

ROMAN ROAD, BLUECASTER SIDE,  
NEAR SEDBERGH, CUMBRIA

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND  
WATCHING BRIEF

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2010, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services (EDAS) Ltd were commissioned by Robert White, Senior Conservation Archaeologist for the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA), to undertake a detailed topographical survey prior to, and a subsequent watching brief during, drainage works carried out along the line of a probable minor Roman road alignment on Bluecaster Side, near Sedbergh, Cumbria (NGR SD 7032 9670 centred). The area of survey measured 610m long by c.20m wide, centred on the line of the probable Roman road, from a point 250m north-east of Bluecaster Side as far as Near Gill (between NGRs SD 7024 9652 and SD 7060 9700).

The route between Sedbergh and Kirby Stephen has been identified as a Roman road and the Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division records suggest that the surveyed part of the alignment is 'undoubtedly Roman'. However, if the road is actually Roman in origin, it is likely to have stayed in use as a drove road throughout the medieval and early post-medieval periods, necessitating repairs and local re-alignments of the course.

The topographical survey established that, with some variation, the form of the road is remarkably consistent, with an eastern scarp, a central terrace and a further scarp to the west. That part of the terrace which is still in use as a trackway is relatively narrow; the earthworks and metalling exposed by the drainage works show that it was once not only considerably wider but also surfaced for most of its width. An orange-brown silty sand exposed in the base of the trench excavated for a new culvert may form an earlier road surface pre-dating that represented by the more modern metalling, but no dating evidence was obtained. That part of the alignment to the north of Near Gill more closely resembles a typical Roman road, and it is possible that the surveyed section actually forms a medieval or post-medieval alteration to a Roman route; this earlier line might be represented by another linear depression which runs south from Near Gill to the east and upslope from the surveyed section. Further topographical survey of the areas to the north of Near Gill and to the east of the surveyed section may help to resolve some of these issues, although it is likely that excavation would be needed to provide conclusive proof.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In June 2010, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services (EDAS) Ltd were commissioned by Robert White, Senior Conservation Archaeologist for the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA), to undertake a detailed topographical survey prior to, and a subsequent watching brief during, drainage works carried out along the line of a probable minor Roman road alignment on Bluecaster Side, near Sedbergh, Cumbria (NGR SD 7032 9670 centred).
- 1.2 The project was not defined by a specification or methods statement, although discussions were held between EDAS and the Senior Conservation Archaeologist of the YDNPA to establish the parameters of the work. The aims of the project were to produce a new detailed measured survey to enhance understanding of the road alignment within the survey area, and to monitor the below-ground drainage works to record any archaeological deposits that might be exposed.

## 2 SITE LOCATION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The section of probable Roman road forming the subject of the survey and watching brief forms part of a longer route running between Sedbergh and Kirby Stephen; it is recorded as site MYD33152 on the YDNPA's Historic Environment Record. The surveyed section of road is now an unsealed unclassified track. It is situated at an elevation of c.260m AOD within an area of open moorland, on the steeply sloping eastern valley side of the river Rawthey, almost directly opposite Cautley Spout and to the north-east of a farmstead named as Bluecaster Side (see figure 1). The surveyed section lies wholly within the modern civil parish of Sedbergh and within the Yorkshire Dales National Park.
- 2.2 The survey area extended along the line of the probable Roman road, for a distance of 610m (see figure 2); the south-west end of the survey area was located at a corner of a large drystone walled enclosure c.250m to the north-east of Bluecaster Side house (at NGR SD 7024 9652) while the north-east end lay c.10m short of Near Gill (at NGR SD 7060 9700).
- 2.3 Relatively little is known of the Roman road. The route between Sedbergh and Kirby Stephen is identified as RR 731 by Margary, and it may have been linking a yet-to-be identified Roman fort near Sedbergh with the rest of the Roman network (White 1997, 39; Wright 1985, 32). The Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division (OSAD) records suggest that the alignment is defined by modern roads and tracks with very little of the original roadway surviving. However, the OSAD reports that the general alignment, width and other characteristics are 'undoubtedly Roman'; in places, specifically between SD 702 965 and SD 706 970 (i.e. within the survey area), there are well preserved stretches of agger and a typically Roman construction is visible where erosion has exposed the old surface (information held by YDNPA HER MYD33152). The proposed alignment also coincides with several 'Street' place names, which are indicative of former Roman roads.

## 3 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

### Documentary Research and Collation

- 3.1 No new documentary research, other than an assessment of such existing information as is known to the YDNPA, was required as part of the survey work.

