

# LAND AT OLD HIGHWOOD FARM, DUNKESWELL, DEVON

(Centred on NGR ST 1503 0675)

Results of an archaeological trench evaluation

East Devon District Council planning ref. 22/1855/FUL

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Prepared by:  
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archaeology

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### Acknowledgements

The evaluation was managed for AC archaeology by John Valentin. The site works were carried out by Alison Jones, with the illustrations for this report prepared by Leon Cauchois. The advice of Stephen Reed, Devon County Council Senior Historic Environment Officer, is gratefully 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 trench evaluation was undertaken by AC archaeology during November 2022 on land at Old Highwood Farm, Dunkeswell, Devon (NGR ST 1503 0675). The evaluation comprised the machine excavation of three trenches totalling 120m in length, with each 1.6m wide. These were positioned to provide good coverage of a proposed new horse training arena. The main archaeological interest for the site concerned the presence of suspected iron ore extraction pits in the area.*

*The trial trenching produced low level results and no evidence for iron ore extraction in the area was recorded. No finds were recovered.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological trench evaluation was undertaken by AC archaeology during November 2022 on land at Old Highwood Farm, Dunkeswell, Devon (NGR ST 1503 0675). The evaluation was commissioned by the landowner, and was required by East Devon District Council as supporting information for a planning application for a new horse exercise arena, following consultation with the Devon County Council Historic Environment Team (DCCHET) Senior Historic Environment Officer. The location of the site is shown on Fig. 1.
- 1.2 Old Highwood Farm is situated to the east of Dunkeswell and west of Luppitt. The location of the proposed horse arena is towards the southern edge of an adjoining pasture field and covers an area of 60m by 40m (Plates 1 and 2). It is situated on the western side of the Blackdown Hills on high ground, with a general trend of sloping down to the north at around 250m aOD (above Ordnance Datum). The underlying solid geology comprises sandstone of the Upper Greensand Formation, a sedimentary bedrock formed between 113 and 93.9 million years ago during the Cretaceous period (British Geological Survey Online Viewer 2022).

### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The main archaeological interest for the site is that Dunkeswell is located on the Blackdown Hills in an area where a number of Romano-British to early post-medieval metalworking sites have been previously identified. Iron ore extraction and production was taking place in and around Dunkeswell extensively over this time, particularly on the airfield site to the west. A recent excavation on Dunkeswell Airfield (Etheridge 2019) recorded a large number of iron ore extraction pits, with many intercutting examples indicating that this activity was taking place over a prolonged period of time. A radiocarbon date from one pit gave a date range of mid 15th to mid 17th century.
- 2.2 Closer to Old Highwood Farm, a densely-packed series of shallow circular depressions or pits was recorded as earthworks from aerial photographs of 1947, each c. 2.5 metres in diameter and extending over an area of at least 1.2 hectares on the northwest-facing slopes to the north of the farm, partly extending into the footprint of the proposed new horse arena (Devon Historic Environment [HER] ref. 116805; see Fig. 1). These are also likely to represent evidence for iron ore extraction in the area, albeit currently undated.

### 3. AIMS

- 3.1 The main aim of the evaluation was to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any archaeological features, deposits or finds within the site, with particular reference to evidence for early ironworking and/or extraction. The

results of the work will be reviewed and used to inform any subsequent mitigation and whether or not the significance and state of survival of any buried archaeological remains is great enough to influence the layout of the proposed scheme should planning consent be obtained.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

**4.1** The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a project design prepared by AC archaeology (Valentin 2022), with reference to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation* (revised June 2020) and the DCCHE document *Specification for Field Evaluation*. It comprised the machine excavation of three trenches (Trenches 1-3), with each 1.6m wide and totalling 120m in length. These were positioned to provide good coverage of the proposed new horse training arena (Fig. 1).

**4.2** 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.

#### **5. RESULTS (Plan Fig. 1)**

##### **5.1 Introduction**

Archaeological features were present in one trench (Trench 2) and are described in detail below. Tabulated context descriptions for all trenches are provided in Appendix 1. Context numbers are prefixed by the relevant trench number (e.g. 100 for Trench 1, 200 for Trench 2 etc.). Natural subsoil, comprising a pale to mid reddish brown silty clay, was exposed at a consistent depth of 0.3m below the ground level. This was beneath an agricultural topsoil of mid brown silty loam clay.

