



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Trial Trenching Evaluation at RAF Upwood, Cambridgeshire (Event No: ECB3151)



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Northamptonshire
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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	RAF Upwood Evaluation	
Short description (250 words maximum)	In December 2009 twelve archaeological trial trenches were excavated on a proposed development area at RAF Upwood, Cambridgeshire. The trenches were positioned to target possible anomalies identified on a geophysical survey. A number of gullies dating to the Roman period were found in trenches 6 and 7 and appear to form part of a Roman ditch system. Trench 8 exposed four gullies of unknown date. Trench 12 contained two undated ditches and a series of plough scars.. Trenches 1-5 and 9-11 were devoid of archaeological features. The evaluation encountered extensive disturbance related to the WW2 and post-war airfield, particularly between the standing buildings.	
Project type (eg DBA, evaluation etc)	Trial Trench Evaluation	
Site status (none, NT, SAM etc)	None	
Previous work (SMR numbers etc)	Desk-based assessment, Geophysical survey	
Current Land use	The site is constrained by wartime and post war use of the site as an airfield and the associated housing	
Future work (yes, no, unknown)	Unknown	
Monument type/ period	Roman	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	Roman pottery	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Cambridgeshire	
Site address (including postcode)	RAF Upwood	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	75ha	
OS Easting & Northing (use grid sq. letter code)	2740 8350	
Height OD	23m AOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project brief originator	Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning & Countryside Advice	
Project Design originator	Paul Gajos CgMs	
Director/Supervisor	Christopher Jones (NA)	
Project Manager	Adam Yates (NA), Paul Gajos CgMs	
Sponsor or funding body		
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	02/12/2009	
End date	11/12/2009	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.) ECB3151	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		Pottery. Bone
Paper		Site records and photographs
Digital		Photographs, digital report copies
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Archaeological Trial Trenching Evaluation at RAF Upwood	
Serial title & volume	09/185	
Author(s)	Christopher Jones	
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QUALITY CONTROL

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Front cover: Tank at RAF Upwood

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCHING EVALUATION
AT RAF UPWOOD, CAMBRIDGESHIRE
DECEMBER 2009
(Event No: ECB3151)

Abstract

In December 2009 twelve archaeological trial trenches were excavated on a proposed development area at RAF Upwood, Cambridgeshire. A number of gullies dating to the Roman period were found in trenches 6 and 7 and appear to form part of a Roman ditch system. Trench 8 exposed four gullies of unknown date. Trench 12 contained two undated ditches and a series of plough scars. Trenches 1-5 and 9-11 were devoid of archaeological features. The evaluation encountered extensive disturbance related to the WW2 and post-war airfield, particularly between the standing buildings. Trenches 3 and 5 were targeted on geophysical anomalies, neither of which were found to be of archaeological origin.

1 INTRODUCTION

This report describes archaeological trial trenching in support of a planning application to develop 75ha of land at RAF Upwood (Fig 1). The trial trenching is part of a tiered process of assessment and evaluation which began with an Archaeological Desk - Based Assessment (CgMs MB-S10170), geophysical survey report (Archaeophysics RUC081) and an aerial photographic assessment (Palmer 2009). A Brief for Archaeological Evaluation was issued by Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice office (CAPCA) which recommended that further archaeological works should be undertaken prior to the determination of the planning application. A specification was prepared by CgMs (2009) who then commissioned Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA), on behalf of clients, to carry out the trial trenching.

The location of the trenching (NGR: TL 2740 8350) is illustrated on Fig 2.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, topography and geology

The site is located in the former airfield RAF Upwood and is situated on Boulder Clay.

The north-western half of the study site is virtually flat, lying just above the 20m contour, and sloping down gently from a high point at approximately 23m AOD near the north-western study site boundary. South of Ramsey Road the study site slopes down from just above 20m AOD to the Bury Brook which forms the southern study site boundary, running from approximately 5m AOD at the south-western study site boundary to approximately 4m AOD at the south-eastern study site boundary. The majority of the southern half of the study site, south of Ramsey Road, lies above the 5m contour.

2.2 Archaeological background

Previous archaeological works on the site have comprised desk-based assessment (Bennett-Samuels 2008), geophysical survey (Roseveare and Roseveare 2008) and an aerial photographic assessment (Palmer 2009).

Full background is contained within the desk-based assessment. There are no known monuments within the development site, a findspot of an undated chalk weight (HER 02785) is not well located. The presence of this and other small finds in the vicinity may be suggestive of settlement activity nearby. Ridge and furrow cultivation is known from aerial photography to the west (HER 11631).

Originally used as a night-landing ground in World War I the airfield site was cleared at the end of the war, and then reactivated and expanded in 1934. The new base became operational in February 1937, housing two flying units. These original squadrons were reassigned in 1939 and replaced by No.90 and No.35 Squadron, which never saw combat and were merged as No.17 Training Unit. When this unit departed Upwood in 1943, the grassed runways were replaced with three concrete runways.

