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Rover Group Ltd

Rover Pallet Park, Cowley, Oxford.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

NGR SP 5584 0374

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

July 1998

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SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation to the east of the Rover Integrated Logistics Centre, Cowley, within the footprint of a new pallet park area, on behalf of the Rover Group Ltd. The evaluation revealed areas of substantial modern disturbance, including a possible railway embankment ditch. A former cultivation level was identified but there were no significant archaeological features present.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

In July 1998 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a field evaluation within the footprint of a new pallet park to the east of the Rover Integrated Logistics Centre, Watlington Road, Cowley, Oxford (Fig. 1), on behalf of the Rover Group Ltd. This evaluation took place in respect of policy EN 40 of the Oxford Local Plan and a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service. The site is located on the southern edge of the Rover Group Cowley Car Plant (at NGR SP 5584 0374).

The evaluation consisted of four 30 m long trenches and this constitutes a 9% sample of the site.

1.2 Geology and topography

The site is bounded by Watlington Road, to the west and the Cowley Works to the north and east. The geology comprises sand and calcareous sandstone of the Berkley Sand Member, part of the Corallian Formation (BGS sheet 237). At the time of the evaluation, overlying railway tracks and associated deposits had been recently removed from the area, to an approximate depth of 3m. A level area of mixed railway make-up deposits was left.

1.3 Archaeological background

Excavations by the OAU at the new Rover Vehicle Quality Building (OAU 1995) and the new Paintshop (OAU 1995), immediately north of the site, revealed a late Bronze Age/early Iron Age ditch. Environmental evidence from the ditch suggests a scrub or ungrazed grassland. Evidence from excavations on the Blackbird Leys Peripheral Road indicates a cleared pastoral landscape. This may suggest that the ditch at the Rover Vehicle Quality Building was in a little used area perhaps adjacent to a settlement; 63 sherds of late prehistoric pottery were recovered from the ditch. The environmental evidence from the ditch at the Rover Quality Building is not inconsistent with similar evidence from inside Iron Age settlements; the number of pottery sherds supports this although the sherds themselves were small and abraded and may have been redeposited. A late Bronze Age/early Iron Age settlement has been excavated by the OAU on the line of the new peripheral road (OAU 1996). These two sites indicate late prehistoric activity in the area. Hitherto activity of this date has been detected more commonly on the river gravels due to the high visibility of cropmarks and topsoil stripping of large areas for gravel extraction.

Roman Way, a major Roman road between Alchester and Dorchester-on-Thames, runs through the site. A very strong background of Romano-British discoveries immediately adjacent to the proposed development is known. Burials were found in 1940 on the west of Roman Way, north of the site, and further burials were found

c500 m to the north. Roman settlement is recorded to the south of the site; Roman pottery and coins have been found at Northfield Farm, 500m east of the site. Ditches, possible wall foundations and a kiln were uncovered close to Roman way where it is crossed by the Watlington Road.

The area was the focus of the Oxfordshire Roman pottery industry which it is thought lay within an extensive pattern of rural settlement, although at present is not clearly understood. Such settlements may have mainly been farms and hamlets rather than major centres, and they may have had small burial plots or larger cemeteries.

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- To preserve by record any archaeological remains so discovered.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any Archaeological remains present with particular reference to known and suspected prehistoric and Roman settlement discussed in sections 1.3 above.
- To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features.
- To make available the results of the investigation.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

The field evaluation comprised of a series of four machined trenches with an overall total length of 120 m, supplemented by hand excavation of archaeological features. This represents a 9% sample of the site.

Trenches 1, 2 and 3 were enlarged and stepped to allow safe archaeological examination of deep deposits. Trench 1 was moved slightly to the east, to avoid undermining the side of a newly constructed road surface, immediately to the east of the new Logistics building. The trench positions, as excavated, are shown on Figure 2. A JCB, equipped with a bladed bucket initially machined all trenches to a width of 2 m.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

The trenches were cleaned by hand and the revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples. All archaeological features were planned and their sections drawn at a scale of 1:50. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3.3 Finds

All machine excavation took place under close archaeological supervision with continuous inspection for finds. Spoil heaps were also monitored for relevant finds recovery. Modern finds were noted but not retained.

3.4 Environmental data

Due to the heavily disturbed nature of the site with substantial modern dumped deposits closely overlying earlier deposits, the environmental potential of the site was poor.

