

# Crane Platform Rushey Weir Bampton Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Strip, Map and Sample Report



July 2012

**Client: Environment Agency**

Issue No: 1

OA Job No: 5363

NGR: SP 3227 0003





Client Name: Environment Agency  
Client Ref No: -  
Document Title: Crane Platform, Rushey Weir, Bampton, Oxfordshire  
Document Type: Archaeological Strip, Map and Sample Report  
Issue/Version Number: 1  
Grid Reference: SP 3227 0003  
Planning Reference: -  
Invoice Code: BURUWEEEX  
OA Job Number: 5363  
Site Code: BURUWE12  
Receiving Museum: Oxfordshire County Museum  
Museum Accession No.: OXCMS:2012.63  
Event No.: -

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Document File Location: \\Servergo\projects3\Rushey Weir SMS\Report

Graphics File Location:

Illustrated by:

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## **Rushey Weir, Bampton, Oxfordshire**

*Archaeological Watching Brief Report*

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*with contributions from Geraldine Crann, Lena Strid and John Cotter*

*and illustrated by Julia Collins*

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## Summary

*Between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2012, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological Strip, Map and Sample (SMS) at Rushey Weir, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 3227 0003). The work was commissioned by Atkins Limited on behalf of the Environment Agency in advance of the upgrading of the existing paddle and rymer weir facility. The SMS revealed that the larger NE part of the area had been previously disturbed by weir construction. The SW extent of the site revealed two curvilinear ditches. These ditches were both of post-medieval date and one was part of a 'D' shaped field boundary, still partially in use today and the other a probable enclosure adjacent to the river.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2012, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out archaeological 'Strip, Map and Sample' works at Rushey Weir, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 3227 0003), Figure 1. The work was commissioned by Atkins Limited on behalf of the Environment Agency (EA) in advance of the upgrading of the existing paddle and rymer weir facility. A brief for the works was issued by Stephen Kemp, Senior Archaeologist for the National Environmental Assessment Service (NEAS), part of the EA.
- 1.1.2 The site lies on the south side of the River Thames adjacent to Rushey Weir and between two Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs); a Causewayed Enclosure (Monument No 1021368) and a Long Mortuary Enclosure and Barrow (Monument No 1021369).
- 1.1.3 The archaeological works were undertaken to mitigate the mechanical ground reduction that was required to establish a temporary and stable platform upon which to operate a large mobile crane. The crane platform covered an area of 320m<sup>2</sup>, and was excavated to depths between 0.5 and 0.8 m bgl (below ground level), to c. 65.9 m OD.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site was situated on the southern banks of the River Thames at Rushey Weir, which is located 8 miles south of Witney and approximately 2 miles south-west of Bampton (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The site lies at c. 66.5 m above OD, and is situated on the Holocene alluvium (clays and silts) which overlie sands and gravels deposited during the Pleistocene period. The underlying solid geology is of the Oxford Clay Formation Mudstone, a sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 154 to 164 million years ago in the Jurassic Period.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

#### *Paleolithic and Mesolithic*

- 1.3.1 The river terrace gravels are the principal sources of Palaeolithic artefacts in the Oxfordshire region. There are however, some hints of activity on the higher ground in the Oxfordshire region, such as the Corallian Ridge to the south-west. There are no recorded sites or finds of Palaeolithic origin in close proximity to the site. Case (1986)



has suggested that the higher ground above the Thames may have been used for Early Mesolithic settlement or exploitation and the location of the weir is relatively low lying.

