

**Coopers Beach Holiday Park,  
Church Lane, East Mersea,  
Colchester, Essex**

*Archaeological Evaluation*



*for:*  
Avision Young (UK) Ltd.

*on behalf of:*  
Parkdean Resorts (UK) Ltd.

CA Project: SU0406  
CA Report: SU0406\_1  
OASIS ID: Cotswold2-505706  
HER Ref: ECC4701

May 2022





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A	May 2022	M. Sommers	S. Boulter	Internal review	Quality Control	S. Boulter

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## SUMMARY

<b>Project name:</b>	Coopers Beach Holiday Park
<b>Location:</b>	Church Lane, East Mersea, Colchester, Essex
<b>NGR:</b>	605134 214107
<b>Type:</b>	Evaluation
<b>Date:</b>	5th and 6th May 2022
<b>Planning reference:</b>	181783
<b>OASIS ID:</b>	Cotswold2-505706
<b>Location of Archive:</b>	To be deposited with Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service (CIMS), the digital archive will also be deposited with the Archaeological Data Service (ADS)
<b>Site Code:</b>	ECC4701

In May 2022, Cotswold Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation on a site within the Coopers Beach Holiday Park, Church Lane, East Mersea, Colchester, Essex. Five trenches were excavated. Two features, a possible ditch and a small pit, that produced fragments of clearly late post-medieval brick/tile, were noted in one trench. No other features were encountered and no other finds were recovered in any of the other trenches.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. In May 2022, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological evaluation on a site within the Coopers Beach Holiday Park, Church Lane, East Mersea, Colchester, Essex (centred at NGR: 605134 214107; Fig. 1). This evaluation was undertaken for Avison Young (UK) Ltd., who were acting on behalf of their client, Parkdean Resorts (UK) Ltd.
- 1.2. Colchester Borough Council (CBC) has granted planning permission for the conversion of existing barns to self-catering holiday units and the construction of fourteen new holiday cottages (planning ref: 181783). An attached condition of this planning permission requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with an approved WSI. Two elements of mitigation were stipulated, the compilation of a Historic Building Record (HBR) of the structures to be converted and a trenched evaluation in the area of the proposed new buildings. This report deals solely with the results of the trenched evaluation, the HBR will be presented in a separate report.
- 1.3. The scope of the evaluation was defined by the curator, Simon Wood, the CBC archaeological advisor (AA), in a brief dated 25th February 2022. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by CA (2022) and approved by the AA.
- 1.4. The evaluation was also undertaken in line with *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2020), *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) PPN 3: Archaeological Excavation* (Historic England 2015) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide* (Historic England 2015).

### The site

- 1.5. The proposed development site was approximately 0.7ha in extent and lay just inside the entrance of the Coopers Beach Holiday Park, in the park's north-east corner, at the southern end of Church Lane. It was in the parish of East Mersea, which is the eastern of two parishes on Mersea Island. Mersea Island is a small island of approximately 18km<sup>2</sup> within the estuary area of the Blackwater and the Colne rivers. It is accessed by a short causeway that is occasionally covered by high tides. The proposed development site lies on the south side of the island, approximately 0.5km from the coast.



- 
- 1.6. The bulk of the evaluation site comprised the maintenance yard for the holiday camp whilst a single trench was cut within part of the caravan sales area. The maintenance yard lay to the south of a timber-framed barn, one of the structures to be converted. A concrete surface lay adjacent to the south wall of the barn whilst the remainder of the evaluation site was grassed or overgrown with weeds. Part of the site was covered in piles of spoil and modern debris, mostly scrap metal from dismantled caravans, and a number of redundant caravans were also present. Two earthwork banks, both heavily overgrown, ran along the eastern and southern edges of the yard with fences beyond. The maintenance yard was closed off from the remainder of the park by a wooden panelled fence and was accessed via pair of large metal gates. The sales area trench was located in an area of mown lawn in a corner formed by another two of the buildings to be converted and behind a group of show caravans arranged in an arc.
- 1.7. The evaluation site sloped very gently from a high of c.12.5m AOD to the north down to c.11.5m AOD close to the southern edge.
- 1.8. The underlying bedrock geology of the site is mapped as Thames Group - Clay, Silt and Sand, a sedimentary rock formed approximately thirty-four to fifty-six million years ago in the Palaeogene Period in a local environment previously dominated by deep seas. They are marine in origin, detrital and comprise coarse- to fine-grained slurries of debris from the continental shelf flowing into a deep-sea environment, forming distinctively graded beds. No superficial deposits are recorded (<https://www.bgs.ac.uk/map-viewers/geology-of-britain-viewer/>).

