

**T H A M E S      V A L L E Y**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

**S E R V I C E S**

**Wendlebury Road, Bicester,  
Oxfordshire**

**Archaeological Evaluation**

**by Danielle Milbank**

**Site Code: WRB10/53**

**(SP 5737 2118)**

# **Wendlebury Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation  
for Oxfordshire County Council**

by Danielle Milbank  
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code WRB 10/53

**July 2010**

## Summary

**Site name:** Wendlebury Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire

**Grid reference:** SP 5741 2122

**Site activity:** Evaluation

**Date and duration of project:** 13th July 2010

**Project manager:** Steve Ford

**Site supervisor:** Danielle Milbank

**Site code:** WRB 10/53

**Summary of results:** The trench failed to find any evidence of Roman road surfaces, flanking ditches or other evidence of Roman activity. The road make up layers all appear to be of fairly recent date with the lowest level containing a post-medieval horseshoe.

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

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 21.07.10
	Steve Preston ✓ 21.07.10

# Wendlebury Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by Danielle Milbank

**Report 10/53**

## **Introduction**

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Wendlebury Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire (SP 5741 2122) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr David Deriaz, of Oxfordshire County Council Environment and Economy, Speedwell House, Speedwell Street, Oxford, OX1 1NE. A proposal has been made by Oxfordshire County Highways to widen a section of Wendlebury Road for a new roundabout and link road off the A41, to serve a new residential development. This would involve widening a 300m stretch of the road by 3m on the east side and 1m on the west, and on each side would have an impact up to 1m outside the proposed road surface. The carriageway surface and foundation are to be broken out and a new road surface constructed, with excavation of associated drainage ditches.

The current road is believed to follow the line of a Roman road. Due to the potential of archaeological remains to have survived on the site which might be damaged or destroyed by the development, an archaeological field evaluation has been requested by the County Archaeological Officer. The results of the evaluation are to inform the basis of any proposals for appropriate mitigation measures to limit the damage to significant archaeological deposits. This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Planning Policy Statement, *Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5 2010), and the County Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Paul Smith, County Archaeological Officer with Oxfordshire County Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Danielle Milbank and Susan Colley and the site code is WRB 10/53. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museums Service.

## **Location, topography and geology**

The site is located on Wendlebury Road, which lies to the south-west of Bicester in Oxfordshire, and to the east of the A41 (Fig. 1). Wendlebury Road is aligned NNE–SSW, and the section relevant to this evaluation lies between the junction with Chesterton Lane to the south and the exit from Bicester Avenue retail centre. The road is 4.25m wide and is flanked by two drainage ditches. The land is relatively flat and lies at a height of

approximately 66.5m above Ordnance Datum, and the underlying geology is described as sandy clay, sand and gravel (BGS 2002), which was observed in the base of the trench.

## **Archaeological background**

The potential of the site has been highlighted in a brief prepared by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (Smith 2010). In summary, the road traverses an area of intense archaeological activity with Iron Age, Roman and Saxon occupation and burial revealed at a number of locations in the vicinity, including the Roman town of Alchester to the south. The Roman road from Alchester to *Lactodorum*, modern Towcester (Margary (1955) route 160a) had its junction with the east-west aligned Akeman Street to the south of Alchester, and this part of Wendlebury Road (called 'Roman Road') is thought to follow the path of the Roman road. Various archaeological investigations and observations have taken place on Wendlebury Road itself, and to the immediate east and west, but none have conclusively identified the position of the Roman road (Smith 2010).

## **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.

The specific research aims of the project were:

- to determine the course of the Roman road;
- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels relating to the Roman road are present on the site; and
- to determine if archaeological deposits of any period are present.

It was proposed to dig a single trench, 1.6m wide and up to 20m long, across the road from the east flanking ditch to the west ditch, as indicated on Figure 2. This was to be excavated by JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under continuous archaeological supervision, and any deposits of a possible archaeological nature were to be hand-cleaned, and excavated or sampled to achieve the research aims. The spoilheap was monitored for finds, and a metal detector was used to aid retrieval of metal finds.

