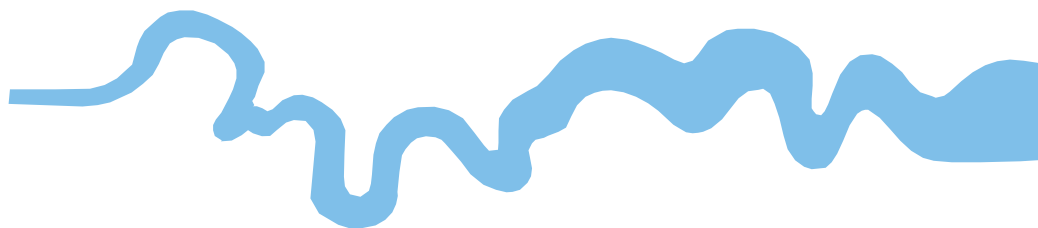


T V A S



SOUTH WEST

**Land at Mells Road, Vobster Cross,
Mells, Somerset**

An archaeological excavation

By Agata Socha-Paszkiewicz

VCM 17/106

(ST 7109 5109)

Land at Mells Road, Vobster Cross, Mells, Somerset

**An Archaeological Excavation
for ECUS Ltd**

by Agata Socha-Paszkievicz
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code VCM 17/106

February 2018

Summary

Site name: Land at Mells Road, Vobster Cross, Mells, Somerset

Grid reference: ST 7109 5109

Site activity: Archaeological Excavation

Date and duration of project: 9th to 14th October 2017

Project manager: Agata Socha-Paszkiewicz

Site supervisor: Agata Socha-Paszkiewicz

Site code: VCM 17/106

Area of site: *c.* 0.8 ha

Summary of results: A four- or six-post structure with associated pits and postholes and two pits and posthole cluster of Late Bronze Age were excavated. Charcoal obtained from one of the pits produced a radiocarbon date of 1110 – 926 cal BC which correlates well with dates anticipated from the pottery assemblage.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at TVAS South West, Taunton and will be deposited with Somerset Heritage Service in due course with accession number TTNCM76/2017.

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www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp.*

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 16.02.18 Steve Preston✓ 20.02.18
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Land at Mells Road, Vobster Cross, Mells, Somerset An Archaeological Excavation

by Agata Socha-Paszkiewicz

Report 17/106c

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological excavation carried out at Mells Road, Vobster Cross, Mells, Somerset (ST 7109 5109) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Daniel Bray of Ecus Limited, Unit 1, Woodland Business Village, Coronation Road, Basingstoke, RG21 4JX on behalf of CPM Group, Mells Road, Mells, Nr Frome, Somerset, BA11 3PD.

Planning permission (2017/0163/FUL) has been gained from Mendip District Council for the erection of a new production building with concrete batching plant as an expansion of the Mells CPM Works. The consent is subject to a condition (14) which requires a programme of archaeological works to identify, excavate and record archaeological deposits which would be affected by proposed development.

The excavation followed a geophysical survey and trial trenching Dawson (2017a and b) and comprised the third stage of investigation at the site, with this report documenting the archaeological mitigation works requested by Somerset Senior Historic Environment Officer to record and advance the understanding of the significance of any further remains which might be present and would be destroyed during construction. 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 excavation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Steven Membrey, Senior Historic Environment Officer for Somerset, the archaeological adviser to the District. The fieldwork was undertaken by Agata Socha-Paszkiewicz and Nicholas Dawson on the 9th to 14th October 2017 and the site code is VCM17/106. Nicholas Dawson together with the author prepared the figures.

The archive is presently held at TVAS South West, Taunton and will be deposited with the Somerset Heritage Service in due course with accession number TTNCM76/2017.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located 2.5km to the north-west of the village of Mells with the larger towns of Radstock 4.2km to the north-west and Frome 7.3km to the south-east. The site was part of a larger arable field, with the CPM

precast concrete manufacturing plant to the north and east and further arable land on all other sides. Hatchet Hill Lane runs down the western edge of the field (Fig. 2). The land has a gradual slope down from the south-west to the east at a height of approximately 134m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is an Inferior Oolite group - Limestone, with no recorded superficial deposits (BGS 2000). Yellowish white limestone with a number of solution holes, caused by acid erosion of the limestone filled by reddish brown clay were observed on site during excavation.

Archaeological background

A desk-based assessment (Bray 2017), geophysical survey (Dawson 2017a) and trial trench evaluation (Dawson 2017b) have previously been undertaken for the site. In summary, the assessment indicated that the site lies within an area of known archaeological sites of Iron Age, Roman and Medieval dates, although there was nothing previously recorded for the site itself. The eastern end of the site was crossed by the line of the Frome branch of the Dorset and Somerset Canal in the late 18th century although this section was backfilled in the 1950s. Running almost parallel to this but just outside the site's eastern boundary is the disused remains of The Newbury Railway, which was opened in 1857 to connect the Frome to Radstock line with Newbury Colliery.

The geophysical survey (magnetometry) identified anomalies associated with three phases of agricultural activity and confirmed the line of the canal just inside the south-eastern boundary of the site; however no obviously archaeological anomalies were identified.

