



Eton Dorney Rowing Lake,
Dorney, Buckinghamshire
and Berkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief
Report

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Between September and December 2011, Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief during preparation work at the Eton Dorney Rowing Lake, Dorney, Buckinghamshire and an associated pedestrian river crossing, part of which was within Berkshire (work centred at SU 932 778).

The watching brief observed evidence for fluvial deposits on the northern bank of the Thames together with evidence for alluvial deposits on both banks. No evidence for any activity pre-dating the 19th century was recorded.

No significant archaeology was encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) to undertake an Intensive Watching Brief at the site of proposed temporary works at the Eton Dorney Olympic and Paralympic venue (Fig. 1), which will host the Olympic Rowing and Canoe Sprint events and the Paralympic Rowing events of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.

1.1.2 The proposed works included a number of temporary facilities at Dorney Lake in South Buckinghamshire and at Windsor Racecourse in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. These included:

- A Temporary Pedestrian River Crossing (TPRC) between the Eton Dorney and Windsor Racecourse sites.
- Facilities at the southern and northern ends of the Dorney Lake site consisting of tentage and porta-cabin type structures.
- Spectator seating and associated facilities on the eastern side and the southern end of the Dorney Lake site.
- Construction of paths, tracks and access roads to the east of Dorney Lake and the temporary spectator stands.
- Spectator seating on the return island near the finish line on the Dorney Lake site.
- Construction of the Paralympic Transport Hub, lying to the north of the Dorney Lake Site.
- Perimeter security fencing of the Dorney Lake site.
- A broadcast compound west of Dorney Lake with a cable route running the length of the return lane.
- Temporary blue badge car parking, coach, taxi and motorcycle parking areas using both the existing parking facilities and grassed areas laid with trackway at the Windsor Racecourse site.
- Staff facilities comprising tentage and porta-cabin type structures at the Windsor Racecourse site.
- Temporary paths, tracks and access roads at the Windsor Racecourse site.



- Pedestrian Screening Area (PSA) including ticket, toilet and other visitor facilities at the Windsor Racecourse site.
- 1.1.3 In the District of South Buckinghamshire the work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permissions 10/10788/TEMP and 10/01789/TEMP. In The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead the work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission 10/02671.
- 1.1.4 Following discussions with Eliza Alqassar, Archaeological and Planning Conservation Officer for Buckinghamshire County Council, and Paul Falcini, of Berkshire Archaeology, it was agreed that an Intensive Watching Brief should take place during the works and to this end generic specifications for the works were issued.
- 1.1.5 Of the proposed works it was agreed that the works requiring attendance by an archaeologist would consist of:
- The TPRC footprint in both South Buckinghamshire and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, including areas of hard standing and access roads.
 - The construction of a cycle path alongside the warm-up lane.
 - The upgrading of the tow path alongside the River Thames.
 - The construction of the Lake Link path between the towpath and the warm-up lane cycle path.
- 1.1.6 Oxford Archaeology (OA) produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) describing how OA would undertake these requirements in both South Buckinghamshire and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (OA, 2011).
- 1.1.7 The work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies (Planning Policy Statement 5, Policies HE 8 and HE 12).

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The Eton Dorney Venue lies on the banks of the river Thames between Dorney and Boveney, 2.5 km west of Eton (centred on SU 932 778) (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 Eton Dorney Lake lies on the northern side of the river within the District of South Buckinghamshire while the Temporary Pedestrian River Crossing (TPRC) spans the River Thames at the south-east corner of the site, with its eastern end terminating in Windsor Racecourse on the southern bank within The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
- 1.2.3 The area of proposed Eton Dorney Lake Overlay development currently consists of the Eton Dorney Lake and Return Lane, which run north-west to south-east. The immediate vicinity of these contains, within open grass-covered areas, access roads and pathways relating to the rowing lake, and a boathouse, finish tower and car park, lying at the lake's southern end. The area immediately adjacent to the river and within the western footprint of the TPRC currently consists of scrub and trees and a towpath.
- 1.2.4 The eastern end of the TPRC lies within the Windsor Racecourse site, which at this location currently consists of scrub, trees and a small access road. (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).
- 1.2.5 The geology of the Eton Dorney Lake site consists of Drift deposits of Pleistocene gravels over London Clay (British Geological Survey sheet 269; Windsor, Solid and Drift 1981; 1999). The geology of the Windsor Racecourse site is recorded in both the 1981 and 1999 edition maps as alluvium (BGS sheet 269; Windsor, Solid and Drift, 1981; 1999).



