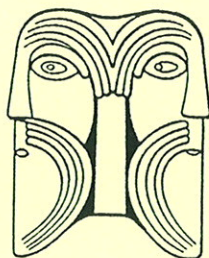


THE
OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT



Phase IV-V Highstead Farm, Chislet, Kent.

Archaeological Assessment

1990

CHISLET: HIGHSTEAD FARM IV-V

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

TR 211669

INTRODUCTION

In September 1990 the 4th and 5th phases of an assessment were carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit on behalf of Brett Gravel Ltd in advance of gravel extraction. The area assessed lay to the N of Highstead farm, and immediately to the S of the Thanet way, in the parish of Chislet, Kent.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies on the crest of the S facing slope of the 100 ft gravel terrace, S of the Thanet Way and two miles SE of Herne Bay (Fig. 1). The gravel terrace lies between the Blean Forest to the W and the now silted-up Wantsum Channel to the E. The Roman road from Canterbury to Reculver forms the W edge of the assessment area.

In 1975-6 the Canterbury Archaeological Trust excavated an area of Highstead village in which they found Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic remains with an Iron Age hillfort and settlement overlain by Roman field ditches and a possible Anglo-Saxon building. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd phases of the assessment did not locate any major archaeological deposits (OAU 1989). However, the density of archaeological remains to the SE of the village

indicates a high level of settlement activity in the area. An archaeological assessment was deemed necessary to see if there were any other foci of activity N and W of the village.

SOILS AND GEOLOGY

The modern ploughsoil was 0.30 m deep. It overlay a layer of old ploughsoil 0.10-0.15 m deep which in places contained chalk as liming. Our machine driver said that he personally had ploughed the field to a depth of 0.60 m, but the present farmers ploughed to only half that depth. The ploughsoil on losing its humic content returns to a condition similar to the sandy clay subsoil. The natural varied across the assessment area from compact buff sandy clay to coarse gravel with areas of iron and manganese staining.

The crest of the terrace runs along the line of the drain, i.e. SW from the disused filling station on the N edge of the site. Trenches 77 to 83, 92 and 134 on this ridge contained no archaeological deposits and were very shallow. The modern ploughing went down to the top of the gravel. If there had been any archaeological deposits here they would have been destroyed by ploughing.

Trenches 128 and 132 contained various geological features, thought to be glacial. Trenches 116 and 120 had what appeared to be water-formed channels.

A roughly oval rise in the natural clay was seen in the E of trench 122. The extent of the clay was 4.50 m N-S and 5.00 m E-W; this may explain why this area retains water.

ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

The strategy was based on a 1.5% sample of the area for extraction. The sample consisted of 49 30 m long and 1.85 m wide machine-dug trenches arranged in a grid pattern. This was supplemented by 14 more trenches and two area excavations measuring approximately 10 m by 10 m. This resulted in a 2% sample of the area (Fig. 2).

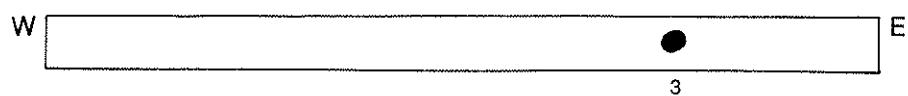
The ploughsoil and old ploughsoil were machined off in all trenches. All potential features were hand-excavated.

FINDS

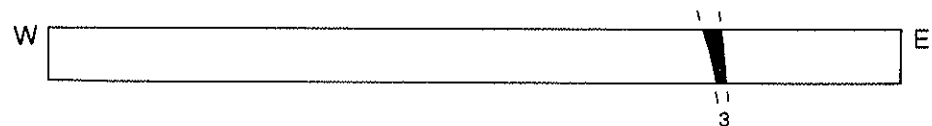
There were many more finds recovered in these phases of the assessment than in the previous three (see table at end for features dated). There were no bone finds.

The Roman activity in the NW corner of the site produced a small amount of pottery. The spread of prehistoric occupation produced a substantial amount of early and middle Iron Age pottery, some of it of very good quality. The Roman occupation on the E side

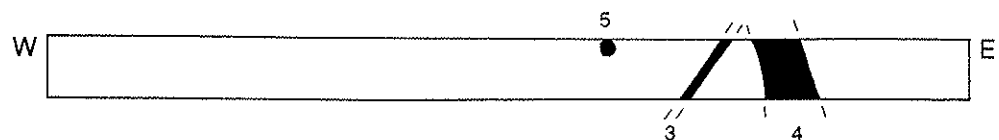
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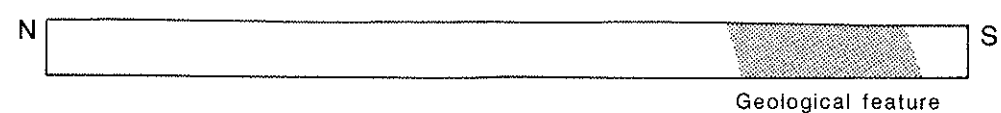
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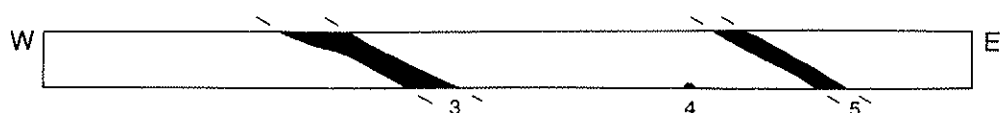
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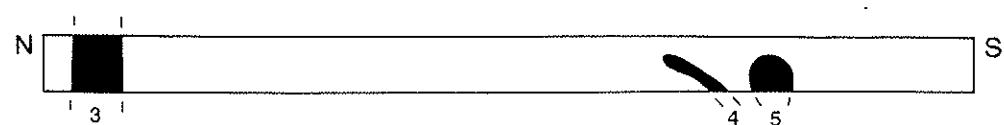
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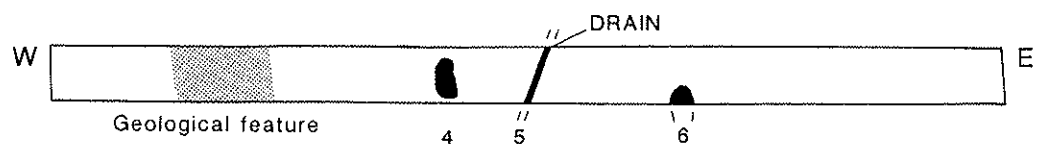
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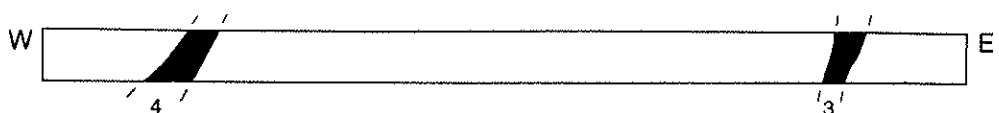
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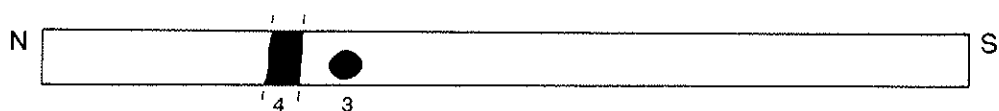
Tr. 120