The evaluation revealed a small number of archaeological features, comprising three pits and a posthole which were of mid to late Bronze Age date.

Objectives and methodology

The general objectives of the project were:

- to excavate and record all archaeological deposits and features within the areas affected by the development;
- to produce relative and absolute dating and phasing for deposits and features recorded on the site;
- to establish the character of these deposits in attempt to define functional areas on the site such as industrial, domestic, etc.; and
- to produce information on the economy and local environment and compare and contrast this with the results of other excavations in the region.

The specific research objectives were to address the following questions:

- when was the site first occupied?

when was the site abandoned?

what is the nature of any occupation of the site?

what is the nature and date of any landscape features encountered (e.g. fields, boundary features, large enclosures) and what is their spatial organisation?

what is the chronology and organisation details of the landscape features if found? How did these landscape features relate to occupied areas? and

what is the palaeoenvironmental setting of the area?

The follow-up excavation areas were to be stripped of topsoil and any subsoil under archaeological supervision to fully expose any archaeological deposits. Hand excavation or sampling of features was to be to an agreed sampling fraction depending on the nature and significance of the feature.

Excavation

Following the results of the evaluation (Dawson 2017) the Somerset Senior Historic Environment Officer requested further archaeological work on the site prior to development. It was proposed to excavate two areas around two trenches (4 and 8) in which archaeological remains were identified. Area 1 was to comprise 25m x 25m around Trench 4 targeting the area of the two pits (1 and 2) and also taking in a geophysical anomaly to the west of the trench not targeted during evaluation. Area 2 covered 10m x 10m, centred on pit 5 found within Trench 8. In both cases should further archaeological remains be identified close to the edge of excavation, provision was made for a further 3m contingency area around the features to be excavated.

Area 1 (Fig 2, 3 and 5; Pl. 1)

As the stripping of Area 1 advanced, it soon became apparent that targeted geophysical anomaly was of natural origin so planned extent along north-west edge was reduced by *c.* 4 m; however elsewhere archaeological features were identified close to the edge of excavation and the additional 3m buffers were stripped to the south-west and to the south-east. This resulted in the irregular shape of Area 1 and the extent of excavation totalling of 597 sq m.

Two postholes (11 and 15) and two pairs of postholes (9-10 and 16-17) were uncovered to the north-west and south-east of postholes 1 and 2 respectively. All were either circular or near-circular and varied from 0.68m to 0.84m in diameter and from 0.23–0.33m deep. Post holes 1, 2, 11 and 15 appeared to form a roughly rectangular, structure with external dimensions of 4.8m by 3.7m (Pl. 3). It seems likely that two pairs of postholes, 9 – 10 (Pl. 4), and 16 - 17 were either a small ancillary structure or formed a partially offset lean-to. The pairings may be indicative of post replacement.

Alternatively, the intercutting post pairs (8-10, 16-17) could be a porch for a roundhouse, facing SE which is the predominant orientation for such structures. Albeit of unusual design, the four-post arrangement could represent a box-like principal structural component of a building to support a roof with non-surviving stake, turf or wattlework walls surrounding them.

To the north-west of the four-post structure were pit 13 (Pl. 5) and posthole 14. Both were circular in plan: pit 13 was 1.20m in diameter and 0.30m deep; while posthole 14 was 0.22m in diameter and 0.20m deep. It was cut partially into a shallow irregular tree root hole. Further to the south-west was isolated small pit/scoop 12. This was circular, 0.49m in diameter and just 0.13m deep.

All features uncovered within Area 1 contained very similar fills of reddish grey brown, quite sterile silty clay. Four features (1, 9, 10 and 11) contained pottery of Late Bronze Age date which combined with surface finds amounted to 15 sherds of pottery, but weighing just 22.5g. No charred plant remains were recovered

Area 2 (Fig 2, 4 and 5; Pl. 2)

This originally planned 10m x 10m area was enlarged to total 188 sq m, as possible archaeological features were identified near the edge of the stripped zone.

Two pits (6 and 7) and a post pad (8) were identified to add to pit 5 found during the evaluation. Pits 6 and 7 lay adjacent to one another (Pl. 6), were trapezoidal in plan and with flat but uneven bases. Pit 6 was 1.6m by 1.2m and 0.25m deep; pit 7 was 2.2m by 1.2m and just 0.07m deep. The relationship between the two pits was unclear as both appeared to be filled by same deposit of greyish red brown silty clay, although in pit 6 this contained visibly more charcoal. Pits 6 and 7 contained 107 late Bronze Age pottery sherds, 93 of which came from pit 6. The date of this feature was further confirmed by a radiocarbon date on charcoal of 1110–926 cal BC (UBA-36550).

A possible post pad (8) lay just to the north-east of pit 7. This was circular in shape, 0.18m in diameter and 0.05m deep and contained no datable artefacts.

Finds

Prehistoric pottery by Richard Tabor

The combined prehistoric pottery assemblage from the evaluation and excavation comprised a total of 124 sherds weighing 290g with a very low mean weight of 2.3g (Table 1). Four fabrics were identified, two of which, S1 and mG1, were represented entirely by formless sherds. It is possible that the differences between fabrics L1 and

V1 may be accounted for entirely by taphonomic variation with local conditions of deposit 58 being hostile to calcareous inclusions. L1 showed little or no loss of inclusions and breaks were often fresh; there were no visible inclusions in V1 and surface and breaks were very weathered.

