

# **Lewington Wood-Moulsford Down High Voltage Cable Trench, Streatley, West Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief**

**For Entec UK Ltd**

by James McNicoll-Norbury

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code RRS 07/128

**July 2008**

## Summary

**Site name:** Lewington Wood – Moulsoford Down High Voltage Cable Trench, Streatley, West Berkshire

**Grid reference:** Lewington Wood (SU 5820 7955) to Moulsoford Down (SU 5835 8215)

**Site activity:** Watching Brief

**Date and duration of project:** 4th April – 5th June 2008

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** David Platt

**Site code:** RRS 07/128

**Area of site:** Approximately 3km in length.

**Summary of results:** A small number of pits and a posthole were identified on site containing pottery dated to the Late Bronze Age/Iron Age as well as a single pit containing Early/Middle Iron Age Pottery. Two lynchets were identified as well as two modern ditches.

**Monuments identified:** Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age and/or Middle Iron Age occupation. Undated lynchets.

**Location and reference of archive:** The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum in due course, with the accession code NEBYM: 2008.84.

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	Steve Preston ✓ 12.08.08

# **Lewington Wood – Moulsoford Down Cable Trench, Streatley, West Berkshire An Archaeological Watching Brief**

by James McNicoll-Norbury

**Report 07/128b**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out between the electrical substations of Lewington Wood (SU 5820 7955) and Moulsoford Down (SU 5835 8215) near Streatley in West Berkshire (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Dr Stephen Townend of Entec UK Ltd, North Canon Court, Abbey Lawn, Shrewsbury, SY2 5DE.

The scheme of archaeological monitoring is in line with government guidance on archaeology and development, as set out in *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16, 1990), the West Berkshire County Council's policies on archaeology and with Section 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 which obliges utility companies to: 'have regard to the desirability of... Protecting sites, buildings (including structures) and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest.' The field investigation was carried out to a specification based on a brief prepared by Entec (Townend 2007) and submitted to Mr Duncan Coe, Archaeological Officer of West Berkshire County Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by David Platt, Andrew Mundin, Jennifer Lowe, James McNicoll-Norbury, Steven Crabb and Ceri Falys between 4th April and 5th June 2008 and the site code is RRS07/128.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum in due course, with the accession code NEBYM: 2008.84

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site is located on the western margins of Streatley, between the electrical substations of Lewington Wood and Moulsoford Down, on a route crossing both the B4009 and Rectory Road, close to Streatley, West Berkshire (Fig.1). The site is currently used for agricultural purposes, the majority being for grazing but the fields closest to the B4009 being used for crops of winter wheat. The underlying geology comprises a mixture of Upper, Middle and Lower Chalk (BGS 1980), which was observed during the fieldwork. The site lies on undulating ground heights of between 90m and 165m above Ordnance Datum (Fig.1).

## **Archaeological background**

The fieldwork took place on the eastern margins of the Berkshire Downs close to Goring Gap, where the Thames breaks through the chalk escarpment. Streatley occupies a strategic crossing point of the River Thames and this location appears to have been the focus for human settlement from the earliest times (Gates 1975; Richards 1978). Roman coins discovered within the village suggest settlement in the near environs, whose precise location has yet to be discovered, although Roman occupation and boundary features are recorded to the south-west (Ford 1982). A Saxon settlement is indicated in this area by references to charters of the time. 'Streatlea' is first recorded in AD690 and the village is mentioned in Domesday Book of 1086 as 'Estriei'. At this time in the early medieval period it is believed Streatley was home to a Minster church indicating some significance for the settlement (Townend 2008).

Of most significance is the site of five ring ditches, presumably the leveled remains of Bronze Age barrows which lie adjacent to the route of the proposed cable (Richards 1978) (Fig. 2).

An earlier watching brief during digging of test pits along the route revealed nothing of archaeological interest (Platt 2007).

## **Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to;

excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the new construction work. In general this is to involve examination of areas of topsoil stripping for the easement access tracks, turning areas, etc, and the digging of the trench itself.

The topsoil stripping on the archaeologically 'sensitive' area of the proposed route (the central area - Townend 2008, section 2.2) was take place using a machine fitted with a toothless bucket and to take place under continuous archaeological supervision. Archaeological deposits threatened by the development would be excavated and recorded. Metal detectors were to be used to enhance the recovery of metal finds. A programme of environmental sampling was planned, should sufficient well stratified subsoil deposits be located.

