



Northamptonshire
County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

**Archaeological Evaluation for the
East Coast Main Line (ECML)
Hitchin Grade Separation
Hertfordshire**

December 2008 and March 2009



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April 2009

Report 09/37

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(Front page illustration: Detail from 'A mapp of Hartfordshire' by Richard Blome, 1673)

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Archaeological Evaluation for the East Coast Main Line (ECML) Hitchin Grade Separation, Hertfordshire	
Short description	An archaeological evaluation was carried out along the proposed route of the East Coast Main Line Hitchin Grade Separation, Hertfordshire. The earliest archaeological remains, which date to the early Bronze Age, were encountered at the western end of the site and comprised two intercutting pits, one of which contained a sherd from a decorated beaker. Nearby, a Neolithic scraper and a late Neolithic/early Bronze Age barbed-and-tanged arrowhead were found in the ploughsoil. Several shallow pits containing sherds of early Middle Iron Age pottery were also identified in the same area. Close to Stotfold Road, a small ditch forming one side of a possible rectangular enclosure was found to contain a sherd of Roman greyware. An unmetalled track bounded by side ditches, which probably dates to the Iron Age, ran roughly parallel and to the west of Stotfold Road, in the direction of the hillfort on Wilbury Hill. A cluster of medieval/post-medieval quarry pits and the remains of 19th century field ditches were also identified. Several features, including a large area of possible quarrying on the ridge at the east end of the site, remain undated.	
Project type	Trial trench evaluation	
Previous work	Field walking survey, Essex Field Archaeology Unit 2008 Geophysical survey, GSB Prospection Ltd 2008	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period	None	
Significant finds (artefact type and period)	Early Bronze Age pits, early Middle Iron Age pits, possible Iron Age track way	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Hertfordshire	
Site address	Stotfold Road to Arlesey Road, Hitchin	
OS NGR (approximate centre)	5196 2316	
Height aOD	55-64m	
Area	8ha	
Land use	Arable	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA)	
Project Brief originator	Jim Keyte, Arup	
Project Design originator	Adam Yates, NA	
Director/Supervisor	Simon Carlyle, NA	
Project Manager	Adam Yates, NA; Jim Keyte, Arup	
Sponsor or funding body	Ove Arup and Partners Ltd	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	15th December 2008	
End date	13th March 2009	
ARCHIVES	Location	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Accession no. pending		
Physical	Hitchin Museum	Pottery, flint, tile (1 box) Site records (1 box)
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title	Archaeological Evaluation for the East Coast Main Line (ECML) Hitchin Grade Separation, Hertfordshire	
Serial title and volume	09/37	
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION FOR THE
EAST COAST MAIN LINE (ECML)
HITCHIN GRADE SEPARATION
HERTFORDSHIRE
DECEMBER 2008 AND MARCH 2009**

Location:	Hitchin
Parish:	Hitchin
District:	North Hertfordshire
National grid reference:	TL 196 316 (approximate centre)
Planning application reference:	Unknown
Museum accession number:	To be issued on deposition of archive
Client name:	Ove Arup and Partners Ltd
Fieldwork (Trenches 1-6):	15th and 16th December 2008
Fieldwork (Trenches 7-41):	2nd to 13th March 2009

Abstract

In December 2008 and March 2009, an archaeological evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology along the proposed route of the East Coast Main Line Hitchin Grade Separation, Hertfordshire. The earliest archaeological remains, which date to the early Bronze Age, were encountered at the western end of the site and comprised two intercutting pits, one of which contained a sherd from a decorated beaker. Nearby, a Neolithic scraper and a late Neolithic/early Bronze Age barbed-and-tanged arrowhead were found in the ploughsoil. Several shallow pits containing sherds of early Middle Iron Age pottery were also identified in the same area. Close to Stotfold Road, a small ditch forming one side of a possible rectangular enclosure was found to contain a sherd of Roman greyware. An unmetalled track bounded by side ditches, which probably dates to the Iron Age, ran roughly parallel and to the west of Stotfold Road, in the direction of the hillfort on Wilbury Hill. A cluster of medieval/post-medieval quarry pits and the remains of 19th century field ditches were also identified. Several features, including a large area of possible quarrying on the ridge at the east end of the site, remain undated.

1 INTRODUCTION

In December 2008 and March 2009, an archaeological evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) along the proposed route of the East Coast Main Line (ECML) Hitchin Grade Separation, Hertfordshire (site centred on NGR TL 196 316; Fig 1). The aim of the grade separation is to increase capacity and reliability on the ECML and Cambridge branch line. It will involve constructing a fly-over to the north of the current junction, to allow

northbound Cambridge bound trains to cross over the ECML without conflicting with ECML trains.

The work, which comprised the excavation of 41 trial trenches (1,230 linear metres; 2,460m²), was commissioned by Ove Arup and Partners Ltd (Arup), acting on behalf of Network Rail.

The trial trench evaluation forms part of a wider scheme of archaeological investigation that will be incorporated in an Environmental Assessment for the railway project. Previous archaeological investigation of the proposed development area comprised a field walking survey (ECCFAU 2008) and a geophysical survey (GSB 2008), which identified several areas of archaeological potential.

The project objectives, as outlined in the project design prepared by NA (2008), were to:

- determine the location, extent, character, date, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by the development,
- include an assessment of the regional context within which the remains are located in order to highlight research priorities relevant to further investigation on the site with reference to the relevant research agendas,
- provide a predictive model of archaeological remains likely to be present on the site as a whole and an assessment of their significance.

Reference has been made to the national research agenda, as set out by English Heritage (EH 1998), and the archaeological resource assessment and regional research framework for the Eastern Counties of England (Glazebrook 1997; Brown and Glazebrook 2000).

The work was carried out in accordance with the approved project design prepared by NA (2008) with reference to the tender documentation supplied by Arup. The project design complied with Appendix 2 of the English Heritage procedural document *Management of Archaeological Projects* (EH 1991) and appropriate national standards and guidelines, as recommended by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA). This report details the results of the trial trench evaluation.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The site is located c 2.5km to the north-north-east of Hitchin town centre, Hertfordshire (Fig 1). The route of the proposed railway corridor extends from Cadwell Crossing on the ECML, to the south of Cadwell village, then curves eastwards, crossing the site of a disused sewage works and three arable

fields, to the point where it joins the Cambridge branch line at Stotfold Road. The area of the sewage works was excluded from the evaluation.

The ground is gently undulating, with a general incline from north-west to south-east, the ground rising from c 55m aOD near the sewage works to c 64m aOD on the ridge close to Stotfold Road. The River Hiz lies to the west of the site, flowing northwards past Ickleford and Cadwell. The River Purwell, a tributary of the River Hiz, flows to the south of the site and reaches its confluence with the River Hiz at Walsworth.

The underlying bedrock is Cretaceous Chalk (Middle and Lower Chalk Groups). During the evaluation, evidence was noted of possible periglacial and solution features. Deposits of glacial till associated with the Anglian Glaciation are mapped to the east and west of the site (BGS 1996). The soils belong to the Swaffham Prior (511e) Soil Association and generally comprise well-drained calcareous coarse and fine loamy soils over chalk rubble (SSEW 1983).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

There are a number of prehistoric and Roman sites in the surrounding area (Fig 1) that have been identified with reference to the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) (sites with the prefix MHT), National Monument Record (NMR) and reports on previous archaeological work for the ECML project (ECCFAU 2008, GSB 2008 and WPCM 2008).

The proposed route of the railway link passes through an area of chalk downland, at the extreme north-east end of the Chiltern Hills, which has been favoured for settlement and farming since the Neolithic. The low-lying downland lies within the Hitchin Gap, a geographical break in the chalk ridge that extends from Norfolk to the Upper Thames region and offers a natural route from north to south.

In the immediate vicinity, on the chalk ridge c 0.5km to the north of the proposed railway corridor, cropmarks identified from aerial photographs have revealed a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age cemetery, comprising six round barrows and one possible satellite barrow, c 120m to the south. Two large ring ditches at the base of the slope to the south-east may be the ploughed-out remains of two further barrows. To the east of Stotfold Road, two barrows have been identified (NMR 365784), one of which is visible on the surface as a flattened, tree-covered mound.

On Wilbury Hill, to the north-east, are the remains of an Iron Age hillfort, the western ramparts of which can still be seen by the side of Stotfold Road (NMR 365779). The hillfort comprised a single-ditched enclosure and internal bank, which may have had up to three phases and enclosed an area of 5.5ha. There was a fortified entrance on the south side. Excavations in the 1930s identified hut circles, storage pits and two smaller, internal enclosures, with evidence for initial occupation in the late Bronze Age (Applebaum 1949; Williamson 2000). The settlement was finally abandoned in the Roman period.

The hillfort on Wilbury Hill is located on the route of Icknield Way, an ancient track way that predates the Roman occupation and follows the chalk escarpment from Norfolk, along the Chilterns, down into the Upper Thames Valley. The track ways identified by the geophysical survey (GSB 2008), one leading roughly parallel to Stotfold Road towards Wilbury Hill and the other running past the barrow cemetery on the Icknield Way, are probably associated with the hillfort and date to the Iron Age.

Aside from the Roman settlement on Wilbury Hill, the remains of Roman settlement and activity have also been located on the banks of the River Purwell, c 1km to the south-west. These include: a cremation cemetery (MHT 1207); an inhumation burial (MHT 1428); and the discovery of a number of Roman artefacts (MHT 1205, 1208 and 1209). In the wider area, there was a Roman settlement at Great Wymondley (NMR 365083) and a Roman building, possibly a villa, has been located c 2km to the south-east of the site, on the east bank of the River Purwell (NMR 365078). To the east, the route of a major Roman road (NMR 1044830) runs in a northerly direction towards the Roman small town at Baldock (NMR 365755), which was established on the site of a Late Iron Age *oppidum*. Stotfold Road may follow the line of a minor Roman road linking the settlement at Great Wymondley with the Icknield Way (Applebaum 1949, 13).

Hitchin, which derives its name from the River Hiz that flows through the town, is first recorded in the Tribal Hidage, a 7th century document that was probably drawn up when the region was incorporated into the Kingdom of Mercia (Stenton 1971). In this document, the town is associated with a people called the *Hicce* (EPNS 1938; Lewis 1848). Interestingly, the name of the people and the river derives from the Brittonic word **sicca*, meaning 'dry', and it is possible that the people took their name from the river and were of British, as opposed to Saxon descent. In 792 a religious house was founded at Hitchin by Offa, King of Mercia, and the town is recorded as a royal manor in the Domesday Book of 1086 (Page 1912).

Medieval ridge and furrow cultivation has been identified from aerial photographs in fields to the north of Icknield Way (WCPM 2008).

