

# New Stock Fence Whiteleaf Hill Princes Risborough Buckinghamshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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# New Stock Fence, Whiteleaf Hill, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire

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Front cover: New gates in place in gully at base of cross



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## SUMMARY

*On the 18th and 19th of November 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Whiteleaf Hill, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SP 821 040). The work was commissioned by Buckinghamshire County Council in advance of the excavation of 33 postholes as part of the scheme to replace the stock proof fence which ran along the bottom of Whiteleaf Cross. The watching brief revealed a sequence of colluvial deposits throughout the length of the fence, however no dating evidence was recovered. No other significant archaeology was observed.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 On the 18th and 19th of November 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Whiteleaf Hill, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire (NGR: SP 821 040). The work was commissioned by Buckinghamshire County Council in respect of a proposal to excavate 33 postholes as part of the scheme to replace the stock proof fence running along the bottom of Whiteleaf Cross.

1.1.2 Due to the works being within a Scheduled Monument (SM 27147), a condition was placed on the works requiring that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken at the site during the period of the excavations.

1.1.3 OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the condition (OA, 2008).

### 1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 Whiteleaf Hill is a prominent chalk ridge on the Chilterns escarpment (Fig. 1) with extensive views over Princes Risborough and the Vale of Aylesbury. It lies within the Chilterns AONB, is crossed by the Ridgeway National Trail and is designated as a Village Green and a Local Nature Reserve. It is owned and managed by Buckinghamshire County Council for conservation and recreational purposes.

1.2.2 The site of the new stock proof fence is located running north-south horizontally along the bottom of a chalk cross at approximately 245 m OD (Fig. 2).

1.2.3 The site is located on the junction between the middle and lower chalk deposits (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no.238).



### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the WSI for the project (OA, 2008) and is reproduced below.
- 1.3.2 There are five Scheduled Monuments present on the site, dating from the Neolithic to the post-medieval period, of which one (SM 27147) is a chalk-cut Cross on a triangular base lying on the hillside on the north side of the site.
- 1.3.3 The origins of the chalk-cut Cross are unknown. The Whiteleaf Cross is first known from Francis Wise's 1742 description of the Cross and it was present on John Andrew and Andrew Drury's map of 25 miles around Windsor (1777). Jeffery's 1787 map of Buckinghamshire (surveyed in 1766-8) shows it in something like its present form (Farley 2000). It seems likely to date from the late 17th or early 18th century.
- 1.3.4 The new stock fence runs along the bottom edge of Whiteleaf Cross immediately below the white chalk area. Two trenches were excavated in this area in 2004 to look for buried soils relating to the first cutting of the Cross (Hey *et al.* 2007). They were dug to chalk natural at a maximum depth of 0.8 m. No evidence for ancient buried soils was observed in either trench, and the only find comprised a small piece of 19th-century glass which was recovered from humic layer 4204 near the bottom of Trench 2.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of the excavations.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The postholes were all hand excavated and measured approximately 0.4 m diameter. Those for the straining posts and the gates in the gully (8 in total) were dug to a depth of between 1.1 m and 1.5 m while the remainder were dug to a depth of 1m. A continuous watching brief was maintained during the period of excavation and details of all the stratigraphy encountered within each hole was recorded.
- 2.2.2 An overall plan showing the location of the holes was drawn at a scale of 1:1000 (Fig. 2) and the sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. A sample of the excavated features were photographed using digital photography, colour slide and black and

white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson, 1992).

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 The results of the investigation can be divided into 3 distinct groups of postholes. Each group will be described separately followed by an overall discussion and conclusion.

##### *Group 1 (Postholes 1 to 13, Sections 1 to 6)*

3.1.2 This group ran northwards along the contour line from the gully at the base of the cross.

3.1.3 In the northernmost posthole, No. 1, the underlying natural, a blocky chalk (3) was encountered at a depth of 0.2 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3, Section 1). This could be seen to be in excess of 0.9 m in depth within the section. This was overlaid by 0.1 m deep layer of light grey-brown clay silt (2) which contained much chalk flecking and which probably represents the original topsoil. Overlying this was a 0.1 m deep layer of pale grey mixed clay silt and chalk (1), a probable accumulation of colluvium.