## **Archaeological Topographic Survey**

- 3.2 A Level 3 archaeological survey (as defined by English Heritage 2007, 23-26) was undertaken of the road and a small strip of the unenclosed moorland to either side, at a scale of 1:500 using EDM total station survey equipment; this produced a survey area measuring 610m long by c.20m wide. This was a divorced survey, but sufficient information was gathered to allow the survey area to be readily located onto an Ordnance Survey map base through the use of surviving structures, fences, walls, water courses, trackways and other topographical features. The survey recorded the position at ground level of all structures, wall remnants and revetments, earthworks, water courses, leats, paths, stone and rubble scatters, ironwork, fences, hedges and other boundary features, and any other features considered to be of archaeological or historic interest. Survey points were taken from fixed survey stations on a closed traverse through the survey area.
- 3.3 In addition to the 1:500 survey plan, three profiles were constructed across the road alignment at a scale of 1:50, using the same methodology as described above. Given the isolated location of the survey area, it was not possible to tie the survey into a known Ordnance Datum point. Therefore, one of the survey stations (Station 1) was given the nominal height of 100m AD and all heights were calculated relative to this point.
- 3.4 On completion of the EDM survey, the field data was processed and plotted using CivilCad and AutoCad software. The data was then independently re-checked in the field in a separate operation. Any amendments or additions were surveyed by hand measurement, and the results digitised back into the electronic survey data. The resulting survey was produced at a scale of 1:500 and is presented as an interpretative hachure plan in the form of a wet ink plot using conventions analogous to those used by English Heritage (1999; 2002, 14; 2007, 31-35).
- 3.5 The drawn survey was supported by a limited number of colour digital photographs showing the best preserved sections of the road, and also the road within its wider landscape setting. The photographs were taken using a Panasonic Lumix digital camera (10 megapixel resolution) and a selection have been reproduced for illustrative purposes to accompany this report. The photographic guidelines produced by English Heritage (2007, 14) were followed and each photograph was provided with a scale where appropriate. All photographs were clearly numbered and labelled with the subject, orientation, date taken and photographer's name, and are cross referenced to film numbers (see Appendix 1).
- 3.6 In addition to the above, sufficient written observations were made in the field to allow a detailed description of the road to be prepared. The EDM total station survey was undertaken on 5th July 2010, and the resulting machine-survey data was hand-enhanced on the 7th July 2010.

## **Watching Brief**

- 3.7 Two culverts were excavated across the Roman road alignment, both on an east-west orientation; culvert 2 was situated some 63m north of the southern limit of the survey area while culvert 1 was situated 245m north of the same point. Both culvert trenches measured 8.0m long and 0.55m wide, and were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.60m below ground level (BGL). Large section plastic pipes were then laid in the trenches, and the ditches backfilled. In addition to the two culverts, the intermittent pre-existing ditch running parallel to the east side of the road was re-cut to the north of each culverts; in the case of culvert 1, the ditch was

re-cut for a distance of c.60m while for culvert 2, for c.75m. In both cases, the new excavation was between 0.5m to 1.0m wide but for the majority of the length, the ground level was reduced by barely more than 0.2m-0.3m in depth. The on-site recording was undertaken on the 8th July 2010, and all excavations were achieved using a tracked mini-digger equipped with either a 0.5m wide or 1.0m wide scraper bucket.

- 3.8 Following standard archaeological procedures, each discrete stratigraphic entity (e.g. a cut, fill or layer) was assigned an individual context number and detailed information was recorded on *pro forma* context sheets. A total of five archaeological contexts were recorded, and these are described in the following text as three digit numbers (e.g. 005) (see Appendix 2). In-house recording and quality control procedures ensured that all recorded information was cross-referenced as appropriate. The positions of all monitored groundworks were indicated on the 1:500 survey plan, and more detailed drawings were made of individual features or sections as necessary. A photographic record was also maintained using the Panasonic Lumix digital camera (10 megapixel resolution) noted above.

### **Report and Archive**

- 3.9 On completion of the archaeological fieldwork, an EDAS archive survey report was produced. The full archive, comprising paper, magnetic and plastic media, relating to the project has been ordered and indexed according to the standards set by the National Archaeological Record (EDAS site code BRR 10). It was deposited with the YDNPA on the completion of the project.

## **4 SURVEY AND WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

- 4.1 The road alignment within the survey area and the results of the watching brief are described below in a logical sequence, starting at the southern end of the survey area. Reference should also be made to the various survey plans and sections, and the photographic record (Appendix 1) and list of recorded contexts (Appendix 2). Photographs are referenced in the following text in bold type and square brackets, the numbers before the stroke representing the film number and the number after indicating the frame e.g. [2/32].

### **The Road Alignment** (see figure 3)

- 4.2 For the majority of its length, the road broadly follows the contour of the hillside. It is terraced slightly into the hillside, and for the southernmost 250m of the surveyed section, it rises gently from south to north. It then runs approximately level for a distance, before sloping downwards again into Near Gill. For most of its length in the surveyed section, the road is grassed, but some metalling, represented by both angular and rounded stones up to 0.10m across, shows through (see plates 1 and 2). In a few places, particularly where natural run-off has gouged deep gullies in the road surface, there are larger angular stones up to 0.25m across, presumably placed here relatively recently to try to stop further erosion.
- 4.3 The southern end of the survey area coincides with the north-east corner of a drystone field wall defining an enclosure formerly associated with Bluecaster Side house. At this point, the line of the road has been somewhat disturbed by a natural gully draining the moorland to the east. However, it is noticeable that to the south

of here, beyond the survey area, an earlier line of the road is clearly visible as an earthwork running parallel to the east side of the existing trackway. To the north of the gully, the road survives as a flattened linear terrace 6.5m in width, with a central rutted strip 3.0m wide forming the existing trackway used by vehicles [1/909] (see plate 1). The surface of the road is hard, but uneven. Along the west side, there is a prominent west-facing sloping scarp, up to 4.0m wide and 2.0m high. On the east side, there is second single, sometimes double, west-facing scarp, narrower but more steeply sloping, and up to 1.4m in height. Taken together, the terrace and scarps have a total width of 12.0m.

