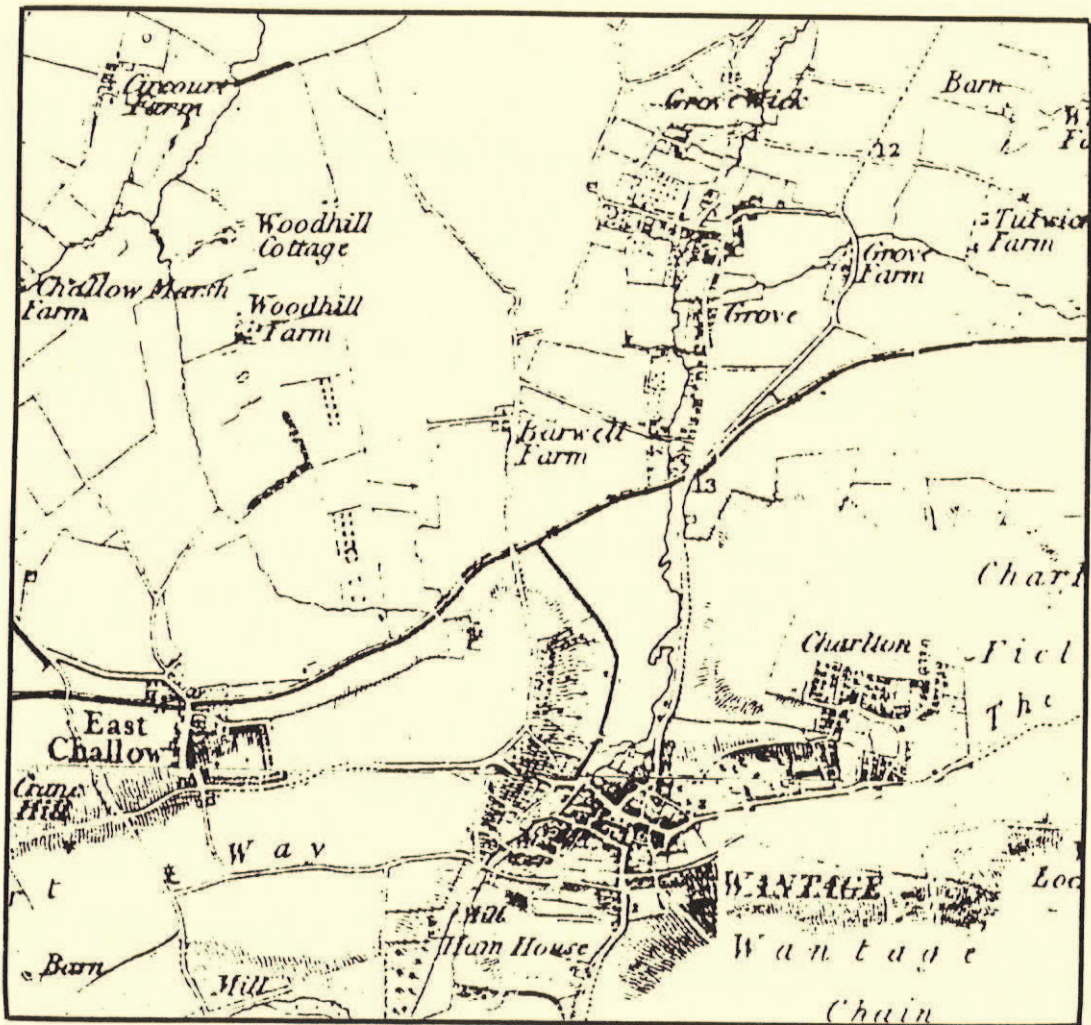


# Land adjacent to 58, Mill Street, Wantage

NGR SU 3956 8806

Archaeological Watching Brief



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

February 1996

58 MILL STREET, WANTAGE,  
OXFORDSHIRE

(WAMST 96)

SU 3960 8809

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Table of contexts, Roman pottery report, Illustrations

## SUMMARY

An evaluation in advance of planning determination was carried out at 58 Mill Street, Wantage by the Oxford Archaeological Unit. No significant archaeological deposits were detected.

## INTRODUCTION

This report has been commissioned by Ibis Project Managers on behalf of the Thames Valley Housing Association, and requested by the local planning authority in support of an application for planning permission for housing. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a brief produced by Oxfordshire County Archaeologist and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by the OAU.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The reasons for commissioning the work were to assess the potential for Roman, Saxon and medieval activity (which was reasonably expected to be present given the location of the site).