Table 1. Distribution of fabrics by sherd count and weight (in grams) by context

<i>cut</i>	<i>deposit</i>	L1		V1		S1		mG1		Totals	
		<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt</i>
Area 1	surface	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	5	1	5
1	52	3	33	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	33
5	56	1	2	-	-	2	6	-	-	3	8
6	58	-	-	93	185	-	-	-	-	93	185
7	59	9	44	5	2	-	-	-	-	14	46
9	61	5	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	4
10	62	2	7	2	0.5	-	-	-	-	4	7.5
14	66	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Totals		21	91	100	188	2	6	1	5	124	290

L1 (coarse) Moderately hard grey fabric with buff orange to grey surfaces including abundant poorly-sorted fine (<1mm) to sparse coarse (<8mm) sub-angular shelly limestone, sparsely as fossil shell plate.

V1 (medium) Moderately soft grey, silty, corky, vesicular fabric with buff orange to dark grey exterior and dark grey to buff brown interior surfaces. Prolific voids varying from fine (<1mm) to coarse (<6mm) sub-rounded to sub-angular voids, some of which are clearly of curved shell impressions.

S1 (medium) Poorly-fired grey brown fabric with buff orange exterior including sparse to moderate fine (<1mm) and rare coarse (<3) sub-angular reddish brown iron oxides.

mG1 (medium) Moderately soft buff pink to grey, sparsely micaceous silty fabric with buff pink surfaces including poorly sorted moderate medium to coarse (<5) sub-angular reddish brown fine (<1mm) iron oxides.

Sherds in fabric L1 were generally of a wall-thickness range of between 7mm to 8mm but with outliers of 5mm and 10mm. Sherds in V1 were consistently within a wall-thickness range of 6mm to 7mm with the exception of one lower wall or basal sherd which was 8mm thick.

Feature sherds were exclusive to deposit 58, all in fabric V1. All were too small to ascertain their forms with certainty. The single definite rim was of simple rounded form, possibly upright and from a neutral bowl. A second rim was badly abraded but appeared to be upright with a bead-like profile from a closed bowl. A third sherd may either have been a badly eroded base-angle or from an incurved rounded rim with inward expansion or thickening. Two further sherds appeared to be from a lower wall or curved base.

The crushed fossil shell reflects the local oolitic limestone geology, similar fabrics occurring routinely in Early Neolithic, Late Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery over much of Somerset. The largest assemblages are from the south and west of the county but a sparse collection from a chambered tomb at nearby Fromefield House, Frome, featured inclusions of oolitic shelly limestone, albeit mixed with flint (Vatcher and Vatcher 1973, 22). At Brean Down, on the western extreme of the Mendips, limestone occurred in earlier Bronze Age pottery but peaked in the Middle Bronze Age (Williams and Woodward 1990, tab. 7). However, the thickness of the limestone sherds of 6mm to 8mm is thinner than is typical of Middle Bronze Age coarse pottery. It should be

noted also that during the Late Bronze Age calcite was often added to limestone mixtures and that it is lacking here. At Dibble's Farm, Christon, south-east of Weston-Super-Mare, fossil shell fabrics were given an extremely broad date range of 1st millennium BC but a date significantly after 800BC seems most likely for sherds in fabric L1 (Morris 1989, 29-41; tab 3). The predominance of finer shell inclusions is suggestive of an Earlier Middle to Middle Iron Age date. The marked weathering of sherds in V1 may be due simply to a significantly longer period of deposition and the generally thinner walls coupled with the curvature of two lower wall/basal sherds would allow attribution to Early Neolithic bowl pottery. However, should the possible third rim sherd have been a base angle the pottery would necessarily be of later date and the Late Bronze Age radiocarbon date would be perfectly acceptable.

The sandy and grog tempered fabrics may be fired clay, rather than pottery. The former material has been noted by the author in later Bronze Age cylindrical loomweights from Sigwells on different geology in south-east Somerset.

Macrobotanical plant material and charcoal by Jo Pine

Three samples were processed from features excavated by standard wet sieving techniques. The samples were sieved to 0.25mm and air dried and the resultant flots examined under a low-power binocular microscope at a magnification of x10. Sample 2 from pit 6 (58) contained small fragments of charcoal, all of which was too small to be identified to species; and a burnt weed seed.

Radiocarbon dating

One sample of unidentified charcoal from pit 6 (58) was submitted to the Chrono radiocarbon dating laboratory at the Queen's University of Belfast. The results were calibrated using Calib rev 7.0 with data from INTCAL 13 (Reimer *et al.* 2013) and are detailed in Table 2, where the probability is expressed as relative area under the curve at 2-sigma ((5.4% confidence). Details of methodology are in the archive. The sample produced a result considered reliable and the dates at 2-sigma probability lies well within the range anticipated for the context from which they were recovered.

