LAND OFF STEWARTBY WAY
STEWARTBY
BEDFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL
TRENCH EVALUATION

Project no.: SW1648
Bedford Museum Accession no. 2010.23
Document: 2010/41

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18th May 2010

Produced for:
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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete an assessment as possible, within the terms of the specification. All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by O & H Properties Ltd and monitored on behalf of the local planning authority by Geoff Saunders, Archaeological Officer, Historic Environment Team (HET), Bedford Borough Council.

This report has been prepared by Wesley Keir (Project Officer). Fieldwork was carried out by Kathy Pilkinton (Assistant Archaeological Supervisor) and Wesley Keir. Artefacts were reported on by Jackie Wells (Finds Officer). Joan Lightning (CAD Technician) digitised the plans and produced the report figures.

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Version History

Version	*Issue date*	*Reason for re-issue*
1.0	*18/05/10*	*n/a*

Key Terms

Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used:

EAA	East Anglian Archaeology
HER	Bedford Borough Historic Environment Record
HET	Bedford Borough Council Historic Environment Team
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
RTK GPS	Real Time Kinematic Global Positioning System

Non-Technical Summary

A planning application (09/02519/MAF) for the change of use of arable land to wildlife habitat at land off Stewartby Way, Stewartby was submitted to Bedford Borough Council in October 2009. The proposed development involves the creation of ponds, woodland and scrub within an area of c. 12ha centred on NGR TL02584162.

As the site lies within an area of potential archaeological sensitivity, a recommendation was made by the Borough Council Historic Environment Team for a pre-determination archaeological evaluation of the site to be carried out. Albion Archaeology undertook the excavation of 32 trial trenches between 19th April and 4th May 2010.

Seven of the trenches contained the remains of early–late Iron Age activity. The features were generally distributed along the higher ground across the centre of the site and were overlain by subsoil and topsoil with a combined thickness of 0.25–0.5m.

Ditches were the commonest type of feature, the majority being aligned NW-SE or NE-SW. Two of the larger ditches appear to form the corners of two enclosures. Other features included a small Iron Age pit and two hearths comprising large, irregular stones.

The Iron Age features most likely represent a small scale farmstead-'type' settlement, which may have been present in one form or another throughout the Iron Age period.

The remains are considered to be both locally and regionally important due to their rarity and their potential to contribute to the study of landscape development and settlement patterns during the Iron Age.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

A planning application (09/02519/MAF) for the change of use of arable land to wildlife habitat at land off Stewartby Way, Stewartby was submitted to Bedford Borough Council in October 2009. The proposed development involves the creation of ponds, woodland and scrub within an area of *c*. 12ha.

As the site lies within an area of potential archaeological sensitivity, a recommendation was made by the Borough Council Historic Environment Team (HET) for a pre-determination archaeological evaluation of the site to be carried out. This recommendation is in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment. The HET subsequently issued a brief (HET 2010) detailing the required trial trenching.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by O & H Properties Ltd to undertake the trial trenching, the results of which will be used to inform any subsequent mitigation strategy.

1.2 Site Location and Description

The site lies to the south-east of the village of Stewartby, adjacent to the Midland Mainline railway and Stewartby Way (Fig. 1). It is centred on NGR TL02584162 and comprises *c*.12ha of open, relatively flat arable land and some hard standing areas, bordered by a strip of woodland to the north-east, and scrub and hedgerow to the north-west. There is also a small pond located in a natural depression in the south end of the site. The proposed works will not affect these existing habitats. Excluding these features, the area affected by the development measures *c*.10.60ha

The height of the land varies between *c*. 42m and 46m OD, generally sloping down towards a watercourse on the eastern edge of the site. The underlying geology consists of Oxford Clay Formation (Mudstone), with an overlying band of alluvium in the location of the watercourse.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Little is known about the archaeology of Stewartby and its immediate environs due to the relative lack of previous investigations or observations. This is despite extensive quarrying that has been carried out in the area over the past 150 years for the brick making industry. However, the regional pattern suggests that the Stewartby area has the potential to contain settlement remains dating from the Iron Age, Roman and medieval periods.

The few records held by the Historic Environment Record (HER) are all located at least 500m from the site. These include several areas of ridge and furrow (HER653, HER1889, HER2791, HER5135); a moated site at How End (HER5223); and the medieval settlement of Wootton Pillinge (HER8292) located *c*.600m to the north-west.

The closest recorded earlier features are a cropmark of a rectangular enclosure and a scatter of Roman pottery (HER2425) found approximately 1km to the south-east of

the site. Further afield, investigations at Marston Moretaine (Albion Archaeology 2004) have revealed extensive later Iron Age and Roman settlement characterised by a series of ditched enclosures.

1.4   Project Objectives

The principal objective of the trial trenching was to determine whether archaeological remains were present at the site and, if so, to record their extent, condition, nature and significance.

The broader objective of the project was to add to the knowledge and understanding of the origins and nature of settlement in the area and produce an archive report that fully describes the archaeological works.

2.   METHODOLOGY

2.1   Introduction

The trial trenching was undertaken between 19th April and 4th May 2010; it comprised the excavation of thirty-two 50m long trenches (Fig. 2).

2.2   Standards

Throughout the project the standards and guidance in the following documents were adhered to:

• Albion Archaeology	*Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork* (2nd edn, 2001).
• Bedford Borough Council	*Preparing Archaeological Archives for Deposition in Registered Museums in Bedford (1998)*
• EAA	*Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (2003)*
• English Heritage	*Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) Project Managers' Guide (2006)*
	Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation (2002/01)
• HET	*Brief for a programme of Archaeological Field Evaluation at Land off Stewartby Way, Stewartby, Bedfordshire (April 2010)*
• IfA	*By-Laws and Code of Conduct*
	Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation (updated 2008) and finds (updated 2008)

2.3   Trial Trench Methodology

The trial trenching was carried out in accordance with the Project Design (Albion Archaeology 2010) and the HET Brief (2010). In summary:

- The trial trenches were set out using a Network RTK GPS to ensure accurate location;
- All machine excavation was supervised by an archaeologist and was undertaken using a mechanical excavator fitted with a flat-edged ditching bucket;
- Cultivation soil and modern overburden were removed by machine down to the top of archaeological deposits, or undisturbed geological deposits, whichever was encountered first;
- Recording took place on pro-forma sheets in accordance with the Albion Archaeology *Procedures Manual* (2nd edition, 2001);
- The trenches were inspected by the HET Archaeological Officer prior to backfilling.

