

**Bayards Hill Primary School, Waynflete Road,
Headington, Oxford**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for Oxfordshire County Council**

by James Lewis
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code BHH 09/76

August 2009

Summary

Site name: Bayards Hill Primary School, Waynflete Road, Headington, Oxford

Grid reference: SP 5580 0750

Site activity: Field Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 3rd–7th August 2009

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: James Lewis

Site code: BHH 09/76

Area of site: *c.* 0.3ha

Summary of results: The evaluation confirmed the presence of a Roman road with several other features present of Roman and post-medieval date.

Monuments identified: Roman road

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

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	Steve Preston ✓ 19.08.09

Bayards Hill Primary School, Waynflete Road, Headington, Oxford An Archaeological Evaluation

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Report 09/76

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Bayards Hill Primary School, Waynflete Road, Headington, Oxford (SP5580 0750) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Mike Bowman, of Mouchel Limited, Stratton Court, Kimber Road, Abingdon, OX14 1SG on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford County Hall, New Road, Oxford, OX1 1ND.

Oxfordshire County Council proposes a major redevelopment of Bayards Hill Primary School which will entail the partial demolition of the existing school buildings. The development will impact upon areas which have previously been used as playing fields, play areas and car park. This evaluation focused upon the area immediately to the south of the existing buildings which will be affected by construction. This area has been subject to a geophysical survey which produced evidence for linear features and specific areas of high and low resistance. The results have been interpreted as showing the remains of the Roman road which once linked Dorchester-on-Thames to Alchester (see below). Due to the high archaeological potential of the site an archaeological evaluation was requested to establish the character and nature of the anomalies identified in the survey. The results of the evaluation will contribute to establishing the mitigation measures which will limit the damage to any archaeological deposits on the site.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and Oxford County Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer. The fieldwork was undertaken by James Lewis and Arkadiusz Gnas between 3rd–7th August 2009 and the site code is BHH 09/76. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located at Bayards Hill Primary School, Headington, Oxford and is currently used as a playing field (Fig. 1). It is situated at the edge of the city north-east of the town. The south of the site is bounded by the London Road (A40) and to the north, east and west of the site is Barton housing estate (Fig. 2). The site is

located at an elevation of *c.*100m above Ordnance Datum and the underlying geology is a Corallian Formation identified as Wheatley Limestone Formation (BGS 1994).

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted in the design brief for the project (Smith 2009). The projected line of the Roman road from Dorchester-on-Thames to Alchester as shown on historic and modern maps, runs approximately south to north through the school grounds. A sizeable rural roadside Roman settlement flanking the road, existed to the north of the school, stretching almost to the crossing at Bayswater Brook. Parts of this settlement have been investigated, with 3rd century AD deposits encountered along with the Roman road at Stowford Road, Barton (Pine 2003). Two Roman inhumation and cremation burials have been recorded from either side of the Bayswater road less than 160m north of the school.

A recent geophysical survey was carried out by Stratascan in the school grounds. Preliminary results show that the resistivity survey revealed the two flanking ditches of the Roman road, with the easternmost ditch almost exactly on the projected line of the road shown on Ordnance Survey maps. A number of other high resistance anomalies were recorded which could possibly be structural remains along with low resistance anomalies which could be archaeological features. Some linear anomalies perpendicular to the projected Roman road may be possible boundary or drainage ditches. Previous archaeological work in the school included a watching brief in the north-west corner of the school grounds (Challis 2002). This failed to produce any evidence of Roman date and only identified disturbance associated with the building of the school and some 19th/20th century activity.

A Bronze Age socketed spearhead was recorded some 320m east of the site, indicating the possibility of prehistoric activity in the area.

Objectives and methodology

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

The specific research aims for this project are:

To determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on the site.

To determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

To determine the date and nature of the positive and negative anomalies identified during the geophysical survey and whether they relate to structural and cut features.

To determine the nature and character of the Roman road that crosses the site.

Three trenches were to be dug using a machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist. All archaeological deposits were to be hand cleaned and excavated and all spoil heaps were monitored. The trenches were to be 40m, 30m and 20m in length. All the trenches were to be 1.5m wide.

Each trench was positioned so as to investigate specific anomalies and areas within the site. Trench 1 was intended to investigate the ditches and the surface of the Roman Road as well as several low and high resistance anomalies. Trench 2 investigated a line of high and low resistance anomalies as well as a low resistance linear and a high resistance linear. Trench 3 investigated two large areas of high resistance within the area of the Roman Road surface.

Results

The three trenches were excavated as intended. A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Fig. 4; Pl. 1)

Trench 1 was aligned NW–SE and measured 40m in length and was 0.7m deep. Eight features were identified within the trench. These will be described from south east to north west.

Feature 100, at about 7m from the south-east end of the trench, was a north-south aligned ditch which measured 2.75m wide and was 0.94m deep (Fig. 5; Pl. 3). The ditch contained a single fill of compact, brown sandy clay (150) with small bone and pottery inclusions dating to possibly the 2nd to 3rd century AD.

Approximately 1m to the west of feature 100 were three NW–SE aligned shallow gullies. Feature 101 measured 0.31m wide and was 0.12m deep. It contained brown silty sand (151) with bone and metal inclusions. Feature 102 measured 0.47m wide and was 0.2m deep. It contained brown silty sand (152) with metal inclusions. Feature 103 measured 0.25m wide and was 0.1m deep and contained brown sandy silt (153) with no inclusions.

