

Bicester Community
Hospital
Kings End
Bicester
Oxfordshire



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



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Bicester Community Hospital, Kings End, Bicester, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Between June 2013 and February 2014 Oxford Archaeology conducted an archaeological watching brief during the construction of the new Bicester Community Hospital at Kings End, Bicester, Oxfordshire (centred at NGR: SP 5803 2229).

The watching brief confirmed some the findings of a previous evaluation of the site, with observations showing that the majority of the site had been disturbed or truncated down to the level of the underlying cornbarsh.

Two ditches, of possible Roman date, recorded during the previous evaluation were not observed during the current works. It is possible that changes to the existing car park in the intervening period may have disturbed these deposits.

A buried ploughsoil and a possible garden soil, both likely to be of post-medieval date, were recorded underlying modern made ground deposits in parts of the site.

No significant archaeology was encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Mansell Construction Services Ltd to undertake a watching brief during the construction of the new Bicester Community Hospital at Kings End, Bicester (centred on SP 5803 2229).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: 12/00809/F). A brief was set by Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Council (OCC 2012) detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the discharge the planning condition. Oxford Archaeology produced a Written Scheme of Investigation showing how it would meet these requirements (Oxford Archaeology 2012).
- 1.1.3 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' '*Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*' (revised 2008) and local and national planning policies.

1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is located to the south-west of the historic core of Bicester and is bounded by King's End to the west, Piggy Lane to the north, a health centre to the east and playing fields to the south (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The proposed development occupies an area of roughly 7500m² and, prior to development, consisted of a level car park, sited to the east of the existing hospital buildings, at a height of approximately 71m aOD.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area consists of Middle Jurassic Cornbrash, a rubbly limestone (BGS sheet 219).



1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site has been described in detail in desk-based assessment (Oxford Archaeology 2010), and is not reproduced in full here. A brief summary is given below.
- 1.3.2 An archaeological evaluation of the car park area was carried out in 2003 (TVAS 2003). A total of six trenches were excavated across the car park revealing two ditches of possible Roman date. A watching brief was carried out on land immediately to the north of the site (TVAS 1998): no archaeological deposits pre-dating the 19th century were recorded.

Potential

- 1.3.3 The desk-based assessment concluded that, while the broader area has a high potential for archaeological deposits of all dates, the site itself had only a limited potential to contain significant archaeological features, other than the Roman ditch.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The aims of the watching brief, as set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation, were to:
- to allow the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works;
 - to provide the opportunity to signal, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated are not sufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The archaeological watching brief was maintained as a series of site visits during those periods when groundworks with the potential to disturb or destroy an archaeological deposits were undertaken. These included the excavation of foundation and service trenches, surface stripping, landscaping and other significant invasive works.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The watching brief was undertaken in four distinct phases:
- Excavation of a service trench
 - Excavation for the construction of a car park and receptor pit for storm water
 - Excavation for the main body of the new building
 - Later ground reduction
- 3.1.2 The observations made during the various phases of the groundworks are described separately below, followed by an overall discussion and conclusion.