## 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1. A number of sites and findspots are recorded on Colchester Heritage Explorer website (<https://colchesterheritage.co.uk/>) in the vicinity of the proposed development area (Fig. 2).
- 2.2. Occasional prehistoric finds have been recorded in the area such as a probable rubbing quartzite pebble stone (MCC8771), found c.150m to the southwest of the proposed development site, and an Iron Age skull (MCC10392) and a Bronze Age sword (MCC8760), both of which were recovered from the mudflats to the south. Prehistoric sites are also recorded. These comprise a probable Bronze Age barrow (MCC8879), c.750m to the northeast, and a scatter of prehistoric flints, wasters and quartzite pebbles (MCC8816), on the coastline c.750m to the southeast.

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- 2.3. Roman activity is recorded across the island. Sites and findspots recorded in the vicinity of the development area consist of a snakehead bracelet (MCC5723), coins and a small flask (MCC8780, 8781 and 8783, all located at the same point as MCC8771), and a coin hoard recovered approximately 750m to the northeast (MCC8134). The sites of probable Roman red hills (salt working sites) are also recorded (MCC8740, 8777, 8778, 8815 and 8855). Roman brick and tile (MCC8793) are incorporated into the fabric of the adjacent St. Edmund's Church and has also been recovered from within the churchyard leading to the suggestion that the church may have been built on the site of a Roman villa.
- 2.4. Evidence for Saxon activity in the local area is limited to a single silver *sceatta* (MCC5724) found by a metal detectorist c.1.4km to the northwest of the proposed development site.
- 2.5. Of greatest significance is the presence of an incomplete medieval moat (MCC8792), which probably encompasses the proposed development site. The moated area also contains the medieval church of St. Edmund (MCC8794), parts of which date from 12th to 13th century, and the adjacent East Mersea Hall (MCC4011), an early 16th century timber-framed house. The moat is possibly associated with earthworks present around the church and hall and there is the possibility that these are parts of a Danish camp or a deserted medieval village. No further medieval sites or findspots are recorded in the local area.
- 2.6. A group of post-medieval buildings are present within the proposed development area. Many are built of soft red brick and are undoubtedly 19th century in date (one has a date stone 1860 in the north gable). A timber-framed barn is also extant which may be earlier. Together these buildings formed part of a formerly working farm, the buildings would suggest livestock, possibly dairy cattle (see the HBR for more a concise interpretation).
- 2.7. The importance of Mersea Island in relation to defence during the Second World War is demonstrated by the sites of a heavy anti-aircraft gun site (MCC5313) and two pillboxes (MCC7255 and 7256).
- 2.8. Cropmarks of an undated building (MCC8819) are located c.650m to the southwest of the proposed development site.

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2.9. A previous archaeological evaluation (ECC2853) was undertaken within the holiday park in advance of an earlier expansion on a site to the southwest of the present proposed site. Nine trenches were excavated but no finds or features were identified.

### 3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1. The general objective of the evaluation is to provide further information on the likely archaeological resource within the site, including its presence/absence, character, extent, date and state of preservation. This information will enable CBC to identify and assess the particular significance of any archaeological heritage assets within the site, consider the impact of any future development upon that significance and, if appropriate, develop strategies to avoid or minimise conflict between heritage asset conservation and the development proposal, in line with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (MHCLG 2021). A further objective of the project is to compile a stable, ordered, accessible project archive.

3.2. The CBC Brief (Section 3.2) states the specific aims of the evaluation are to:

- Identify the date, approximate form and purpose of any archaeological deposit, together with its likely extent, localised depth and quality of preservation. The WSI should provide for contingency in the event of the need for absolute dating (radiocarbon and/or archaeomagnetic).
- Evaluate the likely impact of past land uses, and the possible presence of masking colluvial/alluvial deposits. The WSI should provide for a contingency for soil micromorphological and geochemical analysis of floor and dark earth deposits. In addition, particular attention should be given to the collection of micro-remains preserved within and/or directly over floors.
- Establish the potential for the survival of environmental evidence.
- Provide sufficient information to construct an archaeological conservation strategy dealing with preservation, the recording of archaeological deposits, working practices, timetables and order of costs.