Located approximately 8.5m west of the gullies were two large inter-cutting features 104 and 114. The earliest feature 114 was a NE–SW aligned ditch which was 1m wide and was 0.5m deep. The ditch contained light brown sandy clay (165) with small pieces of bone inclusions. This was cut by a later feature 104 which was also a NE–SW aligned ditch. This measured 1.6m in width and was 0.6m deep. This ditch contained

brown sandy clay (164) with occasional bone and pottery dating to the 18th century. On the western side of the features was found a solid surface (168) which appeared to be the remains of the Roman road surface. Overlying this was the upcast (166) of the surface which had been created when the two post-medieval ditches were dug.

One metre to the west of the inter-cutting features was a north-south aligned ditch (105) which measured 1.5m wide and was 0.62m deep. The ditch contained two fills; the top fill (154) was brown sandy clay which contained a thin lens of limestone and was 0.47m thick and pottery dating to the 3rd or 4th century AD. This overlay light brown sandy clay which contained no inclusions and was 0.15m thick. Immediately west of feature 105 were two shallow gullies and a pit. The first gully (106) measured 0.52m wide and was 0.13m deep. It contained brown sandy clay (156) with no inclusions. The shallow pit (107) measured 1.37m wide and 0.14m deep. Within was brown sandy clay (157) with no inclusions. The final shallow gully (108) was aligned north-south and measured 0.57m wide and was 0.2m deep. It contained brown sandy clay (158) with no inclusions.

Trench 2 (Figs 5 and 6; Pl. 2)

Trench 2 measured 30m in length and was 0.63m deep and was aligned approximately north-south. Two features were identified.

Feature 109 was an oval posthole/pit which measured 0.56m in length, 0.36m in width and was 0.08m deep. At the base of it was found a large piece of limestone which could possibly have been a post pad (Pl. 4). The fill of the feature was dark brown sandy clay (159) with no inclusions.

Located 1m to the south was a possible east-west aligned shallow ditch (110). This measured 1.0m wide and was 0.26m deep with no inclusions.

Trench 3 (Fig. 5 and 6; Pl. 5)

Trench 3 was aligned NNE–SSW and measured 20m in length, and was 0.7m deep. The surface of the Roman road and several small linear features possibly wheel ruts were investigated in the trench.

Feature 111 was a NE–SW aligned shallow gully which measured 0.3m wide and was 0.06m deep and contained no inclusions. Feature 112 was a NE–SW aligned shallow gully which measured 0.3m wide and was 0.06m deep and contained no inclusions. Feature 113 was a north-south aligned shallow gully which measured 0.8m wide and was 0.05m deep with no inclusions. All these features contained dark brown sandy clay fills (161–3).

The road surface (167) consisted of very compact limestone which appeared to be a mixture of natural in-situ limestone and limestone brought in and compacted to create a hard surface. Within this were patches of dark brown sandy clay which presumably collected at the points where the road surface had eroded away or removed. A patch of small cobbles was also observed at the northern end of the trench. On the road surface a single sherd of *mortarium* dating to the 3rd-4th century and four other Roman sherds.

Finds

Pottery by Jane Timby

The archaeological work resulted in the recovery of a small assemblage of 53 sherds of pottery, weighing 311 g, dating to the Roman and post-medieval periods. The material is of mixed preservation with moderately good sherds from the two features but more fragmented, slightly worn sherds from the surface levels. Surface finishes such as colour-coats have been lost. The overall average sherd size is low at 5.9g.

For the purposes of the assessment the assemblage was scanned to assess the likely chronology and quantified by sherd count and weight for each recorded context. Freshly broken sherds were counted as one. The resulting data is summarized in Appendix 3.

Roman

Forty-seven sherds could confidently be dated to the Roman period. Of the total 47 sherds, 29 came from a single vessel from cut 105. Most of the pottery appears to be fairly locally obtained with no continental or regional imports outside the Oxford area.

Cut 100 contained eight Roman body sherds: one Oxfordshire white ware, one Oxfordshire fine grey ware and six sherds of a black sandy ware. Without any featured sherds the group is difficult to date closely but could lie in the 2nd or 3rd century.

Cut 105 produced essentially two vessels; the complete top of an oxidized sandy ware flask and several sherds from a shelly ware, everted rim jar. Shelly wares are long-lived and this vessel could date from the 1st to 4th century. The flask neck is more likely to be later Roman (3rd-4th century).

A single grog-tempered sherd from a necked bowl or jar was recovered from the Trench 2 topsoil probably dating to the 1st century AD. By contrast the subsoil produced sherds of Oxfordshire white ware, fine grey ware and oxidized ware indicating a date from the 2nd century onwards.

The road surface produced a large sherd of Oxfordshire colour-coated *mortarium* (Young 1977) form C100 dating from the later 3rd or 4th centuries. The sherd has completely lost its original surface. Also present are three sherds of Oxfordshire fine grey ware and one of oxidized ware.

Post-medieval

Six sherds glazed and unglazed red earthenware and decorated refined white earthenware (china) were recovered from the topsoil in Trenches 2 and 3.

Animal Bone by Ceri Falys

A very small assemblage of animal bone was recovered from three contexts within the evaluation area. A total of six fragments were present for analysis, weighing 37g (Appendix 4). All pieces were small, while the surface preservation was exceedingly poor with frequent damage from root activity. The preservation greatly hindered any species identification. One “large-sized” animal (cow/horse/deer), was recognized from context 100 (150). It was not possible to determine the species. No evidence of butchery cut marks were observed, and no further information could be retrieved from these skeletal remains.