The base re-opened in October 1943 and between 1944 and 1945 was used by No.139 and No.156 Squadrons.

In 1961 Upwood was transferred to RAF Strike Command and by 1981 the base was almost dormant, until control passed to the United States Air Force and Upwood became a satellite base of RAF Alconbury, providing housing and support for personnel.

Geophysical survey comprising scanning followed by targeted detailed gradiometry revealed evidence for ridge and furrow cultivation. Extensive areas of magnetic disturbance from previous usage were also encountered. Some isolated anomalies were thought to have been possibly archaeological in origin.

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objectives

The general objectives of the overall excavation were set out in the specification as follows:

- To determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains within the development site
- To assess the artefactual and environmental potential of the archaeological deposits encountered
- To provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site to enable that archaeological implications of the proposed development to be assessed
- To assess the impact of previous land use on the site
- To inform formulation of a strategy to avoid or mitigate impacts of the proposed development on surviving archaeological remains
- To produce a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Cambridgeshire HER.

3.2 Methodology

All works were conducted in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Excavation* (IfA 1994, revised 2008) and the *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (IfA 1994, revised 2008).

Trenches were positioned to examine potential anomalies identified by geophysical survey and in blank areas. The trenches were set out by Northamptonshire Archaeology

by a Leica System 1200 GPS in the locations required by the specification (Fig 1). All trenches were machine-excavated using a 2m-wide toothless ditching bucket. The topsoil and subsoil was removed under continuous archaeological supervision to reveal archaeological features or, where these were absent, the natural substrate. The trenches were cleaned sufficiently to assist in the identification of any features.

All deposits encountered during the course of the excavation were given a separate context number and fully recorded. Recording followed standard Northamptonshire Archaeology procedures. Deposits were described on pro-forma context sheets to include details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds.

The areas were planned at a scale of 1:100. Sections of the sequence of deposits in each area were drawn at a scale of 1:10 and related to Ordnance Datum. The excavated area and spoil heaps were scanned visually and with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval.

A full photographic record comprising both 35mm black and white negatives and colour transparencies was maintained, supplemented with digital images. On completion of archaeological recording the trenches were backfilled.

The field data has been compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

4 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

4.1 Introduction

The trenches were positioned to provide a full coverage of the area, with detailed coverage where the geophysical survey had identified possible archaeological features (Fig 2).

Topsoil and overburden were removed by mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision with the soil generated being mounded away from the edges of each trench.

Overlying the clay natural was subsoil, up to 0.30m thick, comprising mid orange-brown silty clay, with an intermittent sand fraction dependant upon the underlying natural. The topsoil was a dark brown humic loam, up to 0.35m thick. Few inclusions were noted in either the subsoil or the topsoil.

Archaeological features were found in trenches 6, 7, 8 and 12 (Fig 2). Trenches 1-5 and 9-11 were devoid of archaeological features. The evaluation encountered extensive disturbance related to the WW2 and post-war airfield, particularly between the standing buildings.

Trenches 3 and 5 were targeted on geophysical anomalies, neither of which were found to be of archaeological origin. Those archaeological features that were present were not detected by geophysical survey.

4.2 Trenches containing archaeological features

Trench 6

Trench 6 was aligned east-west and measured 110m long by 2m wide with a 7m bulk left unexcavated because of modern pipes crossing the trench.

All features were found to the eastern end of the trench. Four gullies [612], [618], [620] and [622] spaced 5m apart, which ran in a north - east by south - west direction (Fig 3, Fig 4 sections 1, 2, 3, Figs 6-9). They had an average depth of 0.26m and 0.60m and were filled with light grey silt clay. A larger ditch [610] 0.88m deep by 2.10m wide, with a dark grey silt clay fill, was located 7m to the west of [612]. Roman pottery was recovered from one of the gullies [612] and the primary fill of the larger ditch [610], together with fragments of fired clay from a another gully [622]. The four gullies appear to be part of a Roman agricultural system (Fig 3). One modern ditch [614] was also present.

Trench 7

Trench 7 was aligned north-south and measured 75m long by 2m wide.

Trench 7 contained eleven gullies, [704], [706], [708], [710], [712], [714], [716], [718], [720], [722] and [724] which were similar to those encountered in trench 6 (Fig 3). They were aligned east west and spaced approximately 5m apart. They averaged 0.24m deep by 0.70m wide with grey - brown clay fill. The ditches had a moderate break of slope down to a flat base (Fig 11 sections 14, 17, Figs 10, 13, 14). All the ditches had a single fill sealed by the subsoil. No finds were recovered, although they were similar in form and spacing to the Roman agricultural ditches seen in trench 6 (Fig 3 and Fig 5).

Trench 8

Trench 8 was aligned northwest – southeast and measured 50m long by 2m wide.