Table 2: Radiocarbon dating

<i>Lab Id</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Feature</i>	<i>Radiocarbon Age</i>	<i>Cal BC</i>	<i>Probability</i>
UBA-36550	Charcoal	Pit 6 (58) s2	2849 ± 30	1110-926	100%

Conclusion

Dating evidence from Area 1 was modest and although the pottery is assigned a Late Bronze Age date no featured sherds were present. However such sherds were recovered from Area 2, pit 6 which allowed for much more confident dating of the deposits uncovered to the Late Bronze Age. This dating was further confirmed by a radiocarbon date of 1110–926 cal BC returned on charcoal from pit 6.

Four post structures of similar scale have been interpreted conventionally as granaries and fodder ricks. Described as such, they featured heavily for example during the Middle to Late Iron Age at Danebury, Hampshire (Cunliffe 1995, 27, fig. 11). However, similar structures are also identified in the Late Bronze Age. Two well dated Late Bronze Age four-post structures from a pottery production site at Sherborne, Dorset, were interpreted as ‘small roofed structures with raised floors which may have been used for storing foodstuffs or other commodities, or for stacking pots before or after firing’ (Best and Woodward 2011, 209, fig. 3; 252). At Cadbury Castle, Somerset, some of the numerous post and one beam slot rectangular structures ranged widely in date from Late Bronze Age/ Early Iron Age to mid-1st century AD (Barrett *et al.* 2000, figs. 77-80; 173-4). The functional interpretation was given as storage predominantly, but a suggested sequence of shrines from the earliest period to the latest has received critical attention (Barrett *et al.* 2000, 291; Downes 1997). Four-post structures can also be found in relative isolation as demonstrated on large area quarry site excavations, as at Roundhouse Farm, Wiltshire (Cass *et al.* 2015, fig 14, structure 6174).

However, the alternative interpretation preferred here is that the site is an occupation site. The nature of the structure and associated features on Area 1 suggest that rather than being a storage facility, it is a dwelling, albeit, of uncommon form. The small number of features and limited site size may indicate it was occupied for only a short time, but if the conjoining 'porch' postholes reflect replacements and are not a design feature, then some time depth is implied.

The cluster of features in Area 2 is more difficult to interpret and whilst they are considered to reflect an area of contemporary activity away from the main house site, there is no certainty that they need be related in time or space.

The archaeological deposits discovered, although of limited extent, nevertheless take on extra significance in being the first such deposits recorded for this area, and with a secure radiocarbon date.

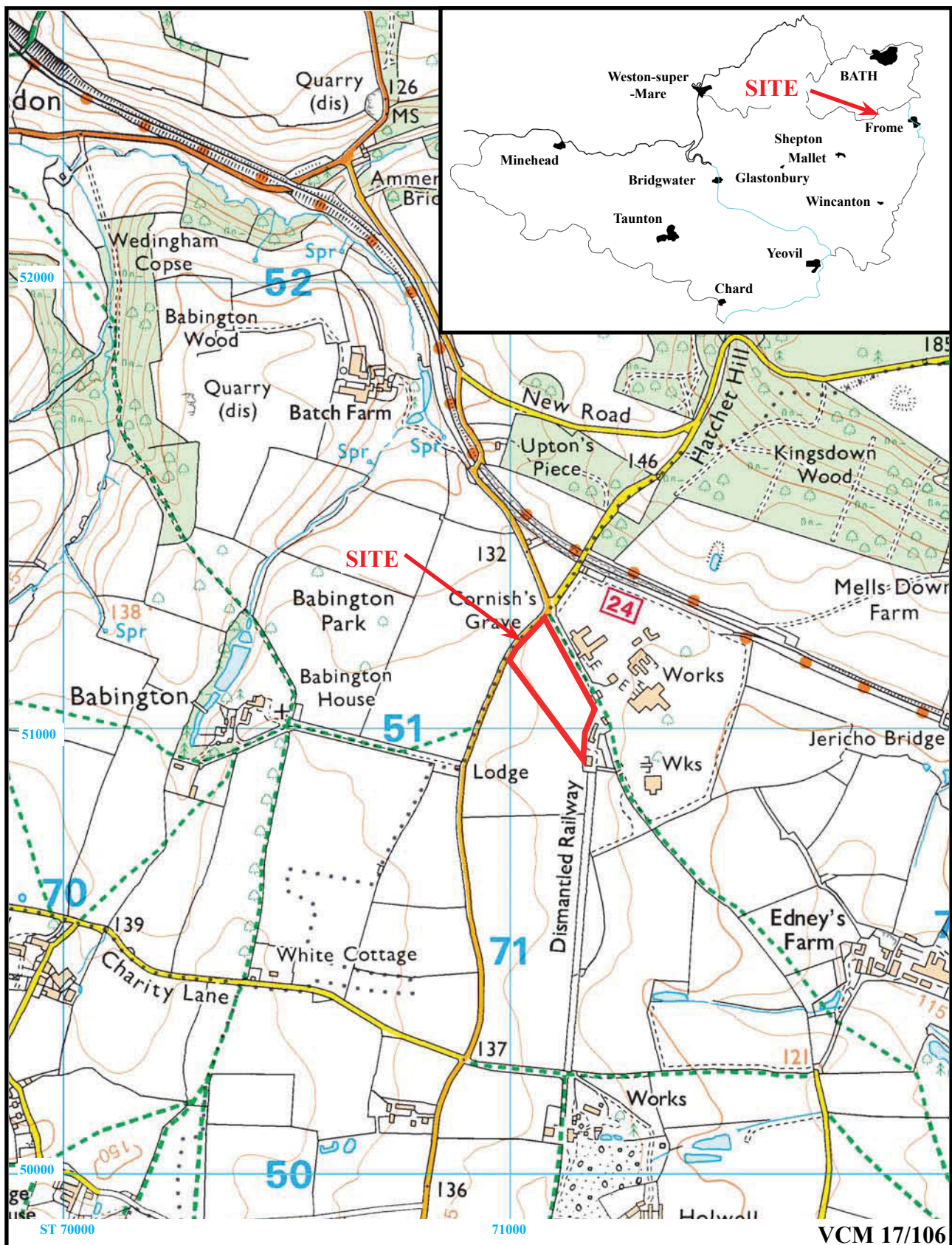
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APPENDIX 1: Feature details (evaluation and excavation combined)

