

Hill Farm, Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Northmoor Trust

by Tim Dawson

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code HFW 09/09

March 2009

Summary

Site name: Hill Farm, Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 5626 9257

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 24th February – 3rd March 2009

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Tim Dawson

Site code: HFW 09/09

Summary of results: A recut ditch of Roman or later date was identified in the base of the Dipping Pond.

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.

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 23.03.09 Steve Preston ✓ 23.03.09

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Report 09/09

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at Hill Farm, Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire (SU 5626 9257) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Caroline Robson of Northmoor Trust, Hill Farm, Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire, OX14 4QZ.

Planning permission (app no P08/W1223) has been granted by South Oxfordshire District Council for the erection of an oak pergola and the reshaping of an existing pond, including the construction of two earth bunds. In addition to this, a number of new trees are to be planted. The consent is subject to a condition which requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological work, in this case taking the form of an archaeological watching brief during groundworks. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Oram 2008) and was monitored by him on behalf of the Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Tim Dawson, between 24th February and 3rd March 2009 and the site code HFW 09/09.

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

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the southern side of Hill Farm to the south-west of Wittenham Clumps and south of the village of Little Wittenham (SU 5626 9257). The village is situated approximately 6km north-east of Didcot and across the River Thames from Dorchester (Fig. 2). The immediate location of the site is currently used as a grassed wildlife area which slopes down to an artificial pond and seasonal pond/wetland area and then, to the west, a concrete farm road. As the site is situated on the southern slope of Wittenham Clumps it slopes downhill towards the south-west, from a height of *c.* 90m to *c.* 88m above Ordnance Datum. The underlying geology is described as 'malmstone'(a local variant of Upper Greensand), which was observed on site (BGS 1980).

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the area has been highlighted in the brief prepared by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (Oram 2008). The site lies on the lower slopes of the hill that is topped by Sinodun Hill Camp, an Iron Age hillfort which is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM OX208). Previous archaeological fieldwork has revealed a landscape containing many surviving archaeological deposits from the Bronze Age and Roman periods. Middle to Late Iron Age features were recorded during the excavation of the existing ponds on the site, along with a Roman ditch, which is thought to relate to a trackway recorded by geophysical survey (Oram 2008).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by the development. This involved the monitoring and examination of all areas of intrusive groundworks, in particular those relating to the reshaping of the ponds, and the digging of service runs and planting of new trees (Fig. 3).

Results

Paths

The paths were dug to a depth of *c.* 0.12m into the topsoil using a mini-digger fitted with toothless bucket. These were placed according to the original design in the eastern area of the site but were moved to obtain the correct gradient in the western area adjacent to the ponds. It was only in the north-west corner that this digging exposed the natural geology, elsewhere not penetrating below topsoil. The digging of the paths revealed no archaeological deposits.

Outlet pipe trench and soakaway

These were both primarily dug through made ground which consisted of topsoil containing many fragments of brick, concrete, plastic and farm waste. The pipe trench had a depth of *c.* 0.70m and width of 0.50m and the soakaway was *c.* 0.80m deep, 1.35m wide and 10.00m long. Beneath the made-ground, the soakaway was cut into the natural geology, which appeared at a depth of *c.* 0.35m. No archaeological features were observed.

Dipping Pond

The digging of the new pond was observed and building of the adjacent bunds monitored. The pond was dug through topsoil and natural geology and shaped so its deepest point was 1.00m below the original ground level. The dry spoil from the hollowing out of the pond as well as waste soil from the previous excavations was monitored as it was laid as a bund between the new and existing ponds. As the area where the new pond was dug was formerly a seasonal wetland pond the upper section of topsoil was in a waterlogged and disturbed state.