1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site has been described in detail in *Eton Rowing Course and Windsor Race Course: Cultural and Heritage Desk-based Assessment* (OA 2010), and is not reproduced here.

1.4 Potential

- 1.4.1 The archaeological potential of the site has been described in *Eton Rowing Course and Windsor Race Course: Cultural and Heritage Desk-based Assessment* (OA 2010), and a summary is reproduced here.
- 1.4.2 The Rowing Lake site has a high potential to contain significant archaeological deposits dating from the Mesolithic to Anglo-Saxon periods. However, the construction of the existing facilities and the preceding archaeological interventions on the site have resulted in the partial or complete removal of these deposits in many areas.
- 1.4.3 The apparent paucity of archaeological sites and finds from the Racecourse site, including the eastern footprint of the TPRC, reflects the low level of interventions rather than a low archaeological potential. Given the density of significant archaeological deposits recorded from the Rowing Lake site, which sits in a similar riverside location in the local landscape, it is very likely that the Racecourse site also contains significant but currently unrecorded archaeological deposits.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The specific aims and objectives of the Intensive Watching Brief were:
- To ensure the archaeological monitoring and recording of specified aspects of the development considered sensitive due to their potential impact on archaeological remains.
 - To determine the existence or absence of any archaeological remains; and should remains be found to ensure their preservation by record to the highest possible standard.
 - To determine or confirm the approximate date or date-range of the remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
 - To determine or confirm the approximate extent of the remains.
 - To determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present.
 - To assess the associations and implications or any remains encountered with reference to the historic landscape.
 - To determine the implications of the remains with reference to economy, status, utility and social activity.
 - To determine or confirm the likely range, quality and quantity of the artefactual evidence present.
 - To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence and the forms in which such evidence may be present.
 - To secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of any artefactual/ecofactual material recovered from the site.



2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The Watching Brief was undertaken by a series of site visits during those works likely to impact upon potential archaeological deposits. Within the areas subject to an Intensive Watching Brief this was undertaken as a continuous archaeological presence during these works.
- 2.2.2 All mechanical topsoil and subsoil stripping and excavation in areas covered by the Intensive Watching Brief was carried out under archaeological supervision using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket. These works included the excavation of the two lift shafts, one at either end of the TPRC, the topsoil stripping of areas around either end of the TPRC prior to the laying of geo-textile membrane for areas of hardstanding and access roads and the excavation of the bases for the new and upgraded paths.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The observations from the watching briefs on the four phases of works will be described separately followed by an overall discussion and conclusion.

The Temporary Pedestrian River Crossing (TPRC)

- 3.1.2 The works monitored during this phase of works included the topsoil stripping and levelling of the areas around either end of the bridge, stripping for the access roads and the excavation of the two lift shafts (Fig. 3).
- 3.1.3 On the northern side of the river, an area measuring approximately 40m by 25m was stripped of topsoil prior to the placing of a geo-textile membrane and laying of compacted type 1 material. During this operation, up to 0.3m depth of a grey-brown silt loam (1) was removed exposing a clean mid brown silty clay (2) with chalk flecking in places.
- 3.1.4 Subsequent to the laying of the type 1 material, the footprint of the northern lift shaft pit was excavated. This measured approximately 9m by 6m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1m (Fig. 4, section 1). Exposed within the base of the excavation was a blue-grey sandy silt (3). This could be seen in section to be in excess of 0.5m in depth. No evidence of truncation or disturbance was observed within this deposit.
- 3.1.5 Overlying layer 3 was the mid brown silty clay, 2, partially exposed during the topsoil stripping. This context was observed to be evenly deposited throughout the area and measured 0.3m in depth. Remnants of the topsoil 1 could also be observed within the section.
- 3.1.6 Excavations on the southern side of the side of the Thames included the topsoil strip and levelling of an area measuring approximately 60m by 70m to accommodate the bridge ramp and steps and the venue entrance. A maximum depth of 0.75m of material was removed during this operation.
- 3.1.7 At the deepest part of this work a layer of yellow-brown clay silt with chalk flecking (5) was exposed (Fig. 4, section 2). At this point it could be seen to be in excess of 0.5m in depth within the section. The excavations approached the rivers edge where some evidence of modern bank stabilisation such as concrete was observed, but no evidence for any earlier river channels could be observed within this deposit. Overlying this was a 0.3m deep layer of greyish brown silty loam (4), the present day topsoil and turf.