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	52	Posthole	Late Bronze Age	Pottery
2	53	Posthole	Undated	None
3	54	Posthole	Undated	None
5	56	Pit	Late Bronze Age	Pottery
6	58	Pit	Late Bronze Age	C14
7	59	Pit	Late Bronze Age	Pottery
8	60	Post pad?	Undated	None
9	61	Posthole	Late Bronze Age	Pottery
10	62	Posthole	Late Bronze Age	Pottery
11	63	Posthole	Undated	None
12	64	Scoope/Pit?	Undated	None
13	65	Pit	Late Bronze Age	Pottery
14	66	Posthole	Undated	None
15	67	Posthole	Undated	None
16	68	Posthole	Undated	None
17	69	Posthole	Undated	None

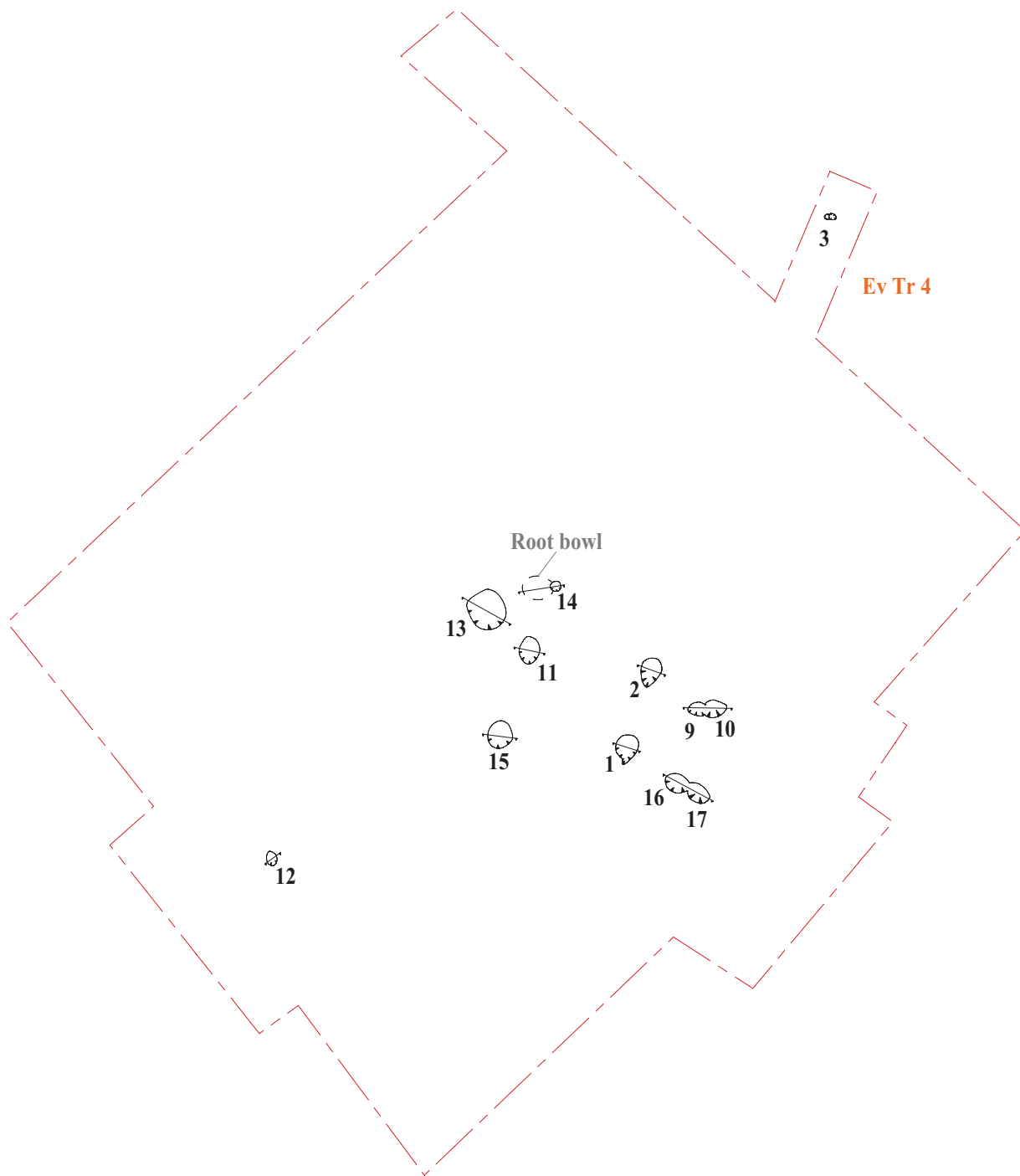


**Land at Mells Road, Vobster Cross
Mells, Somerset, 2017
Archaeological Excavation**
Figure 1. Location of site within Somerset.

