

LAND AT AXE VIEW, WADBROOK, DEVON

(Centred on NGR ST 3285 0183)

Results of an archaeological excavation and Post-
excavation assessment report

Planning ref. East Devon District Council 15/0645/MFUL

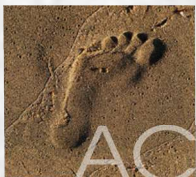
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On behalf of:
Greencells

Report No: ACD1576/2/0

Date: May 2017



archaeology

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Client	Greencells
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Report Author(s)	Stephen Robinson and Paul Rainbird
Contributions	Henrietta Quinnell and Cressida Whitton
Checked by	John Valentin
Approved by	John Valentin

Acknowledgements

The excavation was commissioned by Greencells and managed for AC archaeology by John Valentin. The site works were carried out by Stephen Robinson with the assistance of Paul Jones, Vince Simmonds and Andrew West. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Sarah Cottam and Stella De-Villiers. The collaborative role of Stephen Reed of the Devon County Historic Environment Team is duly acknowledged.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of AC archaeology and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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Summary

An archaeological excavation was undertaken by AC archaeology Ltd on land at Axe View, Wadbrook, Devon in March 2017. The excavation comprised three areas, all of which contained evidence for archaeological activity solely associated with activity previously revealed and recorded in earlier archaeological works undertaken on the site in 2015.

The excavation further exposed part of a Middle to Late Bronze Age enclosure ditch of uncertain function, and a limited amount of other archaeological deposits of similar date. The excavation areas were positioned principally to target both entrances of the enclosure and any associated activity. Two ditch terminals representing parts of the entrances to the enclosure were revealed in areas 1 and 3. Part of a further ditch, of probable post-medieval date, was revealed in area 2. A small quantity of Middle Bronze Age pottery and worked flint was recovered.

Proposals for post-excavation analyses of the finds along with subsequent publication in the journal Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society and the appropriate deposition of the archive are presented.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological excavation on land at Axe View, Wadbrook, Devon (NGR ST 3285 0183; Fig. 1) was undertaken by AC archaeology in March 2017. It was carried out in advance of the construction of a new solar farm. The excavation was commissioned by the developers, Greencells and was conducted as supporting information for a non-material amendment application to East Devon District Council, following consultation with the Devon County Historic Environment Team (hereafter DCHET).
- 1.2 The total site area is approximately 8.9 hectares and was formerly under pasture. It is located on a gentle, generally north-facing slope between 55m and 65m aOD (above Ordnance Datum), on a ridge between the River Axe to the west and its tributary the Blackwater River to the north. The underlying solid geology comprises mudstone of the Charmouth Mudstone Formation (BGS 2017).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site has been subject to a geophysical survey (Pre-Construct Geophysics 2015) and trial trench evaluation (Haines 2015). The geophysical survey identified what were thought to be two ditched enclosures of late prehistoric form, only one of which was confirmed by trial trenching. This was dated by recovered pottery to the Middle to Late Bronze Age period.

3. AIMS

- 3.1 The principal aim of the investigation was to preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits present which will be damaged or destroyed by the development with particular reference to further elucidating the date and function of the prehistoric enclosure.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The excavation was undertaken in accordance with a project design prepared by AC archaeology (Valentin 2017). It comprised the excavation of three areas; Areas 1 and 3 measured 10 x 7m and Area 2 measured 5 x 5m (Fig. 2; Plate 1).
- 4.2 The removal of overlying deposits by mechanical excavator with a toothless bucket within the trenches was undertaken in 20cm spits under the control and direction of a site archaeologist. Stripping ceased at the level at which archaeological deposits or natural geology was exposed.
- 4.3 The archaeological works were conducted in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation* (2014) and all features and deposits revealed were recorded using the standard AC archaeology pro-forma recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2* (revised August 2012). Detailed sections and plans were produced at a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate. All site levels relate to Ordnance Datum. Spoil heaps were scanned both manually and by metal detector for displaced artefacts.

5. ARCHIVE

- 5.1 The aim will be to create a synthesised and ordered archive containing all paper and digital primary records under the code ACD1576 and the following table lists the archive available (Table 1). The end result must be usable and easily accessible for anyone carrying out subsequent research on this or other comparable sites. Agreement will be reached with the RAM Museum, Exeter under the temporary reference number **RAMM 17/24** concerning deposition and long-term storage of the project archive. In the meantime, the archive will be stored at AC archaeology's Devon office. The archive will be prepared with reference to the English Heritage 2006 document *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE).

