

LAND AT BLATCHWORTHY FARM, NEAR TIVERTON, DEVON

NGR SS 89808 16951

Results of an archaeological trench evaluation

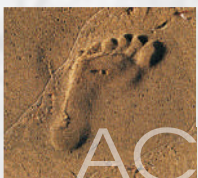
Planning ref. Mid Devon District Council 12/01131/MFUL

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On behalf of:
Lightsource Renewable Energy Ltd

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AC archaeology

LAND AT BLATCHWORTHY FARM, NEAR TIVERTON, DEVON

(NGR SS 89808 16951)

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Summary

An archaeological trench evaluation was undertaken by AC archaeology in September 2012 on land at Blatchworthy Farm, Near Tiverton, Devon (NGR SS 89808 16951). The work was undertaken in support of a planning application for the installation of a PV solar farm and associated infrastructure.

A total of six trenches was excavated, positioned to target anomalies identified by geophysical survey. Two of the trenches contained archaeological features. A curvilinear gully indicative of a roundhouse was exposed at the eastern corner of the site, together with a posthole containing a flint core. Both features had been heavily truncated. A single, undiagnostic pottery sherd of Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date was recovered nearby, probably residual within a later feature. Within the western half of the site a former field boundary ditch was exposed.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 An archaeological trench evaluation was carried out by AC archaeology in September 2012 on land at Blatchworthy Farm, near Tiverton, Devon (NGR SS 89808 16951). The work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd on behalf of Lightsource Renewable Energy Ltd and was undertaken in support of a planning application for the installation of a PV solar farm and associated infrastructure. The evaluation was commissioned following consultation with Devon County Historic Environment Service (hereafter DCHES).
- 1.2 The site lies 7km northwest of Tiverton and comprises a single field, currently used as pasture (Fig. 1). The land lies at between 265m and 235m aOD and slopes down to the north and northwest. The underlying solid geology comprises Mudstone of the Bude formation, with small areas of Regolith head deposits.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Devon County Historic Environment Record (HER) records evidence of prehistoric activity within the vicinity and wider area of the site. A possible barrow lies 40m to the southeast (HER MDV20232) and a number of undated cropmarks and earthworks are recorded 550m to the north (HER MDV58973 and NMR 1033247). A cluster of three bowl barrows is located 1.2km to the west, and is protected as a Scheduled Monument (NMR 1017134). An archaeological desk-based assessment of the site undertaken by CgMs in July 2012 (Bedford 2012) concluded that the site had a moderate potential for the presence of prehistoric remains. Potential for settlement remains of later periods was considered to be low.
- 2.2 A subsequent geophysical survey (Archaeological Surveys Ltd 2012) located a number of anomalies within the site, although the majority were of uncertain (potentially geological) origin. One linear anomaly was identified as relating to a former field boundary removed within the last 40 years and further positive and negative linear responses were considered to possibly relate to former land division. A number of linear anomalies within the eastern half of the field were considered to have a potential archaeological origin.

3. AIMS

- 3.1 The principal aim of the trench evaluation was to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of archaeological features or deposits within the site. This was to be achieved via the targeting of potential archaeological anomalies identified by the geophysical survey. The results of the evaluation (this document) will be reviewed by Mid Devon District

Council and may be used to inform a subsequent programme of archaeological investigation and recording within the site.

4. METHODOLOGY (Fig. 2)

- 4.1 The evaluation comprised the machine excavation of six 1.6m wide trenches totalling 180m in length. The trenches were targeted to locate and identify a number of anomalies identified by the geophysical survey. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a project design prepared by AC archaeology, the terms of which were agreed with DCHES prior to the commencement of works.
- 4.2 Turf and topsoil were removed using a wheeled excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket, under the direct supervision of the site archaeologist. Excavation continued until either the top of archaeological deposits or natural subsoil was reached, at which point machining ceased and areas of archaeological survival were cleaned and investigated by hand.
- 4.3 All archaeological deposits were recorded using the standard AC archaeology recording system, comprising written, drawn and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*. Stratigraphic information was recorded using *pro-forma* context record sheets. Detailed plan and section drawings were produced at a scale of 1:20 or 1:10, while a photographic record was compiled in high-resolution digital format. All site levels were related to Ordnance Survey datum.