4 RESULTS: GENERAL

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

The general soil type was a clayey sand with underlying beds of calcareous sandstone. Ground conditions were dry.

4.2 Distribution of Archaeological Deposits

The four excavated trenches revealed a large linear ditch aligned from south – west to north - east, parallel to existing railway tracks immediately to the north of the site. Two large pits containing dumped sand and mixed debris, were located towards the south - west of the site. All of these features are of modern origin.

4.3 Presentation of Results

The trenches are described individually by context in chronological order, starting with the earliest. A brief description of the finds and an interpretation of the results follow. A full listing of all contexts is presented in Appendix 1.

5 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

5.1 Description of deposits

The stratigraphy of the four evaluation trenches is broadly similar, with underlying sand and intermittent sandstone natural deposits overlain by an orange-brown, slightly clayey sand layer, up to 0.35m thick. This layer contained very occasional charcoal flecking but was otherwise produced little evidence for human activity. It produced only two small bone fragments and a single small sherd of green-glazed pottery despite close inspection. All of the features found post-date this layer. The whole site was covered by an average depth of 0.25m of mixed dumped soil and modern debris.

5.1.1 Trench 1

The natural geology within Trench 1 consisted of sand with intermittent sandstone and was encountered at 72.9 m OD. The earliest deposit found was an orange brown loamy sand (101), which occurred at the north of this trench. This layer was 0.20m thick and contained very occasional charcoal flecking but no finds. Similar layers were found within all four opened trenches and are likely to represent an interface between former cultivation layers and the underlying natural. A large pit (103), measuring at least 7.1 across x 1.25 m deep, truncated this layer towards the centre of Trench 1. The fill of the pit was a clean, bright red, slightly clayey sand (104). A similar feature (204) was also noted in Trench 2, to the east. The sandy fill (104), of pit 103 was truncated on its southern side by a very large modern pit (107), of irregular shape. This pit measured at least 13 m from north to south and up to 1.8 m deep. Its fill contained dumped tarmac, wire and other modern finds, including post-1940 aircraft air cylinders and hydraulic equipment.

5.1.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

Natural sand was encountered at 72.5 m OD and was overlain by an orange brown loamy sand layer (207), up to 0.35m thick. This layer is probably the same as layers 101 303 and 403, found in the other three evaluation trenches. This layer contained very occasional charcoal flecking but no finds. A bright red, slightly clayey sand filled a broad shallow cut (204), near to the center of Trench 2. This cut measured 7.4 m from east to west and was 0.45 m deep. It is very likely to be a continuation of a similar feature (103), in Trench 1. The only other features found in Trench 2 were a small modern pit (202), containing gravel and dumped tarmac, and a shallow, east-west aligned linear cut (206), which also contained loose, dumped tarmac.

5.1.3 Trench 3 (Fig. 4)

Natural sand was encountered at 72.45 m OD and was overlain by a layer of orange-brown clayey sand (303). This layer is probably the same as layers 101, 207 and 403 in the other evaluation trenches and contained very occasional charcoal flecking. This layer produced two small bone fragments and a single sherd of green-glazed pottery. Two shallow, linear features (308) and (310), were investigated at the base of cut 302 to the north of the site. These features were aligned south-west to north-east and measured 0.4 m wide x 0.2 m deep and 0.55 m wide x 0.2 m deep respectively. The features had irregular profiles and very clean orange sand fills. To the north of Trench 3 a very large ditch (302), cuts both layer 303 (to the south) and the fills of linear features 308 and 310. This cut was only partially revealed running south-west to north-east within this trench and measured at least 4 m wide by 1.85 m deep. It had a flat base and a straight sloping southern side. It was filled by a clean, orange-brown, slightly clayey sand, primary fill (301), up to 0.10m thick, overlain by 1.75m of very mixed dumped soils with much modern debris (300). The primary fill of this ditch is very similar to layer 303, which overlay natural sands to the south.

5.1.4 Trench 4 (Fig. 5)

Trench 4 revealed a very similar sequence to Trench 3. A very large, south-west to north-east aligned ditch cut (402), was cut through an orange-brown sandy layer (403), overlying clean natural sand (at 72.4 m OD), at the northern end of the trench. Ditch 402 measured 2.1 m deep by at least 9 m wide, with a slightly concave base and straight, sloping sides. Its primary fill consisted of orange-brown slightly clayey sand, up to 0.20 m thick, which was very similar to layer 303, in Trench 3. The primary fill was overlain by up to 2.1 m of dumped soil and modern debris, including late 19th century pottery and wooden railway sleepers.

