

Land at Great Shelfin Farm, North Devon

NGR (centred on) SS 52004462

## Results of an archaeological trench evaluation

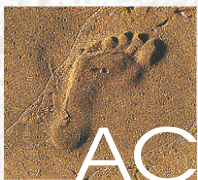
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Prepared by  
Simon Hughes

On behalf of  
Headland Archaeology

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Date: October 2009



AC archaeology

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# LAND AT GREAT SHELFIN FARM, NORTH DEVON

## CENTRED ON NGR SS52004462

### RESULTS OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRENCH EVALUATION

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## Summary

*An archaeological trench evaluation carried out to provide supporting information for a proposed wind energy development on land at Great Shelfin Farm, North Devon (NGR SS52004462), was undertaken by AC archaeology during September 2009. The site is located over five pasture fields to the south and west of the farm, in an area where only limited archaeological work has been previously carried out, but where a number of extant Bronze Age barrows are recorded in the vicinity.*

*The evaluation comprised the machine-excavation of nine trenches, totalling 465m in length, with these positioned to provide a 10% sample of the areas to be affected by proposed development, excluding access tracks. Across large parts of the site negative results were recorded, but a re-cut drainage ditch/channel and two former agricultural boundary ditches were identified, one of which contained two sherds of medieval pottery. The alignments of the boundary ditches indicate that they are likely to pre-date the establishment of the present post-medieval/modern field pattern.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological trench evaluation carried out to provide supporting information for a proposed wind energy development on land at Great Shelfin Farm, North Devon, was undertaken by AC archaeology during September 2009. The work was commissioned by Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd on behalf of BT plc and was undertaken following consultation with Devon County Historic Environment Service (hereafter DCHES).
- 1.2 The site is situated over five pasture fields divided by slate hedgebanks and is to the west and south of Great Shelfin farm complex (Fig. 1 and Plate 1). The general topography of the site comprises land which slopes gently down to the north, between 245m and 200m OD. The underlying solid geology comprises sandstones and slates of the Devonian Ilfracombe Beds.

### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A Cultural Heritage and Archaeology chapter for an Environmental Statement is currently being prepared (Conolly in prep.) This has identified probable 18th or 19th-century quarry pits to the north of the development area and a possible medieval enclosure to the south. The enclosure does not appear to extend within the construction footprint of the development. The general pattern of fields on the site appears to tally with those shown on the parish tithe map of 1840.
- 2.2 There has been only limited intrusive archaeological work undertaken in the area and consequently, recorded archaeological sites are dominated by barrows and other substantial site-types that survive as upstanding earthworks. There is little evidence available regarding pre-medieval settlement patterns in this part of Devon.

### 3. AIMS

- 3.1 The 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. The results set out in this report will be reviewed and used to inform any decisions about subsequent mitigation, as a condition should planning permission be granted.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a method statement prepared by Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd (Conolly 2009), submitted to and approved by DCHES prior to commencement on site. It comprised the machine excavation of nine trenches totalling 465m in length, with each trench 1.6m wide. This represents an approximate 10% sample of the proposed development areas. The location of trenches is shown on Fig. 1.
- 4.2 The site was recorded in accordance with the AC archaeology pro-forma recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and with reference to AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 1*. All plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50 and sections at 1:10 or 1:20. All levels have been related to Ordnance Datum.

## 5. RESULTS

### 5.1 Introduction

In the majority of trenches largely negative results were recorded and consequently these are described in tabulated form only in Appendix 1. In trenches where archaeological deposits or features were found, these are described in more detail below. Relevant plans and sections are included as Figs 2 and 3.

### 5.2 Trench 6 (Detailed plan Fig. 2a-b and sections Fig. 2c-e; Plates 2 and 3)

This trench was excavated through topsoil (context 600) and an interface layer (601) to a general depth of 0.35m onto weathered slate and reddish-brown silty clay natural subsoil (602). A linear feature (F607) was located towards the centre of the trench and two intercutting ditches/channels (F608 and F612) at the southern end.