Service trench

- 3.1.3 A service trench was excavated along the western side of the development area. The trench was approximately 60m long and between 1.1m and 1.6m in depth, along with pits for access chambers/manholes. In places these excavations followed the line of existing drains, but the width of the new trenching was sufficient to expose undisturbed stratigraphy.
- 3.1.4 At the north end of the trench (Fig. 2), the underlying cornbrash (4) was encountered at a depth of 0.6m below ground level (Fig. 3, Section 1). This was overlain by a layer of mixed grey-brown silty clay (3), 0.3m deep, containing numerous sub-angular limestone fragments and occasional fragments of brick. Above layer 3 was a layer of dark grey-brown silty clay loam (2), 0.2m deep. This also produced fragments of brick and occasional shreds of transfer printed creamware.
- 3.1.5 In places, layer 2 was sealed below a layer of crushed stone (1), 0.15m deep, forming hard standing around the existing hospital buildings.
- 3.1.6 Within the centre of the trench, the cornbrash was recorded at a depth of 0.45m below ground level (Fig. 3, Section 2). Overlying this was a 0.3m deep layer of very disturbed material, a grey brown silty clay mixed with limestone fragments and occasional sub-angular brick fragments, a continuation of layer 3.
- 3.1.7 This was sealed by a second mixed layer of dark grey-brown silty clay loam between 0.2m and 0.25m in depth, a continuation of layer 2.
- 3.1.8 At the southern end of the trench, the cornbrash was also recorded at a depth of 0.5m below ground level (Fig. 3, Section 3). A continuation of the mixed layer 3 measuring up to 0.25m in depth was observed to overlie the cornbrash at this point. This was covered by a 0.2m deep continuation of layer 2.
- 3.1.9 Within this area, layer 2 was overlaid by a 0.12m deep layer of crushed stone and tarmac forming an area of hard standing.
- 3.1.10 Although the projected line of the ditch encountered in the 2003 evaluation crossed the trench in the centre of the site, no evidence for its continuation was observed.

Car park

- 3.1.11 Prior to the present development the majority of the area was laid down to hard standing. This was composed of a 0.25m deep layer of crushed stone laid over a geo-textile fabric. This material was stripped off prior to the excavation.
- 3.1.12 Towards the northern edge of the site there was a noticeable rise in ground level where the hard standing finished, with this area being laid down to grass.
- 3.1.13 The pit for the receptor tank was dug along the eastern edge of the car park. This measured 8m wide and was dug to a maximum depth of 1.5m below the original ground level. Elsewhere the excavation for the car park was to a maximum depth of 0.8m
- 3.1.14 The cornbrash (4), a compact layer of fragmented limestone formed by frost shattering of the top of the limestone beds (Plate 4), was observed at a depth of between 0.3m and 0.5m below the level of the hardstanding.
- 3.1.15 This was covered by a 0.2m deep layer of reddish brown silty clay containing a high percentage of very small to small sub-angular limestone fragments (5). The geo-textile fabric within the central and southern areas of the previous hardstanding had been laid directly upon this layer.

- 3.1.16 Within the higher ground at the north-east corner of the car park, layer 5 was overlaid by a layer of mid brown clayey silt loam containing small sub-angular limestone fragments (6), up to 0.18m in depth (Fig. 3, Section 5 and Plate 2). This was sealed by a layer of made ground up to 0.5m in depth, composed of grey-brown clayey silt with inclusions of brick and crushed stone (7). This deposit produced fragments of bottle glass and creamware pottery.
- 3.1.17 The base for an access road was constructed between the car park and the new building. As part of its construction, the ground was reduced by approximately 0.8m in depth to allow for a hardcore base (Fig. 2, Section 4 and Plate 1).
- 3.1.18 The stratigraphy exposed during this operation was similar to that recorded in Section 5.

New building

- 3.1.19 Within the footprint of the new building the original hardstanding had been reduced down to the top of the cornbrash, removing approximately 0.25m of the reddish brown silt and fragment mix (5). No evidence of the continuation of the possible ditch observed in the 2003 evaluation could be discerned within the surface of the cornbrash.
- 3.1.20 Following the removal of the hardstanding, the exposed cornbrash was covered with geotextile membrane and crushed building material (Type 1) laid above it.