Metalwork

Two fragments of heavily corroded iron nails were recovered from gullies in Trench 1; neither could be dated..

Conclusion

The evaluation has confirmed the presence of the Roman road and additional archaeological features on the site. In Trench 1, two roadside ditches match the two linear anomalies identified by the geophysical survey. Only a very small amount of road surface was identified, the rest of the surface having been removed or eroded. Truncating the surface of the road were the two inter-cutting ditches of post-medieval date, the digging of which created limestone up-cast which was located on top of the remaining road surface. A number of other shallow pits and gullies were found in Trench 1 however due to the paucity of dating evidence it is unclear if they were dug before or after the Roman road.

In Trench 2, feature 110 appears to be the high resistance linear feature identified in the geophysical survey. This may represent a boundary of some sort and might be associated with the pit/posthole (109) close by.

In trench 3 the remains of the Roman road surface and the edge of a ditch (very likely the same as 105 n trench 1) was found. Pottery was found on the road surface and some of this was dated to the 3rd/4th century AD. Shallow gullies were also observed and investigated and whilst they may be interpreted as wheel ruts, they do not run parallel to the alignment of the road and may therefore represent an unrelated event.

The evaluation at Bayards Hill School has confirmed the presence of the Roman Road continuing through the school. The date evidence recovered is the same as the site at Stowford Road, Barton which is located further to the north (Pine 2004). Though the date of the original construction is not known. A number of the potential features identified in the geophysical survey have been found to be both of archaeological and natural deposits. Based on the results of this evaluation the archaeological potential for the site is high.

References

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- PPG16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
- Pine, J, 2004, Excavation of part of a 3rd-century Roman settlement and later Roman road at Stowford Road, Barton, Oxford' *Oxoniensia*, LXVLLL (for 2003), 263-77
- Smith, P, 2009, 'Bayards Hill School, Waynelete Road, Headington, Oxford, Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation', Oxford County Archaeological Service, Oxford
- Young C J, 2000 *The Roman pottery industry of the Oxford region*, BAR 43, Oxford (Archaeopress reprint)

APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at south or west end

Trench	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	40	1.5	0.7	Topsoil 0-0.28m; subsoil 0.28-0.58m; natural geology 0.58m+ Features 100–108, 114, road surface 168. [Pls 1 and 3]
2	30	1.5	0.63	Topsoil 0-0.25m; subsoil 0.25-0.49m; natural geology 0.49m+ Features 109 and 110. [Pls 2 and 4]
3	20	1.5	0.7	Topsoil 0.38m; subsoil 0.38-0.7m; natural geology 0.7m+ Roman Road surface 167, features 111–13. [Pl. 5]

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

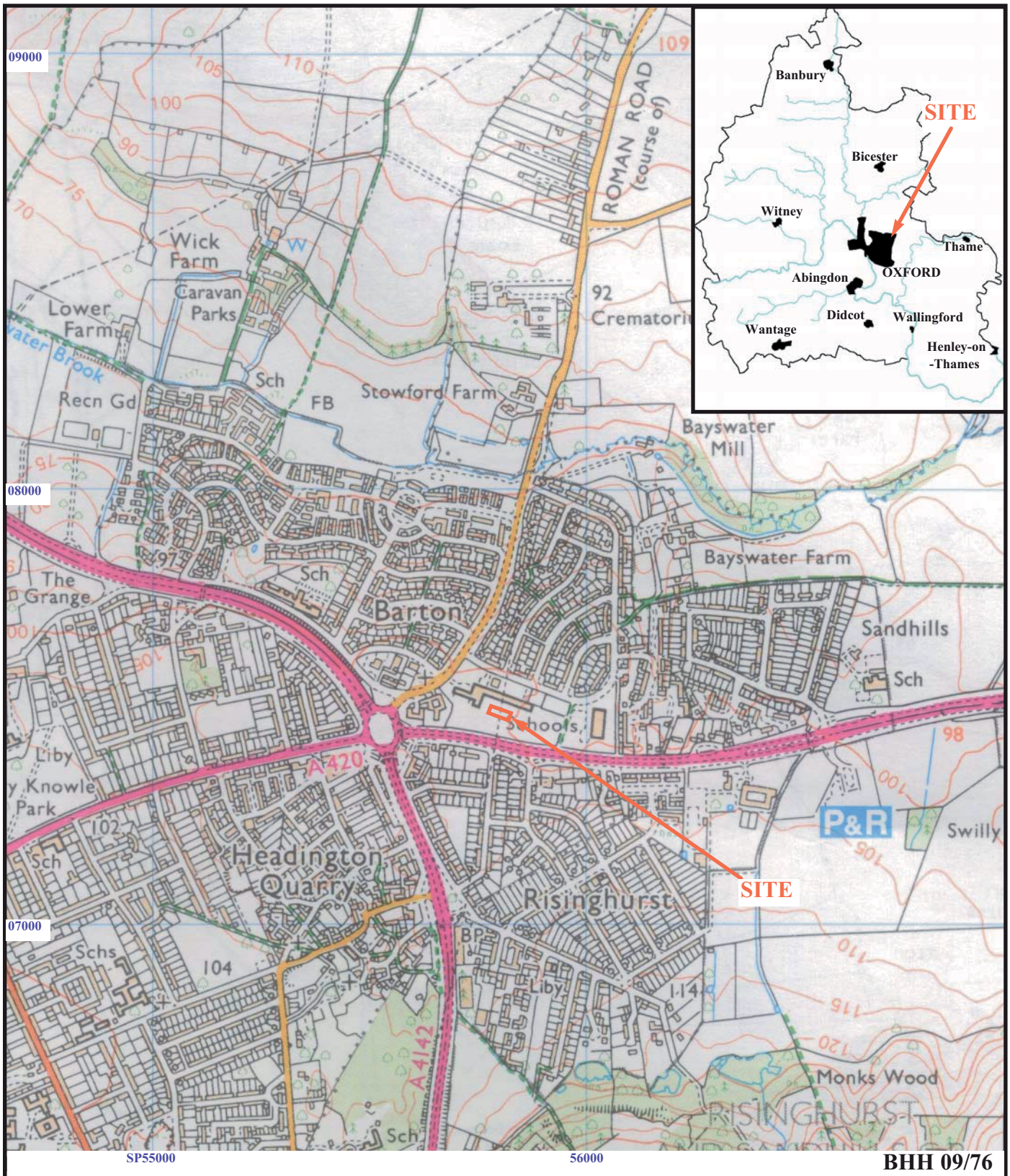
<i>Trench</i>	<i>Cut</i>	<i>Fill (s)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dating evidence</i>
1	100	150	ditch	2nd-3rd century AD	Pottery
1	101	151	gully	unknown	
1	102	152	gully	unknown	
1	103	153	gully	unknown	
1	104	164	ditch	18th century	Pottery
1	105	155	ditch	3rd-4th century AD	Pottery
1	106	156	gully	unknown	
1	107	157	Shallow pit	unknown	
1	108	158	gully	unknown	
2	109	159	posthole	unknown	
2	110	160	ditch	unknown	
3	111	161	wheel rut	unknown	
3	112	162	wheel rut	unknown	
3	113	163	wheel rut	unknown	
1	114	165	ditch	Post-medieval	
1		166	upcast	Post-medieval	
3		167	road surface	Roman	By association
1		168	road surface	Roman	By association
		169	topsoil		
		170	subsoil		