Folder	Primary Records	Format	Number	Comments
1	Context Index Sheets	A4	1	
1	Context Sheets	A4	14	
1	Photographic Register	A4	1	
1	Graphic Register	A4	1	8 drawings
1	Environmental Samples Registers	A4	1	2 samples
-	Drawings	A3	3	
-	Digital Photographs	JPEG	19	

Table 1: Archive of the excavation for ACD1576

6. RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

Each of the excavation areas were situated in close proximity and within the confines of the enclosure identified by the geophysical survey. This was to target the entrance terminals as well as to identify any other archaeological activity in the area. Each area was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.4m revealing natural river terrace gravels below topsoil and subsoil (see Table 2). Archaeological deposits present, comprised two of the ditch terminals and another ditch feature, also identified in the previous trench evaluation.

Context	Depth b.g.s.	Description	Interpretation
100/200/300	0 – 350mm max	Dark grey-brown silty clay loam.	Former ploughsoil horizon
105/205/305	350mm+	Slightly mixed dark orange-brown silty clay/gravels.	Natural river terrace gravels

Table 2: General depositional sequence of each excavation area

- 6.2 Area 1 – Ditch terminus F104** (Detailed plan Fig. 2a and sections Figs 2b-c; Plate 2)
Where revealed this feature measured 3m in length terminating at its northeast extent and continuing beyond the stripped area to the southwest. Two quadrants were excavated through this feature revealing a maximum width of 1.6m and a gentle to steep sloping profile and flat base at a depth of 0.65m. Two fills were revealed comprising a dark reddish brown silty clay containing moderate rounded/angular gravels and occasional charcoal flecks (upper fill 102) and a grey-brown silty clay containing occasional rounded/angular gravels and charcoal flecks (basal fill 103). This feature represents the northwest terminus of the probable enclosure ditch revealed on the geophysical survey. A small quantity of Middle Bronze Age pottery and struck flint/chert was recovered from this feature.
- 6.3 Area 2 – Ditch F204** (Detailed plan Fig. 2d and section Fig. 2e; Plate 3)
Where revealed this feature measured approximately 6m in length, continuing beyond the stripped area both to the east and west. A single slot was excavated through this feature revealing a maximum width of 1.4m and a gentle to moderately sloping profile and flat base at a depth of 0.3m. Two fills were revealed comprising a grey-brown silty clay containing sparse rounded/angular gravels (upper fill 201) and a yellow-brown silty gravel (basal fill 202). This feature represents part of a possible former boundary ditch. The lower south extent of the slot revealed earlier disturbance of probable natural origin such as a tree throw (F206) with a fill composed of a silty gravel with abundant charcoal pieces/flecks (fill 203). A small quantity of Middle Bronze Age pottery and struck flint/chert was recovered from both the ditch slot and probable natural feature.
- 6.4 Area 3 – Ditch terminus F304** (Detailed plan Fig. 3a and sections Figs 3b-c; Plate 4)
Where revealed this feature measured 2.7m in length terminating at its northeast extent and continuing beyond the stripped area to the southwest. Two quadrants were excavated through this feature revealing a maximum width of 1.6m and a gentle to steep sloping profile and flat base at a depth of 0.8m. Three fills were revealed comprising a dark reddish brown silty clay containing moderate rounded/angular gravels and occasional charcoal flecks (upper fill 301); a grey-brown silty clay containing occasional abundant charcoal flecks and occasional rounded/angular gravels (secondary fill 302) and a mid-grey brown, gleyed in appearance, silty clay containing occasional rounded/angular gravels (basal fill 303). This feature represents the southwest terminus of the probable enclosure ditch revealed on the geophysical survey. A small quantity of Middle Bronze Age pottery and struck flint/chert was recovered from this feature.

7. THE FINDS *by Henrietta Quinnell*

- 7.1** All finds recovered on site during the excavation have been retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. They have been quantified according to material type within each context and the assemblage examined to extract information regarding the range, nature and date of artefacts represented. The small collection of finds are summarised in Table 1 below.

Context	Context description	Prehistoric pottery		Worked flint	
		No.	Wt	No.	Wt
100	Area 1 topsoil	1	12	3	146
102	Upper fill of ditch terminus F104	17	65		
103	Basal fill of ditch terminus F104			1	18
200	Area 2 topsoil			8	218
201	Upper fill of ditch F204	2	14	1	7
203	Fill of probable tree throw F206	1	39	2	12
300	Area 3 topsoil			3	28
301	Upper fill of ditch terminus F304	6	61	2	30
302	Secondary fill of ditch terminus F304	1	14		
Total		28	205	20	459

Table 3: Summary of finds by context (weights are in grams)

7.2 Prehistoric pottery

All the sherds, except for that from (100), are in a soft grogged fabric without obvious other inclusions: they are generally oxidised to varying degrees. The only piece with form is a simple upright rim from a vessel with a slightly biconical form from (203). The only decoration is an incised line on a sherd from (201). The material is generally similar to the Fabric 2 from the evaluation phase (Quinnell 2016) although that appeared to have occasional rock inclusions as well as grog: this was tentatively dated to the Middle, as opposed to the Late, Bronze Age. The excavation material can be regarded as provisionally Middle Bronze Age and belonging within the Trevisker-related tradition: the Late Bronze Age material from the evaluation phase was in a different fabric and there is currently no evidence for grogged fabrics in this period in Devon.