Later ground reduction

- 3.1.21 Following the construction of the main building, an area located in the north-west corner of the site and measuring approximately 24m by 8.5m was reduced by between 0.5m and 0.65m in depth (Fig. 2).
- 3.1.22 The depth of excavation was insufficient to expose the underlying natural deposits and a layer of mid brown silty clay (204) was observed within the base of the excavation (Fig. 3, Section 6 and Plate 3). Visible within the surface of this deposit were two parallel bands of crushed stone hardcore, each 0.65m wide by 12m in length and spaced at 2.5m apart (205).
- 3.1.23 Overlying 204 was a 0.18m deep band of dark grey-brown silty clay (203) containing charcoal flecking and which produced fragments of pottery and the handle of a bone toothbrush, dating to the mid to late 19th century.
- 3.1.24 Within the western half of the stripped area, layer 203 was covered by a 0.14m deep layer of redeposited limestone brash (202) which in turn was overlain by a 0.1m deep layer of dark brown clayey silt, (201), which contained numerous sub-angular stone fragments together with fragments of brick, tile and concrete.
- 3.1.25 Sealing both 201 and 202 was a layer of dark grey sandy silt loam, 0.35m in depth, the present day topsoil (200).

3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 Fragments of brick were recovered from layers 5, 6, 7 and 201. The majority of the fragments were too small to be diagnostic, while a number of the large pieces date to the mid 19th century onwards. These were identified on site but not retained.
- 3.2.2 A number of transfer-printed creamware and glazed earthenware shreds of pottery were recovered, again dating to the same period.



3.3 Environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were observed during the course of the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The watching brief showed that approximately two thirds of the development site has been disturbed or truncated down to the level of the natural deposits by the construction of the earlier car park.
- 4.1.2 Within the service trench, the solid natural geology of the area, the limestone cornbrash (4), was observed at roughly the same depth throughout the area of the development site. Layer 3 is likely to be a buried ploughsoil. The presence of abraded brick fragments suggests that it is probably post-medieval in date and relates to agricultural use of the land prior to the spread of Bicester southwards in the 19th century.
- 4.1.3 The composition of Layer 2 is also suggestive of a worked soil. The dating evidence recovered from the deposit also indicates that it is post-medieval in date. Given the site's location this may relate to later garden or horticultural activity. Layer 1 is modern hardstanding.
- 4.1.4 Within the areas of ground reduction for the access road and new car park the limestone cornbrash, 4, was again observed throughout the area. Within these areas it was overlaid by a layer of reddish brown small fragmented stone (5) forming the weathered upper surface of the cornbrash.
- 4.1.5 The composition of Layer 6 is similar to that of layer 3 and may be a possible continuation of the same ploughing activity. Similarly Layer 7 is a probable continuation of layer 2.
- 4.1.6 Within the last phase of ground reduction in the north-west corner of the site the natural deposits were not exposed. It is probable that layer 204 is equivalent to layers 3 and 6. The linear features are probable foundations, perhaps from a shed or possibly a green house. The composition of layers 201 and 202 suggests that they are layers of made ground, probably spreads of material excavated during the construction of the earlier hospital. Layer 200 is a landscaping layer.
- 4.1.7 No evidence for any activity pre-dating the post-medieval period was observed during the course of the watching brief, either in the form of truncated features or of residual finds. The ditches recorded in the 2003 evaluation were not observed during the ground reduction within either the car park area or during the service trenching.
- 4.1.8 It is unclear why this was so, but differences between the stratigraphy recorded in the 2003 evaluation and in the 2013 excavations may suggest that this area of the site had since been truncated, with the hardstanding now recorded as being directly above the natural. The absence of the natural layer 5 within the area of the service trenching suggests that the western part of the site has been subject either to deep cultivation or to modern disturbance which may have been disturbed or destroyed such evidence.