3.3. Any archaeological remains that are identified will be put into their local and regional context with reference to the East Anglian Regional Research Agenda (Medleycott 2011) and the more recent updated version (<https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/>).

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## 4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1. The evaluation fieldwork comprised the excavation of five trenches (Fig. 3). Trenches 1 to 3 were located within the footprints of the proposed structures whilst Trenches 4 and 5 were within areas of parking or landscaping.
- 4.2. Trenches were set out on OS National Grid co-ordinates using Leica GPS although due to the presence of concrete surfaces and permanently plumbed caravans it was not possible to excavate the trenches precisely as planned. This affected Trench 1, which was moved slightly to the north, Trench 3, which was moved slightly to the west and curved around a caravan, and Trench 5, which was cut in an 'L' shape. Trenches 2 and 4 were excavated in their planned locations.
- 4.3. The overburden was stripped from the trenches using a 9 tonne mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket. All machining was conducted under archaeological supervision to the top of the natural substrate, which was the level at which archaeological features were first encountered.
- 4.4. Archaeological features/deposits were investigated, planned and recorded in accordance with *CA Technical Manual 1: Fieldwork Recording Manual*.
- 4.5. Deposits were assessed for their palaeoenvironmental potential in accordance with *CA Technical Manual 2: The Taking and Processing of Environmental and Other Samples from Archaeological Sites*. No deposits were identified that required sampling.
- 4.6. CA will make arrangements with Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service (CIMS) for the deposition of the project archive. A digital archive will also be prepared and deposited with CBC and the Archaeology Data Service (ADS). The archives (museum and digital) will be prepared and deposited in accordance with *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives* (CIfA 2020).
- 4.7. A summary of information from this project, as set out in Appendix C, will be entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain.

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## 5. RESULTS

- 5.1. This section provides an overview of the evaluation results. Detailed summaries of the recorded contexts are given in Appendix A. Details of the relative heights of the principal deposits expressed as metres Above Ordnance Datum (m AOD) are given in Appendix B.
- 5.2. In summary, a natural subsoil of clay or sand and gravel was encountered at depths of around 0.5m. Archaeological features were present in Trench 5 only. These comprised two probably 19/20th century cuts associated with the former farm. No earlier artefacts were recovered during the evaluation. Fuller descriptions of the trenches follow below:

### Trenches 1 and 3 (Figs 3 and 4)

- 5.3. Trenches 1 and 3, at the south end of the evaluation area, produced similar results. Both exposed a natural subsoil of pale yellow/orange clay with areas of fine gravel with an orange sand, particularly towards to the eastern end of Trench 1 and southern end of Trench 3, at depths of around 0.5m below ground level. The overburden comprised topsoil over a subsoil of pale brown silty clay which in turn overlay the natural subsoil. No significant archaeological features or artefacts were identified in either trench.

### Trench 2 (Figs 3 and 5)

- 5.4. This comprised a roughly north-south aligned trench towards the eastern edge of the evaluation area. It too revealed a natural subsoil of pale yellow/orange clay with occasional areas of fine gravel and orange sand at a depth of around 0.5m. Three areas of modern disturbance were noted. One comprised a pit c.2m by at least 0.7m, located towards the southern end of the trench and filled with a dense deposit of modern debris including plastic, glass and scrap metal. The northern two-thirds of the trench were mostly taken up by two large areas of disturbance, both c.8m in length and extended beyond the trench to the west. Both were filled with redeposited natural subsoil but with a clear lens of topsoil containing modern brick, tile and fragments of roof slate around the edges that were visible within the trench. The overburden comprised a mixture of redeposited natural subsoil and modern debris over a layer of buried topsoil which in turn lay directly over the natural subsoil.

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#### **Trench 4 (Figs 3 and 4)**

- 5.5. An east-west trench. Natural subsoil of pale yellow/orange clay at the west end, fine gravel with orange sand to the east was encountered at depth of 0.6m. The overburden comprised a thin topsoil over a dense layer of gravel with small flint cobbles interpreted as a former yard surface. This overlay a layer of silty sand and gravel which in turn overlay the natural subsoil.