3.1.4 The stratigraphy encountered in postholes 2 to 13 was similar (Fig. 3, Sections 2 to 6) with the underlying chalk sinking to 1.2 m below ground level by posthole 13 (Fig. 3, Section 6). The original topsoil(2) remaining fairly constant in thickness at 0.2 m and followed the fall in level of the underlying chalk. In posthole 13 this was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of very pale yellow-brown silty chalk (4), a layer of colluvium. In the remainder of the postholes layer 2 was sealed by the colluvium, layer 1, increasing in depth from 0.25 m (Fig. 3, Section 2) to 0.8 m Fig. 3, section 6).

##### *Group 2 (Postholes 14 to 18, Section 7)*

3.1.5 This group were sited in the large erosion gully running westwards from the gabions at the base of the cross.

3.1.6 Within this area the overburden, such as colluviums and topsoil had been stripped off, presumably by water run off from the cross, exposing the underlying natural. The stratigraphy observed within all the postholes was similar with the blocky chalk natural (2) encountered at a depth of 0.2 m below ground level. This was sealed by a 0.2 m deep layer of weathered chalk (5) (Fig. 3, Section 7).

##### *Group 3 (Postholes 19 to 33, Sections 8 to 11)*

3.1.7 These postholes were located running along the contour line south of the gully at the base of the cross.

3.1.8 The underlying chalk 3, was encountered at a depth of between 0.8 m below the current ground level immediately south of the gully (Posthole 19, Fig. 3, Section 8), rising to 0.55 m below ground level at the southern end of the fence line (Posthole 33, Section 11). This was sealed by a layer of weathered chalk (5) averaging 0.2 m in depth. Within Posthole 19 this was overlaid by a 0.4m deep layer of brown silt loam (6) containing many small chalk inclusions which may represent an original topsoil. Overlying this, and sealing the weathered chalk elsewhere, was a layer of light grey-brown silty chalk (7), a probable colluvium, measuring between 0.18 m and 0.55 m in depth, the depth decreasing towards the south. Between postholes 24 to 30 this was overlaid by a layer of pale grey chalky silt (8), up to 0.25 m in depth (Fig. 3, Sections 9 and 10), a second layer of colluvium. Overlying layer 8 in section 10 and layer 7 in section 11 was a 0.2 m deep layer of brown loamy silt (9), an accumulation of leaf mould and fine silts.

### 3.2 Finds

3.2.1 No dating evidence was recovered during the course of the watching brief.

### 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 The material available from the excavations was too small in quantity to make sampling viable.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The watching brief showed that there were deposits of colluvium over almost the entire area of the site. Only within the northern half of the site, and immediately south of the base of the cross was an original topsoil observed sealed below the colluviums. No dating evidence was recovered to provide a definitive date for this deposit. The absence of this deposit in the southern half of the site suggests that any archaeological deposits overlying the chalk had been removed during the construction of the chalk cross, or possibly during either periodic cleaning of the cross or by natural events such as rainwater running off the steep slopes above. The colluvial deposits 1, 4, 7 and 8 appear to have resulted from the erection of the original stock fence checking the material running off from the slopes above and causing it to accumulate. This has resulted in a notable step in the slope forming along the line of the fence.

4.1.2 Vegetation has grown in this accumulation binding it, preventing erosion and allowing deposits of leaf mould and silts to form in places.

4.1.3 The findings from the watching brief would appear to correlate with the findings of the 2004 evaluation which showed that there was no evidence for ancient buried soils surviving.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.1 m	-	Colluvium	-	-
2	Layer	0.2 m	-	Buried soil horizon	-	-
3	Layer	> 0.9 m	-	Natural chalk	-	-
4	Layer	0.3 m	-	Colluvium	-	-
5	Layer	0.1 m to 0.2 m	-	Weathered chalk	-	-
6	Layer	0.4 m	-	Buried soil horizon	-	-
7	Layer	0.18 m to 0.55 m	-	Colluvium	-	-
8	Layer	0.25 m	-	Colluvium	-	-
9	Layer	0.18 m	-	Accumulation of leaf mould and silts	-	-

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA 2008 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA 1992 *Fieldwork Manual*, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA 2000 *OA Environmental Guidelines for sampling* (first edition, July 2000)