At the bottom of the new pond was a dark linear feature running approximately SSW–NNE (Fig. 4). This was cleaned, photographed and excavated by hand. A 1.18m long slot was dug, approximately half of the length of the exposed feature. The feature appeared to consist of a shallow (0.19m) ditch (1) which had then been re-cut by slightly deeper (0.23m) ditch (2), offset slightly to the west. Each feature had a single fill. Animal bone and a tiny fragment (1g) of possible late Iron Age/Roman pottery were recovered from ditch 1 and two more bone fragments and a possible Roman tile fragment were found in ditch 2.

Tree hole pits

Seven holes were dug down to the top of the natural geology for the new trees. All except TP7 (Fig. 3) were cut through topsoil and made ground with TP4 also exposing a layer of rubble and brick immediately beneath the topsoil. TP7 was dug through topsoil and subsoil only. Depending the location of each hole on the site, the depth of the natural varied between 0.40m (TP7) and 1.10m (TP4). No archaeological deposits were observed.

Finds

Pottery by Steve Ford

A single abraded sherd of pottery (1g) was recovered from ditch 1 (50). The sherd has a brown exterior and black core and interior with a fabric tempered with a fine sparse sand temper. It is not closely datable but may be of late Iron Age or Roman date.

Tile by Steve Ford

A single fragment of roofing tile (226g) was recovered from ditch recut 2 (51). It was up to 26mm thick with a largely temper-free orange/red fabric except for one sanded surface (the other surface is smooth). It is slightly curved, but this is an irregularity rather than intentional. Based on its thickness, it is probably Roman, but cannot be closely dated.

Animal bone by Ceri Falys

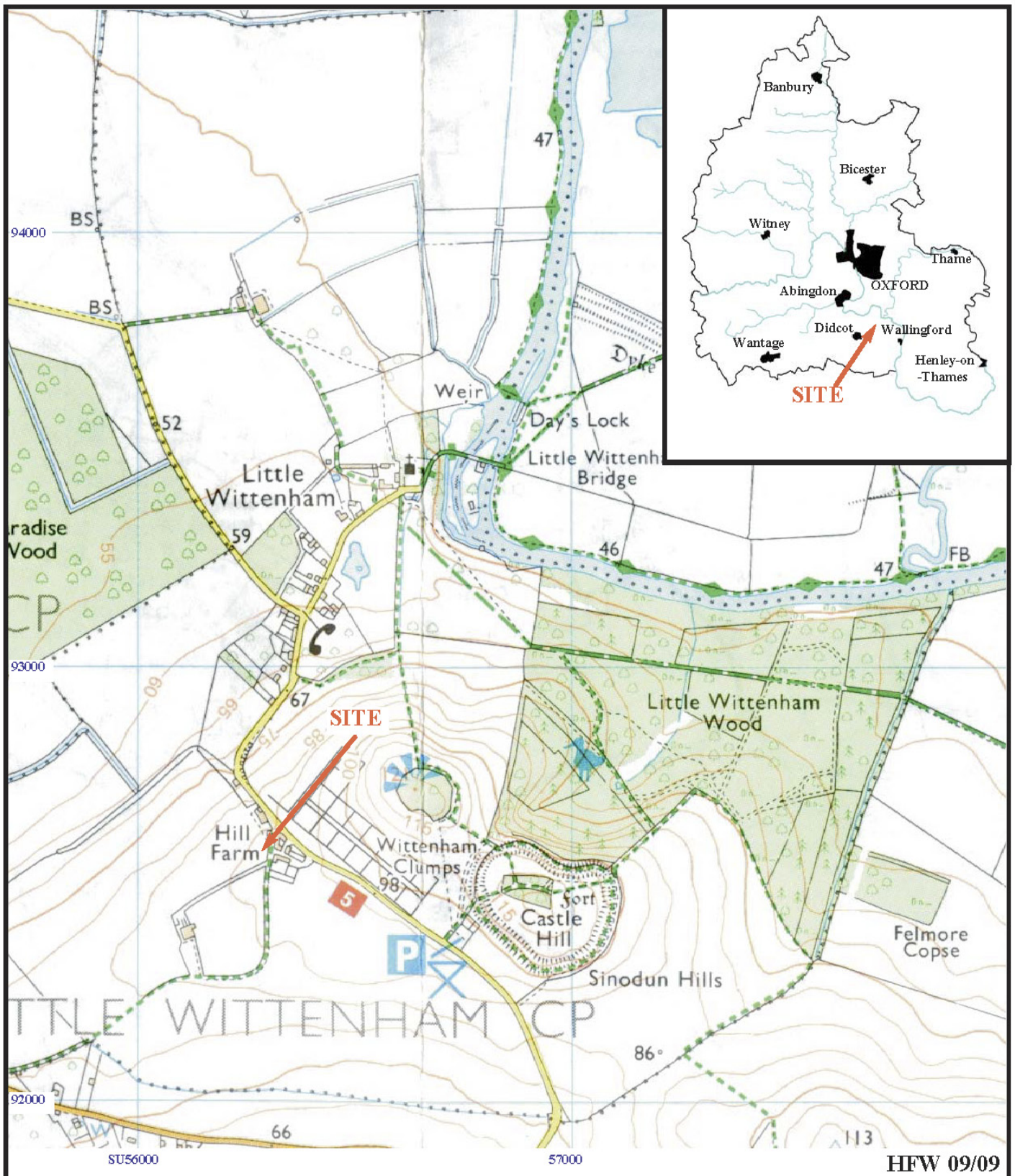
Three small fragments of animal bone were recovered from ditch 1 and recut 2, weighing a total of just 4g. The preservation of the bone was fair, although with moderate surface damage on all pieces. Only one piece of bone identifiable; a sheep/goat proximal phalanx. No further information could be retrieved from these remains.

