fine (depositional) structure, irrespective of individual unit texture. For instance, one would expect at least stringers of like texture in gravels and laminations in sands, had these units not been disturbed after deposition. Many boundaries are crinkled and some are grossly convoluted. Indeed, in the main example (Fig.3), the sands seem to have been injected around the gravel pockets in a fluid state and under considerable pressure. Both strong cryoturbation and slumping (due to development of solution hollows in the underlying Chalk) have been noted before at Highlands Farm. Much larger exposures would be needed to be certain which of these mechanisms (or a combination of both) is responsible for the Elizabeth Road phenomena, although it is difficult to see why the cap of very stony sand was not affected had a solution form developed below over the long-term.

4.4 The very stony sand, although homogenised and lacking in depositional structure is simply of the wrong texture to be a mass-movement deposit – such angular material will experience intergranular locking and will not flow or creep, except on strong slopes (which in any case would cause diagnostic secondary fabric to develop) clearly not present in this case. It must be assumed that this too is fluvial material that has been subjected to intense mixing (probably by shallow cryoturbation).

4.5 Units of the middle gravelly interval (and even the very stony sand), contain much higher rounded pebble components than ever reported for the Black Park Member (including the main gravels at Highlands Farm). It is entirely possible that the 'ultimate' sources of such material are the Tertiary marine/estuarine deposits of the region but obvious marine indicators (e.g. heavy chattering, lithophage cavities, dark staining from sulphides and lignite) are mostly absent at Elizabeth Road. It therefore seems likely that an intermediate fluvial stage (or more than one) is involved, the observed smooth and bright pebbles being derived from an older fluvial terrace. Certainly, the local Winter Hill Member (where it has not been cut out completely by the Black Park Member in the Caversham Ancient Channel) has been observed to have quite a high pebble content. It is noteworthy that geological sources in the vicinity older than the Black Park Member have a sparse archaeological content or (more commonly) none at all.

4.6 This brings us to the fact that no lithics were recovered from the Elizabeth Road trenches. It seems probable that, at a remove of several hundred metres, the observed deposits here (very stony sand & middle gravelly interval) were derived mostly from older, archaeologically sterile fluvial material and are not the same as the higher units at Highlands Farm (which did contain artefacts, although not in such numbers as the lower gravels in the pit).

4.7 This having been said, the presence of relatively thick units of sandy material at Elizabeth Road does constitute a certain potential. If, as seems likely, such material represents bank-collapse, with little subsequent sorting (note the clay/silt content which would have

been washed out in a persistent strong current), any archaeological material caught in the collapse would lose true primary context but might still survive in meaningful secondary assemblages. Whilst such survival cannot be assessed as particularly likely on the available facts, on the precautionary principle (Palaeolithic material of the 'Highland Farm types' being rare) it would seem sensible to recommend a watching brief and modest contingency provision on any construction works, should a Planning permission be forthcoming.

4.8 All of the observed deposits are well aerated (oxidised) and neutral to slightly acidic; there are no traces of the mobilisation of 'fossilising' compounds (e.g. iron and manganese hydroxides). It is extremely unlikely that soft organics would survive, whilst even charred remains would be likely to survive (and to form meaningful associations) only were truly clayey and reduced (grey colours) lenses to be encountered; shell and most microfossils (e.g. pollen) would also be restricted to such fine-grained, 'sealed' contexts. There is little potential for animal bone/teeth, although some remains might survive near the base of the gravels, close to the Chalk bedrock (assumed to be c.3 m below the base of the T2 evaluation, perhaps 5 m below the modern surface).