#### **Trench 5 (Figs 3 and 6)**

- 5.6. An 'L' shaped trench excavated in corner between two of the 19<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings. Natural subsoil of orange sand and gravel was encountered at a depth of 0.45m below ground level. The overburden comprised topsoil over a layer of brown sand and gravel. Two features were recorded, a small pit or possible posthole, 502, and a linear cut, 0504.

*Pit/posthole 502* This feature measured 0.4m in diameter and cut the natural subsoil to a depth of 0.35m. It was filled with topsoil and was visible from immediately below the topsoil layer. This suggested it was relatively recent cut and this was confirmed by the presence of late post-medieval fragments of soft red brick. Given its size it was probably a post setting although the possibility it being a small pit cannot be ruled out.

*Linear cut 504* Interpreted as a possible ditch or drain. It measured 0.58m in width with steep sides and a flat base which was cut into natural subsoil to a depth of 0.12m. The fill comprised a dense brown silty sand, the upper portion of which produced a small number of fragments of soft red brick.

## **6. THE FINDS**

- 6.1. No significant artefacts were recovered during the evaluation.

## **7. THE BIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE**

- 7.1. No biological evidence was recovered during the evaluation.

## **8. DISCUSSION**

- 8.1. No archaeological features relating to the medieval or earlier periods were identified and no artefacts were recovered. The trenches were cleanly cut and although there was some disturbance and possible truncation of the surface of the natural subsoil

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evident in Trench 2 the lack of early evidence overall would indicate that no significant heritage assets are under threat from the proposed development.

- 8.2. Only two features were noted, both in Trench 5, immediately adjacent to two of the 19th century buildings associated with the former farm. The nature of these two features strongly suggests they date to the 19th or 20th century and are associated with activities at the farm. It should be noted that the linear feature (502) is aligned with the gap between the two buildings, again suggesting it is contemporary.

## 9. CA PROJECT TEAM

- 9.1. Fieldwork was undertaken by Mark Sommers, assisted by Andrew Firth. This report was written by Mark Sommers. The report illustrations were prepared by Krissy Moore. The project archive has been compiled by Clare Woolton and prepared for deposition by Zoe Emery. The project was managed for CA by Stuart Boulter who also edited the report.

## 10. REFERENCES

British Geological Survey 2022 *Geology of Britain Viewer*

<https://www.bgs.ac.uk/map-viewers/geology-of-britain-viewer/> Accessed 11 May 2022

Cotswold Archaeology 2022 *Coopers Beach Holiday Park, Church Lane, East Mersea, Colchester, Essex: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation*

Medleycott, M., 2011, *Research and Archaeology Revisited: a revised framework for the East of England*, East Anglian Archaeology. Occ. Paper 24

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government 2021 *National Planning Policy Framework*





## APPENDIX A: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Trench No.	Context	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Context type	Interpretive Category	Comments
1	100		0.3	layer	Topsoil	Mid brown loamy topsoil with occasional modern rubbish and rare small sub-round and sub-angular stone inclusions
1	101		0.2	layer	Subsoil	pale brown silty clay
1	102			layer	Natural	pale yellow/brown clay. Fine gravel, silty, towards east end
2	200		0.3	layer	Topsoil	Mid brown loamy topsoil with occasional modern rubbish and rare small sub-round and sub-angular stone inclusions
2	201		0.4	layer	Subsoil	pale brown silty clay
2	202			layer	Natural	pale orange clay at the southern end of the trench becoming fine yellow/orange sandy gravel to the north
3	300		0.3	layer	Topsoil	Mid brown loamy topsoil with occasional modern rubbish and rare small sub-round and sub-angular stone inclusions
3	301			layer	Natural	Orange light brown clay occasionally redish mid-brown with patches of grey gravelly clay
3	302		0.2	layer	Subsoil	pale orange/brown silty clay
4	400		0.25	layer	Topsoil	Mid brown loamy topsoil with occasional modern rubbish and rare small sub-round and sub-angular stone inclusions
4	401		0.15	layer	Surface	rammed flint layer - former farmyard surface
4	402		0.3	layer	Subsoil	dense silty sand
4	403			layer	Natural	orange sand and fine gravel, pale yellow clay to the west
5	500		0.25	layer	Topsoil	Mid-brown loamy soil with occasional small and medium sub-round and sub-angular stone inclusions and occasional modern rubbish
5	501			layer	Natural	Orange light-brown clay with grey patches and frequent small and large sub-round and sub-angular stone inclusions
5	502	0.44	0.14	cut	Pit	Cut of pit
5	503			fill	Other Fill	Fill of pit 502. Dark brown silty sand.
5	504	0.61	0.09	cut	Ditch	Cut of ditch
5	505			fill	Other Fill	Fill of ditch. Dense orange brown silty sand.
5	506		0.25	layer	Subsoil	orange/brown sand and gravel