### **Neolithic**

- 1.3.2 Evidence of Early Neolithic settlement is sparse in this part of Oxfordshire, however Case (1986) observes that settlement and intense activity in the Middle and Later Neolithic appears to have shifted from the lower valley slopes and floodplains, again moving away from the topography on which this site is located. The areas of higher ground would have been attractive as they overlook the floodplain of the Thames Valley and include soils of varying qualities, which would have provided mixed environments for foraging, hunting and farming.
- 1.3.3 The site lies between a complex of crop marks recently discovered from aerial photos as part of the National Mapping Program (Plate 1). The crop marks demonstrate the presence of archaeological remains, including a Neolithic 'causewayed enclosure', and a Neolithic 'mortuary enclosure', as well as several features such as pits, ring ditches and a ditched trackway, which probably represent activity from other periods. The significance of these remains has been acknowledged and they are now offered statutory protection as Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM's), see Figures 1 and 2.
- 1.3.4 The causewayed enclosure, (SAM No. 1021368) lies to the northwest and west of the site. It measures approximately 225 m across at its widest point, and forms a D-shape, or rough semi-circle, that abutts the southern bank of the Thames. It consists of segments of ditch about 4 m wide, varying in length between 7 m and 26 m and separated by causeways 1 m to 7 m wide. The north west end of the enclosure is hidden beneath rough pasture, and its extent here can only be surmised. A section of the boundary ditches to the south and about half the interior are also partially concealed by a large amorphous crop mark. The area of the interior beyond this is dotted with pits which may be contemporary with the enclosure or possibly natural features.
- 1.3.5 This crop mark also masks a section of two small sub-circular single ditched features, one just outside the enclosure to the south, the other within the eastern sector of the interior. Both measure between 15 m and 20 m in diameter; but the larger circle, attached to the southern edge of the enclosure, has the wider ditch, measuring about 3 m to 4 m across.
- 1.3.6 The remains of a long mortuary enclosure, (SAM No. 1021369) is situated to the south of the site as a sub-rectangular ditched enclosure on aerial photographs. The enclosure is broadly orientated east-west and measures c. 90 m by 34 m. There appear to be several breaks in the boundary ditch but the entrance is thought to lie on the northern side, facing the causewayed enclosure to the north west. There may be another entrance at the eastern end. A small rectangular feature is visible at the centre of the enclosure, along with a scatter of smaller features, interpreted as pits, across the whole of the interior.

### **Bronze Age**

- 1.3.7 The pattern for earlier Bronze Age archaeology shows a focus of settlement activity on the alluvium close to the River Thames, with ritual sites located on the higher ground of the valley slopes. Later in the Bronze Age settlement and farming activity also extended up onto the higher ground.





### ***Iron Age***

- 1.3.8 Iron Age activity over this region appears to primarily consist of pastoral exploitation of the valley floodplains, with more intensive arable farming again tending to be located on the higher ground. There is some evidence that arable cultivation may have spread out over previously pastoral landscapes of the valley floodplains by about the 4th century BC, when enclosed settlements become more common.

### ***Roman***

- 1.3.9 The use of the landscape in the Roman period would have been very similar to that of the later Iron Age, consisting of small farmsteads set in enclosures with mixed field systems and trackways. This pattern of land use is likely to have been spread over both the floodplain and the higher ground.
- 1.3.10 It has been suggested that the chief east-west route through Bampton formed part of an inferred minor Roman road which crossed the river Windrush at Gill Mill and entered Bampton from the north-east. This route possibly following the later Kingsway Lane, and passing just south of the later market place.
- 1.3.11 Immediately to the south of the 'causewayed enclosure' crop marks show what is probably the intersection of two ditched trackways running broadly east- west and north – south. This junction is included within SAM No. 1021368. The route southwards can be seen crossing the next field, and its ditches appear again as a cropmark three fields, or about 400 m further south. The form of these tracks suggests a Roman date.

### ***Medieval***

- 1.3.12 The road from Brize Norton, and a pre-inclosure road from Witney and Lew which formerly intersected it north of the town, were probably also ancient, and like the inferred Roman road seem to have been diverted to funnel into the market place perhaps in the 13th century. Barcote Way, south of the town, a small lane in 1789, originated possibly as a southwards continuation of those roads, crossing the Thames at or near Rushey Weir and continuing to Barcote in Berkshire (Crossley and Currie eds. 1996).
- 1.3.13 Early records from 1425 refer to the use of land near Rushey Weir for the grazing of 'horses or ploughbeasts' Rushey weir, suggest the land was used as part of grazing land associated with nearby Bampton.

### ***Post-medieval***

- 1.3.14 There had been a flash lock further upstream known as Old Nan's Weir, which had been deemed unsuitable for a pound lock in 1790, and eventually removed in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1871 Rushey weir was in a bad state of repair and was subsequently repaired. A new lock keepers cottages was built in 1894 and the lock was later rebuilt in 1898 (Fred 1920).

### ***Previous Archaeological Works***

- 1.3.15 OA carried out an archaeological watching brief at Rushey Weir, monitoring the excavation of two small test pits excavated in advance of geo-technical boreholes. A single sherd of early medieval pottery was recovered (OA, 2009). The location of these boreholes are shown on Figure 3.



## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The general aims of the strip map and sample were to:

- identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development;
- gain further knowledge of the archaeology within the area;
- make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The Strip, Map and Sample work was conducted between the 8<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

2.2.2 The trench, an irregular pentagon, totalling 322m<sup>2</sup> in plan, was located directly south of Rushey Weir. It was excavated in spits no greater than 0.15 m in depth, using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist, to the level required by the client for the crane base (c. 65.9 m OD) or between c. 0.5 and 0.8 m bgl (below ground level).

