

LAND AT WESTACOTT, BARNSTAPLE, DEVON

(Centred on NGR SS 590 322)

Results of an Archaeological Trench Evaluation

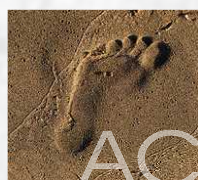
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On behalf of:
EDP

Report No: ACD1696/2/1

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archaeology

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Acknowledgements

The evaluation was commissioned by Eddy Stratford of EDP on behalf of Rockspring Barwood Barnstaple Ltd and managed for AC archaeology by Simon Hughes. The site works were carried out by László Lichtenstein and Lexi Scard. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Sarnia Blackmore. The advice of Stephen Reed, Devon County Council Archaeologist, 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 on land at Westacott, Barnstaple, Devon (NGR SS 590 322), was undertaken by AC archaeology during November 2017. The evaluation consisted of the machine-excavation of five trenches totalling 223m in length and each 1.6m wide. These were positioned to target anomalies identified by a previous geophysical survey.

The trial trench evaluation established that in the areas investigated, the interpreted results from the geophysical survey related to either geological variation or stone land drainage of recent date. No evidence for pre-modern activity was exposed by the work.

Two furrows were also exposed by the work and were considered to reflect medieval to post-medieval agricultural practice, something that is consistent with the historic origins of the estate on which the site is located.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological trench evaluation on land at Westacott, Barnstaple, Devon (centred on SS 590 322), was undertaken by AC archaeology during November 2017. The was required following consultation with the Devon County Historic Environment Team to provide associated information for a proposed forthcoming planning application.
- 1.2 The proposed application area comprises an approximately 55 hectare parcel of land, which is bounded to the south by the A361 North Devon Link Road and to the west by Westacott, a suburb of Barnstaple (Fig. 1). It comprises 14 areas of agricultural land to the southwest of Acland Barton Farm and is currently under mixed pasture. The site lies on ground that generally slopes from a high point of 85m aOD (above Ordnance Datum) to the north towards an unnamed tributary stream of the River Taw that bisects the southwest portion of the site at around 30m aOD. Its underlying solid geology consists of sandstone and mudstone of the Pilton Mudstone Formation, which is overlain in the stream valley by gravel, sand and silt of the Taw River Deposits (www.bgs.ac.uk).
- 1.3 The archaeological works reported here investigated locations in the northwest and northeast portions of the proposed application area; Areas 1 and 2 on Fig. 1.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site has been subject to a geophysical survey (WYAS 2017). The results from this identified a number of anomalies that have been interpreted as representing agricultural features such as former field drains, field boundaries and linear trends thought to represent the result of ploughing. In addition to these features, a rectilinear arrangement of linear anomalies interpreted in Area 1 was considered to have represent a possible enclosure, while in Area 8, an ephemeral second rectilinear and linear arrangement of anomalies was interpreted as of possible archaeological origin.
- 2.2 Much of the existing field pattern is likely to relate to Acland Barton, which has medieval origins and lies some 200m to the north. Acland Barton and chapel has been documented since the 13th century as the residence of the Acland family (Devon County Council Historic Environment Record ref. MDV870). The current Grade-I listed house (National Heritage List for England ref. 1107676), which almost certainly replaced an earlier building, is thought to date to 1470-80 with internal remodelling carried out in 1591. Acland Barton also includes a number of associated

buildings, including a Grade-II listed barn (NHLE 1107678) and stables (NHLE 1107677) that both date to the 17th century.

- 2.3** The 1846 Landkey parish tithe map depicts Acland Barton and its associated buildings as within an agricultural landscape. A number of the linear anomalies identified from the geophysical survey correspond with field boundaries shown on the tithe map. One of these comprises a rectangular plot within Area 1 of the application area. This is named in the accompanying tithe apportionment as 'Canna Park', a name that is considered to be associated with a farmstead (MDV119426).