OA 2004 *Whiteleaf Hill, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire: Post evaluation assessment report.*

OA 2008 *New Stock Fence, Whiteleaf Hill, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

**APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

**Site name:** Whiteleaf Hill, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire

**Site code:** PRRWHH 08

**Grid reference:** SP 821 040

**Type of watching brief:** Hand excavation of 33 postholes within the area of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SM 27147)

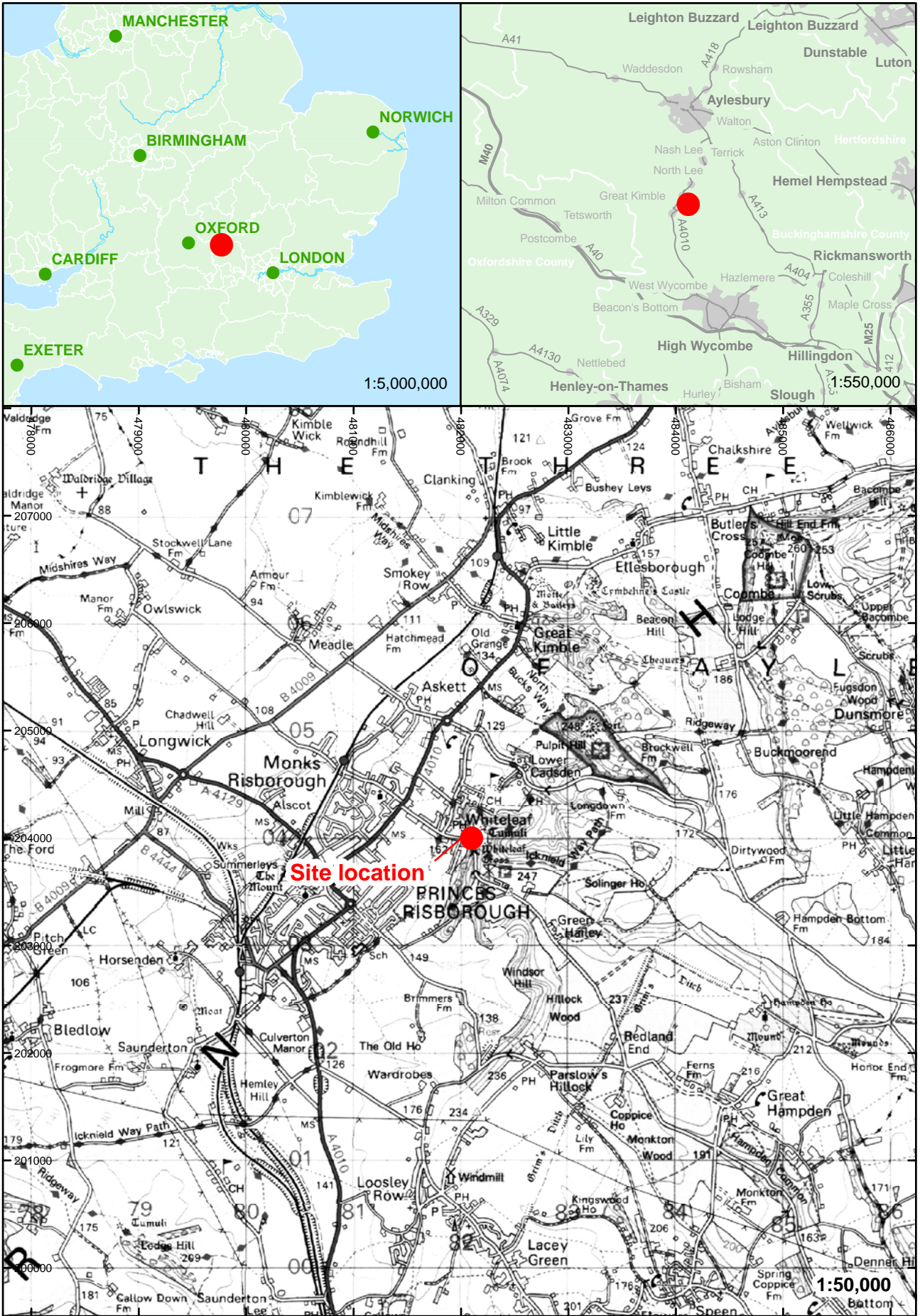
**Date and duration of project:** 18th and 19th November 2008, 2 days