APPENDIX 3: Summary of Pottery

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>Roman</i>	<i>Pmed</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>	<i>Date (century AD)</i>
100	150	8	0	8	19	2nd-3rd
105	155	30	0	30	211	3rd-4th
Tr 2	topsoil	1	4	5	12	C1/C19th+
Tr 2	subsoil	5	0	5	21	2nd-4th
Tr 3	topsoil	0	2	2	3	20th
Road	finds	3	0	3	45	late 3rd-4th
TOTAL		47	6	53	311	

APPENDIX 4: Inventory of animal bone

<i>Cut</i>	<i>Deposit</i>	<i>No. Frags</i>	<i>Wt (g)</i>	<i>Large-Sized</i>
100	150			2
101	151	1	6	-
Trench 2 subsoil		1	2	-
Total		6	37	2

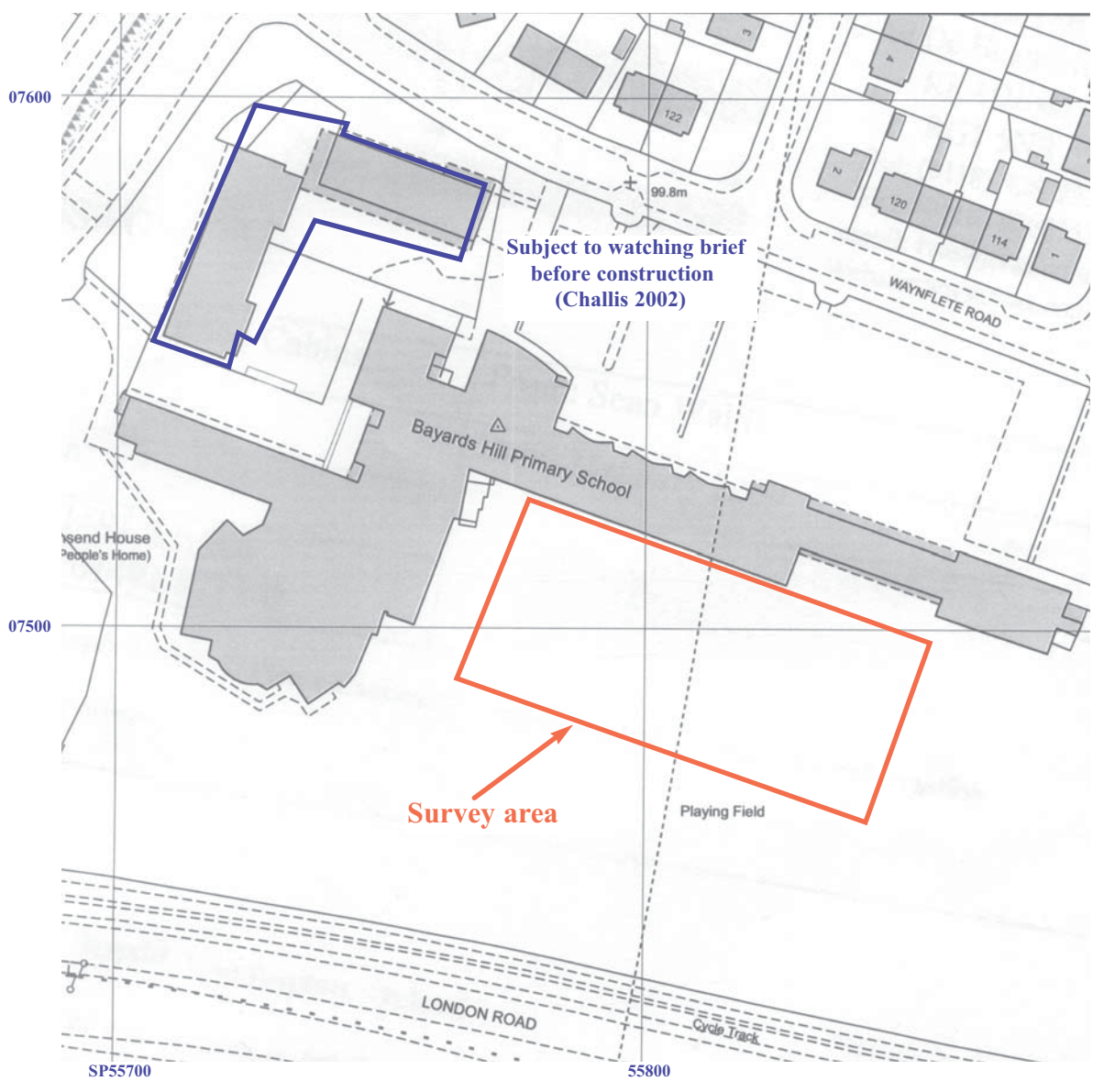


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Archaeological Evaluation**

Figure 1. Location of site in Oxford
and Oxfordshire.

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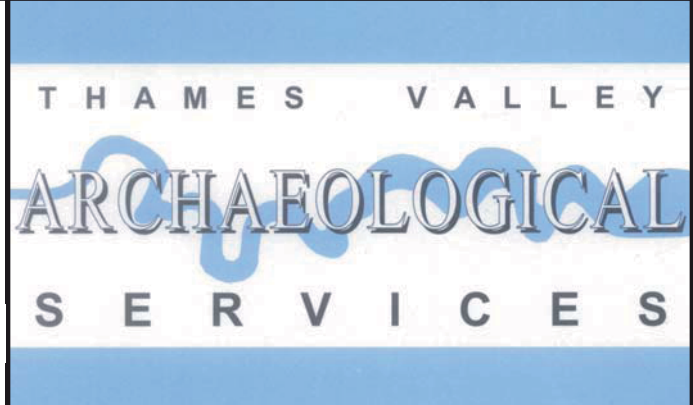


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**Bayards Hill Primary School, Waynflete Road,
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Figure 2. Location of site off Waynflete Road,
showing geophysical survey area.

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Bayards Hill Primary School, Waynflete Road, Headington, Oxford, 2009