Tr. 128



Tr. 130



Tr. 132



CTHF 90 10 0 10 20 m.

Fig. 6

of the assessment area produced large amounts of pottery and tile, some animal tooth fragments and two coins. There were three pieces of lead, one glass fragment and 15 iron objects from this area.

ARCHAEOLOGY

There were three areas of archaeological activity. An area of Roman occupation with a cobbled surface and metalled trackways was found on the E of the site, and to the NW a small area of early Roman activity. In the centre was an area of Iron Age occupation.

ROMAN ACTIVITY (FIG. 3)

In the southern half of the western field was an area of early to late Roman activity. There were areas of cobbling, metalled trackways and enclosure ditches.

An area 20 m by 7.0 m (trench 122) was stripped to expose an area of archaeology. A late 1st- to early 2nd-century cobbled trackway 7.0 m wide and aligned N-S was found. A small section of the trackway was removed to reveal earlier undated features. A gully 0.35 m wide and 0.20 m deep aligned NW-SE was cut by a pit, 0.90 m in diameter and 0.20 m deep. The trackway was flanked by a gully and a ditch on its eastern side and by a

single ditch to the W. The ditches E and W both had 'V' profiles with flat bottoms; the fills were a grey/brown silty sandy clay. Both contained quantities of Roman pottery dated to the 2nd century. The trackway was sunk into a natural depression in the gravel terrace. Both the eastern ditch and gully were found in trench 123 to the S.

Overlying the cobbled trackway was a dark grey silty occupation layer 0.10 m thick (Fig. 7). This layer contained much late 2nd-, 3rd- and 4th-century pottery and tile. Two coins were also found, one silver denarius of Elagabalus dated to 218 to 222 and a bronze coin of Constantine II dated 320 to 325. This layer did not extend westwards or eastwards past the trackway ditches but stopped just short of the gully, which was 0.60 m wide and 0.15 m deep.

E of the trackway was an area of crude late 1st- to early 2nd-century cobbling. The cobbling was found surviving only in a natural depression, and in consequence a thin spread of mid grey occupation also survived overlying it (Fig. 7). This also contained much 2nd-century and later Roman pottery and tile. A NW-SE aligned undated ditch cut across the northeastern corner of the trench; this had a 'V' profile. The fill was similar to the trackway ditches and is probably also Roman. The relationship of the ditch and the cobbling was unclear.

Overlying all the features in the W of the trench was a mid/light grey silty slightly sandy clay loam with less than 5% gravels.

This extended westward into trench 121.

Various modern drains cross the trench. A post-Roman ditch 0.75 m wide and 0.10 m deep was seen aligned E-W and this turned southwards 13 m into the trench.

The trackway in trench 122 was present in trench 123, although no cobbling was found. Two pits were found W of the trackway ditch; one was late Iron Age, the other 2nd-century Roman. The later pit cut a ditch aligned E-W. A mid 2nd-century ditch aligned N-S is present in this trench. This ditch is 1.00 m wide and 0.45 m deep and has a rounded 'V' profile; the fill is a yellow/light grey sandy clay. This ditch is cut by a modern field drain and a recent hedge boundary ditch, which is aligned E-W.

Trenches 119 and 120 contained a number of pits and ditches (Fig. 6). An E-W aligned ditch in trench 119, dated to the 1st century, was not seen in other trenches. A small gully aligned NE-SW, 0.40 m wide and 0.20 m deep, terminated within the trench. This was dated to the 1st century. Just S of this was a hearth 1.50 m in diameter and 0.22 m deep. Two fragments of pottery recovered from this hearth were 1st century in date.

At the eastern end of trench 120 was a pit 0.75 m in diameter and 0.14 m deep. The pit was situated against the southern edge of the trench and may be a ditch terminus.

Trench 124 has a ditch aligned NE-SW, with a broad 'U'-shaped, flat-bottomed profile (Fig. 3). It was 1.90 m wide x 0.40 m deep. The fill was of a grey/brown sandy clay with 10% gravels. Small quantities of 4th-century Roman pottery and tile were recovered. There was also a NNE-SSW aligned ditch of the 2nd to 3rd century.