An area approximately 20m wide was stripped of topsoil along the full route, using a 360<sup>0</sup> machine under continual archaeological supervision, to accommodate cable trenches on either side of the easement and a central access road. In most areas this exposed the chalk geology as very little subsoil was present, however there were areas where the natural chalk level was not exposed, and an orange brown subsoil was encountered. From the

stripped level, the cable trenches were to be reduced further, by approximately 1m, however the access road was constructed on the stripped surface so features encountered on the line of the road were planned but not excavated. In areas where natural chalk was not exposed the digging of the cable trench was monitored to record features exposed in section only. On the chalk, features were recorded in plan. In addition to the cable route several compound areas were also stripped at various points along its length (Fig. 2). The cable route has been divided into segments (A-T) for ease of discussion (Figs 1 and 2).

## **Results**

Several features were encountered along the route of the cable trench, within sections A-B, G-H and K-L (Figs 2 and 3). No archaeological features were encountered in the stretch close to the Bronze Age barrows (section N-O). The main cluster of features was recorded in section G-H which was located approximately 300m to the north of the B4009. A single feature was recorded in the southern section of the cable route (A-B) along with a few unstratified struck flints from section B-C, located on the southern side of the B4009. Two modern ditches were recorded in section K-L.

### *Section A-B*

A single pit (1) was encountered at the southern end of the cable route within section A-B, on the southern side of the B4009. Pit 1 was 0.63m in diameter and 0.14m deep and was filled with an orange brown sandy silt (50). No finds were recovered from its fill.

### *Section G-H*

The main concentration of features encountered during the fieldwork was located within this stretch of the cable trench, a total of 7 pits, a posthole and 2 negative lynchets.

This cluster of features included a group of 6 pits and a posthole, a possible lynchet and a seventh pit located slightly to the south of the main group; the second lynchet (11) was located approximately 100m down slope, to the north.

Only two of the pits in this area were excavated, pits 2 and 10. These were excavated due to their location within the proposed line of the cable trench. The remaining pits were located within the zone of the access road and would not be further disturbed. These features were recorded in plan only and, where possible, finds were retrieved from the surface.

Pit 2 was 2m in diameter and was excavated to a depth of 1.10m; the base of the feature was not reached as the feature was excavated to just below the depth of the proposed cable trench and the remainder of the pit would therefore not be disturbed during the construction works. Finds were recovered from several fills (54-60) of the pit, including 14 fragments of animal bone, 13 sherds of Late Bronze Age/Iron Age pottery, 1 struck flint and 7 pieces of burnt flint.

Pit 10 was observed in section only, truncating the top of pit 2. This feature was 0.80m in diameter and 0.34m deep, and was filled with a dark grey brown silty clay, 53, with frequent burnt flint. Six pieces of Early/Middle Iron Age pottery and 9 fragments of animal bone were recovered from this pit.

Immediately adjacent to pit 2, was posthole 8, 0.40m in diameter, 0.25m in depth and filled with a mid grey silty clay. It produced 2 fragments of Late Bronze Age/Iron Age pottery and several fragments of burnt, unworked stone. The remainder of the pits in this small cluster was scanned for surface finds with only one, pit 5, producing a single sherd of Late Bronze Age/ Iron Age pottery. Further to the south of the pit group was an isolated feature, pit 6, which produced 6 sherds of Late Bronze Age/Iron Age pottery from the surface.

Although dating evidence was not retrieved from pits 3, 4 and 9 they were similar in size and nature to pit 2 and are thought to be of a similar date.

Two possible negative lynchets were recorded in this zone of the stripped area. One was noted dividing the pit cluster from pit 6, towards the top of the slope, and the second was recorded further north towards the base of the slope. Lynchets are generally formed during repeated ploughing on slopes. A build up of soil (positive lynchets) occurs on the higher side of a field boundary and an erosion hollow, or negative lynchets, occurs on the lower side of the boundary (Bowen 1961). Once the positive lynchets is leveled, as has occurred in this case, the soil is pushed into the negative lynchets. The lynchets encountered close to the pit cluster produced a single sherd of Late Bronze Age/Iron Age pottery, while the other produced a single sherd of abraded Roman pottery, as well as a fragment of modern metalwork. These finds, from a negative lynchets provide *terminus post quem* dates for destruction of the lynchets only.