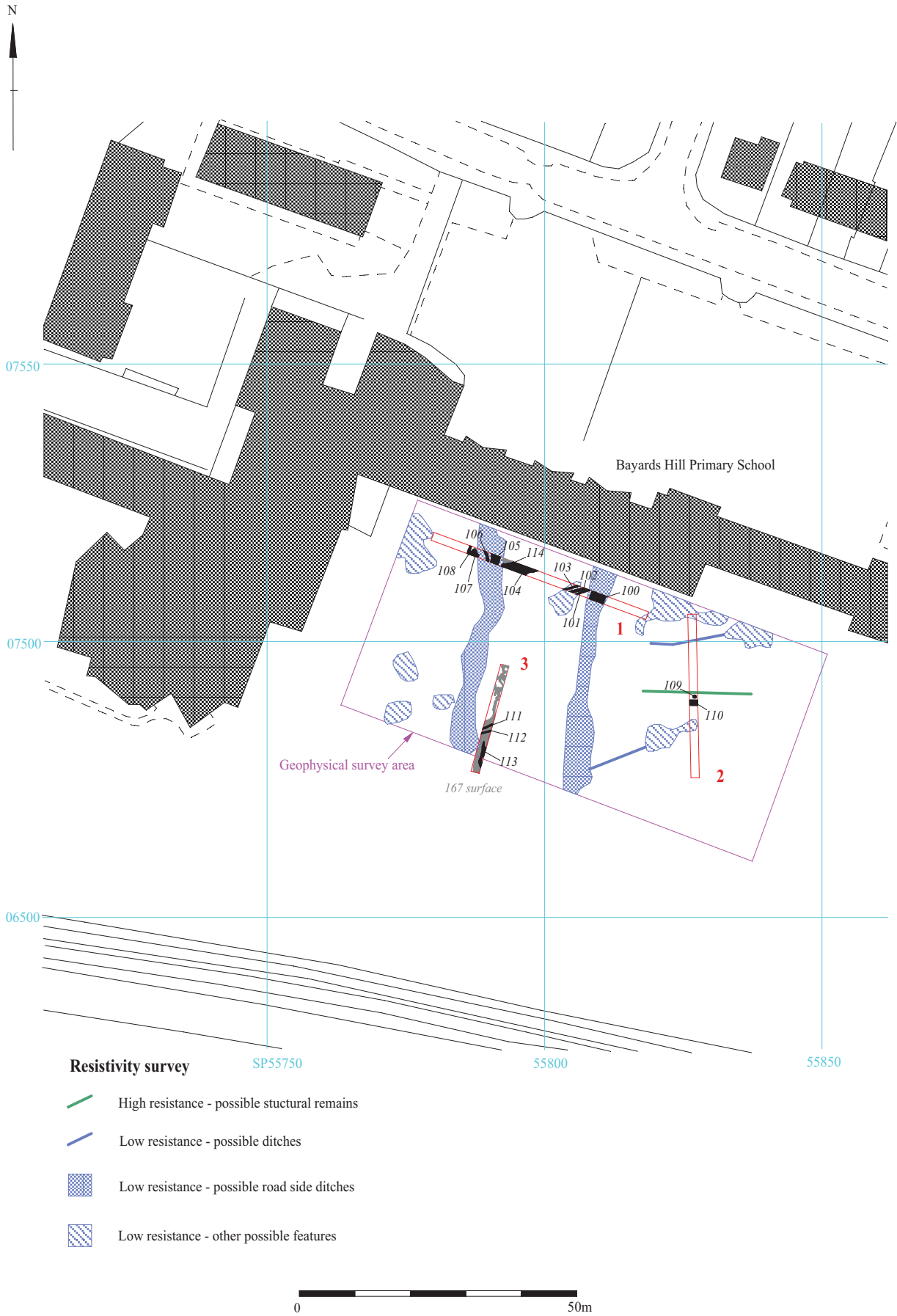


Figure 3. Location of trenches showing feature and summary of geophysical results.