- 4.4 As the road rises to the north-east, another natural gully disturbs the east scarp, and there is a low curvilinear mound on the west side, overgrown with nettles at the time of the survey. At c.60m north of the southern end of the survey (where culvert 2 was excavated – see below), the natural water run-off had caused the surface of the road to become very uneven, including a curvilinear steep-sided gully over 1.0m deep which cuts through the west side. Beyond this gully, the road continues in approximately the same scarp-terrace-scarp form as before [2/924], although the total width of the earthworks increases markedly, reaching almost 15.0m wide where a trackway diverges from the west side towards High House. The first profile (Profile 1, see figure 4) was made across the alignment here, and it shows a total fall of c.3m from the top of the eastern scarp to the bottom of the western scarp. The profile also shows a slight gully or drain on the east side of the road here, although this was difficult to discern in plan at the time of the survey due to thick grass.
- 4.5 The road narrows immediately to the north of the trackway junction, where its east side is disturbed by a number of natural gullies. There may then be evidence for re-alignment or re-cutting, as a 50m long section adopts a slightly curvilinear plan, diverging from the general north-eastern alignment to a more northerly trend. Within this section, the scarp on the east side stands over 2.0m in height, while that on the west side is much lower and more spread at only 0.7m high. There is also a second, very faint scarp at the base of the east scarp which may mark the line of the ditch which become more clearly visible to the north. After a distance of 50m, the road resumes its north-eastern alignment and shallow ditches, set 5.0m apart from centre to centre, can be seen [2/925] (see plate 3). The second profile (Profile 2 - see figure 4) taken across the alignment here shows the road to have a width of 2.4m while the terrace is 6.8m wide, and there is a total fall of c.2.20m from the top of the eastern scarp to the bottom of the western scarp.
- 4.6 After the point where the second profile was taken, the road continues north-eastwards with the same scarp-terrace-scarp form of approximately the same dimensions, although the east scarp gradually becomes less prominent, falling to less than 0.5m in height [1/910] (see plate 2). Between the points where profiles 2 and 3 were taken, there are numerous ruts and gullies in the moorland slope immediately above the east scarp. The stepped profile of the east scarp is still apparent where the third profile was taken (Profile 3 - see figure 4). By this point, the road has almost stopped rising, and has levelled out somewhat. The stepped east scarp has a total height of c.1.4m, with a shallow ditch visible at the base. The terrace that supports the road is 7.5m wide here, with the west scarp becoming increasingly spread and shallow, barely more than 0.3m high. The earthworks forming the road alignment here have a total width of 13.0m, with a total fall of c.1.2m from the top of the scarp on the east side to the bottom of the scarp to the west.



- 4.7 Beyond profile 3, the terrace widens to 10.0m, and is able to support the existing trackway and a pair of ditches set c.4.0m apart to the east; however, at least some of the ditches are almost certainly the result of late 20th century rutting by large farm vehicles. This arrangement is visible for a distance of c.60m, after which point the ditches become intermittent at best, although the road terrace maintains a similar width. Indeed, as the road begins to descend towards Near Gill, it increases to almost 11.0m wide in places, although the scarps on either side remain low. At the northern end of the survey area, c.20m short of where the road crosses Near Gill, a shallow linear depression, diverging towards the northern end, becomes visible on the east side of the terrace. Its east scarp has a steep-sided U-shaped depression, 1.40m deep and open to the west, set into its northern end.
- 4.8 The ground surface dips quite markedly into Near Gill, and it may be that the road was once carried over it on a bridge, although if so, it was presumably a timber structure, as no footings, earthworks or accumulations of rubble that might indicate stone abutments can be seen. To the north of Near Gill, beyond the survey area, the road is visible again, although here it is of a different form and much better defined than within the survey area itself. It comprises a flattened linear strip, slightly raised and c.7m across, flanked by shallow ditches, and set within a low 'cutting' formed by c.1m high scarps [2/921 to 2/923]. In some places, particularly along the western side of the 'cutting', the road is flanked by a substantial bank.
- 4.9 At the point where the surveyed road crosses Near Gill, it was also noted that a second trackway, represented by a faint linear depression, diverges from the 'main' route, to run southwards but further up the slope to the east of the surveyed route. Although faint at first, this track becomes more prominent and better defined as it runs south, eventually reaching a width of 5.0m-6.0m [1/902 and 1/903]. It may be that this line represents the earlier alignment of the road, which was later replaced by the surveyed route.