## **Results**

### Trench 1 (Figs 2 and 3; Pls 1 and 2)

The upper level of the road surface was removed using a toothed bucket with a toothless ditching bucket used for all subsequent digging. The trench was somewhat shorter than proposed due to services in the west verge at the

immediate edge of the carriageway, and was limited at the east by the fence and hedge. The trench was excavated in the position intended, and was aligned NW–SE. It measured 1.6m wide and 9.2m long. The north-west end of the trench was 1.04m deep, and at the south-east the depth was 1.45m.

The stratigraphy revealed consisted of asphalt road surface and grey-pink hoggin base which overall was 0.18m thick. This overlay a pale yellow white layer comprising angular limestone fragments, which was 0.15m thick. This overlay a slightly darker, pale yellow angular limestone layer which was 0.35m thick overall, however the base of this layer was irregular and undulating, and in places was up to 0.52m thick. This overlay a brown slightly silty sandy clay layer, which was 0.29m thick and contained an iron horseshoe which is not closely dated but almost certainly post-medieval. This is likely to represent a subsoil layer. This in turn overlay the natural geology, which comprised orange clayey sand with occasional limestone inclusions.

No deposits or features of an archaeological nature were encountered, and no evidence of the presence of the Roman road was observed.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the evaluation showed that below the modern road surface, limestone layers overlay a subsoil layer. The undulating base of the limestone deposit suggests that it was laid provide a more level, hard-wearing surface, as any pre-existing trackway would have become rutted over time. The presence of a horseshoe almost certainly of post-medieval date indicates that the limestone layers above are also of broadly post-medieval date and represent either rough re-surfacing of the road or a foundation for the modern asphalt road.

It was anticipated that any evidence for the Roman road would most likely have been encountered at or below the level of the remaining subsoil, in the form of a compacted earth layer or a metalled surface, probably rutted from traffic and with repairs. However the subsoil directly overlay the natural sandy clay geology. Despite the evidence to suggest any remains of a Roman road or other deposits would have been well preserved, none were encountered.

## **References**

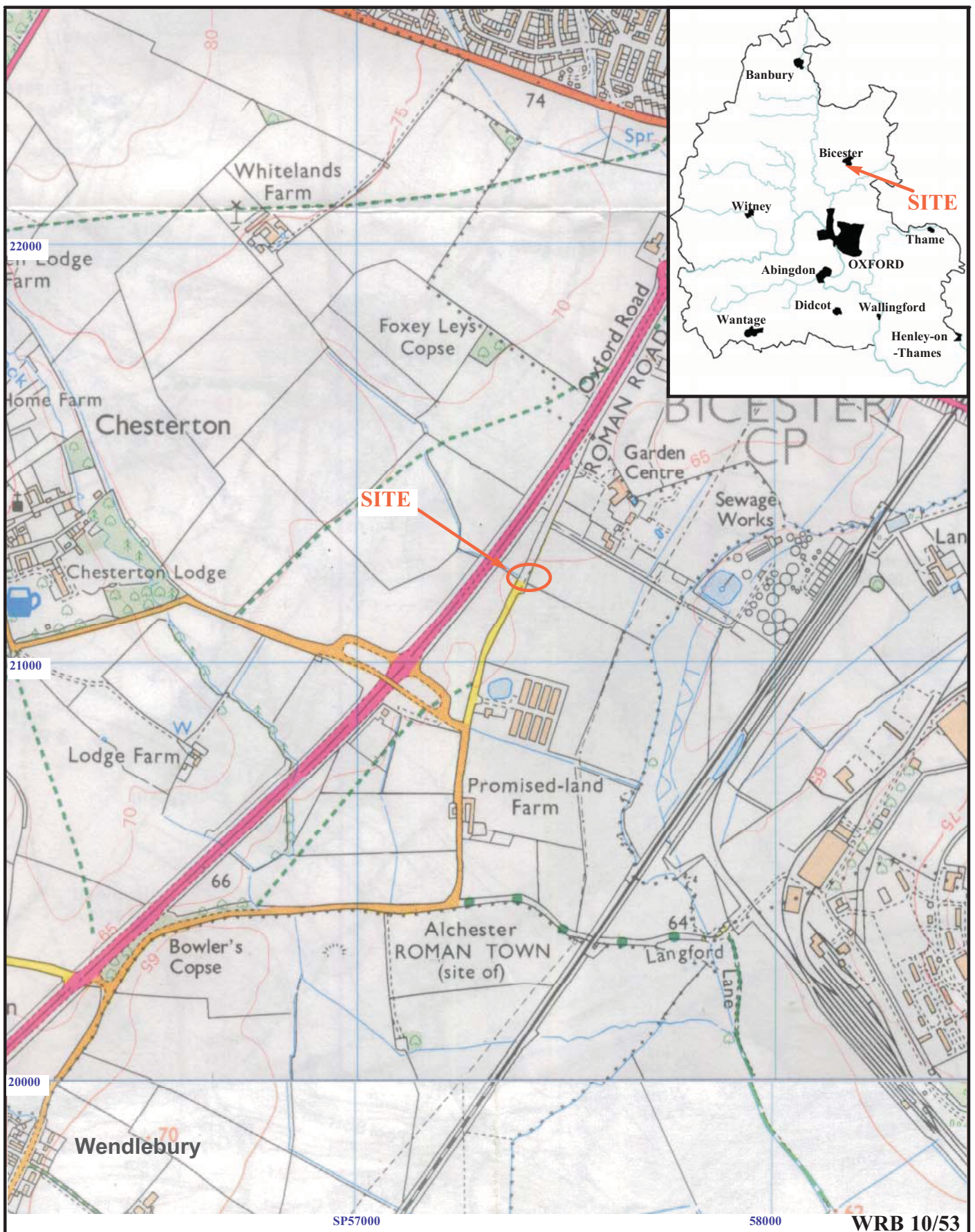
- BGS, 2002, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 219, Solid and Drift Edition, Keyworth  
PPS5, 2010, *Planning for the Historic Environment*, The Stationery Office, Norwich  
Margary, I D, 1955, *Roman Roads in Britain*, London  
Smith, P, 2010, 'Wendlebury Road, Wendlebury, Nr Bicester, Design Brief for Archaeological Field Investigation', Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service, Oxford

## APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at WSW end

Trench	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	9.2	1.6	1.04 (WNW) 1.45 (ENE)	WNW 0-0.18m asphalt and hoggin, 0.18m-0.33m pale yellow limestone; 0.33m-0.68m mid yellow limestone; 0.68m-0.97m brown silty sand clay subsoil, 0.97m+ orange sand and gravel (natural geology). ESE 0-0.70m topsoil, 0.70m-0.90m dark grey silty sand subsoil; 0.90m-1.15m light grey brown sand; 1.15m+ orange sand and gravel (natural geology).



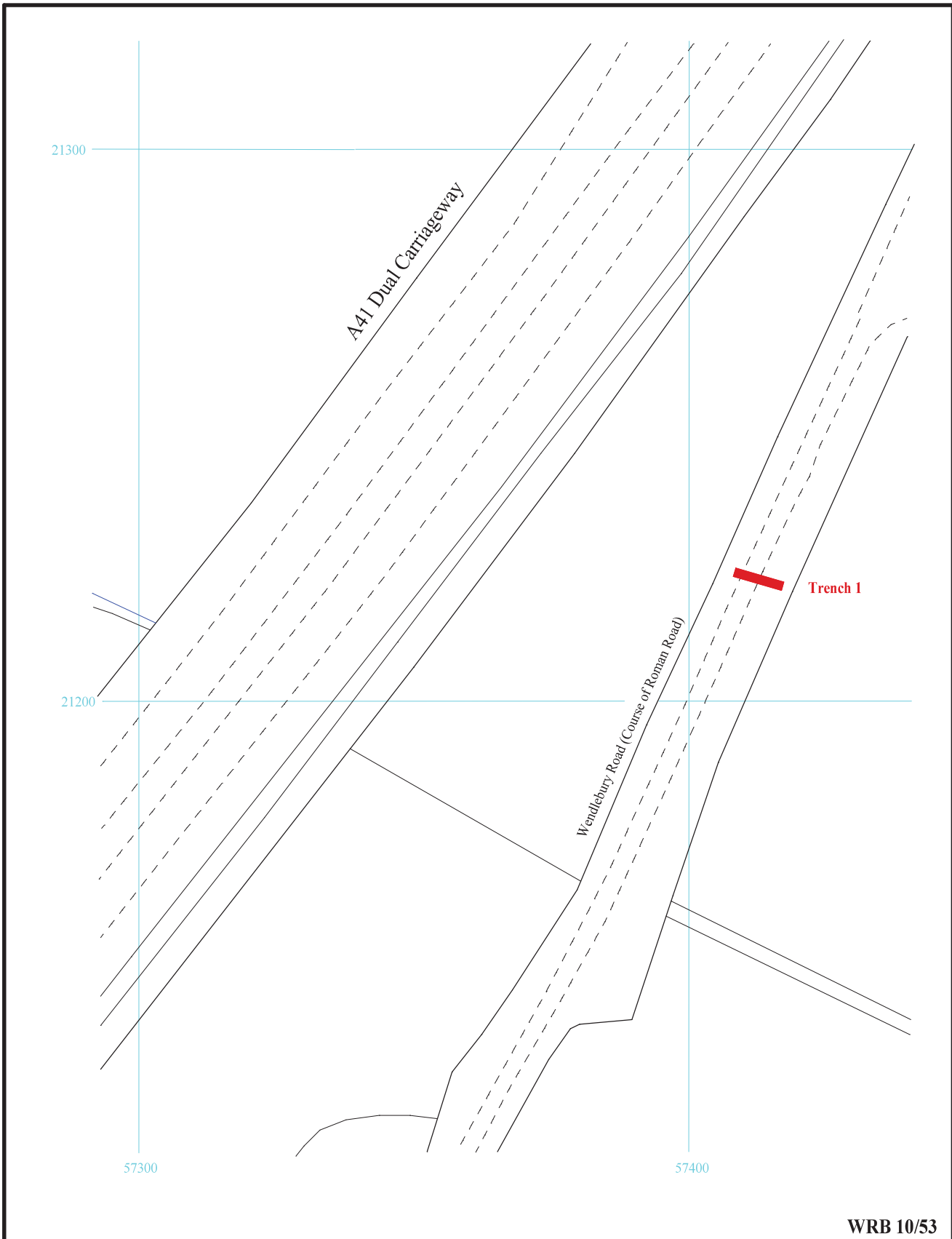