All archaeological deposits and features (known as 'contexts') were assigned an individual number. Within this report, numbers in brackets refer to these context numbers. Cut features *(i.e.* pits, ditches *etc*.) are expressed as [***]; layers and deposits within cut features are expressed as (***). Detailed descriptions of all the contexts are contained within Appendix 2.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

The findings within the trial trenches are summarised below and shown on Figures 3-6. Detailed descriptions of artefacts can be found in Appendix 1 and detailed technical information on all deposits and archaeological features can be found in Appendix 2.

3.2 Overburden and Geological Deposits

The overburden was generally consistent in colour and composition throughout the site. It comprised a topsoil of dark brown silty clay that overlay a firmer orange-brown silty clay subsoil. The thickness of the overburden varied from 0.25m to 0.80m. It was generally thickest within trenches located close to the eastern edge of the site.

The undisturbed geological strata predominantly consisted of brown-orange silty clay, with patches of small to medium sized stones and grey clay. This was reached at between 42.10m OD and 45.26m OD.

3.3 Iron Age

Archaeological features and deposits dated to the early-late Iron Age by artefact or circumstantial evidence were identified within six of the trial trenches (see Table 1 and Figs. 2-6). These trenches were generally distributed along the higher ground across the centre of the site and were overlain by subsoil and topsoil with a combined thickness of 0.25–0.5m.

Trench	Minimum depth to archaeology (bgl)	Feature no.	Feature type	Indicative date based on recovered artefacts
5	0.4m (43.23m OD)	503	Ditch	-
8	0.4m (42.78m OD)	803	pit	late Iron Age
		805	hearth	-
10	0.45m (43.60m OD)	1003	ditch	late Iron Age
		1009	ditch	late Iron Age
12	0.5m (43.64m OD)	1203	ditch	late Iron Age
		1206	ditch	mid-late Iron Age
16	0.45m (43.85m OD)	1603	tree throw/rooting	early-middle Iron Age
		1605	tree throw/rooting	early-middle Iron Age
		1607	ditch	late Iron Age
20	0.35m (44m OD)	2003	ditch	-
		2005	ditch	mid-late Iron Age
		2009	ditch	mid-late Iron Age
		2011	post hole	-
30	0.36m (42.41m OD)	3003	ditch	early-middle Iron Age
31	0.25m (42.77m OD)	3103	hearth	-

Table 1: Summary of all archaeological features

3.3.1 Ditches

Ditches were the commonest type of feature, with the majority being generally aligned NW-SE or NE-SW. The largest of these were located within Trenches 10, 12 and 16 and were 1.57–2.6m wide and 0.5–0.82m deep. Their fills typically varied between orange-brown and brown silty clays and contained pottery that indicates they date to the late Iron Age. Fired clay fragments were also recovered that are likely to be associated with domestic oven floors. Ditches [1003/1009] and [1203/1206] appear to form the corners of two enclosures (Fig. 4).

Three smaller ditches were revealed in Trench 20, comprising two adjacent ditches [2003] and [2009] aligned NNE-SSW located close to a curvilinear ditch [2005] (Fig. 5). Two of these ditches contained mid-late Iron Age pottery and all were generally filled with dark brown-grey silty clay.

A further small ditch [3003] located at the northern end of the site was, in contrast to the other ditches, aligned N-S and contained early-middle Iron Age pottery (Fig. 6).

3.3.2 Other features

A small circular pit [803] containing pottery dating to the late Iron Age was identified within Trench 8, close to a circular hearth [805] comprised of several large irregular stones (Fig. 3). The form and location of the hearth suggests it is of a similar date to the pit, although a small fragment of, probably intrusive, post-medieval tile was recovered from soil within it. A second undated but similar hearth was identified at the other end of the site in Trench 31 (Fig. 6).

A possible posthole [2011] containing two large stones that may represent packing material was located at the western end of Trench 20 (Fig. 5). Though it contained no artefacts, the similarity of its fill to that of nearby ditches [2003] and [2009] suggests it is of a similar date. Two nearby tree throws, [1603] and [1605], also with similar fills, contained early-middle Iron Age pottery.

3.4 Undated

A small ditch aligned NW-SE was revealed at the southern end of the site in Trench 5 (Fig. 3). It contained no artefacts, although its location suggests it may be associated with a NW-SE boundary shown on Ordnance Survey maps dating to 1926–1950.

4. SYNTHESIS

4.1 Summary of Archaeological Remains

The archaeological trial trenching identified a significant quantity of features dated to the Iron Age. These features most likely represent remains of small scale farmstead-'type' settlement activity, which the artefact evidence suggests may have been present in one form or another throughout the Iron Age. The distribution of the pottery tends to suggest the earlier Iron Age activity was focussed more towards the northern half of the site, with the later activity being located nearer the centre and southern end of the site. Later Iron Age settlement, possibly of a similar nature, has been investigated *c*. 2km away at Marston Moretaine (Albion Archaeology 2004) and was characterised by a series of ditched enclosures.

4.2 Significance of Archaeological Remains

The archaeological remains found at Stewartby Way have the potential to contribute to the understanding of landscape development and settlement patterns in the region during the later prehistoric period. The relationship between settlement and enclosure during the Iron Age has been identified as an important area requiring further study in the regional resource assessment and research strategy document (Oake 2007, 11).

The Iron Age remains at the site are also of value due to the rarity of archaeological discoveries in the locality, particularly those predating the medieval period, and the limited potential for further findings within the environs of Stewartby given the extensive loss of land due to mineral extraction.