3 METHODOLOGY

The trenches were marked out using Leica System 1200 GPS, and were positioned in accordance with the trench location plan provided by Arup. In general, the trenches were positioned to target anomalies detected by the geophysical survey or concentrations of artefacts collected by the field walking survey. Trenches were also located in apparently blank areas where there were no geophysical anomalies to ensure that undetected archaeological remains did not occur within these areas. The trenches were excavated using a 14 tonne 360° tracked excavator fitted with a 2.0m wide toothless ditching bucket. All overburden was stripped under archaeological supervision, with the topsoil and subsoil stacked separately and adjacent to the trenches. Mechanical excavation proceeded to the top of the archaeological deposits, to the limits of safe working practice or to the natural substrate where no archaeology was encountered.

Archaeological excavation and recording followed the guidelines outlined in the NA *Archaeological Fieldwork Manual* (2003). Trenches containing archaeological remains were cleaned by hand, sufficient to define the features. Each feature or deposit was given a unique number consisting of the trench number and an individual context number (e.g. 1402, Trench 14, context 2). The details of each context were recorded on *pro-forma* sheets. The trenches were planned (scale 1:50) and section drawings were made at an appropriate scale (1:10 or 1:20). Levels, which were related to Ordnance Datum, were taken on the trenches at appropriate points, on section datum and on all major features. Trench locations were related to the Ordnance Survey National Grid. A photographic record was made of the excavation, using both 35mm colour transparency and black and white negative films, supplemented by digital images.

Artefacts and ecofacts were collected by hand and retained, receiving appropriate care prior to removal from site (Watkinson and Neal 1998). The spoil heaps and features were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval. At one end of each trench the topsoil and subsoil from an area 1m² was hand-sorted in order to assess the presence of any prehistoric artefacts.

Unstratified animal bones and modern material were not retained. Samples were taken for flotation from dateable contexts with the potential for the recovery of charcoal and carbonised plant remains, in accordance with EH guidelines (2002).

All works were carried out in accordance with the IFA *Code of Conduct* (1985, revised 2006) and the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (1994, revised 2001). In addition, all works complied with the guidelines set out in *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003). All procedures complied with Northamptonshire County Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines. The guidelines of the Society of Museum Archaeologists (SMA 1993) will be followed in the preparation of the archive. The project was monitored by Jim Keyte, Senior Archaeologist for Arup.

4 TRIAL TRENCH RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The fieldwork, comprising the excavation of 41 trial trenches (1,230 linear metres; 2,460m²; Fig 2), all of which were 30m long and 2m wide, was undertaken in two phases. The first phase was undertaken on the 15th and 16th December 2008 and comprised 6 trenches (Trenches 1-6) located in the field at the western end of the proposed rail corridor, adjacent to the former sewage works. The main phase (Trenches 7-41) commenced on 2nd March 2009 and was completed on 13th March.

The site has been divided into two areas: the Railway Corridor (Trenches 1-21); and the Compound Area (Trenches 22-41). A summary of the features in each trench is provided in Appendix 1 at the end of this report. Context

numbers in squared brackets denote cuts, those in parentheses or without brackets, deposits.

4.2 Railway Corridor (Trenches 1-21; Figs 3-5)

General

The route of the proposed railway corridor extends eastwards from Cadwell Crossing on the East Coast Main Line (ECML) north of Hitchin to the railway embankment on the Cambridge branch line, c 200m to the east of the bridge that carries the track over Stotfold Road (Fig 2). The western end of the route crosses the site of a disused sewage works and was not included in the archaeological evaluation. From the sewage works the route crosses three arable fields, separated by hedgerows; there is a pronounced drop in ground level of up to a metre, probably caused by ploughing and erosion, at the boundary between the eastern and central fields.

Overlying the chalk bedrock was intermittent subsoil, comprising mid orangey-brown silt, which was up to 0.5m thick on lower slopes and in natural hollows. The ploughsoil was dark greyish-brown organic silt, approximately 0.3m thick. The topsoil and subsoil contained occasional to moderate chalk pebbles, with greater quantities occurring on the higher ground where ploughing was scarring the underlying chalk.

There were no archaeological features in Trenches 1-3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17 and 21. The geophysical anomalies targeted by these trenches were shown to be of natural origin, possibly formed under periglacial conditions or by ongoing erosion of the bedrock.

Trench 4

Near the centre of the trench there were two shallow, oval or circular pits, both of which extended beyond the limits of excavation (Fig 3, Section 1; Plate 1). The earlier of the two pits [408] was 0.91m long and 0.26m deep and had moderately steep sides and a concave base. It was filled with leached, mid brown silt (407) with very occasional chalk pebbles. Its southern edge was cut by pit [406], which measured 1.55m long by 0.35m deep and had steep, concave sides and a slightly concave base. It had two fills: a primary fill (405) comprising mid greyish-brown silt with gritty/sandy lenses, which were probably formed by the weathering of the pit sides; and an upper fill (404) of dark grey silt with occasional charcoal flecks. A flint flake was recovered from the primary fill and two sherds of early Bronze Age pottery from the upper fill.

Trench 7

At the south-west end of the trench (Fig 3) there were two features that appear as possible ditches on the geophysical survey plot. No artefactual evidence was recovered from either feature and excavation was inconclusive in determining whether they were archaeological or natural in origin.

A possible ditch [705], measuring c 0.8m wide and 0.3m deep, was aligned east to west and had a flattened, V-shaped profile and a narrow concave

base offset to the south-west (Fig 3; Section 10). Its fill (704) comprised mid orangey-brown fine sandy silt with occasional chalk pebbles.

Feature [707], a possible ditch terminus, lay c 2m to the south of [705]. It had a V-shaped profile, was fairly irregular in plan and measured 0.9m wide by 0.26m deep. The fill (706) was similar to (704), although it was slightly greyer in colour.

Trench 9

Two possible features were identified in Trench 9, tentatively interpreted as a ditch terminus and a small pit (Fig 3). The ditch [905] extended to the south, had a V-shaped profile with a narrow concave base and measured c 1.2 m wide by 0.45m deep (Fig 3, Section 8). The primary fill was mid to dark brown fine sandy silt (906), overlain by mid orangey-brown fine sandy silt (904); both deposits contained occasional chalk pebbles and very occasional charcoal flecks.

The possible pit [909] was located to the south, near the centre of the trench. It had a diameter of c 0.6m and was 0.28m deep (Fig 3, Section 9). The fill was mid brown sandy silt (908). Neither fill produced any finds.

Trench 11

At the northern end of the trench there was a cluster of four, possibly five shallow, irregular pits (Fig 4), two of which contained sherds of Iron Age pottery. A number of other possible features in the central and southern part of the trench were shown by excavation to be of natural origin. Two of the 'pits' may have been created by tree throw.

The largest pit [1117] was 1.0m wide, 0.23m deep and extended beyond the limits of excavation to the east (Fig 4, Section 17). It had a broad, shallow, irregular profile and was filled with mid yellowish-brown fine sandy silt (1116), up to 0.23m thick, overlain by a thin deposit, up to 0.07m thick, of dark greyish-brown sandy silt with occasional charcoal flecks (1115). The upper fill contained a small quantity of early Middle Iron Age pottery, and a single charred cereal grain and seeds of fat hen (*Chenopodium album*) were recovered from a soil sample taken from this deposit.

Adjacent to pit [1117] were two irregular, roughly oval pits, [1110] and [1114]. Pit [1110] was 0.98m long, 0.75m wide and 0.18m deep and was filled with mid yellowish-brown fine sandy silt (1109). Pit [1114] measured 1.20m long by 0.74m wide by 0.20m deep (Fig 4, Section 18) and contained a similar fill (1113), from which was recovered a small quantity of animal bone.

Several metres to the south of these three pits were two very irregular features, [1106] (Fig 4, Section 12) and [1112], which were probably created by tree throw but contained fills similar to the pits, as opposed to the more orangey fills of the natural features further to the south. A sherd of early Middle Iron Age pottery was recovered from [1112].

Trench 13

This trench was targeted on a concentration of Iron Age pottery collected by the fieldwalking survey. A large, irregular feature [1306], possibly a quarry pit comprising a number of very irregular, undifferentiated pits and scrapings, was located in the northern half of the trench. It was at least 4m long and 0.46m deep and was filled with light brown chalky silt (1305) weathered from the sides, overlain by sterile dark brown silt (1304) derived from gradual infilling. Frequent complete snail shells in the upper fill suggest that the pit had remained open for some time. No dating evidence was recovered from the feature but it was sealed by the subsoil.

Trench 16

A modern ditch [1605], aligned north-west to south-east, was identified at the northern end of the trench (Fig 4, Section 6). It cut the subsoil and had a V-shaped profile and measured 0.85m wide by 0.55m deep. The fill contained a small quantity of brick rubble, the brick probably dating to the 19th century. The ditch corresponds to a field boundary shown on the 1884 edition Ordnance Survey map (1:10,560).

Trench 18

Passing through the centre of the trench on a north to south alignment was a possible ditch [1808], which may be associated with a possible quarry pit in Trench 19, as both features contained similar organic deposits with large quantities of snail shells. The ditch can be clearly seen on the geophysical survey plot, extending southwards from an apparent cluster of pits for a distance of c 120m.

The ditch was 2.0m wide and 0.76m deep and had four fills (Fig 4, Section 4). The earliest deposits, which had accumulated against the base and west facing slope of the ditch, were dark greyish-brown, almost black fine organic silt (1806) with moderate fine to medium chalk pebbles, and light yellowish-white degraded chalky silt (1807). The main fill of the ditch, which was up to 0.64m thick, was dark brown organic silt (1805) with frequent fine chalk pebbles. Overlying (1805) along the western edge of the ditch was a band of dark greyish-brown, almost black fine silt (1804), similar to the deposit at the base of the ditch.

A linear feature at the east end of the trench may be either a broad, shallow ditch or a naturally occurring band of dark silt in the soft bedrock. The feature [1811] was c 2.0m wide, 0.27m deep and had an indistinct profile. It was filled with sterile, dark brownish-grey silt (1810).

Trench 19

This trench had been positioned to target a cluster of pit-like features or a possible ditch shown on the geophysical survey plot. Excavation identified a large, irregular feature at the south-western end of the trench, possibly a quarry pit, and a smaller pit to the north-east.

The quarry pit [1910] was over 7.5m long and up to 0.8m deep and extended beyond the limits of excavation (Fig 5, Section 3; Plate 2). The primary

deposits, (1909) and (1908), largely comprised redeposited, degraded chalk, mixed with soil, and appear to have been cast up against the south-east side of the pit. The resulting cavity then silted up over time with dark greyish-brown, almost black fine silt (1906) that tended to become more compact and clayey (1907) towards the edge of the deposit. Chalk pebbles, snails shells and very occasional charcoal flecks occurred throughout these deposits. The presence of very small pieces of coal, recovered from the soil sample taken from (1907), suggests that the feature is medieval or later in date.

The pit [1905], which was roughly oval in plan and had indistinct edges, was 2.3m long, 0.97m wide and 0.49m deep (Fig 5, Section 2). It was filled with light to mid brownish-grey fine silt (1904) with very occasional chalk pebbles.