The sherd from (100), much abraded, is hard with slate and rock inclusions: its date is uncertain.

Context	Description	Sherds	Weight	Totals
100	Area 1 topsoil	1*	12	1/12
102	Upper fill ditch terminus F104	17	45	17/45
201	Upper fill ditch F204	2	14	2/14
203	Fill of tree throw F206	1	39	1/39
301	Upper fill ditch terminus F304	6	61	6/61
302	Secondary fill ditch F304	1	14	1/14
Totals		28	185	28/185

Table 4: Bronze Age pottery in context order. * indicates a sherd of a different fabric to the remainder

Comment

Finds of Middle Bronze Age material currently known to the author from the Axe Valley and West Dorset may be summarised as follows. A sherd with Trevisker affinities comes from Dalwood Farm, Kilmington (Farnell and Rainbird 2016). There is probable contemporary material from Harepath Road, Seaton (Valentin and Sims 2012) and Burrowshot Cross, Axminster (Quinnell 1993) in extreme east Devon. There was also some Trevisker material from Seaton Down excavated by Exeter Archaeology in its last years before closing. Into Dorset/South West Somerset there is a small amount of Trevisker-related material at Doghouse Hill near Golden Cap (Papworth 2013, 220) and a large amount from an enclosure at Templecombe Junction, Chard (Quinnell 2012, 165).

7.3 Lithics

The 20 pieces together weigh 459g, an average weight of 23g for each piece which is unusually large. The proportion of chert to flint is also unusually high but may relate to ready availability of chert in the Axe Valley. The flint blade from (301) suggests a date in the Mesolithic to Neolithic and the simple transverse arrowhead should be Middle or Late Neolithic.

Context	Description	Chert	Flint	Totals
100	Area 1 topsoil	Large double ended scraper	2 including small burnt piece with retouched edge	3*
103	Basal fill ditch terminus F104	1 large flake		1
200	Area 2 topsoil	6 including 2 core preparation pieces, two flakes and two flakes in pale chert one of which may be a transverse arrowhead	2, core preparation piece and one flake with usewear	8
201	Upper fill ditch F204	1 flake		1*
203	Fill of tree throw F206	2 flakes		2*
300	Area 3 topsoil	2 flakes	1 blade with retouch/usewear	3
301	Upper fill ditch F304	1flake	1 flake with usewear	1*
Totals		14	6	20

Table 5: Details of lithics by context. * indicates association with ceramics

The remaining pieces may belong with the ceramics although the amounts found in the ditches as opposed to topsoil does not allow this conclusion from association. The large size of the pieces and their general character is reminiscent of the assemblage from Stowford Rise, Sidford (Hughes 2009), where the ceramics are Late Bronze Age, as are some from the other site at Axe View. There however almost all the assemblage is of immediately local flint. There are strong apparent similarities to the assemblage from the Middle and Late Bronze Age enclosure at Hayne Lane, Honiton (Bellamy 1999). The Axe View small assemblage has value in suggesting good evidence for local flint working into Middle or Late Bronze Age.

8. PALAEOENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT *by Cressida Whitton*

8.1 Introduction

Two bulk soil samples were recovered and assessed for environmental potential.

8.2 Methodology

Between 50% and 100% of recovered sample was processed by standard flotation using a siraf-type tank and 250 micron mesh. Residues were sieved over 5.6mm, 2mm and 500 micron mesh sieve nest. A percentage of the dried sample flot (depending on size), was sorted for charcoal and charred ecofacts under a stereo-binocular microscope (10 – 30 x magnification) and finer residues (2mm and 500 micron) were also scanned for charred ecofacts. The 5.6mm coarse residue was hand-sorted for artefacts and ecofacts using an illuminated hand lens. There were no waterlogged samples.

8.3 Results

The results are presented in Table 3.