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Headington, Oxford, 2009**

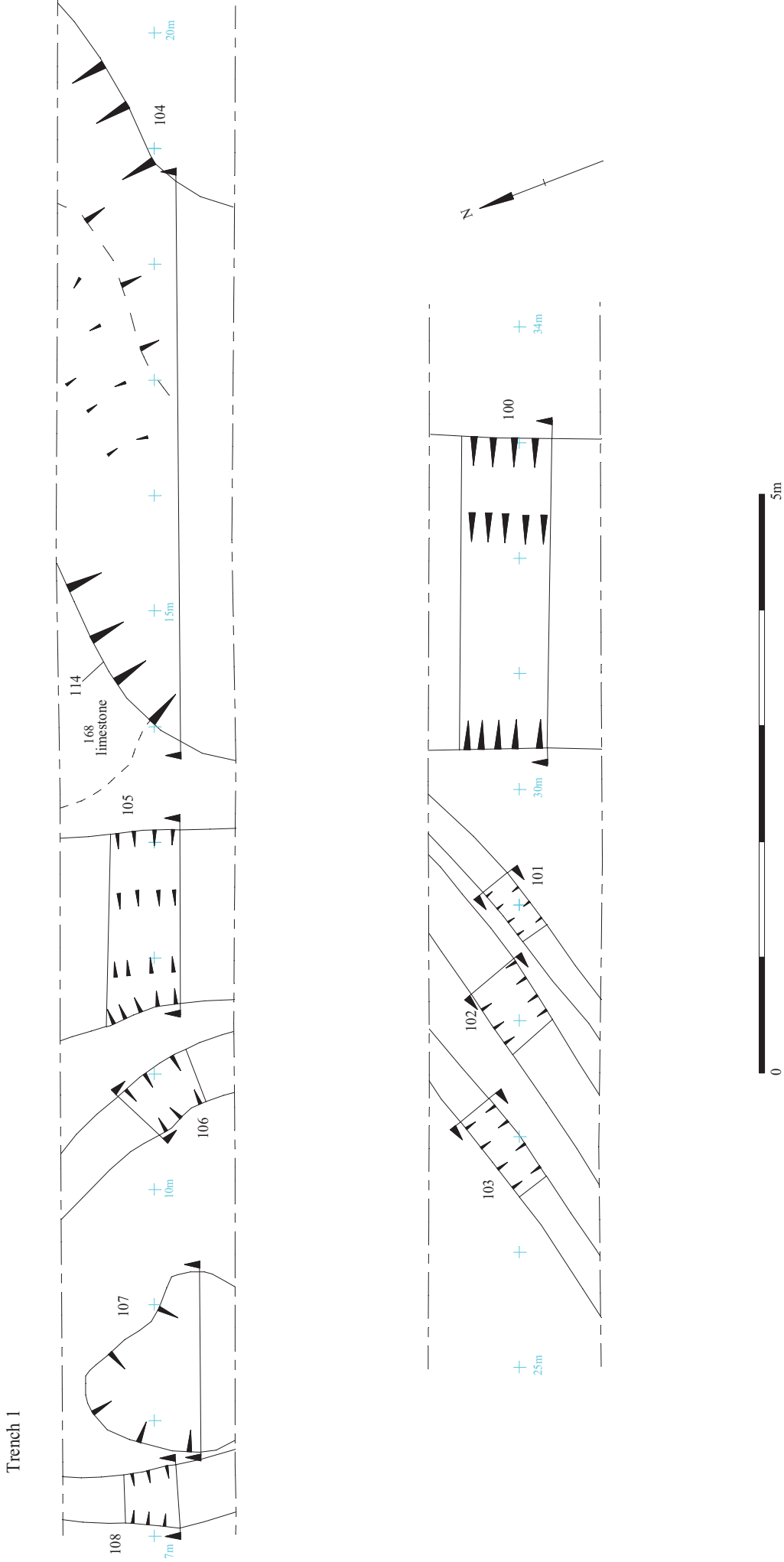


Figure 4. Detail of Trench 1.