#### **The Watching Brief** (see figure 5)

- 4.10 The groundworks involved with the excavation of two culverts across the Roman road alignment, as well as the re-cutting of the drainage ditch on the east side of the road, were subject to archaeological monitoring.
- 4.11 The trench for culvert 2 was set 60m to the north of the south end of the survey area. The trench was aligned almost east-west, and was c.8.0m long, 0.55m wide and up to 0.5m deep. To reduce the amount of ground disturbance, the trench was placed partly within a deep natural gully created by water run-off. As a result, the sections revealed in the trench [2/929 to 2/931] were partly cut through ground that had previously been disturbed by natural erosion and, although the sequence of deposits appeared broadly similar to that seen in culvert 1 (see below), they were not as clear, and so were not recorded in detail.
- 4.12 However, within the trench for culvert 1, excavated 245m north from the south end of the survey area, a sequence of deposits was clearly visible. The north-facing section was recorded at a scale of 1:10 [2/914 to 2/917]; this has been reduced to a scale of 1:20 for publication (see figure 6). Like the trench for culvert 2, this was also c.8.0m long, 0.50m wide and 0.60m deep (see plate 4). The uppermost deposit encountered (001) was a hard-packed layer of angular stones up to 0.10m across forming the metalling of the road; it had an average depth of 0.20m but became shallower towards the east before petering out. This metalling appears to relate at least in part to the existing trackway, but may also partly belong to a pre-modern route. Beneath the layer of stones, there was a layer of compacted clean

mid-brown silty sand (002), only 0.04m thick in the centre of the section, but becoming substantially deeper at either end. This silty sand overlay a deposit of orange-brown silty sand (003), containing frequent inclusions of angular stone up to 0.25m long but mostly smaller; towards the western side of the top of the deposit, the stones may form the remains of a surface. The top of the central part of the deposit runs approximately level for 1.80m, where it is set at 0.28m below ground level, but it slopes away gently at either end, continuing beneath the base of the trench.

- 4.13 The shallow nature of the ditch re-cutting on the east side of the road alignment meant that little more than turf and a thin layer of topsoil (004) was revealed (see plates 5 and 6). However, within the re-cut sections, some patches of metalling (005) were noted, represented largely by hard-packed angular stones, generally less than 0.05m across but with some occasionally up to 0.10m long [2/917 to 2/920 and 2/926 to 2/928]. Significantly, this metalling appeared to extend right to the base of the east scarp, well beyond that part of the road which is still used by vehicles today.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 As the YDNPA HER notes, much of the route of the Roman road from Bluecaster Side to Kirkby Stephen is defined by modern roads and occupational trackways. Furthermore, the road, if it is actually Roman in origin, is likely to have stayed in use as a drove road throughout the medieval and early post-medieval periods, necessitating repairs and local re-alignments of the course. With some variation, the form of the road through the survey area, in terms of the scarp-terrace-scarp arrangement, and the overall dimensions, is reasonably consistent. That part of the terrace which is still in use as a trackway by vehicles is relatively narrow; the surviving earthwork, and the metalling exposed in the re-cut ditch, show that it was once not only considerably wider but also metalled for most of its width. The orange-brown silty sand (003) exposed in the base of the north-facing section of culvert 1 may be an earlier road surface pre-dating that represented by the metalling, but no dating evidence was obtained from any part of the excavations monitored by the watching brief.
- 5.2 That part of the road to the immediate north of the surveyed section, i.e. to the north of Near Gill, resembles the typical Roman form far more closely than any part surviving within the survey area. It is possible that the surveyed section actually forms a medieval or post-medieval alteration to the Roman route. The latter could be represented by the linear depression that runs south from Near Gill to the east and upslope from the surveyed section, which is also seen on 2002 and 2008 aerial photographs held by the YDNPA. Further topographical survey of the areas to the north of Near Gill and to the east of the surveyed section may help to resolve some of these issues, although it is likely that excavation would be needed to provide conclusive proof.

## 6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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English Heritage 2002 *With Alidade and Tape: Graphical and Plane Table Survey of Archaeological Earthworks*

