



Site 37, Gavray Drive
Bicester
Oxfordshire

Archaeological
Evaluation Report

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The Chiltern Railways (Bicester to Oxford Improvements) Order 2012

Site 37, Gavray Drive, Bicester, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Summary

Between the 10th and 12th of June 2013 Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation of land off Gavray Drive, Bicester on behalf of Chiltern Railways. The evaluation comprised six trenches identifying ridge and furrow and a later field ditch. No significant archaeological features or finds were encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project details and background

1.1.1 In October 2012, the Secretary of State made the Chiltern Railways (Bicester to Oxford Improvements) Order 2012 (the Order). This Transport and Works Act (TWA) Order authorises the construction and operation of an improved railway between Bicester and Oxford along the line of the existing operation. The Order is being implemented by the Chiltern Railway Company Ltd. (Chiltern Railways) and subsequently by Network Rail and is accompanied by a planning direction granted by the Secretary of State, which is subject to a number of conditions. Condition 9 of the deemed planning permission refers to the provision of archaeological investigations along the route in advance of the construction.

1.1.2 Oxford Archaeology (OA), was commissioned by Chiltern Railways through ERM to design and undertake the archaeological investigations required along the route. To facilitate this OA proposed and discussed a scheme-wide archaeological design to Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for the Cherwell District at Oxfordshire County Council and David Radford, Oxford City Archaeologist at Oxford City Council. In May 2013 OA produced and issued the final version of the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) that outlined the approach for all archaeological works and potential variations to these along the scheme which was approved by both Planning Archaeologists (OA 2013). The design includes walkover survey, earthworks survey, trial trench evaluation and excavation methods.

1.1.3 As part of the archaeological design an evaluation is required on land situated to the north of Gavray Drive, Bicester (Site 37) which is located at the northern limit of the scheme (Fig. 1). The fieldwork for this evaluation comprised six trenches representing an approximate 4% sample of the site by area which was undertaken between 10th and 12th June 2013.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 Site 37 is located at the northern end of the project TWA boundary where the Oxford to Bicester rail line will connect to the Birmingham to London track within the eastern part of Bicester. The site boundary subject to the evaluation requirement encloses an area of approximately 0.94 hectares centred on National Grid Reference SU 5933 2259 (Fig. 2). The western boundary is defined by the existing freight line which leads to the north out of Bicester with the northern boundary marked by the Birmingham to London line. Gavray Drive defines the southern boundary with the eastern limit crossing open fields. Mature hedgerows line the established boundaries with the eastern side crossing the existing rough grassland.

1.2.2 The site is located on relatively flat land at c 69m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The underlying solid geology of the site is Kellaways Clay Member - Mudstone.



1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 A detailed study of the known cultural and archaeological heritage resource within a 1km boundary to either side of the entire scheme route has been completed by OA as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Environmental Statement (ES) undertaken in 2009 (ERM 2009a and 2009b). Reference should be made to the ES for detailed background information and the findings from previous desk studies (ERM 2009b).
- 1.3.2 With regard to this specific location, the fields immediately to the east have been subject to an evaluation in 2005 (CA 2005). This produced limited evidence of Iron Age activity within the vicinity. Perhaps the focus for this activity was a small multi-phase settlement located approximately 350m to the south at Fields Farm which was excavated by OA in 1998 (Cromarty *et al.* 1999). This defined a small enclosed settlement spanning the Middle-Late Iron Age periods. Another possible settlement of Iron Age origin which may have extended in use until the post-conquest period is present 650m to the south-east. Combined with a number of known Iron Age and Roman sites to the north and south, these suggest that the low lying land to either side of Langford Brook was relatively densely settled during these periods.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The general aims for all evaluations as defined within the WSI are as follows:

- (i) establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains,
- (ii) determine and confirm the character of any remains present, without compromising any deposits that may merit detailed investigation under more detailed open area excavation or Strip, Map and Sample recording,
- (iii) determine or estimate the date range of any remains from artefacts or otherwise,
- (iv) characterise any underlying archaeological strata down to undisturbed geology without significantly impacting upon significant younger (overlying) deposits where possible,
- (v) determine the geo-archaeological and palaeo-environmental potential of any archaeological deposits encountered,
- (vi) establish what archaeological remains/deposits may be affected by any proposed development,
- (vii) make available the results of the investigation to inform subsequent mitigation strategies,
- (viii) produce reports and full archive or summary reports where these will facilitate a rolling programme of investigation, and
- (ix) disseminate the results of the investigation at a level appropriate to their importance.

