

LAND AT VERNDITCH CHASE, BOWERCHALKE,
WILTSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

BY

BRONA LANGTON

FOR

ORANGE PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES LTD



Cotswold Archaeological Trust

LAND AT VERNDITCH CHASE, BOWERCHALKE, WILTSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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GLOSSARY

ARCHAEOLOGY

For the purpose of this report, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains, from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

IRON AGE

The first period in which iron was the predominant metal. In Britain it is dated between *c.* 700 BC and the Roman conquest of Britain in AD 43.

NATURAL

Defined in archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, e.g. river terrace gravels, etc.

NEOLITHIC

A chronological division of the prehistoric period during which agriculture and domestic animals were introduced into Britain. It is conventionally dated to between *c.* 4500 and 2000 BC.

NGR

National Grid Reference given from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance Datum; used to express a given height above mean sea level.

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by Cotswold Archaeological Trust on land at Vernditch Chase, Bowerchalke, Wiltshire, as a condition of planning permission to construct a telecommunications tower. The work was commissioned by Pitcairn Surveyors on behalf of Orange Personal Communications Services Ltd.

Three gullies and three pits of possible archaeological origin were recorded. These features were undated but the location of the site in an area of high archaeological activity and the presence of two prehistoric flints in the subsoil layer sealing the gullies and pits suggests that these features may be of prehistoric date.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 In September 1996 Cotswold Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at Vernditch Chase, Bowerchalke, Wiltshire (centred on NGR SU 0340 2212) (Fig. 1).

1.1.2 The work was commissioned by Pitcairn Surveyors on behalf of Orange Personal Communications Services Ltd., and was undertaken as a condition of planning permission to erect a telecommunications tower. This condition was in accordance with the Department of the Environment's *'Planning and Guidance Note 16 'Planning and Archaeology'* (PPG16).

1.1.3 The archaeological work was conducted according to the brief issued by Wiltshire County Council Archaeological Service and a detailed project specification prepared by Cotswold Archaeological Trust. This was in line with the *'Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations'* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

1.1.4 The development comprises an area approximately 10m by 10m and is located in a small clearing at the north end of woodland known as Vernditch Chase, close to the Ox Drove trackway, c. 1500m south of the village of Bowerchalke (Fig. 2).

1.2 Geology and Topography

1.2.1 The underlying geology of the area is chalk with a capping of Clay-With-Flints.

1.2.2 The study area is at approximately 180m OD on ground that slopes down gradually to the west.

1.3 Archaeological background

- 1.3.1 A square enclosure of probable Iron Age date lies c. 110m to the southwest of the study area. This enclosure partially survives as earthworks within the wood. The Ordnance Survey map also shows linear banks to the east of, and presumably associated with the enclosure site, and it is in this area that the development lies.
- 1.3.2 On a more general level, the development area lies within an area rich in prehistoric archaeological remains. Two Neolithic longbarrows are located within Vernditch Chase, one c. 1000m to the south of the study area and the other c. 1600m to the south. Further earthworks are also recorded within the woods. The south-east boundary of Vernditch Chase is defined by the course of a Roman road.

1.4 Methodology

- 1.4.1 A project design for evaluating the archaeological potential of the site was prepared by Cotswold Archaeological Trust and approved by H. Cave-Penney of the County Archaeological Service, Wiltshire County Council.
- 1.4.2 The objective of the evaluation was to determine if archaeological deposits were present within the study area, and if so to assess their date, nature, extent and condition.
- 1.4.3 The study area was cleared of dense vegetation with the assistance of a mechanical mini-excavator. A 2m by 2m trench was positioned within the study area, located away from visible tree stumps and roots.
- 1.4.4 Topsoil was removed from the trench by mechanical mini-excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket. Subsoil was excavated by hand and the trench was cleaned, planned and photographed. All identified features were hand excavated and recorded in accordance with the Cotswold Archaeological Trust *'Field Recording Manual'* and with