Sample no.	Context no. & type	Sample volume (litres) & % of flot/residues assessed (scanning & sorting)	Ecofacts charcoal fragments - % size (mm) % trunkwood (t/w) &/or charred roundwood twig charcoal amounts xxxx – abundant (1000 +) Charred Plant Macrofossil (CPM) eg charred grain	Potential for radio-carbon dating? Y/N (type)	Potential for Environmental analysis? (Y/N – type eg CPM +/- wood charcoal)
1	302 – secondary fill of ditch terminus F304	30 Lt (100% of sample)	xxxx - charcoal, mostly small (< 2 mm) trunk/branchwood fragments. 10% large charcoal (1- 5 cm), including oak. CPM – 2 x part charred grain	?Y (wood charcoal)	Y – wood charcoal
2	203 – charcoal-rich fill of probable tree throw F206	5 Lt (100% of sample)	xxxx - mostly large charcoal (1- 5 cm), ?predominantly oak trunk/branchwood fragments. 10% small charcoal (< 2 mm) No CPM	?Y (wood charcoal)	Y – wood charcoal

Table 3: Results of the palaeoenvironmental assessment

8.4 Discussion

The results of the assessment indicate some environmental potential. Both samples were recovered from feature fills containing prehistoric potsherds and flint artefacts and were rich in charcoal, including some well-preserved large charcoal fragments (1 – 5 cm) which might represent domestic fire/oven fuel waste. A number of larger charcoal fragments were identified as oak. By contrast, few charred plant macrofossils were found, with only a couple of poorly-preserved fragments of charred grain recovered from Sample 1. Whilst indicative of human activity in the vicinity, the recovered grain is likely to represent background soil material, rather than a domestic concentration. The grain was also poorly-preserved and unlikely to be suitable for radiocarbon dating, although further charcoal analysis might identify datable earlywood charcoal fragments, if required.

9. DISCUSSION

9.1 The excavation has identified limited evidence for archaeological activity on the site, all of which is associated with the previous archaeological deposits recorded in the 2015 evaluation trenches. The main component on the site comprised elements of a former enclosure, and is represented by both the northwest and southwest ditch terminals to this feature. A small quantity of Middle Bronze Age pottery sherds and worked flint/chert was recovered from both terminals. That the northeast and southeast terminals were not identified is odd, but they must have fallen

outside of the excavation areas. No further internal features to add to pit 1804 excavated during the evaluation phase were uncovered.

9.2 A further feature, representing part of a shallow former ditch was revealed in Area 2. The function of this feature is uncertain as it would not seem to be contemporary with the enclosure, unless it represents some form of partition within the confines of the enclosure. It appears to be the same as ditch 1802 excavated during the evaluation phase and is shallower than the enclosure ditch. Interestingly, a review of historic mapping shows that this ditch is on the line of a field boundary that was removed in the 20th century and it almost certainly is a former hedgebank ditch belonging to this feature. The prehistoric finds from this ditch should be regarded as.

9.3 Bronze Age enclosures

The finds from the excavation and evaluation indicate that the enclosure dates to the Middle – Late Bronze Age. Enclosures of this date in lowland areas of Devon are rare, but examples have been identified in the county at Old Rydon Lane, Exeter (Gilbert 2012), Otter Farm, Colaton Raleigh (Farnell and Quinnell 2015) and Farleigh Meadows, Tiverton (Rainbird 2014). A short distance (3.5km) across the border to the northeast in Dorset at Chard Junction two Middle Bronze Age enclosures have been excavated (Valentin 1998; Taylor and Preston 2004). These are very similar in form and in their locations on the southeast side of the Axe valley.

10. STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL

10.1 The investigation has established that the site was occupied mainly during the Middle - Late Bronze Age.

10.2 Aims of further analysis

Further analysis of the archive and publication of the results of these excavations will aid fulfilling some of the aims of the South West Archaeological Research Framework (SWARF; Webster 2008). These are:

- Aim 2: Encourage works of synthesis within and across periods, settlements, monuments and areas.
- Aim 14: Widen our understanding of Later Bronze Age and Iron Age material culture.
- Aim 17: Improve the quality and quantity of environmental data and our understanding of what it represents.
- Aim 20: Improve our understanding of wild and cultivated plants in the past.
- Aim 39: Understand better the relationships of Neolithic and Bronze Age people to plants and animals.

10.3 Recommendations for further work and publication

Site descriptions

The aim of this section of a proposed published report will be to produce a revised integrated text outlining the results of the work and to more fully establish the chronology, function and nature of the site reflecting the data produced as part of the finds assemblage and environmental assessment. This will comprise the following:

- 1) Summarised descriptions of site stratigraphy to be prepared;
- 2) Relevant illustrations (plans, sections and photographs) will be prepared in a format suitable for publication; and
- 3) Parallels will be sought and further analysis will be undertaken to clarify the nature and function of the enclosure.

Pottery

Nothing in the ceramic assemblage merits illustration. Fabrics should be examined microscopically by Roger Taylor and an overall report on the pottery for publication should be prepared by Henrietta Quinnell.

Lithics

A photograph of some of the large chert pieces could be usefully published. The assessment report by Henrietta Quinnell can be included in the publication.