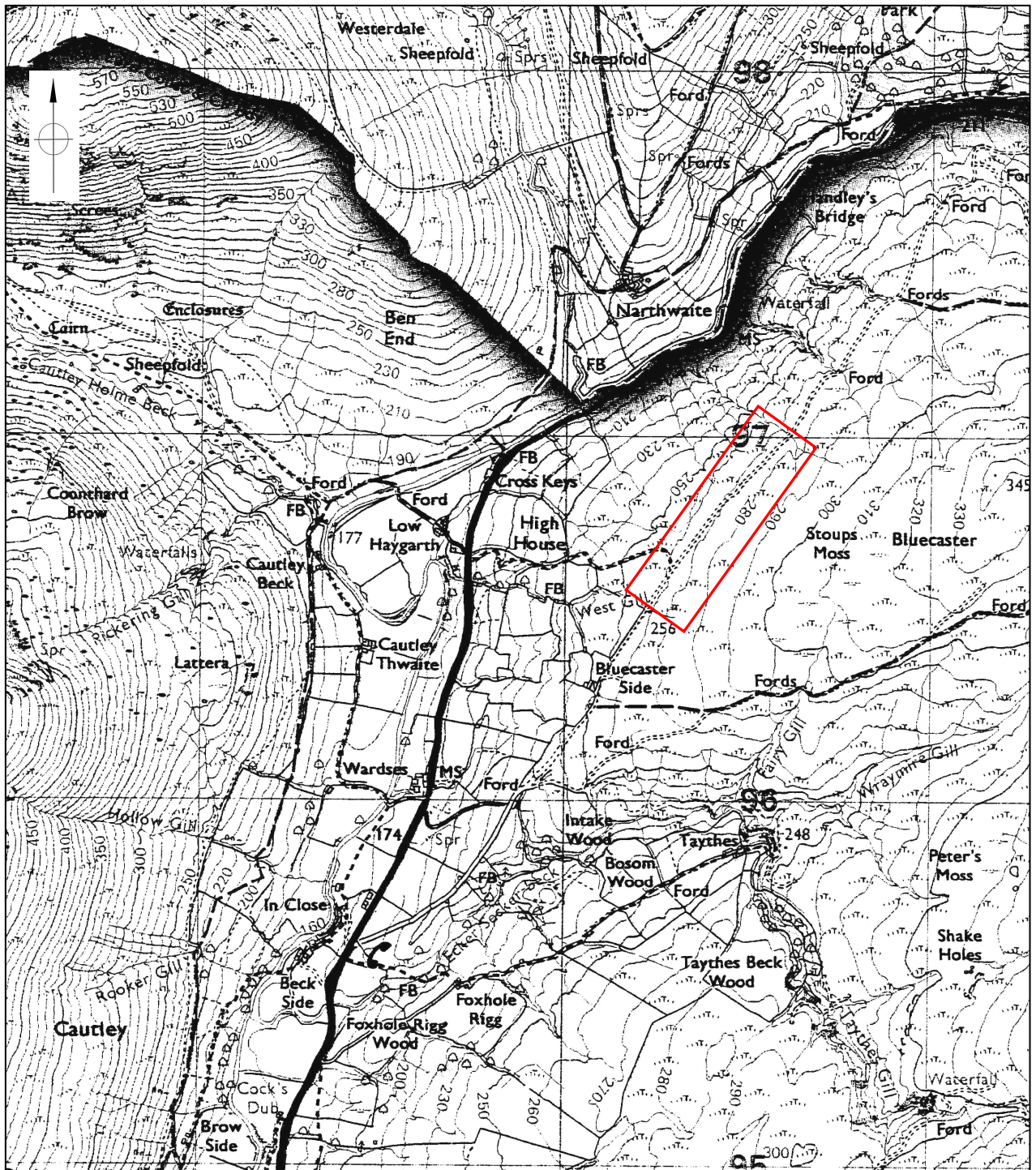
English Heritage 2007 *Understanding the Archaeology of Landscapes: A Guide to Good Recording Practice*

White, R 1997 *Yorkshire Dales: Landscapes through Time*

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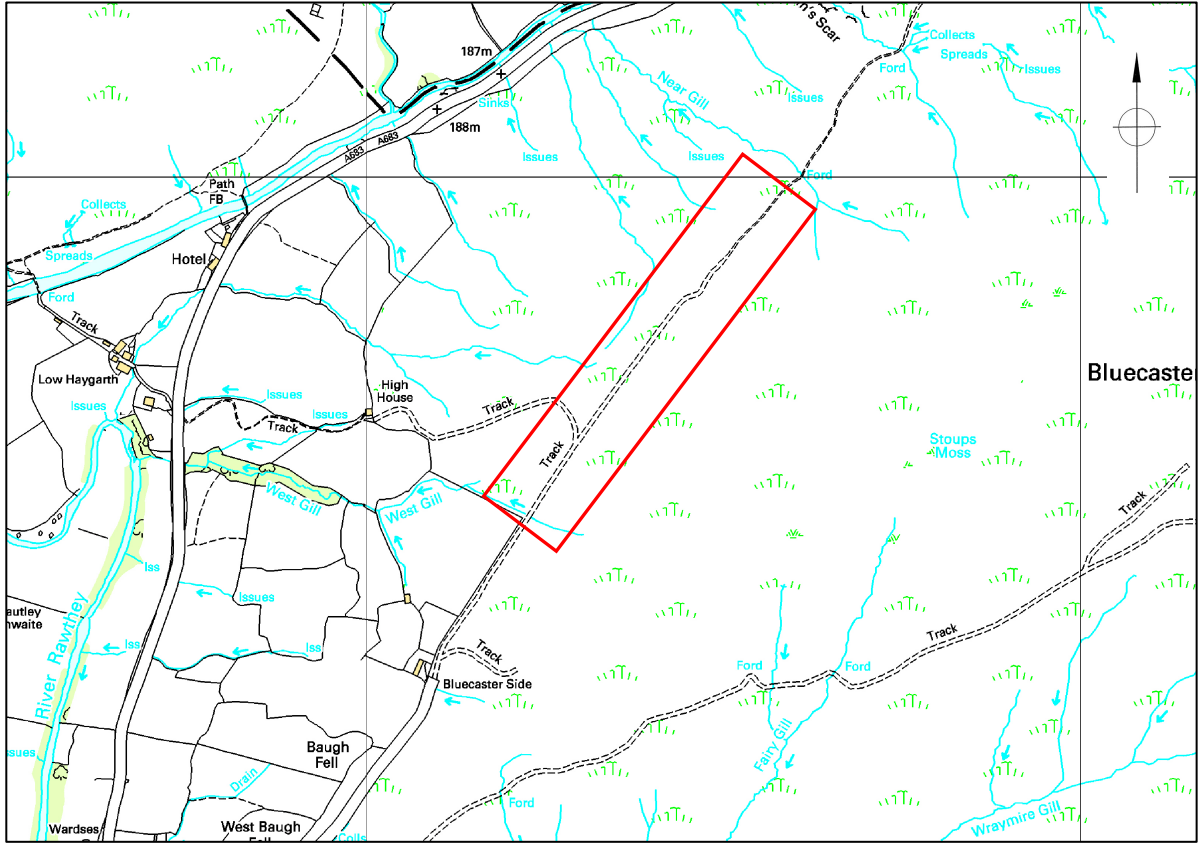
## **7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