Trench 129, just N of trench 122, also had a spread of mid grey silty clay 13 m wide, which represented 2nd-century occupation. When part of it was removed three shallow gullies were seen under it. They were all aligned NNE/SSW. They averaged 1.10 m wide and 0.25 m deep; their fill was a grey sandy clay with 10% pebbles. A large pit 2.80 m diameter and 1.20 m deep (not fully excavated) was dated to the late 4th century. It was cut by a gully aligned NNE-SSW which was undated. The fill of the pit was mainly grey/brown sandy clays with various amounts of charcoal although there was a large tipping of charcoal and ash present.

Trench 125 revealed another trackway orientated E-W and dated to the late 2nd century. Although it heads towards the area of occupation it was not visible in trench 122, perhaps because it has a junction with the trackway in trench 122. This trackway was also found in trench 133 to the W; although almost completely ploughed out traces of both N and S ditches were seen. The trackway itself was 7.0 m wide and had two ditches (Fig. 8). The one to the S was 2.0 m wide and 0.50 m deep, with a possible recut in the top containing fragmented chalk. This later recut may be a recent hedge boundary. The northern ditch is somewhat

smaller at 0.50 m wide by 0.30 m deep. The patchy surface of the trackway consisted of rounded cobbles 0.05-0.10 m in diameter set into a mid brown sandy clay.

Other features in this trench included a small pit 0.30 m in diameter and 0.15 deep. This was full of charcoal and also contained some fragments of burnt bone and parts of three middle Iron Age pottery vessels. Two pits were seen S of the trackway. One of them was sub-rectangular, 1.0 m in diameter and 0.50 m deep; its fill was a compacted light grey/brown sandy clay and contained mid 2nd-century pottery. The other was smaller, 0.50 m in diameter x 0.06 m deep, and its fill was a similar light grey/brown sandy clay. It contained late Iron Age sherds.

EARLY ROMAN ACTIVITY (FIG. 4)

In the NW corner of the assessment area, next to the Roman road, was a small area of early Roman features (Fig. 4). These were in trenches 71,73,74,75 and 76.

Trench 71 contained one ditch aligned NW-SE and a square late Iron Age to early Roman pit 71\3 which cut a small gully. The ditch 71\4 survived to a depth of 0.50 m and was 0.60 m wide. The pit 71\3 was 1.1 m across and 0.70 m deep with vertical sides and a flat base. The small gully was aligned NW-SE. These linear features were not observed in any of the other trenches.

Trenches 73 and 75 contained a pair of parallel features aligned NW-SE. In trench 73 the larger ditch 73\6 was 1.4 m wide and 0.40 m deep. This ditch was dated as 1st to 2nd century in trench 75. The shallow ditch was 0.80 m wide and 0.18 m deep. There was one feature in trench 76; it was 0.15 m deep and was probably the terminal of one of the linear features in trenches 73 and 75. There were several small postholes, two in trench 73, one in trench 74 and one in trench 75. They ranged from 0.06 m to 0.15 m deep and from 0.80 m to 0.50 m wide. The one in trench 74 was dated as 1st to 2nd century.

These features were filled with a light grey-brown silty clay quite similar to the natural. Their depth and position, on the top of the 'plateau' of the gravel terrace, suggest that most of the features have been ploughed away.

IRON AGE ACTIVITY (FIGS. 5a and b)

In the W centre of the assessment area was a spread of truncated early to mid Iron Age features. There were eight ditches generally aligned NE-SW to N-S and 17 discrete features: pits, postholes and two hearths. The fill of these features except for those containing charcoal was difficult to see because it was a grey brown sandy clay, very similar to the natural.

There was an area of middle Iron Age domestic occupation in trenches 85 and 126. In the W end of trench 85 was a ditch 85\3

aligned NW-SE. It probably comprised two cuts, one of which terminated to form an entrance with another ditch on the same alignment 126\3 further to the SE. The fill of 85\3 contained much charcoal and some potsherds. SW of 85\3 were two small postholes and to the E of these, and to the S of the terminal of 85\3, was a large oval pit. These features were very shallow, 0.06 m to 0.18 m deep, again suggesting that they had been severely truncated by modern ploughing.

There was a series of small ditches in the immediately adjacent trenches, 111 and 113. These were undated but may be related to the occupation in trenches 85 and 126. In trench 111 there were two ditches aligned NE-SW which were shallow, only 0.26 and 0.30 m deep. One of these was visible in trench 113. There were three very shallow gullies in trench 113, all aligned NE-SW. None of these features was visible in trench 126. Trench 85 contained one N-S-aligned gully and an undated probable pit which had been partially destroyed by a field drain.

The above features probably represent a house area surrounded by enclosure ditches.

To the N and W of the domestic occupation area there was a scattered spread of pits, postholes and hearths. Trenches 86 and 112, E of the domestic area, each contained a large middle Iron Age pit partly filled with charcoal. Both were over 2.0 m across and were 0.40 m and 0.60 m deep. The charcoal and daub in the fill of these features suggest domestic debris from a nearby

source, but no other features were visible apart from a very shallow posthole in the section of trench 86. This had been mostly ploughed away.

There were other small partially charcoal-filled discrete features in trenches 94 and 89 and similar features in trenches 87, 90 and 93. Only the features in trenches 87 and 89 were dated as early and middle Iron Age. They ranged from 1.05 m to 0.5 m across and were between 0.40 m and 0.12 m deep. There was an undated hearth 0.23 m deep and scorching of the natural to a depth of 0.02 m in trench 94. A large middle Iron Age pit in trench 91 contained 31 flints some of which were worked, including one leaf-shaped arrow head. Trench 84 contained one small undated pit.

There were small ditches aligned NE-SW at the N ends of trenches 90 and 93. They were between 0.5 m and 1.0 m wide and 0.1 m to 0.09 m deep. One ditch ran NW-SE in trench 91. It was 0.7 m wide and 0.22 m deep.

