BMW UK Manufacturing Ltd

Proposed Waste Management Site
MPRD Site, BMW Plant, Oxford

NGR SP 558 040

Archaeological Field Evaluation Report

Oxford Archaeological Unit
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Summary

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook an archaeological field evaluation on the site of the proposed New Waste Management Centre at the BMW Plant, Cowley Works, East Oxford (NGR SP 558 040). The two-trench field evaluation was undertaken in April 2001. The evaluation site lies immediately east of the line of the Roman Road from Dorchester on Thames-Alchester.

Natural clay deposits were recorded at the base of one of the trenches, sealed beneath a layer of `made ground' probably imported when the original car factory was built. A substantial concrete raft was also encountered, and this relates to an earlier phase of the car plant. The second trench exposed a further concrete raft and the remains of a tarmac surface of 20th century date, overlying contaminated natural clay. A large service trench also cut across the line of the trench. The absence of former soil horizons and finds of any antiquity from the evaluation suggests that this area of the current factory was cleared prior to its construction.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook an archaeological field evaluation at the BMW Plant Cowley, East Oxford (NGR SP 558 040). The two-trench field evaluation was undertaken in April 2001; this report presents the results of the evaluation.

1.2 BMW Cowley are proposing to construct a new waste management centre at the BMW plant in Oxford (Fig. 1). The site lies in an area of known archaeological potential and therefore a predetermination archaeological evaluation was required in order to allow the City Council to make an informed decision on the development. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with PPG16 and Policy EN 40 of the Oxford Local Plan.

1.3 The City Archaeologist issued a brief for the work on behalf of the City Council. OAU prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) in March 2001, detailing how the OAU would implement the requirements of the brief for the project.

1.4 The site of the evaluation lies in the south-east area of the former Rover Car Works Site (hereafter the Works) in Cowley, Oxford. The proposed development site lies in the southern area of the Works, the dismantled railway marking its northern limit.

1.5 The geology on this part of the site is Wheatley Limestone Member including 'Coral Rag'. The overlying drift geology is typically clay and clay-over-sand (British Geological Survey Sheet, 237).

2 Archaeological Background

2.1 The Works have already been the subject of a comprehensive desktop assessment by Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU, 1999), a summary of this information is presented below.

2.2 The archaeological potential of the Cowley area, particularly in relation to the nationally important Roman pottery industry, is clear and has been evident for a long time. The industry is thought to lie within an extensive pattern of rural settlement, which nonetheless remains poorly understood. Roman pottery kilns have been found to the north, west and south-west of the former works. Several concentrations of Roman activity thought to relate to pottery production were discovered during an evaluation by *Tempus Reparatum* in 1995, *c* 1.1 km to the

south of the Works (beside Blackbird Leys Farm). An important Iron Age settlement, possibly with Bronze Age origins, was also discovered on the Blackbird Leys development site.

2.3 `Roman Way', the road from Alchester to Dorchester, runs north-south through the eastern half of the Works. In 1960 a watching brief during the construction of a gas main immediately south of the development site, revealed two adjacent metalled road surfaces constructed of limestone gravel and rubble. This is thought to represent part of Roman Way.

2.4 The area around the Works has produced a number of possible Roman burials over the last 100 years. None of the burials are well documented or securely located. Burials have been discovered to the east and west of the road line.

2.5 Excavations by OAU at the new Rover `Quality Building' and Paint-shop revealed a late Bronze Age/early Iron Age ditch. Environmental evidence from the ditch suggests that in this period at least the area was scrub or un-grazed grassland. Evidence from excavations on the nearby Blackbird Leys Peripheral Road indicates a cleared pastoral landscape.

2.6 A late Bronze Age/early Iron Age settlement has been excavated by the OAU on the line of the new peripheral road. An archaeological field evaluation was undertaken on the site of the proposed Pallets Park at the Works in July 1998 and the results have been made available (OAU 1998).

3 Aims of the Investigation

3.1 To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the proposal area.

3.2 To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains present

3.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.

3.4 To make available the results of the investigation.

4 Strategy

4.1 Two trenches were excavated by a mechanical excavator (JCB) under archaeological supervision, with excavation of archaeological deposits undertaken by hand.

4.2 The trenches were positioned within the area of greatest impact for the new building. Both trenches were aligned east-west, owing to on site problems with extant cars in a very busy car park. The trench locations were in effect determined by site conditions, in accordance with section 4 of the WSI. The work was undertaken by a team comprising a Project Supervisor (Andy Holmes,

OAU) and one technician, under the general direction of R J Williams MIFA (Head of Fieldwork).