2.2 Scope of works

2.2.1 The evaluation comprised an approximate 4% sample of the development area. This translated as 6 x 30m trenches each at approximately 2m wide for which the layout was agreed within the WSI prior to commencing the fieldwork (Fig. 2). The trenches were



arranged to provide a best coverage of the site and the associated construction impacts.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Each trench was mechanically excavated to the first archaeological horizon or the surface of the underlying silt clay natural geology depending upon which was encountered first. During machine excavation particular care was taken to ensure any archaeological deposits above the natural geology could be identified. In the event none were encountered and machine excavation proceeded to the surface of the underlying geological deposits. Trench views and sample sections were photographed digitally and levels of the exposed geological surface were recorded for each trench prior to backfilling (Figs 3-4 and Plates 1-2). The spoil generated from each trench was scanned for artefacts during the course of the evaluation. Ricahrd Oram was informed of the results and visited the site prior to the backfilling of the trenches.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are summarised below followed by individual trench descriptions where features were recorded. Trench plans and sections are illustrated in Figures 2, 3 and 4 with excavated sections also presented in Plates 1 and 2. A full context inventory of all deposits is tabulated in Appendix A. This should be referred to for information such as dimensions which are not otherwise included within the descriptive text unless pertinent to the description. Finds identification and quantification is tabulated in Appendix B. No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered.

3.1.2 Individual contexts have been uniquely numbered by trench starting at the relevant hundred numeral and then being followed by the individual context (e.g. The first context used for Trench 1 would be 100 followed by 101, Trench 2 starts at 200 etc).

3.2 Trenches and deposit sequence

3.2.1 No significant archaeological features, deposits or finds were encountered within the evaluation. However, several shallow features, mostly deriving from the historical agricultural use of the land, were recorded along with the recovery of a small amount of finds that date from the post-medieval period. No features were present within Trench 3. Each trench contained a ploughsoil sequence overlying the natural clay silt geology. This consisted of a buried ploughsoil probably associated with the former ridge and furrow cultivation of this field overlain by the current dark brown humic ploughsoil / topsoil and turf.

3.3 Trench 1

3.3.1 Two shallow features were encountered cut into the natural geology within Trench 1 (Figs 2 and 3). These comprised a NW-SE aligned ditch or furrow (105) containing a single fill (106) and a roughly circular treehole (103) that contained a similar fill (104). Neither feature produce any artefacts and the fills were sealed under the buried ploughsoil.



3.4 Trench 2

3.4.1 Two shallow N-S aligned probable linear furrows (203 and 205) cut into the natural geology were recorded within the eastern part of Trench 2 (Fig. 2). Both were filled with a yellowish brown clay silt fill (204 and 206) of similar appearance to the buried ploughsoil horizon (Fig. 3). Neither produce any artefactual material.

3.5 Trench 4

3.5.1 Two ditches were recorded in Trench 4 (Fig. 2). The earliest comprised a NE-SW aligned ditch (403) within the western part of the trench and cut into the natural geology. This was well defined with a rounded base and in excess of 0.2m deep containing a single sterile fill (404) (Fig. 3).

3.5.2 A NW-SE aligned ditch (405) was recorded to the east of 403 and displayed a similar profile. However, this ditch was cut through the buried ploughsoil horizon (401) and contained a single fill (406) that produced two small sherds of post-medieval pottery. The overlying modern plough / topsoil (400) also filled the upper part of this ditch profile (Fig. 3 and Plate 1).

3.6 Trench 5

3.6.1 A possible ditch or furrow (503) aligned NE-SW and cut into the natural geology was recorded within the northern end of the trench (Fig. 2). The was relatively well defined suggesting that it was a ditch rather than a furrow, although the single fill (504) contained within it was comparable to that of the furrows recorded within Trenches 1 and 2 (Fig. 4 and Plate 2). Several small fragments of artefacts were recovered from the fill. These comprised a single fragment of post-medieval roofing peg tile, an iron nail, a fragment of oyster shell and a fragment of animal bone. The fill was sealed by the buried ploughsoil horizon (501).