3. AIM

- 3.1** The aim of the trial trench evaluation was to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any archaeological features, deposits or finds within the site. 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 development should planning consent be obtained.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1** The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a project design prepared by AC archaeology (Hughes 2017) and with reference to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2014). It comprised the machine-excavation of five trenches totaling 223m in length and with each 1.6m wide. These were positioned to target anomalies interpreted from the previous geophysical survey in Areas 1 and 2. All trenches were located with a Leica Net rover GPS with sub-10mm accuracy.
- 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 as appropriate. All site levels relate to Ordnance Datum.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Introduction (Plan Fig. 2)

Three of the trenches (Trenches 2, 3 and 4) contained archaeological features and two (Trenches 1 and 5) had negative results. Trench 1 was not machine-excavated to its full proposed length due to health and safety concerns relating to the steepness of the slope in this part of the site (Plate 3). This meant that a linear anomaly that the trench was positioned to target was not tested. The trenches containing features are described below, with descriptions for all trenches presented in tabulated form in Appendix 1.

Across the site, the exposed overlying soil sequence comprised a topsoil of mid greyish-brown sandy silt, above an occasional subsoil of mid greyish-brown silty clay. The natural subsoil largely comprised light grey clayey-sands with frequent mudstone gravels or weathered mudstone banding. The natural subsoil was present at a depth of between 0.27m and 0.62m below the current ground surface.

5.2 Trench 2 (Plan Fig. 3a, sections Figs 3b-c; Plate 4-5)

This trench was located on moderately-steep sloping ground in the eastern part of Area 1. It was positioned to test two linear anomalies interpreted from the results of the geophysical survey. Natural subsoil (context 102) was exposed at a depth of between 0.29m and 0.38m below subsoil (context 101), which was present only in the downslope portion of the trench and topsoil (200).

The trench contained one linear feature (F204) representing a probable furrow that was unlikely to correspond with one of the targeted geophysical anomalies. Instead, the position of the targeted anomalies corresponded with bands of clay within the weathered mudstone geology.

Furrow F204

This was aligned approximately northwest to southeast and measured 0.85m wide by 0.09m deep with gradually-sloping sides and a flat base. It had a single fill (203) composed of mid greyish-brown silty-clay, from which a roof slate fragment was recovered.

5.3 Trench 3 (Plan Fig. 3d, sections Figs 3e-f; Plate 6)

This trench was located to the southwest of Trench 2 on similar moderately-steep sloping ground. It positioned to principally target an east to west aligned linear anomaly interpreted from the results of the geophysical survey. As with Trench 2, the natural subsoil (302) was overlain in the down-slope portion of the trench by a subsoil (301), which measured approximately 0.25m thick. This was sealed by topsoil (300). The trench contained one linear anomaly (F304), representing a probable furrow that did not correspond with the location of the targeted linear anomaly. As had been exposed in Trench 2, the position of the targeted anomaly correlated with geological banding.

Furrow F304

Furrow F304 was aligned approximately east to west and measured 1.80m wide by 0.18m deep with a shallow concave profile. It had a single fill (303) composed of mid brownish-grey silty clay. No finds were recovered.

5.4 Trench 4 (Plan Fig. 2b; Plates 7-8)

This trench was located in Area 2 on flattish ground. It was positioned to test several linear anomalies interpreted from the results of the geophysical survey. Natural subsoil was exposed at a depth of 0.33m beneath topsoil. The positions of the targeted anomalies corresponded with four stone land drains measuring approximately 0.4m wide.

6. FINDS *by Charlotte Coles*

- 6.1 The only find recovered from this site was a small piece of roof slate from context 203, this weighs 22g and is not datable.