##### **5.2 Trench 1**

This was 40m long, aligned northeast-southwest and located along the northwest limit of the site. The natural subsoil (101) was exposed at a depth of 0.3m below ground surface and was overlain by topsoil (100). The trench contained some plough scarring, but there were no features or finds from this trench.

##### **5.3 Trench 2 (Detailed plan Fig. 2a and sections Figs 2b-c; Plates 3 and 4)**

This was 40m long, aligned northeast-southwest and located in the central area of the site. The natural subsoil (201) was exposed at a depth of 0.3m below ground surface and was overlain by topsoil (200). The trench contained a single pit (F202) and a shallow and narrow linear feature (F205). There were no finds from this trench.

##### **5.4 Pit F202**

This was not fully exposed in the trench, but appeared to be roughly circular in plan measuring 1.5m across by 0.6m deep. The pit had moderate to steep sloping sides and a flat base. It contained two fills, with the lower one (204) composed of mid to dark brown silty loam, which was beneath an upper fill (203) of mid to dark brown silty loam mixed with patches of pale to mid reddish brown redeposited natural. No finds were recovered.

##### **5.5 Linear feature F205**

This was approximately northeast-southwest aligned measuring 0.3m wide by 0.02m deep, with gently sloping sides and flat base. It had a single fill (206) composed of mid brown silty clay which contained no finds.

## 6. DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The evaluation returned low level results. A single pit and a shallow linear feature were identified in the central area of the site in Trench 2. These features remain undated as no finds were recovered. Trenches 1 and 3 contained no archaeological features, and no finds were recovered from them.
- 6.2 The main archaeological interest in the site is the adjacent area of pitting assumed to be related to iron ore extraction as seen in aerial photographs taken in the 1940s (Devon HER ref. MDV116805). There is no surface evidence for this pitting surviving in the present day within the footprint of the proposed horse arena and linear scars identified by the evaluation might suggest that they have been removed by modern ploughing. Although observations were hindered by constant flooding of the trenches, pit F202 does not appear to be related to iron ore extraction in that there were no reburied iron ore nodules in the backfill or evidence for undercutting of the sides which are both typical elements of such pits as seen at the Mansell Raceway site (Etheridge 2019). In addition, other excavated examples at the Raceway were of much greater depth (often in excess of 1.7m) and size (up to c. 3m across) than F202.
- 6.3 The only other feature exposed was linear feature F205. This was a very shallow and narrow feature (more of a scar) and it may be the location where the plough has dragged a stone across the surface of the natural subsoil, which was present below only 0.3m of overburden.

## 7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The evaluation produced low level results and no evidence for iron ore extraction in the area was observed.

## 8. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 8.1 The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ under the unique project code of **ACD2819** and the temporary reference number **RAMM: 22/79** obtained from the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. It will be held until it is known if any further archaeological work on the site is required.
- 8.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed using the unique identifier **510633**, which will include a digital copy of the final approved version of this report.