2.2.3 The archaeological features were then sample excavated (1 m wide slots in linears, half-sectioned discrete features) and recorded following procedures detailed in the *OAU Field manual* (OAU, 1992). Due to the lack of artefacts within the sample excavations, the remaining fills of features were hand excavated to retrieve additional dating evidence.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 An area 322m<sup>2</sup> was stripped under archaeological supervision until significant archaeology was revealed, this coincided with the maximum depth that was required for the formation of the crane platform (Plate 2). The results of the Strip, Map and Sample were reasonable, in that archaeological features were located, but limited due to the large area of modern disturbance on the eastern side of the site (which covered the majority of the trench and measured c. 187m<sup>2</sup>), combined with the general lack of artefactual remains within the deposits leading to a lack of reliable dating evidence, and the complete absence of suitable deposits for environmental sampling.

#### **Natural**

3.1.2 The earliest deposits seen on the site were the natural pale orangey brown gravelly silts into which most of the features were cut. This only survived along the SE baulk of the site, beyond the limits of the the modern disturbance.

#### **Ditch Group 1030**

3.1.3 A curvilinear Ditch Group 1030 was orientated NW-SE, along the southern edge of the site and measured 16 m in length (Plate 2 and Fig. 2).

3.1.4 Two 1 m wide sample slots were hand excavated in the ditch, 1005 and 1017. Slot 1005 recorded the ditch as 1 m wide and 0.2m deep, with a concave base and shallow sloped sides (Fig. 4 Section 1000). It contained a single fill, 1006, of light brown grey silty clay. Slot 1017 revealed that the ditch here was 0.7 m wide and 0.35 m deep, with



a concave base and moderately sloping sides (Fig. 4 Section 1002). It contained two fills, the lower 1018, was a mid grey clay, 0.1m thick, and the upper, 1019 was a dark yellowish brown silty sand.

- 3.1.5 Fill 1006 contained the only artefact from the entire length of Ditch Group 1030, and consisted of an animal bone fragment and a flint flake.
- 3.1.6 The ditch was truncated by root disturbance 1003, a modern feature 1007, and by an extant and functioning well which was left in-situ protruding from the southern bank.

### ***Ditch Group 1031***

- 3.1.7 A curvilinear Ditch Group 1031 was aligned approximately SW-NE and measured 7 m in length, within the area excavated. Its continuation to the north-east had been removed by a large modern cut 1011, and immediately prior to this it had been partially removed by shallow pit 1022 (Plate 3 and Fig 2).
- 3.1.8 Three 1 m wide slots were hand excavated in the ditch, 1020, 1021 and 1023. Slot 1020 recorded the ditch as 1.25 m wide and 0.35m deep, with a flat base and vertical sides (Fig. 4, Section 1004). It contained a single fill of dark greyish brown clay. Slot 1021 recorded the ditch as 1.1 m wide and 0.3 m deep, with a flat base and steep sides (Fig. 4, Section 1021). It contained a single fill of dark greyish brown clay. Slot 1023 recorded the ditch as 0.92 m wide by 0.32 m deep, with a flat base and vertical sides and contained three fills (Fig. 4, Section 1003). The primary fill, 1026, was a light grey clay measuring 0.1 m thick, a secondary fill, a light grey mottled with reddish brown clay, 0.22 m thick, and the upper fill, a mid grey brown silty clay with frequent gravel inclusions, 0.1 m thick.
- 3.1.9 The upper fills of the ditch all showed disturbance from rooting. The only fill to produce any finds was fill 1027, within 1020. The small number of finds were medieval to post-medieval in date.

### ***Other features***

- 3.1.10 Pit 1022 was located to the southern end of the site and cut Ditch Group 1031. The pit was oval in shape and measured 1.8 m wide by 1.6 m long and 0.2 m deep, with a concave base and shallow sloping sides (Fig. 4, Section 1005). It contained a single fill, 1029, of light brown sand.