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## APPENDIX B: LEVELS OF PRINCIPAL DEPOSITS

Levels are expressed as metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), as calculated by the GPS equipment (average for each trench)

	Trench 1	Trench 2	Trench 3	Trench 4	Trench 5
Current ground level	11.40m	11.45m	11.60m	11.85m	12.50m
Top of Natural Subsoil	10.80m	10.80m	11.10m	11.25m	11.95m

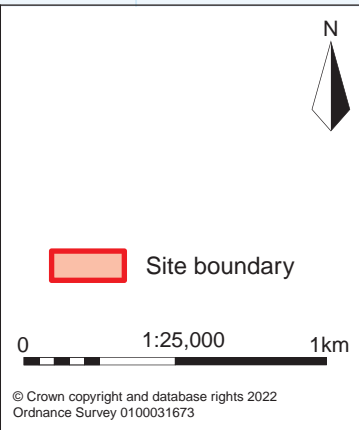
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## APPENDIX C: OASIS REPORT FORM

### Summary for cotswold2-505706

OASIS ID (UID)	cotswold2-505706
Project Name	Evaluation at Coopers Beach Holiday Park, Church Lane, East Mersea
Sitename	
Activity type	Evaluation
Project Identifier(s)	SU0406
Planning Id	181783
Reason For Investigation	Planning: Post determination
Organisation Responsible for work	Cotswold Archaeology
Project Dates	05-May-2022 - 13-May-2022
Location	Coopers Beach Holiday Park, Church Lane, East Mersea NGR : TM 05133 14130 LL : 51.7882032465043, 0.972882524174522 12 Fig : 605133,214130
Administrative Areas	Country : England County : Essex District : Colchester Parish : East Mersea
Project Methodology	5 machine dug trenches, each 20m in length
Project Results	pending
Keywords	
Funder	
HER	Colchester Borough Council - unRev - STANDARD
Person Responsible for work	
HER Identifiers	
Archives	Physical Archive - to be deposited with Colchester & Ipswich Museum Service (Colchester Collection) Digital Archive - to be deposited with Archaeology Data Service Archive






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**PROJECT TITLE**  
 Coopers Beach Holiday Park, Church Lane, East Mersea, Colchester, Essex

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**FIGURE TITLE**  
 Site location plan

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<b>DRAWN BY</b>	<b>KM</b>	<b>PROJECT NO.</b>	<b>SU0406</b>	<b>FIGURE NO.</b>
<b>CHECKED BY</b>	<b>DJB</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>17/05/2022</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>APPROVED BY</b>	<b>SB</b>	<b>SCALE@A4</b>	<b>1:25,000</b>	





- Site boundary
- HER data



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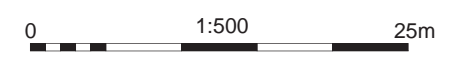
**PROJECT TITLE**  
 Coopers Beach Holiday Park, Church Lane, East Mersea, Colchester, Essex

**FIGURE TITLE**  
 Selected HER data

<b>DRAWN BY</b>	<b>KM</b>	<b>PROJECT NO.</b>	<b>SU0406</b>	<b>FIGURE NO.</b>
<b>CHECKED BY</b>	<b>DJB</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>17/05/2022</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>APPROVED BY</b>	<b>SB</b>	<b>SCALE @A3</b>	<b>1:10,000</b>	



- Site boundary
- Evaluation trench
- Archaeological feature  
(excavated/unexcavated)
- Modern disturbance / truncation



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**PROJECT TITLE**  
 Coopers Beach Holiday Park, Church Lane, East Mersea, Colchester, Essex

