

Northstowe, Longstanton, Cambridgeshire: An Archaeological Watching Brief

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A watching brief was carried out by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit at Longstanton between the 4th May and 22nd June 2007. This brief consisted of monitoring the investigation of magnetic anomalies by Bactec, and also the excavation of geotechnical test pits by WSP Environmental. The investigation work was observed by an archaeologist, and halted when necessary to excavate/record possible archaeological features. Both of these surveys took place across Oakington Airfield (Areas C and D) and on land adjacent to Longstanton Golf Course (Area A; fig. 1). Given the extensive nature of both surveys, and the limited size (and often depth) of the excavations, the brief concentrated on monitoring test pits within the vicinity of known sites. Additional excavations in non-archaeologically sensitive areas were monitored only as and when the opportunity arose.

The Bactec survey consisted of 206 investigations within the vicinity of areas of archaeological interest (117 from Sites XVI and XXXIII, 51 from Site XVIII, 25 from Site XXXIV and 13 from Site XXXIX). The majority of these entailed hand-digging within the topsoil, and were of no archaeological interest. Deeper or more elusive signals were investigated by a 360° machine with a 1.80m wide toothless ditching bucket, resulting in an excavation approximately 2 metres square, although most of these excavations likewise failed to reach the surface of the natural geology. Of the seven investigations to impact significantly on the natural geology, only one contained a possible feature, TP 39 in Area A (fig. 2). This revealed a rather amorphous feature 2.00m x 1.10m and 0.25m deep, roughly an elongated rectangle in plan with a V-shaped profile. Although this feature contained some charcoal flecking, it was not conclusively archaeological in character and contained no artefacts. A natural origin for this feature is likely, but it coincidentally fell within the putative prehistoric 'site' (Site XXXIX) in Area A (fig. 2) which itself contained an amorphous but genuine pit (Evans and Mackay 2004).

The geotechnical test pits were excavated by a JCB with a 0.60m wide ditching bucket, and tended to be *c.* 3.00m long and *c.* 3.00m deep. Only the uppermost metre or so was normally of any potential archaeological interest. Of the 79 pits monitored, only two exposed any deposits of potential archaeological interest. These occurred in TPB 66, within Site XVIII, and TPC 50B on the south-eastern periphery of Sites XVIII and XV (fig. 3). TPB 66 contained a 0.35m thick layer of dark grey-black silt clay containing five sherds of 2nd-4th century Roman pottery, including a Nene Valley colour-coated sherd and three sandy greyware sherds (K. Anderson *pers. com.*). This was sealed by 0.60m of mixed topsoil and subsoil, seemingly a 20th century levelling episode associated with the construction of the airfield. The Roman layer could, therefore, form part of a horizontal occupation layer, or the base of a shallow feature truncated by the levelling activity. TPC 50B exposed a small ditch, 0.80m wide and 0.27m deep, lying on a southeast by northwest alignment (fig. 4). This was excavated by hand, but no artefacts were uncovered. All that could be said was that the feature

appeared to be sealed by the subsoil, making a pre-Medieval date likely. Iron Age and Roman ditch systems were found on a broadly similar alignment on Sites XVIII and XV, and this feature may be an outlier to one of these systems. No archaeological features were encountered in Area D (fig. 5).

The test pit survey did indicate areas of truncation, particularly around the main hangers and to the north of them, TPC 5 to 14 inclusive showing truncation and WWII period rubbish dumping, which was indicated by the one trench put through that area in 2005 (Evans *et al.* 2006), to the point that little archaeology would be likely to survive within that swathe. Although other pits did show disturbance, these tended to be more isolated, and did not identify 'zones' of truncation.

References

Evans, C. and Mackay, D. 2004 *Longstanton, Cambridgeshire, A village Hinterland*. CAU Report No. 696.

Evans, C., Appleby, G., Mackay, D. and Armour, N. 2006 *Longstanton, Cambridgeshire, A village Hinterland (II)*. CAU Report No. 711.