Probable ditch F607 was northeast to southwest aligned and was a maximum of 0.9m wide and 0.17m deep. Two segments were excavated across the feature (603 and 605), which established that the ditch had gradual sloping sides and a concave base. A consistent and homogenous mid brown clay silt fill was present (604 and 606). Two small abraded sherds of medieval pottery and one piece of ironworking slag were recovered from fill 604.

Intercutting linear ditches/channels F608 and F612 were visible on the surface as a single, probably naturally-formed channel extending east-west across the field, which is likely to have been utilised to help drain the field. F608 was cut to the south by F612 and was 1.8m wide and 0.5m deep, with stepped moderate to steep sloping sides and a flattish base. It contained three fills, comprising a thin basal fill (609) of organic-rich material, beneath two dark brown to dark greyish-brown clay silt accumulation deposits (609 and 610). No finds were recovered.

F612 was >2.4m wide and 0.4m deep and extended beyond the southern end of the trench. It had moderately sloping sides and an irregular concave base and contained three fills, comprising a silty clay basal fill (613) containing frequent slate fragments, which was overlain by a dark thick peat/organic deposit (614). This was below an upper fill composed of a mid grey clay silt accumulation deposit (615). No finds were recovered.

### 5.3 **Trench 7** (Detailed plan Fig. 3a and sections Fig. 3b-d)

This trench was excavated to a depth of 0.58m into a weathered slate and light brownish-red silty clay natural subsoil (702). This was below a subsoil layer (701) and topsoil (700). Towards the southern end of the trench an irregular 0.05m thick lens of heat-affected clay (705) was located under the topsoil layer 700.

The trench contained a single oval shaped probable tree throw (F704) located towards the north end. This was 0.5m wide and 0.08m deep, with irregular root-disturbed gradually sloping sides and flattish base. It contained a dark greyish-brown silty clay fill (703) containing common charcoal flecks. No finds were recovered.

### 5.4 **Trench 9** (Detailed plan Fig. 3e and sections Fig. 3f-g; Plate 4)

This northwest to southeast aligned trench was excavated to a depth of 0.38m into weathered slate and light brownish-red silty clay natural subsoil (902). This was below an interface layer (901) and topsoil (900).

The trench contained a single northeast to southwest aligned linear feature (F903) located towards the centre of the trench. This probable ditch was 0.64m wide and 0.41m deep, with moderately sloping sides and a concave base. A single homogenous mid reddish-brown clay silt fill was present and no finds were recovered.

## 6. **THE FINDS**

by Emma Firth

- 6.1 A very small quantity of finds was recovered, comprising two small plain, thin-walled body sherds (3g) of North Devon medieval coarseware pottery and a small piece of undiagnostic slag (15g). All finds were recovered from fill of ditch F603 (context 604). The pottery is broadly dateable to c. 1200-1450. One sherd has sooting present on one surface which suggests it may derive from a cooking vessel. The sherds are small, abraded and undiagnostic and do not warrant any further analysis.

## 7. **DISCUSSION**

- 7.1 In the majority of trenches there was a general absence of archaeological features, deposits and finds. The position of the site on exposed high ground means it would not have been a favourable location for early settlement, but it could potentially have contained buried remains relating to former Bronze Age barrows. No features characteristic of these, such as ring ditches or burial pits, were identified.
- 7.2 The linear features exposed in Trenches 6 and 9 are likely to be agricultural drainage ditches and boundaries. Intercutting ditches F608 and F612 in Trench 6 represent two phases of utilisation of a natural channel for field drainage, visible as a linear hollow extending east-west across the field and downslope to the east into a waterlogged part of the site. Ditches F607, Trench 6 and F903, Trench 9 are both likely to be small former boundary ditches, with their alignments indicating that they are likely may pre-date the establishment of the present, mainly north-south/east-west, post-medieval/modern field pattern. Two small sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the fill of F607.
- 7.3 Irregular oval-shaped pit F704 in Trench 7 is likely to be a natural feature, probably a tree throw. The intermittent layer of heat affected clay (705) located below the current topsoil in the same trench suggests some form of deliberate burning, possibly

associated with tree or stubble clearance. The frequent charcoal within the tree throw may also indicate tree clearance by burning.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

**8.1** In the majority of trenches no evidence for archaeological activity was recorded. Where there were archaeological features present, these are likely to have been agricultural ditches relating to early field division and drainage. Based on the high sample of trenching undertaken and the general paucity of features and finds, it is considered unlikely that any new evidence for archaeological activity will be present within the areas to be affected by development.