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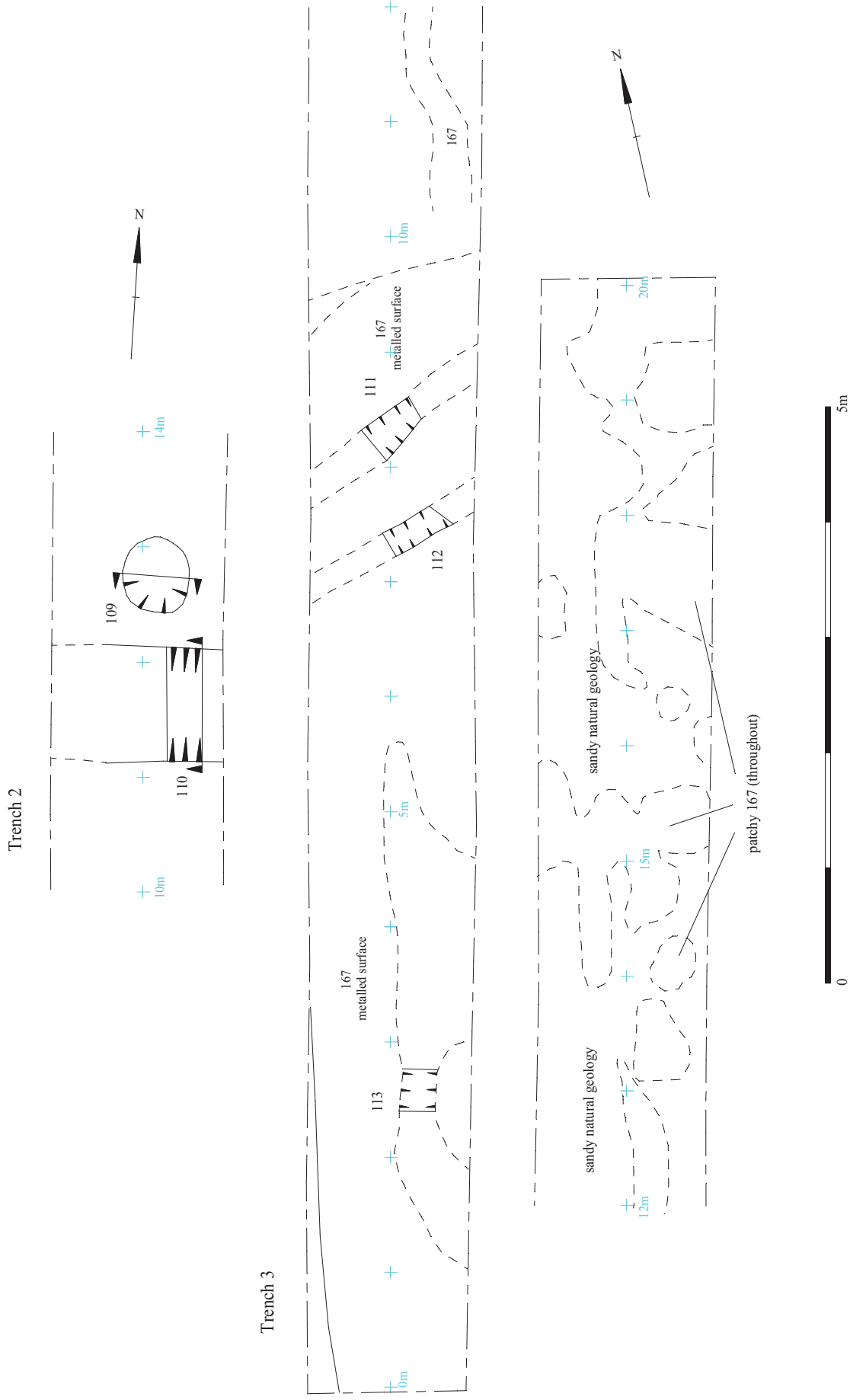


Figure 5. Detail of Trench 2 and 3.