- 2.2.5 A possible pit [111] was located in the north-west corner of the trench. It had gradually sloping sides and a flat base and was 0.20m in depth. Two further possible pits were located on the east side of the trench. Pit [105] had steep sides and a flat base and was 0.30m in depth. Pit [107] had steep sides and a flat base and was 0.28m in depth. The west sides of [105] and [107] were parallel with gully [103].
- 2.2.6 All the features that cut into the natural ground were sealed by subsoil layer (102), a compact clay silt with flint gravel and large nodules of flint. The subsoil was up to 0.16m thick. Two worked flints of possible Neolithic date were retrieved from this layer, directly above fill (106) of cut [105] (Appendix 2).
- 2.2.7 No artefacts were retrieved from any of the cut features recorded in the trench and the fills of these features were devoid of cultural material indicative of human activity.

3. CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 Six features cutting the natural ground were recorded in the evaluation trench, three gullies and three possible pits. Gullies [103] and [109] are probably of archaeological origin given their regular form. The remaining features were only partly visible within the trench (Fig. 3), and given the absence of cultural material in their fills it is not possible to determine if these features are archaeological or natural (i.e. caused by tree roots).
- 3.2 The limited size of the evaluation trench and absence of finds from within the features means that it is difficult to interpret the remains. The Neolithic flint artefacts found in the subsoil could be derived from underlying pit [105], and this would imply Neolithic activity in the study area. Alternatively the deposits in the trench may relate to the Iron Age enclosure and associated ditches (see 1.3.1 above).

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Fieldwork was carried out by Brona Langton and David Cudlip and the report was compiled by Brona Langton with drawings by Richard Morton.

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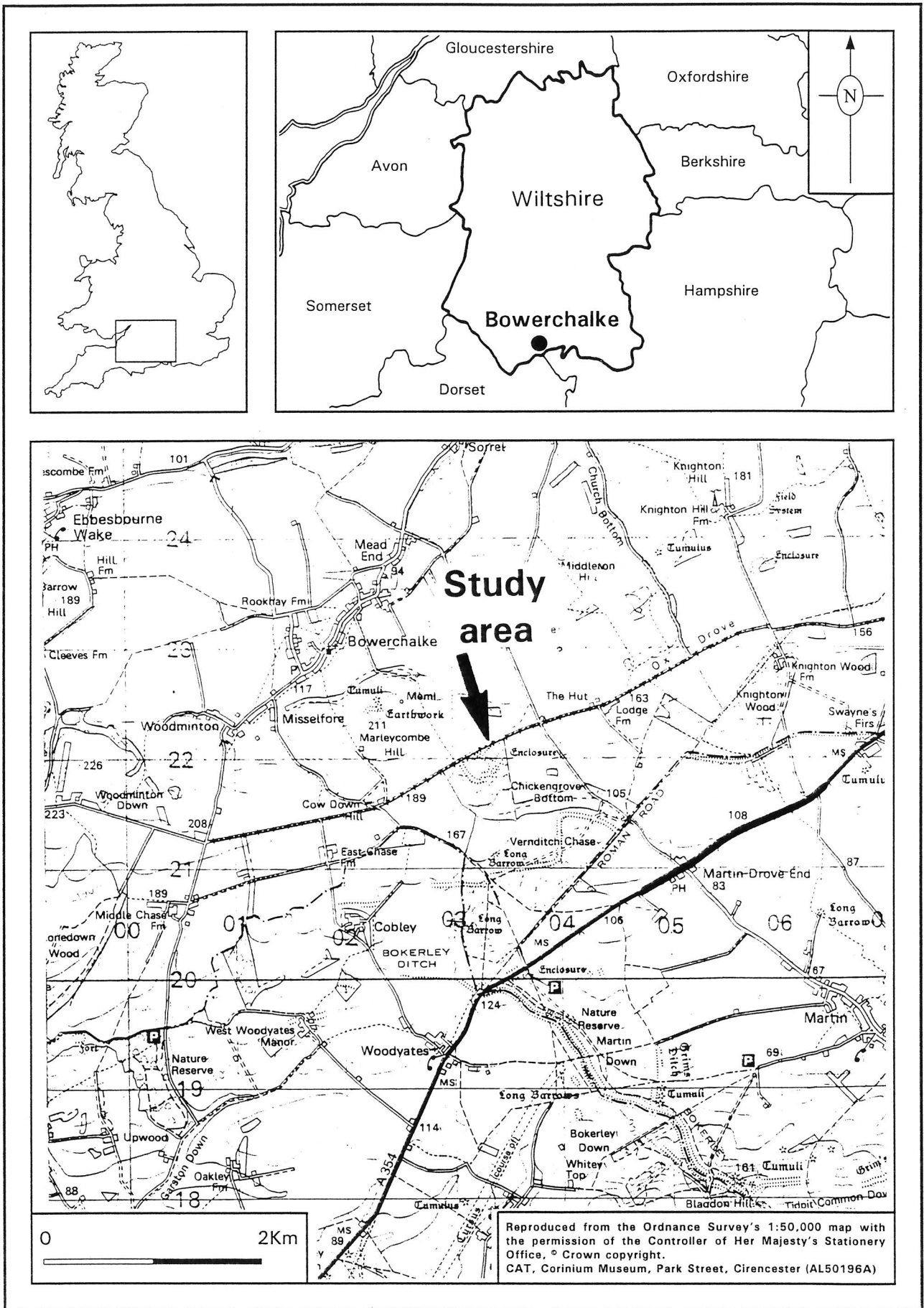