Palaeoenvironmental remains

The assessment of the palaeoenvironmental potential showed that this was generally poor for charred plant remains, but there was some potential for analysis of the charcoal for species identification and radiocarbon dating. It is proposed that analysis of and a descriptive report on the charcoal should be undertaken by a relevant specialist for Sample 1. Sample 1 is derived from a charcoal rich deposit that was deposited when the enclosure ditch was still open but had already partially filled, but ought to be derived from settlement activity related to the enclosure. In addition to species identification an appropriate piece of charcoal should be selected for radiocarbon dating. Sample 2 is derived from the fill of a probable tree throw and this is consequently of less value in meeting the aims outlined in section 10.2 above and as such it is not recommended for further analysis. The material to be sent for specialist palaeoenvironmental analyses is summarised in Table 6.

Sample	Context	Radiocarbon selection	Charcoal	CPM	Comments
1	302	Y	Y	N	Potential for Bronze Age settlement activity

Table 6: Material for specialist palaeoenvironmental analyses

Radiocarbon dating

It is recommended that a radiocarbon date be obtained from the following:

- Fill context 302 of enclosure ditch F304.

Discussion and conclusions

This section will provide synthesis and discussion, drawing on the individual stratigraphic, artefactual and environmental reports, and with reference to wider regional results.

Publication

It is currently proposed that the final report on the archaeological works will be submitted for publication in *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society*.

11. TASK LIST

- 11.1 Table 7 below lists the main tasks involved in achieving the proposed publication project aims and objectives. It also states the personnel and time required to complete each task.

TASK	PERSONNEL	DURATION
Pottery analysis and report, petrological analysis, finds illustrations	Henrietta Quinnell, freelance specialist Roger Taylor, freelance specialist Gary Young, freelance finds illustrator	Fixed quotation
Other finds analysis and specialists liaison	Dr Naomi Payne, Finds Manager, AC archaeology	3 days
Palaeoenvironmental analysis	Dana Challinor, freelance specialist	1 day
Radiocarbon dates (x 1)	SUERC	8-10 weeks
Revision of site descriptions and results	Dr Paul Rainbird, Reports Officer, AC archaeology	1 day
Site illustrations	Sarnia Blackmore, Graphics Officer, AC archaeology	1 day
Synthesis and Discussion	Dr Paul Rainbird, Reports Officer, AC archaeology	2 days
Editing	John Valentin, Director, AC archaeology	1 day
Publication	<i>Proc Devon Archaeol Soc</i> (10 pages)	N/A
Archive preparation and deposition	Charlotte Coles, AC archaeology + deposition costs	1 day
Total		