5.   BIBLIOGRAPHY

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6. APPENDIX 1: ARTEFACT SUMMARY

6.1 Introduction

The evaluation produced a finds assemblage comprising mainly pottery and animal bone (Table 2). The material was scanned to ascertain its nature, condition and, where possible, date range.

Tr.	Feature	Feature type	Context	Spot date*	Finds summary
8	803	Pit	804	Late Iron Age	Pottery (108g)
	805	Hearth	806	Undated	Pottery (3g); fired clay (14g); roof tile (29g)
10	1003	Ditch	1004	Late Iron Age	Pottery (123g); animal bone (17g)
	1009	Ditch	1010	Late Iron Age	Pottery (10g); animal bone (89g)
12	1203	Ditch	1204	Late Iron Age	Pottery (81g); animal bone (51g)
	1203	Ditch	1205	Late Iron Age	Pottery (355g); animal bone (615g)
	1206	Ditch	1207	Mid-late Iron Age	Pottery (30g); animal bone (16g); fired clay (50g)
16	1603	Tree-throw	1604	Early-middle Iron Age	Pottery (202g); animal bone (35g); fired clay (63g)
	1605	Tree-throw	1606	Early-middle Iron Age	Pottery (4g)
	1607	Ditch	1608	Late Iron Age	Pottery (32g); animal bone (131g); fired clay (200g)
20	2003	Ditch	2008	Undated	Animal bone (83g)
	2005	Ditch	2006	Mid-late Iron Age	Pottery (11g)
	2009	Ditch	2004	Mid-late Iron Age	Pottery (338g); animal bone (252g)
30	3003	Ditch	3004	Early-middle Iron Age	Pottery (23g); burnt stone (61g)

* - spot date based on date of latest artefact in context

Table 2: Artefact summary by trench and feature

6.2 Pottery

Seventy-seven Iron Age pottery sherds, weighing 1.3kg were recovered. These were examined by context and quantified using minimum sherd count and weight. Sherds are small, with an average weight of 17g, and uniformly abraded. Twelve fabric types were identified using common names and type codes in accordance with the Ceramic Type Series, currently held by Albion Archaeology. Fabrics are listed below (Table 3) in chronological order.

Fabric type	Common name	Sherd no.	Context/sherd no.
F03	Grog and sand	**8**	(806):1, (1204):1, (1205):1, (1604):1, (2004):3, (3004):1
F05	Grog and shell	**4**	(1004):3, (1608):1
F06B	Medium grog	**4**	(1205):3, (1608):1
F07	Shell	**9**	(1204):5, (1205):3, (1608):1
F09	Sand and grog	**10**	(804):2, (1004):2, (1010):1, (1204):5
F14	Fine mixed inclusions	**3**	(1205):1, (1207):2
F19	Sand and organic	**3**	(2004):3
F22	Grog and organic	**16**	(804):7, (1205):1, (2004):6, (2006):2
F28	Fine sand	**11**	(804):4, (1205):2, (1604):2, (1606):1, (2004):1, (3004):1
F29	Coarse sand	**7**	(1604):5, (2004):2
F30	Sand and calcareous	**1**	(2004):1
F39	Grog and mica	**1**	(1207):1

Table 3: Pottery type series

Forty-nine handmade sherds tempered with a range of mixed grog (fabrics F03, F14), sand (F28, F29), calcareous (F30) and organic matter (F19, F22) were recovered. Early Iron Age material derived from ditch [3003] and tree-throws [1603] and [1605]; and mid-late Iron Age pottery from ditches [1206], [2005] and [2009]. Forms are round-shouldered and ovoid vessels, and a single scored sherd. Several sooted examples occur, indicating the use of vessels as cooking pots.

Late Iron Age pottery comprises wheel-thrown, grog-tempered vessels (fabrics F06B, F09, F39) and contemporary handmade coarse wares, the latter mainly occurring in shell/grog- or shell-tempered fabrics (types F05, F07). Forms include fine-walled vessels with flat, pedestal and footring bases, and single examples of an everted rim jar, cordoned vessel and large jar with a thumbed rim.

6.3   Other artefacts

The fills of ditches [1206] and [1607] yielded ten fired clay fragments in an organic fabric (total weight 250g), several of which have pre-firing perforations of approximately 35mm diameter. They are likely to represent part of a domestic oven floor, with the holes acting as vents to create an updraught from a heat source below. Four pieces of fine sand-tempered fired clay (63g) with smoothed surfaces and finger impressions derived from tree-throw [1603]. Two amorphous coarse sandy fragments (14g) were recovered from hearth [805]. The latter also contained an abraded sand-tempered piece of flat roof tile (29g), likely to be of post-medieval date, which is considered to be intrusive within the feature.

A piece of burnt sandstone (61g) derived from the fill of ditch [3003].

6.4   Animal bone

The faunal assemblage comprises seventy-five fragments weighing 1.3kg, and occurs mainly in ditches of late Iron Age date. The majority derived from the fills of ditch [1203], which contained 666g, including eleven molars, an incisor and mandible fragments, all deriving from a horse. The remaining pieces are small, with an average fragment weight of 17g, and generally abraded. Diagnostic elements are long bone, rib, vertebra, phalanx and mandible fragments, mainly of indeterminate species, although cow teeth can be positively identified from the fill of ditch [1009].