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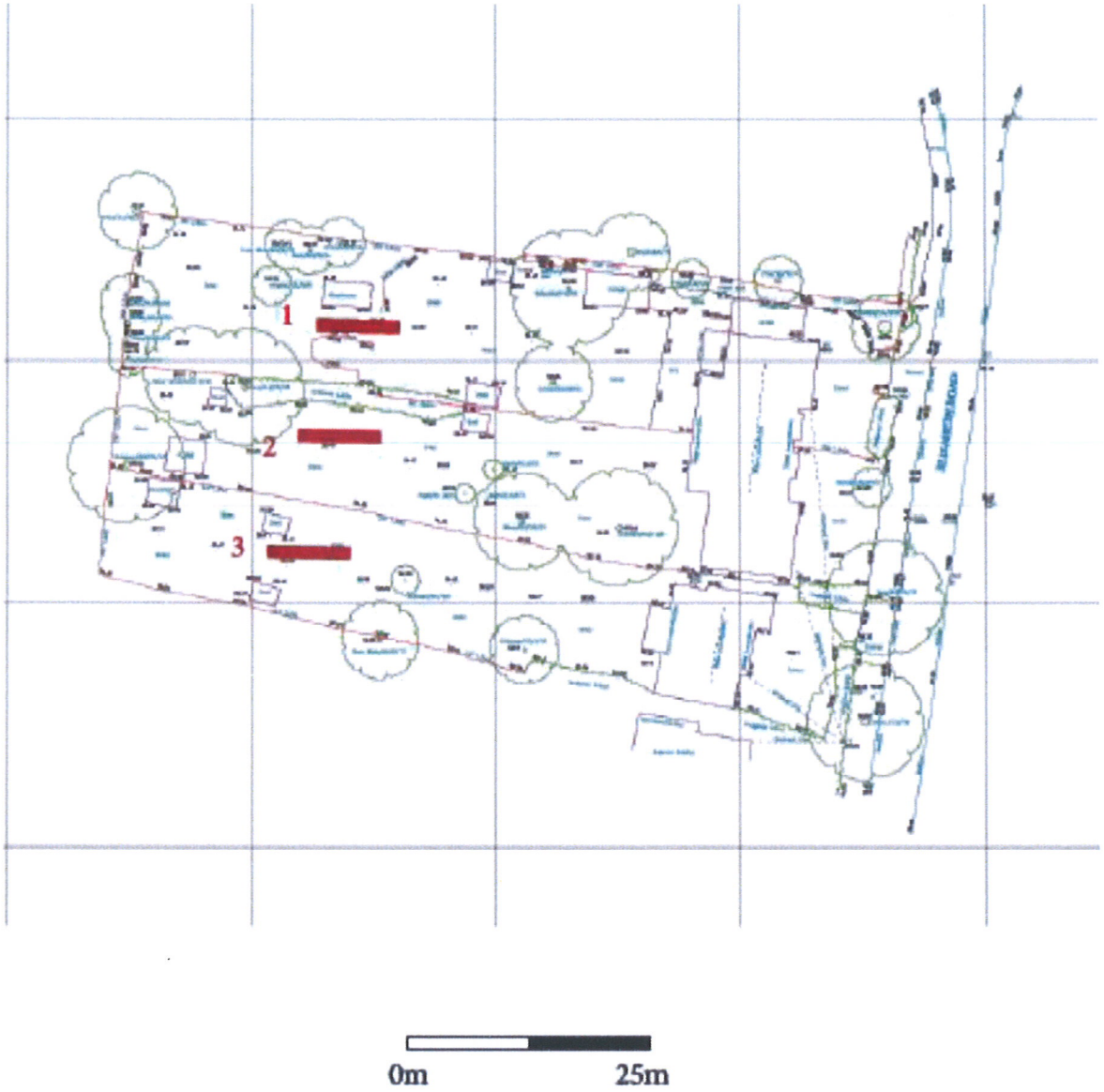


Figure 1

Rear of 'Windyridge', Elizabeth Road, Henley - approximate trial trench locations.

Figure 2

Rear of 'Windyridge', Elizabeth Road, Henley – Trial Trench 2

(Observer looking obliquely northwest; 20 cm scale in cm units; ranging pole in 50 cm units)

This view of the northern face of the excavation shows the generally tabular bedding of the middle gravelly interval. There is a gritty, matrix-poor unit near the base (loose and collapsing in the section); the next unit (up to the scale) has a very sandy (yellower) matrix; the uppermost unit has a stiff clayey silt matrix. Note the common rounded pebbles (and pebble fragments).