Table 7: Table of task listings and duration of publication and archive work

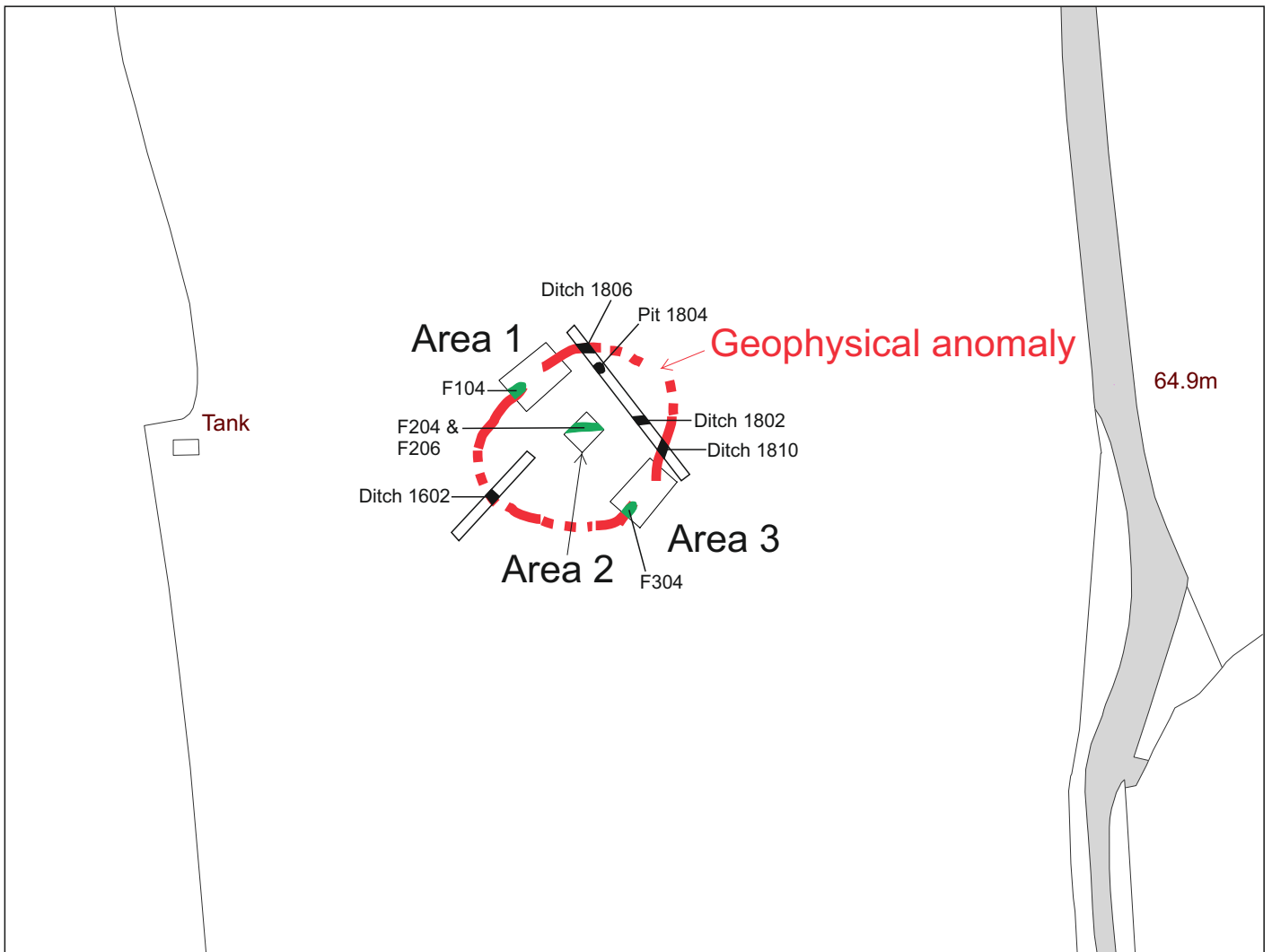
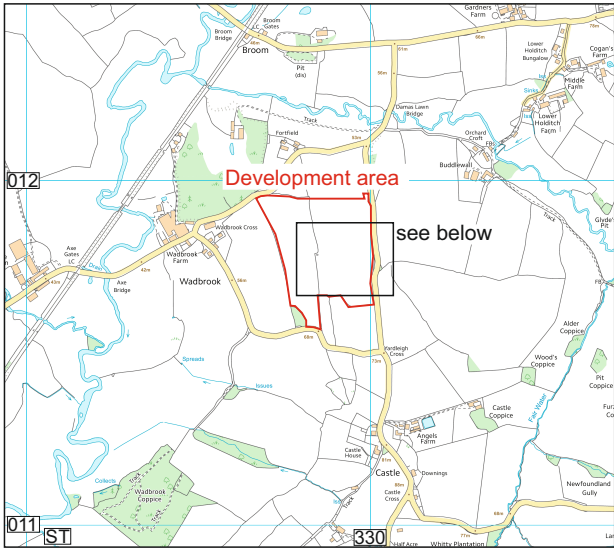
12. OASIS ENTRY

- 12.1 An online OASIS entry has been completed using the unique number **283792**, which includes a digital version of this report.

13. REFERENCES

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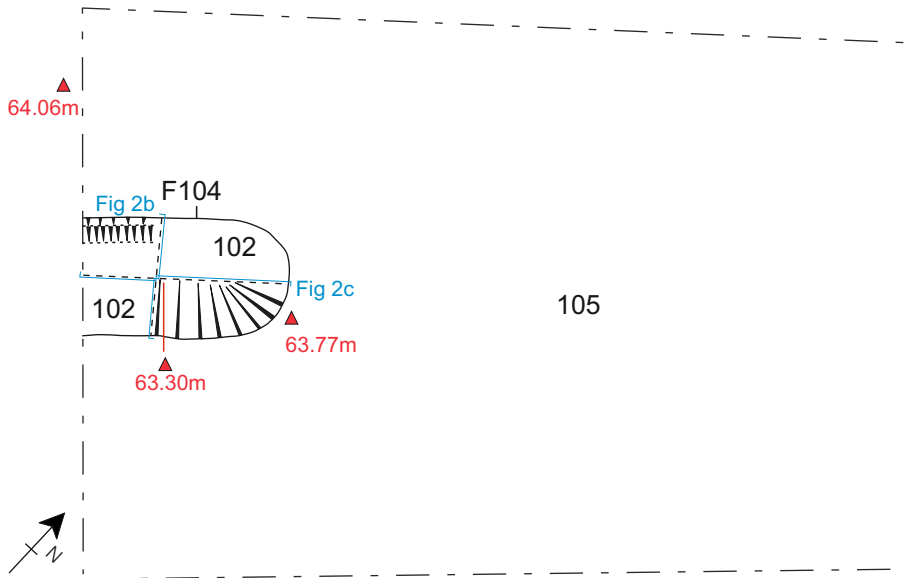
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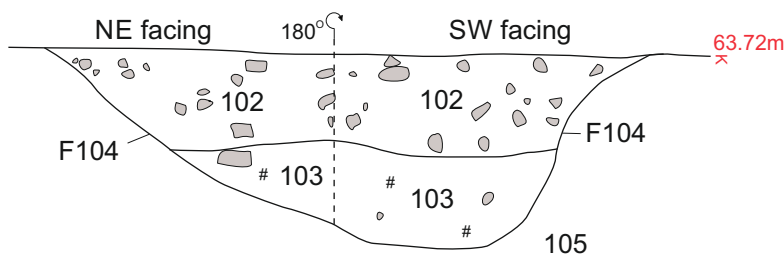
PROJECT
Land at Axe View, Wadbrook, Devon