7.1 The archaeological survey and watching brief was commissioned and funded by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, and EDAS would like to thank Mr Robert White (Senior Conservation Archaeologist) and Paul Wilkinson (Area Ranger) for their help and co-operation during the project. The topographical survey was undertaken by Shaun Richardson (EDAS) and Dave Kempley (Benchmark Surveys), and the watching brief was undertaken by Shaun Richardson and Becky Goulding (Bradford University placement student with YDNPA). Shaun Richardson produced the fieldwork records and photographs, and a draft report. The final report was produced by Ed Dennison, with whom the responsibility for any errors remains.



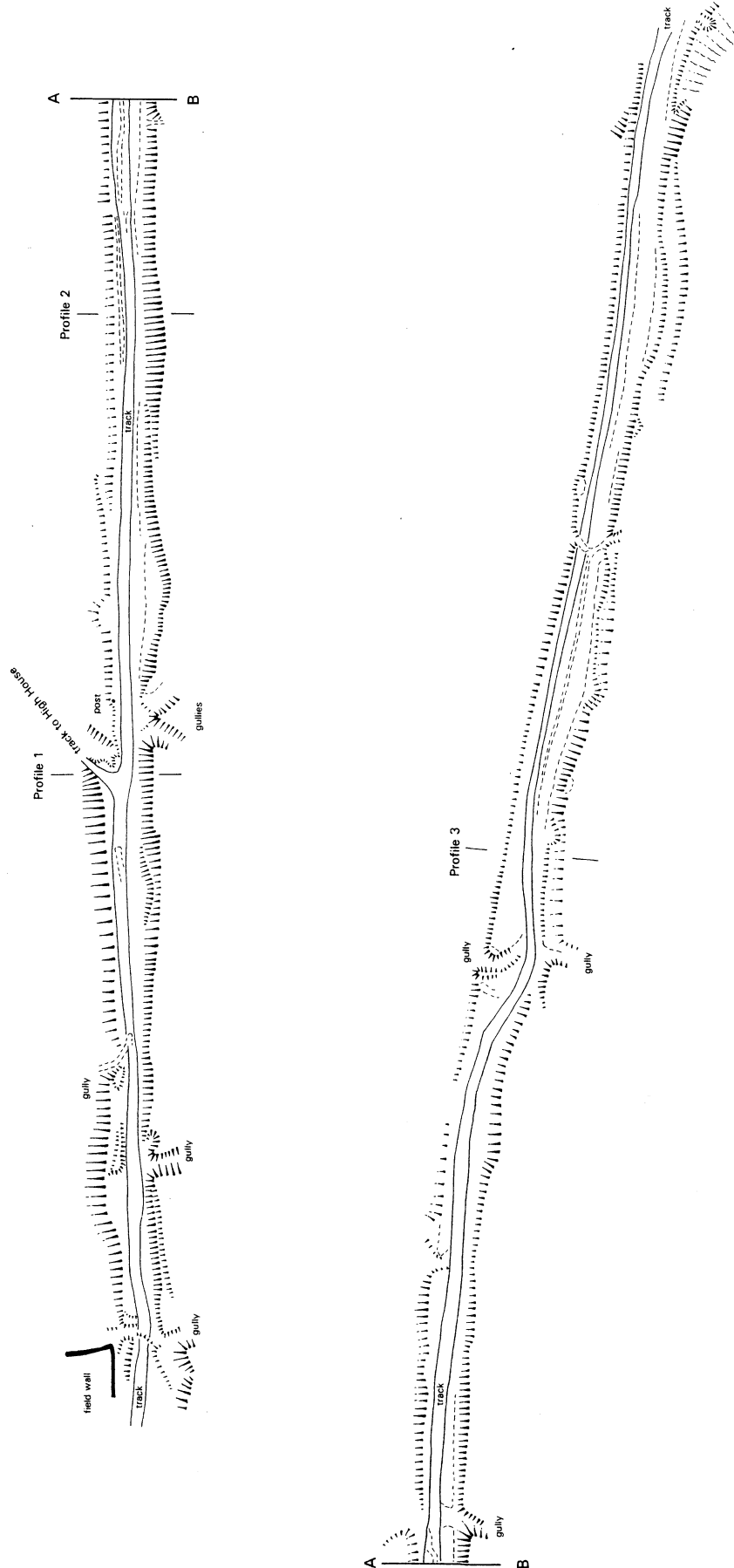
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TITLE		GENERAL LOCATION	
SCALE	NTS	DATE	DEC 2010
EDAS		FIGURE	1

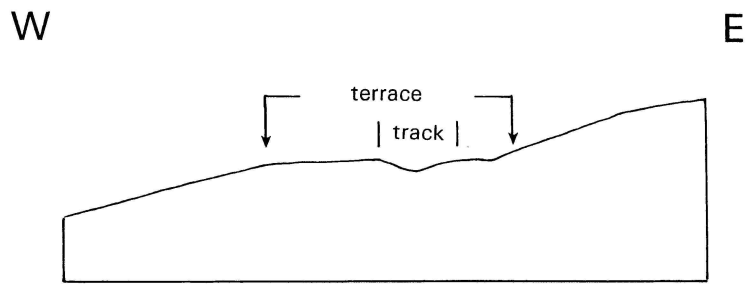


Plan supplied by YDNPA.