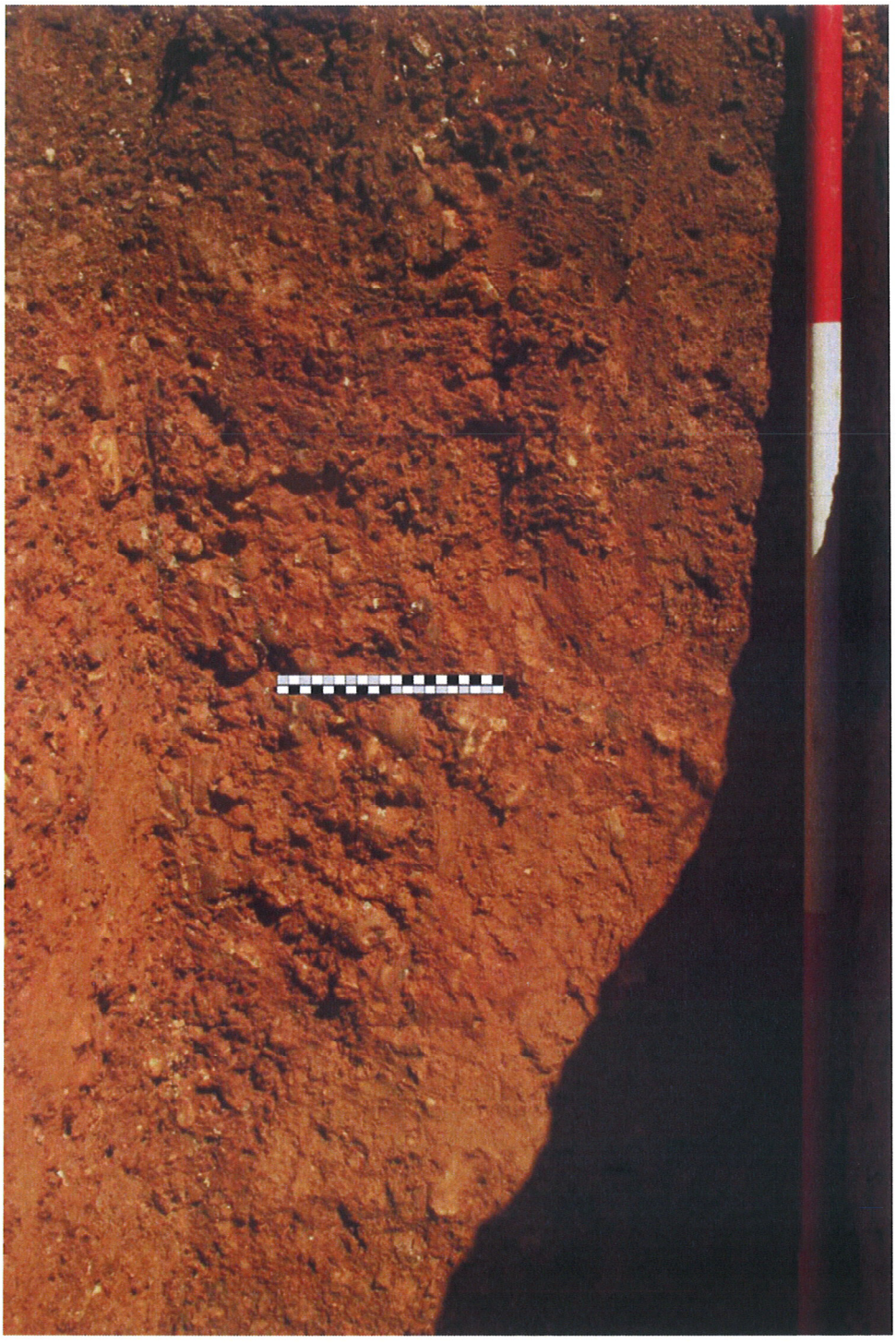
