

Portal House School Newington Kent



Archaeological Evaluation Report



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SUMMARY

Between 7th and 11th April Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Portal House School, Newington, Kent (formerly Newington Infant School) on behalf of Land Securities Trillium (NGR TR 364 657). The evaluation consisted of eight mechanically excavated trenches. Of these, only one contained any features of any archaeological significance. Trench 2 contained two linear features and the base of a small pit or posthole. The only recovered finds were worked and burnt flint from one of the linear features.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 Between 7th and 11th April 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Portal House School, Newington, Kent (Fig. 1) on behalf of Land Security Trillium in respect of a planning application for redevelopment of the school (Formerly Newington Infant) and in accordance with a specification set by Kent County Council. The development site is centred on NGR TR 364 657 and is c 2.9 hectares in area.

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The underlying geology of the site is Cretaceous Upper Chalk, which is overlain at the north-east end of the site by Pleistocene and recent Head Brickearth (older), and in the north-west by Pleistocene and recent Head Brickearth (younger) (GSGB, 1980, Sheet 274). The site is located at an approximate height of 43 m OD, and slopes gently from the north-east to the south west.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1.1 The following background is summarised from the desk-based assessment report (OA 2007).

2.2 Introduction

2.2.1 There is one Scheduled Monument within the study area, an Anglo Saxon cemetery (SAMKE250 c 903 m south-west of the site). There are no Registered Parks or Gardens or Historic Battlefields within the site or the wider study area.

2.2.2 There are no Listed Buildings within the site. The nearest Listed Building is over 600 m to the south There are also two non-listed Historic Buildings recorded in the National Monuments Record (NMR) and County Heritage Environment Record (HER).

2.3 Previous archaeological work

- 2.3.1 There have been no recorded archaeological investigations within the site, but twelve within the wider study area. Five of these investigations recorded no significant archaeological remains, three recorded prehistoric activity, three recorded Roman activity, one recorded medieval artefacts, and one recorded only undated features.

2.4 Known archaeology

- 2.4.1 The HER and NMR do not record any archaeological entities within the site. Map regression has highlighted the presence of a post-medieval chalk pit and various field boundaries.

The Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods (c 500,000 BC to 4000 BC)

- 2.4.2 Palaeolithic populations were hunter-gatherers. Little remains to indicate Palaeolithic communities apart from artefacts mainly consisting of stone tools and animal remains. Many of these are likely to have been disturbed from their original depositional sequence by later glacial, riverine, estuarine and human activity.
- 2.4.3 There is extensive evidence for Lower Palaeolithic activity in Kent. Many flint collections have been retrieved from the Thames gravels, whilst other rivers in Kent have also produced Palaeolithic material. Hominid presence was not limited to the river courses, however, with artefacts dating to the Palaeolithic period having been found as surface finds in east and west Kent.
- 2.4.4 There are no archaeological artefacts or features of the Palaeolithic period recorded within the site or study area.
- 2.4.5 Evidence for early and mid Mesolithic activity is more common but still, in the main, comprises isolated surface finds or artefacts retrieved from rivers. By the later Mesolithic period, microliths (very small flint tools) were geometric in shape, and there have been many discoveries throughout Kent of artefacts of this nature. These finds are among the most common of any phase of post-glacial hunter gatherer activity in Kent, and may indicate an increase in population during this time.
- 2.4.6 Mesolithic activity within the study area is indicated by the discovery of a Mesolithic Thames pick, found in 1962 c 605m to the south of the site.

The Neolithic period (c 4000-2400 BC)

- 2.4.7 The emergence of the settled farming societies of the Neolithic period was a gradual process, with certain areas developing faster than others. Kent appears to have been one of the first to undergo the transition.
- 2.4.8 There are no archaeological artefacts or features of the Neolithic period recorded within the site. Within the wider study area a crouched inhumation of the Neolithic

period was found in a pit alongside the disarticulated remains of a second individual c 640 m south of the site.

The Bronze Age (c 2400-700 BC)

- 2.4.9 During the Bronze Age, increasing population occurred alongside an intensification of land use and a change in farming methods. Natural divisions of land such as river lines and ridges became more important as boundaries, and rivers became important communication routes. This is apparent in Kent, as the settlements within the Thames Valley became politically and socially dominant, and there was a dramatic growth in settlement throughout the region.
- 2.4.10 There are no recorded archaeological artefacts or features from the Bronze Age period within the site. Within the wider study area, however, there is much evidence for Bronze Age activity. The closest of which are Bronze Age crouched inhumations located c 100m south east of the site).