- 3.1.8 The excavation for the southern lift shaft measured 9m by 6m and reached a maximum depth of 1m. Layer 5 was exposed throughout the base of the excavation showing it to be in excess of 0.75m in depth within this area.

Warm-Up Lane Cycle Path

- 3.1.9 This ran parallel to the warm-up lane and measured approximately 1150m in length.
- 3.1.10 The path was constructed approximately 3m in from the southern edge of the lane, and measured 1.5m in width. The majority of the path's route lay within the landscaped area along the southern edge of the warm-up lane. Prior to laying of the path's surface a trench measuring up to 0.3m in depth with a level base was excavated. The excavations exposed the underlying terrace gravel (22) within the base of the path. The exposed gravels were very clean, suggesting that the upper layers of the gravels had been truncated during earlier works at the site. No features were observed cutting this deposit within the footprint of the path.
- 3.1.11 A layer of grey-brown silty clay loam (21), the present day topsoil and turf measuring between 0.15m and 0.2m in depth, lay directly above the gravel.

Tow Path Upgrade

- 3.1.12 The object of this work was to upgrade an approximately 1140m length of the existing tow path running along the northern bank of the Thames so that it could be used as a cycle path during practice sessions on the river.
- 3.1.13 The route followed the line of the existing path which ran parallel to the river, between 3m and 5m in from the river channel. There was a noticeable step down of approximately 0.25m between the path and the land running up to river. In places the path ran along the top of a shallow bank (possibly an earlier flood defence) with an associated ditch or gully running on the landward side.
- 3.1.14 In addition to the construction of the path a program of woodland management was undertaken, clearing fallen trees and cutting back others to provide clear access.
- 3.1.15 The excavations for the new path measured up to 0.18m in depth and 2m wide. These were conducted wholly within a layer of dark grey silt loam (31). Intermittently encountered within the base of the excavation was a layer of compacted tarmac scalplings (32), an earlier phase of the tow path. A number of cast iron markers bearing a crest and the legend "The Conservators of the River Thames" were observed marking part of the route. No evidence for any other deposits or earlier river channels were encountered during this work.

Thames - Lake Link Path

- 3.1.16 This ran from close to the western end of the upgrade tow path, approximately east-west linking to the warm-up Lane path, a length of roughly 320m.
- 3.1.17 The method of construction was similar to that used for the upgraded tow path: a trench 2m wide and up to 0.25m deep was excavated before placing a geo-textile membrane and laying crushed stone.
- 3.1.18 Between the tow path and the perimeter road these works were wholly within a layer of grey silty loam (41), the present day topsoil. This layer continued for approximately 100m east of the perimeter road at which point the ground visibly dipped down towards the Warm-Up lane. At this point, stratigraphy similar to that observed within the Warm-Up lane path was observed with clean terrace gravel (43) exposed within the base of the excavation overlaid with a 0.2m deep layer of grey-brown silty clay loam (42).



3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Examples of 19th and 20th century material such as pottery, bottle glass and plastic were recovered from within the topsoil deposits. The presence of this material was recorded but the material was not retained.
- 3.2.2 No artefacts pre-dating the 19th century were recovered during the course of the watching brief.

3.3 Environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits containing material suitable for palaeoenvironmental reconstruction were encountered and, consequently, no samples were taken.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 Within the northern TPRC lift shaft excavation, a deposit of blue-grey sandy silt (3) was observed at a depth of 0.8m below the current ground level. The composition of this material (a coarse sandy silt) suggests that it was deposited in fluvial conditions, presumably associated with an earlier alignment of the current river channel. Later overbank flooding of the river had sealed this deposit beneath a layer of alluvium (2). The alluvium (5) observed at the southern end of the TPRC was very similar although the underlying fluvial deposit was absent.
- 4.1.2 The Warm-Up Lane path was contained within the area of modern landscaping running along the southern edge of the rowing lake and thus was within an area that had previously been truncated. Only clean terrace gravel overlaid by modern landscaping deposits was observed.
- 4.1.3 The upgrading of the tow path was contained wholly within a layer of recent overburden (31).
- 4.1.4 At the construction of the Thames – Lake Link Path was contained wholly within a layer of modern topsoil (41) with the exception of its eastern end where the truncated surface of the underlying gravels were exposed.
- 4.1.5 Despite the potential for archaeology noted within section 1.4, no archaeological features were observed during the works. This is likely to be the result of a combinations of factors: the depth of impact of the majority of the works was insufficient to expose any underlying deposits which may have been present; previous construction (and archaeological work) at the site has resulted in the truncation of underlying levels in many areas.



APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
TPRC Construction							
1	Layer	0.3m	>40m	>40m	Topsoil and turf	Bottle glass, plastic	19th/ 20th century
2	Layer	0.3m	>9m	>4m	Alluvium	-	-
3	Layer	> 0.5m	>9m	>4m	Fluvial deposit	-	-
4	Layer	0.3m	>60m	>60m	Topsoil and turf	Bottle glass, plastic	19th/ 20th century
5	Layer	>0.7m	>60m	>60m	Alluvium	-	-
Warm-Up Lane Cycle Path							
21	Layer	0.25m	>1.5m	>140m	Topsoil and turf, landscaping layer	Bottle glass, plastic	19th/ 20th century
22	Layer	> 0.2m	>1.5m	>140m	Terrace gravel, natural deposit	-	-
Towpath Upgrade							
31	Layer	0.25m	>2m	>140m	Topsoil and turf, landscaping layer	Bottle glass, pottery, plastic	19th/ 20th century
32	Surface	> 0.1m	1.4m	> 15m	Earlier tarmac towpath surface	-	20th century
Lake Link Path							
41	Layer	0.25m	>1.5m	>100m	Topsoil and turf, landscaping layer	Bottle glass	19th/ 20th century
42	Layer	0.25m	>2m	>140m	Topsoil and turf, landscaping layer	Bottle glass, plastic	19th/ 20th century
43	Layer	> 0.2m	>2m	>140m	Terrace gravel, natural deposit	-	-



APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Bibliographic Sources

Berkshire Archaeology; Berkshire Archaeology Brief for an Archaeological Watching Brief

Buckinghamshire County Council; Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service: Generic Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief.

Oxford Archaeology; 2010 Eton Rowing Course and Windsor Race Course: Cultural and Heritage Desk-based Assessment.

Oxford Archaeology; 2011 Eton Dorney Rowing Lake, Dorney, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire: Written Scheme of Investigation.