Fig. 1 Location plan

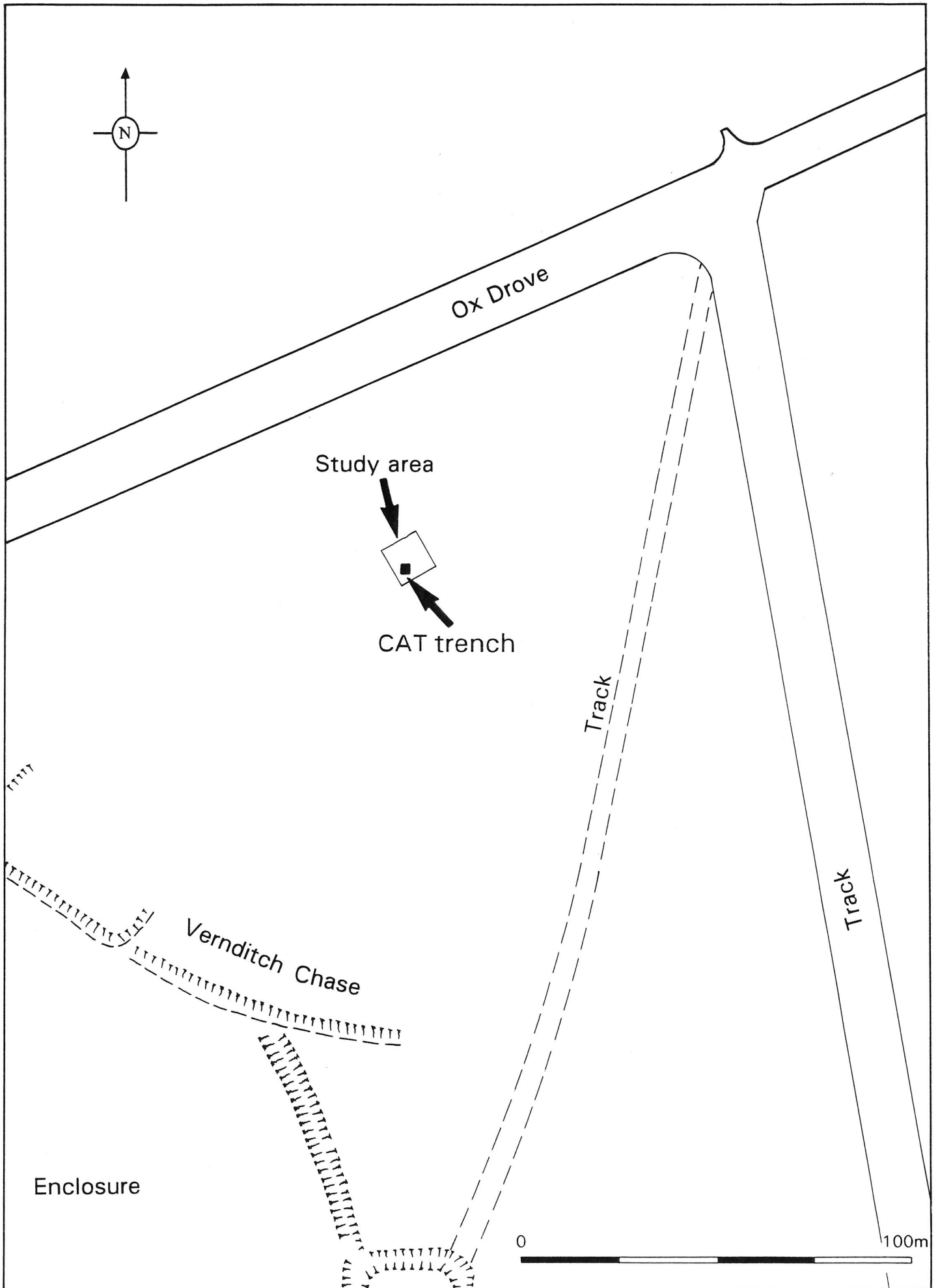


Fig. 2 Location of trench

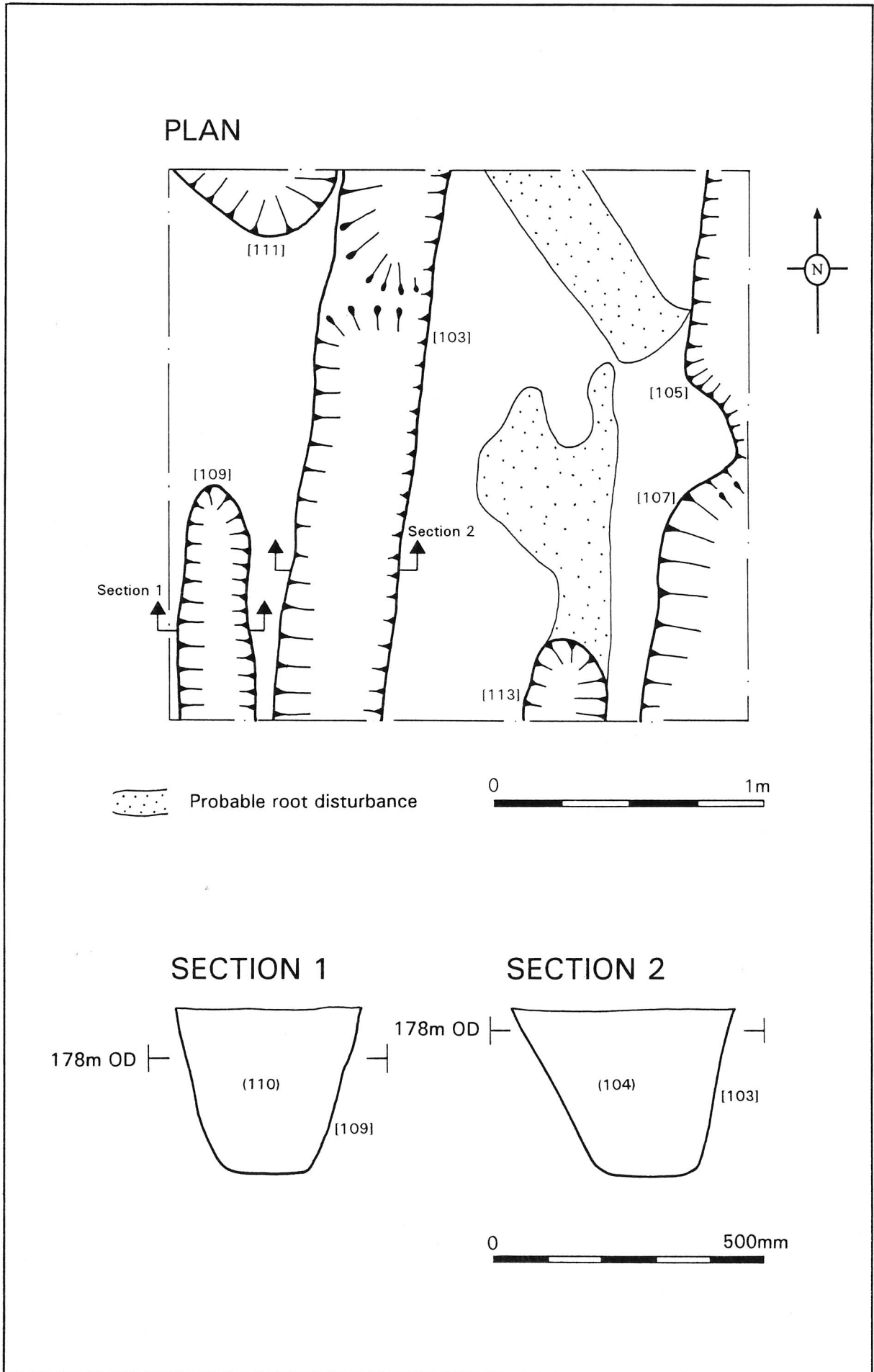


Fig. 3 Trench plan & sections

APPENDIX 1

Trench Description

Note: Stratigraphic descriptions are given from the earliest to the latest deposits. Cut features are designated by square brackets thus: [000], all other deposits/layers are in round brackets; (000). All stated depths are given from present ground level. Heights OD are based on the Ordnance Survey 180m contour line which crosses the Ox Drove to the north-east of the study area. Only features of archaeological interest are described in detail here. Basic details of all features are retained within the site archive.

Trench 1

Natural chalk was encountered at a depth of 0.22m below present ground level at 178.10m OD.

Six features cut into the natural ground:

[103]: a N-S linear cut/gully, with steeply sloping sides and a slightly rounded base which sloped down to the south. The north section stepped down irregularly. It was 0.40m