**Area of site:** 0.8 hectares

**Summary of results:** The watching brief revealed a sequence of colluvial deposits throughout the length of the fence, sealing an earlier ground surface in places. No archaeologically significant deposits were encountered.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Buckinghamshire County Museum under the Accession No. AYBCM:2008.191





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Figure 1: Site location





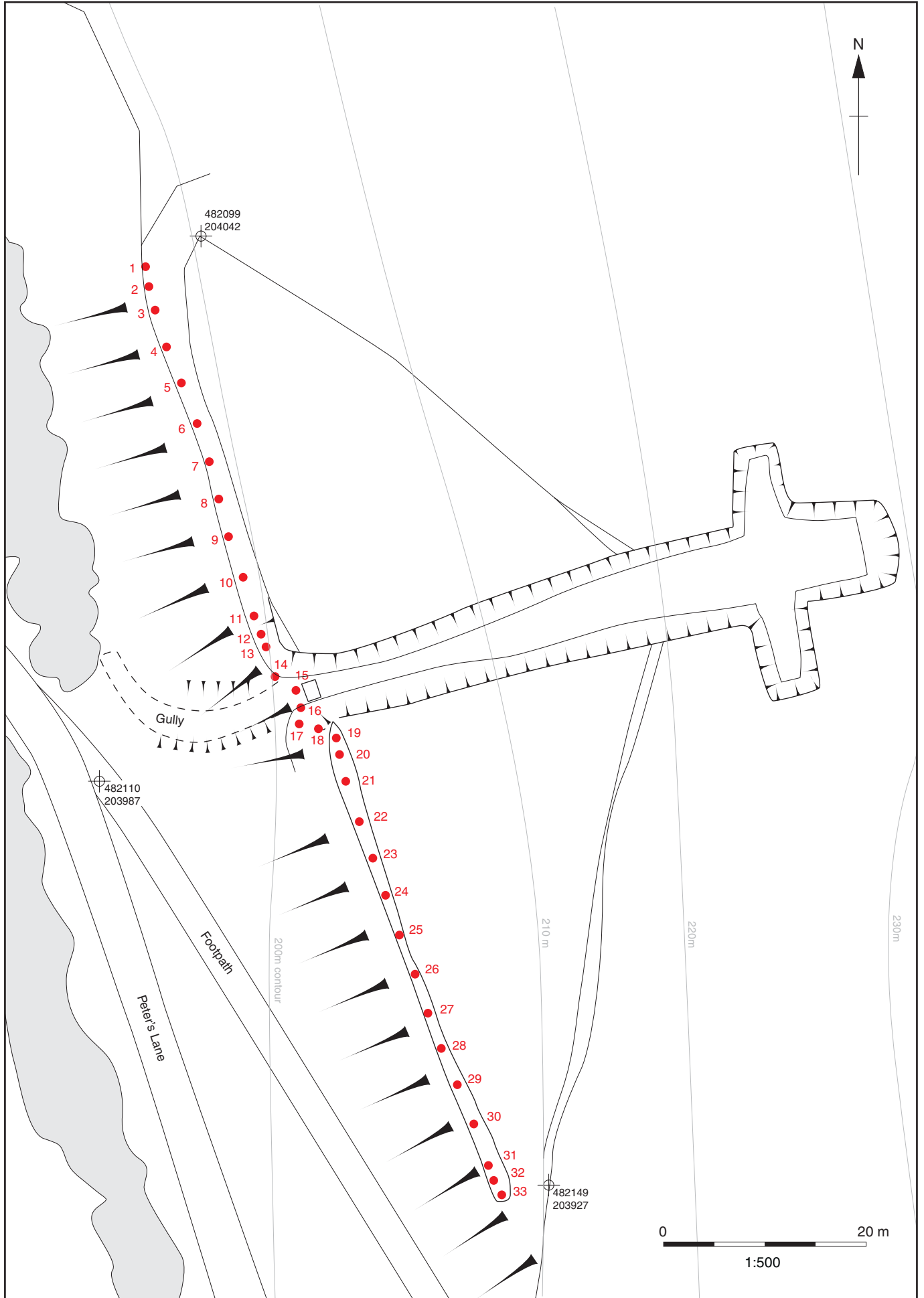


Figure 2: Site plan showing location of postholes



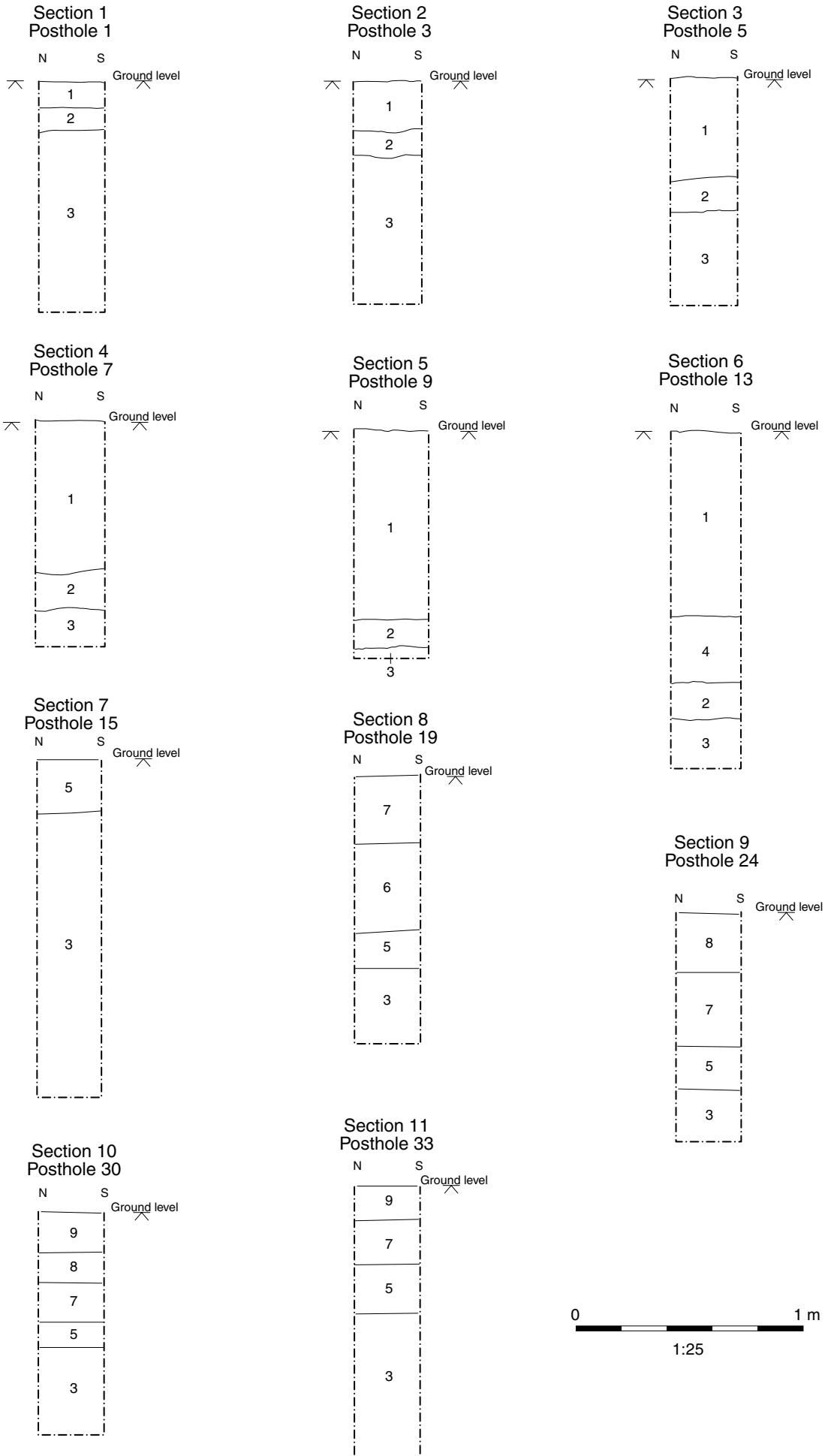


Figure 3: Sections 1-11





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