TITLE
Fig. 1: Location of site, excavation areas, evaluation trenches and archaeological features in relation to the geophysics interpretation

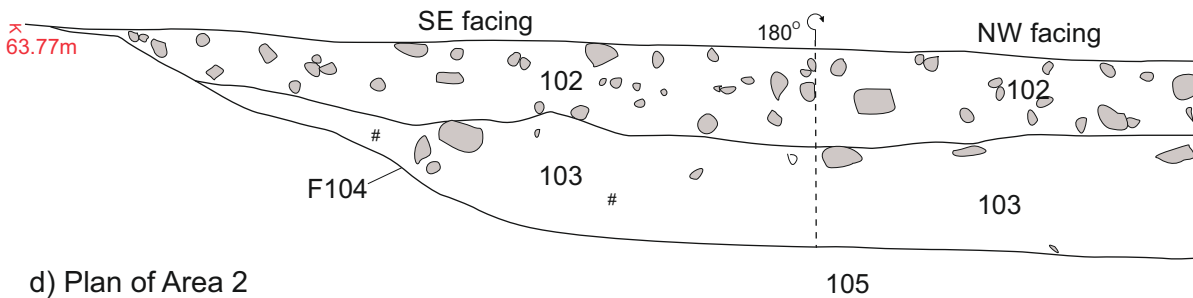
a) Plan of Area 1



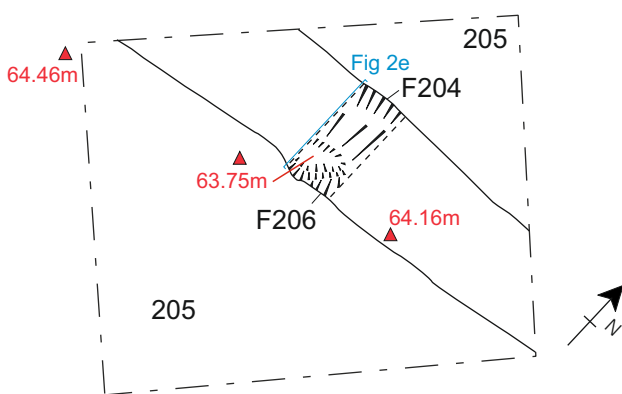
b) Section of F104



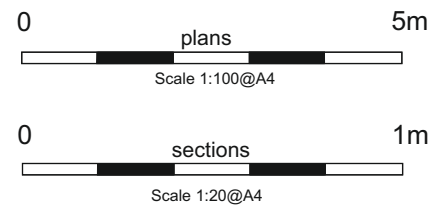
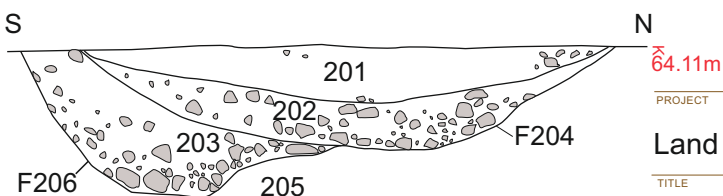
c) Section of F104