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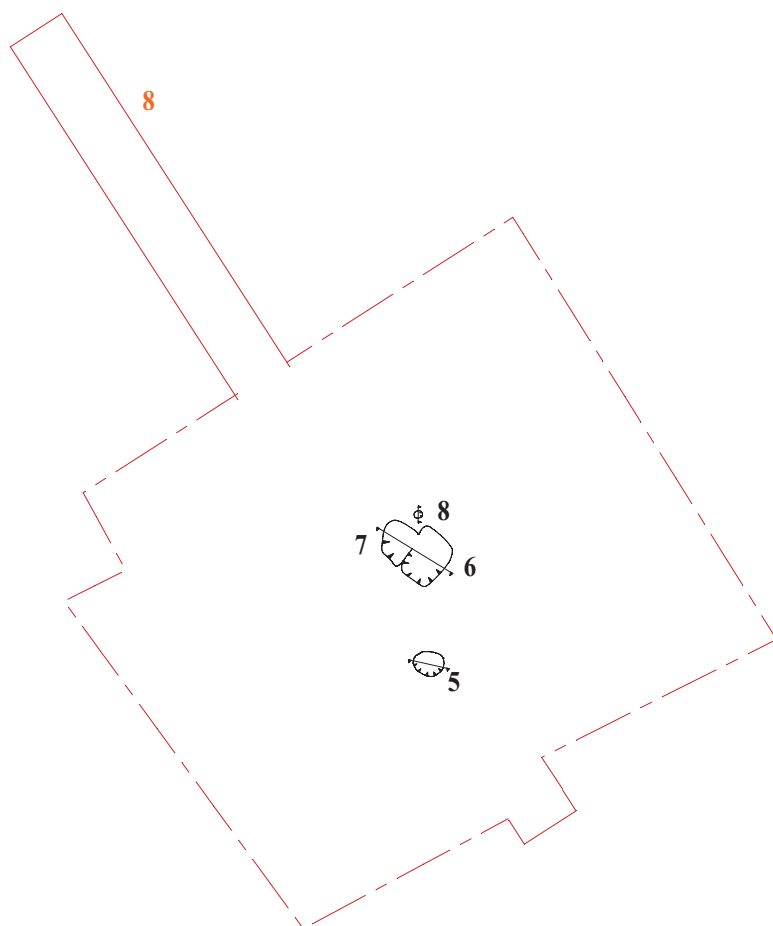
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**Land at Mells Road, Vobster Cross,
Mells, Somerset, 2017
Archaeological Excavation**