5. RESULTS (Figs 3-4; Plates 1-8)

5.1 Introduction

All of the trenches contained a mid brown clayey loam topsoil. Within Trenches 1-4 this overlay a thin silty clay or clayey loam cultivation soil, which in turn overlay natural subsoil. The natural subsoil was variable across the site, comprising a mixture of yellow clay, bedded mudstone and shale. The cultivation soil was absent within Trench 5, which was sited at the highest point in the site, towards the top of a ridge. Trench 6, which was sited on steeply sloping ground above a marshy area contained a layer of colluvial clay between the topsoil and underlying natural subsoil, which in places consisted of gleyed pale grey clay indicative of wet ground.

Of the six trenches excavated, two (Trenches 1 and 5) contained archaeological features. Finds were recovered from the fills of two features within Trench 5 and consisted of a sherd of prehistoric pottery and a flint core. Trenches deemed to be 'Negative' (i.e. not containing archaeological features) are summarised below in table form only.

5.2 Trench 1 (Plan Fig.3a, section Fig. 3b; Plate 3)

This trench was aligned northeast-southwest, measured 30m long and was located towards the western end of the site in order to investigate a linear anomaly identified by the geophysical survey (Fig. 2). The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.66m. Natural subsoil was encountered from a depth of 0.36m. A small linear feature (F102) was exposed 13m from the northeast end of the trench. No finds were recovered.

Context No.	Depth	Description	Interpretation
100	0-0.30m	mid brown clay loam	Turf and topsoil
101	0.30-0.36m	Light brown clayey loam	Agricultural subsoil
105	0.36m+	Yellowish brown clay with abundant shale fragments	Natural subsoil

Feature F102

A former field boundary ditch measuring 1.15m wide and 0.27m deep, with gently sloping sides and a slightly rounded base. The ditch was aligned northwest-southeast and contained two fills. The lower fill (103) consisted of light brown clay containing abundant small to medium shale fragments resulting from weathering of the ditch sides. The upper fill (104) consisted of light brown clay loam and contained occasional shale fragments.

5.3 Trench 5 (Plan Fig. 3c, sections 3d & 4a-b; Plates 6-8)

This trench was aligned approximately northeast-southwest, measured 30m long and was located in the southeast corner of the site near the crest of a ridge. It was positioned to investigate a parallel pair of east-west aligned anomalies and a curvilinear anomaly identified by the geophysical survey (Fig. 2). The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.45m. Natural subsoil was encountered from a depth of 0.28m. Three features were exposed: a shallow ditch (F510) at the southern end of the trench and a posthole (F508) and curvilinear gully (F502) towards the northern end of the trench. A fourth feature (F504) was of uncertain, probably non-archaeological origin.

Context No.	Depth	Description	Interpretation
500	0-0.28m	mid brown clay loam	Turf and topsoil
501	0.28m+	Yellow clay, shale and mudstone. Mixed and variable throughout trench	Natural subsoil

Feature F502

This was a very shallow curvilinear ditch or gully exposed over a distance of 3m at the north end of the trench. The feature measured 0.41m wide by 0.05-0.10m deep and continued beyond the limit of the trench both to the north and southeast. An apparent break in the continuity of the feature to the south simply reflects a greater degree of localised truncation. It contained a single fill (503/507) of angular and rounded small shillet and shale fragments within a matrix of silty clay.

Feature F504

A sub-rectangular and very shallow feature extending beyond the eastern side of the trench. It measured 0.8m north-south by 0.6m+ east-west and was 0.15m deep, with a flat but undulating base and poorly defined edges. This may be the base of a heavily eroded pit, but may equally represent a naturally-formed hollow. It contained a single fill (505) consisting of yellowish brown silty clay loam.

Feature F508

A circular posthole measuring 0.62m in diameter and 0.22m deep, with steep sides and a flat base. It contained a single fill (509) of reddish brown silty clay loam, with angular and sub-angular shillet and shale fragments, which are likely to represent the original stone packing displaced after removal of the post. A flint core was recovered from the fill.

Feature F510

A shallow ditch measuring 0.9m wide 0.15m deep, with very gently sloping sides and a rounded base. The ditch was aligned east-west and contained a single fill (511) of reddish brown silty clay loam which appeared to be a natural infill resulting from weathering of the ditch sides. A small sherd of prehistoric pottery was recovered from the fill.

