



Wetland Creation at Eythrope Meadows, Waddesdon Estate, Buckinghamshire

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Wetland Creation at Eythrope Meadows, Waddesdon Estate, Buckinghamshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Summary

In April 2019 Oxford Archaeology carried out a trial trench evaluation as part of wetland regeneration scheme at Eythrope Meadows, Waddesdon Estate, Buckinghamshire on behalf of the River Thames Conservation Trust. The site is situated on the floodplain of the River Thames directly adjacent to and within the setting of a medieval moat site known as 'moated site 650m south of Beachendon Farm' (NHLE: 1018671).

Four trenches were excavated within the footprints of the proposed fish ponds and management channels, but only uncovered a single undated ditch, possibly modern. Test pits dug at either end of each trench to investigate the underlying floodplain sequences, revealed a sterile alluvium sequence extending below the maximum impact depth but encountered no archaeological remains. The archaeological potential of the site is therefore considered to be low.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Hannah Worker, from the River Thame Conservation Trust, for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Lucy Lawrence, who monitored the work on behalf of Buckinghamshire County Council, for her advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Carl Champness. The fieldwork was directed by Rachael Daniel, who was supported by Elizabeth Kennard. Survey and digitizing was carried out by Benjamin Brown. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by the River Thames Conservation Trust to undertake a trial trench evaluation at Eythrope Meadows, Waddeston Estate, Buckinghamshire. The work was undertaken a part of a proposed wetland regeneration project, with fish ponds and channel management on floodplain of the River Thames.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of planning permission (Planning Ref. 18/02233/APP). Historic England were also consulted following submission of the planning application. In their response (ref: P00951787) Historic England highlighted the potential impacts to designated heritage assets particularly the 'Moated site 650 m south of Beachendon Farm (NHLE: 1018671), both directly and indirectly must also be considered within the application. These were addressed within the Heritage Statement (OA 2019a) and an evaluation proposed in order to assess the archaeological impacts of the scheme. A brief was set by Phil Markham, Planning Archaeologist for Buckinghamshire County Council, and a written scheme of investigation was produced by OA detailing the local authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning decision (OAb 2019). This document outlines the results of the evaluation.
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation (2014) and local and national planning policies.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site lies within the Waddesdon Estate, approximately 5km west of Aylesbury and 540m south of Beachendon Farm. The application area is centred on NGR SP 76176 13007 (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The area of the Application Area encompasses approximately 10ha and comprises an irregular shaped field beside the River Thames. The total area of the proposed scheme is 2.2ha and covers an area in the north-eastern part of the Application Area and another in the south-western corner. The Application Area is bounded by two secondary channels of the River Thames and currently comprises short grass with some mature trees along the southern boundary. Beyond the Application Area are further fields primarily used for pasture.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as a combination of alluvium (clay, silt, sand and gravel) and glaciofluvial deposits (mid-Pleistocene sand and gravel).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 As the archaeological and historical background of the site is discussed in more detail within the Heritage Assessment (OA 2019b), only a brief history of the site is outlined here.

- 1.3.2 The Application Area is situated on the northern floodplain of the River Thames, adjacent to the scheduled site of a medieval moat 650m south of Beachendon Farm (List Entry 1018671). The site area is also part of the setting of Beachendon Farmhouse (Grade II listed building, List Entry 1117797) and a range of associated Grade II listed outbuildings, which are situated 450m to the north. This 17th Century farmhouse is thought to be the location of a deserted medieval village, identified through field survey and aerial photography.
- 1.3.3 Fieldwalking to the south of the site has identified large quantities of prehistoric and Romano-British finds.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine the presence or absence of any archaeological remains;
- ii. To determine or confirm the likely date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;
- iii. To determine the condition and state of preservation of any remains;
- iv. To determine the degree of complexity of any surviving horizontal or vertical stratigraphy;
- v. To determine the geoarchaeological and palaeo-environmental potential of any archaeological deposits encountered;
- vi. To make available the results of the investigation through an appropriate level of reporting or publication;
- vii. To collate and submit the project archive to the receiving museum.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Four trenches measuring 30 x 1.6m were excavated within the proposed pond areas (Fig. 2; Plates 1 and 2). The trenches were located using a GPS system with a sub-50mm accuracy. The trenches were excavated under constant archaeological supervision, using a mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket. Excavation proceeded in spits down to the undisturbed alluvium. The single revealed feature was hand cleaned, excavated and recorded.

2.2.2 Test pits were undertaken at the ends of each trench to investigate the potential of the underlying alluvial sequence for earlier, pre-medieval archaeology which could be situated at the base of the alluvial deposit (Plates 3 and 4).