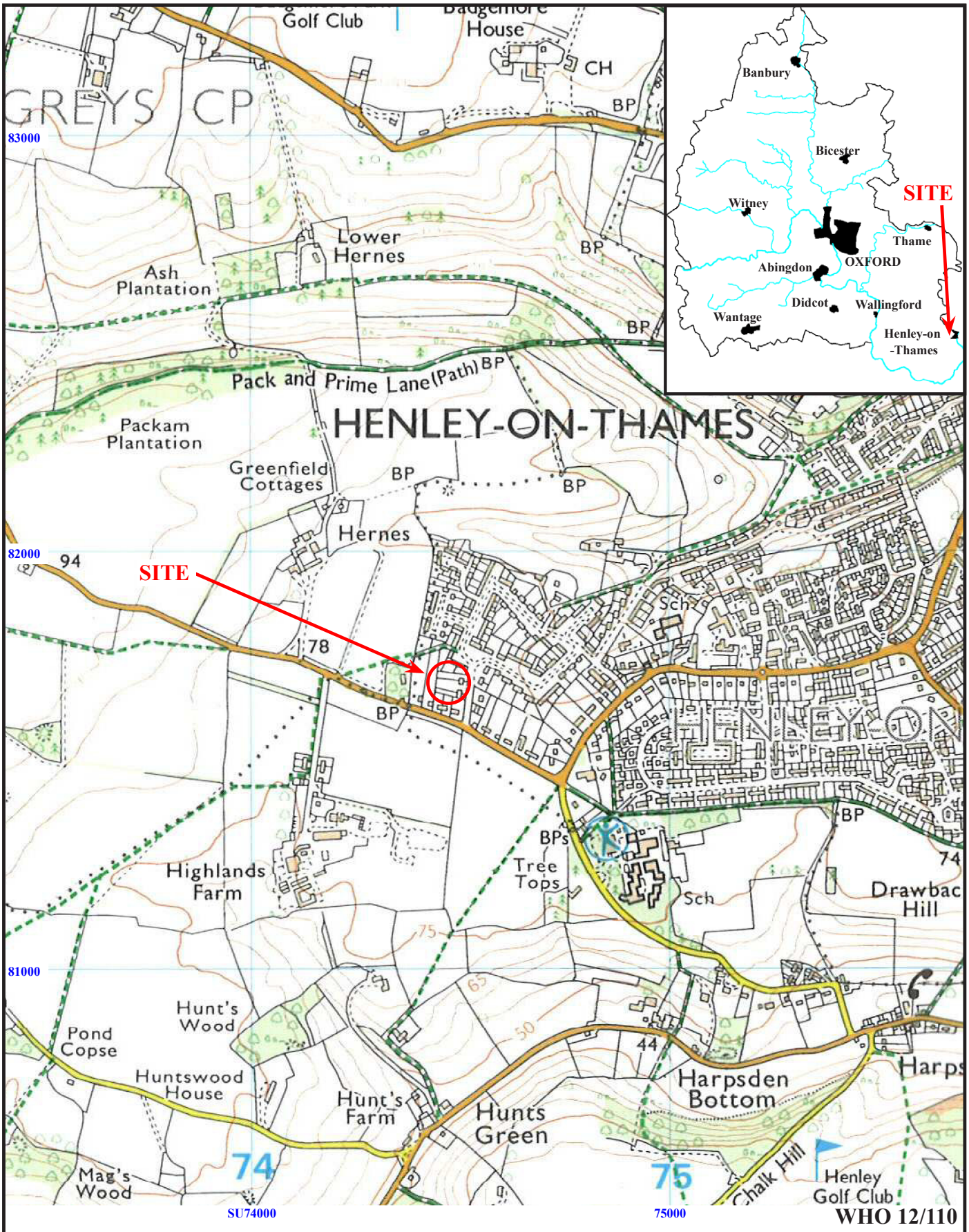