These features would have formed domestic areas similar to those in trenches 85, 111, 113 and 126 but have been largely destroyed by ploughing.

There was a small area of possible Iron Age activity in the far NE of the site. Trench 130 had a nebulous scatter of burnt flint and early to mid Iron Age pottery (Fig. 6). There was also an E-W aligned ditch 1.10 m wide x 0.30 m deep which did not appear

in trench 114 and may have turned northwards to become the feature in trench 98 (Fig. 6). The fill of these ditches was a light brown sandy clay with >5% gravels.

UNDATED FEATURES

Trench 118 had a NW/SE aligned ditch 0.70 m wide and 0.20 m deep (Fig. 6), the top fill of which contained fragments of chalk in large quantities and which may therefore be post-Roman. The only other feature in this trench was a small posthole, the fill of which contained much charcoal, but no pottery or bone.

Trench 96, the furthest NE of the trenches dug, contained a small undated pit, 0.50 m in diameter and 0.02 m deep (Fig. 6). The fill of the pit was a mid grey sandy clay with frequent manganese staining. Trenches 108 and 99 contained undated, very shallow, features which had chalk in their fill from liming the soil (Fig. 6). This may mean that they are post-Roman, as none of the prehistoric or Roman features contained chalk.

Trench 88 contained two parallel undated ditches aligned NE-SW (Fig. 3). These did not appear in trench 135, but as they were only 0.14 m deep they may have been ploughed out. Their fill was of a light grey buff sandy clay.

Trenches 135 and 131 were dug to determine why the existing tarmac bridlepath veers to the E, then continues on its original

course.

Trench 131 revealed a 5.0 m wide gravelled medieval trackway aligned N-S, which lines up with the existing bridlepath. The surface of the trackway consisted of a compacted layer of 40% gravels in a grey/brown sandy clay 0.20 m thick, and overlay clean natural. The trackway that was found in trench 131 did not continue into trench 135, where there was a ditch aligned NE-SW.

ENVIRONMENTAL

The timescale of the assessment precluded any detailed environmental work, but although the site was not waterlogged the presence in many of the features of appreciable amounts of charcoal indicates considerable environmental potential.

SUMMARY

The proposed extraction area examined in this phase of the assessment contained an early to middle Iron Age settlement in the centre, an early Roman settlement in the NW and an early to late Roman settlement in the E. The Iron Age and early Roman areas, although extensive, were not well preserved and only the bases of the deepest features survived. The nucleus of the larger Roman area was well preserved in a small depression in the top of the gravel plateau. Its surrounding enclosure ditches and trackways had been plough-damaged. The best preserved remains

were occupation layers over a cobbled yard surface and segments of metalled trackways with ditches on either side.

MARK ROBERTS

MICK PARSONS

OCTOBER 1990

FINDS

FEATURES DATED BY POTTERY

Trench	Ctx	Type	Date	Remarks
71	3	pit	1st century	
73	6	ditch	? non-diagnostic	
74	3	posthole	1st-2nd century	
75	3	ditch	1st-2nd century	
85	3	ditch	middle Iron Age	
86	3	pit	middle Iron Age	
87	3	pit	early Iron Age	
89	1	plough-soil	early to middle Iron Age	
91	3	pit	middle Iron Age	
112	3	pit	middle Iron Age very fine	
126	3	ditch	middle Iron Age	
126	4	pit	middle Iron Age	
126	5	pit	middle Iron Age	
119	3	ditch	1st century	
119	4	gully	1st century	
119	5	pit	1st century	
120	6	pit	1st century	
121	4	ditch	1st to 2nd century	
122	1002/A/1	ditch	mid 2nd century	
122	1002/A/2	ditch	1st to 2nd century	
122	1002/B/1	ditch	1st to 2nd century	
122	1003/A/1	layer	2nd to 4th century	
122	1003/B/1	layer	2nd to 4th century	

122	1005/A/1	layer	late 2nd century
122	1006	gully	? non-diagnostic
122	1007	layer	late 3rd to 4th century
1228	1008	slot	2nd century
122	1009/1	layer	2nd to 3rd century
122	1010/A/1	layer	2nd century
122	1011/B/1	layer	1st to 2nd century
122	1012	ditch	2nd century
122	1013/A/1	layer	2nd century
122	1014/A/1	gully	2nd century
122	1014/B/1	gully	2nd century with 1st to 2nd century mortaria
122	1015/A/1	posthole	2nd century
122	1016/A/1	posthole	4th century
122	1017/A	layer	1st to 2nd century
122	1018	layer	2nd century
122	1019	layer	late 1st to 2nd century
122	1023/A/1	pit	2nd century
123	5	pit	2nd century
123	6	pit	mid 2nd century
123	7	ditch	2nd century
123	8	ditch	mid 2nd century
123	10	ditch	mid 2nd century
124	3	ditch	2nd to 4th century
124	4	ditch	2nd to 3rd century
124	2	ploughsoil	medieval

125	3	pit	middle Iron Age
125	4	ditch	2nd century
125	5	trackway	2nd century
125	6	trackway	2nd century
125	7	ditch	2nd century
125	8	pit	2nd century
125	9	pit	late Iron Age
129	3	ditch	2nd to 4th century
129	4/A/1	pit	late 1st to 2nd century
129	4/A/2	pit	mid to late 3rd century
129	4/A/3	pit	2nd century
129	4/A/5	pit	1st to 2nd century
129	8/A/1	ditch	1st to 2nd century
130	3	scatter	early to mid Iron Age
131	3	trackway	Roman
131	4	ditch	medieval
135	3	ditch	Roman?