2.2.3 Once the trenches were excavated and recorded, they were backfilled at the discretion of Lucy Lawrence, County Archaeologist for Buckinghamshire.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

- 3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of the trench that contained ditch 4002. The full details of all trenches, with dimensions and depths of all deposits, can be found in Appendix A.
- 3.1.2 Context numbers reflect the trench numbers unless otherwise stated, eg layer 1004 is a deposit within Trench 1 while ditch 4002 is a feature within Trench 4.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 The soil sequence was fairly uniform throughout the trenches. The geology of alluvial clay was overlain by a subsoil, which in turn was overlain by the modern topsoil.
- 3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good and the trenches remained mostly dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

- 3.3.1 The only archaeological feature was a ditch in Trench 4, although it may be a modern drainage ditch.

3.4 Trench 4

- 3.4.1 A NE-SW aligned ditch (4002) was found at the north-west end of the trench. The ditch measured 0.79m wide and 0.4m deep (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 section 4000). It contained two naturally derived fills (4003 and 4004), both of which were sterile.

3.5 Test pits

- 3.5.1 The eight test pits reached an average depth of 2.1m below ground level (Fig. 4 section 1.2). None of the test pits uncovered any archaeology and in every test pit the alluvial clay deposits extended below the maximum impact depth of the proposed development (Plates 3 and 4).

3.6 Finds and environmental summaries

- 3.6.1 No finds or deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the works.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of the field investigation

- 4.1.1 The evaluation was undertaken in fair weather conditions, and although there was an ingress of water in the deepest parts of the test pits, the site was mainly dry. A good spatial coverage of site was achieved with the trenches, and the results are considered to be a reliable reflection of the archaeological potential of the site.
- 4.1.2 The drainage ditch in Trench 4 was easily identified against the lighter coloured natural alluvium. The single drainage ditch discovered was excavated and recorded.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

- 4.2.1 The results of the trenching determined that the area of the evaluation contained a single feature, of possible modern date. The palaeoenvironmental potential of the underlying alluvial sequence was considered to be low, lacking either organic remains suitable for dating or palaeoenvironmental interpretation.

4.3 Interpretation and significance

- 4.3.1 The single drainage or field boundary ditch recovered in Trench 4 is likely to be modern in date, although no finds were recovered.
- 4.3.2 No remains were found associated with the alluvial sequence or the scheduled monument. The archaeological potential of the proposed impact pond areas is considered to be low.

5 BIBLIOGRAPHY

OA 2019a Wetland Creation at Eythrope Meadows, Waddesdon Estate, Buckinghamshire, Heritage Assessment

OA 2019b Wetland Creation at Eythrope Meadows, Waddesdon Estate, Buckinghamshire; Written Scheme of Investigation

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying alluvium.					Length (m)	30
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.52
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1000	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil – dark reddish brown humic clayey silt, very rare subangular flint pebble inclusions.	-	-
1001	Layer	-	0.1	Subsoil – firm mid greyish brown silty clay, trace CBM inclusions.	-	-
1002	Layer	-	0.7	Alluvium – medium-firm mid orangey grey silty clay.	-	-
1003	Layer	-	0.6	Alluvium – soft pale greyish brown silty clay.	-	-
1004	Layer	-	0.6	Alluvium – soft/saturated pale greyish blue silty clay.	-	-
1005	Layer	-	>0.1	Alluvium – saturated mid blueish grey silty clay. Possible channel fill.	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	SE-NW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying alluvium.					Length (m)	30
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.55
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
2000	Layer	-	0.25	Topsoil	-	-
2001	Layer	-	1.65	Alluvium- soft/saturated, mid brownish grey silty clay.	-	-
2002	Layer	-	>0.05	Alluvium – soft, banded blue silty clay.	-	-