The Iron Age (c 700BC- AD 43)

- 2.4.11 During the Early Iron Age, traces of settlement have been found mainly concentrated in eastern Kent, specifically on the Isle of Thanet and other coastal areas. Middle Iron Age settlements are noticeably rare throughout the county, but an expansion in population during the Late Iron Age is reflected in a widespread settlement of Kent.
- 2.4.12 Despite the regional pattern, there is very little evidence for Iron Age activity within the study area, which is in contrast to the large amount of Bronze Age and Roman activity. The only recorded features of this period are two pits amongst a series of cropmark field enclosures, located some 650 m to the south of the site.

The Romano-British Period (AD 43-410)

- 2.4.13 During the Roman period, the Wantsum Channel, a topographic depression separating the Isle of Thanet from the rest of Kent, was a river open at both ends to the sea, making the Isle of Thanet an island. The fort of Regulbium (Reculver) and Rutupiae (Richborough) were built to protect the contemporary eastern coast of mainland Kent.
- 2.4.14 There are many known villas throughout western Kent, but noticeably fewer in eastern Kent, with the exception of the Isle of Thanet where at least nine are known. There is one possible villa site approximately 330 m south-west of the site.
- 2.4.15 With this wealth of Roman activity within the Isle of Thanet it is of no surprise that the study area is respectively rich in recorded archaeology of the Roman period. However, there is no recorded archaeology of this period within the site.

The early medieval period (AD410-1066)

- 2.4.16 There is little archaeological evidence for the period following the decline of Roman infrastructure in the 5th to 6th centuries AD. In Kent evidence for the 5th to 8th centuries almost exclusively comes from cemeteries, which are abundant, especially in the east of the county.

- 2.4.17 There are at least three such cemeteries within Ramsgate known to have been in use during the early medieval period, the most extensively excavated of which, a Scheduled Monument (SAMKE 250), lies partly within the study area. Anglo Saxon inhumations have also been found at three other locations within the study area, one of which lies very close to the site (*c* 90 m to the south-east).
- 2.4.18 The recorded archaeology of the early medieval period lies to the south of the site, nearer to the coast. It is likely that the early medieval settlement was centred around the church of St Lawrence which is located *c* 730 m south-east of the site.

The later medieval period (AD1066-1550)

- 2.4.19 The study area contains extensive evidence of later medieval activity. However, as with the early medieval period, all of the later medieval activity is located to the south of the study area, and is unlikely to have directly affected or encroached upon the site.

The post-medieval period (AD1550+)

- 2.4.20 Hall's 1792 map of the Isle of Thanet is the earliest detailed map of the site and Study Area to be identified. The site is clearly shown as being situated outside the settlement centre of St Lawrence. Hasted's map of the Isle of Thanet (1800) shows St Lawrence to have expanded to the east and south but not to the west towards the site. It also shows Ramsgate to have expanded to the west; the two settlements are close to becoming one large town by this date.
- 2.4.21 The 1840 Tithe Map of the parish of St Lawrence-in-Thonet shows the development site to be divided into four separate plots of land, all of which are recorded in the accompanying Tithe Apportionment as having been utilised as arable land. It also shows a circular feature in the south-west of the site which is also shown on subsequent OS maps and labelled as a chalk pit. The Tithe Map also shows a lane and field boundary, neither of which survives.
- 2.4.22 The 1877 1st edition OS map through to the Provisional edition OS map (1948) show no additional features on the land occupied by the site, until the construction of Newington Infant School in the 1950s.

3 EVALUATION AIMS

- 3.1.1 The principal objective of the evaluation was to determine the quality, character, date and extent of any archaeological remains present on the site.

4 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

4.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 4.1.1 The evaluation consisted of eight evaluation trenches. These were each 20 m long and c. 2 m wide.

4.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 4.2.1 The overburden was removed using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, working under close archaeological supervision. Excavation proceeded to the first archaeological horizon or to undisturbed natural geology, whichever was encountered first. The trenches were then cleaned by hand and any revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples.
- 4.2.2 All features and deposits encountered were issued a unique context number. A plan was drawn of each trench at a scale of 1:50, and a sample section of the edge of the trench was drawn at a scale of 1:10. Each excavated feature was also recorded in section at a scale of 1:10. Colour transparency and black-and-white photographs were taken of each feature, as well as more general shots of each trench. Digital photography was also used. All recording was conducted in accordance with the procedures detailed in the OA Fieldwork Manual (OAU 1992).