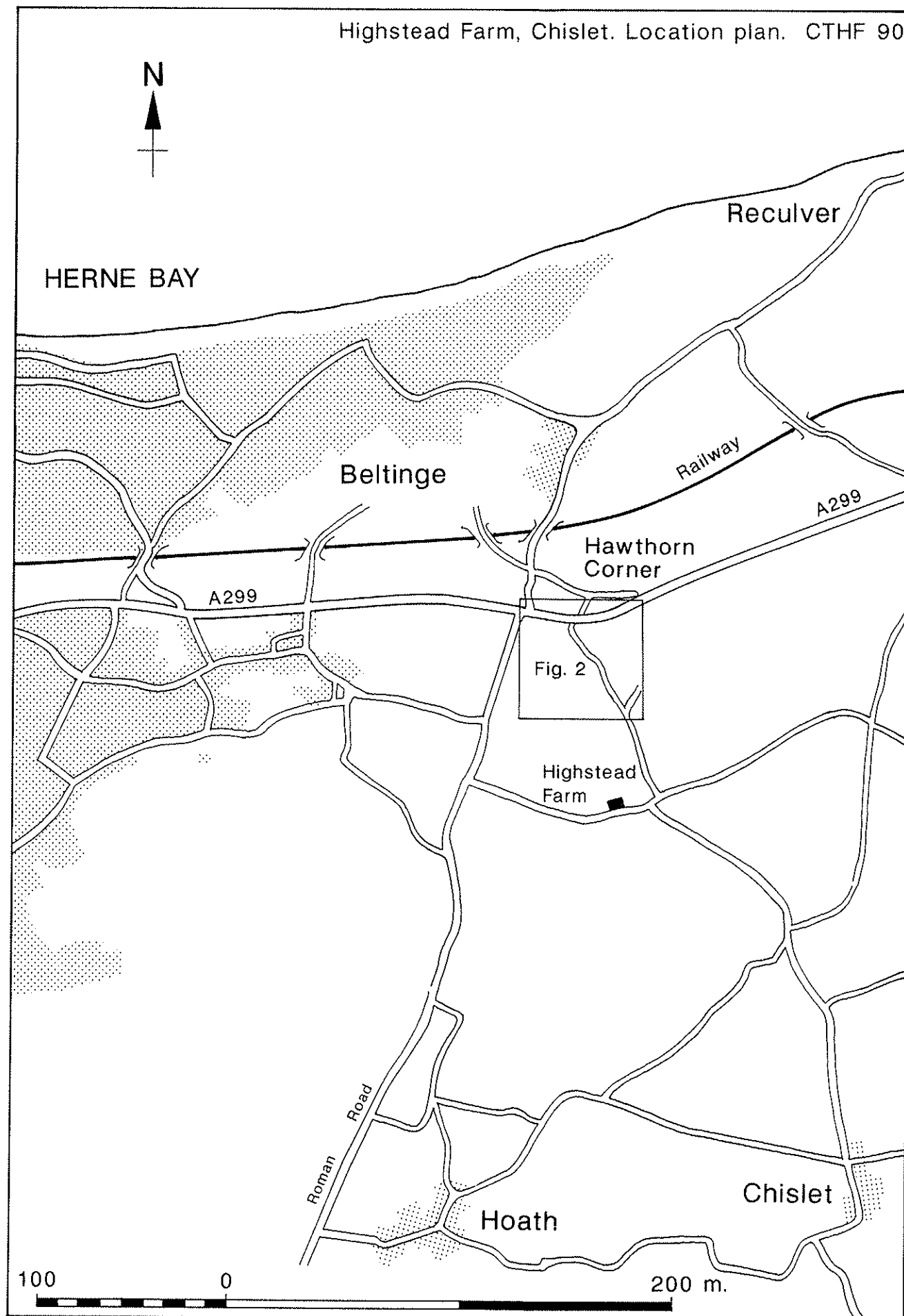
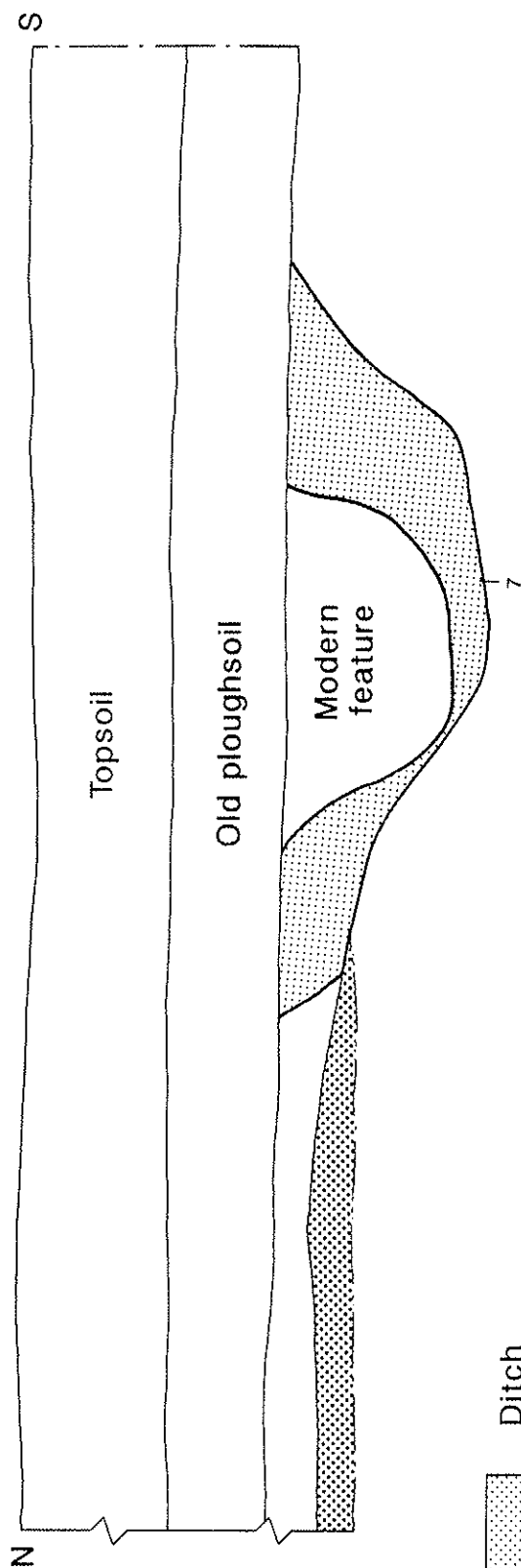
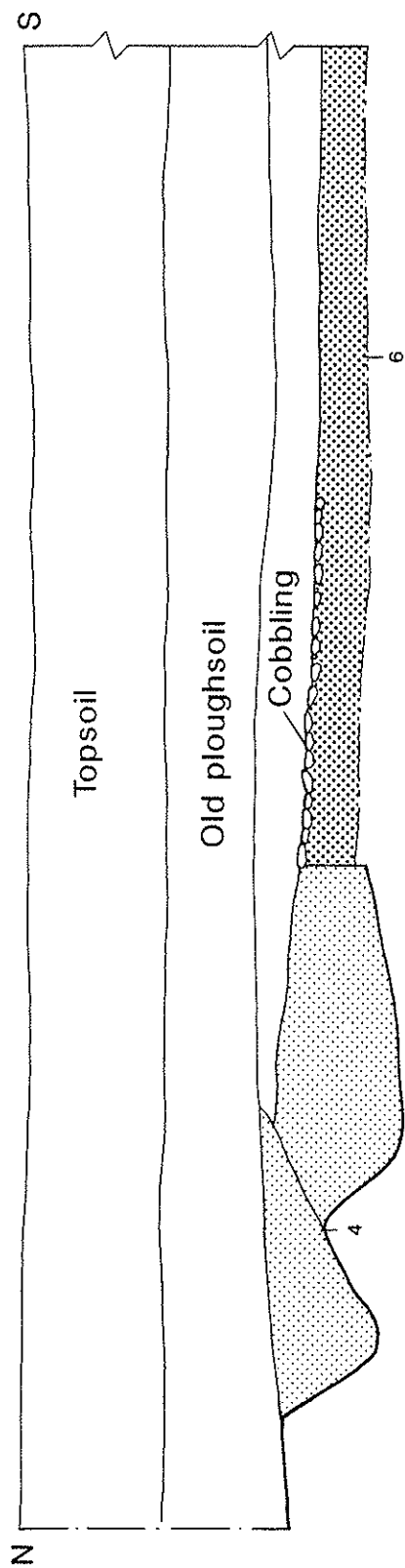