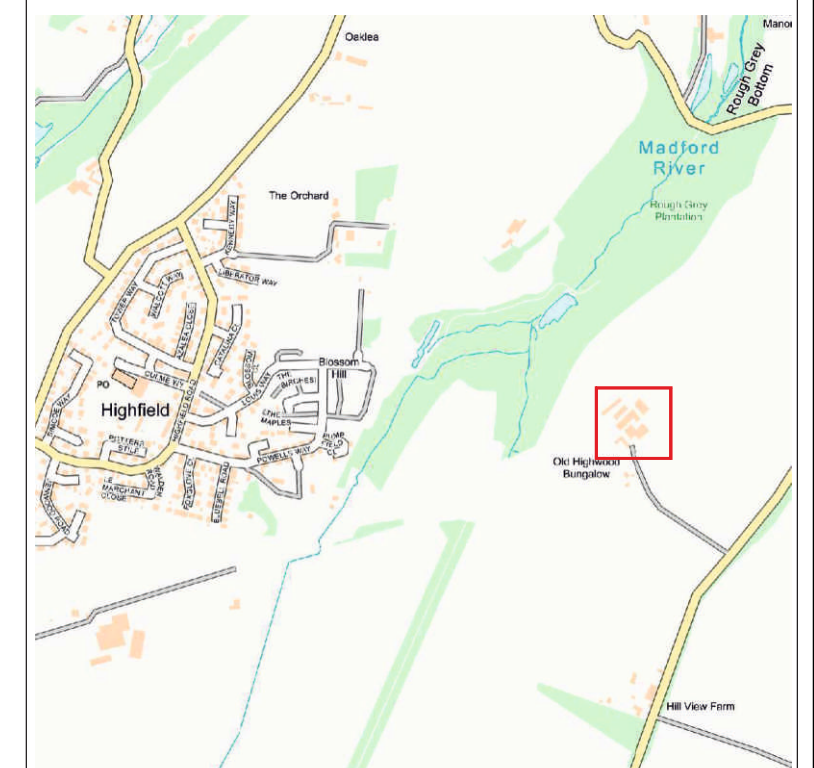
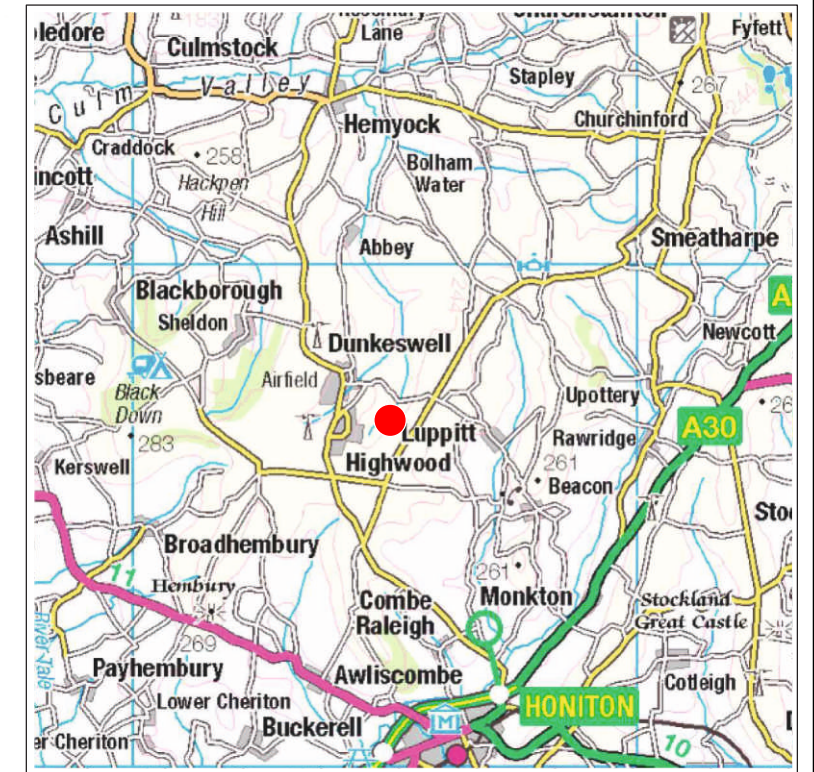