5.3 Negative trenches

Trench	Context number	Depth below ground level	Interpretation
Trench 2	30m long x 1.6m wide		
	200	0-0.26m	Turf and topsoil
	201	0.26-0.4m	Agricultural subsoil
	202	0.4m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 3	30m long x 1.6m wide		
	300	0-0.26m	Turf and topsoil
	301	0.26-0.34m	Agricultural subsoil
	302	0.34m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 4	30m long x 1.6m wide		
	400	0-0.23m	Turf and topsoil
	401	0.23-0.3m	Agricultural subsoil
	402	0.3m+	Natural subsoil
Trench 6	25.6m long x 1.6m wide		
	600	0-0.4m	Turf and topsoil
	601	0.4-0.8m	Colluvial subsoil
	602	0.8m+	Natural subsoil

6. THE FINDS by Naomi Payne and Henrietta Quinnell

The only finds from the evaluation were a single sherd of prehistoric pottery and a flint core, both from Trench 5.

The single small body sherd from the fill (511) of ditch F 510 is not diagnostic. It has a scatter of fairly coarse inclusions but it is not of a distinctive fabric which can be dated. It could either be a fairly fine version of a Middle or Late Bronze Age vessel, or a rather coarse Iron Age fabric, Early rather than Middle or Late.

The single flint core (31g) from the fill (509) of posthole F508 has been used for flake removal. It is multiplatform and has been well-worked out. It most likely dates from the Later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 The geophysical survey report acknowledged the possibility that a number of the anomalies identified, many of which produced relatively weak magnetic responses, may have either an agricultural origin relating to drainage, or a natural origin, relating to jointing or bedding cracks within the underlying geology. The trench evaluation has demonstrated this to be the case with regard to the majority of anomalies investigated, with archaeological features exposed only in Trenches 1 and 5. Ditch F102 (Trench 1) correlates well in terms of position and alignment with a long linear geophysical anomaly that produced a strong magnetic response and must, therefore, represent a former field boundary that extended across the site on a northwest-southeast alignment. It remains unclear however as to whether this ditch, which is undated, formed part of a wider field system, or merely represents a former sub-division of the present field.

7.2 Within Trench 5, ditch F510 represents one of the two parallel linear anomalies suggested as possibly representing a former east-west field boundary. A second ditch was not found, but this may be explained by an abrupt change in the composition of the natural subsoil from clay to stone, which occurs immediately to the south of the ditch, and parallel with it. The present hedgebank, which lies on the same alignment a few metres to the south of the ditch, marks the

parish boundary of Stoodleigh. As noted in the geophysics report, the anomaly/ditch F510 must predate this boundary, although it is possible that it represents an earlier form of it, with the boundary subsequently adjusted southwards. Although the presence of a sherd of Bronze Age or Early Iron Age pottery within the fill of the ditch means that a prehistoric date for it cannot be ruled out, its proximity to the adjacent hedgebank and its striking alignment with it, would suggest that the pottery is more likely to be residual.

- 7.3** Curvilinear feature F502, which was identified by the geophysical survey, is likely to represent part of a heavily truncated ring gully associated with a roundhouse. It lies within the highest point of the site in what would have been considered a favourable settlement location - on the edge of a ridge, with commanding views to the north and west. The presence within the same trench of a posthole containing a flint core and a sherd of Bronze Age pottery provides further evidence of early settlement.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1** The evaluation has provided evidence for prehistoric activity and probable settlement within the development site. This evidence is, however, limited and confined to a small area in the far southeast corner of the site. The evidence suggests a single roundhouse; if further houses existed, they are likely to lie beyond the site boundary to the east on higher ground.
- 8.2** All exposed features within the southeast corner of the site have been shown to be very shallow, a probable consequence of truncation resulting from ploughing, as soil cover here is thinner than on the sloping ground elsewhere in the site. Any other archaeological features that may be present here are likely to have been similarly truncated.
- 8.3** Within the remainder of the site, apart from a former (undated) field boundary ditch, no evidence for archaeological activity of any period has been identified, the majority of geophysical anomalies reflecting agricultural activity or variations in the natural substrate.

9. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

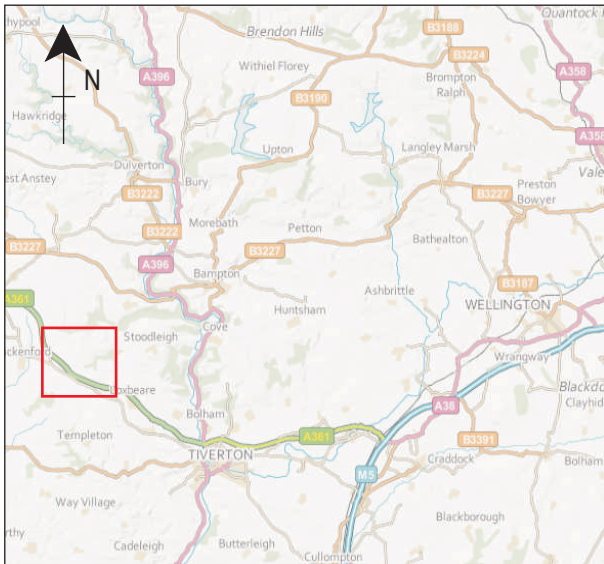
- 9.1** The paper and digital archive and finds are currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ, prior to deposition Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM), Exeter.
- 9.2** An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier 133990, which includes a digital copy of this report.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

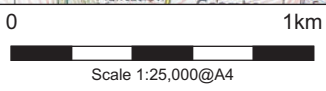
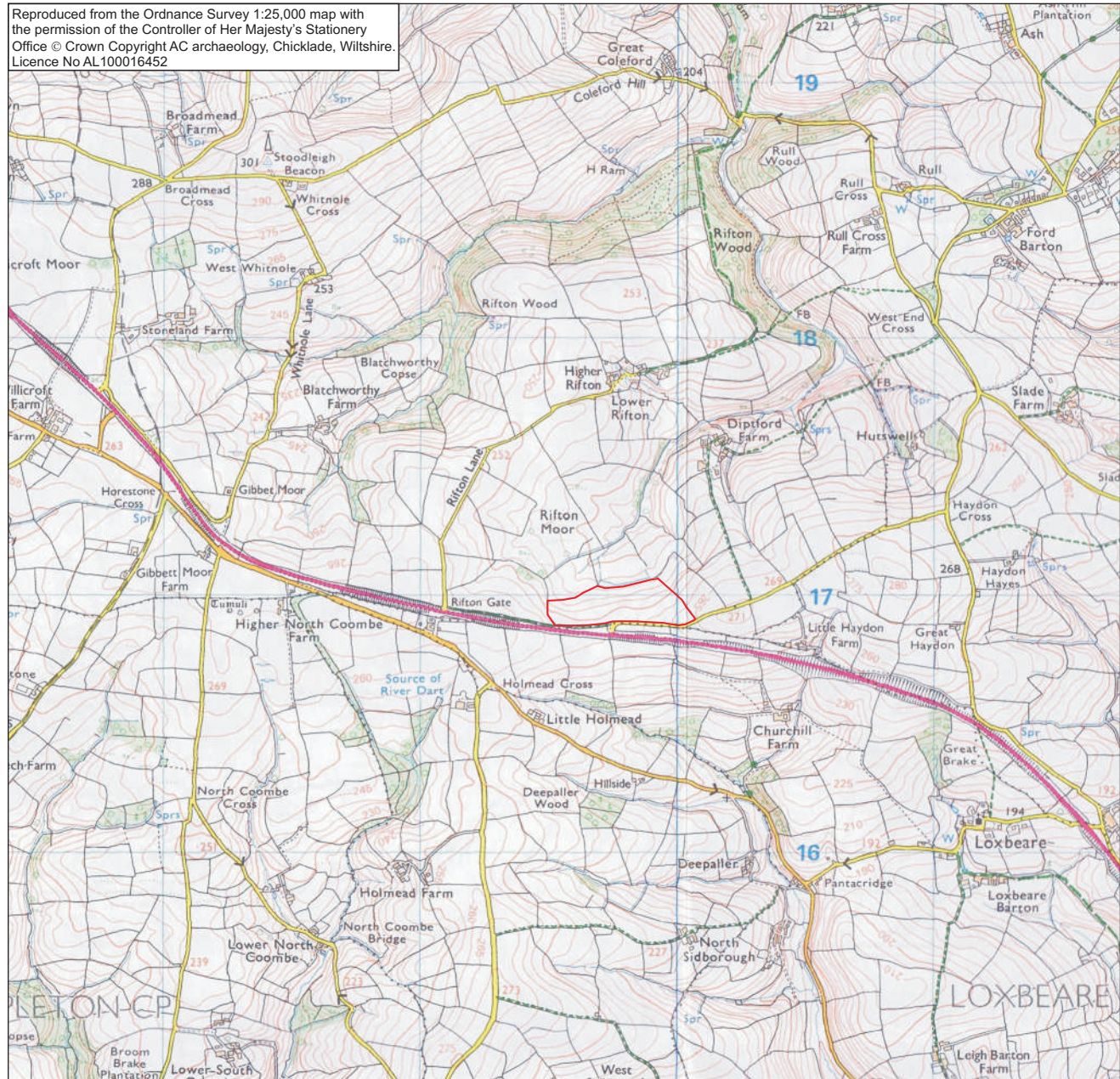
The evaluation was commissioned by Will Bedford of CgMs Consulting on behalf of Lightsource Renewable Energy Ltd. Thanks are due to the landowner Mr Wyatt for his co-operation and assistance. The site work was carried out by Peter Stead and Paul Cooke. The report figures were prepared by Elizabeth Patkai and Sarnia Blackmore.