Fig. 1

Tr. 125

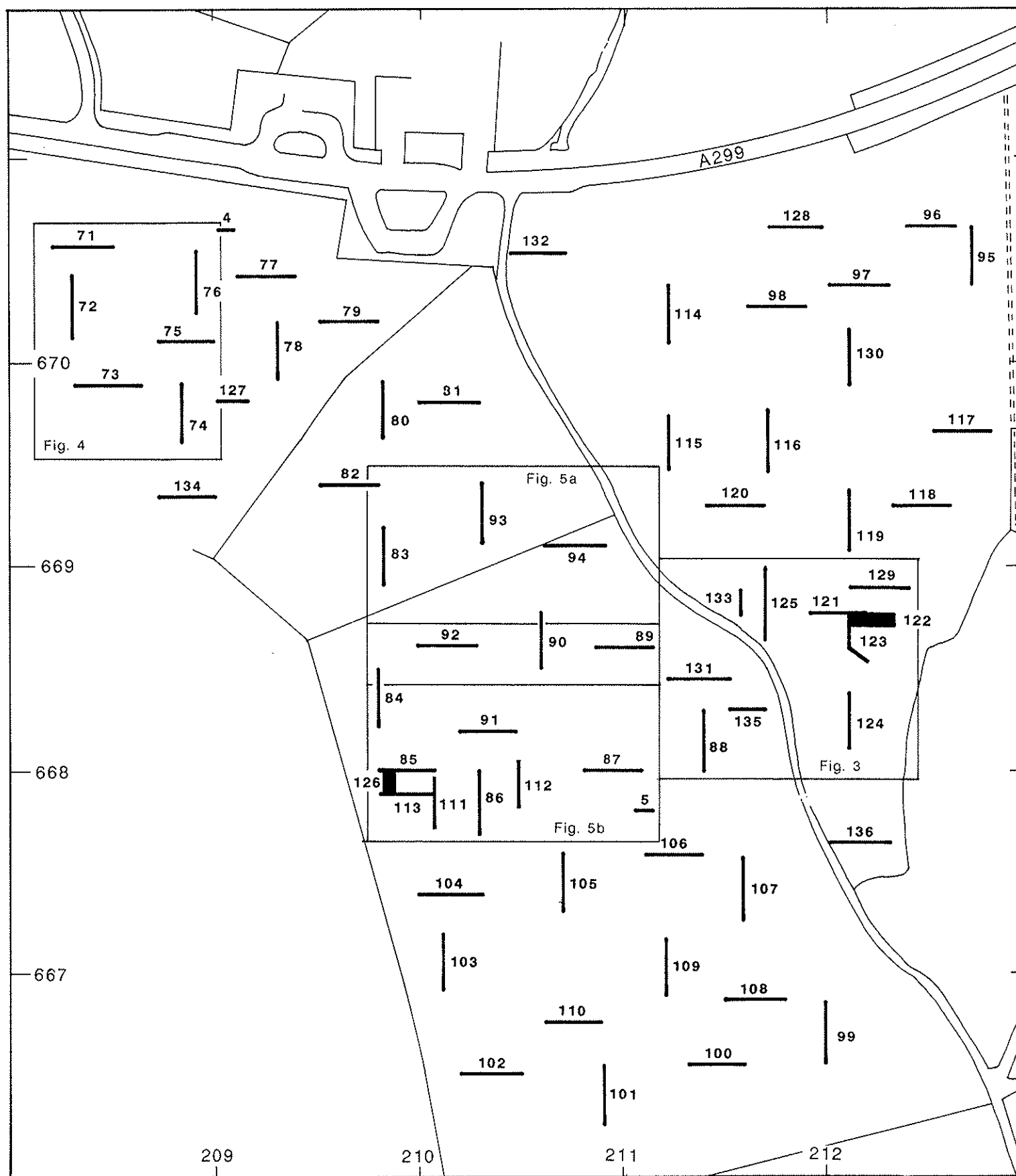
CTHF 90



Ditch
Trackway

1 0 1 m.