Cartographic Sources

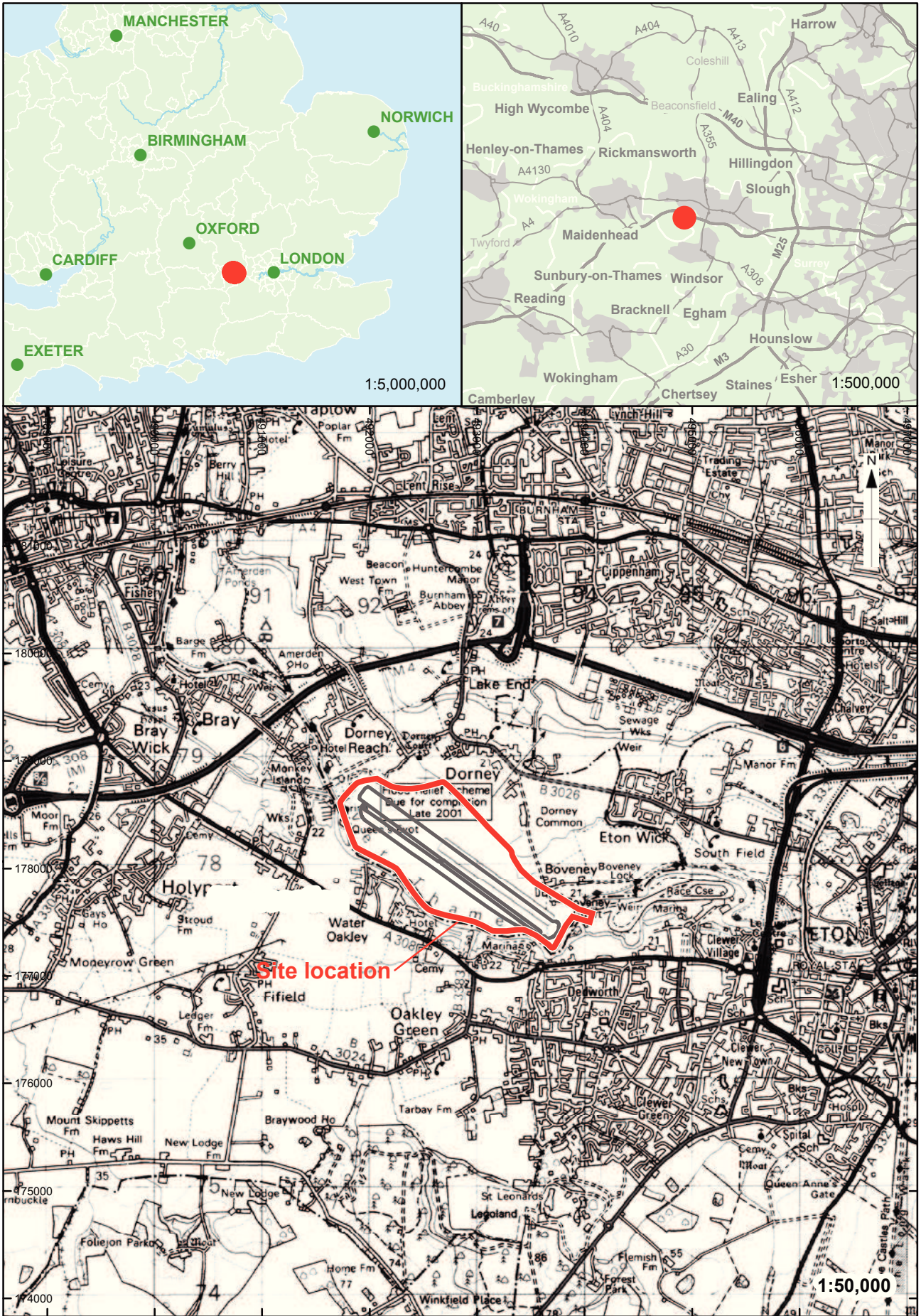
British Geological Survey 1981 Windsor sheet 269, Solid and Drift, 1:50,000 series

British Geological Survey 1999 Windsor sheet 269, Solid and Drift, 1:50,000 series



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Eton Dorney Rowing Lake, Dorney, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire
Site code:	DLAKE 11
Grid reference:	Centred at SU 932 778
Type of watching brief:	Machine excavation of pathways and lift shaft bases, topsoil stripping and ground reduction.
Date and duration of project:	September to December 2011, 13 weeks
Area of site:	Approximately 3.8 hectares
Summary of results:	The watching brief observed evidence for extensive alluvial deposits on both the northern and southern banks of the Thames. No evidence for any activity pre-dating the 19th century was recorded.
Location of archive:	The archive will be deposited with the Buckinghamshire County Museum Service under the Accession Number AYBCM:2011.85