## **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. They will be deposited at Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon, Barnstaple under the accession code 2009.64.

**9.2** The OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of archaeological InvestigationS) number for this project is 65219.

## **10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The evaluation was commissioned for Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd by Richard Conolly. The site trial-trenching was carried out by Simon Hughes, Kerry Dean and Chris Caine and the illustrations for this report were prepared by Sarah Cottam. The advice and collaboration of Stephen Reed, Devon County Archaeology Officer, is duly acknowledged.

## **11. REFERENCES**

Conolly, R., 2009, *Archaeological Evaluation of land at Great Shelfin Farm, North Devon: Written Scheme of Investigation*. Unpublished Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd document for client.

Conolly, R., in prep., *Draft Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Chapter for Environmental Statement*. Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd document for client.

## APPENDIX 1: Trench descriptions

Trench 1			Length 40m	Width 1.6m	Alignment N-S/E-W
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation		
100	Mid brown friable clay silt	0-0.22m	Topsoil		
101	Mid reddish-brown friable silty clay with abundant slate fragment inclusions	0.22m-0.33m	Interface layer		
102	Mid brown grey weathered slate with mid brown red silty clay	0.33m+	Natural subsoil		

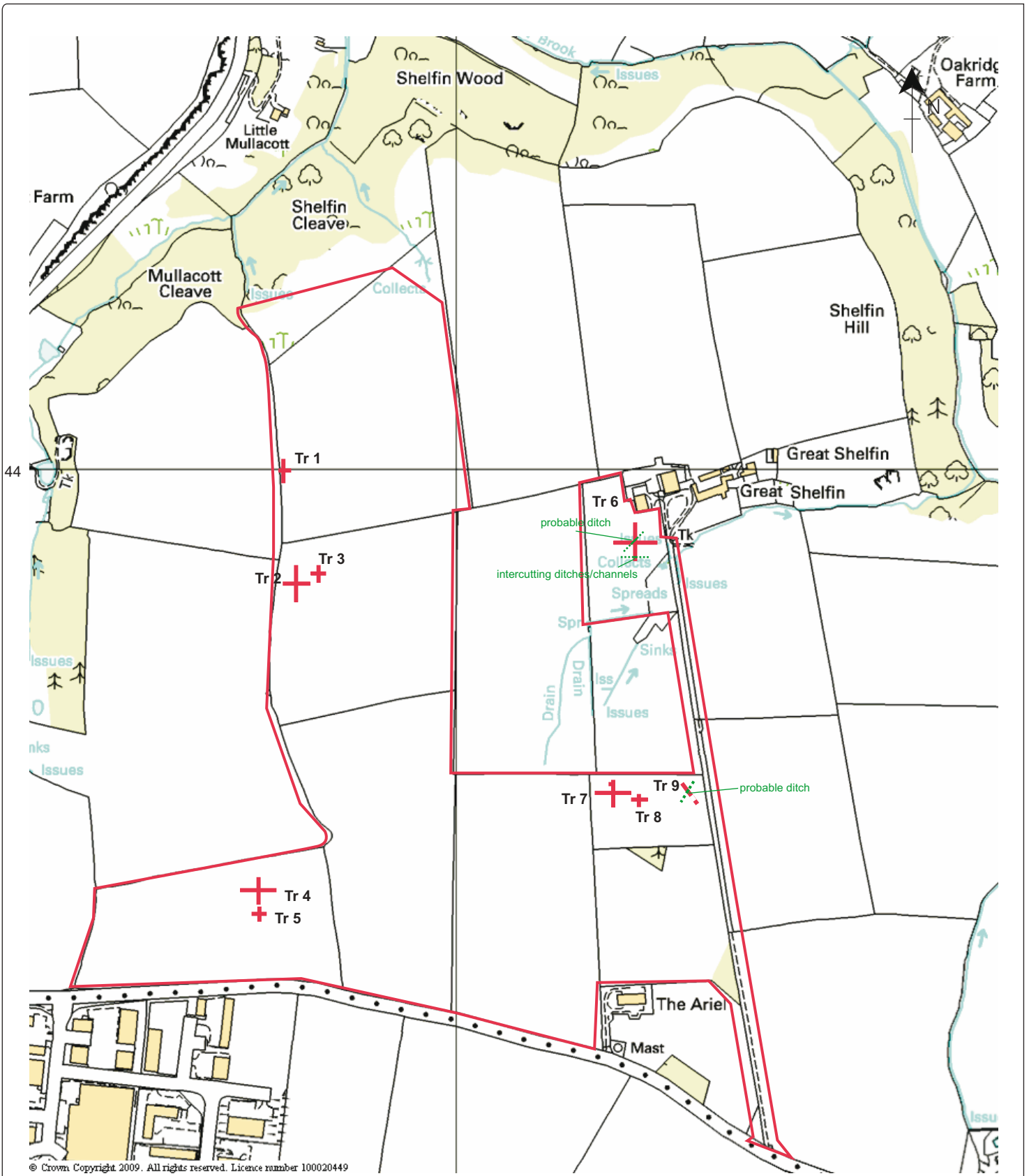
Trench 2			Length 70m	Width 1.6m	Alignment N-S/E-W
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation		
200	Mid brown friable clay silt	0-0.22m	Topsoil		
201	Mid reddish-brown friable silty clay with abundant slate fragment inclusions	0.22-0.28m	Interface layer		
202	Mid brownish-grey weathered slate with mid brownish-red silty clay	0.28m+	Natural subsoil		