4.3 Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations deposits and features were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on pro-forma sheets. Soil descriptions were compiled using estimated percentages using standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types soils. Recording was in accordance with standard OAU practices (OAU 1992).

4.5 Levels were related to a site temporary bench mark (TBM), located at the base of the north-east corner of the existing building south of the site of the proposed development. This TBM was allocated a notional value of 100.

4.4 The City Archaeologist monitored the site on the second day of the evaluation.

5 Results: Trench Descriptions (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3)

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was located 13 m to the east of a gas house and 21.5 m north of an extant factory building. Following study of the service plan of the site provided by BMW, the trench was positioned in order to avoid both above and below ground obstructions and hazards. The trench was aligned east-west and measured 25 m in length by 1.8 m wide.

The deepest point of the trench (*c* 0.9 m below present ground level) revealed a contaminated natural deposit of grey- green clay (8) that was present within the cut of a pipe trench (6 - see below). The clay material was overlain by a former tarmac road surface (4) at the east end of the trench. The `road' was 0.2 m deep and over 6 m wide. The tarmac was cut by a north-south aligned pipe trench (6) that was 1.4 m wide and filled to a depth of over 0.3 m by a deposit of gravel (5). This fill was sealed by a layer of broken tarmac (3) that was 0.12 m deep and extended for a length of 6 m along the trench. Above lay a course gravel and sand make up deposit (2) that was 0.3 m deep. West of the pipe trench (6) and abutted by the tarmac surface was a concrete raft (7) that extended along the remainder of the trench. The concrete raft was 0.5 m thick and over 18 m in length. All deposits and structures within the trench were sealed by a 0.5 m deep hardcore make up deposit (1), which in turn was sealed by the car park surface (not illustrated in section).

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was positioned 16 m north of the extant factory building at the east end of the proposed new building. The trench was aligned east-west, in order to avoid parked cars and marked services. The trench was 30 m long and 1.8 m wide. At the base of the trench was a yellow-brown layer of calcareous clay (24), the natural clay sealing the geology. An ovoid clay deposit (slightly darker in colour) within this layer was investigated and was interpreted as a lens of

natural material. Overlying the natural was a 0.48 m deep layer of re-deposited calcareous clay material (23) which abutted a concrete raft (25) located at the western end of the trench. The raft was a similar structure to that located in Trench 1. Here the raft was 0.5 m thick and extended over 5.5 m in length. Structure 25 and layer 23 were sealed by a layer of bricks and clinker (22) that was 0.16 m thick, in turn covered by a 0.14 m deep hardcore deposit (21). This was sealed by the present car park surface (20).

6 Finds

6.1 All of the finds excavated during the evaluation were of 20th century date, and comprised bricks and construction material associated with the car factory.

6.2 None of these finds were retained for further analysis.

7 Conclusions

7.1 The natural clay was exposed at the base of Trench 2, at a depth of 1.04 m below the present ground surface, while a deposit of grey-green clay, possibly a contaminated natural layer was exposed in Trench 1, 0.77 m below the surface of the present car park. Little more can be said about the deposits in Trench 1, as they comprised a large concrete raft and part of a former tarmac surface. Both relate to the recent car factory and probably date to the early-middle part of the 20th century.

7.2 A thick layer of redeposited mixed natural overlay the clay in Trench 2, suggesting that any original ground surface here has been removed and reinstated with material to provide solid 'made ground'. A second concrete raft was also found here, again associated with the earlier car works.

7.3 The general results from this evaluation and the depth of 'made ground' indicates that the site was probably cleared and landscaped prior to the original building works.

7.4 No evidence of features or finds pre-20th century was forthcoming from the evaluation.

References

British Geological Survey sheet 237.

OAU 1992 Fieldwork Manual (First Edition, ed. D Wilkinson).

OAU 1998 Rover Pallet Park, Archaeological Evaluation Report. Unpublished client report.

OAU 1999 Rover Group Car Works, Cowley, Oxford: Impact Assessment on Potential Archaeology. OAU client report.