7. DISCUSSION

- 7.1 The results from the trench evaluation were largely negative. The geophysical anomalies targeted by the trenches were found to relate to geological banding for Trenches 2, 3 and 5 and stone land drains of probable post-medieval date in Trench 4.
- 7.2 The furrows exposed in Trenches 2 and 3 are of probable medieval to post-medieval origin and are likely to be the result of agricultural practice.
- 7.3 A lack of finds from any of the trenches suggests limited potential for settlement-related occupation in the vicinity of the areas investigated. Furthermore, the steeply-sloping topography

present in Area 1 would also suggest that this was unlikely. Despite the linear anomaly adjacent to Trench 1 having not been tested during the work, on the basis of corresponding geological variation exposed in Trenches 2 and 3 coupled with steep topography, it is probable that this anomaly was also of natural origin.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The trial trench evaluation has established that in the areas investigated, the interpreted results from the geophysical survey relate to either geological variation or stone land drainage of recent date. No indication for pre-modern activity was exposed by the work.
- 8.2 Two furrows exposed by the work are considered to reflect medieval to post-medieval agricultural practice, something that is consistent with the historic origins of the estate of Acland Barton on which the site is located.

9. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

- 9.1 The find, 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 **ACD1696** and under an accession number from the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon. It will be held until the need for any further archaeological work on the site is established.
- 9.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier **302475**, which includes a digital copy of this report.