Trench 3			Length 30m	Width 1.6m	Alignment N-S/E-W
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation		
300	Mid brown friable clay silt	0-0.3m	Topsoil		
301	Mid reddish-brown friable silty clay with abundant slate fragment inclusions	0.3-0.4m	Interface layer		
302	Mid brownish-grey weathered slate with mid brownish-red silty clay	0.4m+	Natural subsoil		

Trench 4			Length 70m	Width 1.6m	Alignment N-S/E-W
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation		
400	Mid brown friable clay silt	0-0.2m	Topsoil		
401	Mid reddish-brown friable silty clay with abundant slate fragment inclusions	0.2-0.4m	Subsoil		
402	Mid brownish-grey weathered slate with mid brownish-red silty clay	0.4m+	Natural subsoil		

Trench 5			Length 30m	Width 1.6m	Alignment N-S/E-W
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation		
500	Mid brown friable clay silt	0-0.15m	Topsoil		
501	Mid reddish-brown friable silty clay with abundant slate fragment inclusions	0.15-0.4m	Subsoil		
502	Mid brownish-grey weathered slate with mid brownish-red silty clay	0.4m+	Natural subsoil		

Trench 8			Length 30m	Width 1.6m	Alignment N-S/E-W
Context	Description	Depth	Interpretation		
800	Mid brown friable clay silt	0-0.25m	Topsoil		
801	Mid reddish-brown friable silty clay with abundant slate fragment inclusions	0.25-0.35m	Interface layer		
802	Mid brownish-grey weathered slate with mid brownish-red silty clay	0.35m+	Natural subsoil		



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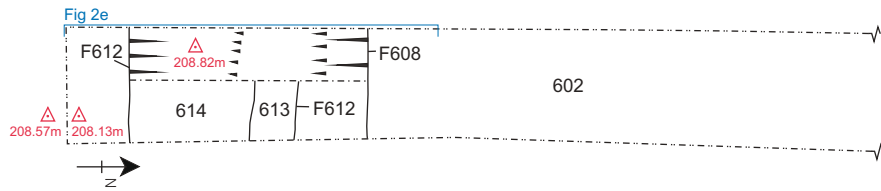
Great Shelfin Farm