11. REFERENCES

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- Bedford, W., 2012, *Archaeological desk-based assessment, Blatchworthy Farm, Tiverton*. Unpublished CgMs Consulting document for client, ref WB/14210
- Valentin, J., 2012, *Land at Blatchworthy Farm, near Tiverton, Devon: Project Design for an archaeological trench evaluation*



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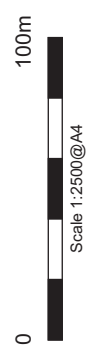
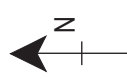
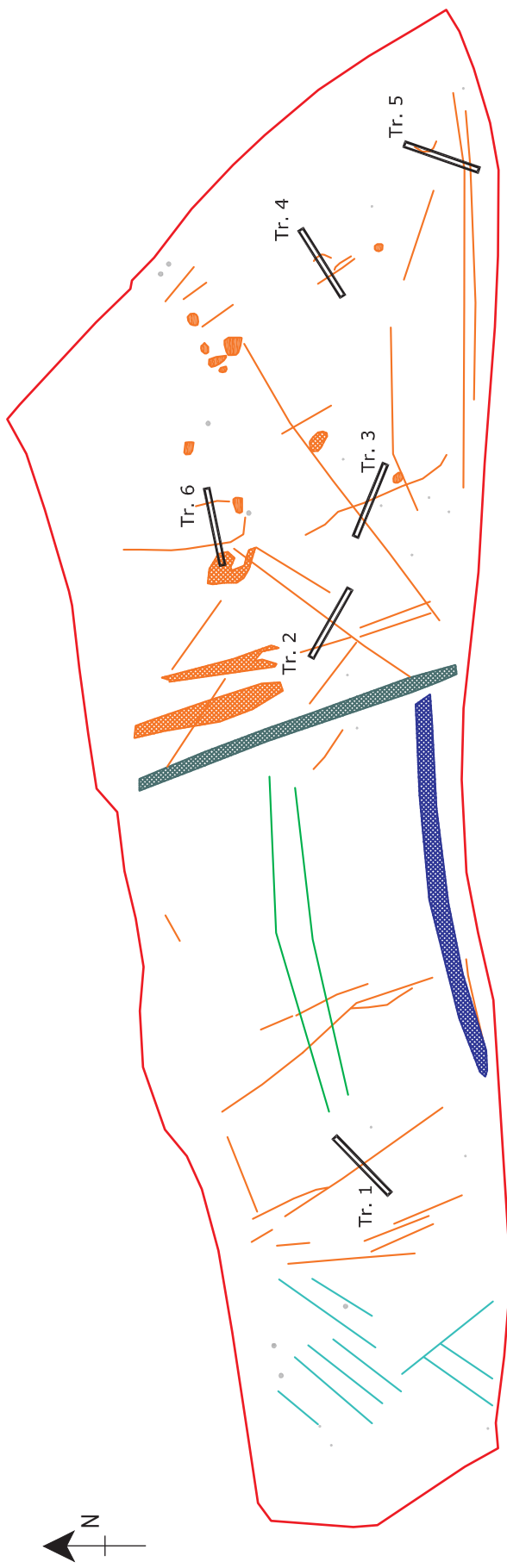