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Figure 1. Location of site in relation to the Roman town at Alchester, Wendlebury and within Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Location of trench.



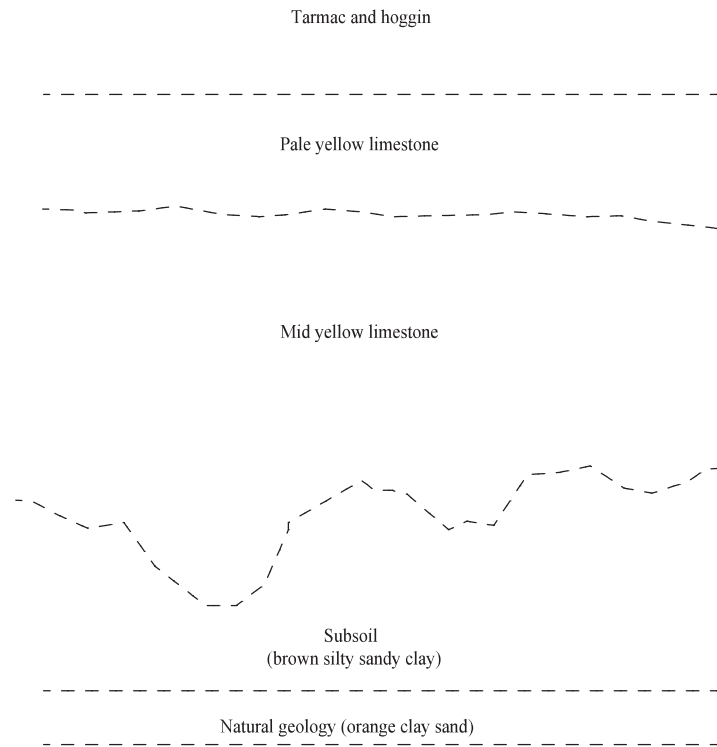
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Trench 1

ESE

WNW

66.9m



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Figure 3. Representative Section

0 1m

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Plate 1. Trench 1 section (through road), north facing section, scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 2. Trench 1 section through roadside, north facing section, scales: 2m and 1m.