in width and up to 0.30m in depth. It contained fill (104), a compact mid orange clay silt with very occasional small flecks of chalk and small flint gravels.

[105]: a ?pit visible in the NE corner of the trench. It had steep sides, a rounded corner to the SW, and a flat base. It measured 0.35m in depth and was filled with (106), a compact mid orange clay silt with occasional flecks of chalk and small flint gravels.

[107]: a ?pit located in the SE corner of the trench, south of [105]. It had steep sides and a flat base and was 0.28m in depth. It contained fill (108), a mid orange clay silt with occasional small flint gravels. This fill was indistinguishable in section from (114). The west sides of [105] and [107] were parallel with [103].

[109]: a N-S linear gully with steep sides, rounded terminus and a flat base. It measured 0.36m in width and 0.27m in depth and contained fill (110) a mid orange clay silt with occasional small flint gravels.

[111]: a ?pit in the NW corner of the trench. It had gradually sloping sides and a concave base and measured 0.20m in depth. It was filled with (112), a mid orange brown clay silt with occasional small flint gravels.

[113]: a N-S?linear cut. It had a steep W side and a gradually sloping E side, a rounded terminus and a flat base. It measured 0.30m in width and 0.22m in depth and was filled with (114), the same as (108).

Subsoil (102) covered all the cut features and the natural ground. It was a compact clay silt with flint gravel and large nodules and measured up to 0.16m in depth. Two worked flints were found in this deposit, overlying [105].

Topsoil (101) was a soft silt with some sand and very occasional flints. It was heavily disturbed by tree roots.

APPENDIX 2

Worked Flint

Two pieces of worked flint were retrieved from the evaluation trench. Both were found in the subsoil layer directly over possible pit [105]. It is possible that the flints are derived from [105] (fill (106)). Both flints are characteristic of the Neolithic period.

1 x flake, broken

1 x flake, ?retouch on one side.