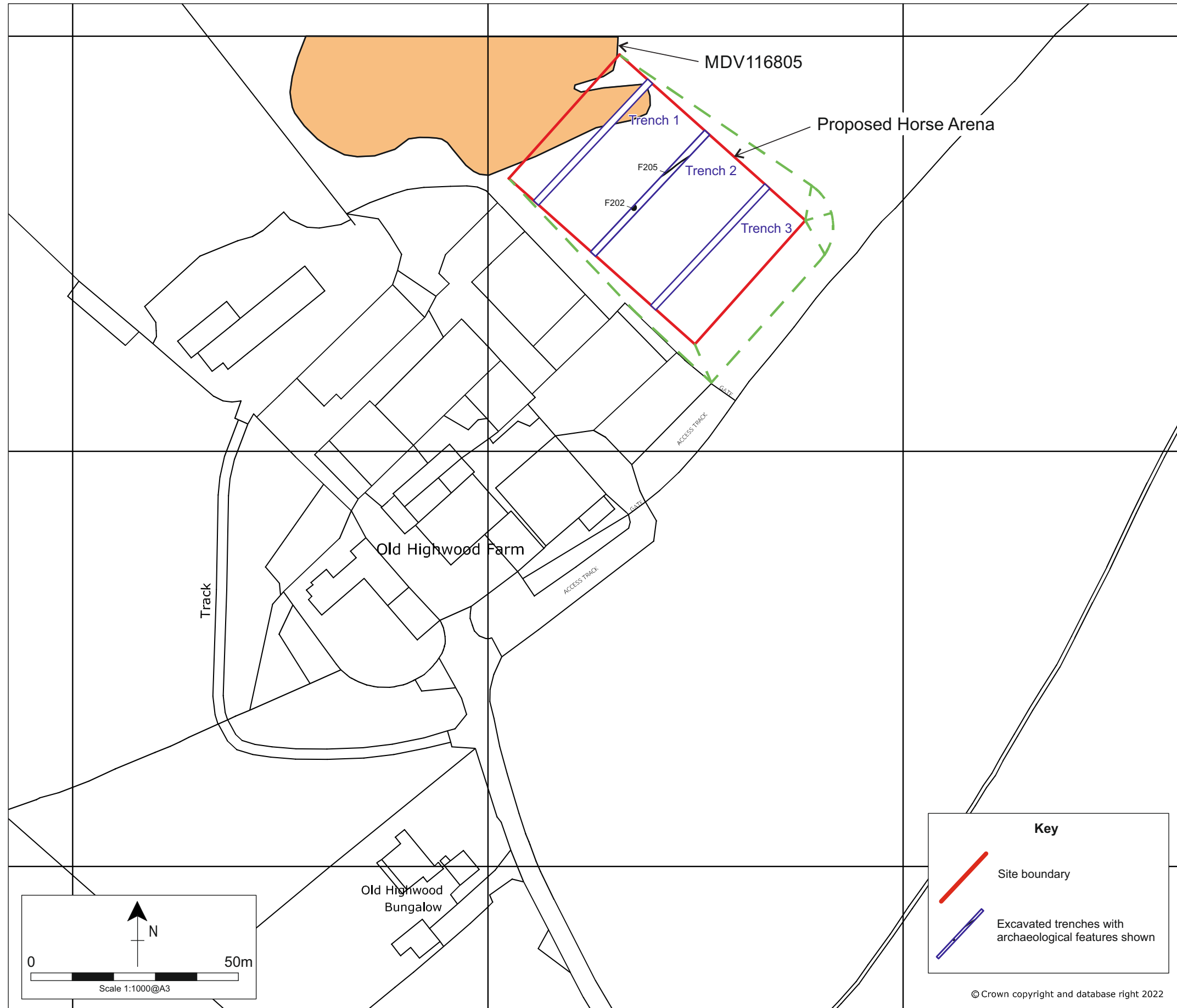
## 9. SOURCES CONSULTED