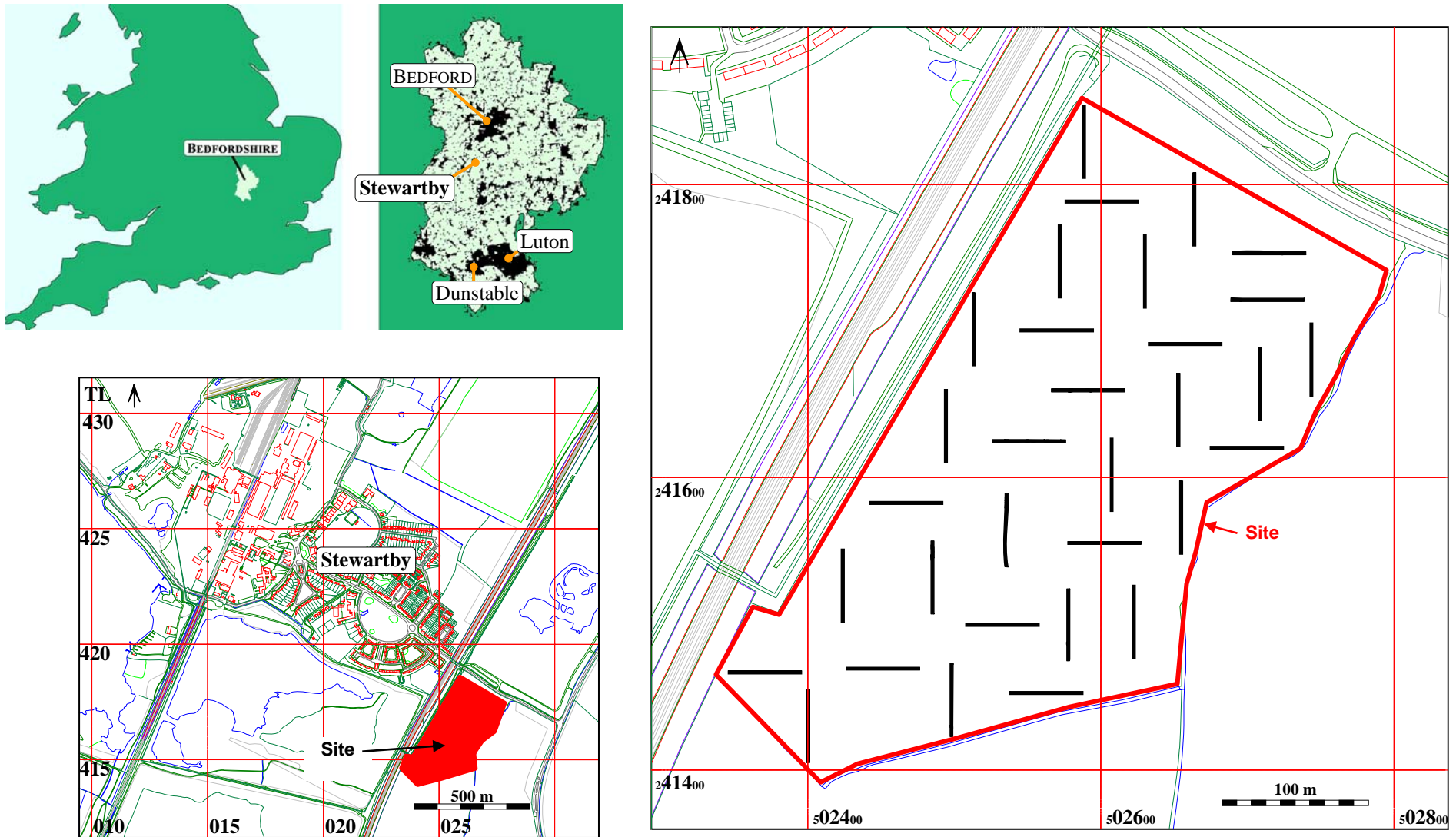# 7. APPENDIX 2: CONTEXT DATA

Figure 1: Site location plan

Base map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Albion Archaeology, Central Bedfordshire Council. OS Licence No. 100017358(LA). © Crown Copyright.