Trench 8 had four undated gullies [805], [807], [809] and [811] (Fig 3). The gullies were up to 0.20m deep by 0.30m wide with U-shaped profiles and were filled with light silt grey clay (Fig 12 sections 11, 12). Gullies [805] and [807] first appeared to be a single ditch but when excavated turned into two gullies running parallel in a north - east by south - west direction. Gullies [809] and [811] were cut by two field drains and terminated to the north-east. All four gullies had a different profile and size to the gullies seen in trenches 6 and 7, and do not appear to be part of the same system (Fig 3).

Trench 12

Trench 12 was aligned east – west and measured 100m long by 2m wide with an 8m bulk unexcavated because of modern pipes and track way crossing the trench.

Trench 12 at the south of the evaluation area contained two undated ditches [1204] and [1206] crossing the trench in a north south direction. Ditch [1204] was 1m wide by 0.40m deep with light grey silt clay (Fig 15, section 24, Fig 17). Ditch [1206] was 1.35m wide by 0.24m deep with light grey silt clay (Fig 15, section 23, Fig 16). A series of plough scars [1208], [1209], [1210], [1211], [1212] and [1213] were filled with redeposited subsoil and ran north-south (Fig 15, section 25, 29, Fig 18 and Fig 19). All the features were located at the west end of the trench, with no evidence of any features to the east of the bulk (Fig 3).

5 THE FINDS

5.1 The pottery by Tora Hylton

Three sherds of Greyware with a combined weight of 30g were recovered from ditches [610] and [612]. The sherds and undiagnostic body and base sherds show no signs of abrasion, therefore the fabric has been used as an indicator of date, c 2nd century.

Eight very small amorphous fragments of fired clay weighing 26g were recovered from [622]. The surface of the clay is oxidised and the core grey; the fabric is soapy to touch

with sparse sand inclusions. A faint recess on one fragment may be the remains of a wattle impression. The fragments are undatable.

5.2 The animal bone by Karen Deighton

A total of 38g of animal bone was recovered by hand from context [610] during the course of trial trenching. Unfortunately the material could not be classified due to heavy fragmentation and a high level of bone surface abrasion. This poor preservation was probably a result of soil conditions.

6 DISCUSSION

The evaluation has identified a number of features in the north-eastern corner of the development area. The remainder of the area was devoid of archaeological remains. None of the remains encountered correspond with geophysical anomalies and none of the anomalies examined proved to be of archaeological origin.

The remains encountered in trench 6 and 7 appear to represent the remains of an agricultural system of Roman date. Ditch [610] probably represents a plot boundary marking the western limit of an area of cultivation defined by the smaller parallel gullies in trenches 6 and 7, which may be cultivation (lazy) beds. Similar features excavated at Wollaston in Northamptonshire were shown to be the remains of viniculture (Meadows 1996). The features at Upwood resemble superficially the Wollaston remains as first seen in the ground, which were also initially interpreted as lazy beds. Careful and sensitive excavation at Wollaston revealed additional elements such as a central planting strip and post holes for supports, none of which were apparent at Upwood. However, it should be borne in mind that only small a few small sections were excavated during the Upwood evaluation, and it is possible that controlled excavation may reveal more details.

The small quantity of artefactual material would indicate that any settlement is probably some distance away.

Large parts of the development area were found to have been disturbed by the 20th century activity related to the construction and use of the airfield, particularly near the buildings.