Appendix: Table of Context Information

Context	*Type*	*Depth*	*Width*	*Comments*
1	Layer	0.5 m	-	Tarmac
2	Layer	0.2 m	-	Make-up for 1
3	Layer	0.12 m	-	Make-up for 2
4	Structure	0.3 m	-	Former road
5	Fill	0.28 m	-	Service trench fill
6	Cut	-	1.4 m	Pipe trench
7	Structure	-	10 m +	Concrete raft
8	Deposit	-	-	Contaminated clay silt
20	Layer	0.04 m	-	Tarmac
21	Layer	0.14 m	-	Make-up for 20
22	Layer	0.16 m	-	Made-ground
23	Layer	0.48 m	-	Made-ground
24	Natural	0.1 m+	-	Natural
25	Structure	0.5 m	5.5 m+	Concrete raft

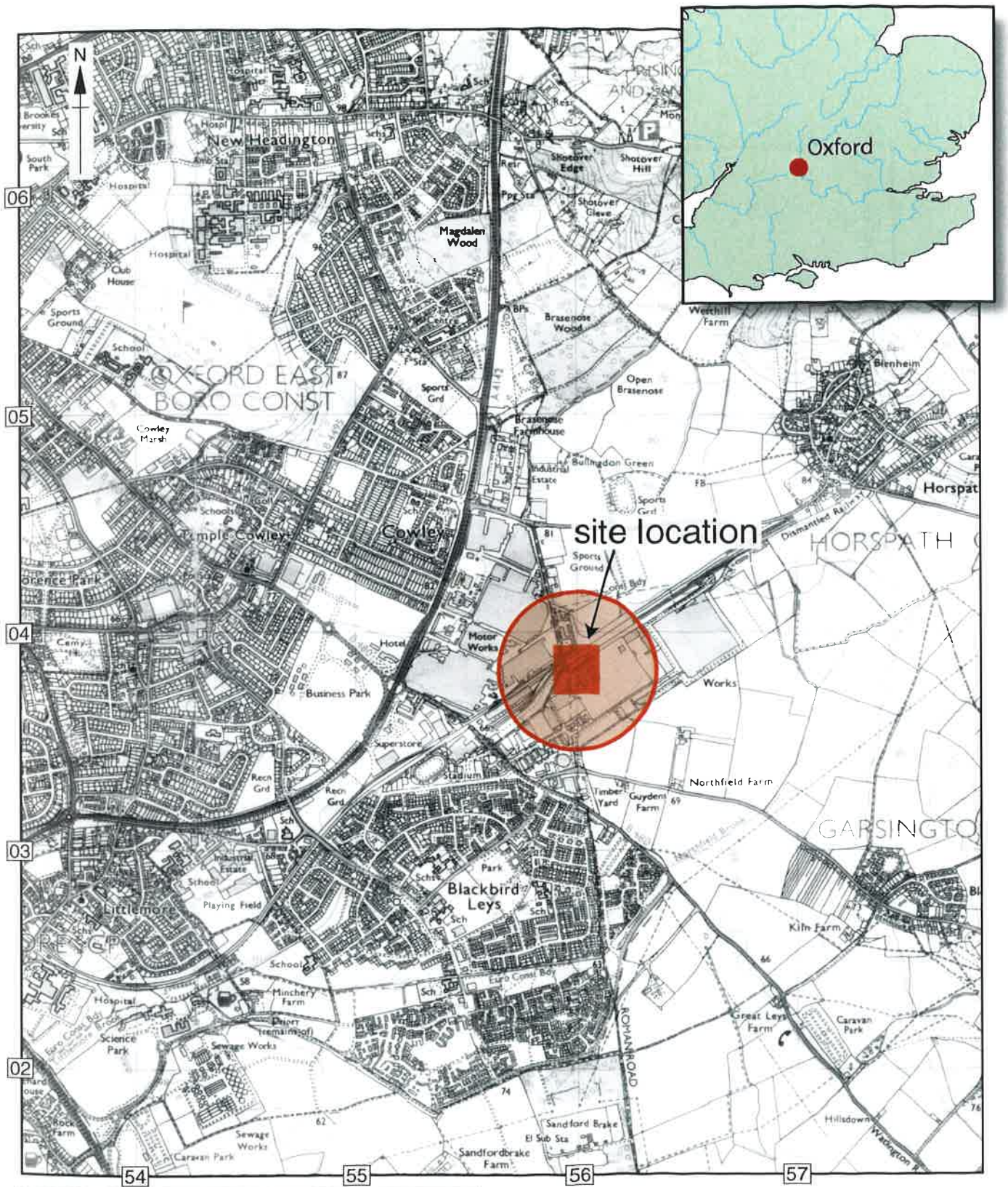


Figure 1: Site location

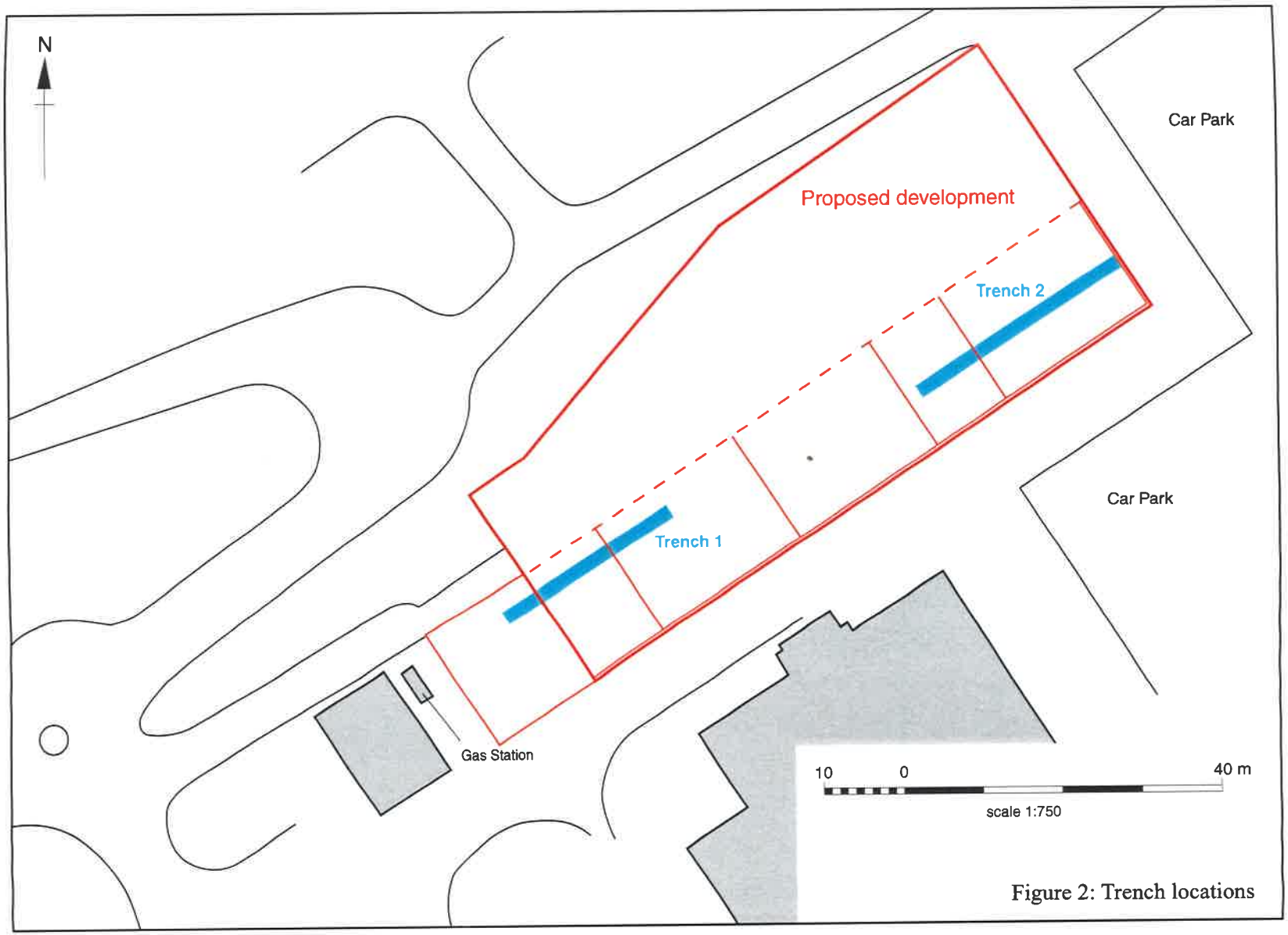
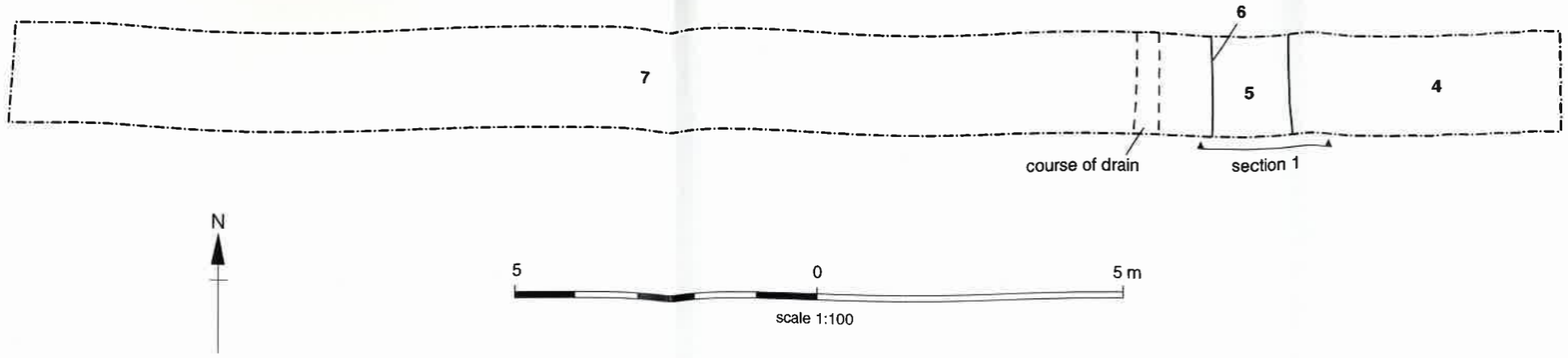
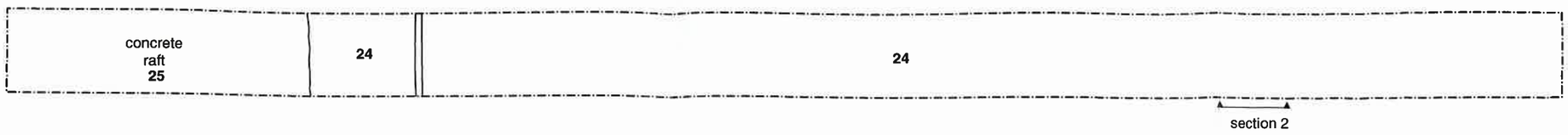