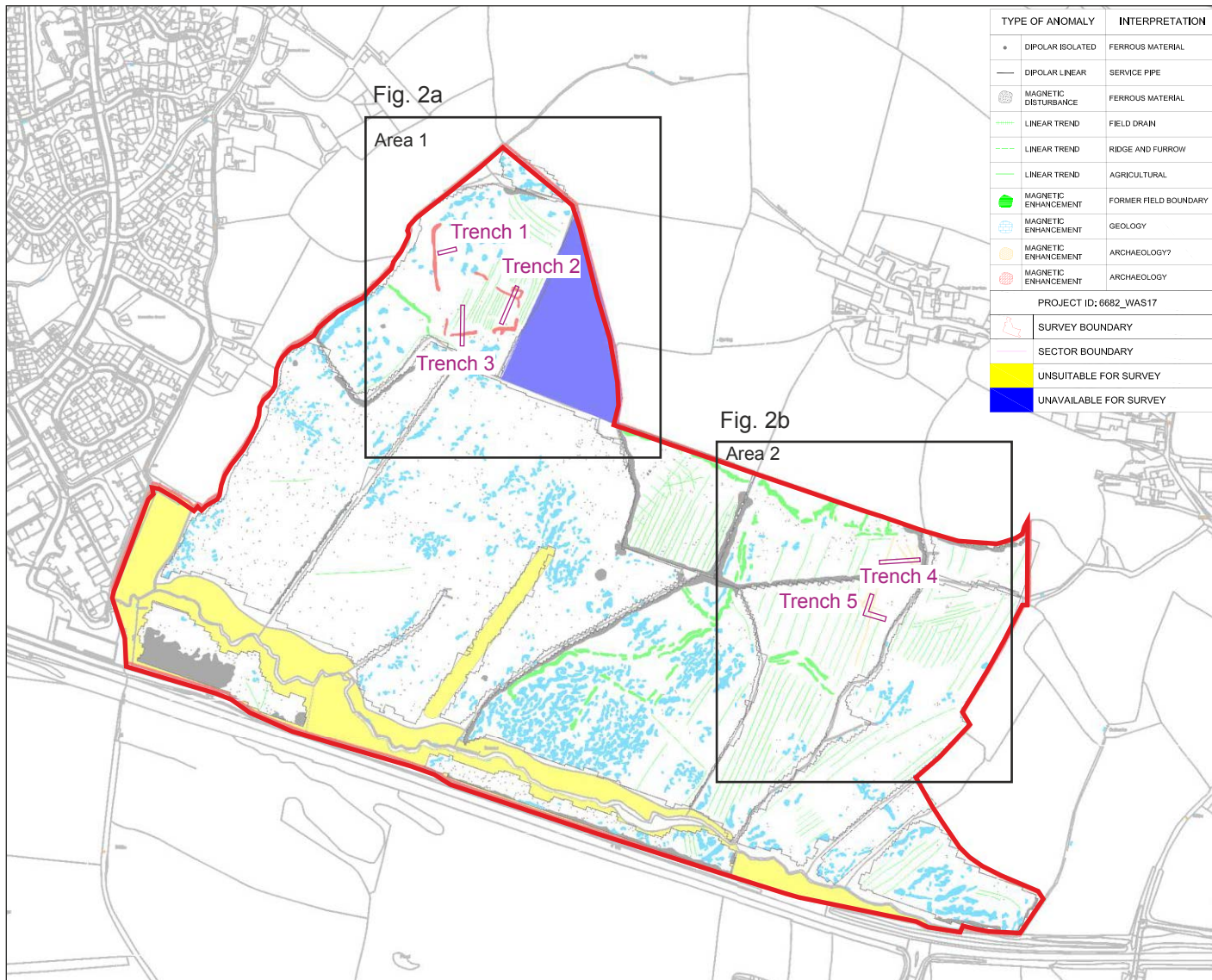
10. REFERENCES

BGS, 2017, *British Geological Survey Geology of Britain On-line Viewer* (www.bgs.ac.uk).

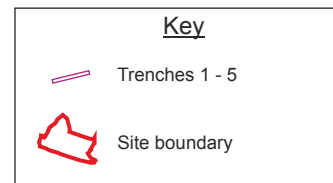
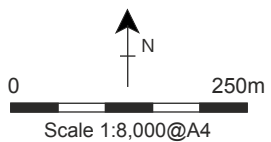
DRO, Landkey parish tithe map, 1846 and apportionment

Hughes, S., 2017, *Land at Westacott, Barnstaple, Devon: Project Design for an Archaeological Trench Evaluation*. AC archaeology report, ref. **ACD/1696/1/0**.

WYAS, 2017, *Westacott, Barnstaple, Devon: Geophysical Survey*. Unpublished West Yorkshire Archaeological Service report, ref. **3014**