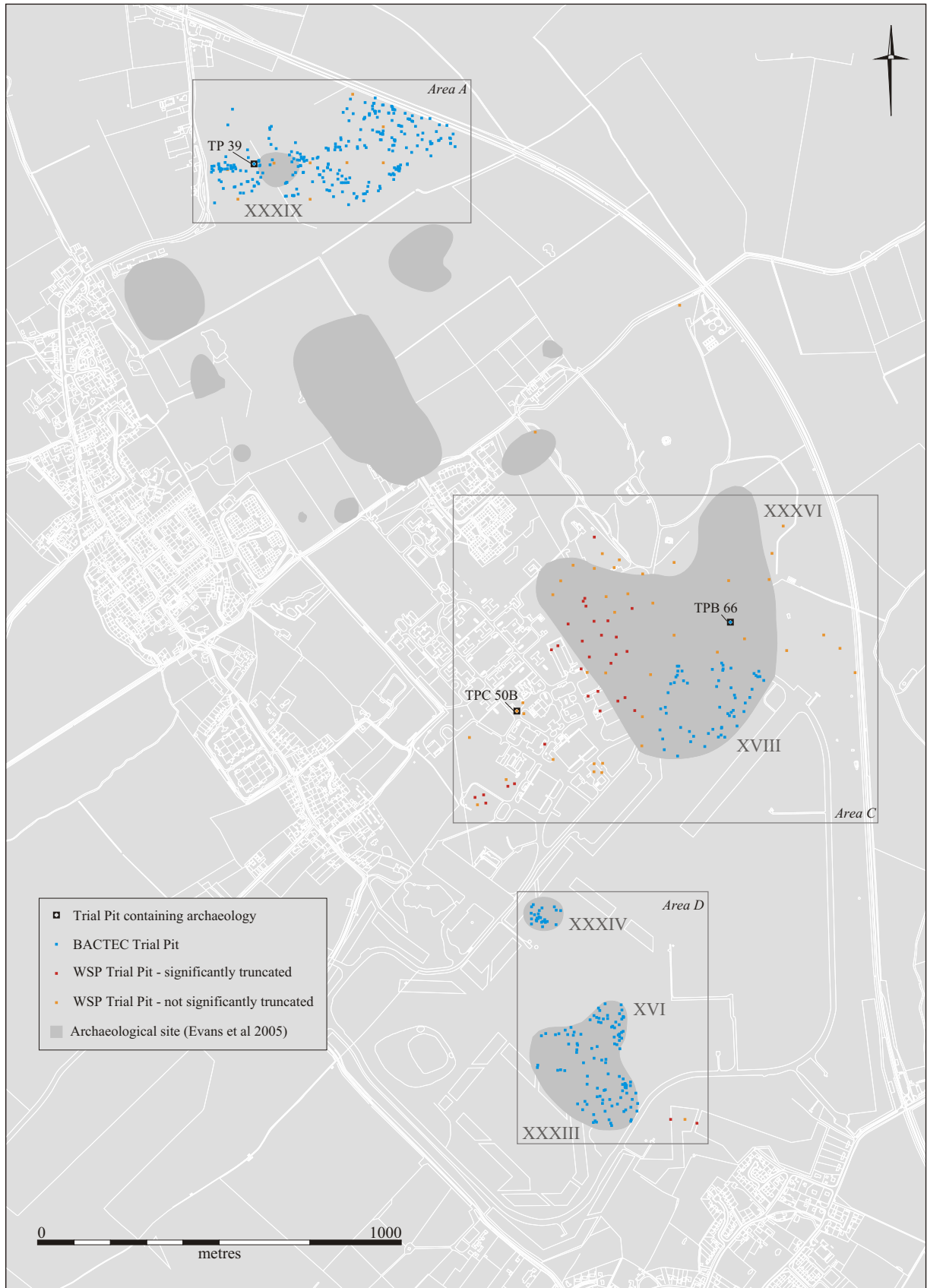


Figure 1. Watching Brief Areas