Trench 20

A small ditch [2005], corresponding to the possible rectangular enclosure ditch shown on the geophysical survey plot, was located at the south-west end of the trench (Fig 5). The ditch, which had a V-shaped profile and was filled with mid brown silt (2004), measured 1.1m wide by 0.47m deep (Fig 5, Section 7). A single undiagnostic body sherd of Roman greyware (Hylton pers comm) was recovered from near the base of the ditch.

4.3 Compound Area (Trenches 22-41; Figs 5-8)

General

The proposed compound area is situated at the east end of the railway corridor, adjacent to Stotfold Road, and covers an area of approximately 5.5ha (Plate 3). On the higher ground the subsoil was absent due to truncation by ploughing; on the lower slopes and low-lying ground it was up to 0.6m thick due to colluviation (hill-wash). A possible buried soil horizon was noted in two trenches (Trenches 27 and 33) near the base of an extensive depression in the local topography. The ploughsoil was dark greyish-brown organic silt, approximately 0.3m thick.

There were no archaeological remains in Trenches 21, 23-26, 31, 32, 35, 36 and 38.

Trench 22

Partially exposed at the northern end of the trench was a relatively large, undated pit [2204], measuring 1.65m wide by 0.44m deep (Fig 5, Section 14). The stony fill comprised dark grey silt (2203) with frequent chalk pebbles throughout, suggesting that the pit had been backfilled shortly after it was dug.

Trench 23

Aligned with the extant hedgerow to the west, there was a ditch at the northern end of the trench with a width of 0.85m and a depth of 0.39m. It cut the subsoil and contained modern (18th/19th century) tile and pottery. Not shown on early editions of the Ordnance Survey maps for the area, this

section of hedgerow was probably removed when the railway was constructed in the 1860s.

Trench 27

Trench 27 was located on an east-north-east-facing slope that dipped into a natural, broad depression in the topography, the axis of the depression extending to the north-north-west for a distance of c 150m. In the northern (downslope) half of the trench the chalk (2706) was overlain by a layer of dark greyish-brown gritty silt (2704), up to 0.32m thick, with occasional to moderate fine to medium chalk pebbles (Fig 6, Section 21; Plate 4). Above this was a layer of colluvium of a similar thickness, comprising dark brown silt (2703) with occasional chalk pebbles. The colluvium was sealed by subsoil and ploughsoil, with a combined thickness of approximately 1.0m. These deposits, which also occur in Trench 33, appear to have accumulated at the base of the depression and may relate to soil erosion associated with the clearance of the landscape for farming.

Trench 28

Running northwards across the western half of the trench, in the direction of Wilbury Hill, was a track way (2809) (Fig 6; Plate 5). It was defined by flanking ditches, spaced c 5.5m apart. The track way was also investigated in Trenches 29, 30, 34, 39 and 40.

The western ditch [2806] measured 1.0m wide by 0.21m deep and had short, steep concave sides and a flat base (Fig 6, Section 30). The eastern ditch [2808] had a narrower, V-shaped profile and measured 0.64m wide by 0.30m deep (Fig 6, Section 31). They were filled with light to mid brown silt with occasional fine to medium chalk pebbles. The ditches were sealed by a layer, approximately 0.2m thick, of firm, mid brown silt, which was in turn sealed by the subsoil (2802).

There was no evidence for a metalled surface, but in section between the ditches the subsoil (2802) became more compact and clayey (2803), suggesting that the soil structure had broken down due to churning by passing traffic. Several parallel striations between the two ditches are probably wheel ruts from horse drawn carts.

At the eastern end of the trench and cutting the subsoil were two large, modern pits, [2811] and [2813]. Investigation of pit [2811] found that it contained a sequence of loose, mixed deposits, suggesting that it had been backfilled shortly after excavation. They probably date to the 19th or 20th centuries.

Trench 29

Five small, parallel ditches were encountered, defining the route of the track way towards Wilbury Hill (Plate 6). The presence of five ditches suggests that the route had been slightly realigned, with the cutting of new flanking ditches when the original ones had silted up.

The ditch [2906] on the western side of the track way measured 0.7m wide by 0.13m deep and had a shallow, concave profile (Fig 7, Section 35).

Approximately 2m to the east was a pair of ditches, 0.7m apart: ditch [2908] was 1.1m wide and 0.22m deep and had short, steep, concave sides and a concave base; ditch [2910] was 1.2m wide and 0.26m deep and had moderately steep concave sides and a concave base (Fig 7, Section 37). The eastern ditches, [2912] and [2914], which were not excavated in this trench, lay c 6-7m further to the east of ditch [2910], and measured 0.6m and 1.2m wide respectively. All five ditches were filled with mid brown fine silt with occasional to moderate chalk pebbles.

A small gully [2904], which terminated c 3m to the west of ditch [2906], extended beyond the trench to the west (Fig 7, Section 34). It measured 0.35m wide by 0.12m deep and was filled with mid brown silt (2903) with occasional chalk pebbles.

Trench 30

Two ditches, spaced c 14m apart and forming part of the track way leading up to Wilbury Hill, were identified in the trench. The larger of the two ditches [3006] lay at the western end and measured c 4m wide by 0.52m deep, had relatively shallow sloping sides and a flat base (Fig 7, Section 38). The second ditch [3004], which was only 0.8m wide by 0.12m deep, lay at the eastern end of the trench and had a similar profile. Both ditches were filled with mid brown fine silt with occasional chalk pebbles.

Trench 33

There were no archaeological remains in this trench and the only feature of interest was a layer of dark soil (3303), similar to that encountered in Trench 27 (2704). It was up to 0.22 m thick and petered out c 6m from the north-east end of the trench. As in Trench 27, the soil had accumulated downslope, although there was no build-up of colluvium in this area.

Trench 34

At the western end of the trench there was a ditch [3405], aligned north to south, which measured 0.82m wide by 0.17m deep (Fig 8, Section 33). The fill comprised light orangey-brown fine silt (3404) with moderate chalk pebbles. From the geophysical survey plot, it can be seen that the ditch is the eastern flanking ditch of the track way leading to Wilbury Hill.

Trenches 37 and 41

In the north-west corner of the proposed compound area, the geophysical survey had identified a cluster of pit-like anomalies. Trenches 37 and 41 were positioned to investigate these features.

In both trenches there were a number of amorphous, irregular features cut into the chalk, varying in width from 0.5m to 5.3m across. Several of these features were excavated and they were shown to range in depth from between 0.08m and 0.63m. They were filled with mid brown silt that was indistinguishable from the overlying subsoil, which varied in thickness between 0.4 and 0.8m in this area. The only finds recovered from these pits was an abraded sherd of Iron Age pottery, several tiny fragments of animal

bone and a fragment of medieval/post-medieval tile. The pits were probably formed by quarrying activity in the medieval/post-medieval period.

Trench 39

At the west end of the trench there were two small, parallel ditches, spaced c 3m apart and aligned north to south (Fig 8). Ditch [3906] measured 1.4m wide by 0.24m deep and had a shallow, concave profile. Its primary fill (3905) was light to mid brown fine silt, up to 0.12m thick, with moderate to frequent chalk pebbles. The upper fill (3904) was mid brown fine silt, up to 0.12m thick, with occasional chalk pebbles. The smaller ditch [3911] to the east measured 0.65m wide by 0.25m deep and had a V-shaped profile with a narrow concave base. The fills, (3910) and (3909), were similar to those recorded in ditch [3906].

Roughly parallel to and lying between the two ditches was a narrow, linear feature [3908], measuring approximately 0.3m wide by 0.10m deep and filled with mid brown fine silt. There were several similar, parallel features further to the east, suggestive of cart wheel ruts.

Trench 40

Three parallel ditches, aligned north to south and forming part of the track way leading to Wilbury Hill, were encountered in the trench (Fig 8). The westernmost ditch [4011] had a shallow, splayed, concave profile and measured 1.1m wide and 0.14m deep (Fig 8, Section 24). Approximately 5m to the east, ditch [4009] had a width of 1.0m, a depth of 0.17m and had steeply concave sides and a concave base. A further 1.5m to the east, ditch [4007] had a V-shaped profile with a narrow concave base and measured 0.65m wide by 0.26m deep (Fig 8, Section 22). All three ditches were filled with mid brown fine silt with occasional to moderate chalk pebbles. In common with other trenches placed cross the route of the track way, there were a series of parallel wheel ruts between the ditches, one of which [4005] was excavated (Fig 8, Section 41).

5 THE FINDS

5.1 Worked flint by Yvonne Wolfram-Murray

In total, six pieces of worked flint were recovered, comprising four flakes, a scraper and an arrowhead. With the exception of two of the flakes, all of the material was recovered from the ploughsoil. The flint was in a moderate condition with a modest amount of post-depositional edge damage and three of the flints were heavily patinated. The flints were struck from translucent mid grey to greyish brown flint or light grey and mid grey banded flint and the raw material probably originated in local gravels.

Of the four flakes that were recovered, one was broken. The flake from Trench 17 (1701) was a heavily patinated primary flake that was soft hammer struck. The two flakes that were recovered from stratified contexts were from

the fill (405) of an Early Bronze Age pit [406] and the fill (2004) of a Roman ditch [2005].

The scraper recovered from Trench 8 (801) was a relatively large, heavily patinated disc scraper of Neolithic date. There was abrupt retouch on the convex distal end and semi-abrupt retouch on both convex lateral edges leaving the area around the striking platform untouched (Plate 7, 1). The heavily patinated barbed-and-tanged arrowhead from Trench 7 (701) dates to the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age. It was bi-facially invasively retouched, though both barbs and the tip had broken off; the breakages are old as these surfaces are also heavily patinated (Plate 7, 2).

5.2 Prehistoric pottery by Andy Chapman

A total of 52 sherds, weighing 197g, of hand-built pottery was recovered from five contexts, including three in Trench 11, which produced the majority of the assemblage. The material largely comprises small sherds, with an average weight of 3.8g/sherd.

The fill (404) of a small pit [408] produced five sherds. This group includes the rim from an early Bronze Age Beaker vessel. The core and outer surface are orange and the internal surface is grey-brown. The vessel is thin-walled, 5mm thick, with a simple rounded rim. The surviving fragment is decorated with five closely-spaced horizontal rows of comb impressed decoration (Plate 8, 1). The other four sherds are thicker-walled, 7mm thick, body sherds, generally oxidised and containing frequent pieces of angular flint up to 4mm long. This assemblage can be dated to the early Bronze Age by the presence of the Beaker sherd.

The second largest group comprises 19 sherds, weighing 80g, from the fill (1113) of a pit [1114] in Trench 11. There are seven non-joining and fragmentary sherds from a single vessel, a bowl in a sandy fabric, dark grey throughout, with a simple flat-topped rim with a concave neck. The sharp angle at the shoulder is decorated with deeply-impressed fingertip incisions, with the impression of the nail still clearly visible (Plate 8, 2). The other sherds are from vessels either in a similar sandy fabric or vessels containing crushed shell and sand. They have oxidised orange-brown surfaces and include sherds from a second thin-walled bowl with a simple flat-topped rim. The decorated vessel would be appropriate to the early Middle Iron Age, probably no later than around 300BC.