d) Plan of Area 2



e) Section of F204 and F206



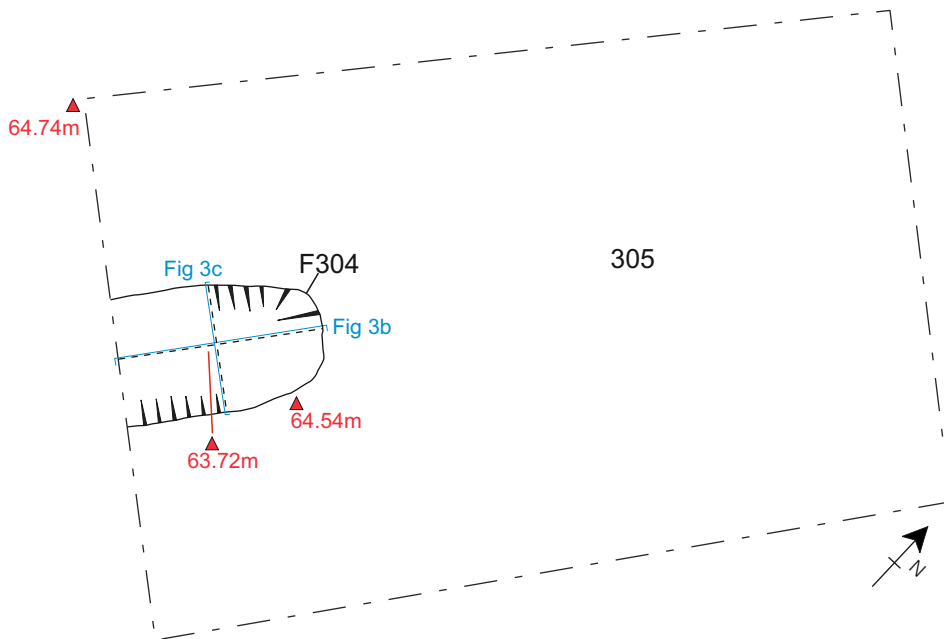
PROJECT

Land at Axe View, Wadbrook, Devon

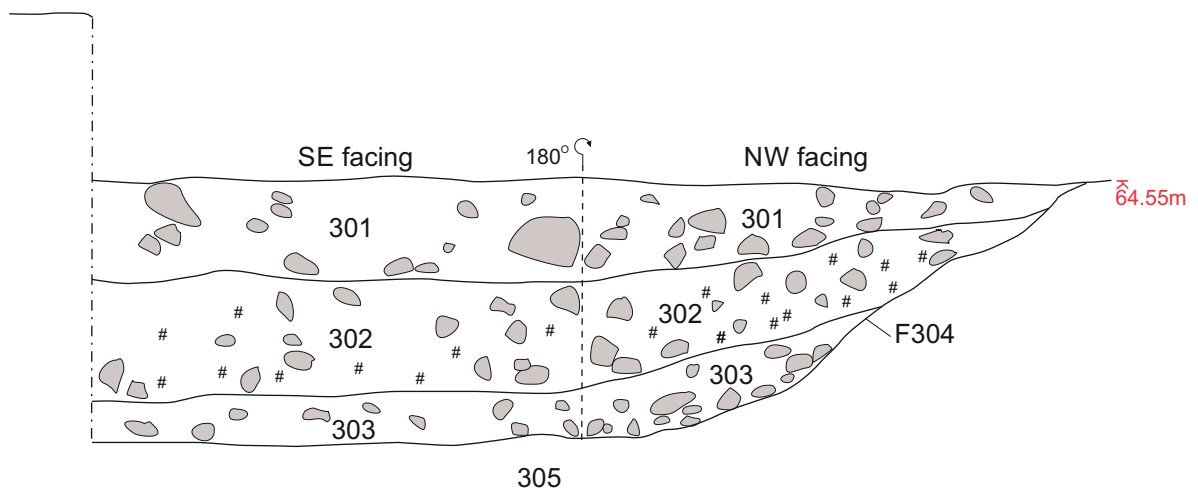
TITLE

Fig. 2: Detailed plans and sections, areas 1 and 2

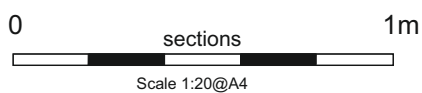
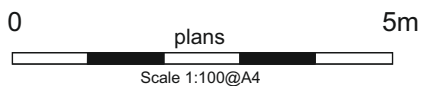
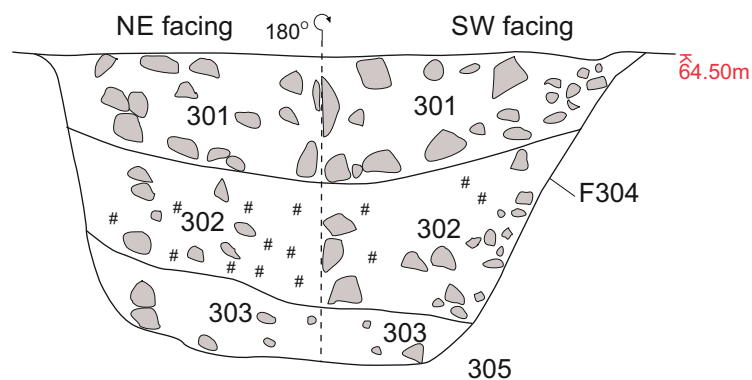
a) Plan of Area 3



b) Section of F304



c) Section of F304



PROJECT

Land at Axe View, Wadbrook, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 3: Detailed plan and sections, area 3



Plate 1: General view of excavation area 1, looking south



Plate 2: Excavation area 1, enclosure ditch terminus F104, looking southwest (1m scale)



Plate 3: Excavation area 2, east facing section of treethrow F206 and ditch F204 (1m scale)



Plate 4: Excavation area 3, enclosure ditch terminus F304, looking southwest (1m scale)

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