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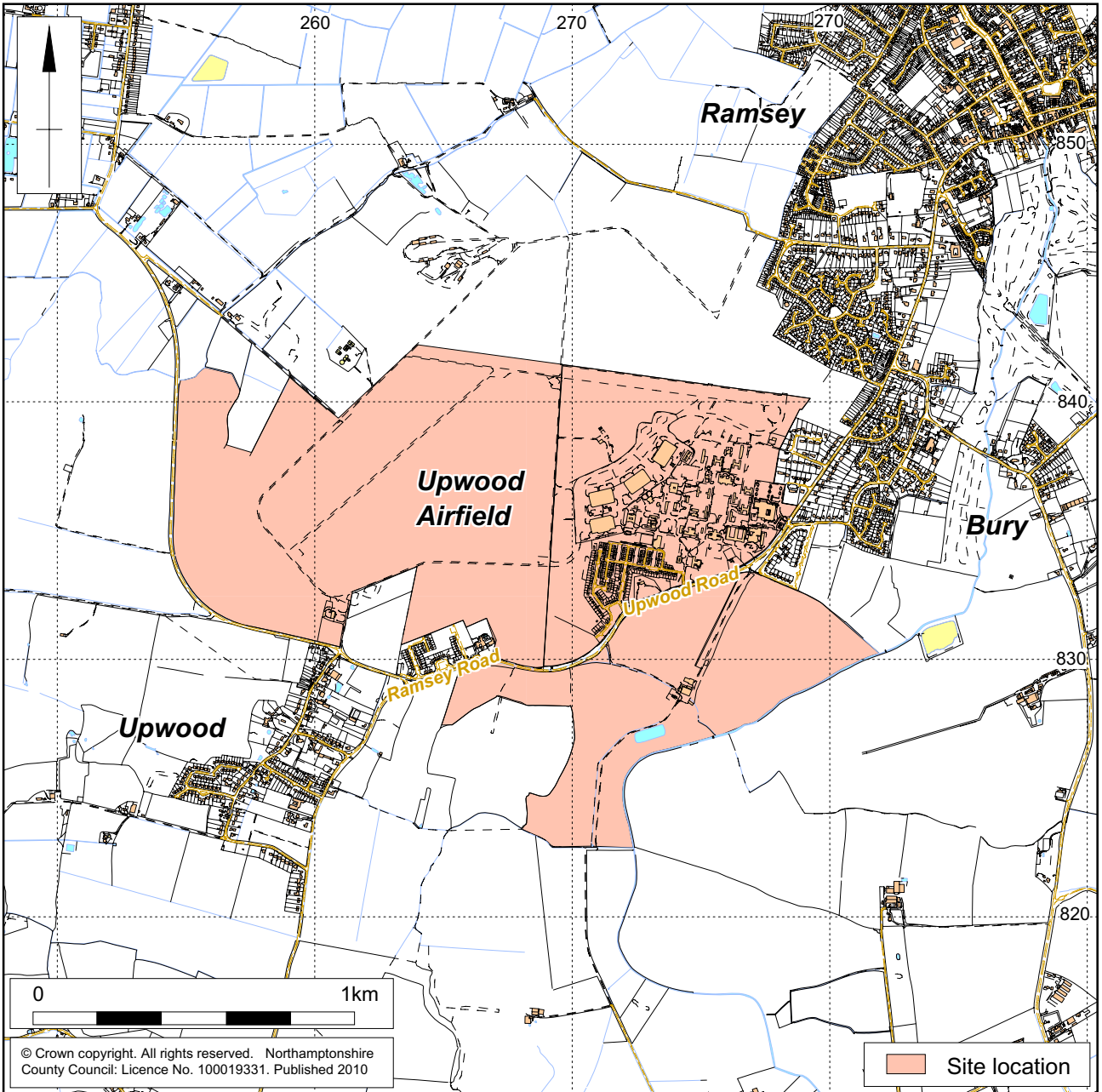
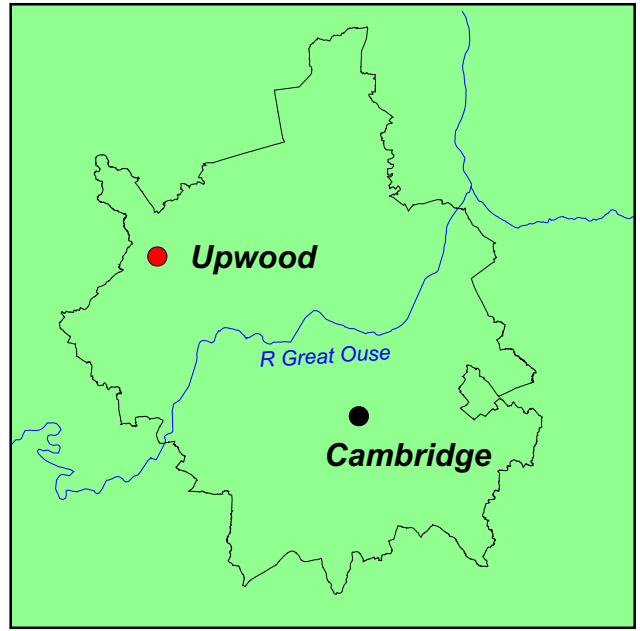
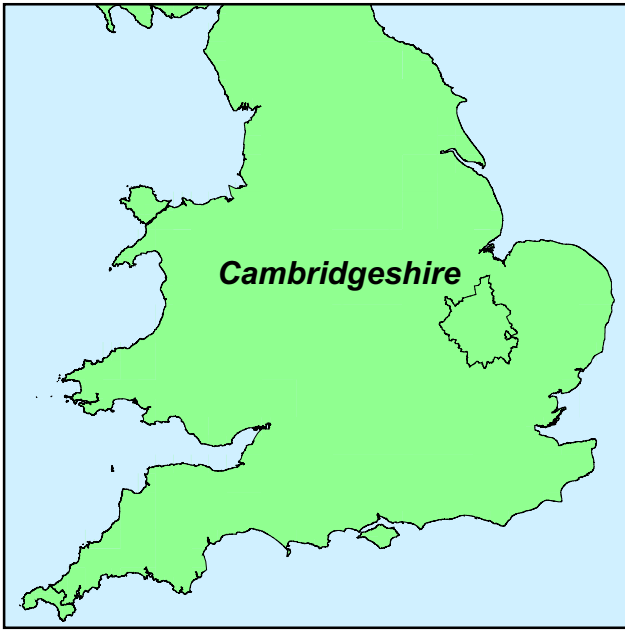