4.3 Finds

- 4.3.1 Finds recovered by hand during the course of the excavation are bagged by context. Finds of special interest, when found, are given a unique small find number.

4.4 Palaeo-environmental evidence

- 4.4.1 Bulk environmental samples (40 l) are collected from any suitable archaeological deposits.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Description of Trenches

- 5.1.1 The evaluation comprised a total of eight trenches, which were located across the site (Fig.2). These were used to ascertain the density of the archaeological features and their overall condition in terms of survival and potential for further study.

Empty trenches

- 5.1.2 Of the eight trenches in this evaluation, seven were found to be devoid of archaeological features, other than modern service trenches. (Trenches 1, 3, and 7 contained modern services, but nothing more, while Trenches 4, 5, and 8 contained no features at all.) All of the trenches had topsoil overlying a subsoil layer. In Trenches 7 and 8, the original ground level had been built up, presumably during landscaping associated with the school. The buried former land surface appeared in section as a band of topsoil.
- 5.1.3 Topsoil and cultivation soils were removed by machine in all trenches, to the top of the Pleistocene/ head deposits. This was a firm mid orange brown silty clay (102/210/302/402/503/602/703/803). It was overlain by a mid yellow brown firm sandy clay subsoil layer (102/203/301/401/502/601/702/802).

Trenches containing archaeological features

Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

- 5.1.4 Trench 2 was aligned approximately E-W. It measured 20 m long and 1.7 m wide. The average depth to the top of undisturbed Head deposits (210) was 0.72 m.
- 5.1.5 Layer 210 was cut by a N-S ditch (204), displaying a very shallow 'U' - shaped profile and measuring 0.90 m wide x 0.20 m deep. The mid grey silty clay fill (205) produced a small quantity of worked flint (see below).
- 5.1.6 To the south of ditch 204 was a second shallow gully (206), also oriented N-S and cut into the natural (210). The gully measured up to 0.42 m wide x 0.16 m deep, and contained a grey silty clay fill (207) that produced no finds.
- 5.1.7 To the south of gully 206 was a small posthole (208), measuring 0.29 m in diameter x 0.05 m deep. The grey silty clay fill (209) produced no finds.
- 5.1.8 All three features were sealed by a layer of grey/brown silty clay subsoil (203), averaging 0.30 m in depth. This was in turn overlaid by a possible buried topsoil (202), similar in character to that found in Trenches 7 and 8, and a modern levelling layer (201) followed finally by the topsoil (201).

5.2 Finds

- 5.2.1 The only finds recovered from the site was a small quantity of flint material. This included both worked and burnt pieces. They were all recovered from fill (205) of feature 204 (Fig 3).

5.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 5.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

- 6.1.1 The evaluation has shown little evidence for significant archaeological remains in the investigated area. There was little sign of modern disturbance in any of the trenches, but there has clearly been some truncation caused by ploughing in the past. The archaeological features that were uncovered were all concentrated to the west of the site in Trench 2. The features comprised a ditch, a gully and either a pit or posthole base. They were heavily truncated and only one feature, ditch 204, contained any artefacts, a small quantity of burnt and worked flint from ditch 204, tentatively dated to the Neolithic period (Trench 2 Fig. 3).
- 6.1.2 The low concentration of archaeological features found across the site is consistent with the fact that it has, in historical periods at least, been located at some distance from local centres of settlement.
- 6.1.3 The excavation of the trenches during the course of this evaluation has shown that recent activity is unlikely to have had a great affect on the potential survival of archaeological features. However, agricultural activity appears to have truncated the identified archaeology (in Trench 2). There is evidence of extensive landscaping in the north-western part of the site, indicated by the presence of a buried topsoil in Trenches 2 (layer 202), 7 (layer 701) and 8 (layer 801). This is most likely to have been associated with construction of the school or subsequent landscaping of the grounds.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Ctxt No</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Thick. (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1							
	100	Layer		0.36	Topsoil		
	101	Layer		0.14	Subsoil		
	102	Layer			Natural		
2							
	200	Layer		0.15	Topsoil		
	201	Layer		0.15	Levelling layer		
	202	Layer		0.25	Possible buried topsoil		
	203	Layer		0.30	Subsoil		
	204	Cut	0.94	0.22	Ditch		
	205	Fill	0.94	0.22	Fill of Ditch 204	Flint	?Neolithic
	206	Cut	0.42	0.16	Gully		
	207	Fill	0.42	0.16	Fill of Gully 206		
	208	Cut	0.29	0.05	Pit / Posthole		
	209	Fill	0.29	0.05	Fill of 208		
	210	Layer			Natural		
3							
	300	Layer		0.40	Topsoil		
	301	Layer		0.28	Subsoil		
	302	Layer			Natural		
4							
	400	Layer		0.25	Topsoil		
	401	Layer		0.15	Subsoil		
	402	Layer			Natural		
5							
	500	Layer		0.25	Topsoil		
	501	Layer		0.10	Subsoil		
	502	Layer		0.30	Subsoil		
	503	Layer			Natural		
6							