3.7 Trench 6

3.7.1 A N-S aligned ditch or furrow (603) cut into the natural geology was excavated within the western end of the trench (Fig. 2). This was relatively well defined along its western edge suggesting that it was a ditch, although its eastern edge was much more shallow and suggestive of it being a furrow. The feature was infilled with a single sterile silt clay fill typical of the other features encountered within the evaluation. This was overlain by the buried ploughsoil layer (601).



4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 The evaluation was undertaken during good ground and weather conditions ensuring that these results are truly representative of the site potential. No significant archaeological deposits, features or artefacts were encountered.
- 4.1.2 The features recorded appear to largely comprise furrows representing the historic farming arable use of the land around the historic core of Bicester. However, these features do not conform to a regular alignment as would be expected for a ridge and furrow system covering a relatively localised area. Observation of the ridge and furrow arrangement clearly indicated as crop / parch marks by the current satellite images of the site show that the main alignment is NE-SW reflected by the existing hedge boundary east of Trenches 1-4 with a NW-SE arrangement to the east of this. Within the evaluation it is probable that the furrows are partly truncated by later ploughing and that their true alignment is not clear within the limits of these trenches. It is also clear that features 405 and 105 are at right angles to the furrow arrangement and that these are likely to be related to other factors. Certainly the later date of ditch 405 is demonstrated by the fact that this is cut through a later ploughsoil horizon. This may be a later field boundary ditch or drainage feature.
- 4.1.3 Although a definitive origin for all of the features can not be provided, the lack of any significant artefactual material suggests that these are field boundaries or otherwise related to agricultural activities. More detailed investigation of these features is unlikely to yield further information and they do not appear to be archaeologically significant.



APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description				Orientation	NE-SW	
Trench contained one small NE-SW aligned linear that is probably a furrow and one treehole. Deposit sequence comprised topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of sandy clay.				Avg. depth (m)	0.48	
				Width (m)	2	
				Length (m)	30	
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
100	Layer	-	0.28	Topsoil	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil / buried ploughsoil	-	-
102	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
103	Cut	1.5	0.2	Treehole	-	-
104	Fill	1.5	0.2	Mid yellowish brown silty clay fill of 103	-	-
105	Cut	1.5	0.1	Furrow	-	-
106	Fill	1.5	0.1	Mid yellowish brown sandy silt clay	-	-

Trench 2						
General description				Orientation	WNW-ESE	
Trench contained two N-S aligned furrows. Deposit sequence comprised topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of sandy clay.				Avg. depth (m)	0.52	
				Width (m)	2	
				Length (m)	30	
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
200	Layer	-	0.28	Topsoil	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil / buried ploughsoil	-	-
202	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
203	Cut	1.7	0.15	Furrow	-	-
204	Fill	1.7	0.15	Mid yellowish brown silty clay fill of 203	-	-
205	Cut	1.9	0.15	Furrow	-	-
206	Fill	1.9	0.15	Mid yellowish brown silty clay fill of 205	-	-



Trench 3						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
No archaeology. Deposit sequence comprised topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of sandy clay.				Avg. depth (m)		0.45
				Width (m)		2
				Length (m)		30
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
300	Layer	-	0.28	Topsoil	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil / buried ploughsoil	-	-
302	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 4						
General description				Orientation		E-W
Trench contained one NE-SW ditch and one NW-SE ditch. Deposit sequence comprised topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of sandy clay.				Avg. depth (m)		0.45
				Width (m)		2
				Length (m)		30
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
400	Layer	-	0.28	Topsoil	-	-
401	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil / buried ploughsoil	-	-
402	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
403	Cut	1.08	0.23	Ditch / furrow	-	-
404	Fill	1.08	0.23	Dark orange brown silty clay fill of 403.	-	-
405	Cut	1.2	0.2	Ditch	-	-
406	Fill	1.2	0.2	Dark greyish brown silty clay fill of 405	Y	Post-medieval

Trench 5						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
Trench contained one NE-SW probable furrow. Deposit sequence comprised topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of sandy clay.				Avg. depth (m)		0.44
				Width (m)		2.10
				Length (m)		37.70
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
500	Layer	-	0.28	Topsoil	-	-
501	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil / buried ploughsoil	-	-
502	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
503	Cut	1.6	0.2	Furrow	-	-
504	Fill	1.6	0.2	Silty clay fill of 503	Y	Post-medieval