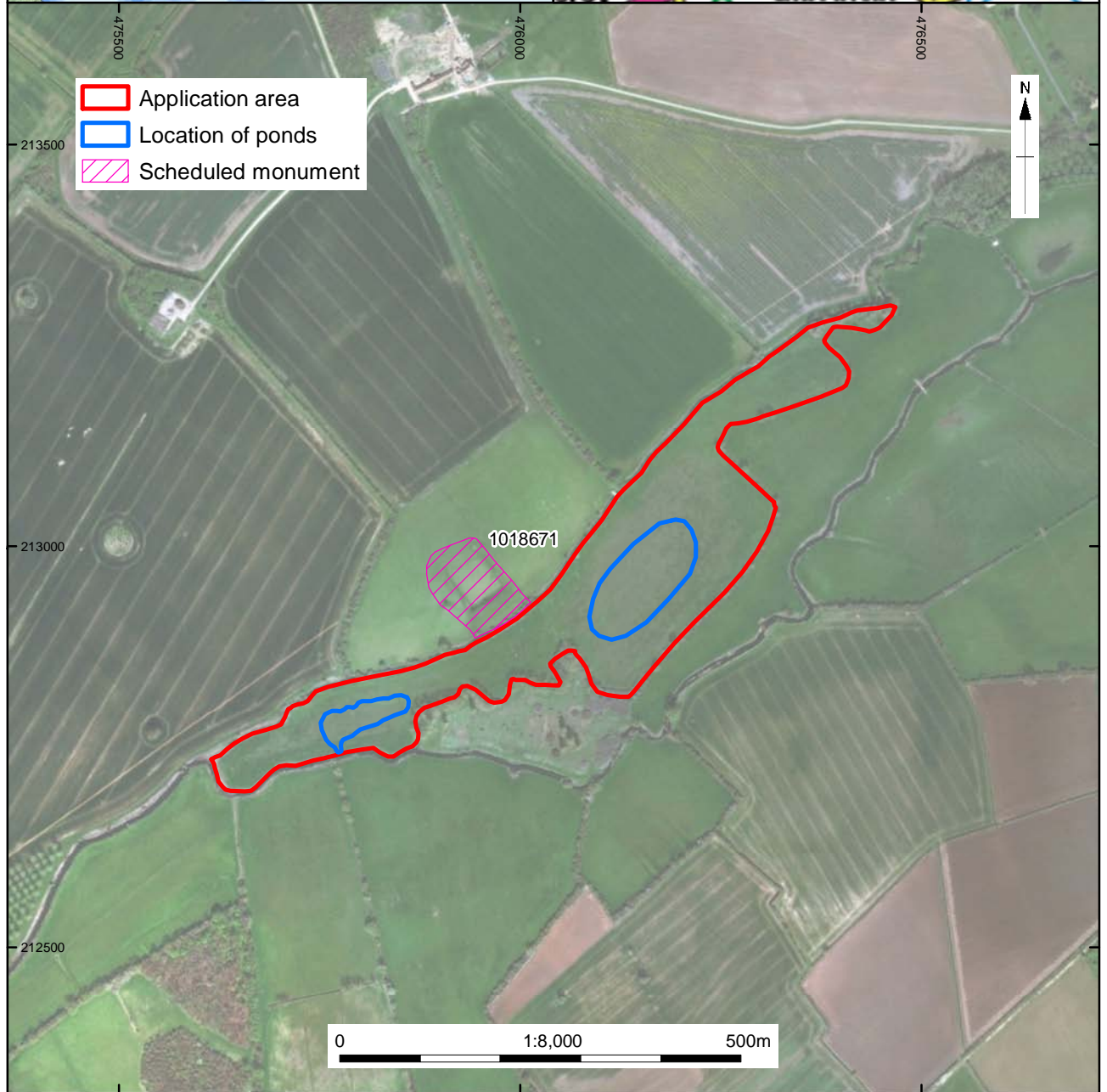
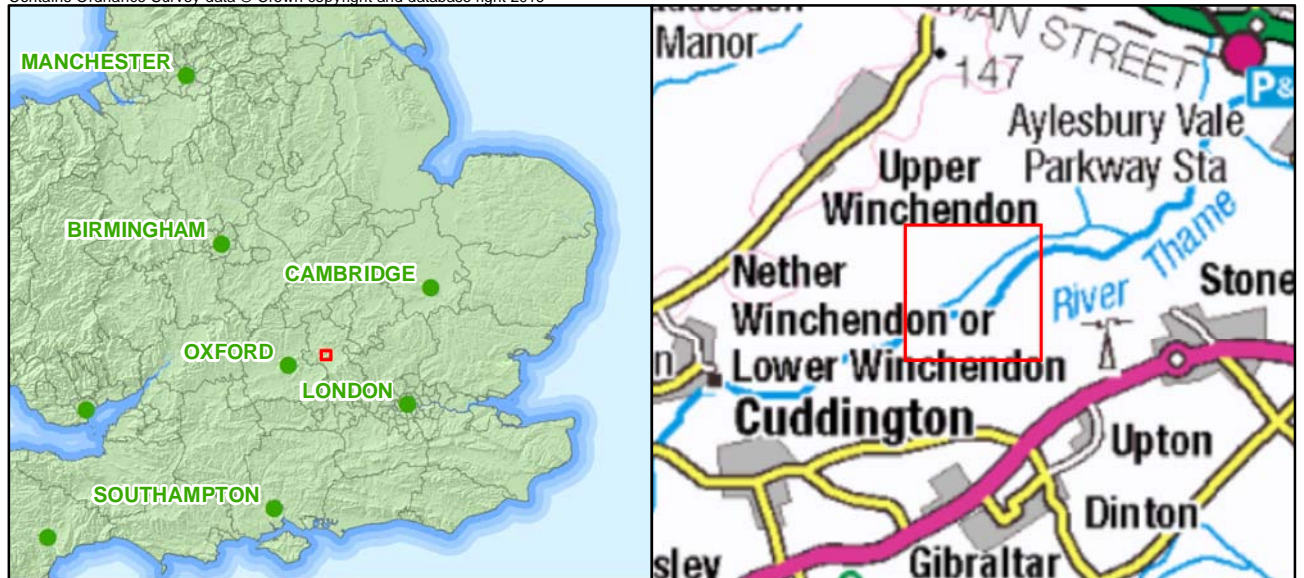
Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil overlying alluvium.					Length (m)	30
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.55
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
3000	Layer	-	0.25	Topsoil – dark reddish brown humic clayey silt.	-	-
3001	Layer	-	1.3	Alluvium – mid brownish grey soft silty clay.	-	-
3002	Layer	-	>0.5	Alluvium – mid greyish/blue soft clay with darker grey mottling.	-	-

Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	SE-NW
Trench contained a single NE-SW aligned ditch, date unknown. Consists of topsoil overlying alluvium.					Length (m)	30
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.40
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
4000	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil – soft, dark reddish brown humic clayey silt.	-	-
4001	Layer	-	1.6	Alluvium – mid-soft mid orangey grey clay.	-	-
4002	Cut	0.79	0.4	Ditch – Straight, sloping sides and a flattish base.	-	-
4003	Fill	0.53	0.11	Ditch fill – mid-dark very soft clayey silt.	-	-
4004	Fill	0.79	0.3	Ditch fill – mid greyish orange silty clay saturated silty clay, rare small limestone chip inclusions.	-	-
4005	Layer	-	>0.45	Alluvium – light, mid bluish grey soft clay.	-	-

APPENDIX B SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	Wetland Creation at Eythrope Meadows, Waddesdon Estate, Buckinghamshire
Site code:	WADW19
Grid Reference	SP 76176 13007
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	May 2019
Area of Site	2.2 hectares
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: tbc
Summary of Results:	In April 2019 Oxford Archaeology carried out a trial trench evaluation as part of wetland regeneration scheme at Eythrope Meadows, Waddesdon Estate, Buckinghamshire on behalf of the River Thames Conservation Trust.

Four trenches were excavated within the footprints of the proposed fish ponds and management channels, but only uncovered a single undated ditch, possibly modern. Test pits dug at either end of each trench to investigate the underlying floodplain sequences, revealed a sterile alluvium sequence extending below the maximum impact depth but encountered no archaeological remains. The archaeological potential of the site is therefore considered to be low.



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Figure 1: Site location



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Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