Figure 3
Rear of 'Windyridge', Elizabeth Road, Henley – Trial Trench 2
(Observer looking east; 20 cm scale in cm units; ranging pole in 50 cm units)

This view shows the middle gravelly interval, mainly in the eastern face of the excavation but the angle with the northern face occurs some 10 m left of the scale. Mostly in the eastern face but extending onto the northern face towards the base, there is a large pocket of relatively coarse but 'dirty' gravel (the scale is placed within this). Right of the pocket (E face), there is an amorphous body of dense silty sand fining irregularly upwards to sandy silt. Left of it (N face), a 'tongue' of silty sand swings past and partially over the stony pocket.



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Land to the rear of Windyridge, Elizabeth Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, 2012
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Figure 1. Location of site within Henley-on-Thames and Oxfordshire.

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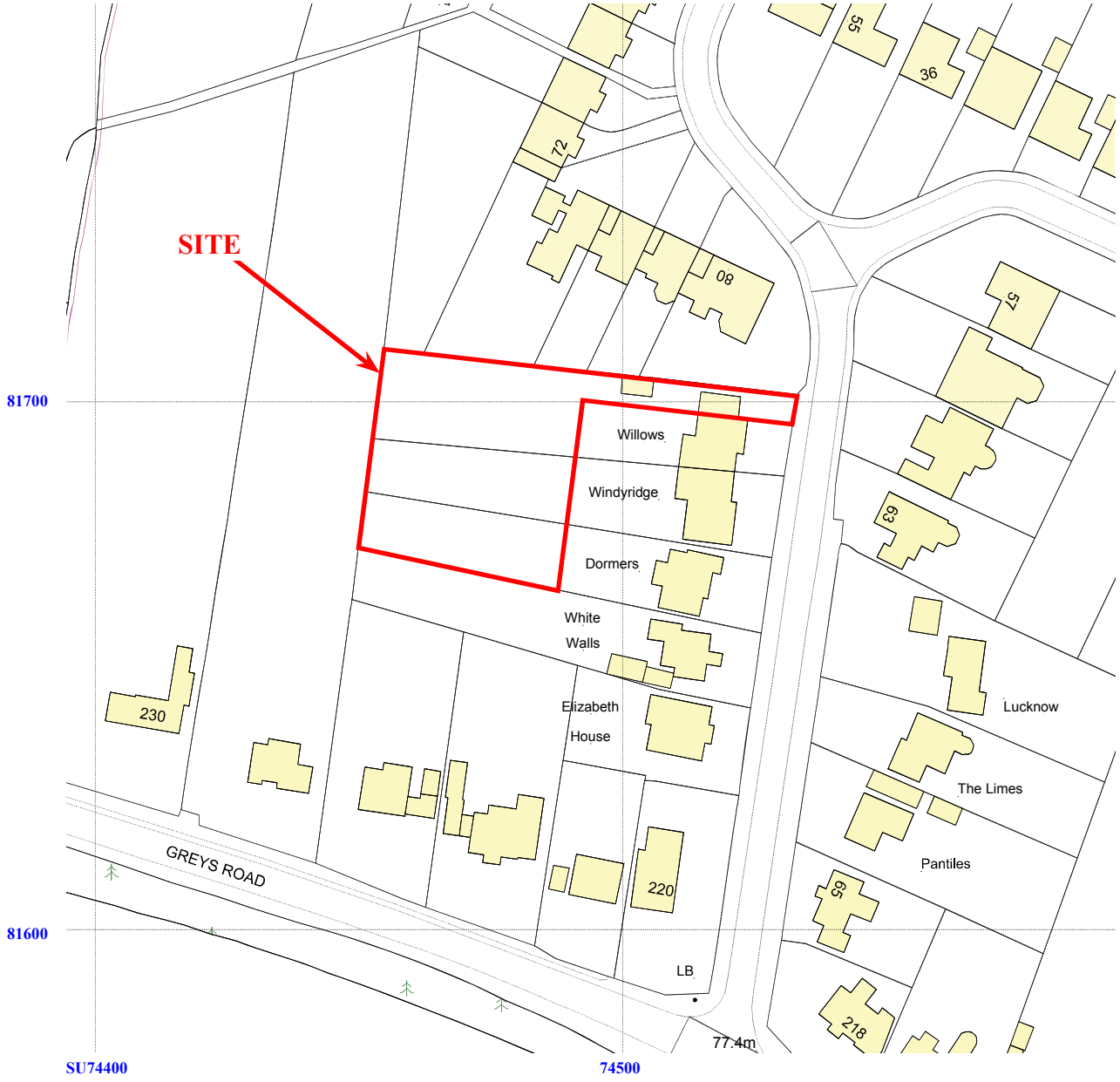

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site off Elizabeth Road.