### *Section K-L*

Ditches 12 and 13 were identified close to where the cable route crossed Rectory Road. These ditches were parallel to one another and were 2m and 1.45m wide and 0.33m and 0.20m deep respectively. Both ditches contained fragments of modern metalwork including barbed wire. A single sherd of residual Roman pottery was recovered from ditch 12.

### *The contractor's compounds*

Construction of the contractor's compounds comprised removal of topsoil prior to the laying of hard core and Tarmac surfaces. The overburden was not stripped to a depth to expose the archaeologically relevant horizon expect in small patches and no archaeological deposits could be observed. A single fragment of flint gritted prehistoric pottery was recovered from the main compound (section B-C).

## **Finds**

### *Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn*

The pottery assemblage comprised 43 sherds with a total weight of 406g. It was all of prehistoric date, other than two sherds of Roman material and a small assemblage of early post-medieval wares. A lack of diagnostic sherds makes the exact dating of the prehistoric pottery somewhat difficult, but at least one feature appears likely to date to the middle Iron Age. The rest of the assemblage could date to the late Bronze Age or early to middle Iron Age.

### Fabrics

The following were noted:

#### *Prehistoric*

- F1:** Sparse Quartz. Fine fabric, rare to sparse quartz up to 1mm, sparse organic voids up to 3mm. 6 sherds, 58g.
- F2:** Quartz and Ironstone. Moderate to dense sub-angular quartz up to 1mm, rare to sparse red rounded ironstone up to 2mm. 1 sherd, 8g.
- F3:** Sparse Flint and Ironstone. Rare to sparse angular white flint up to 1mm, sparse red rounded ironstone up to 2mm. 2 sherds, 19g.
- F4:** Micaceous Quartz and Ironstone. Sparse sub-angular quartz up to 1mm, rare angular red ironstone up to 1mm, rare to moderate fine silver mica. 2 sherds, 12g.
- F5:** Flint. Moderate to dense angular grey and black flint up to 3mm, sparse to moderate sub-angular calcareous material up to 2mm. 2 sherds, 33g.
- F6:** Sandy Flint. Moderate to dense sub-rounded quartz up to 1mm, sparse angular flint up to 3mm, sparse shell fragments up to 2mm. 18 sherds, 130g.

#### *Post-medieval*

**GRE:** Glazed Red Earthenware, 16th – 19th century. Fine sandy earthenware, usually with a brown or green glaze, occurring in a range of utilitarian forms. Such 'country pottery' was first made in the 16th century, and in some areas continued in use until the 19th century. 10 sherds, 143g.

In addition, two sherds (3g) of extremely abraded Roman pottery were also noted. The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1.

### Chronology

The bulk of the prehistoric pottery consisted of plain bodysherds which offered no chronologically diagnostic information. The range of fabrics appears fairly typical of sites in the region, with quartz, flint, iron oxide and micaceous fabrics of Late Bronze Age date noted at the Reading Business Park site (Morris 2004, 61) and similar fabrics were present at the Reading Waterfront excavations (Underwood 1997, 144). Further to the west, a wide range of sand- and flint-tempered fabrics occurred at the Perry Oaks site (Every and Mephram 2007, 25-26). There, flint-based fabrics were more common in the Late Bronze Age Post-Deverel Rimbury assemblages, whereas sandy wares were more common in the middle Iron Age, but both types occurred in both periods. Consequently, exact dating of most of the bodysherds from this site must remain uncertain, as they could date to the late Bronze Age or early to middle Iron Age on the basis of the fabric alone.

A few sherds offer some diagnostic information. A single rimsherd from a fairly large vessel was noted in context 53, a few sherds with light vertical scoring or wiping were present in contexts 54 and 55. In the case of the latter, wiping was noted on both the late Bronze Age and middle Iron Age pottery from Perry Oaks (Every and Mephram 2007, 8 and 17). The rimsherd was from a fairly large vessel, with an upright and slightly everted form, and the beginning of a shoulder below the rim, although it is broken at this point. This form appears more typical of the early to middle Iron Age tradition of the region (Every and Mephram 2007). The same context also produced a thin-walled, highly-burnished sherd. This again appears more typical of the middle Iron Age than the late Bronze Age. It would appear therefore that Pit 10 is almost certainly of middle Iron Age date, but, on the basis of the ceramic evidence alone, the rest of the prehistoric pottery could date to any time in the late Bronze Age or early to middle Iron Age.