Based on drawing prepared by WYAS

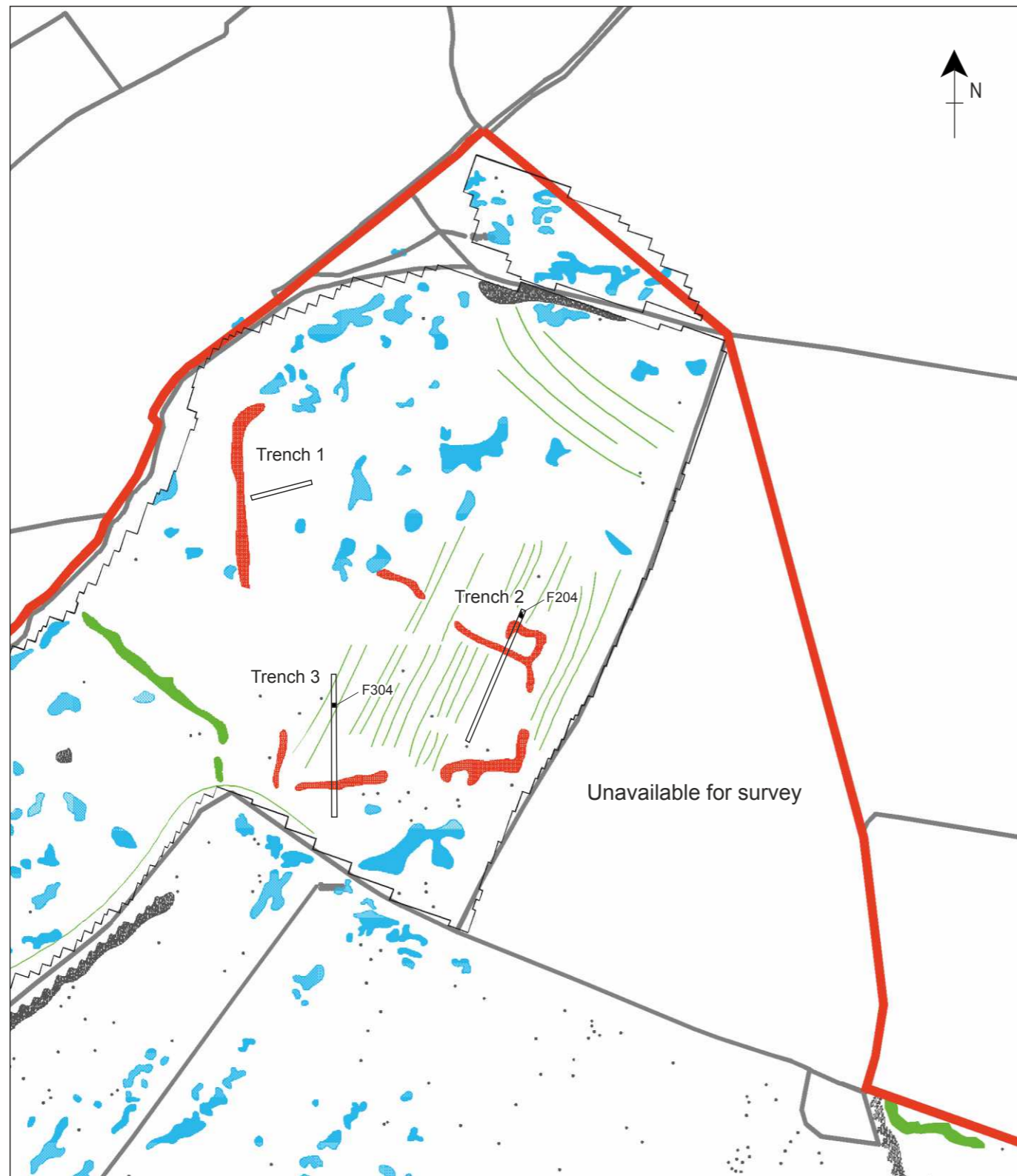


PROJECT

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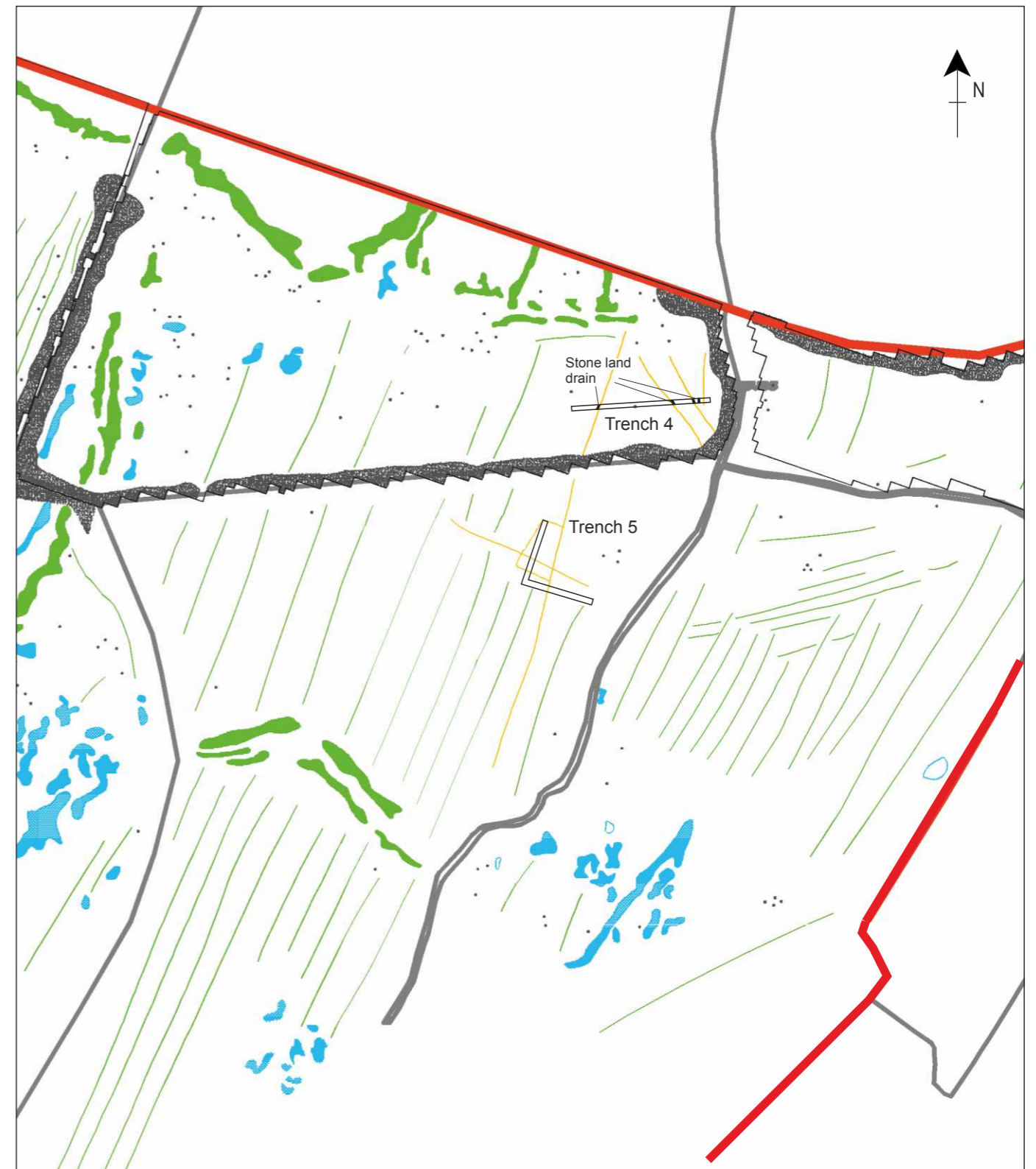
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Fig. 1: Site location