Figure 2: All features plan

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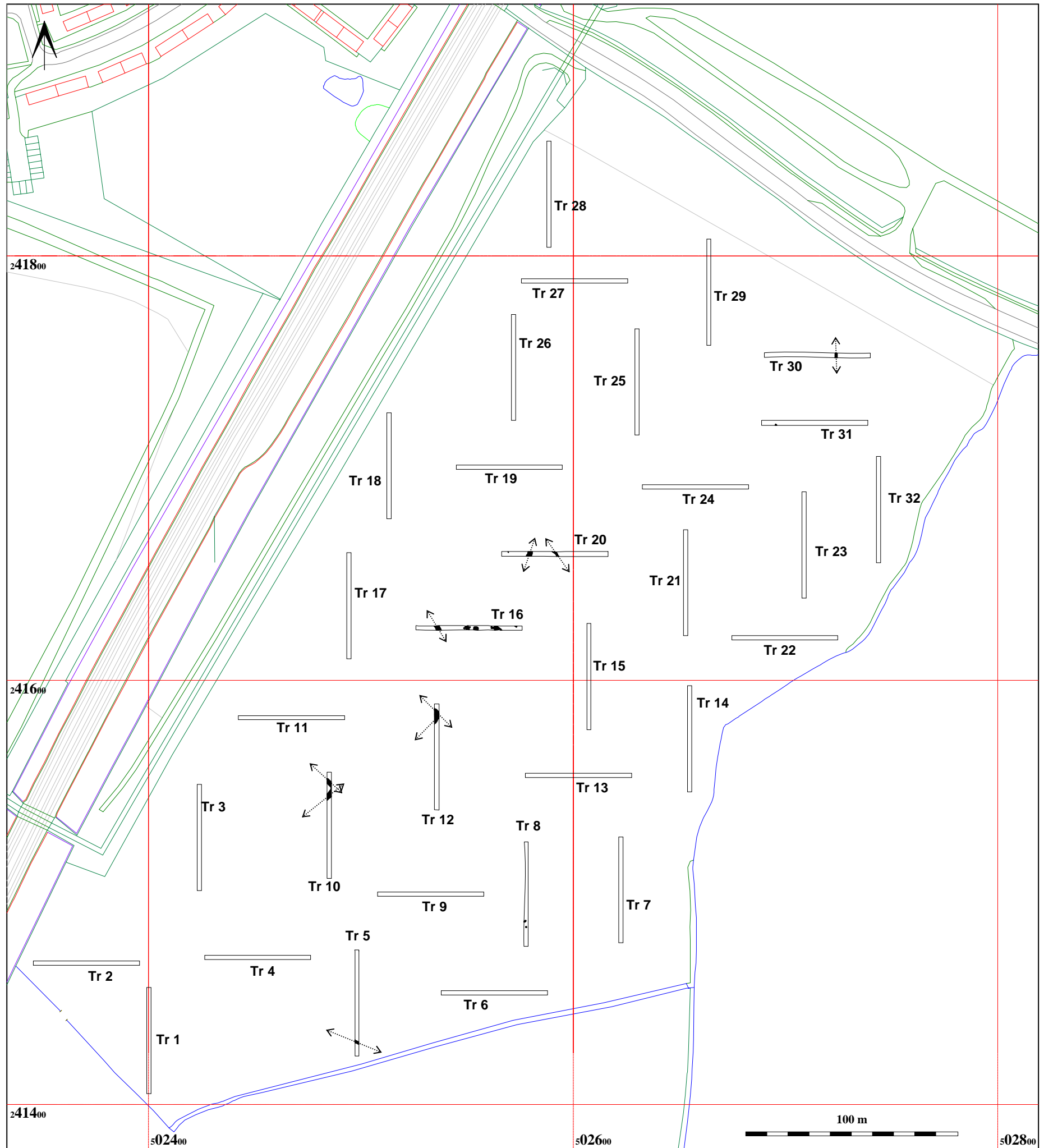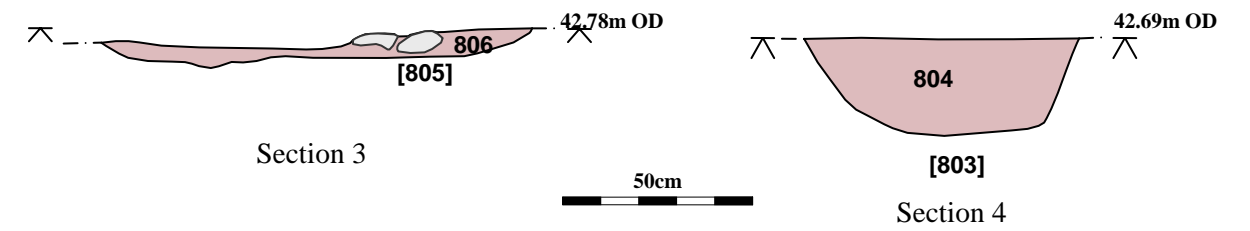