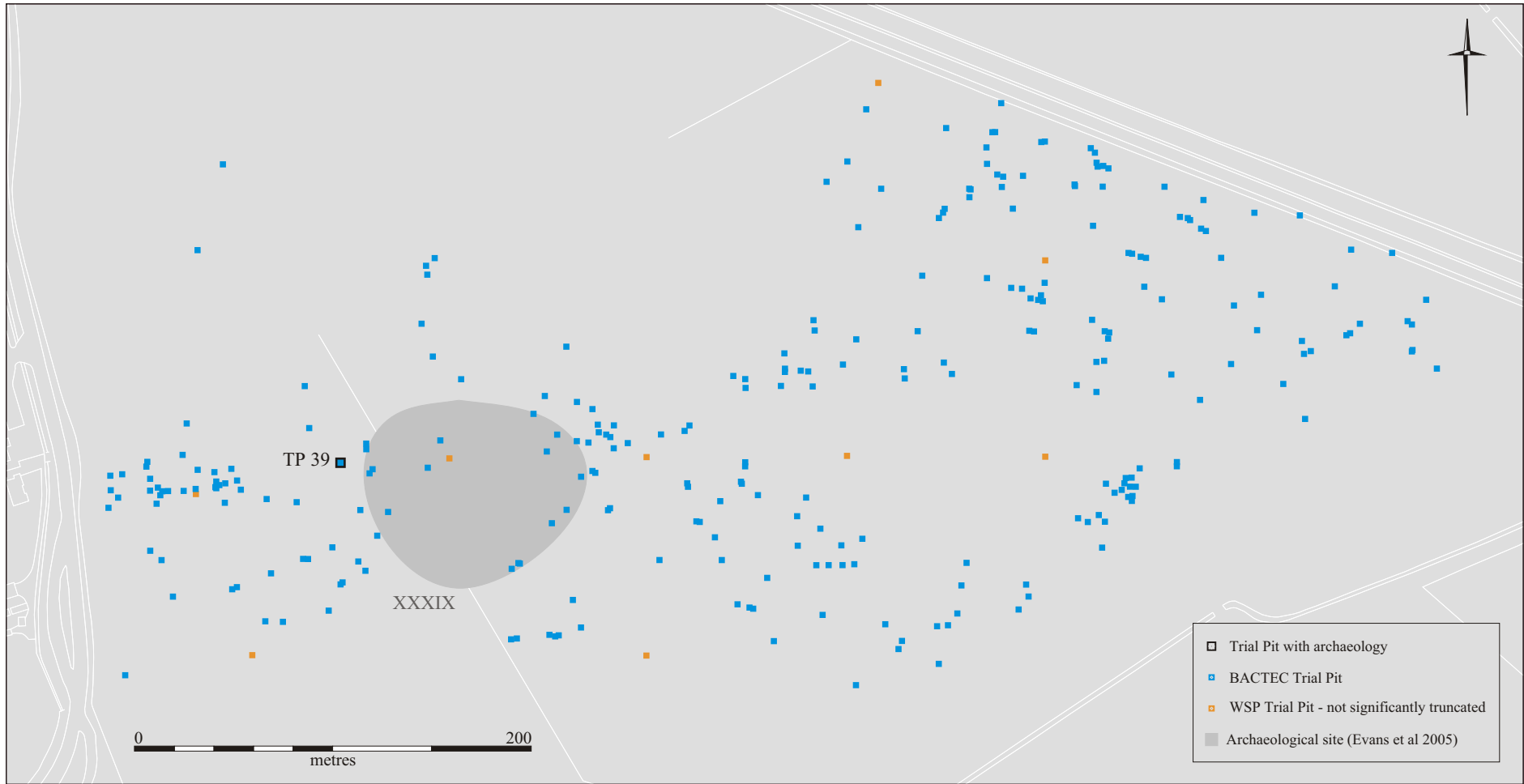


Figure 2. Area A