A group of similar size, 26 sherds, weighing 92g, comes from the fill (1115) of another nearby pit [1117] in Trench 11. This group contains only undiagnostic body sherds in a sandy fabric that is either grey throughout or has oxidised orange-brown surfaces, but the assemblage is consistent with that from fill (1113). A single sherd from another nearby feature, the fill (1111) of pit [1112] is also in a similar dark grey fabric, but containing crushed shell. It is likely that all of the feature group in Trench 11 can be dated to the early part of the Middle Iron Age.

The fill (3704) of pit [3706] contained a single small, abraded body sherd in a dark grey fabric containing crushed shell, but with no diagnostic features.

5.3 Ceramic roof tile by Pat Chapman

There are five sherds of roof tile, weighing 100g, from a modern field boundary ditch [2304](2303), a track way ditch [2910](2909) and a quarry pit [3711](3710). All the sherds are 12mm thick and made from hard, slightly coarse sandy clay, fired to shades of orange-brown, one with a partially reduced core of dark grey. The sherds are slightly abraded. There is a slight difference in the surfaces, with one being a bit rougher and the other slightly smoother from the manufacturing process. This type of roof tile could date from the 14th century to the early 19th century, just predating the introduction of machine-made tiles.

6 FAUNAL AND FLORAL REMAINS

6.1 Animal bone by Karen Deighton

A small quantity of animal bone (75g) was recovered from the fills of an early Middle Iron Age pit [1114], an Iron Age track way boundary ditch [3006] and a post-medieval quarry pit [3705]. Preservation was extremely poor with high levels of fragmentation and surface abrasion evident, suggesting that the bone had been exposed on the surface for a period of time before being buried. Poor preservation adversely affected identification and the recognition of butchery and canid gnawing. Only a horse molar and a fragment of large ungulate scapula could be identified from the fill (3005) of ditch [3006]. The small size of the assemblage precludes any further comment.

6.2 Charred seeds and molluscs by Karen Deighton

Three 40 litre soil samples were taken from archaeological features in three trenches. Samples were taken from an Early Bronze Age pit [406] in Trench 4, an early Middle Iron Age pit [1117] in Trench 11 and an undated 'quarry pit' [1910] in Trench 19.

The samples were processed using a modified siraf tank fitted with a 250 micron flot sieve and 500 micron mesh. The resulting flots were dried and examined under a microscope (x10 magnification). This material was assessed to ascertain the presence, nature and level of preservation of ecofacts. The potential contribution to the understanding of the site along with any future sampling strategies was considered. Identifications of molluscs were made with the aid of Kerney and Cameron (1994), Gloer and Meier-Brook (1994) and the Conchological Society website (www.conchsoc.org).

The ecofacts recovered from the soil samples are presented in Table 1 below. Plant remains were preserved by charring only and were fragmentary and abraded. Molluscs exhibited a low level of fragmentation and abrasion.

Table 1: Ecofacts by sample and context

Cut/fill	[406]/404	[1910]/1907	[1117]/1115
Sample no.	1	2	3
Feature	Bronze Age pit	Quarry pit?	Iron Age pit
Charcoal* (see Section 6.3)			3
Cereal			1
Fat hen (<i>Chenopodium album</i>)			5
Molluscs			
<i>Cochliopa lubrica/lubricella</i>	1	37	3
<i>Pupilla muscorum</i>	52	48	105
<i>Discus rotundatus</i>		207	
<i>Clausilia bidentata</i>		7	
<i>Vitrea sp</i>	69		37
<i>Bithynia leachii</i>		17	

*Key for charcoal: 1= present, 2=2-10, 3=10-20, 4=20-50, 5=50-100

Fat hen (*Chenopodium album*), seeds of which were recovered from pit [1117], was the only wild/weed plant taxa observed; it is ubiquitous on sites of human activity. The cereal grain from the same feature could only be categorised as wheat/barley (*Triticum/Hordeum*) due to poor preservation.

Due to the low number of mollusc taxa identified, any statements regarding the environment are tentative. Both *D.rotundatus* and *C.Bidentata* indicate moist, sheltered conditions whereas *P.muscorum* indicates exposed calcareous places, although it will live in walls. *B.leachii* was the only aquatic taxa present and lives in all kinds of slow flowing fresh water.

The reasonable preservation and overall numbers of molluscs suggest that if enough taxa could be identified some attempt could be made to understand the past environment of the site. With this in mind, should further excavation take place, incremental sampling of well-stratified, dateable features should be undertaken.

6.3 Charcoal by Dana Challinor

A small quantity of charcoal from an undated feature, possibly a quarry pit [1910], was submitted for identification. The standard identification procedures were followed, and the results are presented in Table 2 below. The indeterminate charcoal was consistent with Salicaceae type, but could not be confirmed as the charcoal was too friable to check the relevant anatomical characteristics. The few fragments which were less than 2mm in size were not identified but appeared to be comminuted oak (*Quercus* sp). The presence of very small pieces of coal suggests that the deposit is not prehistoric and probably dates to the medieval period or later. The condition of the charcoal was too crumbly or small to allow maturity analysis, but the hazel might be suitable for radiocarbon dating.

Table 2: Summary of charcoal identification

Description/species	Deposit (1907) Pit [1910]
<i>Corylus avellana</i> (hazel)	2
<i>Quercus</i> sp. (oak)	12
Indeterminate diffuse porous	1
Coal	3
Total	18

7 DISCUSSION

The trial trench evaluation identified several areas of archaeological interest which corresponded with areas of archaeological potential highlighted by the geophysical (GSB 2008) and fieldwalking surveys (ECCFAU 2008). There was a high correlation between the geophysical survey plot and features encountered in the trenches. Many of the features remain undated due to the paucity of finds.

The earliest archaeological remains were encountered at the west end of the railway corridor and comprised two separate groups of prehistoric pits and two flint implements recovered from the ploughsoil. The earliest pit group dates to the early Bronze Age and comprised two shallow, intercutting pits, one of which contained a sherd from a decorated beaker. The second pit group, a cluster of up to five shallow, irregular pits, three of which contained sherds of early Middle Iron Age (c 300 BC) pottery, lay c 260m to the south-east. The flint implements, which were found close to Trenches 7 and 8, were a Neolithic scraper and a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age barbed-and-tanged arrowhead.

The track way detected by the geophysical survey, which extends southwards from the hillfort on Wilbury Hill, crosses Stotfold Road and passes under the railway embankment, was investigated in six trenches. The unmetalled track way, which was defined by roughly parallel side ditches, was found to vary in width between 5m and 10m, and in places it had been slightly re-aligned and new side ditches cut. In Trench 28, at the bottom of the slope, the structure of the subsoil above the track way was more compacted and clayey, suggesting that the ground had been churned up by passing traffic. Between the side ditches in the majority of the trenches there were narrow striations running parallel with the ditches; these have been interpreted as cart wheel ruts. The termination of the track way at or close to the south entrance of the hillfort suggests that it is Iron Age in date, although there is no artefactual evidence to support this. The only find was a piece of medieval/post-medieval tile from the surface of one of the ditches.

Close to Stotfold Road, a small ditch, forming one side of a possible rectangular enclosure that extends to the south of the existing railway embankment, was found to contain a sherd of Roman greyware.

A cluster of intercutting medieval/post-medieval quarry pits was located in the north-west corner of the compound area. Elsewhere, the remains of 19th century field ditches were located; they are shown on the 1884 edition Ordnance Survey map of the area (www.oldmaps.com).

Several features, including a large area of possible quarrying on the ridge at the east end of the site, remain undated. The roughly linear feature, initially identified from aerial photographs, extending across the compound area from north-west to south-east, was shown by excavation to be a natural feature, probably of periglacial origin. The dark soil layer recorded in Trenches 27 and 33 may be a buried soil horizon, possibly predating the clearance of the land for farming, although it may have formed by natural soil/groundwater processes.

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APPENDIX 1 Summary of features

The following summary lists the archaeological features identified in each trench, their date (if known), depth below ground level and associated finds.

Abbreviations

B bone; F flint; P pottery; Br brick; T tile; EBA Early Bronze Age; MIA Middle Iron Age

Rail corridor (Trenches 1 to 21)

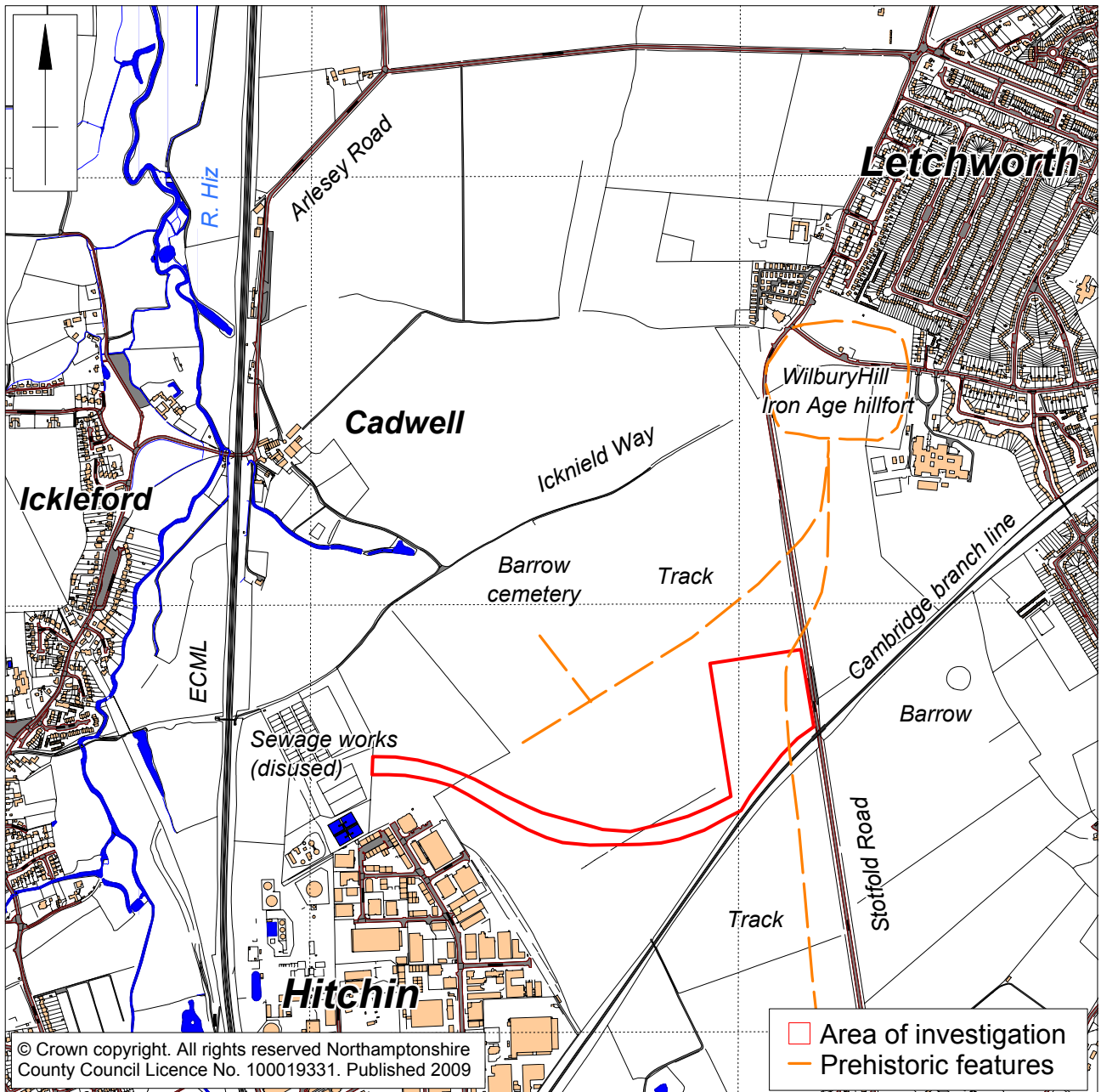
Trench no.	Context no.	Feature type	Date of feature	Depth ¹ (m)	Finds
1		No archaeology		0.20-0.63	-
2		No archaeology		0.41-0.51	-
3		No archaeology		0.31-0.40	-
4	[406] [408]	Pit Pit	EBA EBA	0.26-0.29	F P -
5		No archaeology		0.23-0.29	-
6		No archaeology		0.23-0.38	-
7	[705] [707]	Pit/ditch? Ditch?	Undated Undated	0.30-0.65	- -
8		No archaeology		0.29-0.37	-
9	[905] [909]	Ditch? Pit?	Undated Undated	0.35-0.39	- -
10		No archaeology		0.27-0.34	-
11	[1106] [1108] [1110] [1112] [1114] [1117]	Pit/gully? Tree bowl Pit? Pit? Pit Pit	Undated Undated Undated MIA MIA MIA	0.70-0.75	- - - P P B P
12		No archaeology		0.75-0.95	-
13	[1306]	Pit?	Undated	0.72-0.80	-
14		No archaeology		0.39-0.76	-
15		No archaeology		0.29	-
16	[1605]	Ditch	Modern (19th century)	0.31-0.41	Br
17		No archaeology		0.30-0.42	-
18	[1808] [1811]	Ditch Gully?	Undated Undated	0.30-0.95	- -
19	[1905] [1910]	Pit? Quarry pit?	Undated Undated	0.65-1.00	- -
20	[2005]	Ditch	Roman	0.30-0.90	P
21		No archaeology		0.30	-