Figure 3. Plan of Area 1



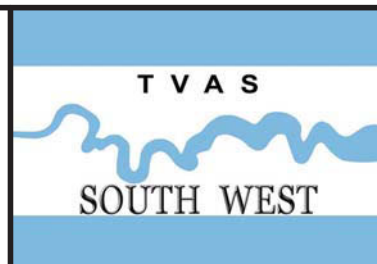


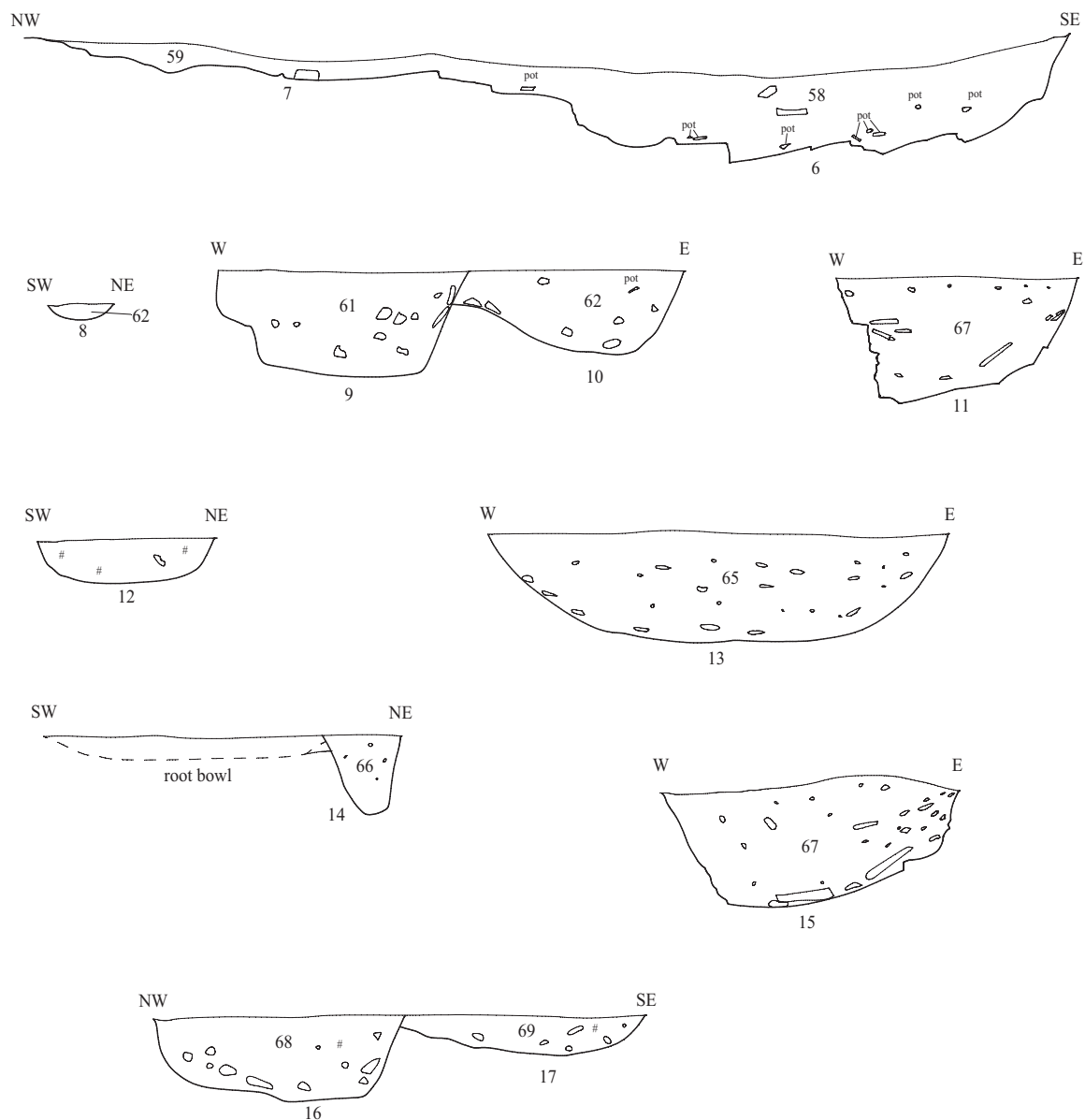
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**Land at Mells, Road, Vobster Cross,
Mells, Somerset, 2017
Archaeological Excavation**

Figure 4. Plan of Area 2





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**Land at Mells Road, Vobster Cross,
Mells, Somerset, 2017
Archaeological Excavation**

Figure 5. Sections

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T V A S
SOUTH WEST



Plate 1. Area 1, looking north-east. Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 2. Area 2, looking north-west. Scales: 2m and 1m

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Land at Mells Road, Vobster Cross
Mells, Somerset, 2017
Archaeological Excavation
 Plates 1 and 2.





Plate 3. Six-Post Structure, looking north - west. Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 4. Postholes 9 and 10, looking north. Scales: 1m and 0.30m.

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Land at Mells Road, Vobster Cross
Mells, Somerset, 2017
Archaeological Excavation
 Plates 3 and 4.



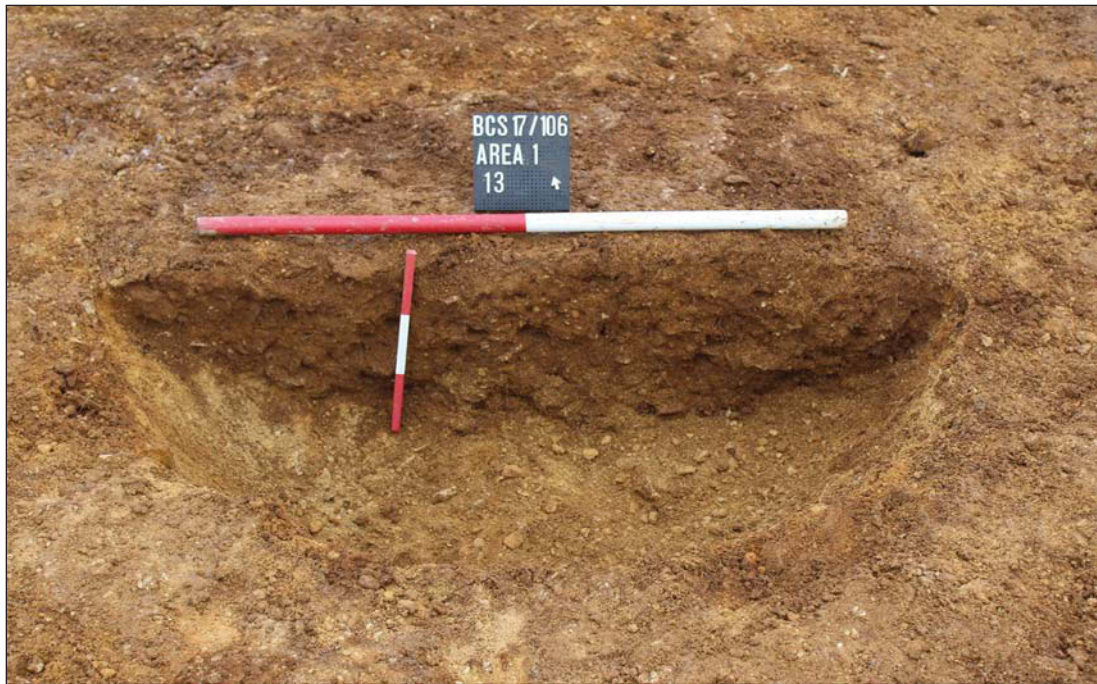


Plate 5. Pit 13, looking north-east. Scales: 1m and 0.3m.