### ***Subsoils, topsoil and later features***

- 3.1.11 Overlying these features was subsoil layer 1001; this was a mid-brown silty clay measuring 0.3m thick. Above this was a 0.5 m thick layer of modern building rubble and clay, 1016, whose extent was confined to the northern end of the site. Cutting this layer were two later features 1007 and 1011.
- 3.1.12 Feature 1011 was a modern cut arising from the construction / modification of the weir. This extended across most of the NE part of the site covering an area of 187m<sup>2</sup>. The cut was filled with gravels and clay, which also formed an area of raised ground (up-to 1m high) over the entire site.
- 3.1.13 The pit 1007 in the NW part of the site also truncated layer 1016. The modern pit was oval in shape, 2m wide, 4m long and excavated to a depth of 0.5m.
- 3.1.14 Sealing the modern features was the present topsoil which was 0.2m thick.



### 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 A very small artefactual assemblage was recovered from two contexts, 1006 and 1027, both ditch fills.
- 3.2.2 From fill 1006 in ditch 1005 (part of Group 1030) two artefacts were recovered; a horse bone and a blade-like flint flake dated to the Late Mesolithic – Early Neolithic.
- 3.2.3 Fill 1027 in ditch 1020 (part of Group 1031) yielded an animal bone, a few pieces of coal, one sherd of pottery dated AD 1175–1350, and one fragment of clay pipe dated AD 1700–1750.
- 3.2.4 Data tables for these finds can be found in Appendix B.

### 3.3 Environmental remains

- 3.3.1 Due to the sterile nature of the fills no environmental samples were taken.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The interpretation of the archaeological features found is limited, due to the small size of the area within the site limits that had not been completely truncated by the modern disturbance, and the lack of finds from the archaeological deposits.
- 4.1.2 Ditch Group 1030 could be related to a curvilinear cropmark situated directly SE of the causewayed enclosure but given the position of the feature it is more likely to form part of a 'D' shaped field boundary, still partially in use today. The present field boundary may be a relic of the original feature and therefore have been fossilised in the landscape, although this cannot be proven. The worked flint from the fill of this ditch is almost certainly residual, but does indicate activity from the Late-Mesolithic-Early Neolithic took place in the vicinity.
- 4.1.3 Ditch group 1031 could be related to a cluster of cropmarks visible to the south or maybe part of a feature that does not show up on the aerial photographs. The presence of post-medieval finds within the ditch fills indicate this ditch was probably part of a small post-medieval enclosure next to the river.
- 4.1.4 There is limited significance in the single sherd of Medieval pottery recovered from the fill of ditch group 1031, dated to AD 1175–1350. Although when considered together with the single sherd of pottery dated AD 875–1250, recovered from a borehole excavated by Oxford Archaeology in 2009, it does indicate that there was activity in the area during the Medieval period.

## 5 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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Fred S, 1920 *The Thames Highway: Volume II Locks and Weirs*

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## APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Comments	Finds	Date
1000	Layer	-			Natural gravels		
1001	Layer	0.3			Subsoil		
1002	Layer	0.2			Topsoil		
1003	Cut	0.05			Tree root disturbance		
1004	Fill	0.05			Tree root disturbance		
1005	Cut	0.2	1		Ditch		
1006	Fill	0.2			Ditch fill, filling 1007	Flint blade, animal bone	
1007	Cut	0.5	2	4	Pit		Modern
1008	Fill	0.4			Pit fill		Modern
1009	Fill	0.2			Pit fill		Modern
1010	Layer	0.5			Made ground		Modern
1011	Cut	0.45			Construction cut		Modern
1012	Fill	0.5			Construction cut fill		Modern
1013	Fill	0.35			Construction cut fill		Modern
1014	Layer	0.35			Made ground		Modern
1015	Layer	0.1			Made ground		Modern
1016	Layer	0.5			Made ground		Modern
1017	Cut	0.35	0.7		Ditch		
1018	Fill	0.1			Ditch fill		
1019	Fill	0.3			Ditch fill		
1020	Cut	0.35	1.25		Ditch		
1021	Cut	0.3	1.1		Ditch		
1022	Cut	0.2	1.8	1.6	Pit		
1023	Cut	0.32	0.92		Ditch		
1024	Fill	0.1			Ditch fill		
1025	Fill	0.22			Ditch fill		
1026	Fill	0.1			Ditch fill		
1027	Fill	0.35			Ditch fill	Animal bone, clay pipe, pottery, coal	
1028	Fill	0.3			Ditch fill		
1029	Fill	0.2			Pit fill		
1030	Group			16	Ditch group		
1031	Group			7	Ditch group		



## APPENDIX B. FINDS

### B.1 The Animal Bone

*By Lena Strid*

Context	Description	Date
1006	Horse metacarpal fragment, 1-1.5years, root damage or dog gnawing marks, 114g.	
1027	Large mammal scapula, 5 fragments, 98g.	