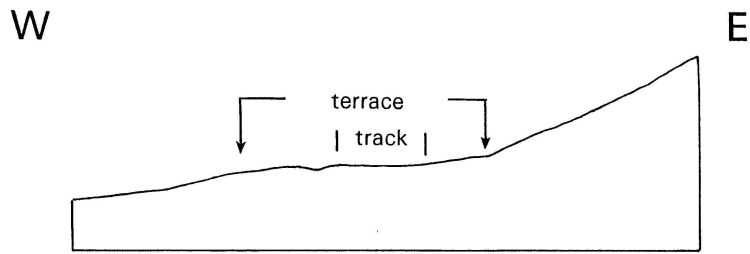
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TITLE		AREA OF SURVEY	
SCALE	NTS	DATE	DEC 2010
EDAS		FIGURE	2



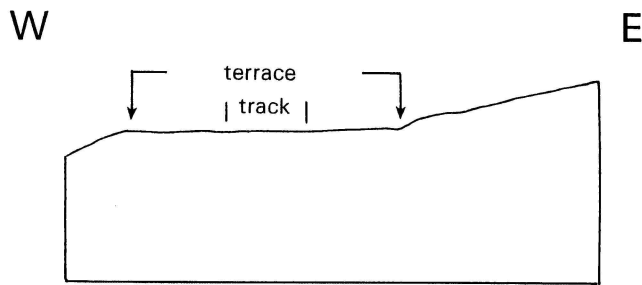
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TITLE	TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEY		
SCALE	AS SHOWN	DATE	DEC 2010
	EDAS	FIGURE	3