5.2 Finds

5.2.1 *Medieval pottery*

A single sherd of decorated pottery was recovered from probable cultivation layer 303. This sherd is of Brill/Boarstall type and dates from the early mid 13th century (Mellor, 1994,116).

5.3 Environmental data

Due to the heavy truncation and contamination by modern deposits and features, no environmental samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

The whole of the evaluation area was covered by thick deposits containing modern debris. There was extensive modern disturbance from rubbish pits to the south and a large ditch (302; 402) to the north. Two shallow linear features found at the base of ditch cut 302, were probably caused by disturbance associated with the use of, or cutting of, the ditch. The depth of these features, at 1.5 m beneath the level of the surrounding natural sand, also suggests that they are not survivals of earlier features. Charcoal flecks found within a probable cultivation layer overlying the natural sand (303) are likely to derive from the overlying deposits or earlier human activity on the site.

A single small sherd of green-glazed pottery recovered from layer 303 in Trench 3 is not secure dating evidence and may well be re-deposited. Since the evaluation trenches represent 9% of the site area there is no reason to believe that the results of the evaluation are not representative of the whole area.

6.2 Overall interpretation

6.2.1 *Summary of Results*

The earliest deposit found (101, 207, 303 and 403), was an extensive layer which may represent the interface between former cultivated soil levels and natural sand below. The single sherd of medieval pottery from this layer was abraded and may have been disturbed by ploughing. It does not provide secure dating for this context. It is likely that the whole site has been at least partially truncated by modern activity and the sandy nature of this interface indicates that it is not the original topsoil.

The purpose of a very large ditch (302 and 402) seen in Trenches 3 and 4 is uncertain, but it seems likely that this is a railway embankment ditch or 'borrow pit' associated with construction of the parallel railway tracks to the north. It is known that the railway sidings were constructed during the 1930's and the finds from the backfill of these two ditches were early 20th century in date. Deposit 104 (the same as 203) is thought to be dumped foundry sand and, although undated, is likely to be modern.

A large, irregular pit (107), in Trench 1, contained modern debris including aircraft air cylinders and hydraulic equipment which is likely to be refuse associated with aircraft manufacture at Cowley during the 1930s and 1940's.

6.2.2 *Significance*

The survival of a probable cultivation layer, sealed beneath extensive modern deposits, indicates that there is some potential for the survival of archaeological features within this area, although it is likely that they would have been disturbed by modern activity. However, no significant archaeological features were discovered during the evaluation.

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British Geological Survey. Ref. details Sheet 237