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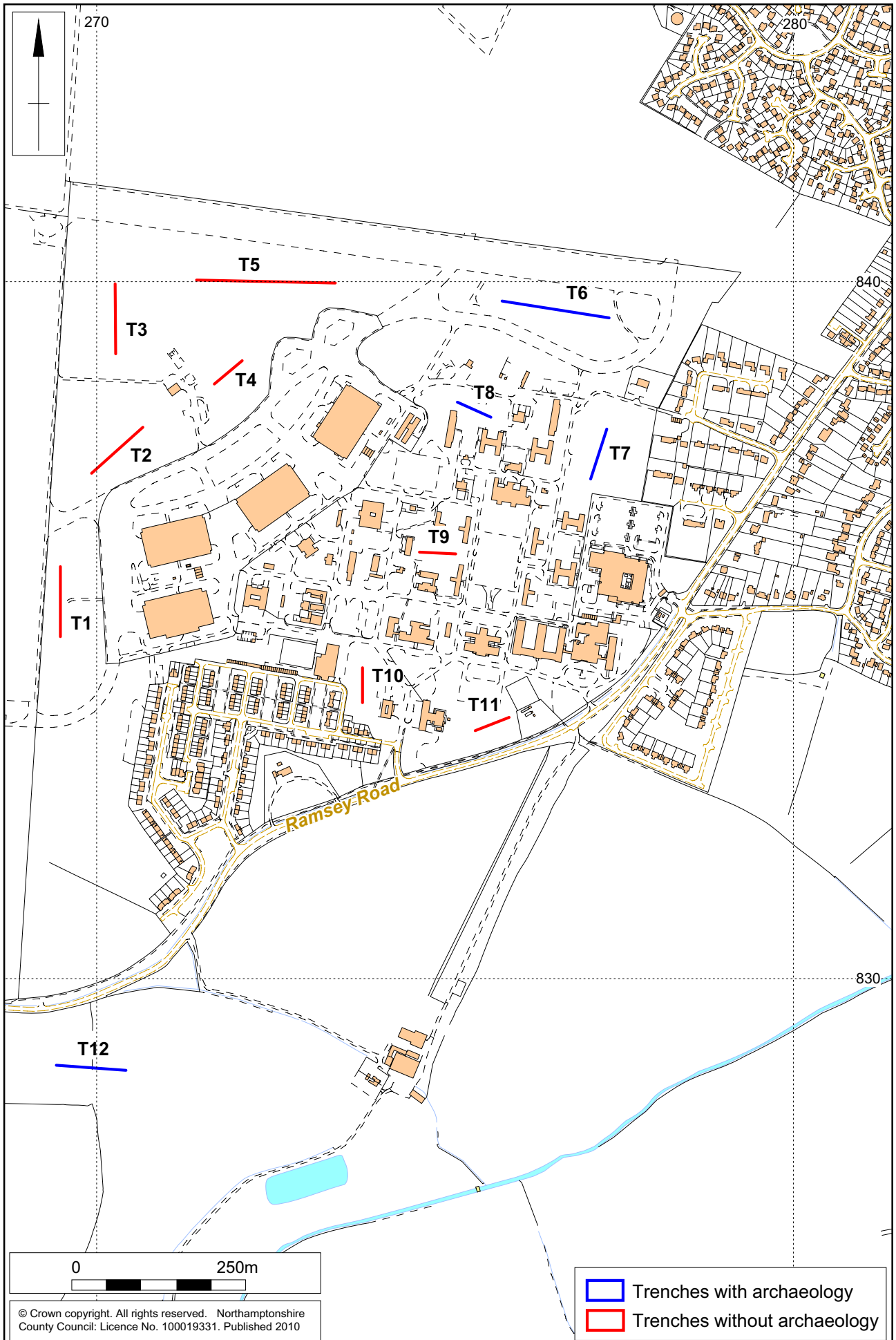
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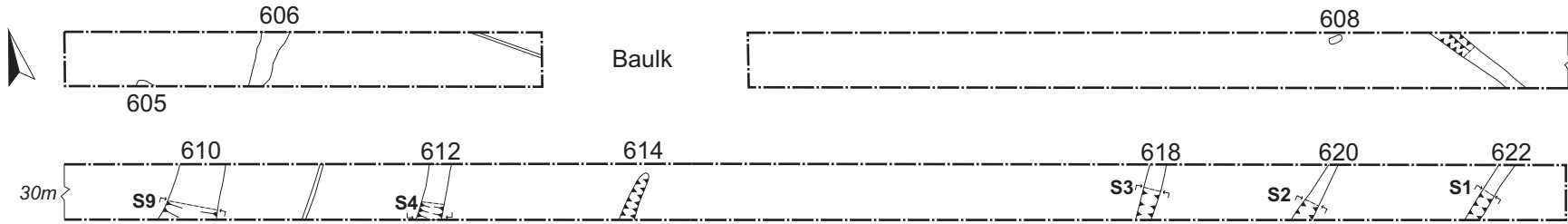
Site Location Fig 1