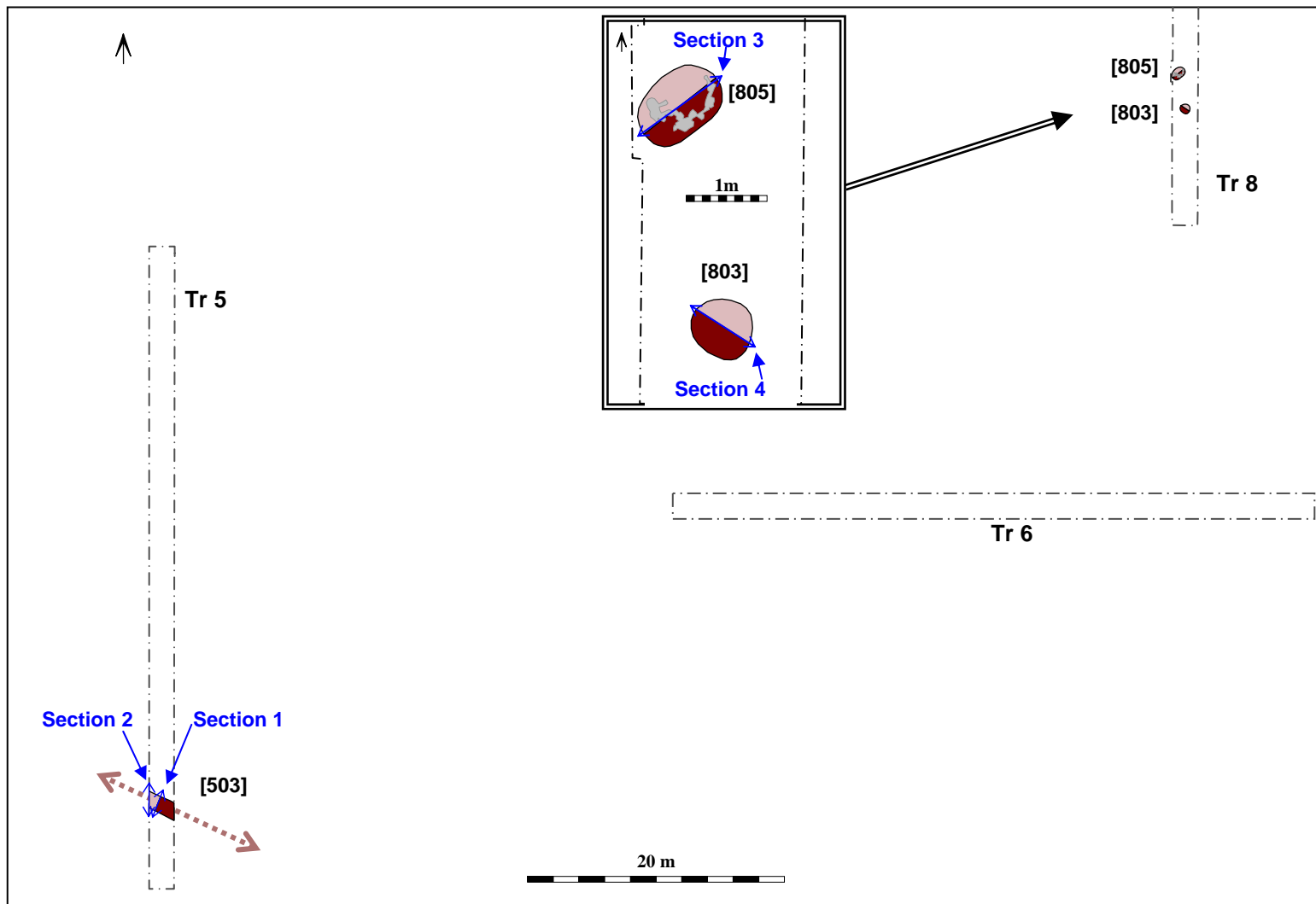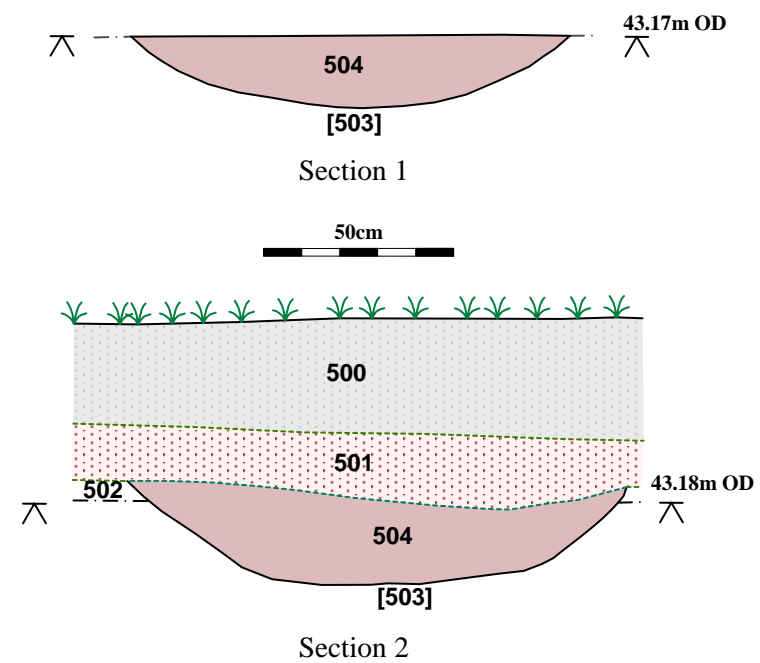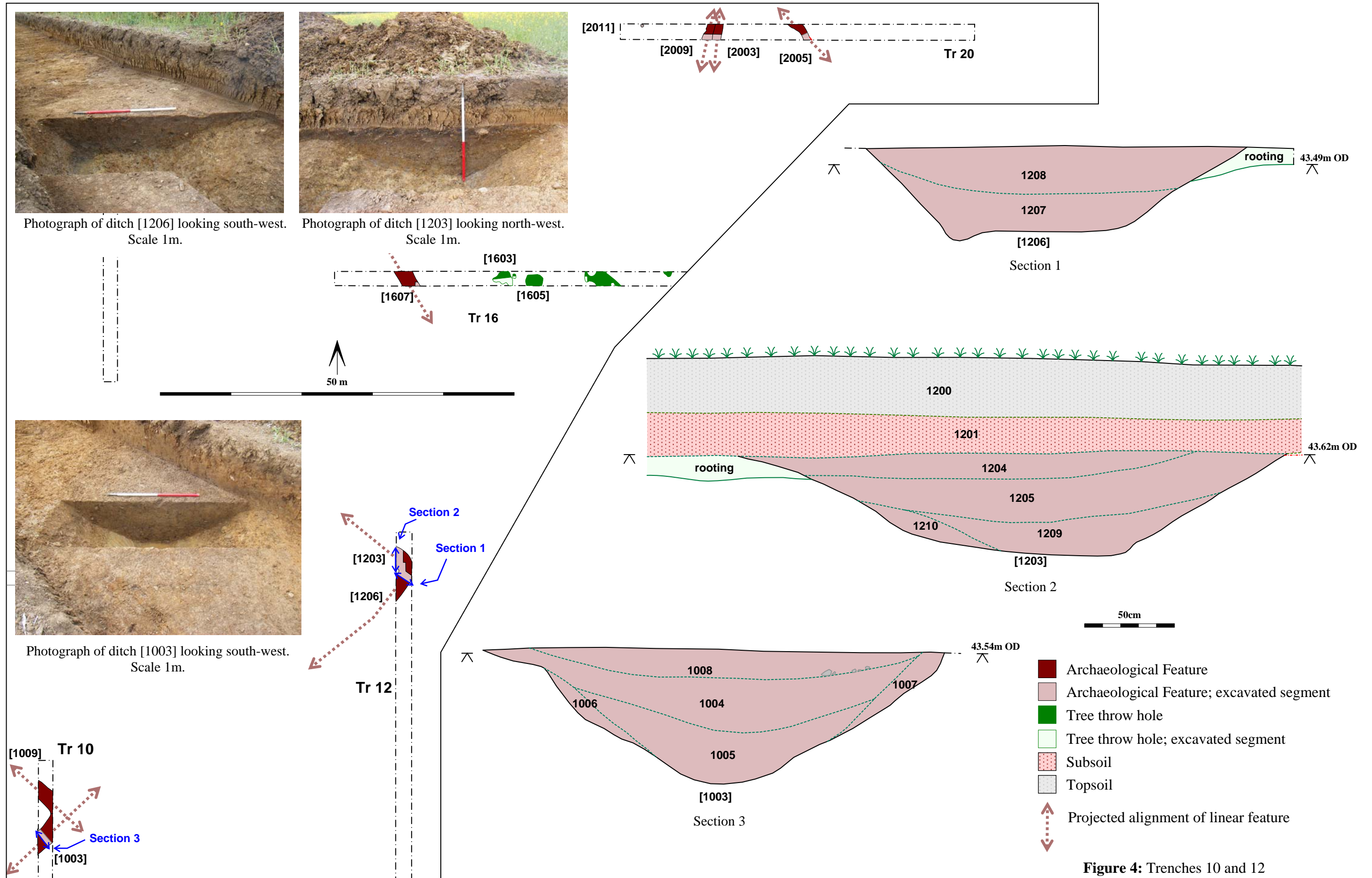
Section 3