### *Bone*

A total of 26 fragments of bone was recovered from 3 separate contexts; pit 2, pit 10 and ditch 13. Pit 2 produced 14 fragments, the diagnostic pieces including a dog mandible, as well as a second mandible fragment from a slightly larger mammal, most likely a sheep or goat. A fragment of scapula, possibly from a dog, was also retrieved from this context. Pit 10 produced a total of 9 fragments of bone which included an almost complete vertebra from a cow, as well as fragment of 2 fragments of mandible from a sheep or goat. A single unidentified fragment of bone was retrieved from ditch 13.



### *Metal*

Eight fragments of metal were recovered from features 11, 12 and 13 weighing a total of 55g. The pieces are all modern and include fragments of barbed wire.

### *Struck Flint by Steve Ford*

A small collection comprising just 8 struck flints was recovered during the course of the fieldwork (Appendix 3). Seven of these came from subsoil contexts with just one (a flake) from Late Bronze Age/Iron Age pit 2. Seven of the collection are flakes with one spall (a piece less than 20x20mm). None of the items are closely datable in themselves and could be of Neolithic or Bronze Age date. One of the flakes was a narrow flake, a type which is often indicative of Mesolithic or earlier Neolithic activity. However, fortuitous production of narrow flakes with proportions of up to 5% are recorded in later Neolithic and Bronze Age assemblages and the piece here is likely to belong to this latter category.

Several of the pieces are patinated and, with the exception of the flake from pit 2, are slightly edge damaged, presumably reflecting their recovery from contexts which have been ploughed.

### **Conclusion**

A small number of archaeological features were encountered during the course of the watching brief. The main concentration of archaeology encountered comprised a cluster of Late Bronze Age/Iron Age pits on the steep slope of the downs north of the B4009. In addition two lynchets were also encountered in this area.

The cluster of pits probably represents an occupation site, the full extent of which is clearly unknown. Unless the site is peripheral to a much larger settlement complex, the absence of additional contemporary deposits in the easement strip especially a lack of ditches or gullies, suggests that the site is a small unenclosed settlement. Later Bronze Age occupation sites are relatively common on the Berkshire Downs (Ford 1991, fig 6.13) and this fieldwork adds to the corpus of known sites and contributes to the overview of a densely settled landscape at that time.

By way of contrast no archaeological finds or features were encountered closest to the Bronze Age round barrow cemetery.

Many parts of the Berkshire Downs, especially to the west, north of Lambourn were covered by ancient ('celtic') fields (Rhodes 1950). The majority of the visible traces of the fields are though of Roman date with only small areas of confirmed prehistoric fields present (Ford et al 1988). Most of these ancient fields have now

been leveled by cultivation, much of which has taken place since the middle of the 20th century. Some of the best preserved fields though are located close to the site to the west at Streatley Warren (Richard 1978, plate 6). Two interventions (Mills 1948; Richards 1986) suggest that that they are no earlier than Iron Age and by analogy with the better dated fields to the west, they are probably of Roman date. It is likely that the leveled lynchets revealed during the watching brief here and now represented only by their negative components, are broadly of similar date.

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**APPENDIX 1: Feature details**

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	50	Pit	Undated	
2	54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60	Pit	Late Bronze Age/Iron Age	Pottery
3	Unexcavated	Pit		
4	Unexcavated	Pit		
5	Unexcavated	Pit	Late Bronze Age/Iron Age	Pottery
6	Unexcavated	Pit	Late Bronze Age/Iron Age	Pottery
7	51	Lynchet		Pottery
8	52	Posthole	Late Bronze Age/Iron Age	Pottery
9	Unexcavated	Pit		
10	53	Pit	Early/Mid Iron Age	Pottery
11	Unexcavated	Lynchet		Pottery
12	61	Ditch	Modern	Metal
13	62	Ditch	Modern	Metal

APPENDIX 2: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Cut	Deposit	F1		F2		F3		F4		F5		F6		Roman		GRE	
		No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt
	Topsoil main compound									1	1						
	Topsoil SU57824 80548															1	2
	Subsoil find 1 SU57824 80548															1	51
	Subsoil find 2 SU57991 80769											3	7			1	36
	Subsoil find 3 SU57981 80775															7	54
	Subsoil find 4 SU 57961 80796							1	5	1	32						
2	54											2	6				
2	55	1	4									6	92				
5		1	2														
6												6	16				
7	51											1	9				
8	52	2	6														
10	53	2	46	1	8	2	19	1	7								
11														1	2		
12	6													1	1		
	Total	6	58	1	8	2	19	2	12	2	33	18	130	2	3	10	143