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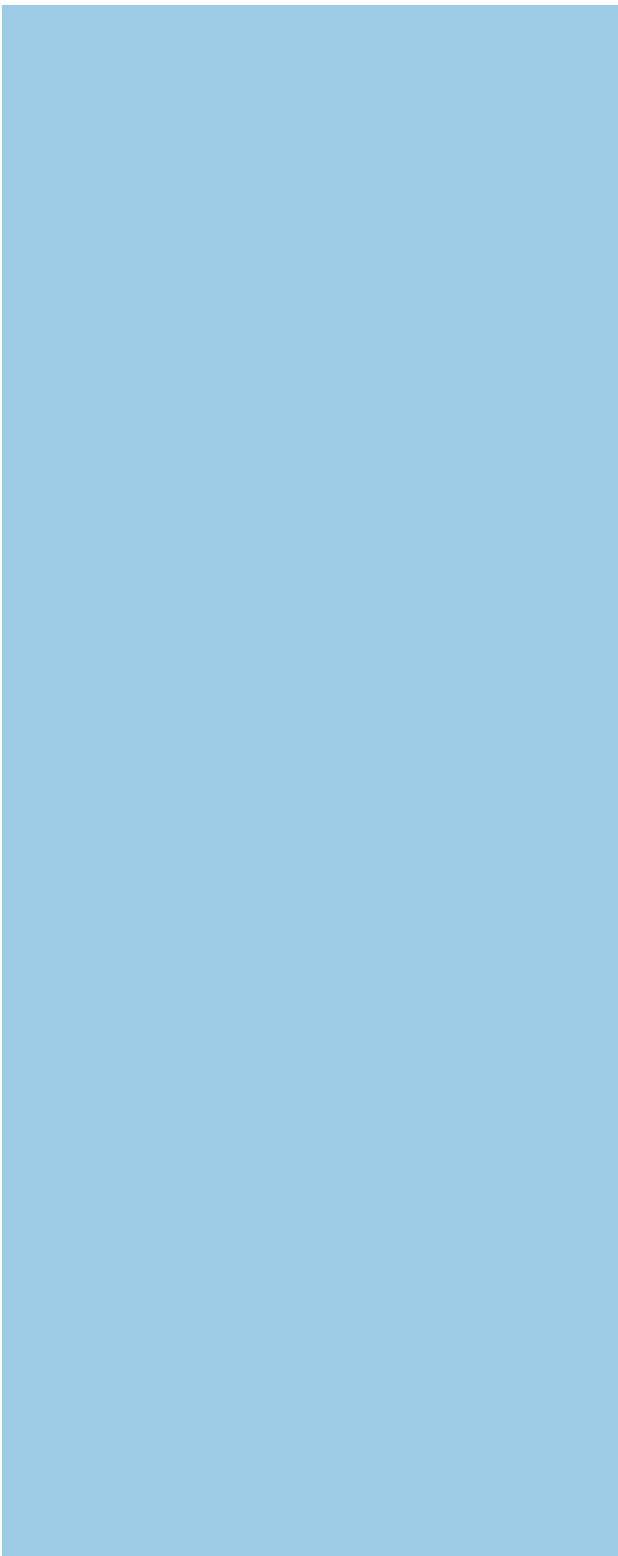
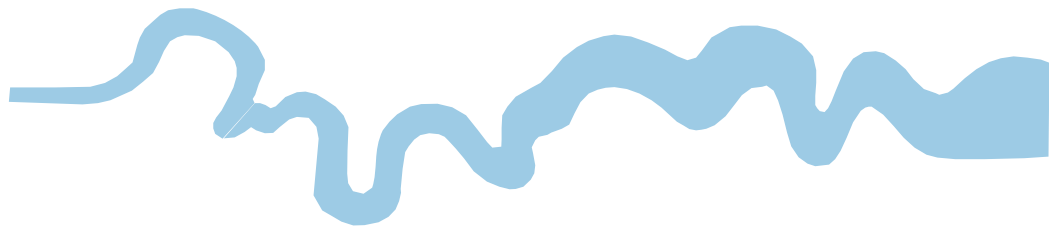
Plates 1 and 2

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## TIME CHART

	<b>Calendar Years</b>
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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