¹ Depth of archaeological features, or natural substrate where no archaeology present, below ground level

Compound area (Trenches 22 to 41)

Trench no.	Context no.	Feature type	Date	Depth ¹ (m)	Findings
22	[2204]	Pit	Undated	0.30-0.35	-
23	[2305]	Ditch	Modern (19th century)	0.30	P T
24	No archaeology			0.31	-
25	No archaeology			0.33	-
26	No archaeology			0.32-0.53	-
27	2703	Colluvium	Undated	0.35-1.04	-
	2704	Buried soil?	Undated		-
28	2803	Layer (over track)	Undated	0.33	-
	[2806]	Ditch	Undated		-
	[2808]	Ditch	Undated		-
	2809	Track (with ruts)	Undated		-
	[2811]	Pit	Modern		-
	[2813]	Pit	Modern		-
29	[2904]	Gully	Undated	0.34	-
	[2906]	Ditch	Undated		-
	[2908]	Ditch	Undated		-
	[2910]	Ditch	Medieval/post-medieval		T
	[2912]	Ditch	Undated		-
	[2914]	Ditch	Undated		-
30	[3004]	Ditch	Undated	0.25	-
	[3006]	Ditch	Undated		-
31	No archaeology			0.29-0.41	-
32	No archaeology			0.31	-
33	3303	Buried soil?	Undated	0.49-0.89	-
34	[3405]	Ditch	Undated	0.30	-
35	No archaeology			0.30	-
36	No archaeology			0.68-0.78	-
37	[3706]	Quarry pit	Medieval/post-medieval	0.85-1.12	-
	[3708]	Quarry pit	Medieval/post-medieval		-
	[3710]	Quarry pit	Medieval/post-medieval		T
	[3712]	Quarry pit	Medieval/post-medieval		-
38	No archaeology			0.30	-
39	[3906]	Ditch	Undated	0.31-0.41	-
	[3908]	Gully	Undated		-
	[3911]	Ditch	Undated		-
40	[4005]	Ditch	Undated	0.33-0.40	-
	[4007]	Ditch	Undated		-
	[4009]	Ditch	Undated		-
	[4011]	Ditch	Undated		-
41	[4106]	Quarry pit	Undated	0.84-0.99	-

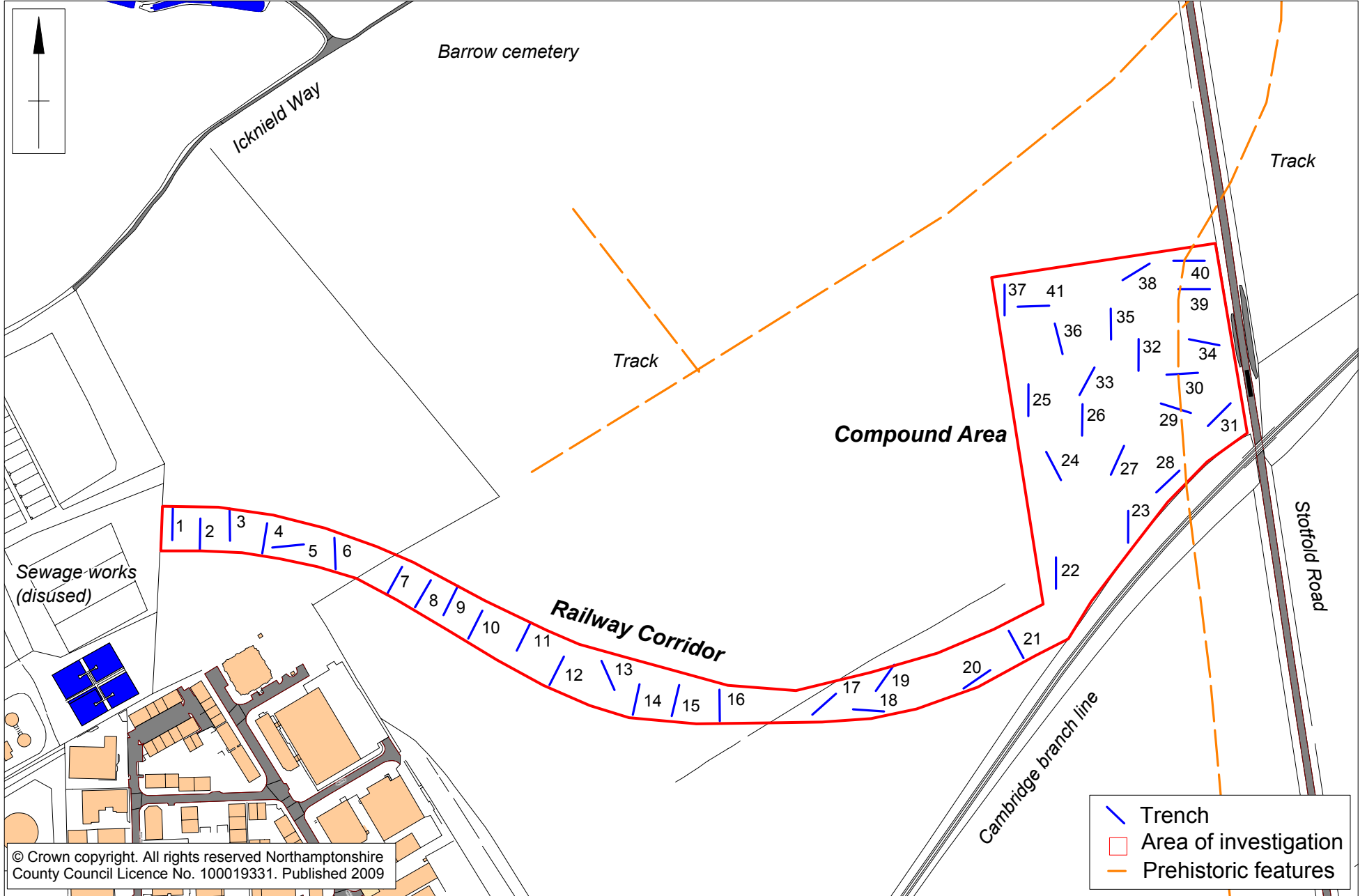
¹ Depth of archaeological features, or natural substrate where no archaeology present, below ground level