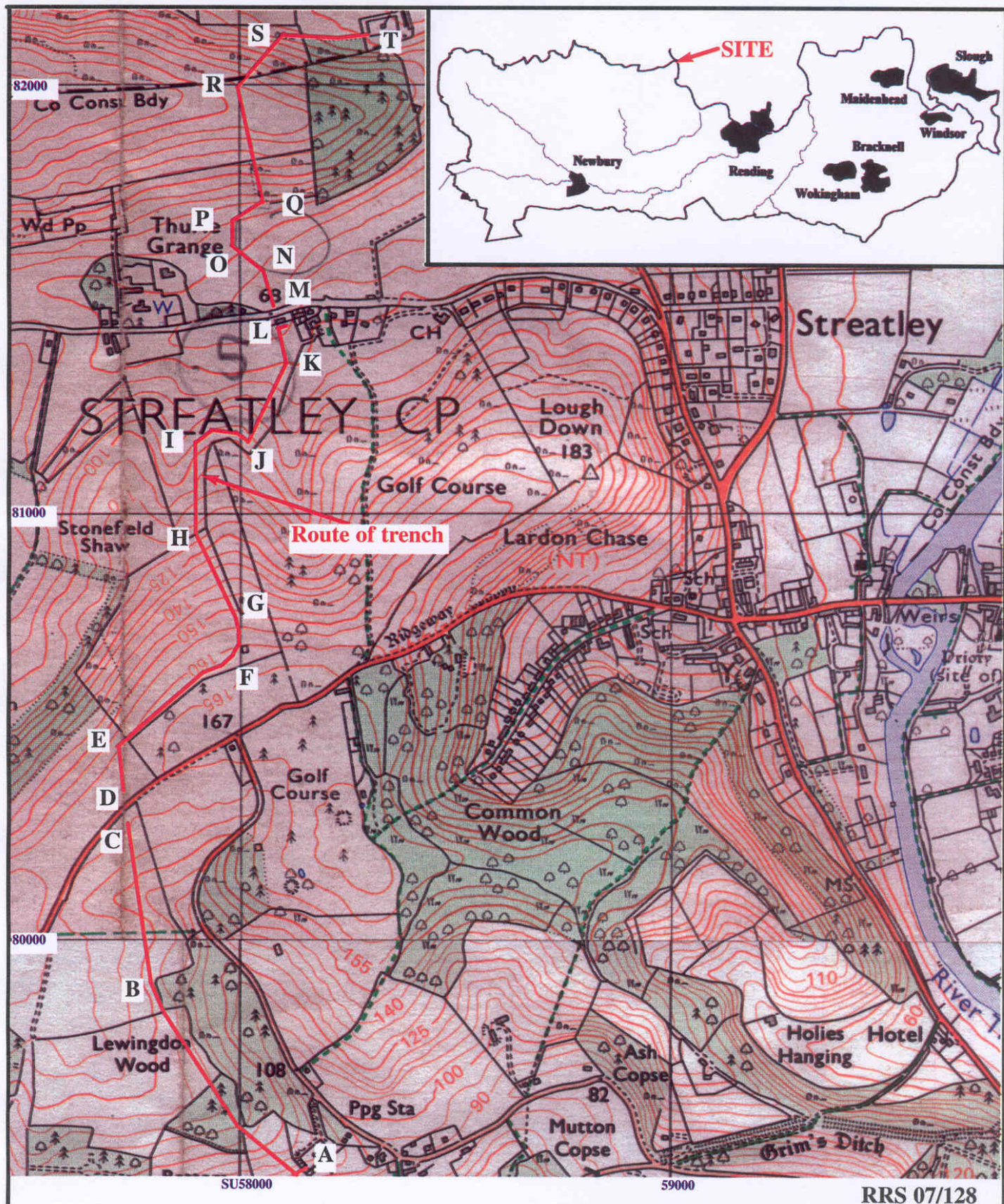
**APPENDIX 3: Flint catalogue**

Easement strip Section B-C: Broken flake(patinated), Intact flake, Intact narrow flake (patinated), spall

Pit 2 (fill 55) Intact flake (patinated)

Subsoil Find 2 (SU 57991 80769): Broken flakes, Intact flake





RRS 07/128

Lewington Wood-Moulsford Down H/V cable trench, Rectory Road, Streatley, West Berkshire, 2008