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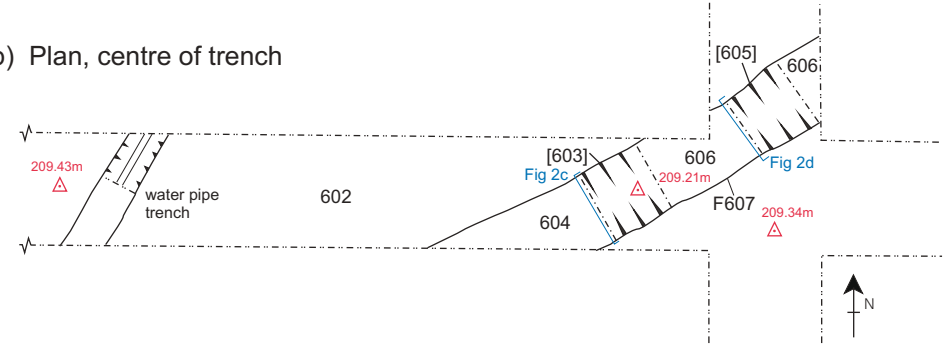
Fig. 1: Site and trench location



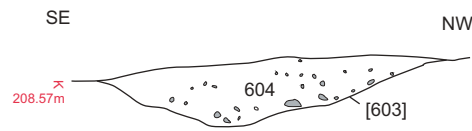
a) Plan, south end of trench



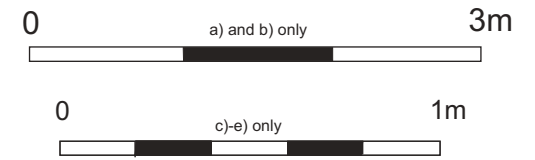
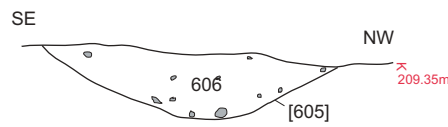
b) Plan, centre of trench



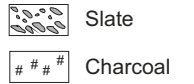
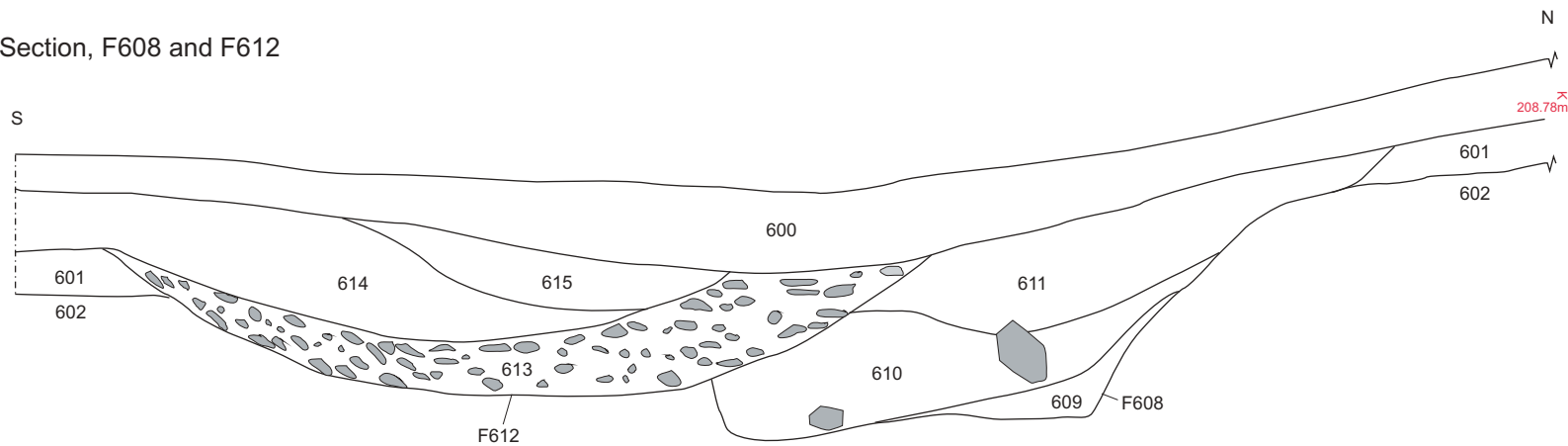
c) Section [603]



d) Section [605]



e) Section, F608 and F612



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Great Shelfin Farm

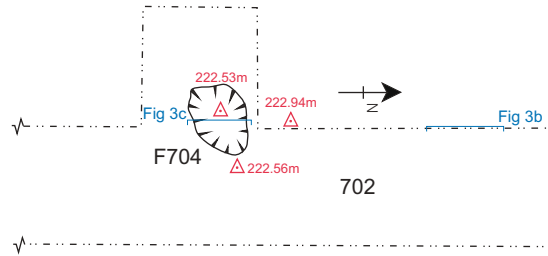
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Fig. 2:  
Plan and sections, Trench 6