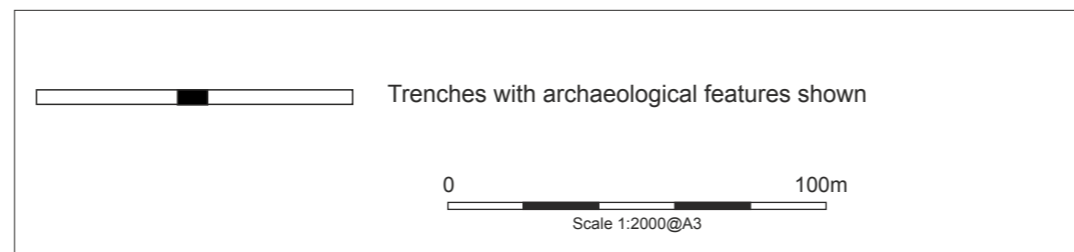


2a: Area 1, plan

Plan supplied by WYAS Archaeological Services



2b: Area 2, plan

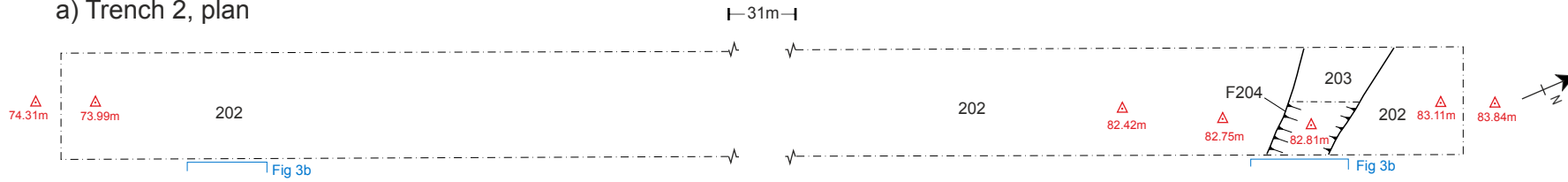


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Land at Westacott, Barnstaple,
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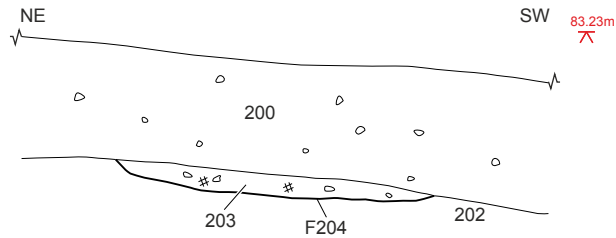
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Fig. 2: Trench location plan with
features shown in relation to
geophysical results