Archaeological watching brief

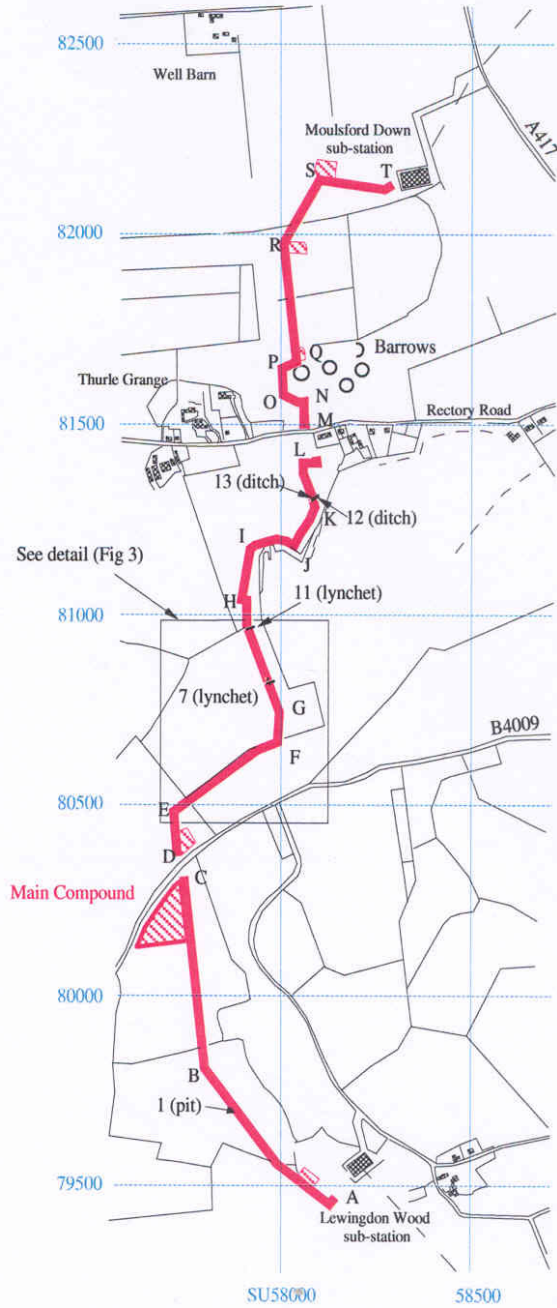
Figure 1. Location of site in relation to Streatley and West Berkshire.

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# Lewington Wood - Moulsoford Down H/V cable trench, Rectory Road, Streatley, West Berkshire, 2008



Main Compound

See detail (Fig 3)



-  Stripped area
-  Stripped area of easement



Figure 2. Location of road strip and compound areas.