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Devon County Council, 2022, Devon Environment Viewer  
[www.map.devon.gov.uk/DCCviewer/](http://www.map.devon.gov.uk/DCCviewer/).

Etheridge, T., 2019, *Mansell Raceway, Dunkeswell Airfield, Dunkeswell, Devon: Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief*. Unpublished AC archaeology client report, ref. **ACD1746/2/0**.

Valentin, J., 2022, *Land at Old Highwood Farm, Dunkeswell, Devon: Project Design for an Archaeological Trench Evaluation*. Unpublished AC archaeology document, ref. **ACD2819/1/0**.



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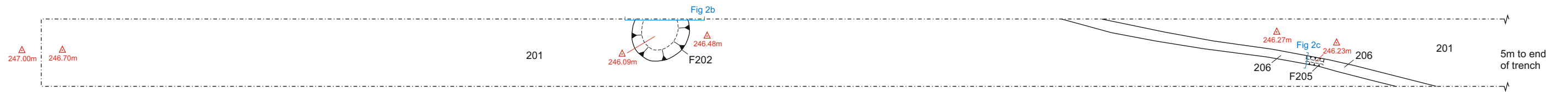
PROJECT  
Land at Old Highwood Farm,  
Dunkeswell, Devon

TITLE  
Fig. 1: Location of site,  
trenches and archaeological  
features

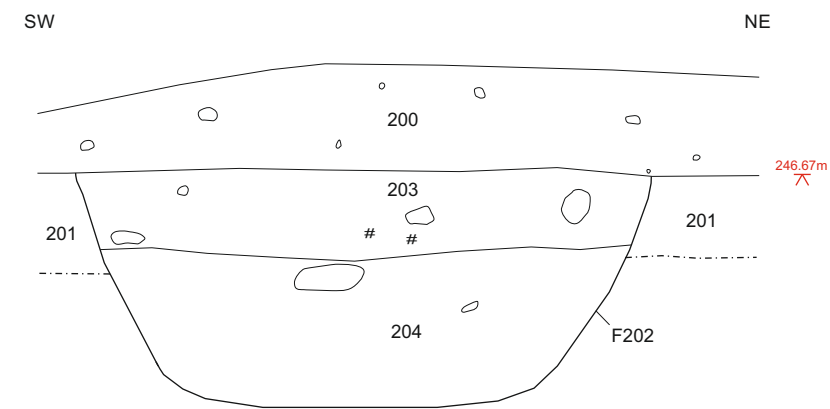
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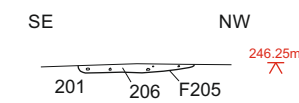
a) Plan of Trench 2



b) Section of pit F202



c) Section of linear feature F205



**Key to all sections**

Stones

Charcoal

PROJECT  
Land at Old Highwood Farm,  
Dunkeswell, Devon

TITLE  
Fig. 2: Trench 2, plan and  
sections

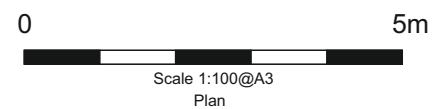






Plate 1: General view of the site looking southwest towards Old Highwood Farm



Plate 2: General view of the site, looking northwest with Trench 3 in the foreground



Plate 3: Trench 2, pre-excitation view of pit F202, looking north (1m scale)



Plate 4: Trench 2, pre-excitation view of linear feature F205, looking southwest (1m scale)

# Appendix 1

Tabulated Context Descriptions by Trench

## APPENDIX 1: TABULATED CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS BY TRENCH

Trench 1		Length 40m	Width 1.6m	Alignment NE-SW
Context	Description	Depth b.g.s.	Interpretation	
100	Mid brown silty loam clay with moderate gravel and occasional sub-angular pebbles	0m-0.3m	Ploughsoil	
101	Dark reddish brown silty clay with occasional small gravels and pebbles	0.3m+	Natural subsoil	

Trench 2		Length 40m	Width 1.6m	Alignment NE-SW
Context	Description	Depth b.g.s.	Interpretation	
200	Mid brown silty loam clay with moderate gravel and occasional sub-angular pebbles	0m-0.3m	Ploughsoil	
201	Dark reddish brown silty clay with occasional small gravels and pebbles	0.3m+	Natural subsoil	
F202	Circular feature 1.5m across by 0.6m deep, moderate to steep sloping sides and flat base	0.3m-0.62m	Cut for a shallow pit	
203	Mid to dark brown mixed with pale to mid reddish brown redeposited natural silty loam	0.3m-0.4m	Upper fill of pit F202	
204	Mid to dark brown silty loam	0.4m-0.62m	Basal fill of pit F202	
F205	Linear feature on a northeast/southwest alignment, 0.3m wide and 0.02m deep	0.3m-0.32m	Shallow gully or possible plough mark	
206	Mid brown silty clay	0.3m-0.32m	Fill of linear feature F205	

Trench 3		Length 40m	Width 1.6m	Alignment NE-SW
Context	Description	Depth b.g.s.	Interpretation	
300	Mid brown silty loam clay with moderate gravel and occasional sub-angular pebbles	0m-0.3m	Ploughsoil	
301	Dark reddish brown silty clay with occasional small gravels and pebbles	0.3m+	Natural subsoil	

b.g.s. = below ground surface

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