The site lies between Roman and Saxon sites located around the Letcombe Brook, which flows to the S of the site (see Fig. 1). The site slopes to the S and drops around 0.7 m

In 1993 and 1994 a series of excavations by the Trust for Wessex Archaeology and the Cotswold Archaeological Trust at 76 Mill Street located 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century enclosures, wells and palisades. A 2<sup>nd</sup> century aisled building was also recorded which was replaced by a 3<sup>rd</sup> century stone building. Fifth to eighth century pottery and loomweights were recovered indicating Saxon occupation. (SU 395881)

Other Romano-British artefacts have been recovered to the N on the hillside overlooking the town. Significant Roman activity has been located to the N along the line of the Roman Road.

Wantage was of some importance in the Saxon period. There was a Royal Villa (Asser states that King Alfred the Great was born in a *Villa Regia* in AD 849). In AD 990 Ethelred summoned his council there and the *Witan* met there in AD 997. In AD 1006 Wantage was destroyed in a Danish Raid.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

The percentage of the site which was investigated 2.3 % (75.2 square metres). There is no reason to believe that the site has been significantly disturbed by 19th century and modern activity. At present the site is covered concrete and used as a mobile home repair yard which slightly limited the sample for evaluation.

The initial two trenches (as long as practicable in the space, one 30 m and one 17 m long) were positioned to prospect for archaeological material. These were to be machined in spits down to the top of the geological subsoil (greensand and gault clay) and monitored and hand cleaned for archaeological material. As the trenches were deeper than the limit for shoring alternate deep and shallow sections were dug and the trenches backfilled in the same working day in accordance with standard OAU safety practice when shoring is not available. One environmental sample was taken.

Trenches were recorded using the OAU standard procedure; contexts in Trench 1 were assigned numbers 101 on and those in Trench 2 201 on etc.

## DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS

(also see Table of contexts, pottery and environmental reports in appendices)

### Layers

Five layers were seen in both trenches. The lowest 106/206 was a pale grey clay which is the natural gault clay subsoil. The other layers varied slightly (see illustrations and table in appendices, NB not all layers were drawn on section due to the deep parts of the trench being unavailable for recording due to safety practice) from a basic brown silty clay. The sequence was capped by concrete.

### Environmental

One sample was taken from layer 105. This was washed over fine mesh sieves by Dr Mark Robinson of the Environmental Unit, University Museum, Oxford. No plant remains were found. Snail shells were found (see table). The variety of habitat which this assemblage of snails suggests is not inconsistent with a occasionally flooded site with mixed vegetation which is also waterlogged for most of the year by ground water from springs. The only significant difference from the snail assemblage from the similar Roman site uphill is the presence of *Bithinia tentaculata*, which is an aquatic species, and is only found in flowing water. The particle size of the soil which was sieved also suggests flowing water as large grains of sand were found in the clays; these are likely to have been deposited by a stream. However, large calcareous particles in the sample were formed in the deposit by slowly seeping ground water.

SPECIES	HABITAT
<i>Bithinia tentaculata</i>	flowing water
<i>Piscidium</i>	flowing/stagnant water
<i>Lymnia truncatula</i>	flowing/stagnant water
<i>Planorbis-Anisus</i>	flowing/standard water
<i>Vertigo antivertigo</i>	marsh/wet grassland
<i>Discus rotundatus</i>	woodland
<i>Vallonia pulchella</i>	open country

### Finds

Twenty sherds of pottery were recovered from the evaluation of which 16 were Roman (see report in appendices). However, medieval and modern material was also recovered from all these layers. There were no associated features noted with these finds in the trenches.

The Roman pottery was in good condition and not abraded. It ranged in date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century. A southern Spanish amphora sherd, five samian sherds and a fineware sherd were among those recovered.

Although this assemblage is small the composition suggests either a high status site or from a site adjacent to a major road.

### **Subsoil**

No greensand was detected over the gault clay which was found in both trenches.

### **DEPOSIT SURVEY**

The site slopes from the N to the S dropping around 0.7 m (from c 84.1 to c 83.4 m OD). The part of the site next to the road was flat (c 83 m OD) but not available for evaluation.