# Lewington Wood - Moulsoford Down H/V cable trench, Rectory Road, Streatley, West Berkshire, 2008

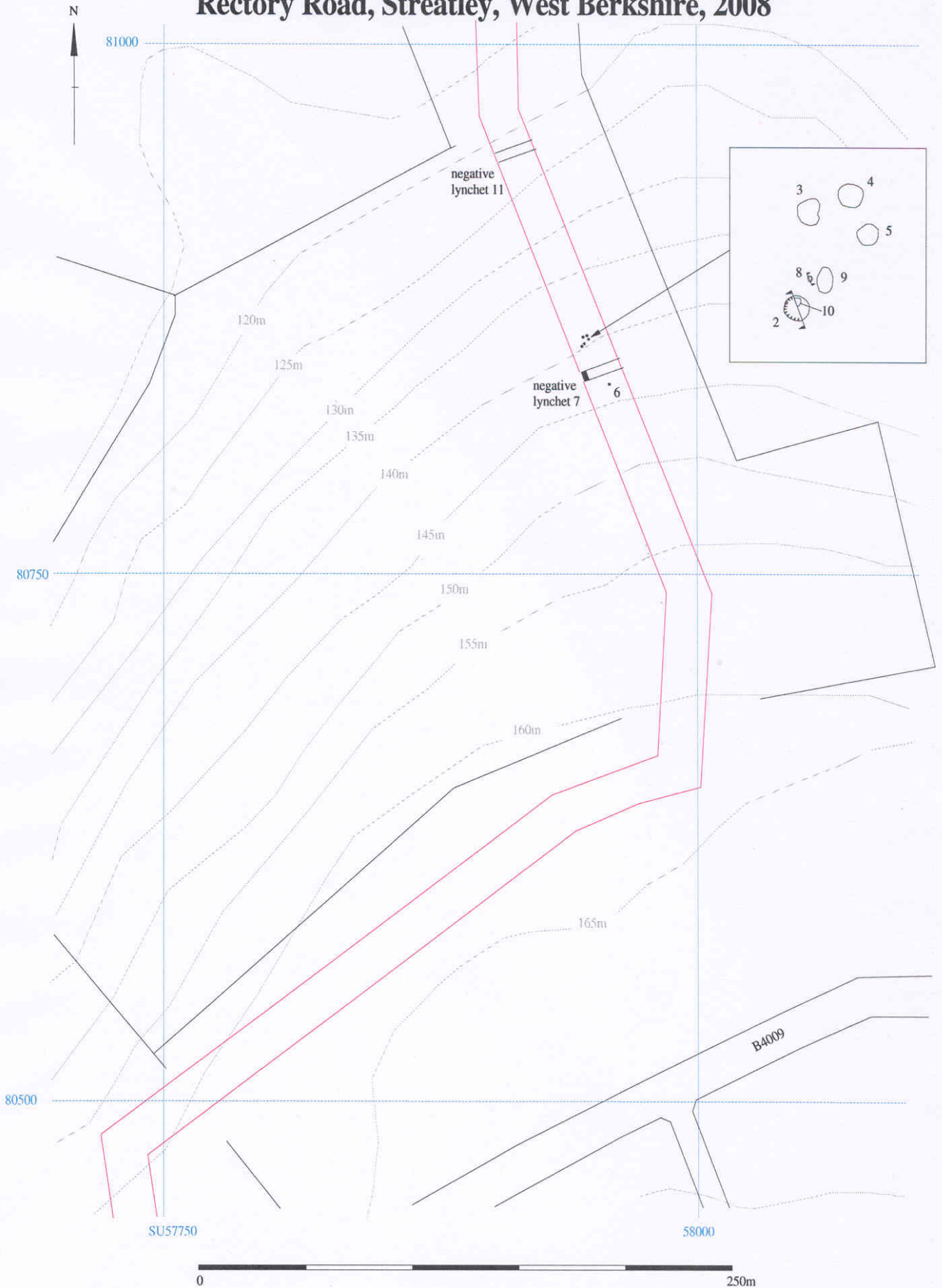


Figure 3. Detail of Iron Age pits.