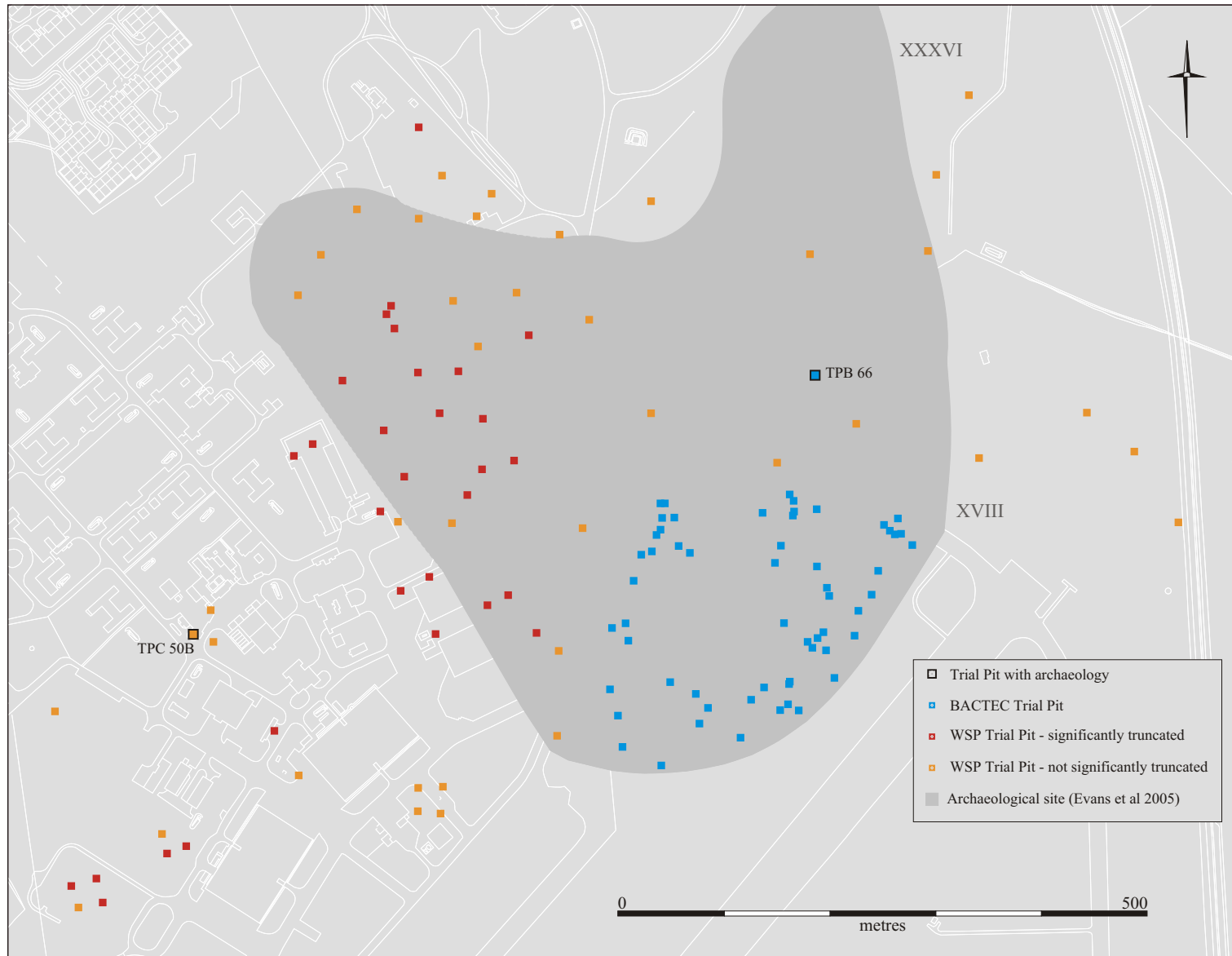


Figure 3. Area C