APPENDIX A. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Length	Comments	Finds	Date
1	Layer	Up to 0.2m	> 10m	> 60m	Hardcore, car park surface	-	C20th
2	Layer	Up to 0.25m	> 10m	> 60m	Worked soil	Pottery, glass brick	C19th/ C20th
3	Layer	0.2m – 0.3m	> 10m	> 60m	Worked soil, possibly made ground	Pottery, brick	C19th
4	Layer	> 0.5m	> 60m	> 85m	Natural, Cornbrash	-	-
5	Layer	0.12m – 0.2m	> 10m	> 20m	Weathered natural	-	-
6	Layer	Up to 0.18m	> 10m	> 20m	Worked soil, possibly medieval ploughsoil?	-	-
7	Layer	0.3m – 0.5m	> 10m	> 60m	Worked soil	Pottery, brick, glass	C19th
200	Layer	0.35m	> 8.5m	> 24m	Landscaping layer	Pottery, glass, brick	C19th/ C20th
201	Layer	0.1m	> 8.5m	> 24m	Made ground	Pottery, brick, concrete	C19th/ C20th
202	Layer	0.14m	> 8.5m	> 24m	Made ground	Stone	C19th/ C20th
203	Layer	0.1m	> 8.5m	> 24m	Worked soil	Pottery, brick, bone	C19th/ C20th
204	Layer	>0.2m	> 8.5m	> 24m	Worked soil	Stone	C19th/ C20th
205	Deposit	> 0.2m	0.65m	12m	Bands of hardcore 2.5m apart, possible foundations for shed or Greenhouse?	Stone	C19th/ C20th



APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- | | |
|---|--|
| Oxford Archaeology, 2010 | Bicester Community Hospital, Bicester. Oxfordshire: Archaeological Desk Based Assessment |
| Oxford Archaeology, 2012 | Bicester Community Hospital, Bicester. Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief |
| Oxfordshire County Council, 2102 | Bicester College Hospital: Design Brief for Archaeological Watching Brief |
| Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 1998 | St. Mary's School and Caesars Lodge, Piggy Lane, Bicester, Oxfordshire: An Archaeological Watching Brief |
| Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 2003 | Bicester Cottage Hospital, Kings End, Bicester, Oxfordshire: An Archaeological Evaluation |



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Bicester Community Hospital, Kings End, Bicester, Oxfordshire
Site code:	BICH 12
Grid reference:	Centred at NGR SP 5803 2229
Type of watching brief:	Machine excavation of service trenches, ground reduction and foundations
Date and duration of project:	Between June 2013 and February 2014
Area of site:	Approximately 0.6 Hectare
Summary of results:	<p>The watching brief confirmed some the findings of a previous evaluation of the site, with observations showing that the majority of the site had been disturbed or truncated down to the level of the underlying cornbarsh.</p> <p>Two ditches, of possible Roman date, recorded during the previous evaluation, were not observed during the current works. It is possible that changes to the existing car park in the intervening period may have disturbed these deposits.</p> <p>A buried ploughsoil and a possible garden soil, both likely to be of post-medieval date, were recorded underlying modern made ground deposits in parts of the site.</p> <p>No significant archaeology was encountered.</p>
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at Janus House and will be archived with the Oxfordshire County Museum Service under the Accession Number: OXCMS:2012.155