It is likely (but unproven) that the 19th century house by the road may have truncated the subsoil and any archaeological deposits. The extent and nature of this truncation is unknown.

The evaluation trenches showed a build-up of recent deposits. Consultation of maps and other documents held by Oxfordshire County Council indicate that there were no houses along Mill Street until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that the area to the rear was orchards. The spur of the Berkshire and Wiltshire canal which served Wantage ended immediately to the E of the site and the stream crossing the site to the rear of the houses fronting on to Mill Street may have been a feeder for the canal. It is possible that the proximity of flowing water accounts for the presence of aquatic molluscs in what would otherwise be deposits formed by slow hillwash caused by waterlogging from a stream or spring. However, it is possible that the snail shells accumulated over a considerable time and represent change from glaciation onwards

## Appendices

### Table of Contexts

CTX	DESCRIPTION	LENGTH	WIDTH	DEPTH	DATE
101	concrete raft and building rubble			0.5	med
102	dark brown silty clay			0.14	Roman (7) , medieval (1),19th-century (1), 1 brick
103	grey brown silt			0.19	Roman (3), 19th-century (1),1 brick
104	brown grey clay silt			0.25+	Roman (1), 16th- to 17th-century (1)
105	dark grey brown clay			0.12	
106	grey clay			-	
201	concrete raft and building rubble			0.5	
202	dark brown silty clay			0.2	
203	grey brown silt			0.34	
204	brown grey clay silt			0.4	
205	dark grey brown clay	0.3		0.3	Roman (3), 18th- 19th century (1)
206	grey clay			-	

#### The Roman Pottery by Paul Booth

A total of 20 sherds was recovered from the site. Sixteen of these were of Roman date, 1 probably medieval and 3 post-medieval. Four contexts produced dating material (102, 103, 104 and 204). Post-medieval material, either pottery or brick/tile, was present in all of these contexts, so it is likely that all the Roman material was redeposited.

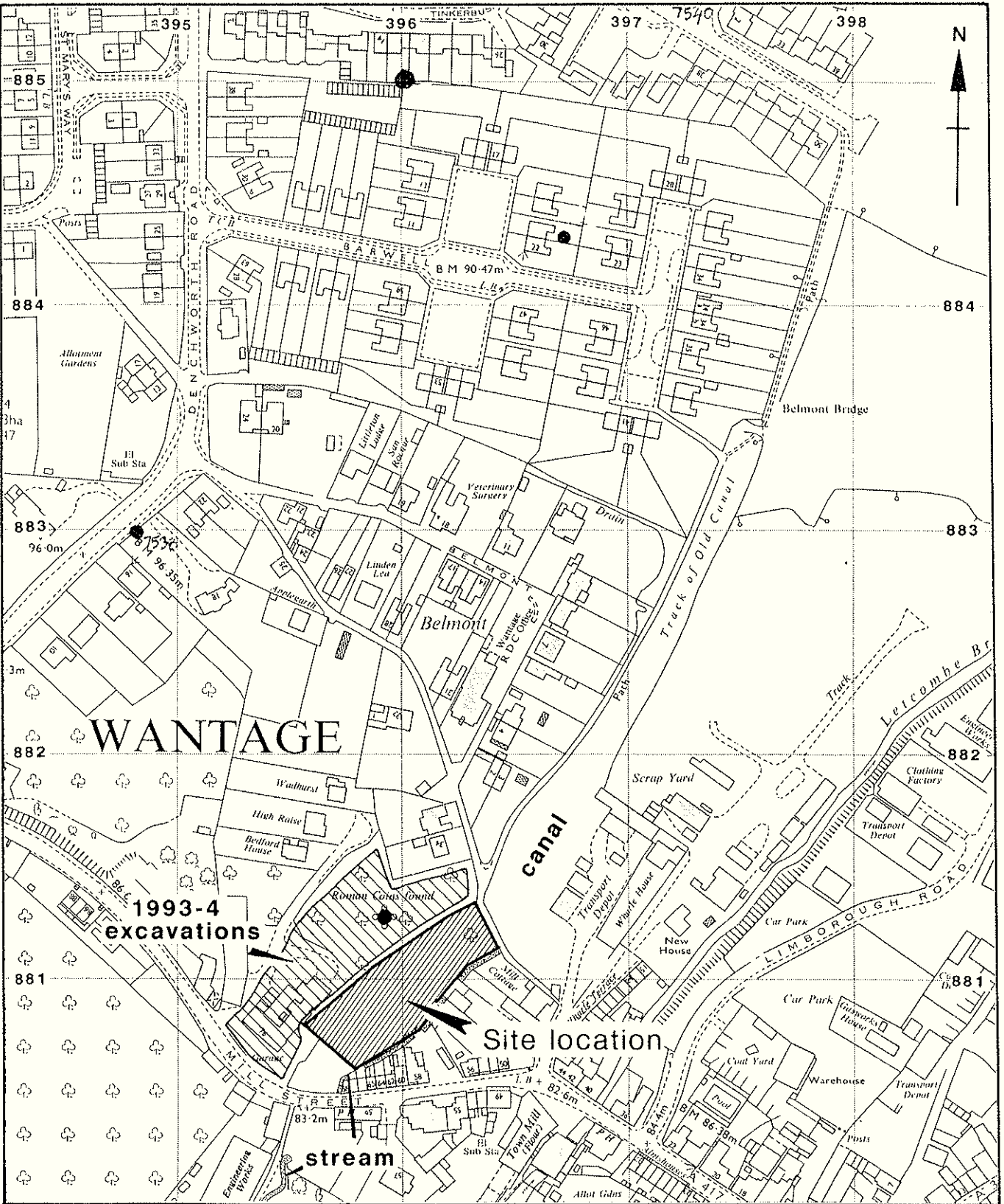
Despite this the pottery was in good condition. Sherds were variable in size but were not abraded. The Roman material was recorded by major ware group as follows:

MAJOR WARE GROUP	NUMBER OF SHERDS
Samian wares	5
Fine ware (New forest colour-coated ware)	1
amphora (South Spanish)	1
reduced (grey) wares (various fabrics)	9

The samian ware was all Central Gaulish, with one piece possibly from Les Martres-de-Veyre. This was a Drag 27 cup which had been repaired in antiquity. Other forms included ?Curle 11 and at least one decorated bowl (2 fragments). The reduced wares included probable Savernake material as well as less diagnostic fabrics. There was only one rim, from a jar form. A base sherd in a distinctive (but unsourced) heavily flint-tempered fabric was perhaps from a bowl or dish.

The Roman material ranges from 2<sup>nd</sup> century to late 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century, the latter date being indicated by the New Forest fine ware sherd. The reduced coarse wares are not closely datable within this range.

The composition of the group, with a high proportion of samian ware with amphora also represented, is unusual in a rural context. However, the sherd total is low and comments on the assemblage are therefore of limited value. It is almost certain that the material has been deposited from the adjacent site. in date from the 11th/12th century to the 13th century.



SU3988

scale 1:2500

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Figure 1



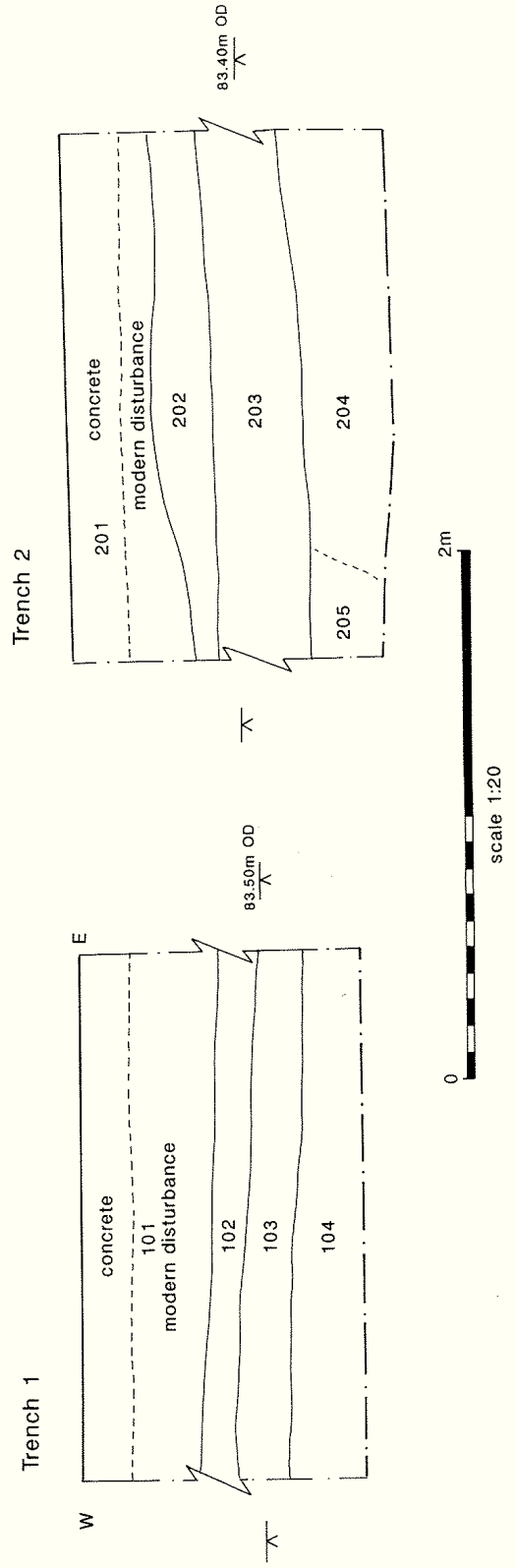
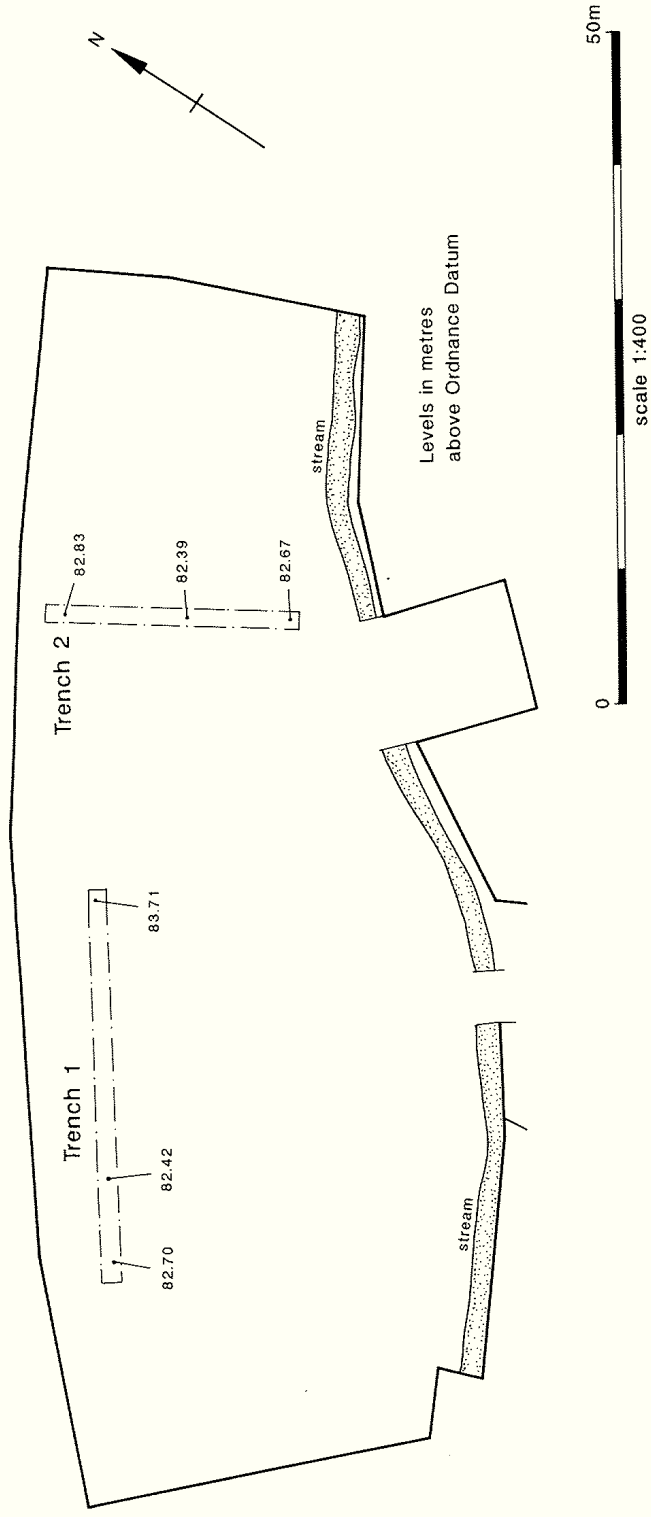


Figure 2



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