Trench 6						
General description				Orientation		WNW-ESE
Trench contained one N-S probable furrow or ditch. Deposit sequence comprised topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural of sandy clay.				Avg. depth (m)		0.44
				Width (m)		2.10
				Length (m)		37.70
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
600	Layer	-	0.28	Topsoil	-	-
601	Layer	-	0.22	Subsoil / buried ploughsoil	-	-
602	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
603	Cut	1.3	0.15	Ditch / furrow	-	-
604	Fill	1.3	0.15	Dark orange brown silty clay fill of 603	-	-



APPENDIX B. FINDS

B.1 Finds quantification

Context	Description	Date
406	CBM, x1 fragment, peg tile, 54g	Medieval / post-medieval
406	1 sherd transfer printed ware (TPW), 1 cream ware dish rim sherd, 9g	1770-1830
504	Bone – 1 cow tooth, 16g	
504	CBM - 1 fragment over-fired late medieval peg tile, 78g	15th - 17th century
504	Iron – 1 nail, 3g	
504	Shell – 1 oyster shell, 8g	
504	Stone - 1 fragment burnt, 42g	



APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

CA, 2005 Land North of Gavray Drive, Bicester, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Evaluation Report. Unpublished client report by Cotswold Archaeology

Cromarty, A M, Foreman, S, and Murray, P, 1999 The excavation of a late Iron Age enclosed settlement at Bicester Fields Farm, Bicester, Oxon, *Oxoniensia* **64**, 153-233

ERM, 2009a Evergreen 3 Project: The Chiltern Railways (Oxford to Bicester) Improvements: EIA Scoping Report. Client report issued April 2009

ERM, 2009b Evergreen 3 Project: The Chiltern Railways (Oxford to Bicester Improvements) Order Environmental Statement: Volumes 1-4. Client report issued December 2009

OA, 2013 The Chiltern Railways (Bicester to Oxford Improvements) Order 2012. Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Works. Unpublished client document



APPENDIX D. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Site 37, Gavray Drive, Bicester, Oxfordshire
Site code:	BIGL 13
Grid reference:	SP 5930 2257
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	10th to 12th June 2013
Area of site:	0.94 ha

Summary of results:

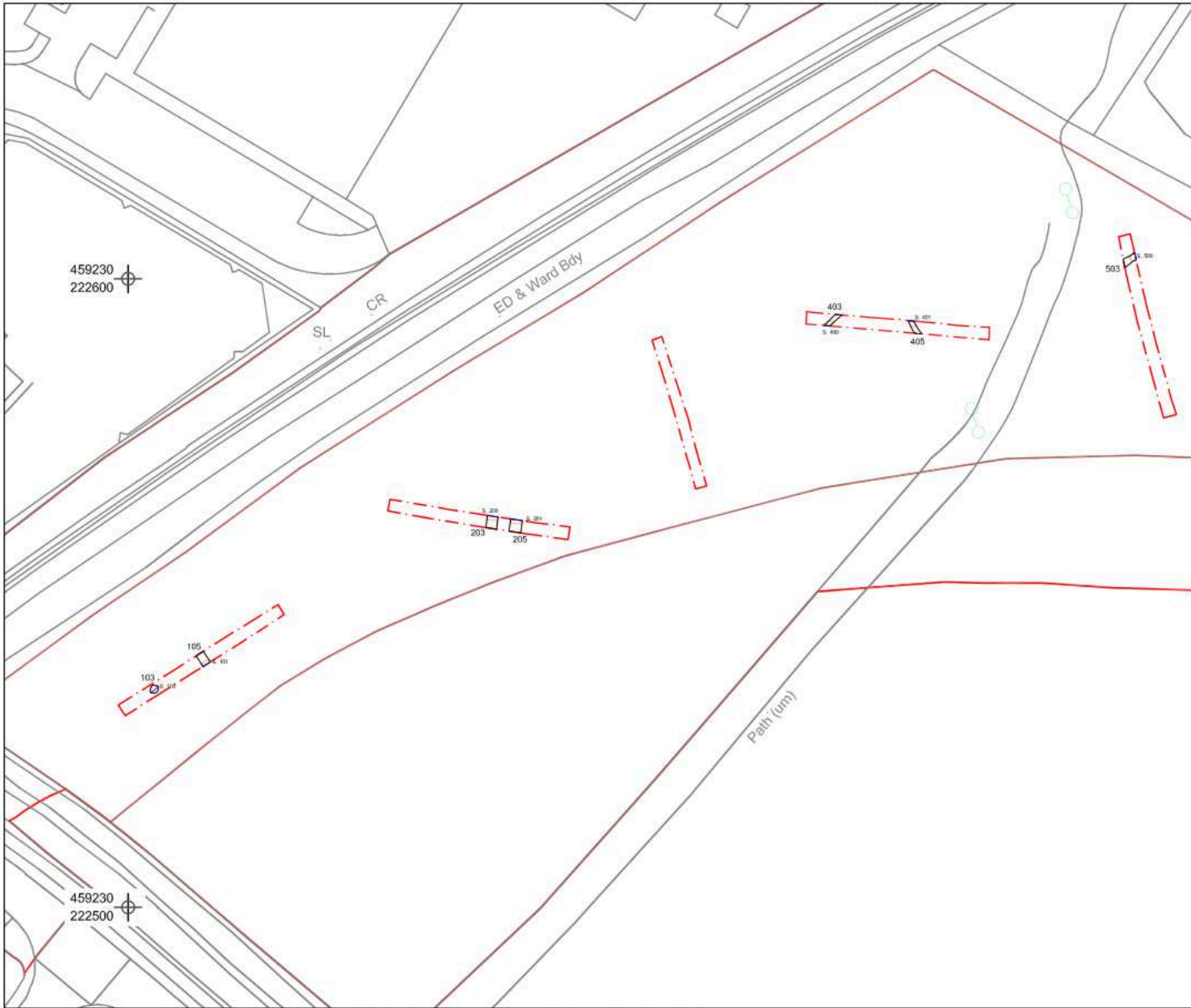
Between the 10th and the 12th of June 2013 Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation of land off Gavray Drive, Bicester on behalf of Chiltern Railways. The evaluation comprised six trenches identifying ridge and furrow and a later field ditch. No significant archaeological features or finds were encountered.