Section 4

Photograph of hearth [805] looking west. Scale 40cm.

Section 1

Section 2

Photograph of ditch [503] looking west. Scale 1m.

■ Archaeological Feature

▨ Archaeological Feature; excavated segment

▨ Subsoil

▨ Topsoil

Projected alignment of linear feature

Figure 3: Trenches 5 and 8

Photograph of ditch [1206] looking south-west. Scale 1m.

Photograph of ditch [1203] looking north-west. Scale 1m.

[2011]   [2009]   [2003]   [2005]   **Tr 20**

[1603]   [1607]   [1605]   **Tr 16**

50 m

Photograph of ditch [1003] looking south-west. Scale 1m.

Section 2   **Section 1**   [1203]   [1206]   **Tr 12**

Tr 10   [1009]   **Section 3**   [1003]

1208   1207   [1206]   rooting   43.49m OD

Section 1

1200   1201   1204   1205   1210   1209   [1203]   rooting   43.62m OD

Section 2

50cm

1008   1006   1004   1007   1005   [1003]   43.54m OD

Section 3

- Archaeological Feature
- Archaeological Feature; excavated segment
- Tree throw hole
- Tree throw hole; excavated segment
- Subsoil
- Topsoil
- Projected alignment of linear feature

Figure 4: Trenches 10 and 12

Photograph of ditch [2005] looking south-east.
Scale 40cm.

Photograph of ditches [2003] and [2009] looking south.
Scale 1m.

[2011] [2009] [2003]

Section 1

Section 3 [2005] Section 2

Tr 20

[1607] [1603]

[1605] **Tr 16**

44.04m OD

[2011]

Section 1

43.69m OD

2006

[2005]

Section 2

50cm

Section 3

2000

2001 44m OD

2002

2008

2007

2004

2010

[2003]

[2009]

Section 3

50 m

[1203]

[1206] **Tr 12**

Photograph of tree throw [1603] looking north-west.
Scale 1m.

Tr 13

Tr 10

[1009]

[1003]

Archaeological Feature

Archaeological Feature; excavated segment

Tree throw hole

Tree throw hole; excavated segment

Subsoil

Topsoil

Projected alignment of linear feature

Figure 5: Trenches 16 and 20

3000

3001

3002

3004

42.28m OD

50cm

[3003]

Section 1

Photograph of ditch [3003] looking south. Scale 1m.

Section 1

[3003]

Tr 30

10 m

Tr 31

[3103]

area of
scorching

[3103]

stones

50 cms

Photograph of hearth [3103] looking south. Scale 40cm.