Figure 2: Trench locations

Trench 1 plan



Trench 2 plan



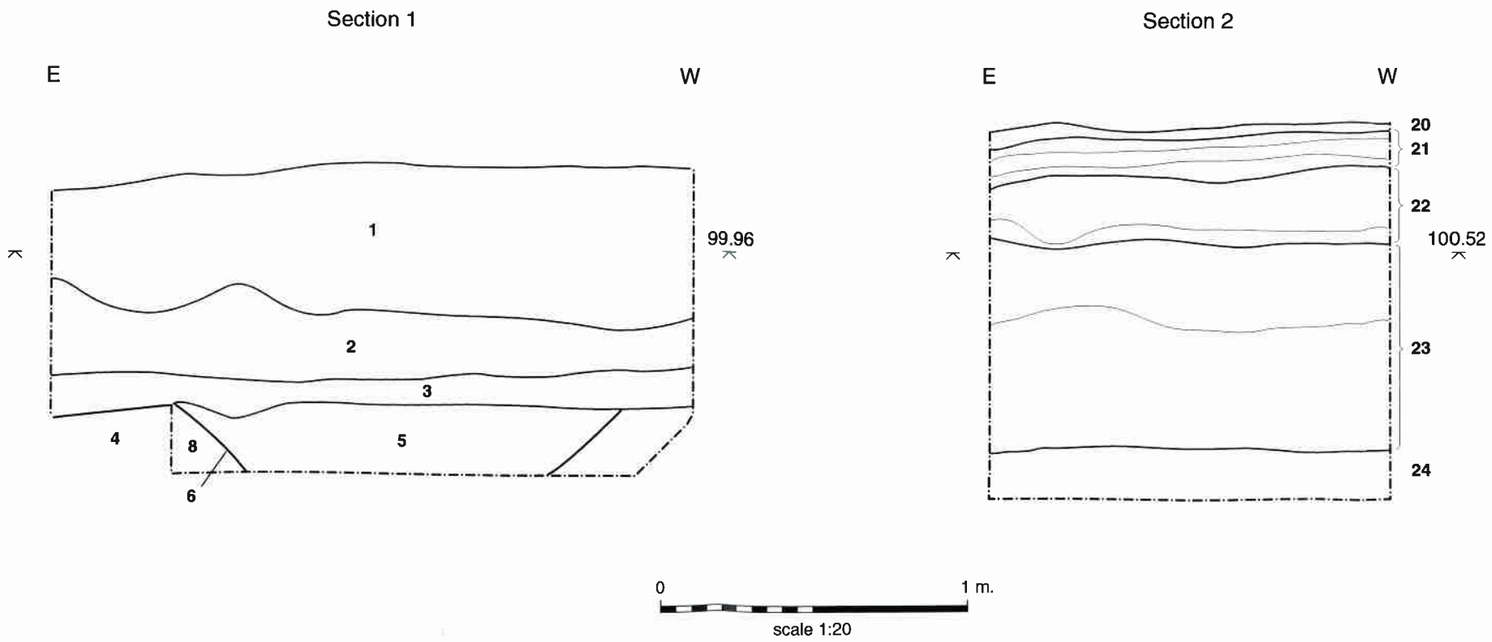


Figure 3: Trench plans and sections

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