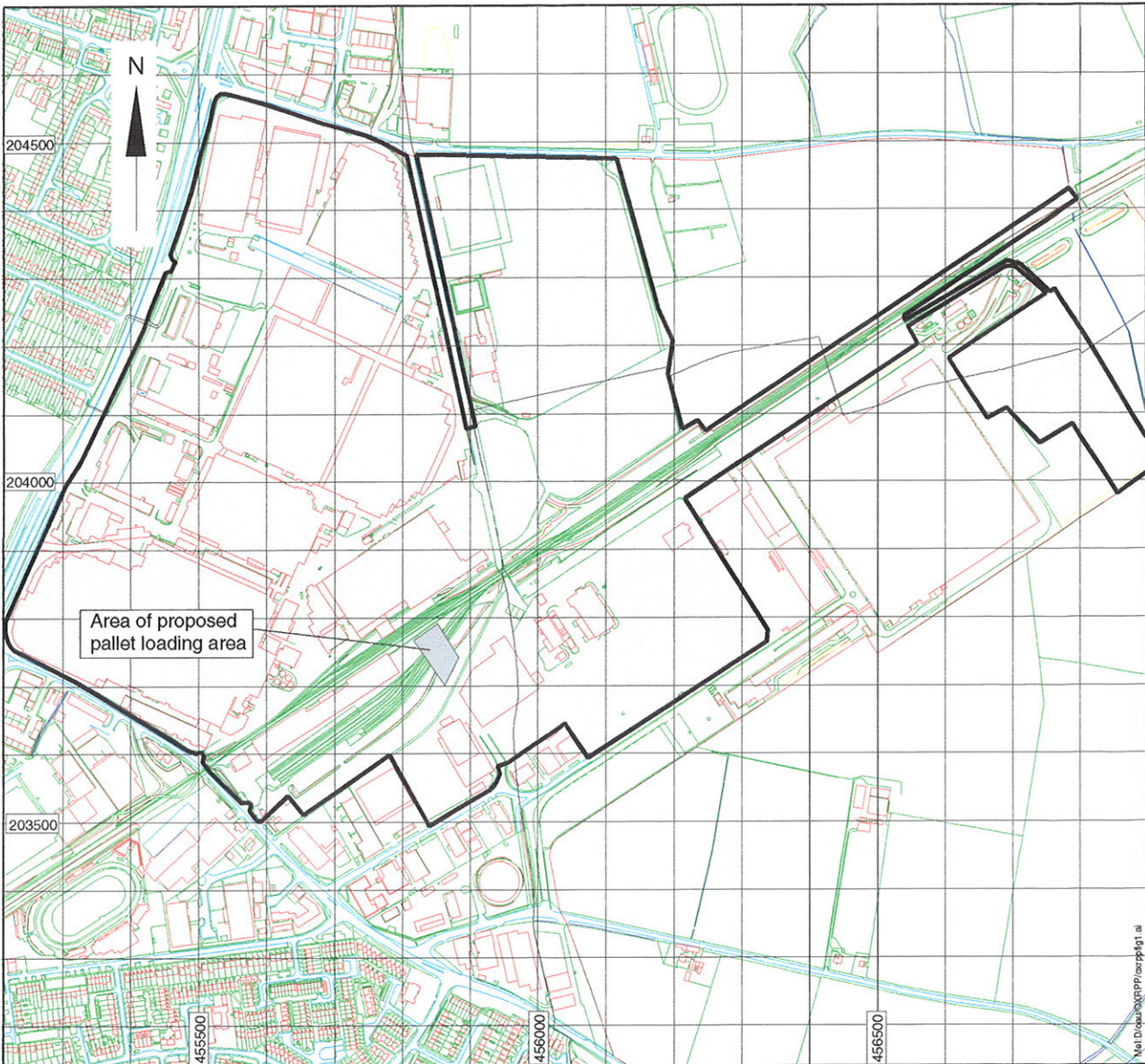
Appendix 1: Archaeological Context Inventory

Trench 1							
Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
100	Layer	Modern dumped deposit	0.25	2.10+		Glass; Pot	Modern
101	Layer	Cultivation level	0.2				
102	Layer	Natural	0.3				
103	Cut	Pit	1.25		7.1		Modern
104	Fill	Foundry sand?	1.25		7.1		
105	Layer	Bedrock	0.45		4		
106	Layer	Natural sand	0.5				
107	Cut	Modern pit	1.8		13		
108	Fill	Modern mixed pit fill	1.8		13	Metal; glass	Modern

Trench 2							
Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
200	Layer	Modern dumped deposit	0.4	2.2		Glass; CBM	Modern
201	Fill	Modern fill of 202	0.35		2		Modern
202	Cut	Pit	0.35		2		Modern
203	Fill	Foundry sand?	0.45	2.1	7.4		
204	Cut	Pit	0.45	2.1	7.4		
205	Fill	Modern fill of 206	0.35	0.35			Modern
206	Cut	Pipe trench	0.35	0.35			Modern
207	Layer	Cultivation interface	0.35		31		
208	Layer	Natural	0.25		31		
209	Layer	Bedrock					

Trench 3							
Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
300	Fill	Modern dumped deposit	1.75	4		Pot; Glass; CBM	Modern
301	Fill	Primary fill of 302	0.1	1.5+		Metal	
302	Cut	Embankment ditch?	1.85	4			Modern
303	Layer	Cultivation interface	0.3			Pot	
304	Layer	Natural	0.35				
305	Layer	Bedrock	0.2				
306	Layer	Natural	0.4		5.80+		
307	Fill	Sandy fill of 308	0.2	0.4	1.5+		
308	Cut	Linear feature	0.2	0.4	1.5+		
309	Fill	Sandy fill of 310	0.2	0.55	1.5+		
310	Cut	Linear feature	0.2	0.55	1.5+		