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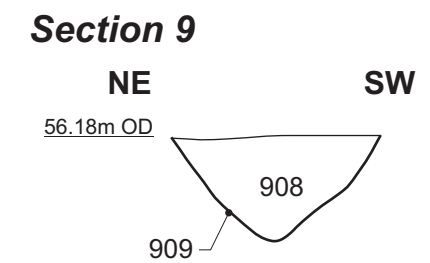
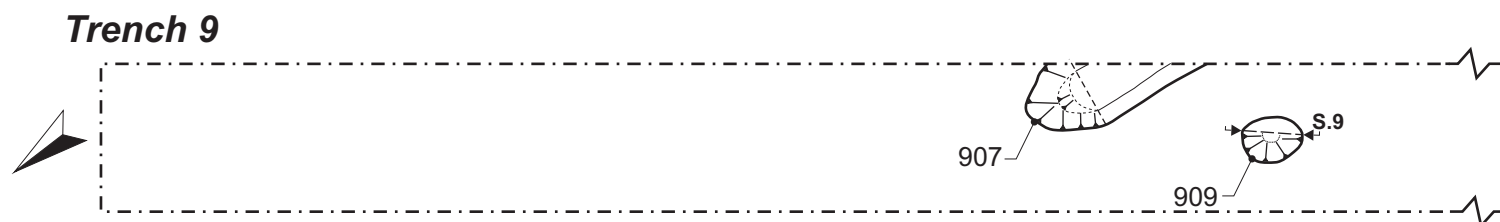
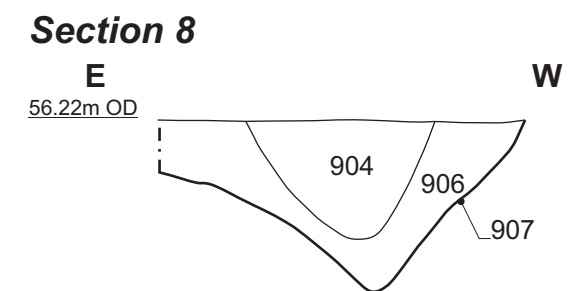
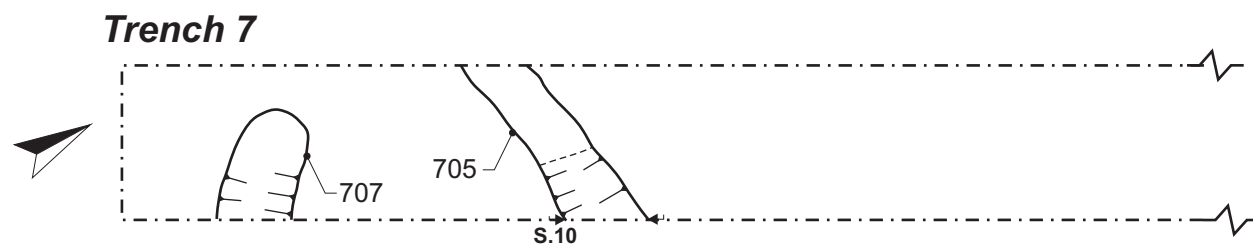
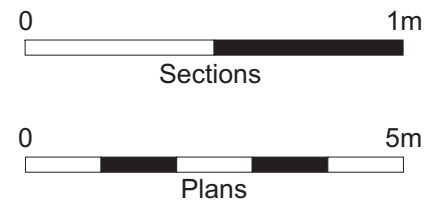
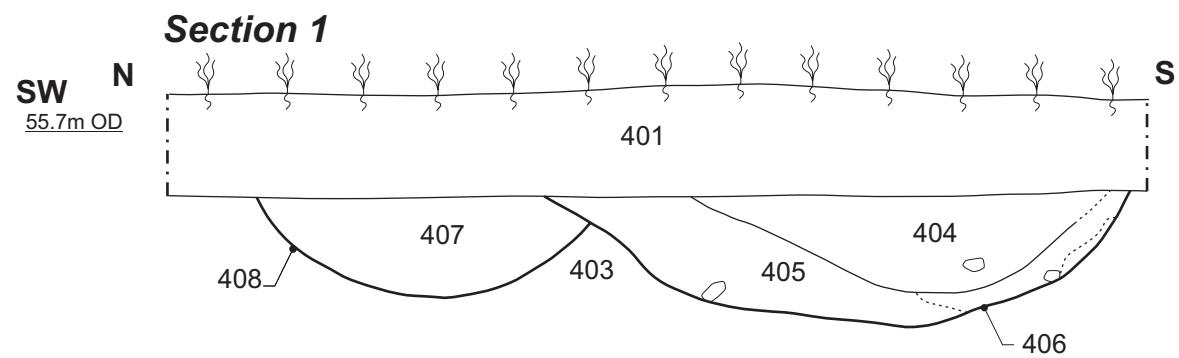
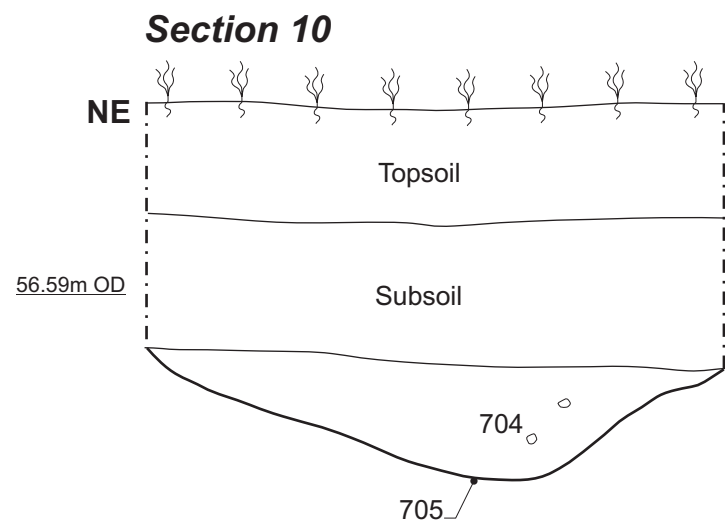
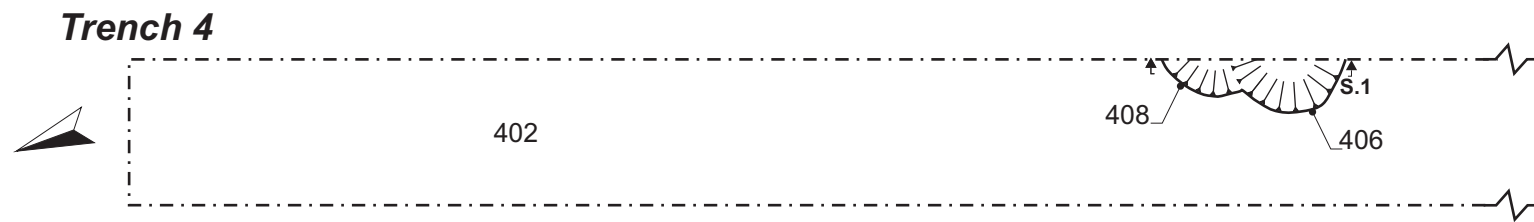
Site location Fig 1

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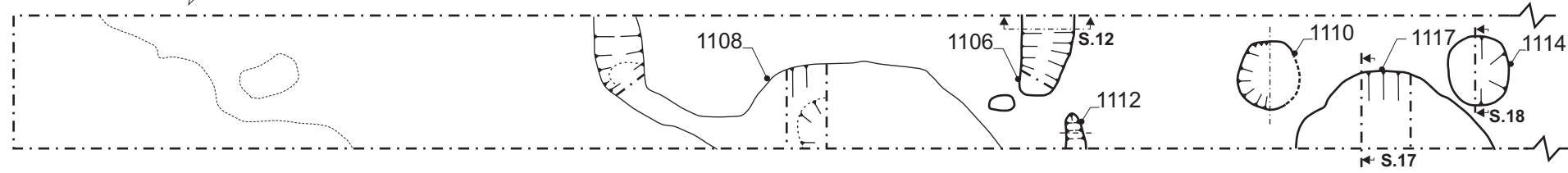
Trench locations Fig 2

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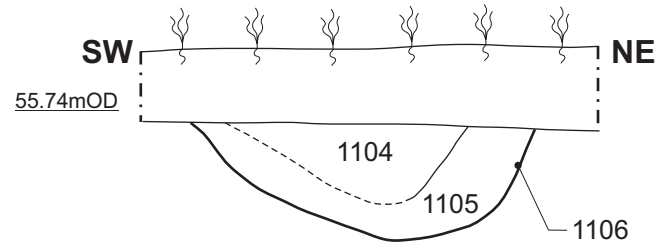