Scale 1: 25,00

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Figure 1: Site location

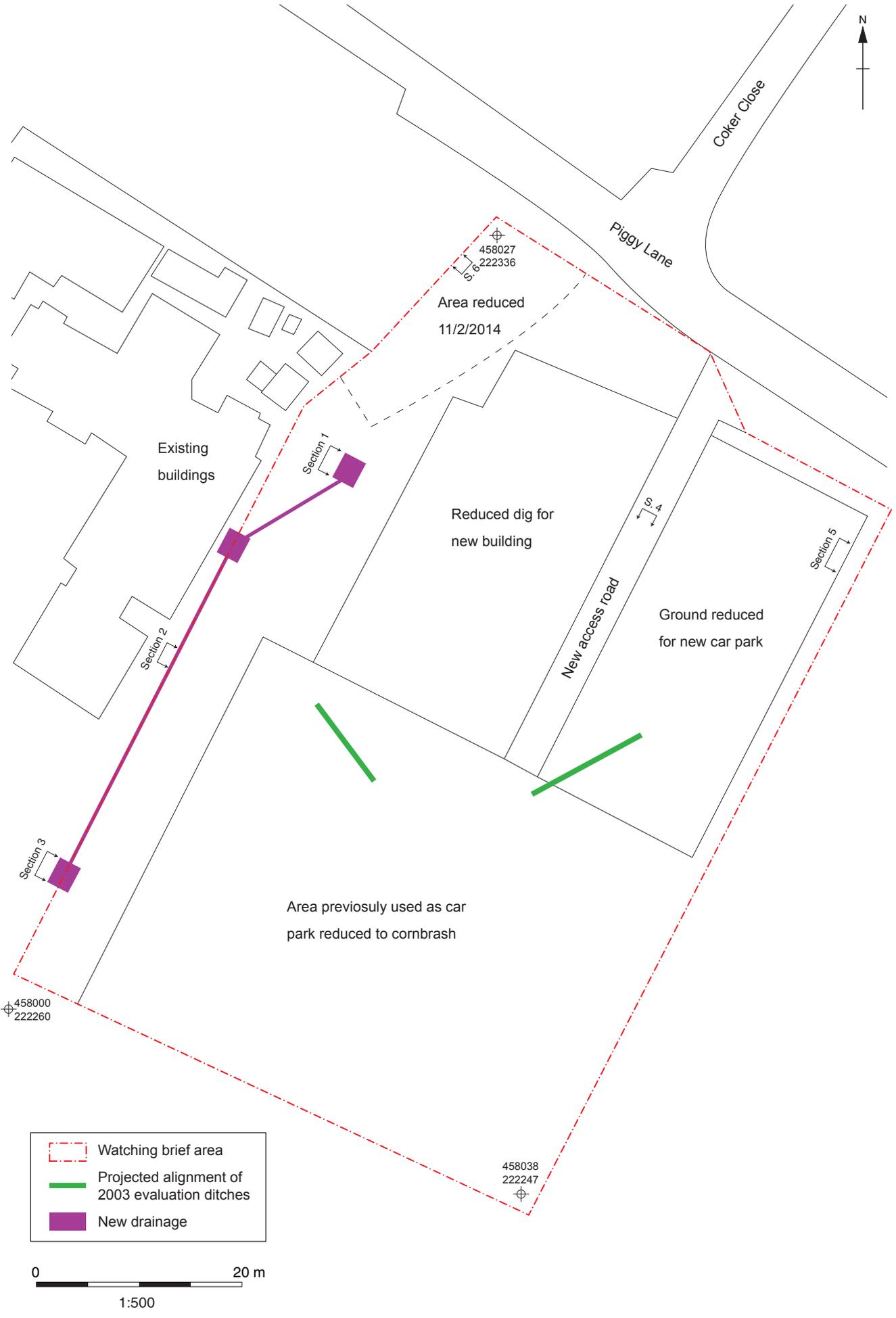
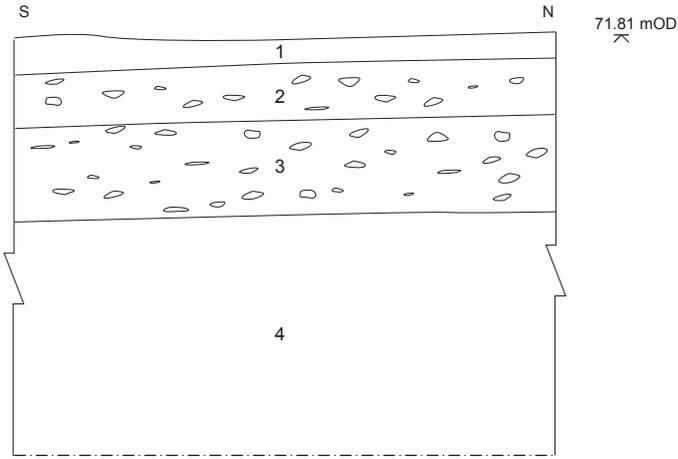