Trench 4							
Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
400	Fill	Modern dumped deposit	2.1	4.40+		Pot; Glass	Modern
401	Fill	Primary fill of 402	0.2	4.40+	8.8+		
402	Cut	Embankment ditch?	2.3	4.40+	9.00+		
403	Layer	Cultivation interface	0.3		20+		
404	Layer	Natural	0.35		12.75+		
405	Layer	Bedrock					
406	Layer	Natural			7.50+		



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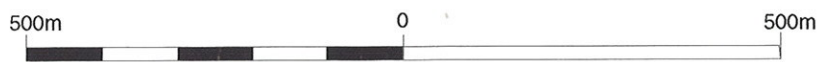


Figure 1: Location of site

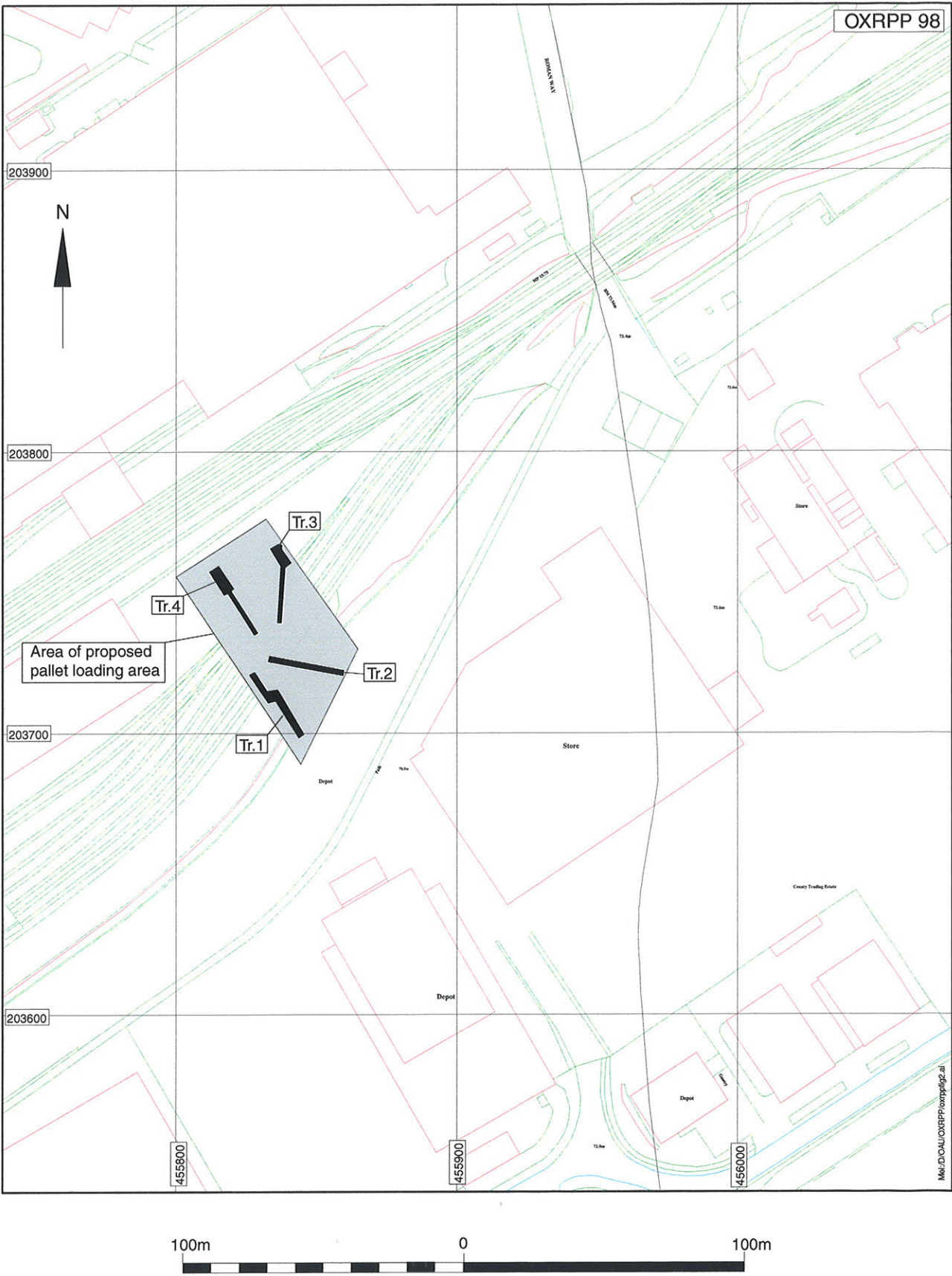