	600	Layer		0.33	Topsoil		
	601	Layer		0.10	Subsoil		
	602	Layer			Natural		
7							
	700	Layer		0.30	Topsoil		
	701	Layer		0.20	Possible buried topsoil		
	702	Layer		0.18	Subsoil		
	703	Layer			Natural		
8							
	800	Layer		0.48	Topsoil		
	801	Layer		0.35	Possible buried topsoil		
	802	Layer		0.40	Subsoil		
	803	Layer			Natural		

APPENDIX 2 WORKED FLINT

A total of five flints were recovered from a single context.

Context	Description
205	Bi-polar core. Light grey flint
205	Secondary flake. Dark grey flint
205	Proximal end of broad blade with utilisation along one lateral margin. Dark brown flint
205	Burnt flint
205	Burnt flint

The flint occurs in low numbers and appears to be residual in its' contexts, making a detailed analysis impossible. The non-burnt flint could all be Neolithic in date.

No further work is recommended.

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Portal House School

Site code: KS2RPH08

Grid reference: TR 364 657

Type of evaluation: Eight 20 m x 1.7 m mechanically excavated trenches.

Date and duration of project: The fieldwork was carried out between 7th and 11th April 2008.

Summary of results: Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at Portal House School, Newington, Kent (formerly Newington Infant School) on behalf of Land Securities Trillium (NGR TR 364 657). The evaluation consisted of eight mechanically excavated trenches. Of these, only one contained any archaeological features:

Trench 2 contained two shallow gullies and the base of a small pit or posthole. Residual burnt and worked flint (tentatively dated to the Neolithic period) was found in one of the gullies;

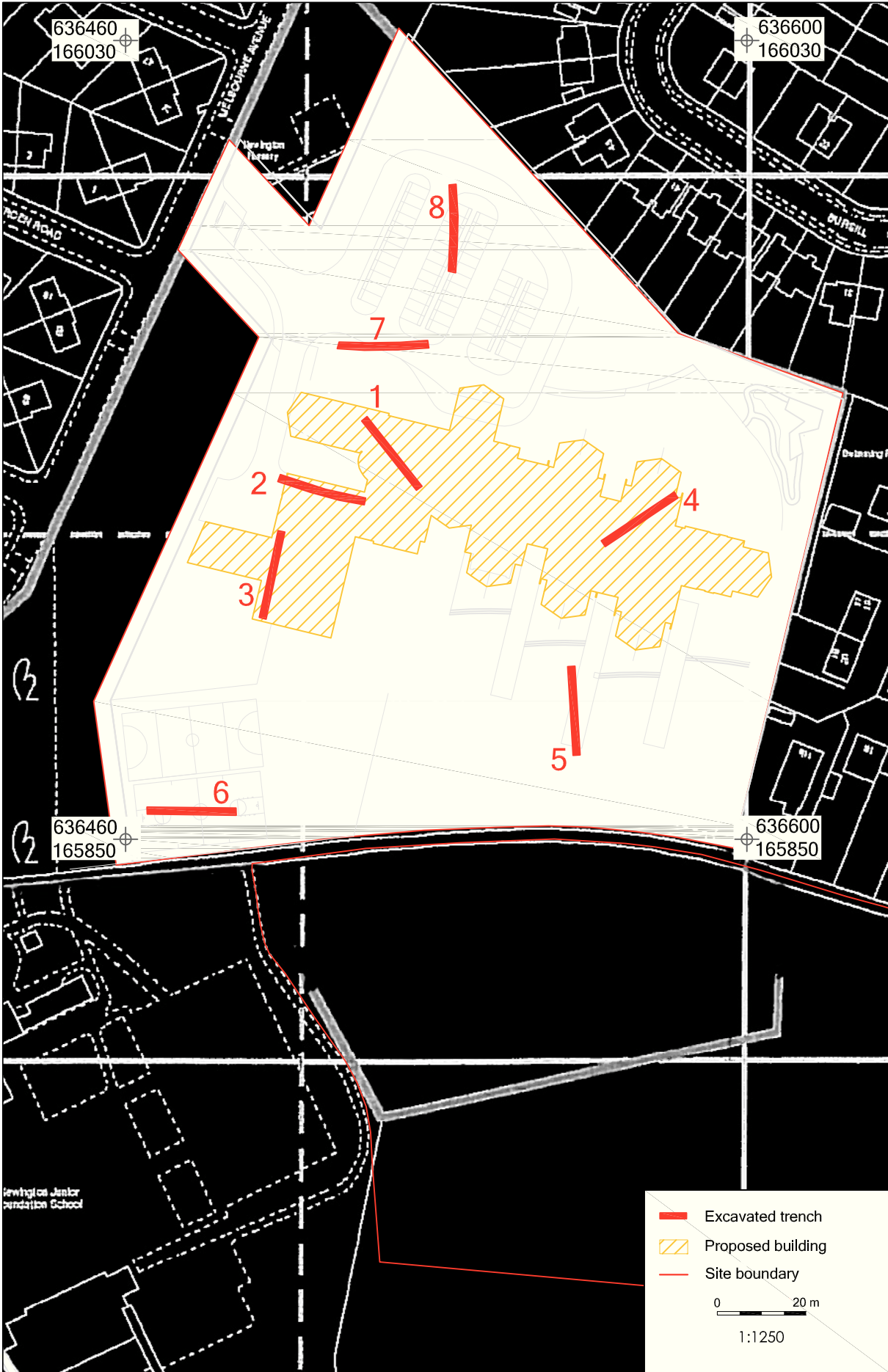
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited at a suitable local Museum in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location