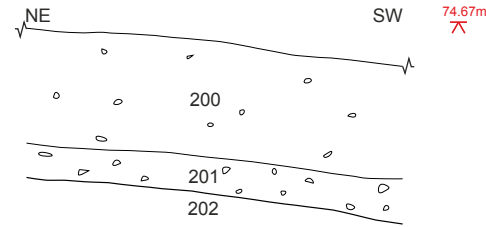
a) Trench 2, plan



b) Section of furrow F204

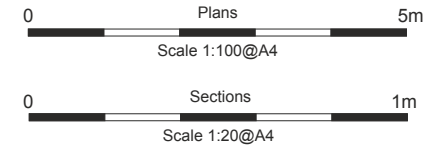


c) Representative section

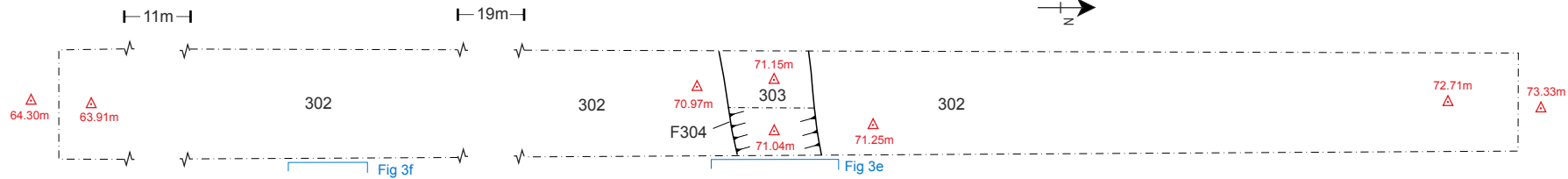


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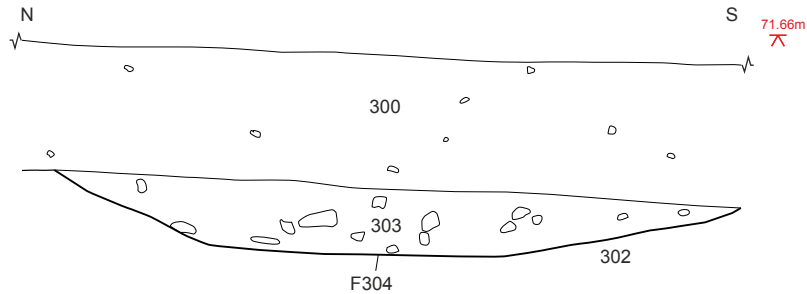
- Stones
- Charcoal



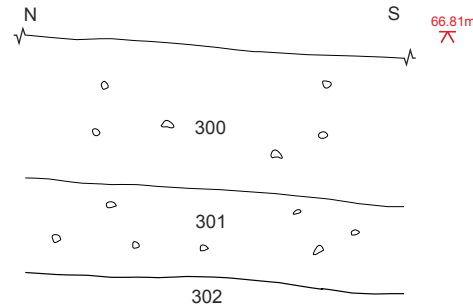
d) Trench 3, plan



e) Section of furrow F304



f) Representative section



PROJECT AC archaeology

Land at Westacott, Barnstaple, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 3: Trenches 2 and 3, plans and sections



Plate 1: General site view, looking southwest from Area 1



Plate 2: General site view, looking west from Area 1



Plate 3: Showing working view of Trench 1, looking southwest



Plate 4: Trench 2, view to southwest (scales 1m)



Plate 5: Trench 2, furrow F204, view to southeast (scale 1m)