Archaeological Feature

Archaeological Feature; excavated segment

Subsoil

Topsoil

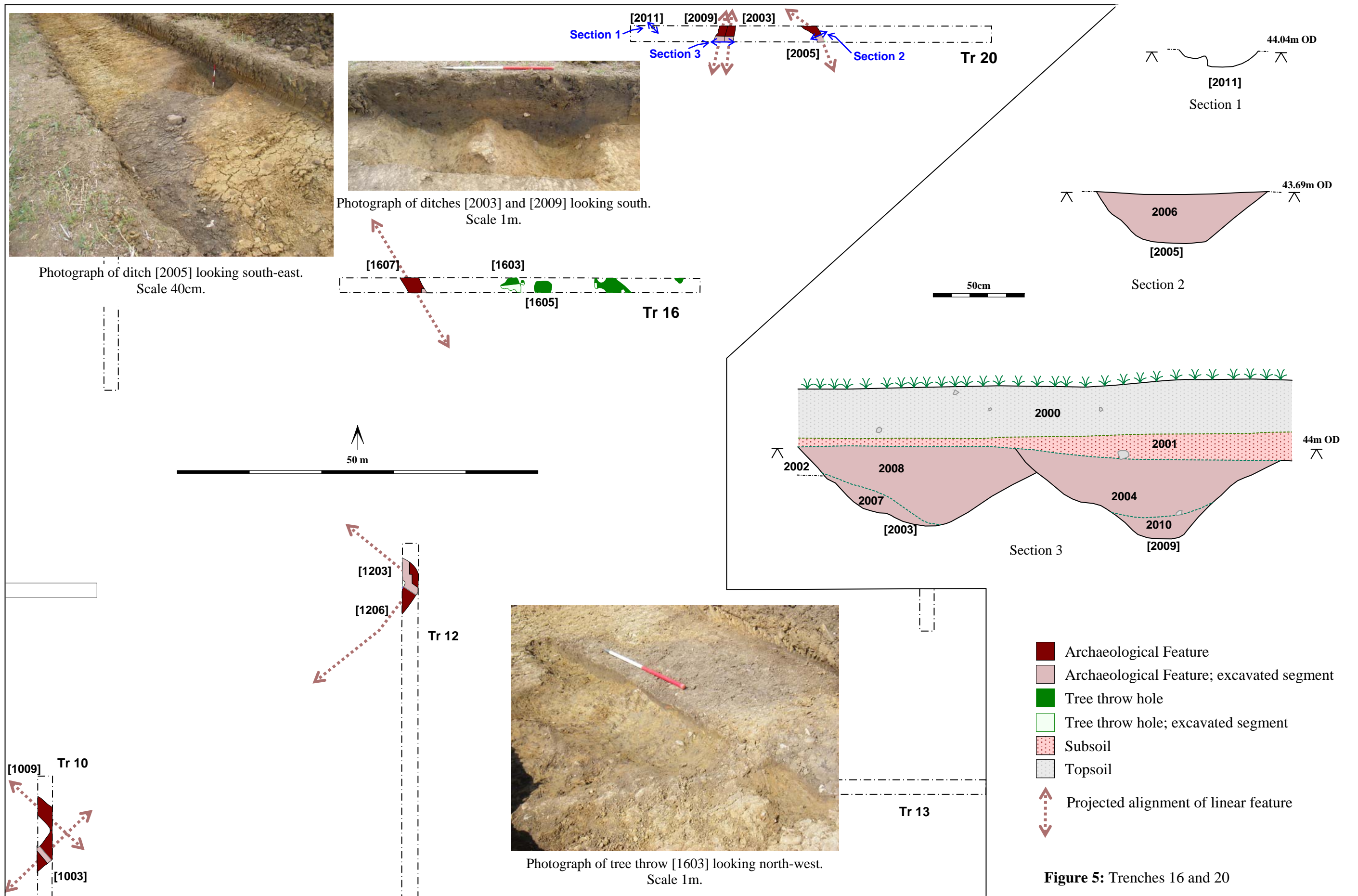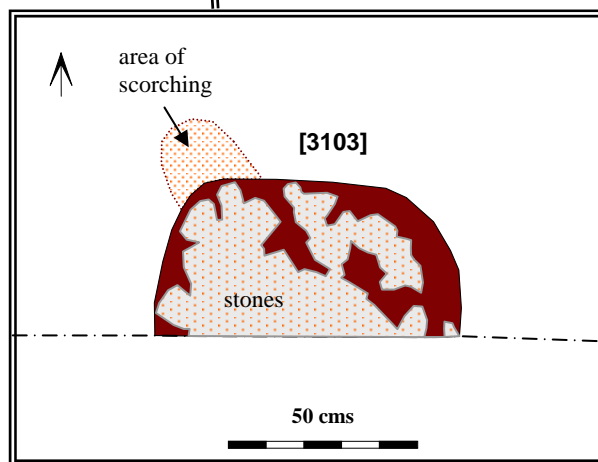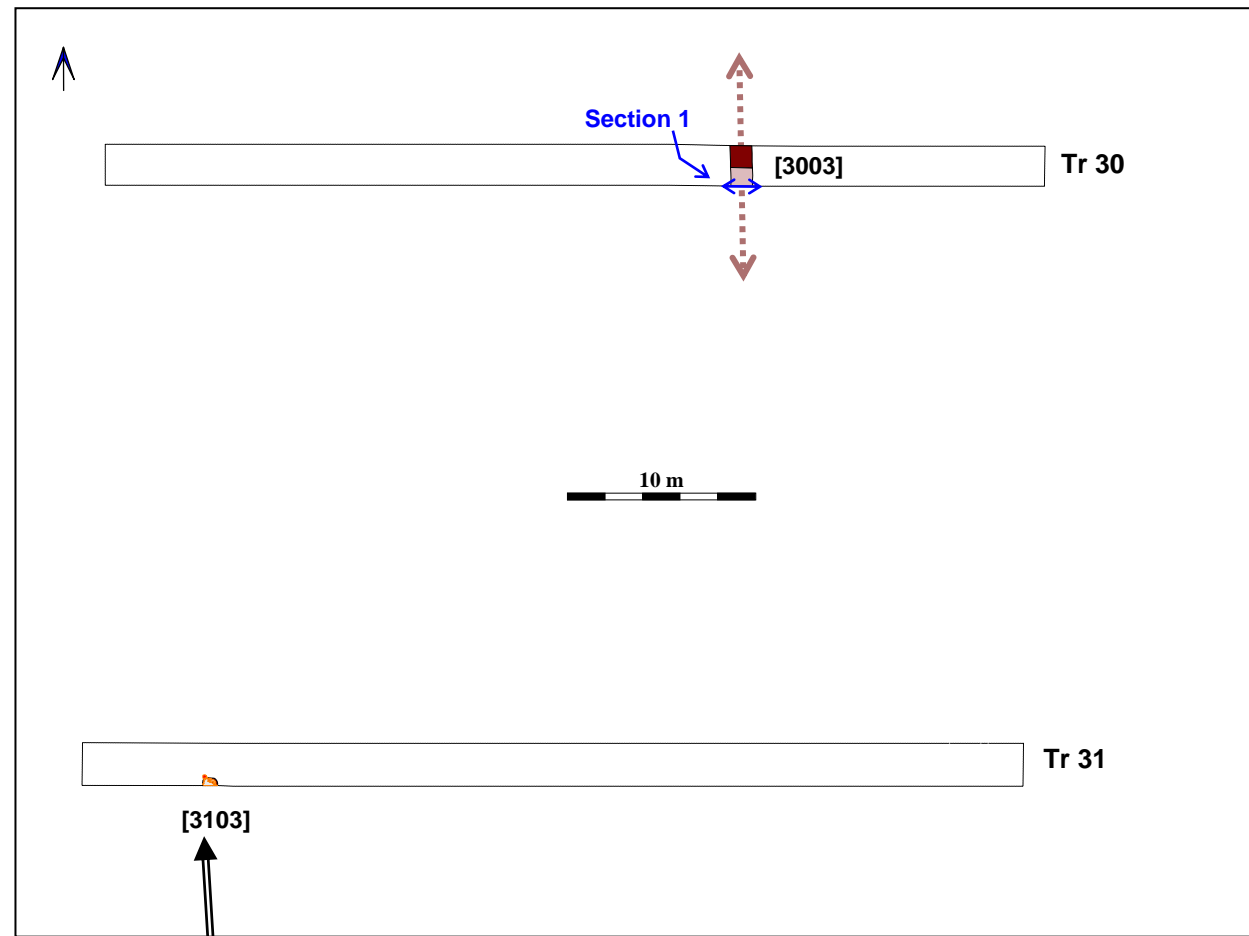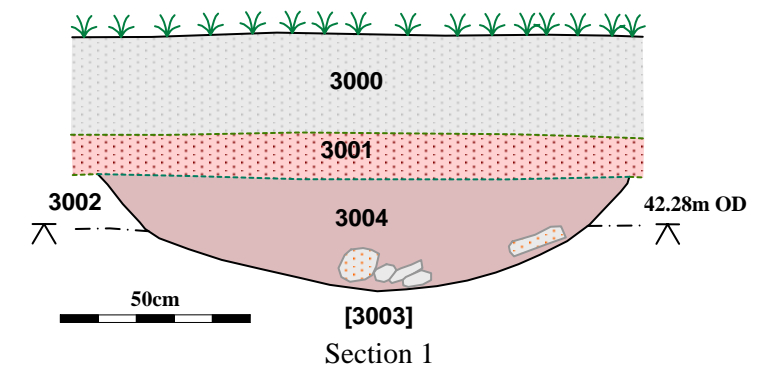Projected alignment of linear feature

Figure 6: Trenches 30 and 31