Trenches 4, 7 and 9, plans and sections Fig 3

Trench 11



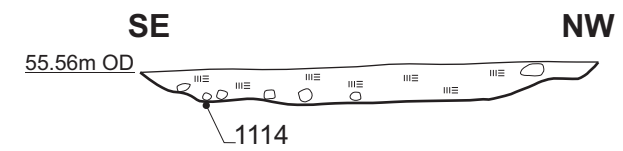
Section 12



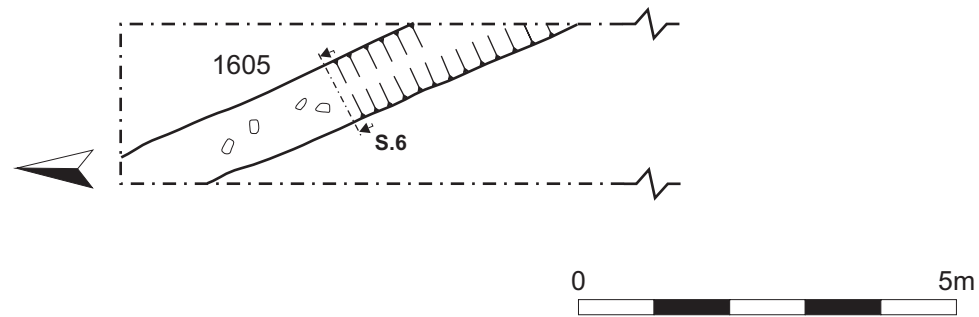
Section 17



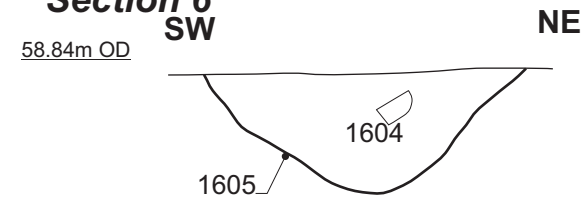
Section 18



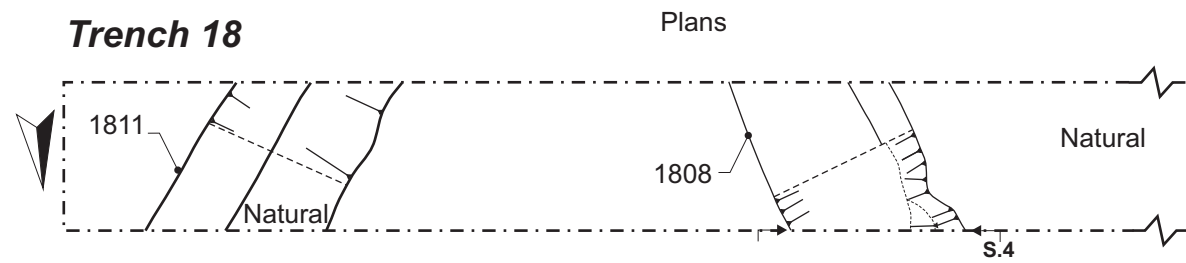
Trench 16



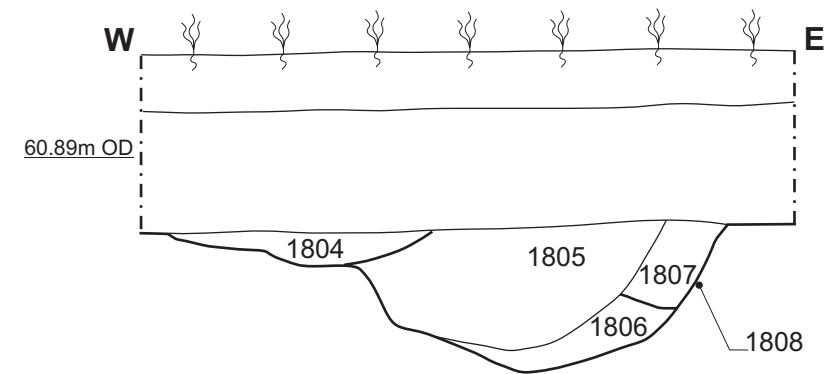
Section 6



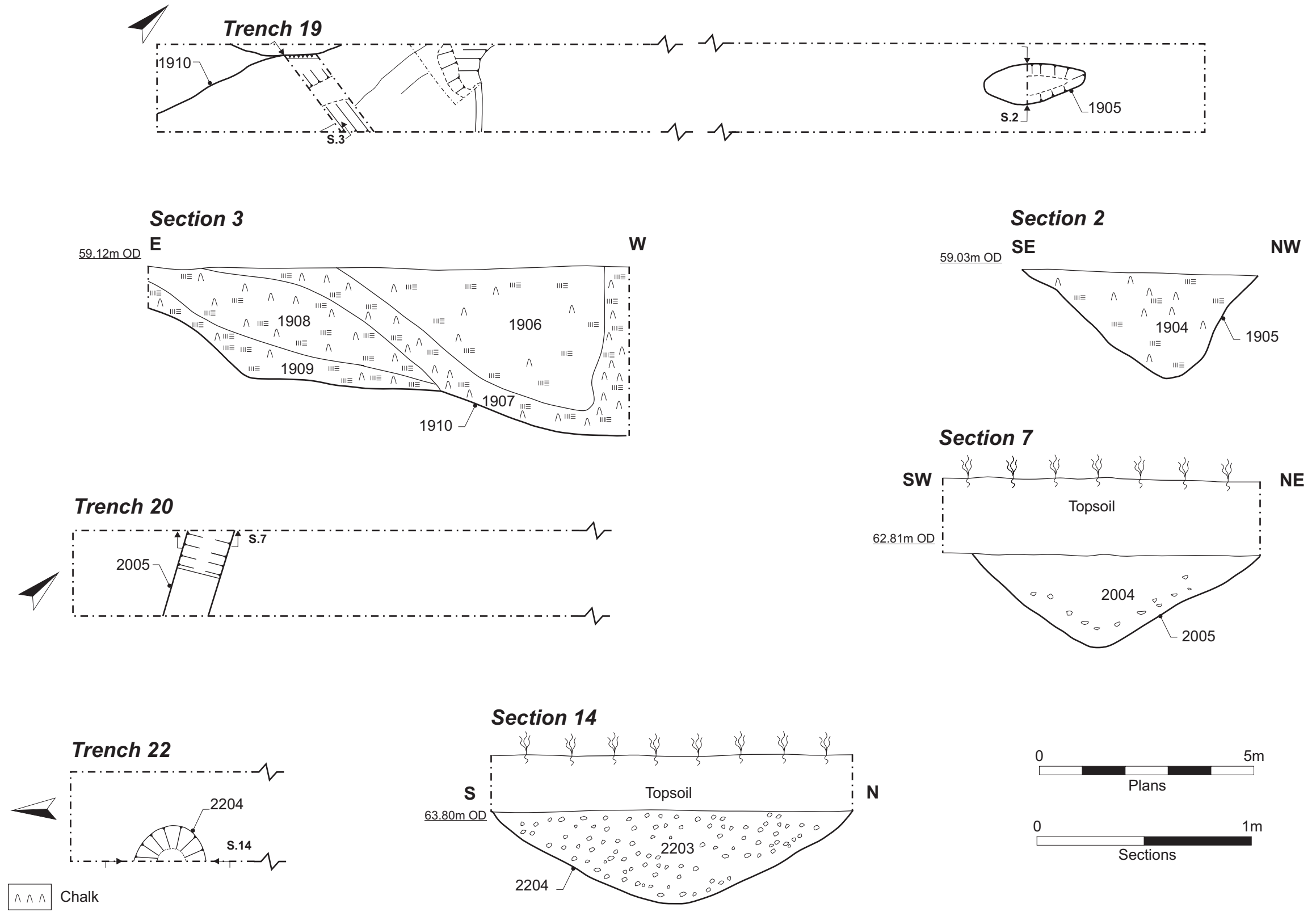
Trench 18



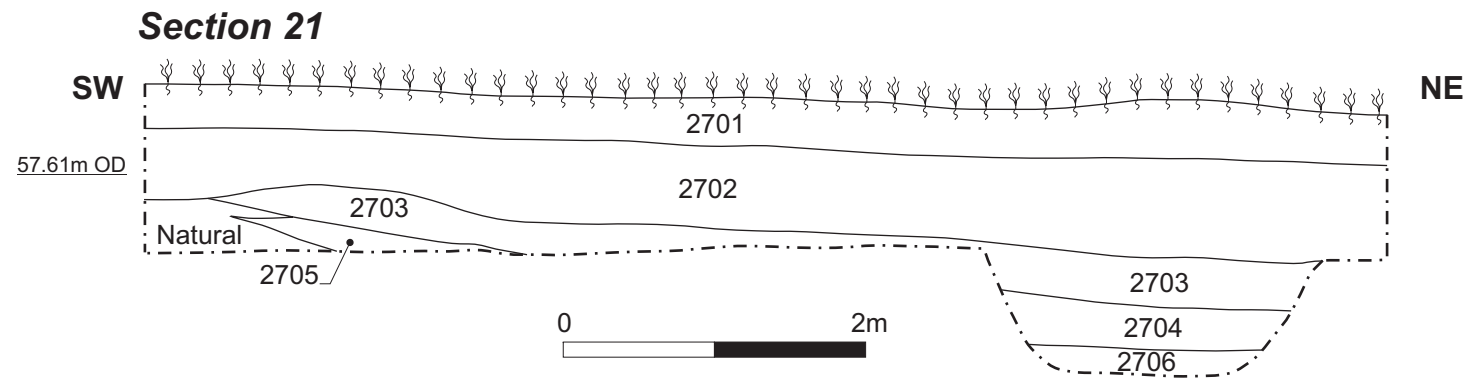
Section 4



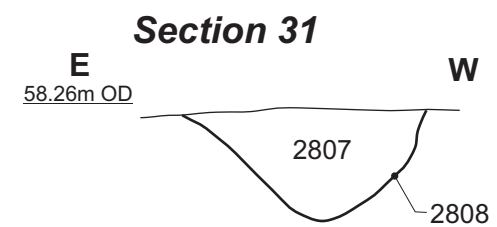
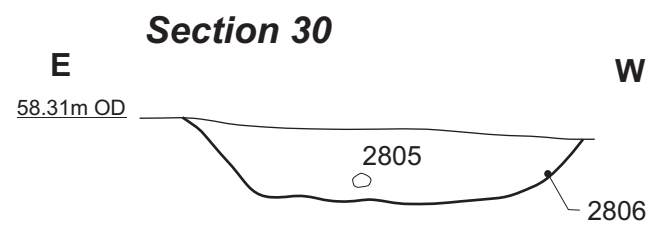
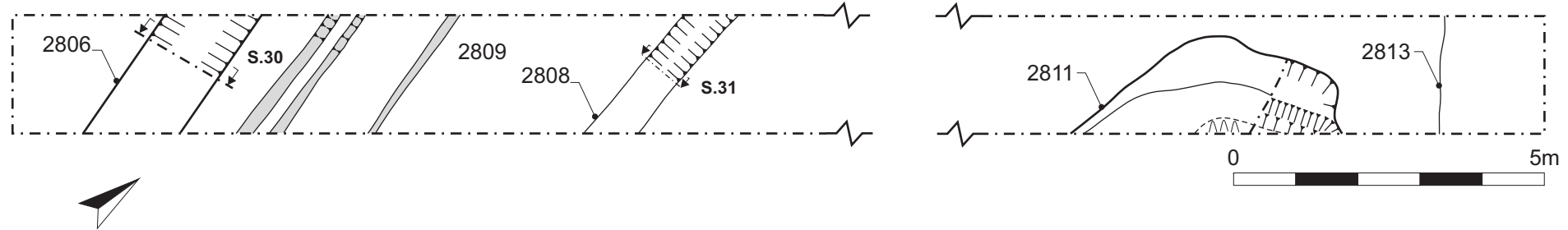
Trenches 11, 16 and 18, plans and sections Fig 4





Trenches 18, 20 and 22, plans and sections Fig 5

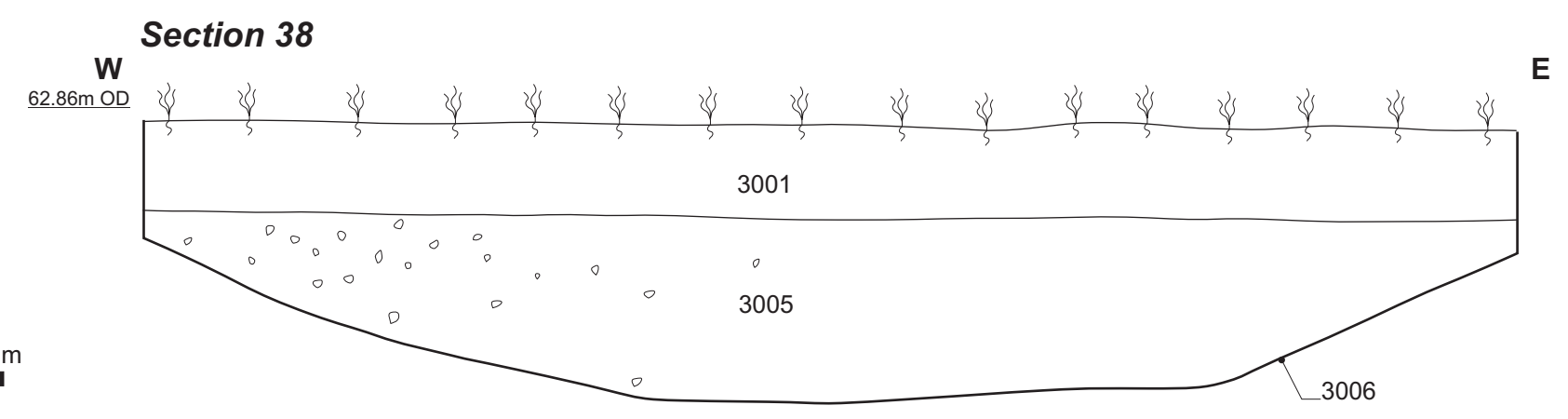
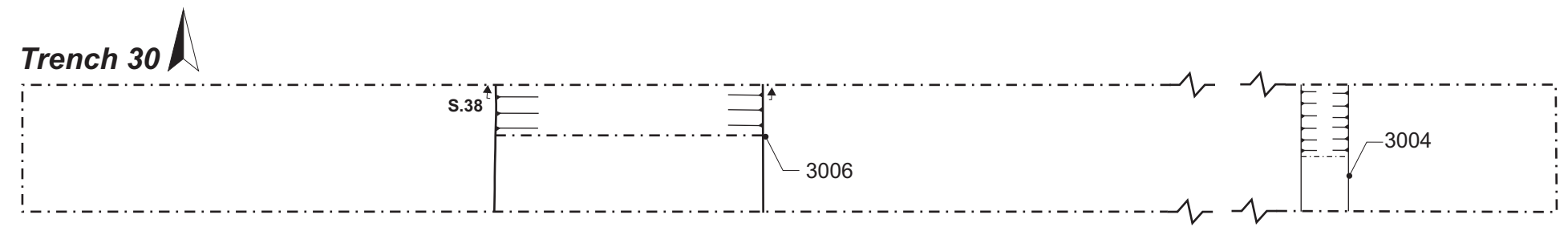
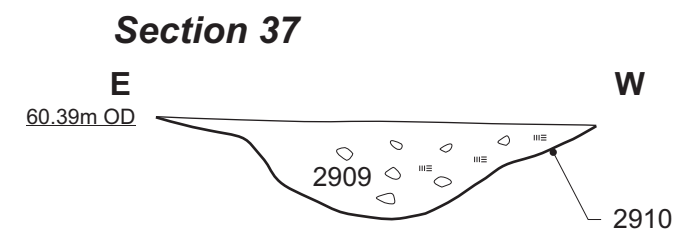
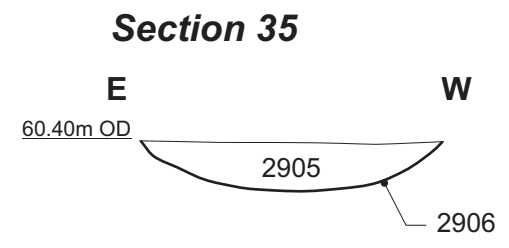
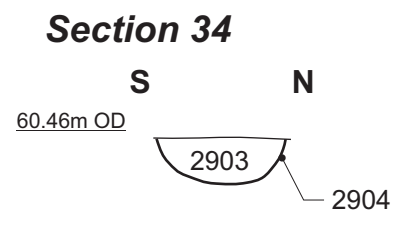
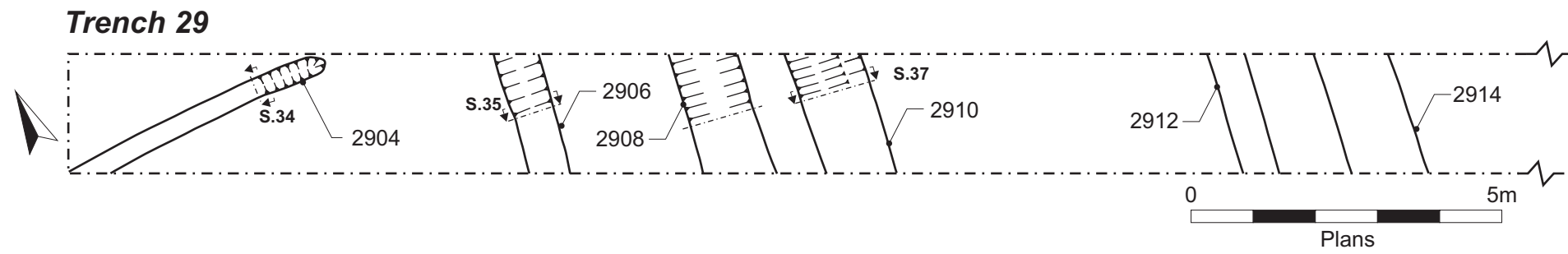