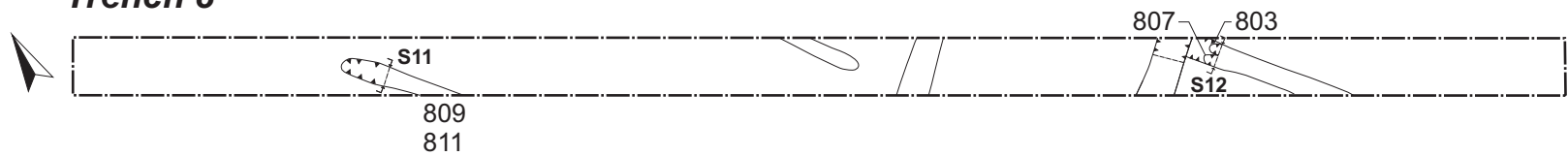
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Trench locations Fig 2

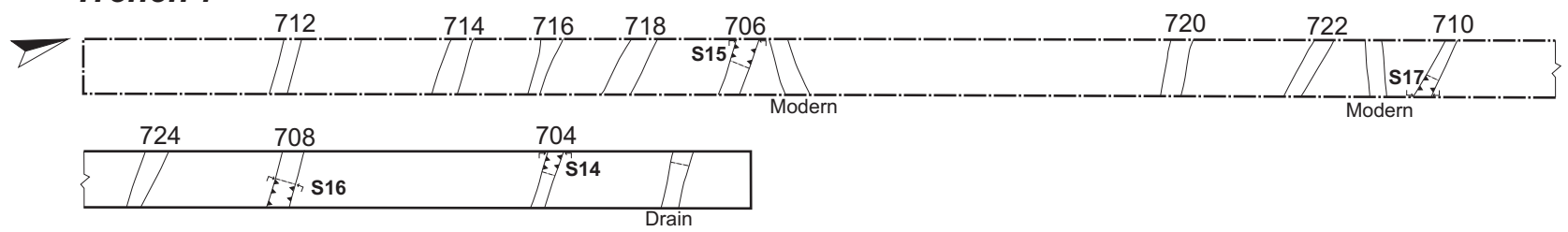
Trench 6



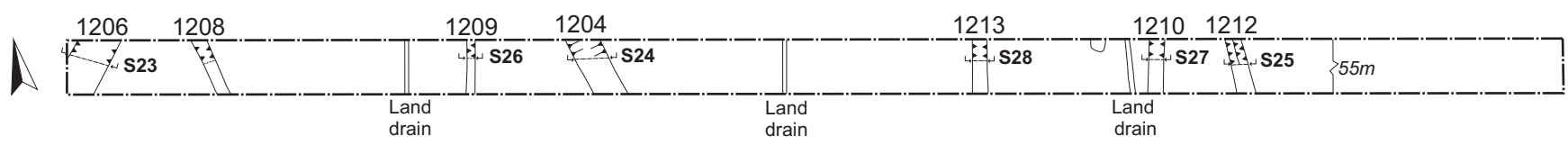
Trench 8



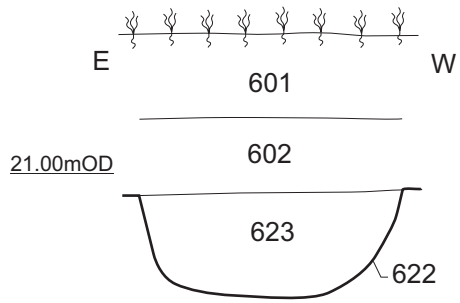
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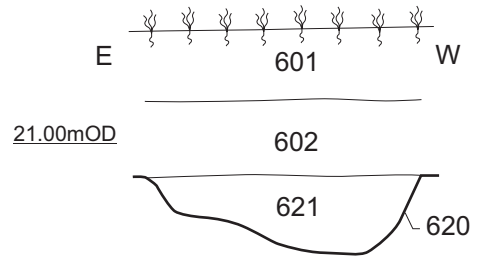
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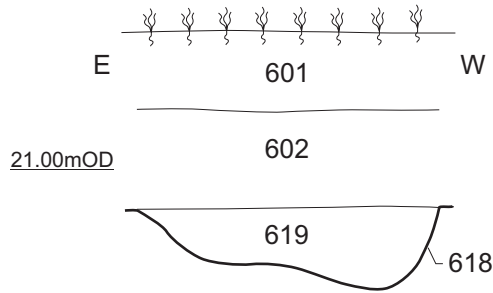
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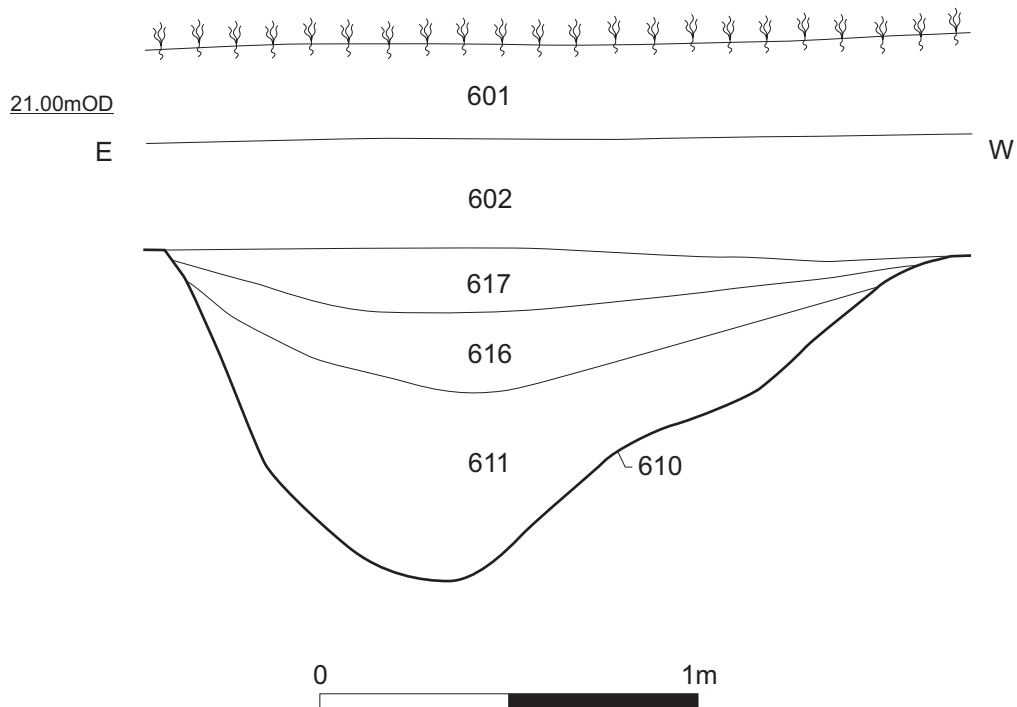
Section 2



Section 3



Section 9