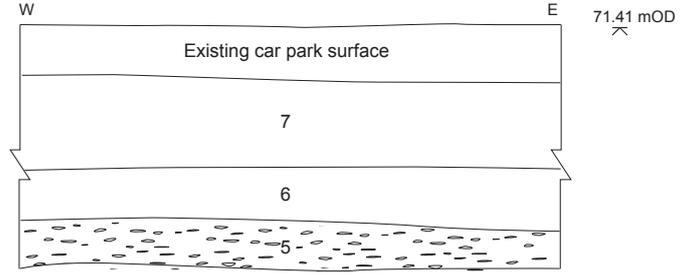
Figure 2: Site plan



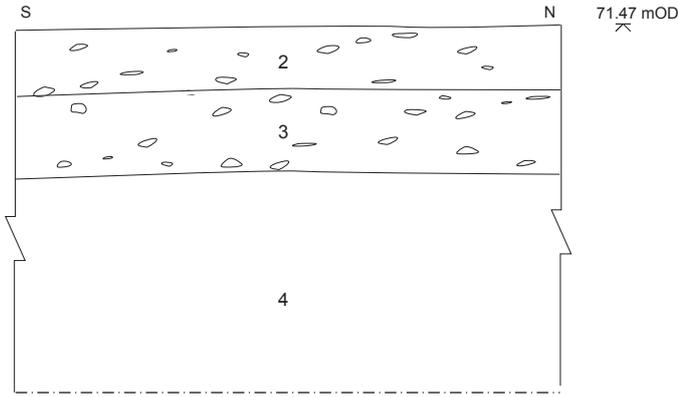
Section 1



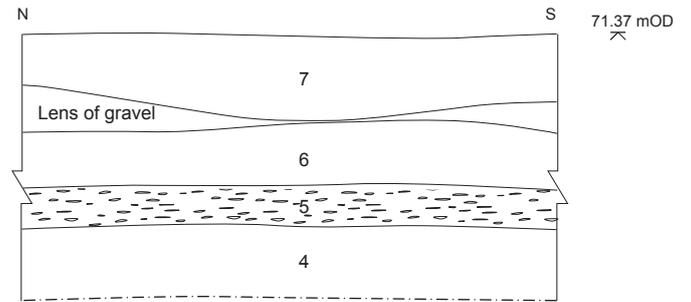
Section 4



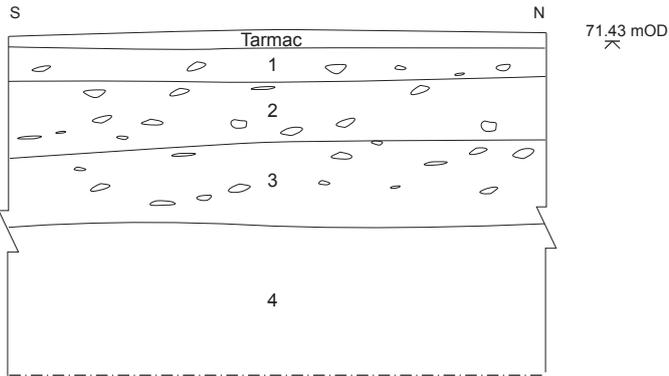
Section 2



Section 5



Section 3



Section 6

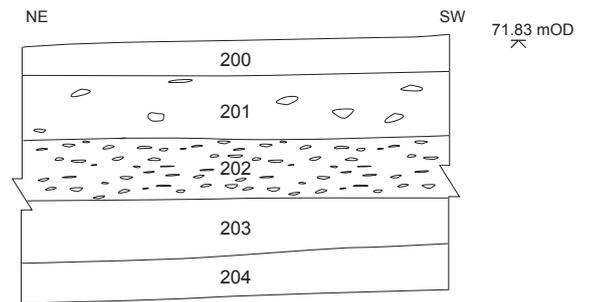


Figure 3: Sections



Plate 1: Section 4



Plate 2: Section 5



Plate 3: Section 6



Plate 4: Surface of weathered cornbrash



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