**FIGURE TITLE**  
 Site plan showing archaeological survey results

DRAWN BY <b>KM</b> CHECKED BY <b>DJB</b> APPROVED BY <b>SB</b>	PROJECT NO. <b>SU0406</b> DATE <b>17/05/2022</b> SCALE@A3 <b>1:500</b>	FIGURE NO. <b>3</b>
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Trench 1, looking east (scale 1m)



Trench 3, looking north-west (scales 1m)



Trench 1, representative section (scales 0.5m and 1m)



Trench 4, looking north-east (scales 1m)



Trench 3, representative section (scale 1m)



Trench 4, representative section (scales 0.5m and 1m)


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**PROJECT TITLE**  
 Coopers Beach Holiday Park, Church Lane, East Mersea, Colchester, Essex

**FIGURE TITLE**  
 Trenches 1, 3 and 4, general views and representative sections: photographs

DRAWN BY	KM	PROJECT NO.	SU0406	FIGURE NO.
CHECKED BY	DJB	DATE	17/05/2022	
APPROVED BY	SB	SCALE	@A3 NA	<b>4</b>





Trench 2, looking south (scale 1m)



Trench 2, representative section (scales 0.5m and 1m)



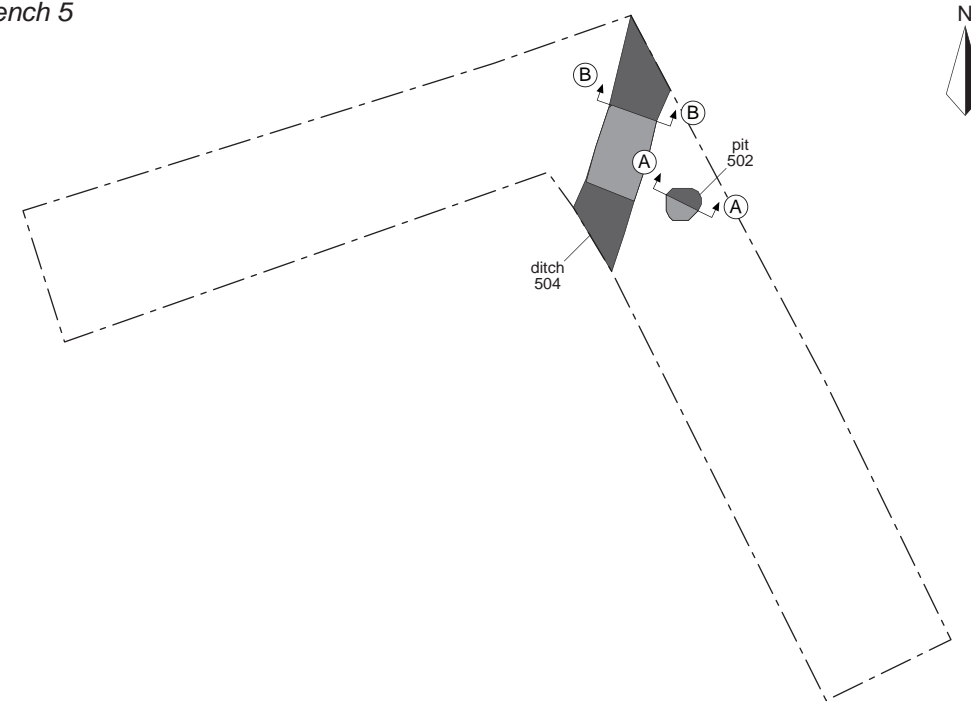


Trench 5, looking north-east (scales 1m)






Trench 5, representative section (scale 1m)

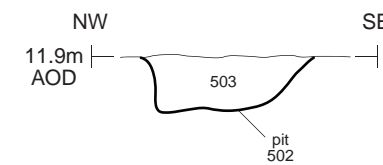
Trench 5



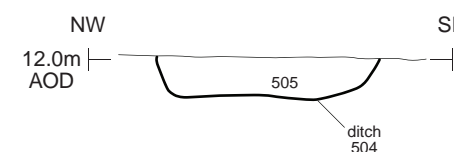
0 1:100 5m

-  Evaluation trench
-  Archaeological feature  
(excavated/unexcavated)
-  Section location

Section AA



Section BB



0 1:20 1m



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