# Lewington Wood - Moulsoford Down H/V cable trench, Rectory Road, Streatley, West Berkshire, 2008

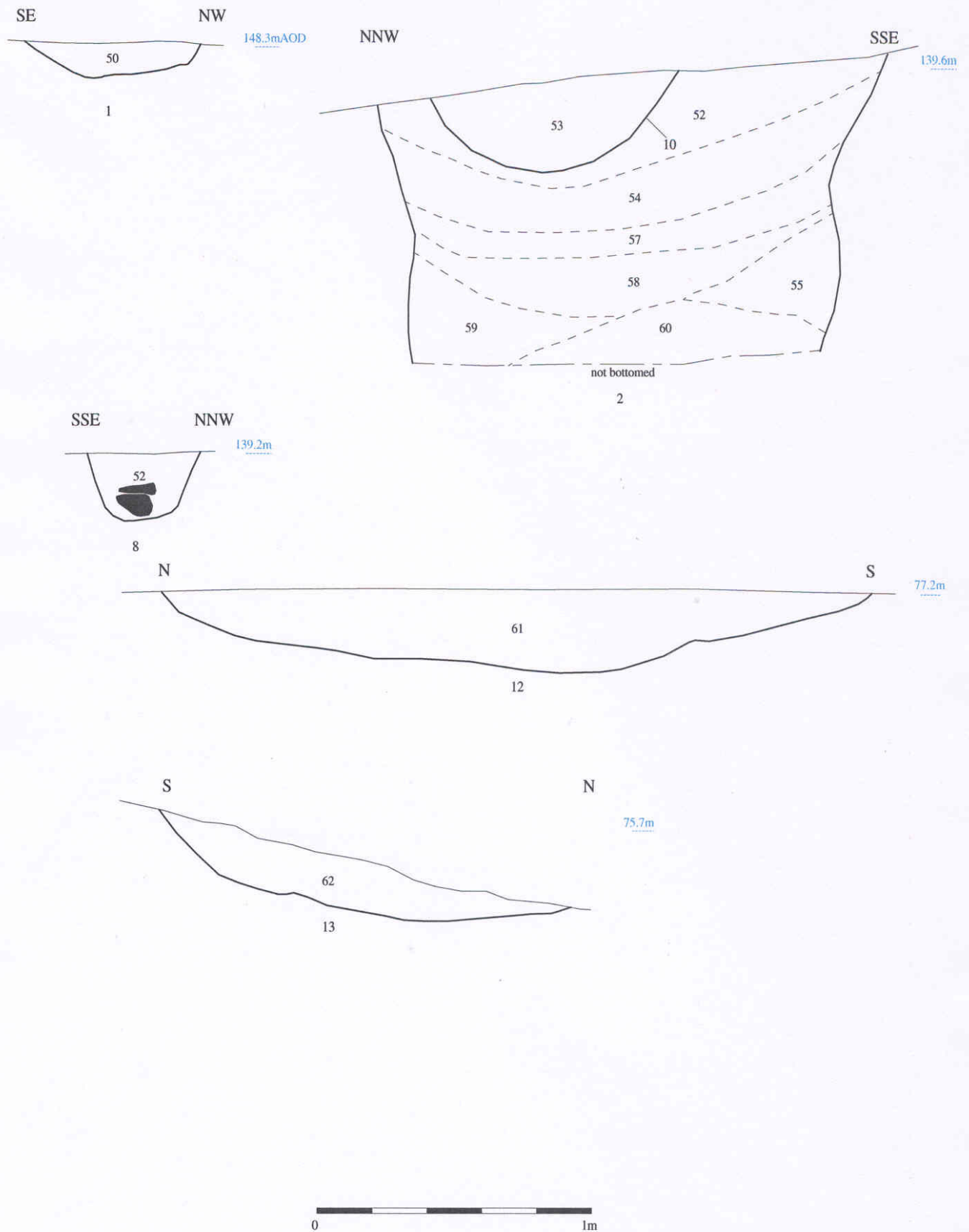


Figure 4. Sections.



Plate 1. Pit 2 and pit 10, looking east-northeast, scale 2m.

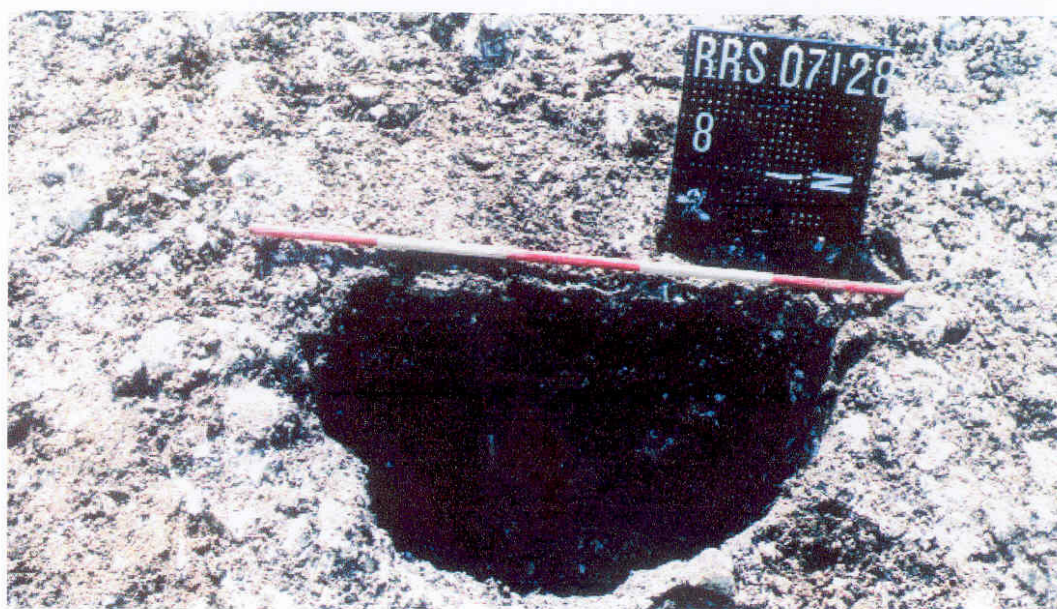


Plate 2. Pit 8, looking west southwest, horizontal scale 0.5m.