 Site location




PROJECT
Blatchworthy farm, near Tiverton, Devon
 TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site





-  Positive anomaly - magnetically enhanced material
-  Negative anomaly - material of low magnetic susceptibility (subsoil/stone?)
-  Former field boundary
-  Strong dipolar anomaly - ferrous object
-  Discrete positive response - possible pit-like feature

-  Positive linear anomaly - possible ditch feature
-  Linear anomaly - of agricultural origin
-  Positive linear anomaly - possible land drain

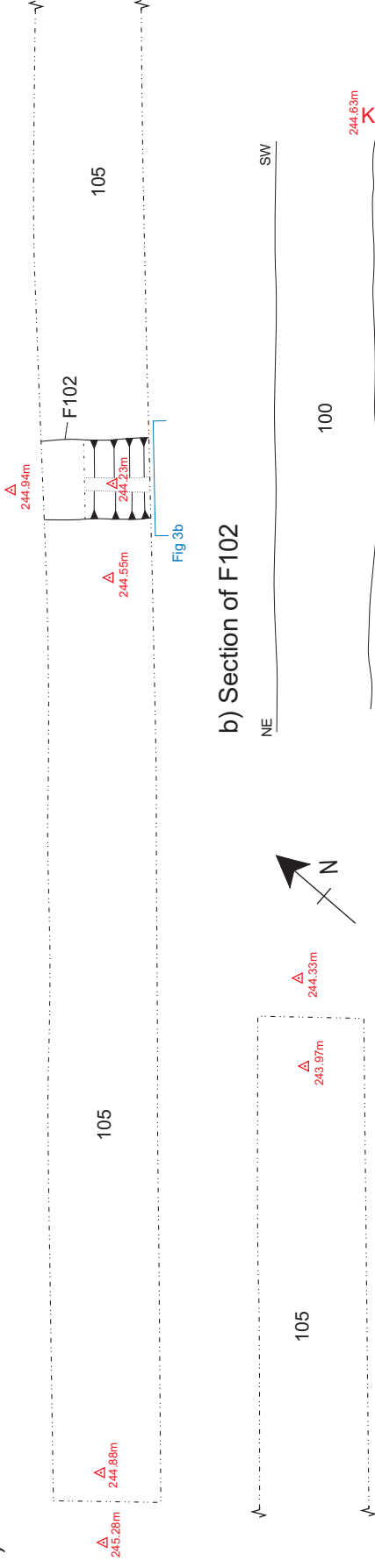
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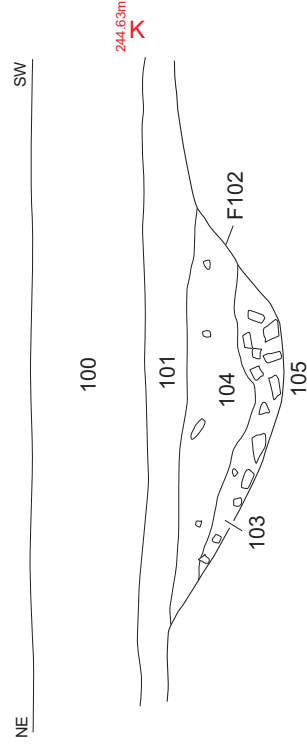
Fig. 2: Location of trenches in relation to anomalies identified by geophysical survey