Plate 6: Trench 3, furrow F304, view to east (scale 1m)



Plate 7: Trench 4, view to east (scales 1m)



Plate 8: Trench 4, stone land drains, view to south (scale 2m)

Appendix 1

Tabulated Context Descriptions by Trench



APPENDIX 1: TABULATED CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS BY TRENCH

Trench 1		Length	Width	Alignment
		22m	1.6m	NE-SW
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
100	Mid greyish-brown sandy-silt loam with moderately-common small-medium size mudstone inclusions	0-0.27m	Topsoil	
101	Light grey clayey-sand with frequent mudstone inclusions	0.27m+	Natural subsoil	

Trench 2		Length	Width	Alignment
		50m	1.6m	NNE-SSW
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
200	Mid greyish-brown sandy-silt loam with moderately-common small-medium size mudstone inclusions	0-0.29m	Topsoil	
201	Mid greyish-brown silty-clay with frequent small-medium mudstone inclusions	0.29-0.38m	Subsoil	
202	Light grey clayey-sand with frequent mudstone inclusions	0.38m+	Natural subsoil	
203	Mid greyish-brown silty-clay with occasional poorly-sorted mudstone inclusions	0.38-0.47m	Fill of F204	
F204	Linear feature NNW-SSE aligned, 0.85m wide and 0.09m deep with shallow sloping sides and flat base	0.38-0.47m	Cut of furrow	

Trench 3		Length	Width	Alignment
		50m	1.6m	N-S
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
300	Mid greyish-brown sandy-silt loam with moderately-common small-medium size mudstone inclusions	0-0.37m	Topsoil	
301	Mid greyish-brown silty-clay with frequent small-medium mudstone inclusions	0.37-0.62m	Subsoil	
302	Light grey clayey-sand with frequent mudstone inclusions	0.62m+	Natural substratum	
303	Mid brownish-grey silty-clay with frequent poorly sorted subangular mudstone inclusions	0.37-0.56	Fill of F304	
F304	Linear feature E-W aligned measured 1.7m wide by 0.19m deep with shallow sloping sides and concave base	0.37-0.56m	Cut of furrow	

Trench 4		Length	Width	Alignment
		50m	1.6m	E-W
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
400	Mid greyish-brown sandy-silt loam with moderately-common small-medium size mudstone inclusions	0-0.33m	Topsoil	
401	Light grey clayey-sand with frequent mudstone inclusions	0.33m+	Natural subsoil	
402	Mid grey brown compact silty clay with abundant sub-angular pebbles and cobbles	0.33-0.61m	Fill of F403	
F403	Linear feature N-S aligned measured 0.58m wide by 0.28m deep with vertical sides and concave base	0.33-0.61m	Stone land drain	
404	Mid grey brown compact silty clay with abundant sub-angular pebbles and cobbles	0.33-0.63m	Fill of F405	
F405	Linear feature NW-SE aligned measured 0.46m wide by 0.30m deep with vertical sides and concave base	0.33-0.63m	Stone land drain	
406	Mid grey brown compact silty clay with abundant sub-angular pebbles and cobbles	0.33-0.57m	Fill of F407	
F407	Linear feature NNW-SSE aligned measured 0.40m wide by 0.24m deep with vertical sides and concave base	0.33-0.57m	Stone land drain	

APPENDIX 1: TABULATED CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS BY TRENCH

408	Mid grey brown compact silty clay with common subangular pebbles and cobbles	0.33-0.52m	Fill of F409
F409	Linear feature NE-SW aligned measured 0.50m wide by 0.19m deep with vertical sides and concave base	0.33-0.52m	Stone land drain

Trench 5		Length	Width	Alignment
		50m	1.6m 1.6m	NE-SW NW-SE
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation	
500	Mid greyish-brown sandy-silt loam with moderately-common small-medium size mudstone inclusions	0-0.37m	Topsoil	
501	Mid greyish-brown silty-clay with frequent small-medium mudstone inclusions	0.37m +	Natural subsoil	

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