Profile 1



Profile 2



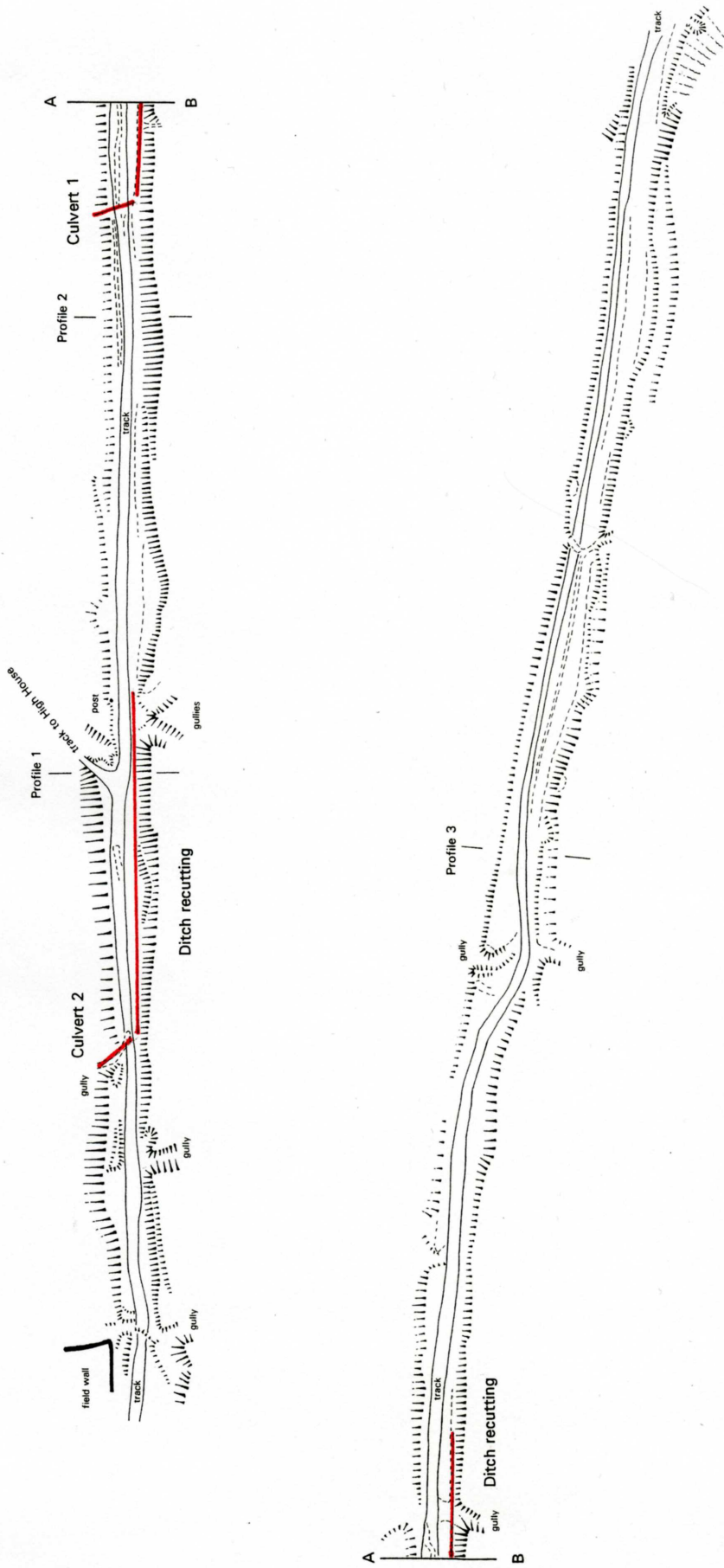
Profile 3



W

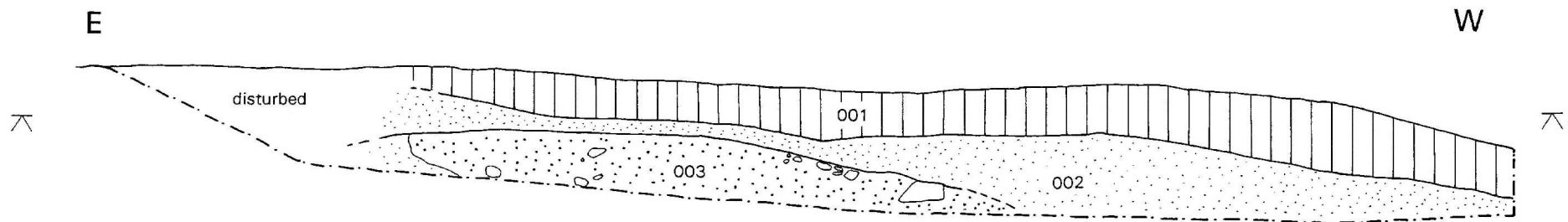
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TITLE E PROFILES	
SCALE AS SHOWN	DATE DEC 2010
EDAS	FIGURE 4



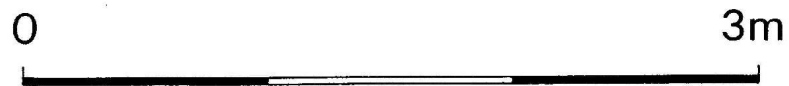


PROJECT	BLUECASTER ROMAN ROAD
TITLE	AREAS OF WATCHING BRIEF
SCALE	AS SHOWN
DATE	DEC 2010
FIGURE	5





Culvert 1, north-facing section



PROJECT		BLUECASTER ROMAN ROAD	
TITLE		CULVERT 1 SECTION	
SCALE	AS SHOWN	DATE	DEC 2010
EDAS		FIGURE	6



Plate 1: Southern end of surveyed section, looking SW.



Plate 2: Central part of surveyed section, looking NE.



Plate 3: Central part of surveyed section, showing side ditches, looking NE.





Plate 4: Trench for culvert 1, looking SE.



Plate 5: Re-cut ditch to north of culvert 1, looking NE.



Plate 6: Re-cut ditch to north of culvert 2, looking SW.

## **APPENDIX 1**

## APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHIC CATALOGUE

Film 1: Colour digital photographs taken 5th July 2010

Film 2: Colour digital photographs taken 8th July 2010

Film	Frame	Subject	Scale
1	902	Possible Roman road route to the E and upslope of surveyed section, looking E	-
1	903	Possible Roman road route to the E and upslope of surveyed section, looking W	-
1	909	Southern end of surveyed section, looking SW	-
1	910	Central part of surveyed section, looking NE	-
2	914	Trench for culvert 1, looking SE	2 x 1m
2	915	Trench for culvert 1, looking SE	2 x 1m
2	916	Context (003), culvert 1 trench, N-facing section, looking N	1m
2	917	Trench for culvert 1, looking NW	2 x 1m
2	918	Re-cut ditch to N of culvert 1, looking NE	1m
2	919	Re-cut ditch to N of culvert 1, showing metalling (005), looking SW	1m
2	920	Re-cut ditch to N of culvert 1, showing metalling (005), looking SW	1m
2	921	Road to N of Near Gill, looking SW	2 x 1m
2	922	Road to N of Near Gill, looking NE	2 x 1m
2	923	Road to N of Near Gill, looking NE	2 x 1m
2	924	Central part of surveyed section, looking NE	2 x 1m
2	925	Central part of surveyed section with ditches, looking NE	2 x 1m
2	926	Re-cut ditch to N of culvert 2, looking SW	2 x 1m
2	927	Re-cut ditch to N of culvert 2, looking NE	2 x 1m
2	928	Re-cut ditch to N of culvert 2, looking NE	2 x 1m
2	929	Trench for culvert 2, looking NW	2 x 1m
2	930	Trench for culvert 2, looking SE	1m
2	931	Trench for culvert 2, looking SE	2 x 1m

## APPENDIX 2

## APPENDIX 2: LIST OF CONTEXTS

<i>Context</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Description</i>
001	Culverts 1 & 2	Hard-packed layer of angular stone, up to 0.10m across, average 0.2m deep - metalling of modern and potentially earlier date.
002	Culverts 1 & 2	Compacted clean mid-brown silty sand, variable depth - possible levelling layer over 003.
003	Culverts 1 & 2	Compacted orange-brown silty sand with frequent angular stone up to 0.25m long - possible former road surface.
004	Ditch re- cutting	Turf and topsoil.
005	Ditch re- cutting	Patches of metalling, formed by hard-packed angular stones generally less than 0.5m across.