### B.2 The Clay Pipe

*by John Cotter*

Context	Description	Date
1027	Single bowl/stem fragment with heel, 6g	AD1700 – 1750.

### B.3 The Flint

*by Geraldine Crann*

Context	Description	Date
1006	A single blade-like flake with 4 broadly parallel dorsal scars indicating careful core-reduction strategy, heavily patinated, 6g	Late Mesolithic – early Neolithic.

### B.4 The Pottery

*by John Cotter*

Context	Description	Date
1027	Single base sherd of an east Wiltshire-ware sagging cooking pot, 17g	AD1175 – 1350.

### B.5 The Coal

*by Geraldine Crann*



<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Date</b>
1027	5 fragments of coal, 20g	



## APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Rushey Weir, Bampton, Oxfordshire
Site code:	BURUWE12
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SP 3227 0003
Type of watching brief:	Strip, Map and Sample
Date and duration of project:	8 <sup>th</sup> and 14 <sup>th</sup> of May 2012
Area of site:	322m <sup>2</sup>
Summary of results:	Between the 8 <sup>th</sup> and 14 <sup>th</sup> of May 2012, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Rushey Weir, Oxfordshire (NGR SP 3227 0003). The work was commissioned by Atkins Limited on behalf of the Environment Agency prior to weir refurbishment. The watching brief revealed that the larger NE part of the area had been previously disturbed by weir construction. The SW extent of the site revealed two curvilinear ditches. These ditches were both of post-medieval date and one was part of a 'D' shaped field boundary, still partially in use today and the other a probable enclosure adjacent to the river.

Location of archive:



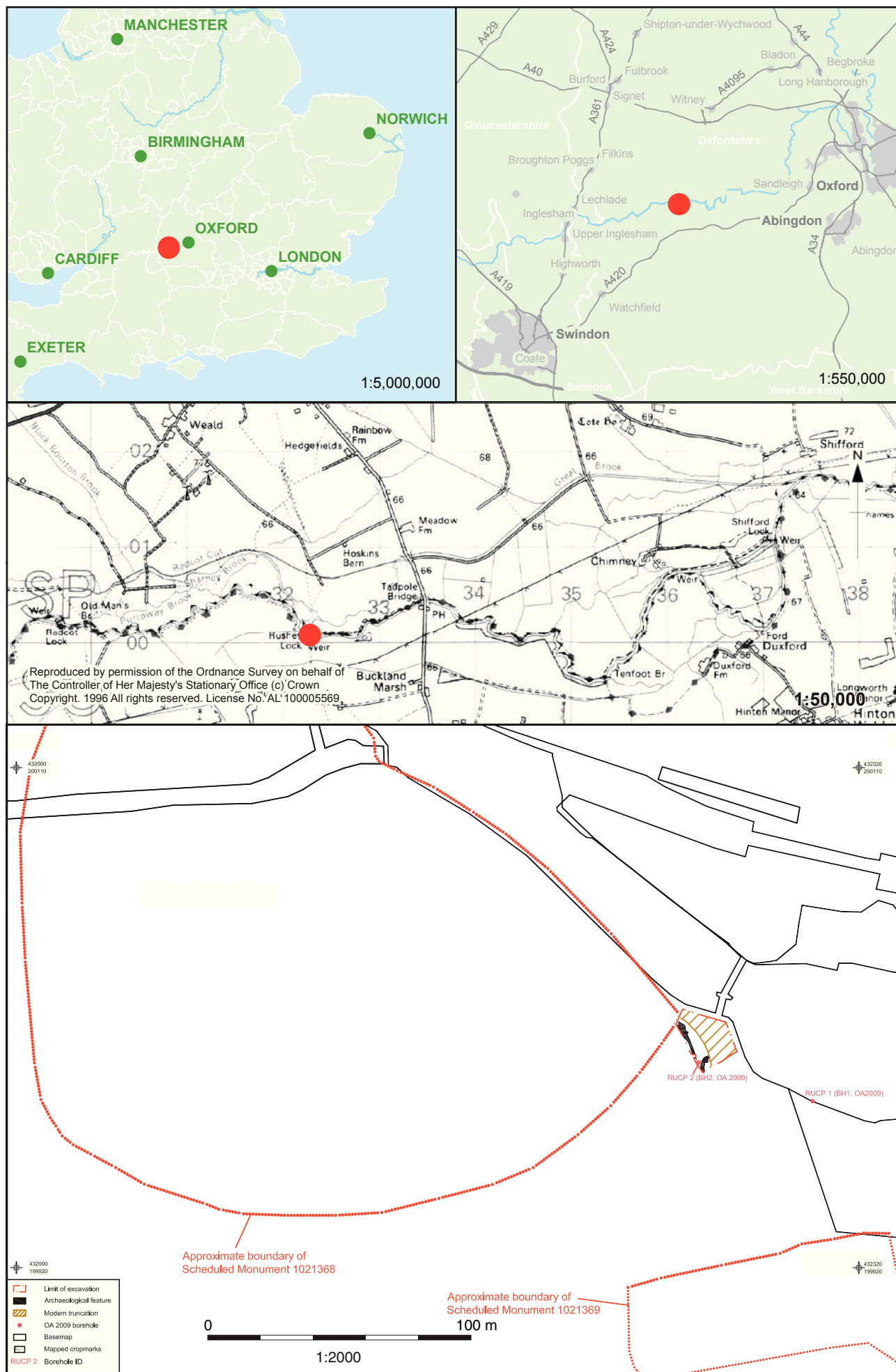


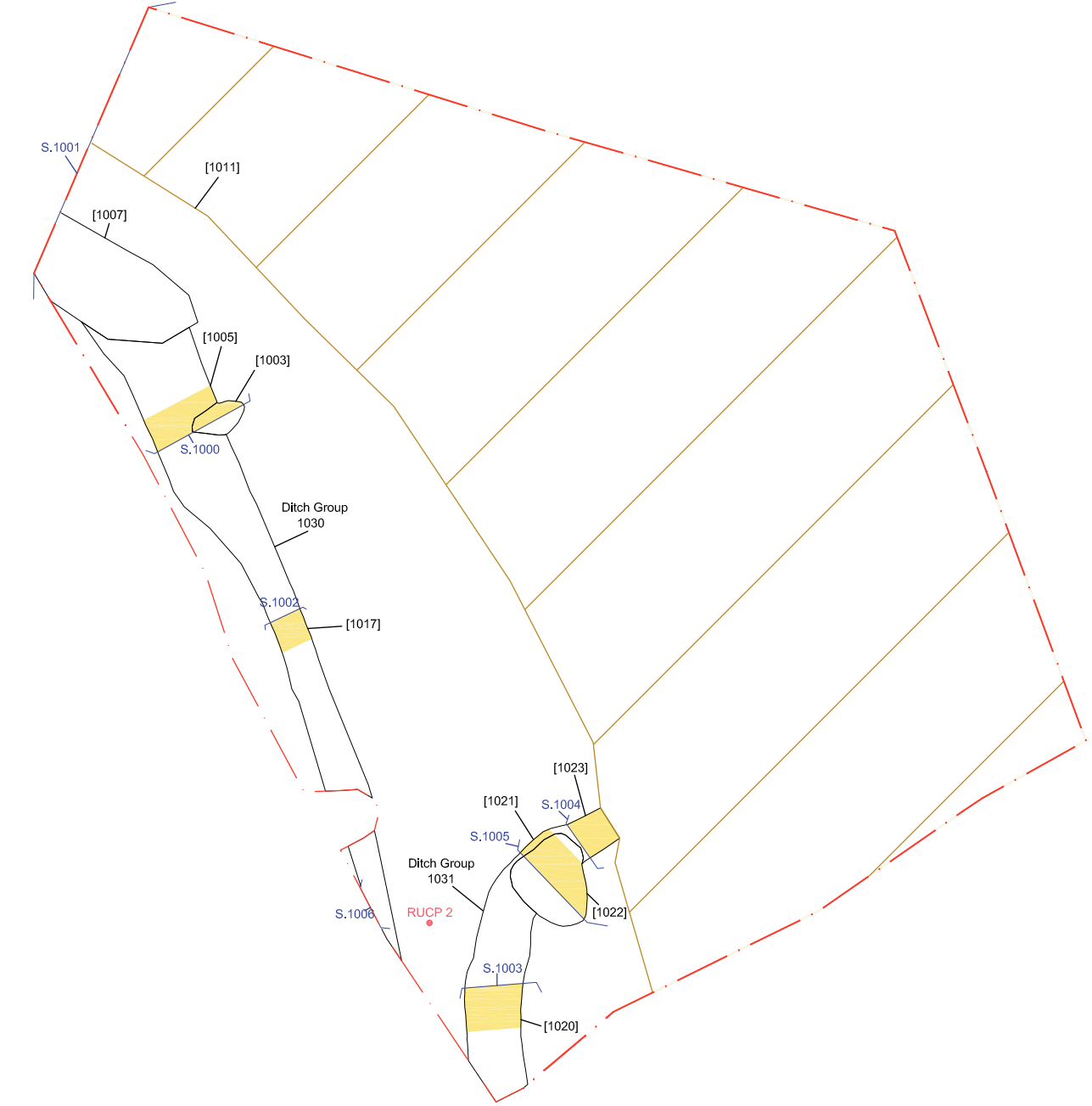
Figure 1: Site location





432250  
200020

432270  
200020



432250  
199990

432270  
199990

- Limit of excavation
- Modern truncation
- Archaeological feature
- Excavated intervention
- Drawn section
- 1000 Section number
- OA 2009 borehole
- [1007] Cut feature number
- 1030 Group feature number
- RUCP 2 Borehole ID

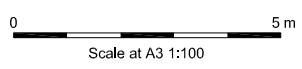


Figure 2: Plan of the Archaeological features within the strip, map and sample area