Trench 6, gully sections 1, 2 and 3 and ditch section 9 Fig 4



Trench 6, ditch [610], looking south Fig 5



Trench 6, gully [612], looking south Fig 6



Trench 6, gully [618], looking south Fig 7



Trench 6, gully [620], looking south Fig 8

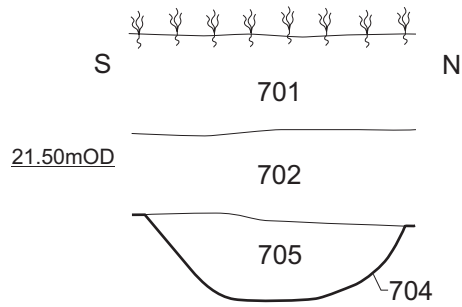


Trench 6, gully [622], looking south Fig 9

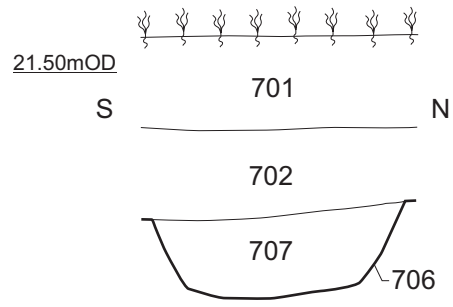


Trench 7, gully [709], looking east Fig 10

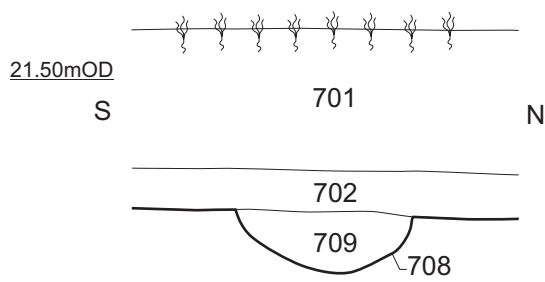
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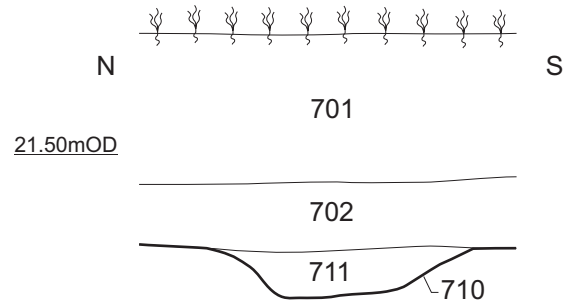
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Section 16