Plate 6. Pit 6 and Pit 7, looking north - east. Scales: 2m and 0.2m, 0.1m.

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**Land at Mells Road, Vobster Cross,
Mells, Somerset, 2017
Archaeological Excavation
Plates 5 and 6.**

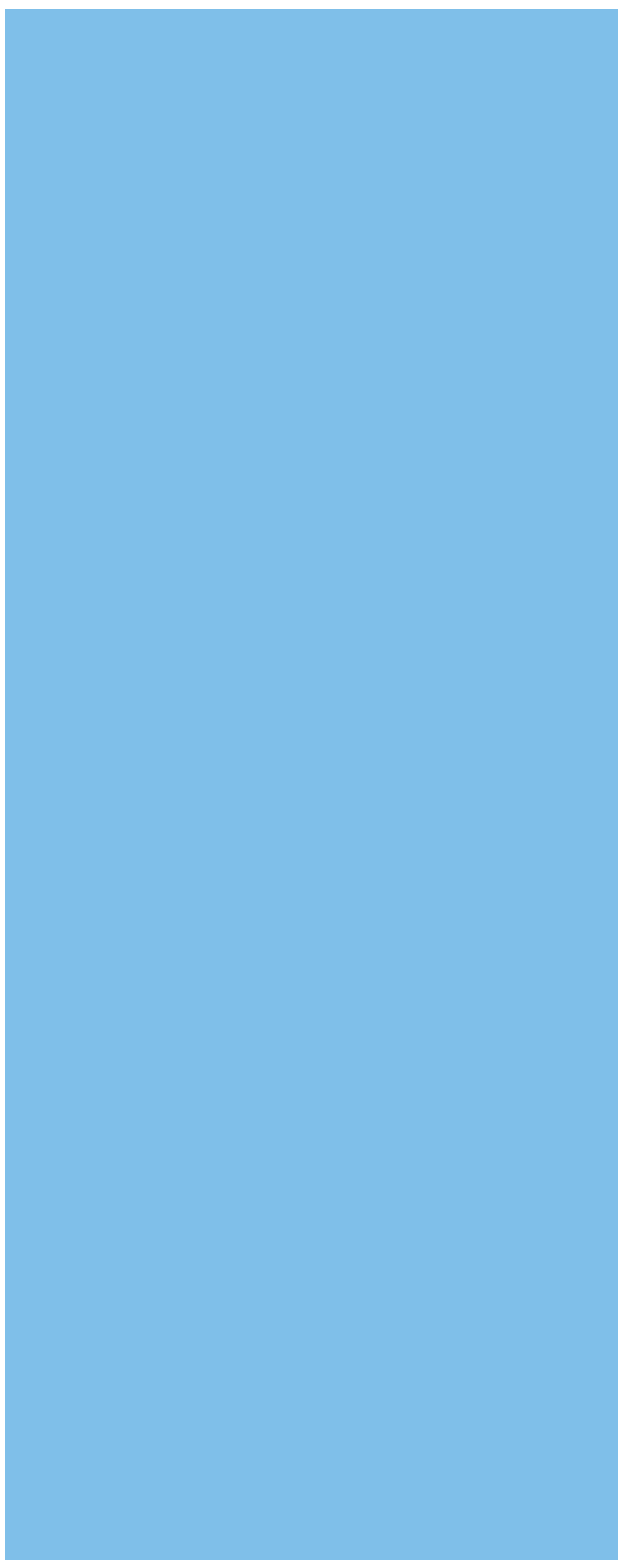
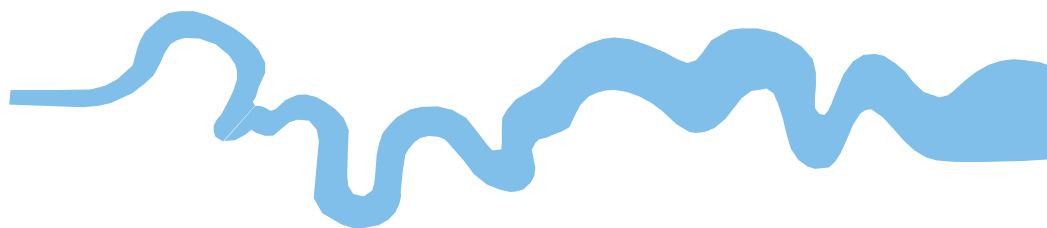


TIME CHART

Calendar Years

Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43
	AD 0 BC
Iron Age _____	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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