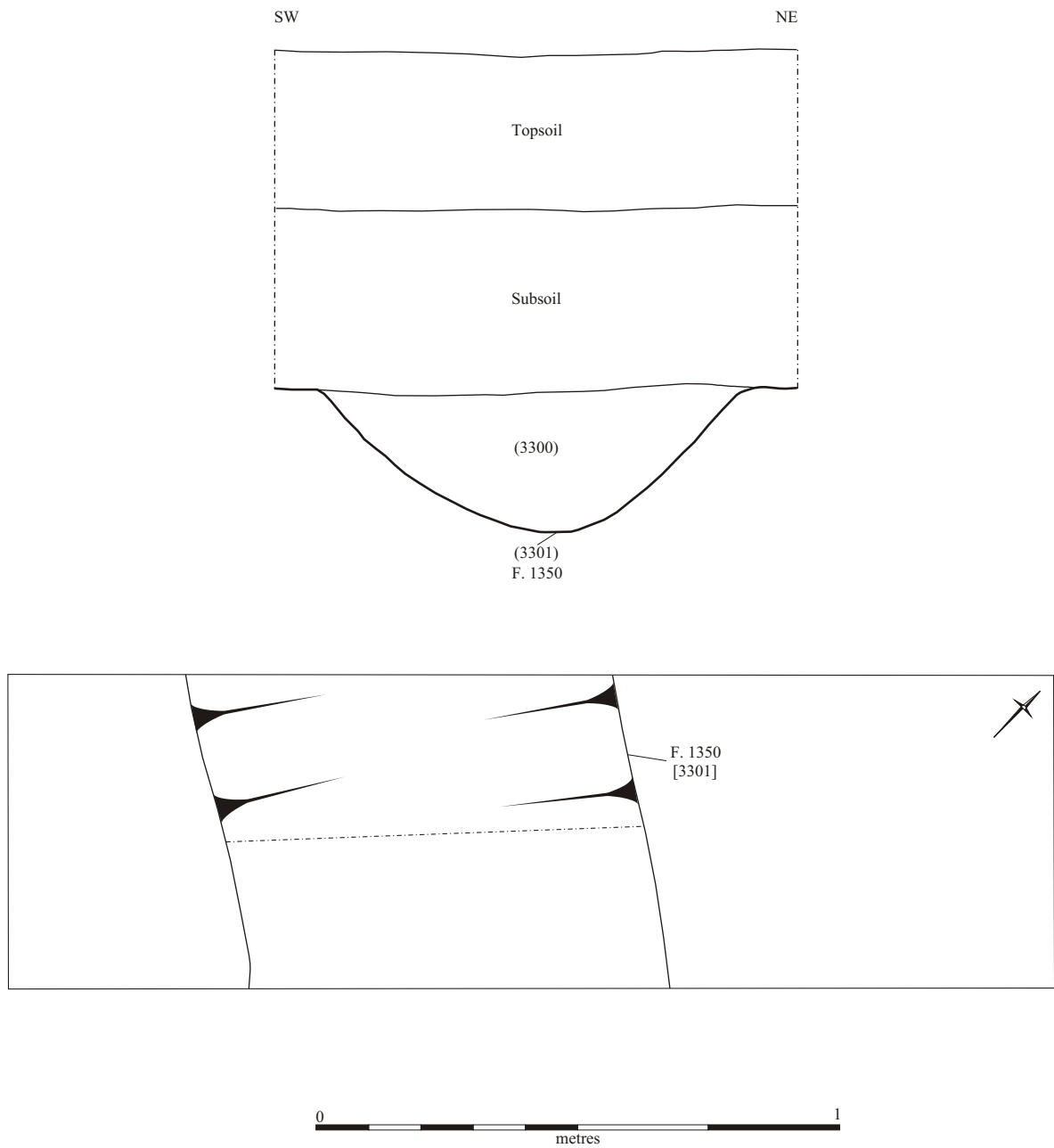


Figure 4. Plan and section of Test Pit TPC 50B