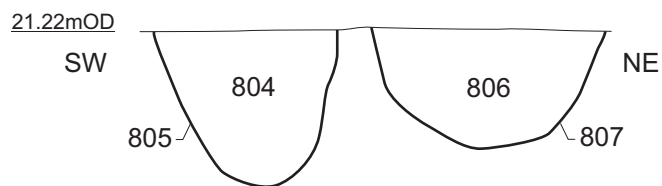


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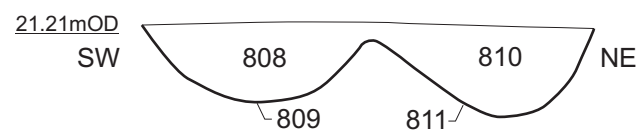


Gully 7, sections 14,15,16 and 17 Fig 11

Section 11



Section 12



Gully 8, sections 11 and,12 Fig 12

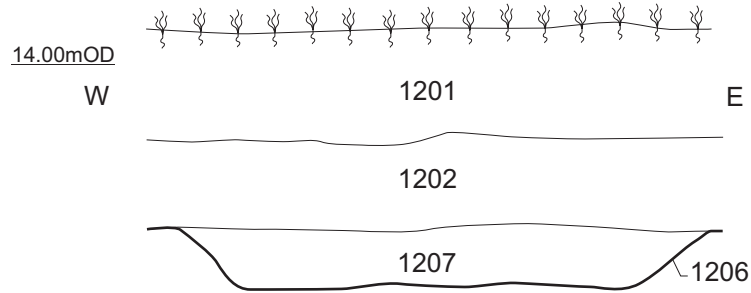


Trench 7, gully [710], looking east Fig 13

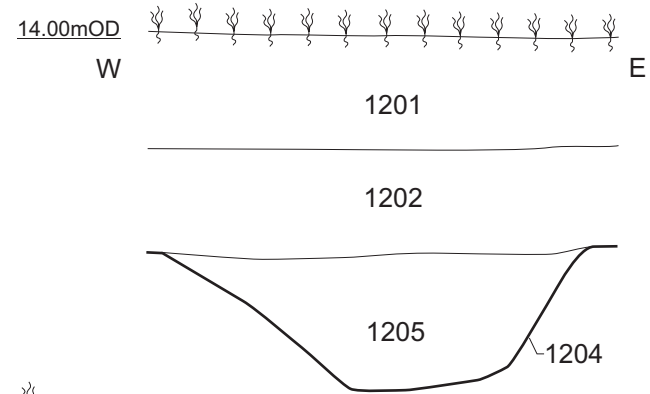


Trench 7, gully [707], looking west Fig 14

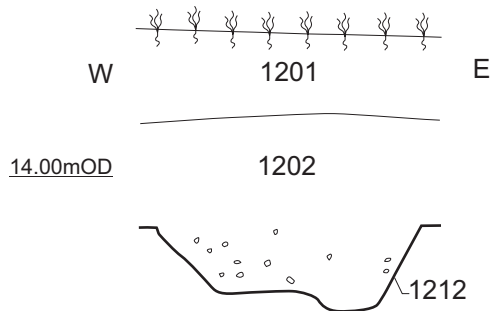
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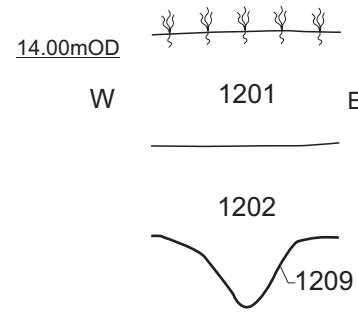
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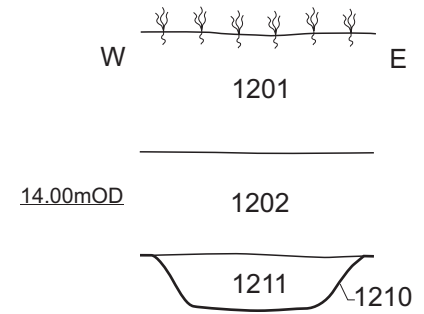
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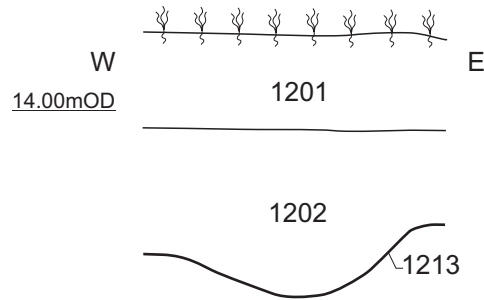
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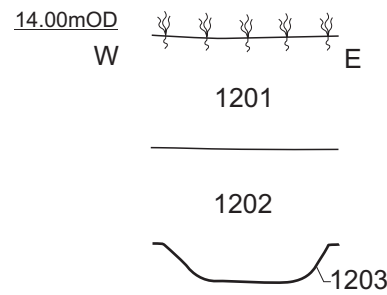
Section 27



Section 28



Section 29





Trench 12, ditch [1206], looking north-east Fig 16



Trench 12, ditch [1204], looking north Fig 17



Trench 12, plough scar [1208], looking north Fig 18



Trench 12, plough scar [1209], looking north Fig 19