Location of archive:

The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, under the accession number OXCMS: 2013.91.



Figure 1: Site location



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0 50 m

Scale at A4 1:1000

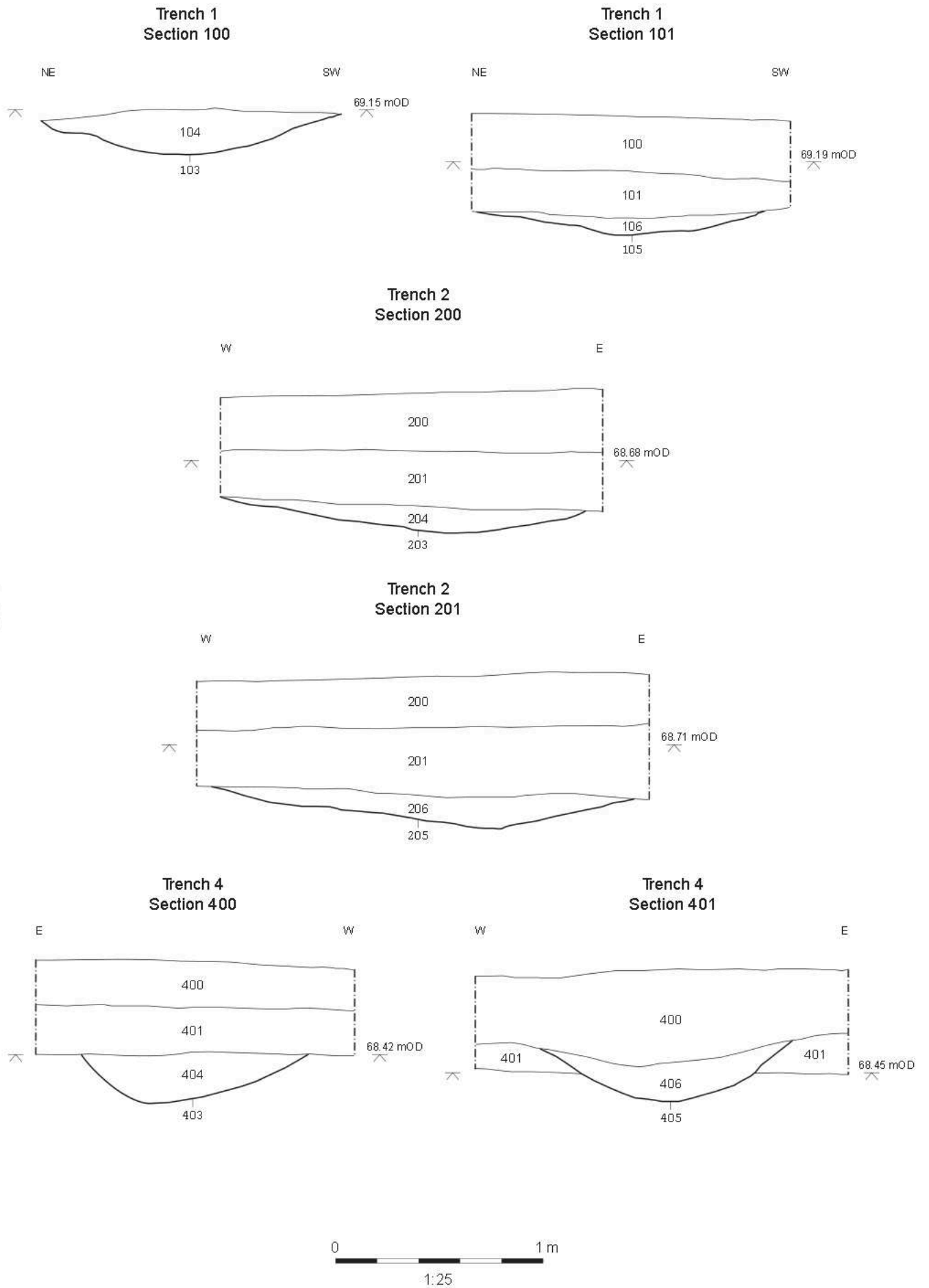


Figure 3: Sections

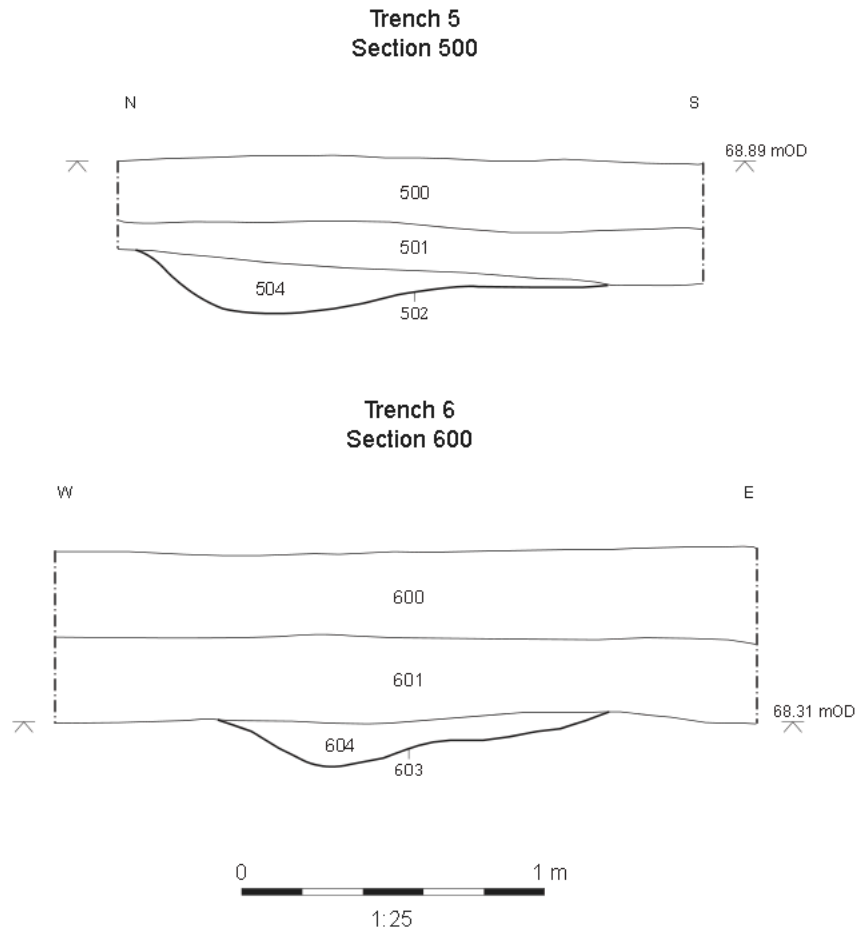


Figure 4: Sections



Plate 1: Ditch 405



Plate 2: Ditch 503



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