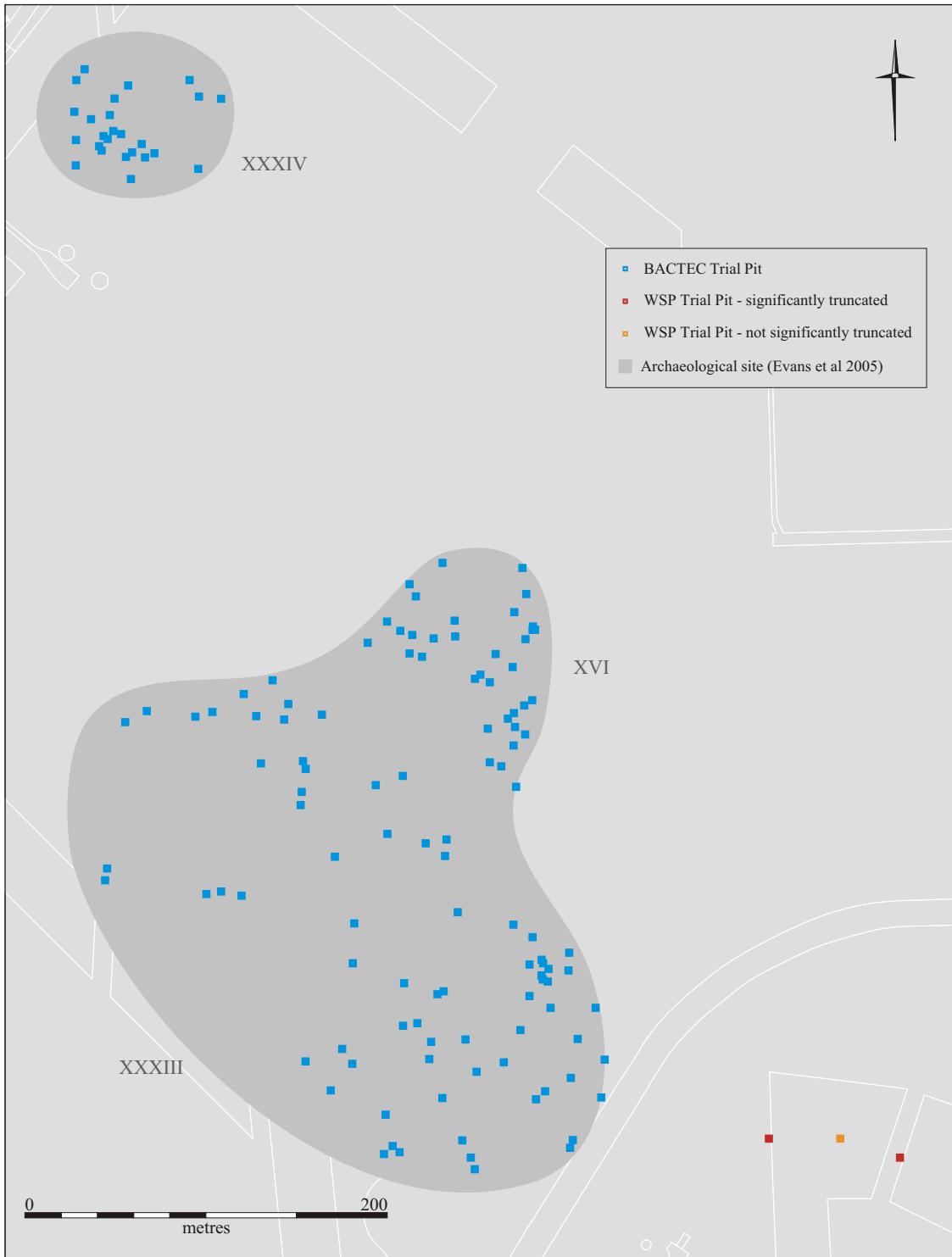


Figure 5. Area D