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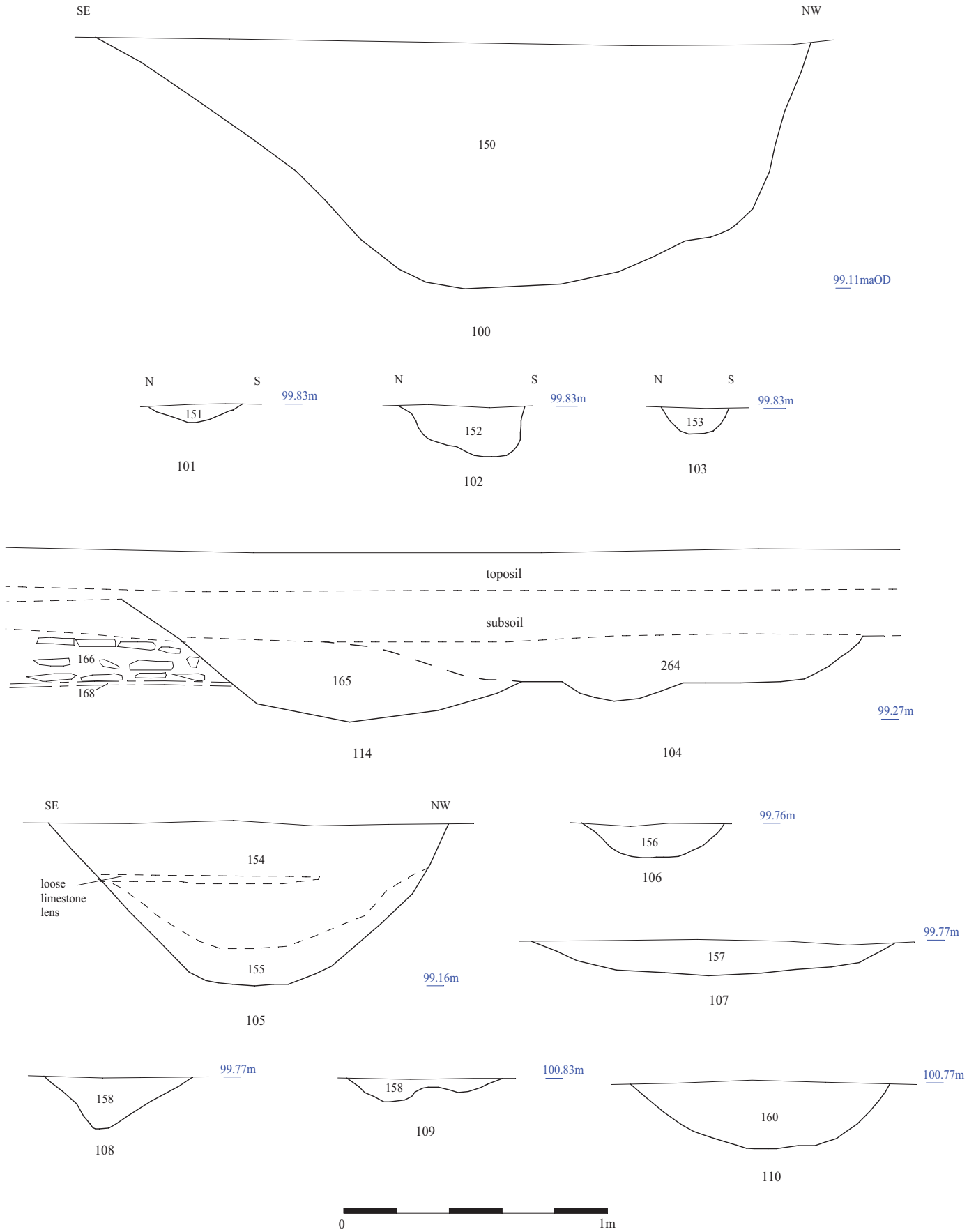


Figure 6. Sections.



Plate 1. Trench 1, looking north west, scales: 1m and 2m.



Plate 2. Trench 2 looking north, scales: 1m and 2m.



Plate 3. Trench 1, roadside ditch 100, looking south west, scales, 2m and 1m.

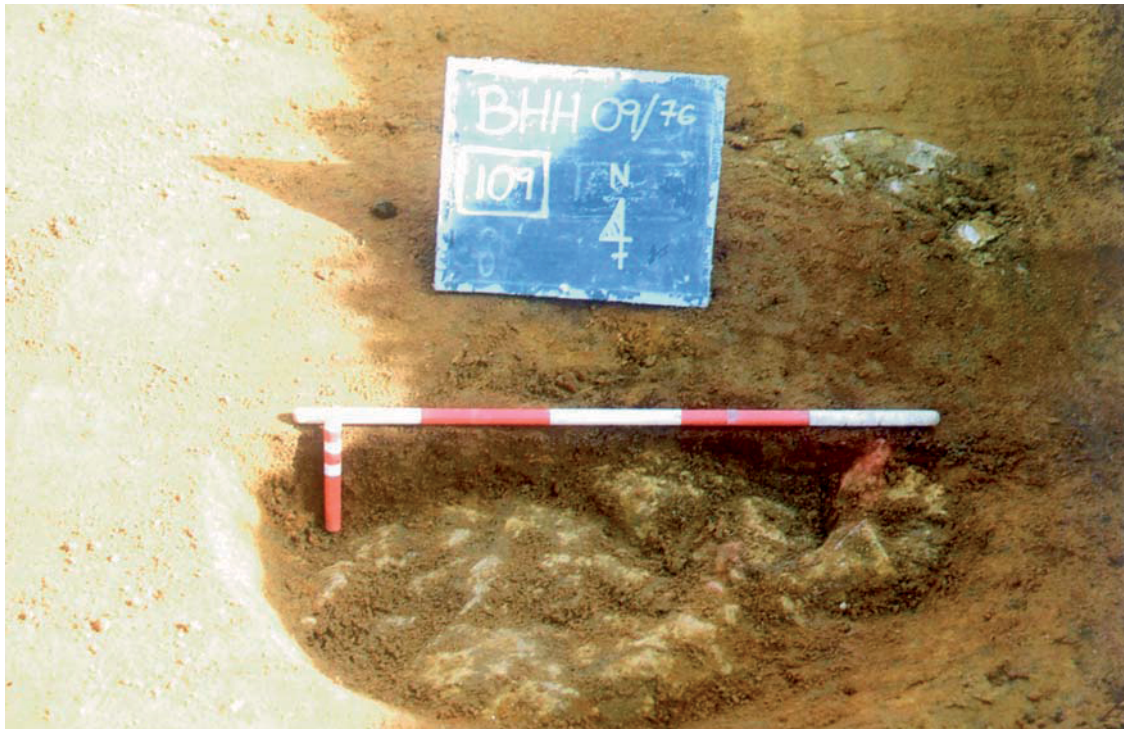


Plate 4. Trench 2, pit 109, looking north, scale, 2m and 1m..



Plate 5. Trench 3, showing patchy road metalling looking north, scales, 2m and 1m.