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Figure 2: Excavated trench layout at Portal House

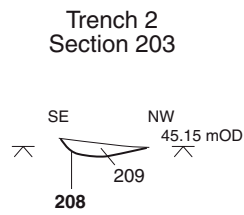
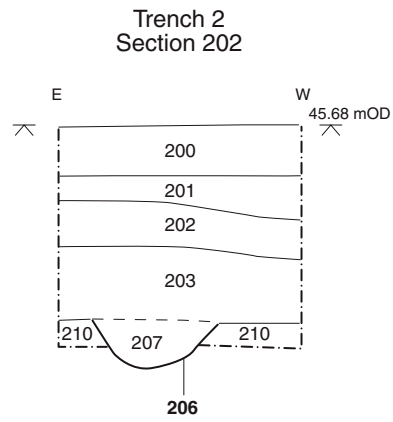
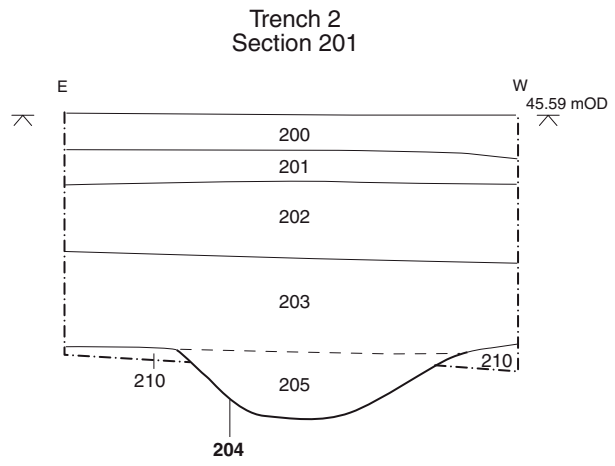
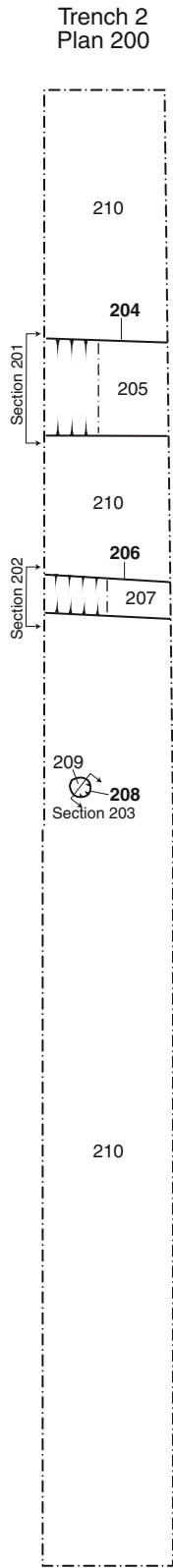


Figure 3 : Trench 2 plan and sections



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