Trench 28

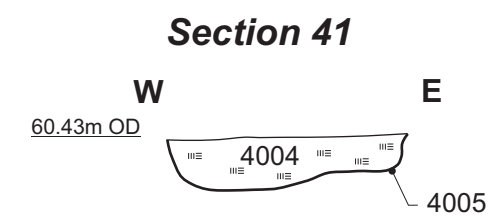
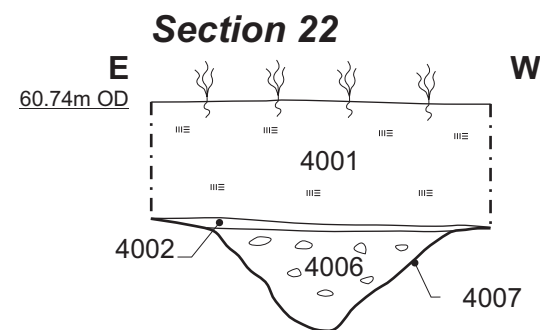
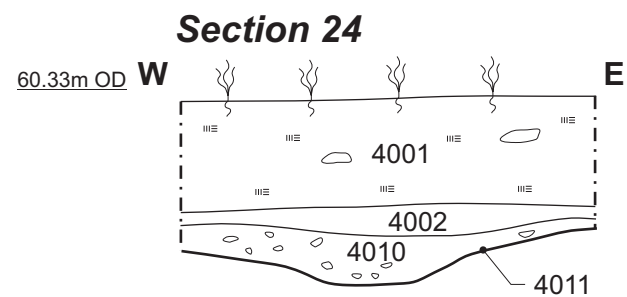
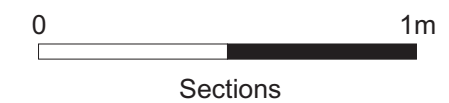
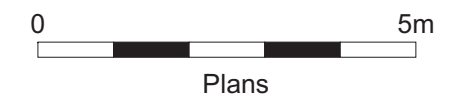
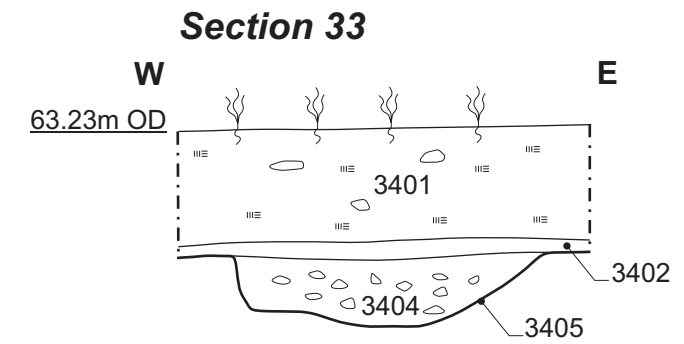
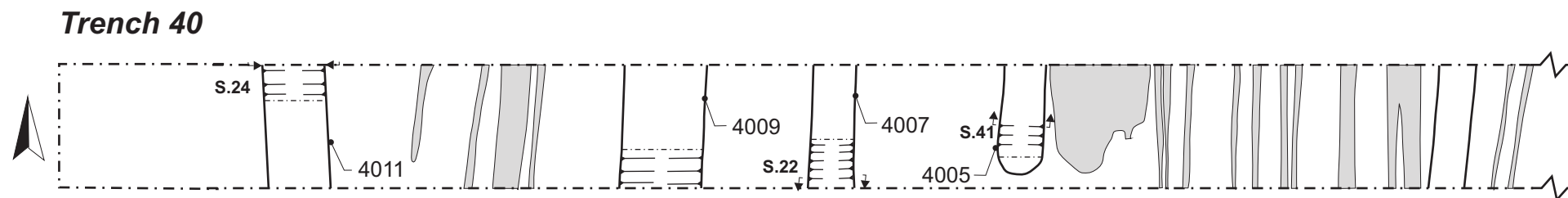
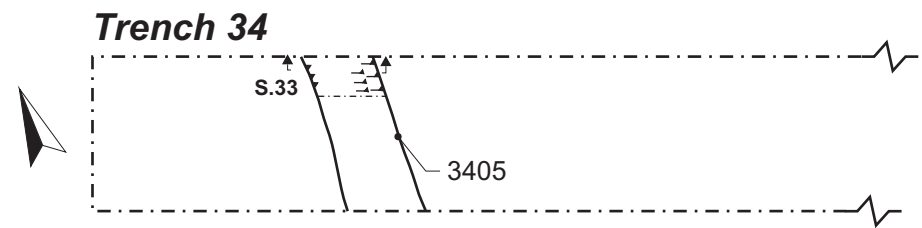


-  Cart ruts
-  Chalk

Trenches 27 and 28, plans and sections Fig 6



Trenches 29 and 30, plans and sections Fig 7



Trenches 34, 39 and 40, plans and sections Fig 8



Plate 1: Trench 4, Early Bronze Age pits [406] and [408], facing east



Plate 2: Trench 19, possible quarry pit [1910], facing south-west



Plate 3: General view across compound area towards Wilbury Hill, facing north-east



Plate 4: Trench 27, dark soil horizon (2704) and colluvium (2703), facing north-west



Plate 5: Trench 28, track way (2809) leading to Wilbury Hill, facing north-east



Plate 6: Trench 29, Side ditches [2906], [2908] and [2910] of track way (centre) and gully [2904](foreground), facing south-east



Plate 7: Worked flint; discoidal scraper, 1, barbed and tanged arrowhead, 2 (scale 10mm)

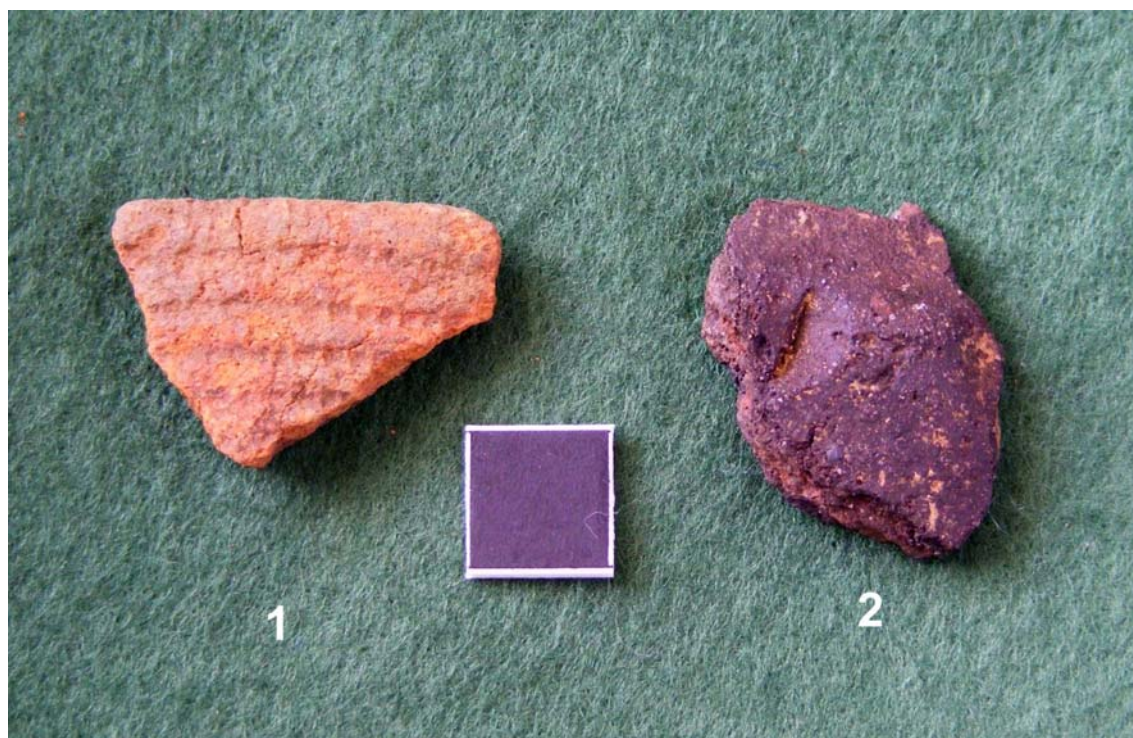


Plate 8: Prehistoric pottery; Beaker rim sherd, 1, and fingertip-decorated shoulder on Iron Age vessel, 2 (scale 10mm)