Figure 2: Trench location

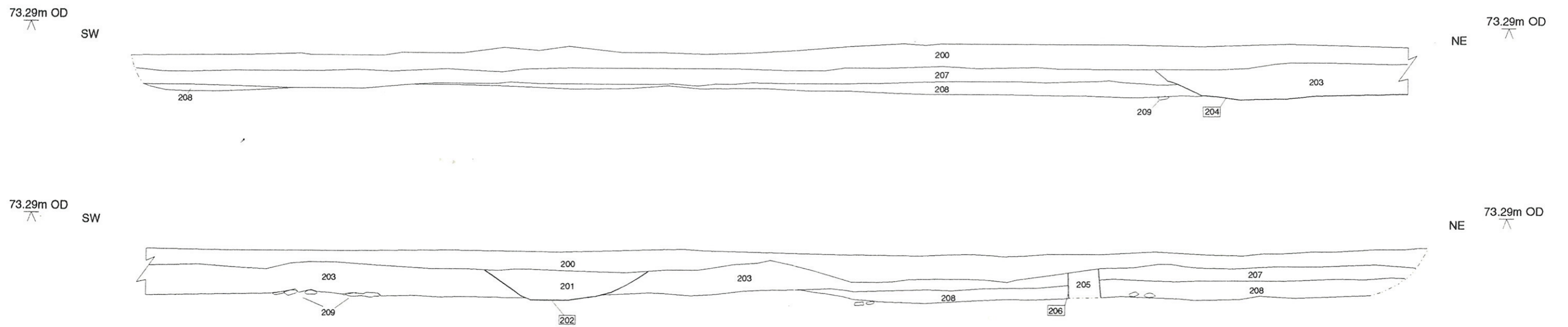
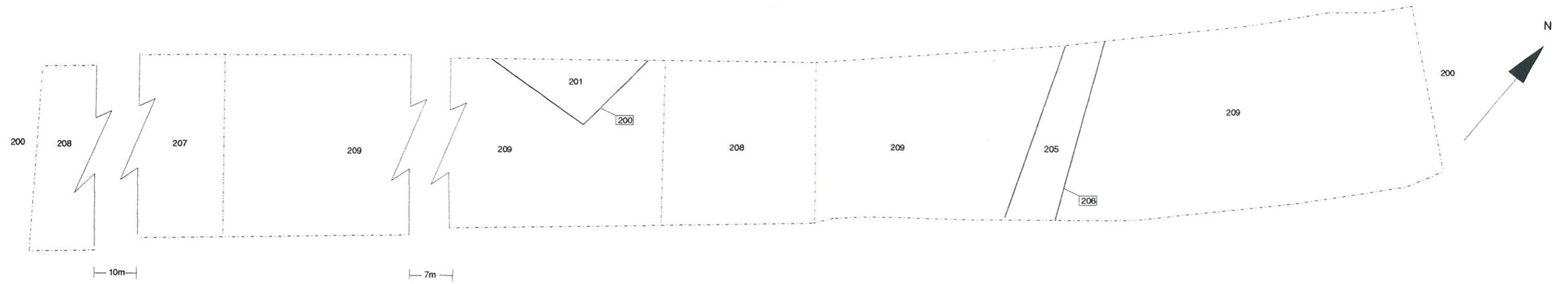
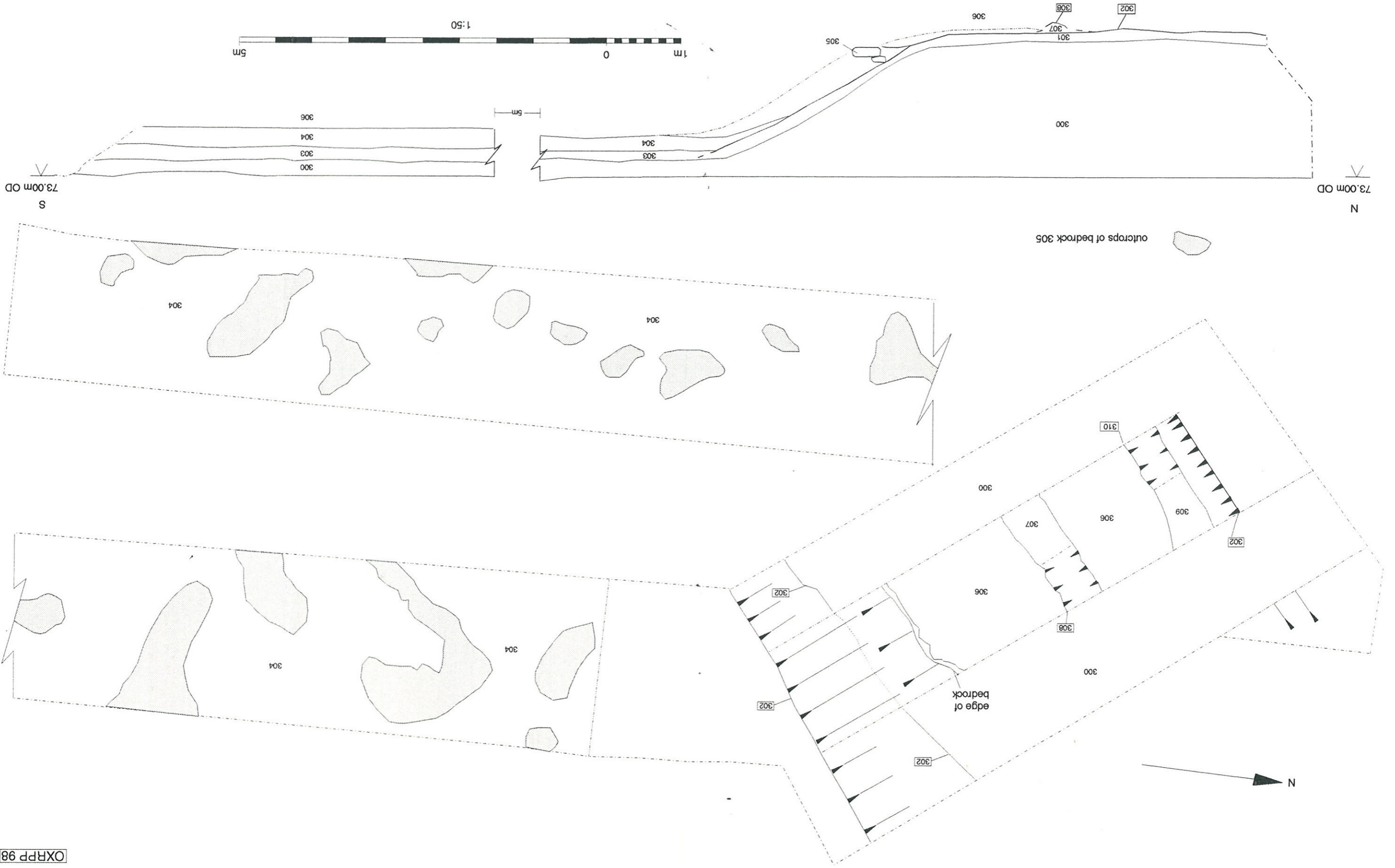
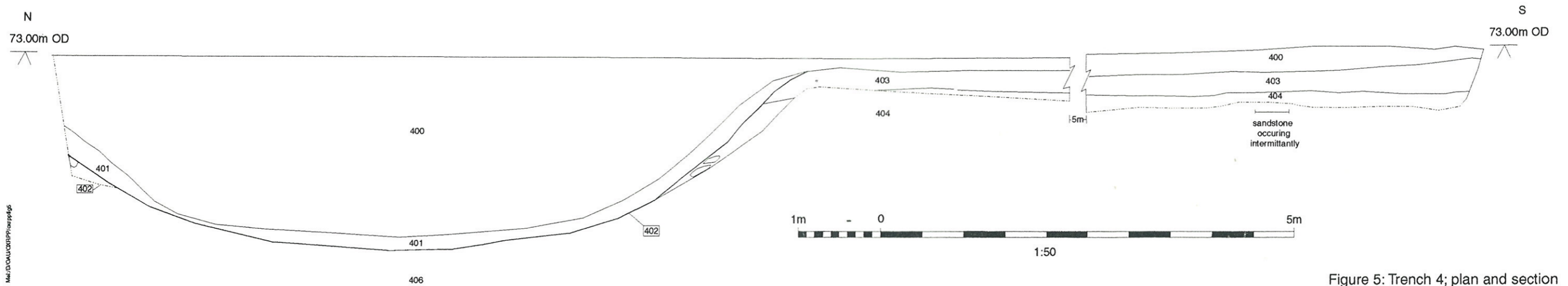
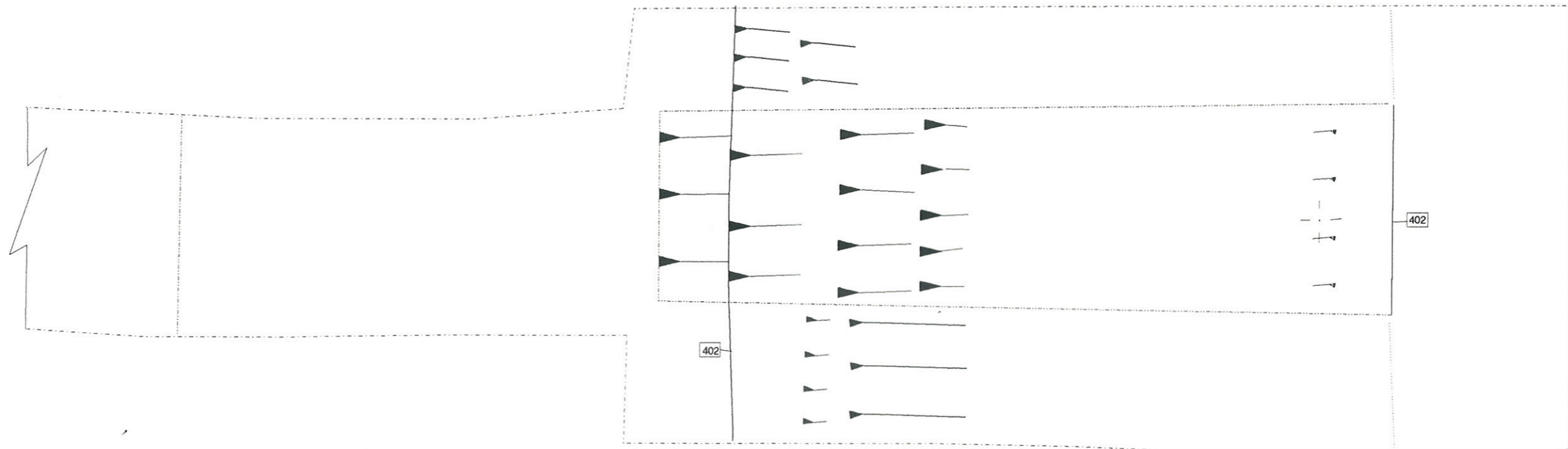