Fig. 8



Trench location plan

CTHF 90

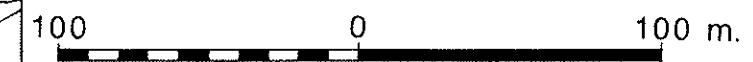


Fig. 2

CTHF 90



21130/66870

Tr. 125

Tr. 133

? ploughed out trackway

Tr. 131

Tr. 135

Tr. 88




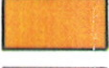

Tr. 124

Tr. 129

Tr. 121

Tr. 122

Tr. 123

-  Ditches
-  Cobbling
-  Trackway
-  Occupation layer
-  Post Roman features

10 0 50 m.

Fig. 3

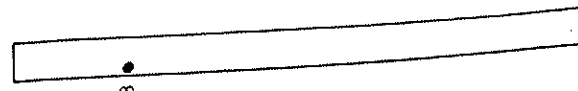
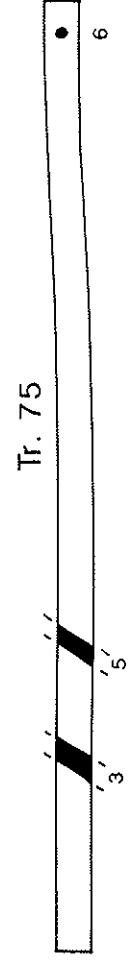
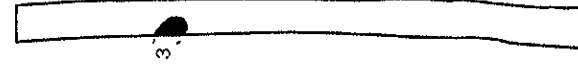
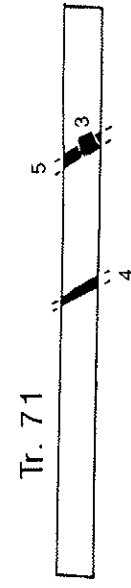


Fig. 4



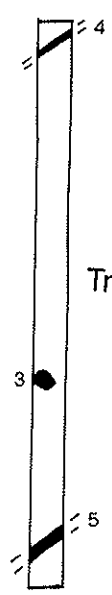
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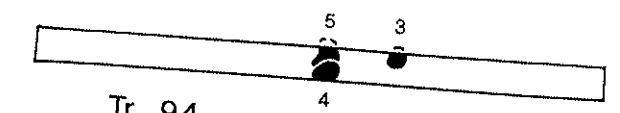
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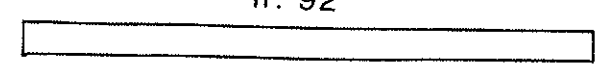
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Tr. 93