0 1:2,000 @ A4 100 m

Figure 2: Trenches and test pits

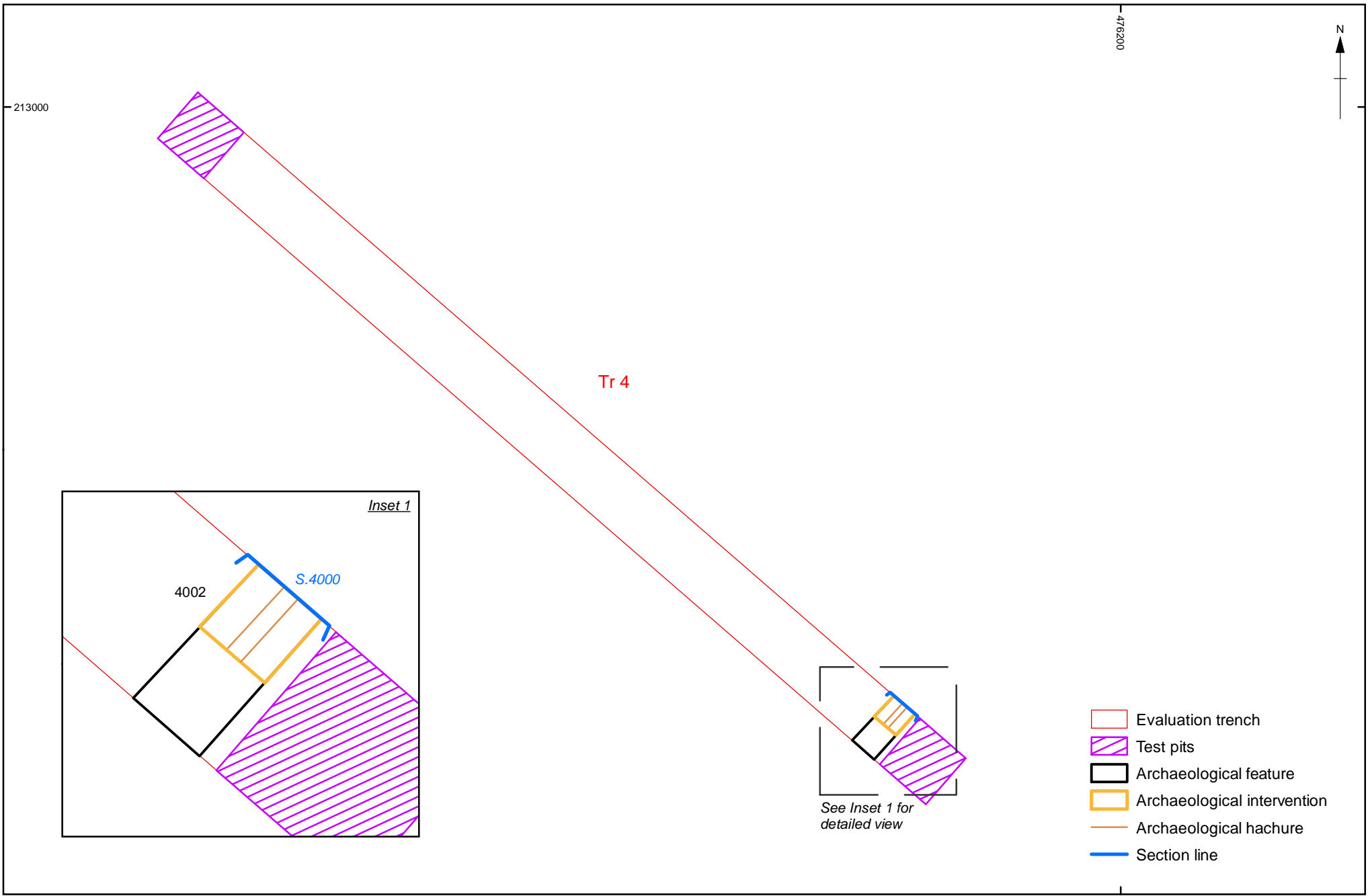


Figure 3: Plan of trench 4

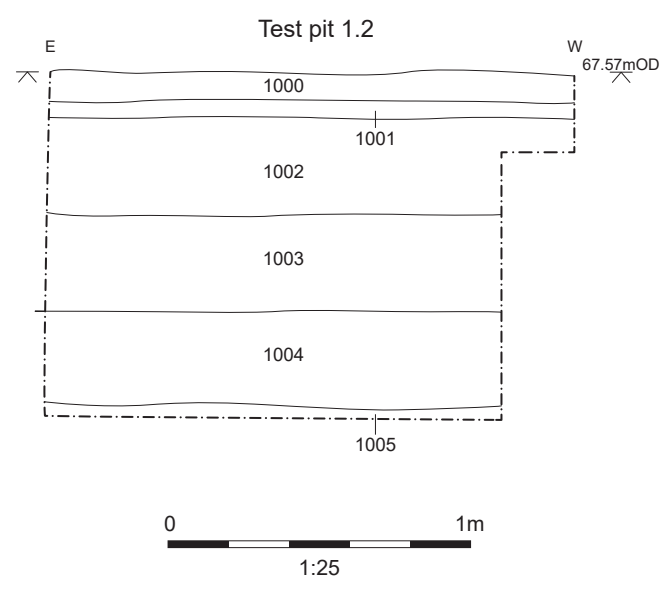
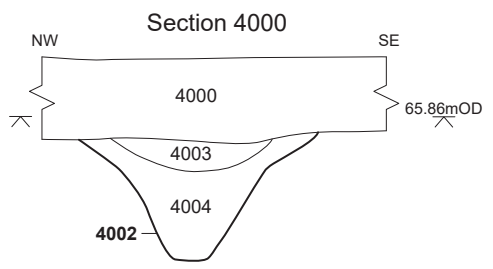


Figure 4: Section of ditch 4002 and Test pit 1.2



Plate 1: Trench 3, looking north-west (1m and 2m scales)



Plate 2: Trench 4, looking north-west (1m and 2m scales)



Plate 3: Test pit 3.1, looking north-west (1m scale)



Plate 4: Test pit 1.1, looking north (1m scale)



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