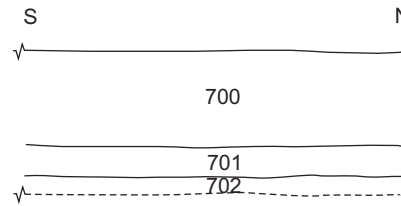


## Trench 7

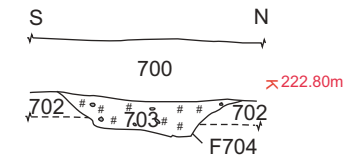
a) Plan



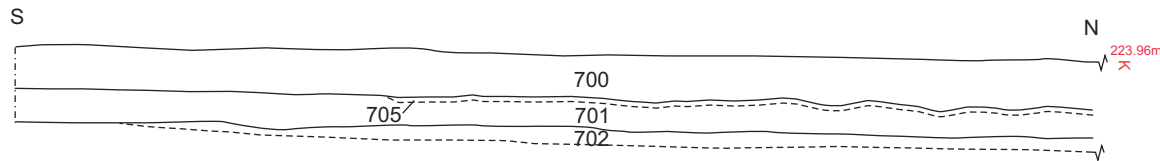
b) Representative section



c) Section, F704

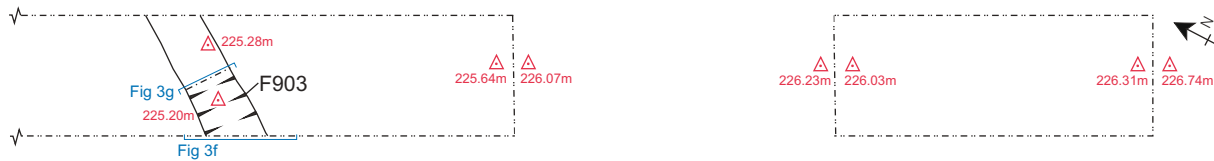


d) Section, south end of trench

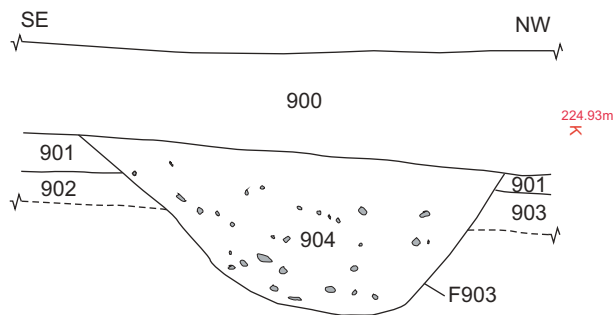


## Trench 9

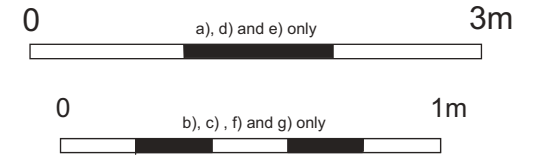
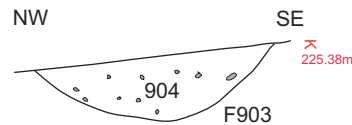
e) Plan



f) Section, F903



g) Section, F903



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Fig. 3:  
Plans and sections,  
Trenches 7 and 9



Plate 1: Machine-excavation of Trench 4. View to the northwest



Plate 2: Ditches F607 and F609, Trench 6, east-facing section.  
View to the west (scale 2m)



Plate 3:  
General view of Trench 6 with  
ditch F607 in the foreground.  
Looking to the west (scale 1m)



Plate 4:  
Ditch F903, Trench 9.  
View to the southeast (scale 1m)

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