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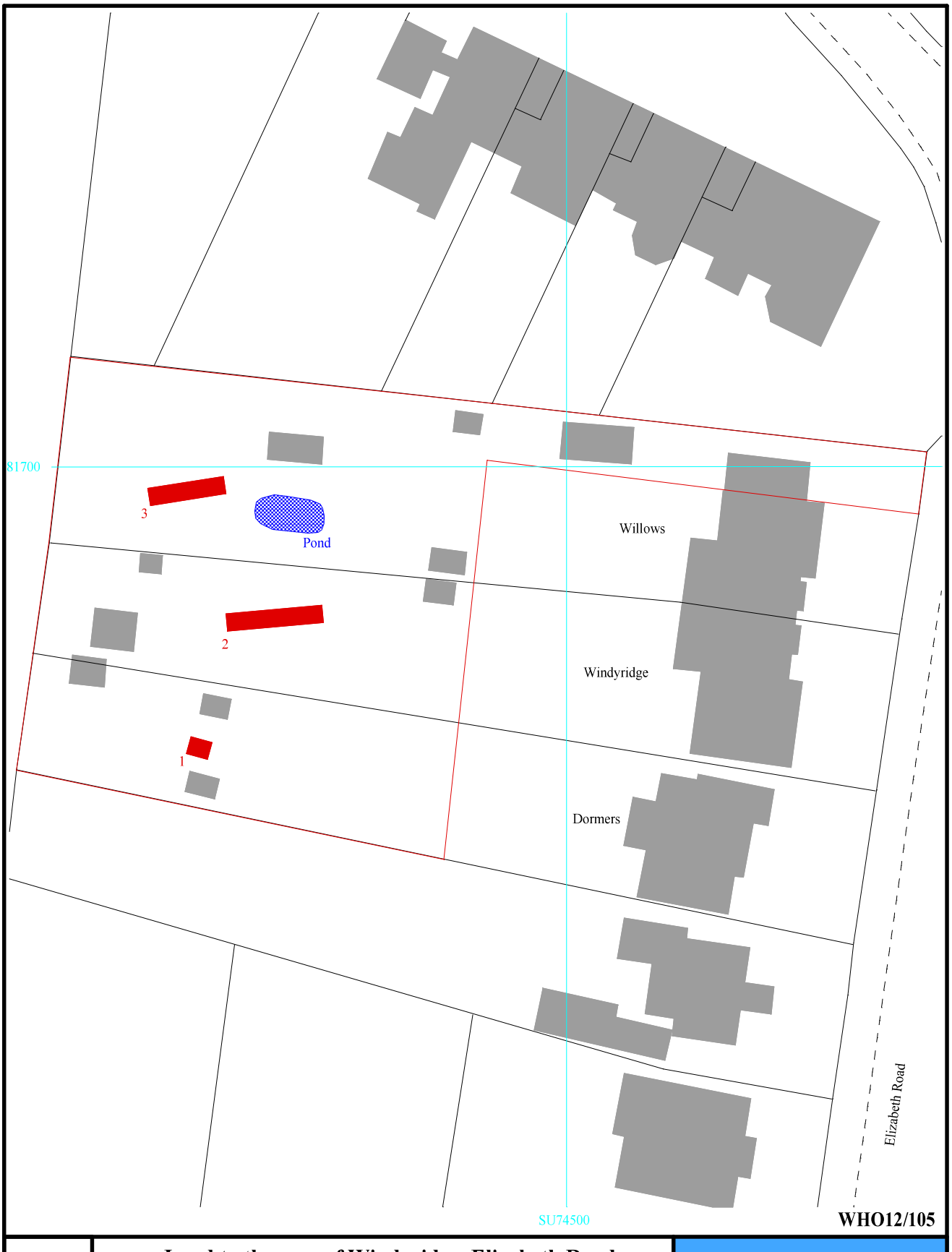

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Land to the rear of Windyridge, Elizabeth Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, 2012 Archaeological Evaluation

Figure 3. Trench locations

0 25m

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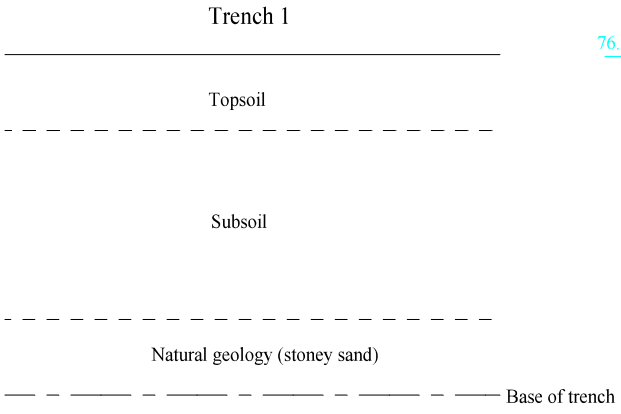

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Figure 4. Representative section.

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Plate 1. Trench 2, looking east, test pit part dug. Scale: 2m.

Plate 2. Trench 3, looking west, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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Land to the rear of Windyridge, Elizabeth Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, 2012
Archaeological Evaluation

Plates 1 and 2.

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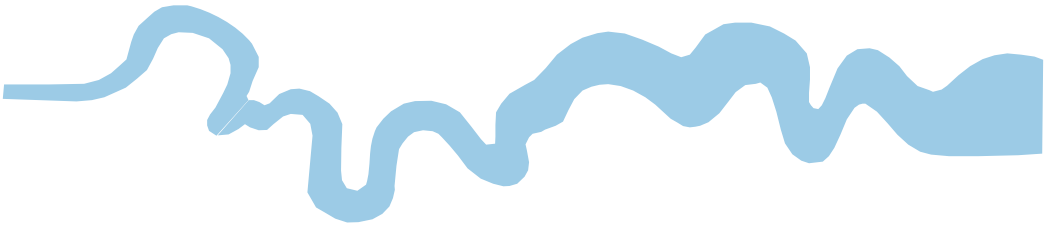
TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern	AD 1901
Victorian	AD 1837
Post Medieval	AD 1500
Medieval	AD 1066
Saxon	AD 410
Roman	AD 43
Iron Age	BC/AD 750 BC
Bronze Age: Late	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower	2,000,000 BC



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