Conclusion

The excavation of the pond was the only aspect of the groundworks which exposed and disturbed any archaeological deposits, a ditch, which was re-cut. Both cuts can be tentatively dated as Roman (or later). These may then be related to the Roman ditch seen during the excavation of the pond to the south and the trackway identified from the geophysical survey. No other features were identified during the observation of the remainder of the work.

References

- BGS, 1980, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 254, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth
Oram, R, 2008, 'Design brief for an archaeological watching brief at Hill Farm, Little Wittenham', Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services, Oxford
PPG 16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO



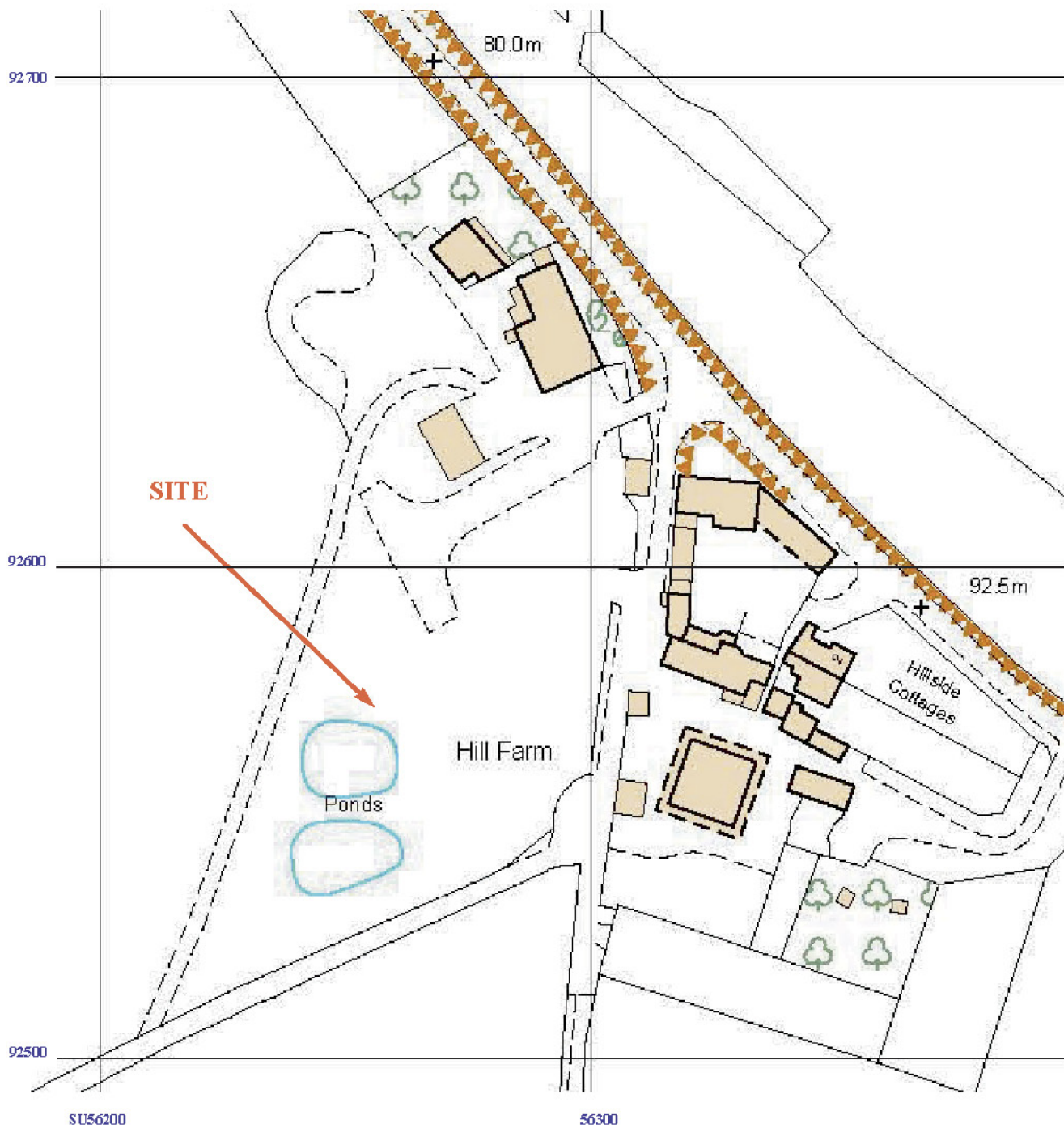
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Figure 1. Location of site within Little Wittenham and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site at Hill Farm.

Scale: 1:1250.

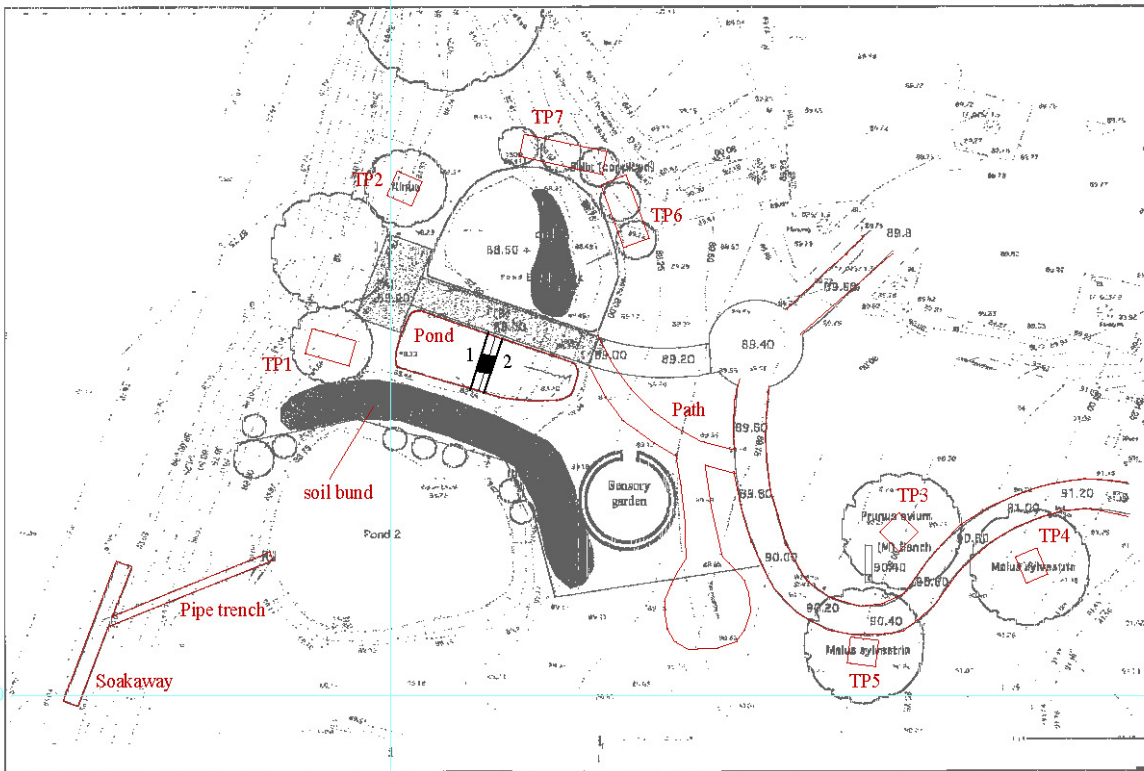
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Hill Farm, Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire, 2009