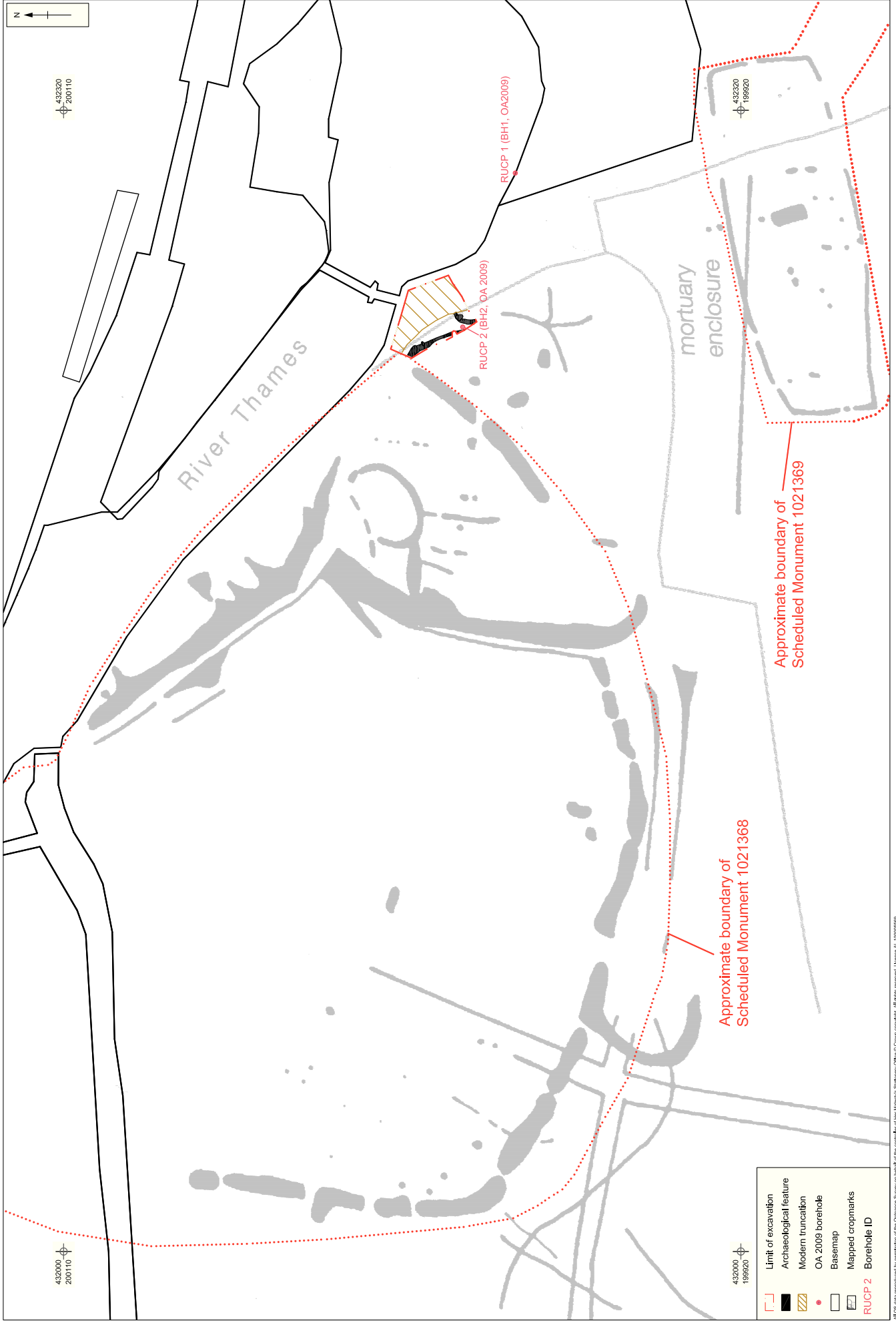


Figure 3: Plan of features found and mapped cropmarks



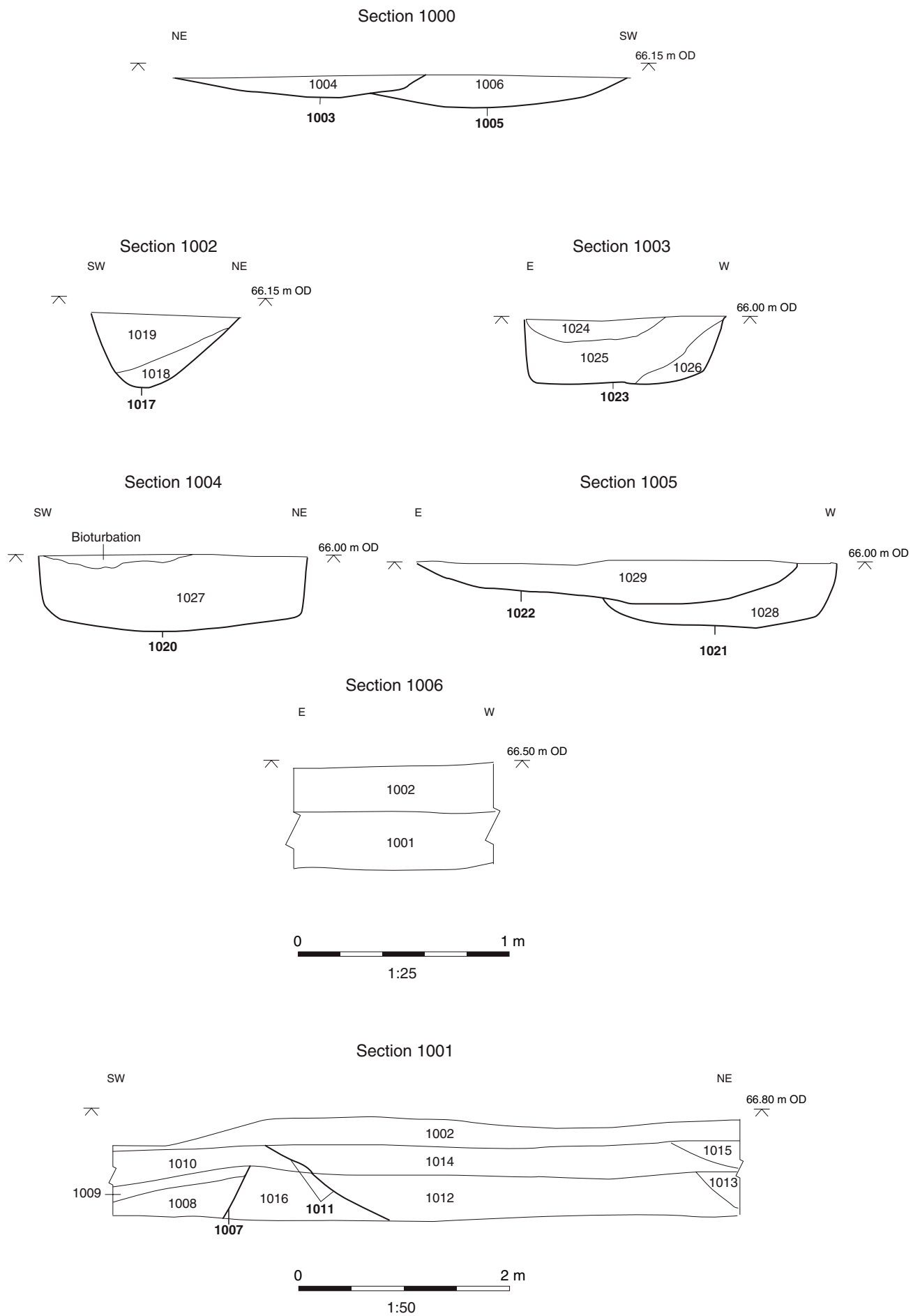


Figure 4: Sections







Plate 1: Aerial photo of the site



Plate 2: General view of the site looking NW



Plate 3: Curvilinear ditch **1031** in plan





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