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Figure 1: Site location

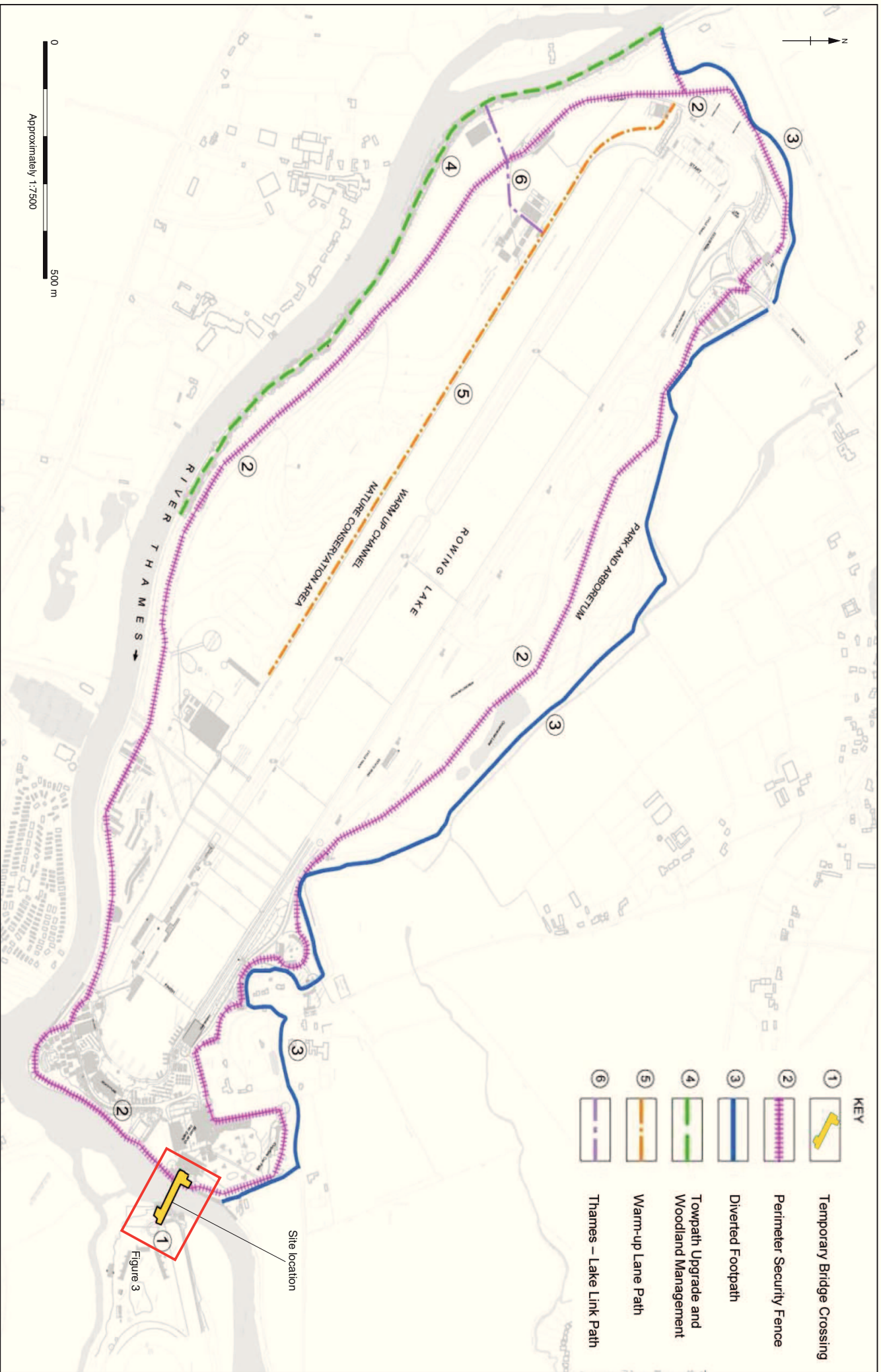


Figure 2: Site plan

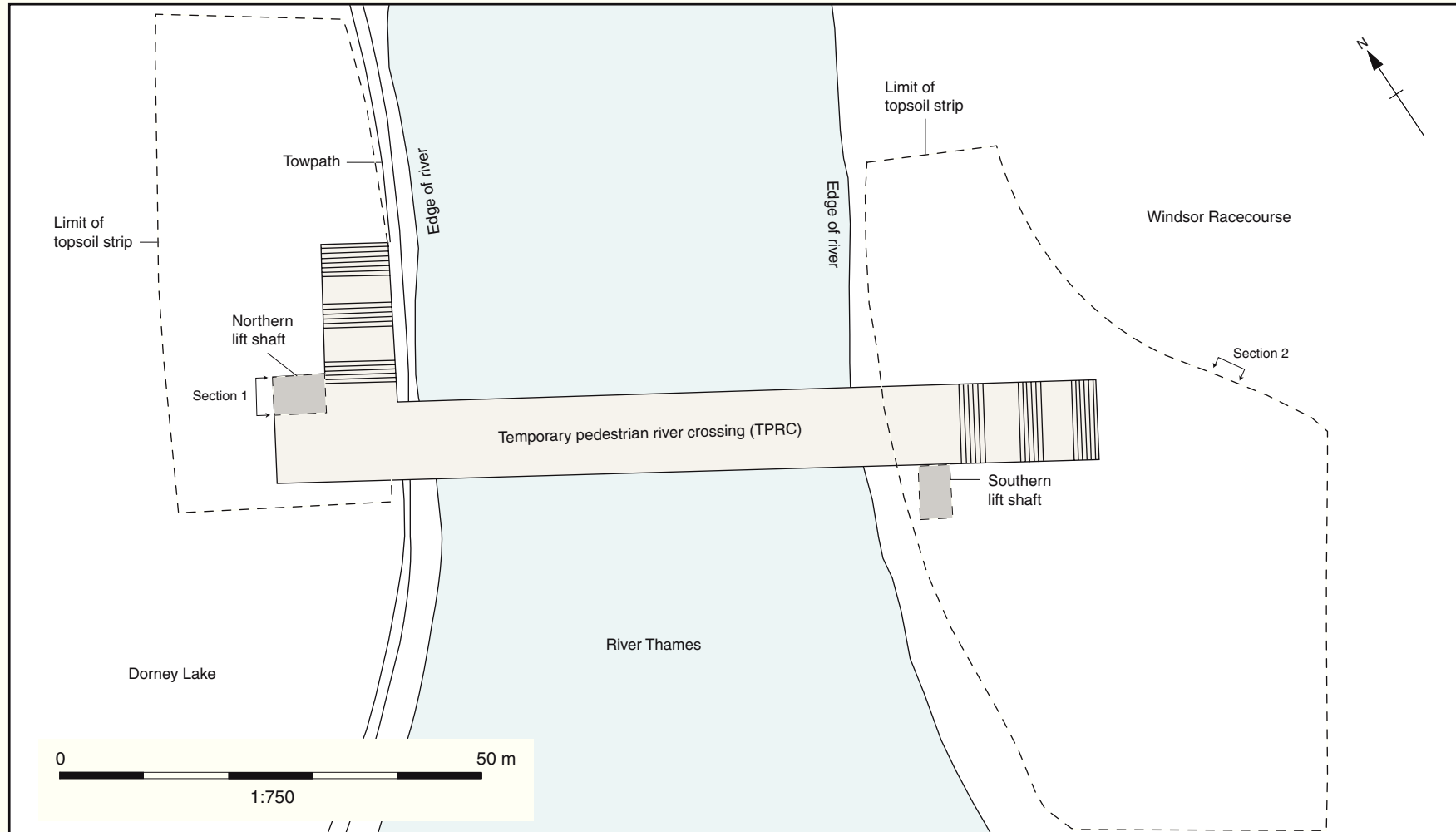