92600



92550

SU56250

56300

0 25m

Figure 3. Plan of areas observed on site.

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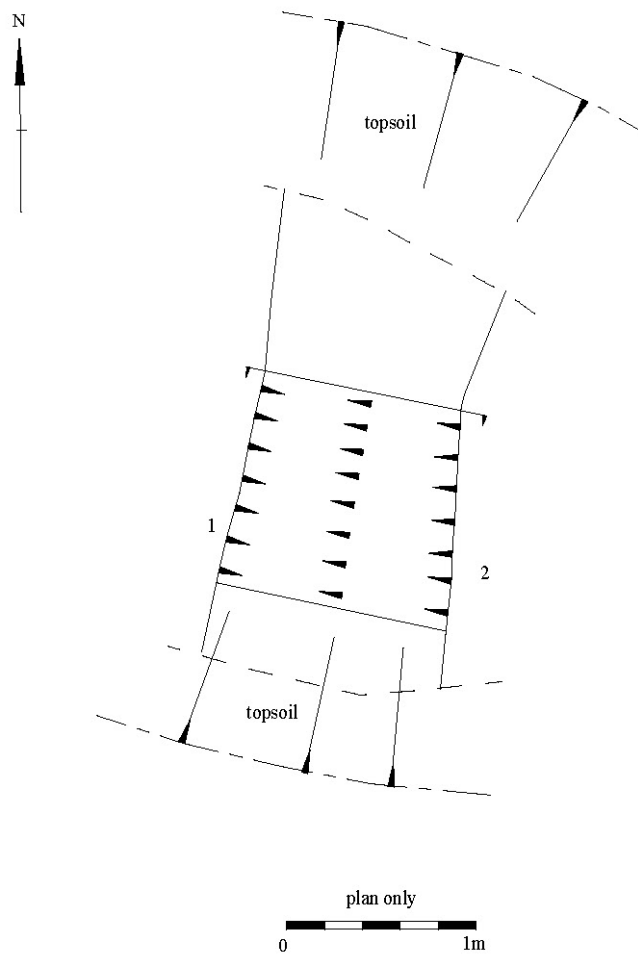
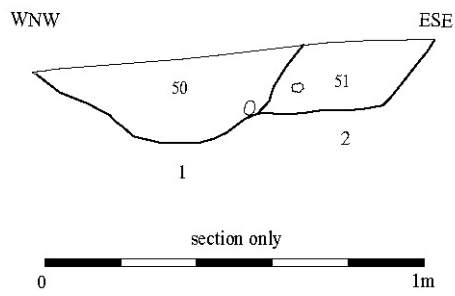


Figure 4. Plan and section of ditch.