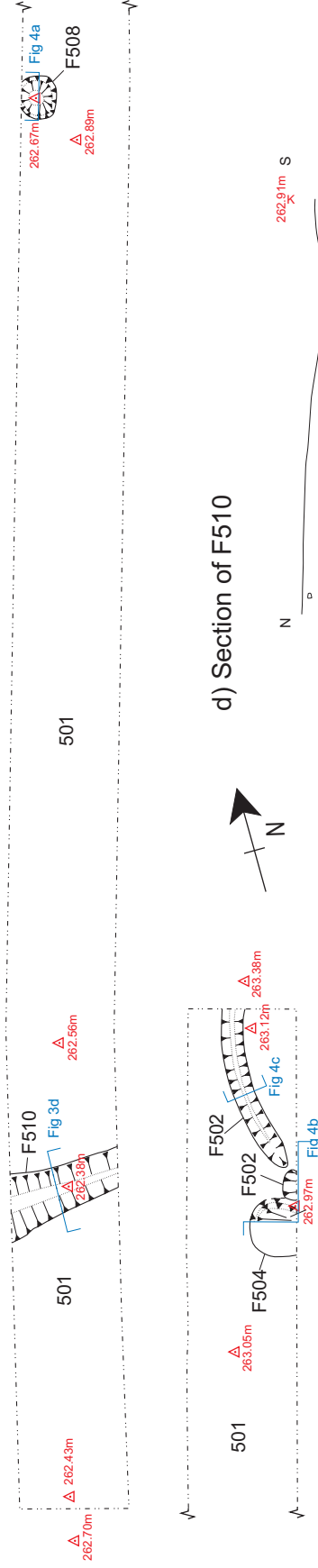
a) Plan of Trench 1



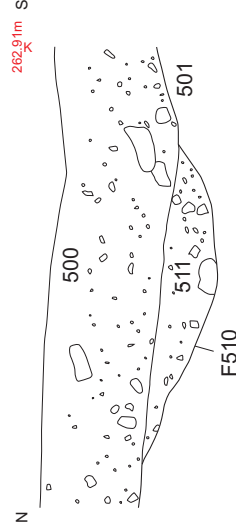
b) Section of F102



c) Plan of Trench 5



d) Section of F510



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Fig. 3: Plans and sections,
Trenches 1 and 5



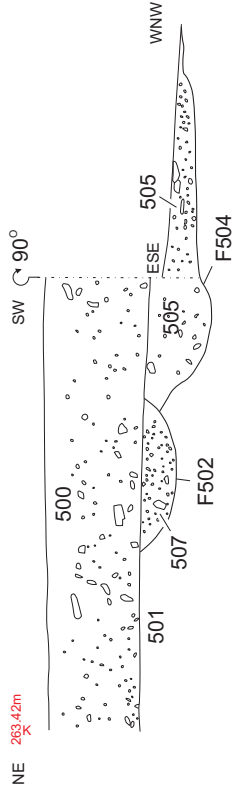
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a) Section of F508



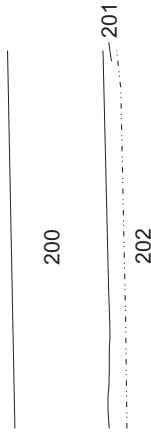
b) Section of F502 and F504



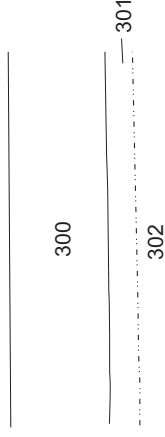
c) Section of F502



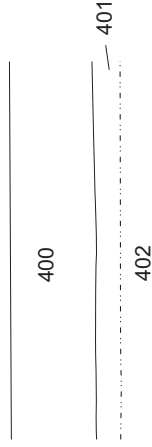
d) Trench 2, representative section



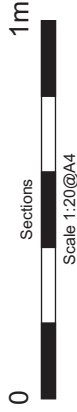
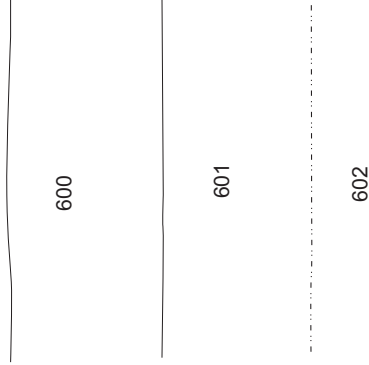
e) Trench 3, representative section



f) Trench 4, representative section



g) Trench 6, representative section



PROJECT

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TITLE

Fig. 4: Trench 5 sections and
representative sections
Trenches 2 - 6



archaeology



Plate 1: General view of site, showing Trenches 2 (left) and 3 (right). View from the southwest



Plate 2: General view of site from the northeast



Plate 3: Trench 1, ditch F102, view from the northwest



Plate 4: General view of Trench 2 from the southeast



Plate 5: General view of Trench 3 from the southeast



Plate 6: Trench 5, posthole F508, view from the southeast



Plate 7: Trench 5, ditch F510, view from the southeast



Plate 8: Trench 5, section through gully F502, view from the south

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