Figure 3: Plan of temporary pedestrian river crossing

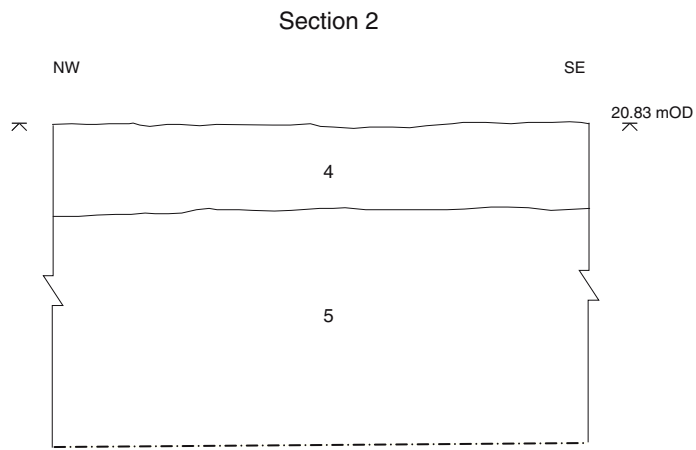
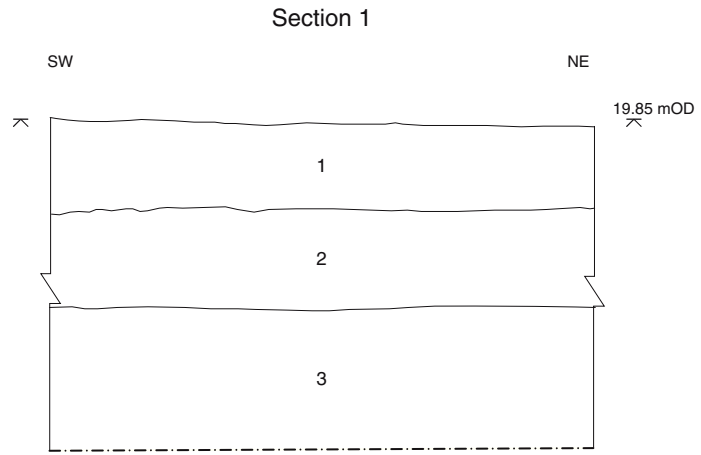


Figure 4: Sections



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