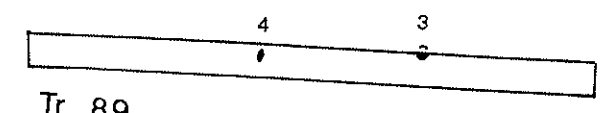
Tr. 94



Tr. 92



Tr. 90



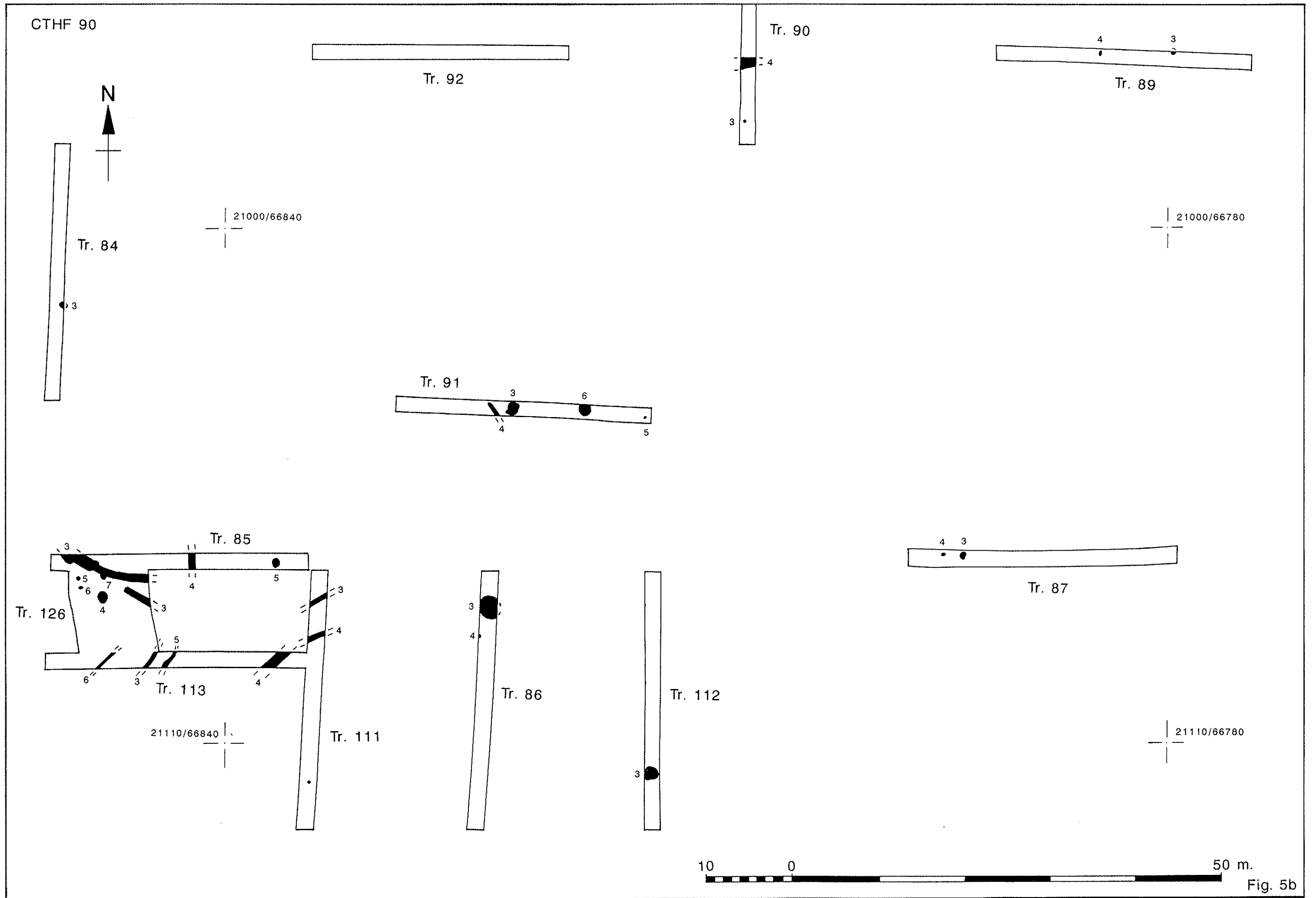
Tr. 89



Tr. 84



Fig. 5a



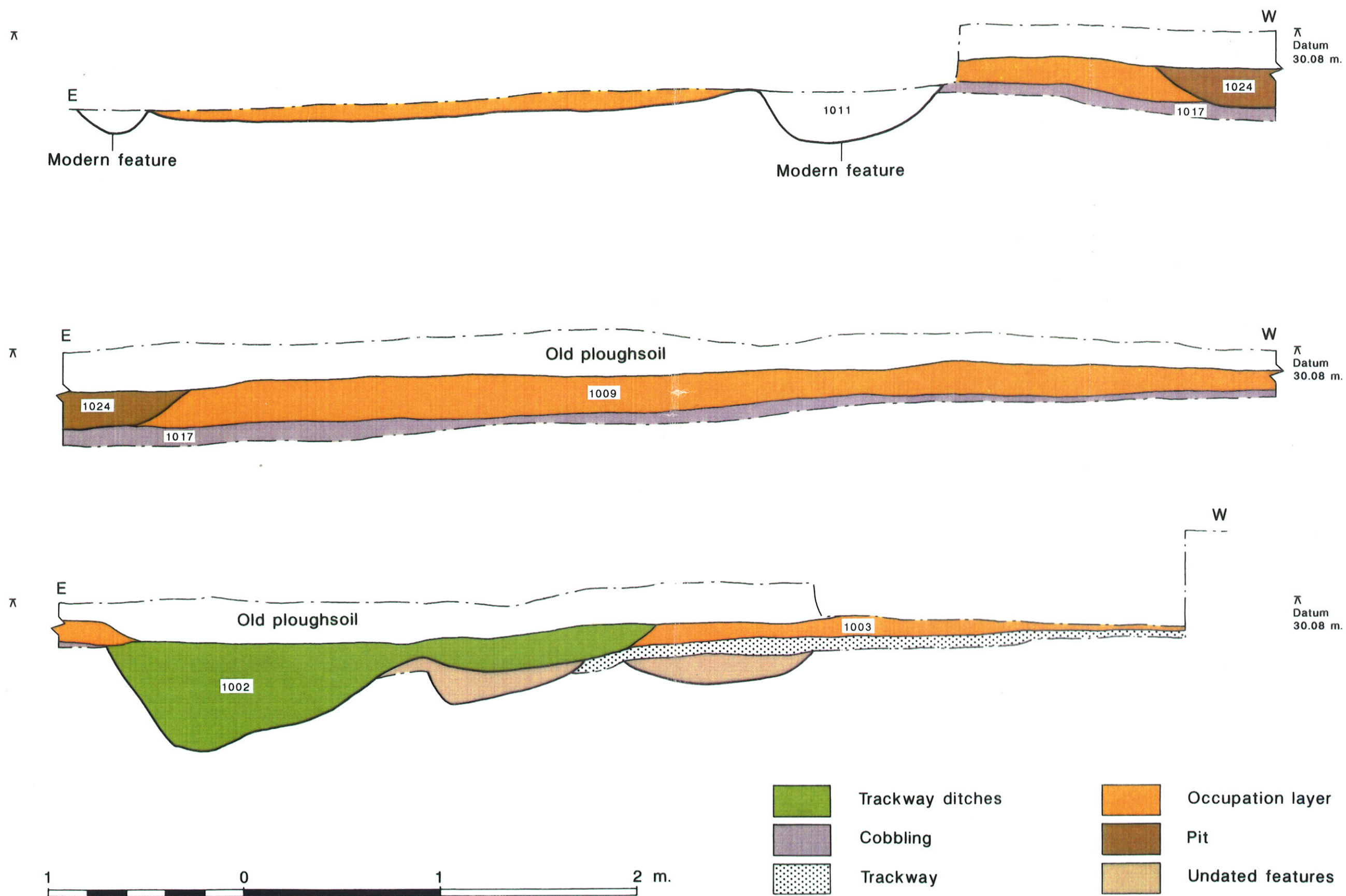


Fig. 7



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