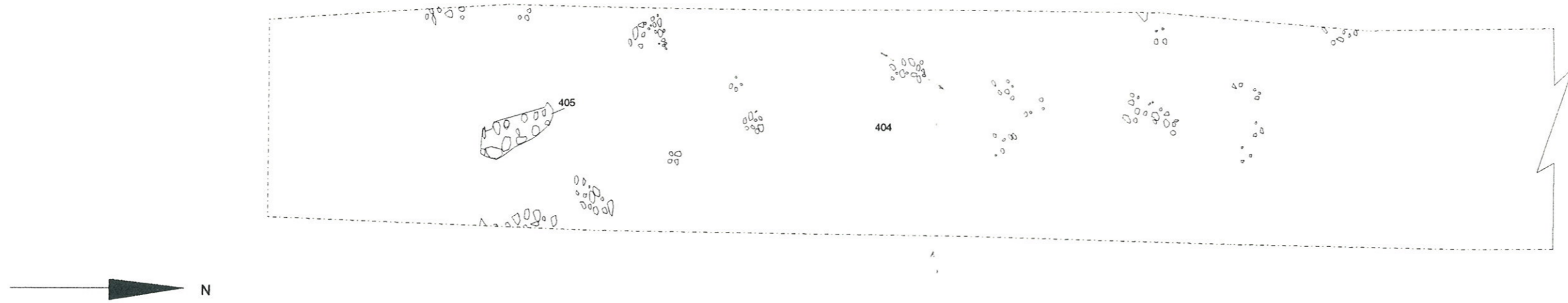


Figure 3: Trench 2; plan and section

Figure 4: Trench 3; plan and section





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Figure 5: Trench 4; plan and section



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