

WS Atkins Consultants Ltd

FOXLEY FARM  
EYNHAM  
OXFORDSHIRE

*ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

NGR SP 4190 0808

Planning Application No. W9911098

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September 2001

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Prepared by: Robin Bashford Date: September 2001
Checked by: <i>A. Hardy</i> Date: <i>21.9.01</i>
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*Summary*

*Between November 2000 and September 2001, the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Foxley Farm, Eynsham (SP4190 0808). A number of archaeological features were observed during the groundwork for the development and included a partially exposed Bronze Age ring ditch, a cremation and numerous pits and post-holes.*

**1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Permission had been granted by West Oxfordshire District Council for the demolition of the existing house and outbuildings and construction of a new house, garages, a store and garden wall with an additional programme of landscaping including the remodelling of the lake (W9911098). Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological deposits, a condition for an archaeological watching brief was attached to the permission, in line with PPG16 and local plan policy. The development site (Fig. 1) lies approximately 1.5 kilometres to the south west of Eynsham and west of the B4449 running from Eynsham to Stanton Harcourt (NGR SP 4190 0808). It lies at approximately 65 metres OD with the underlying limestone gravel overlain by a fine loam. At present the development is an open space adjacent to the existing farmhouse.

**2 BACKGROUND**

2.1 The site of proposed development is located between the two component parts of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 119), a large and important group of cropmarks, the majority of which are interpreted as Bronze Age ring ditches and Iron Age and Romano British enclosures and settlements. Elements of these features extend beyond the scheduled areas.

- 2.2 Aerial photography has identified pits and an oval enclosure in the vicinity of the farm; these features are undoubtedly related to the scheduled crop marks. Additional evidence of prehistoric and Iron Age activity in the form of pottery has also been found nearby.
- 2.3 The remodelling of the lake was of particular interest as the existing lake lies within Foxley Farm gravel pit which was excavated in the 1930's by E.T Leeds. The excavation (Oxoniensia, 1938, p.7-30) revealed a Bronze Age Beaker cemetery consisting of at least eighteen crouched inhumations.

### 3 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS

- 3.1.1 To record the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of archaeological remains within the entire area affected by development.
- 3.1.2 If exceptional archaeological remains were discovered, for which the resources allocated were insufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard, the OAU would signal to all parties that such an archaeological find had been made.
- 3.1.3 To make available the results of the investigation.

### 4 METHODOLOGY

#### 4.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 4.1.1 The watching brief was undertaken on all areas of ground disturbance, specifically:
- The excavation of the strip foundations for the Coach House
  - The landscaping of the existing lake
  - The excavation of gravel within the footprint of the main building

#### 4.2 Recording

- 4.2.1 Archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100, sections were drawn at 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson, 1992).

### 5 RESULTS

There were three phases of groundwork on the development site (Fig. 2).

#### 5.1 THE COACH HOUSE (AREA 1 - Fig. 3 (Plan): Fig. 5, Sections 1-4)

- 5.1.1 The first phase was the excavation of strip foundation trenches for the garages, store and garden wall (The 'Coach House') to the north of the proposed new house.

5.1.2 The strip foundations consisted of a series of trenches approximately 0.80 m wide and 0.90 m in depth. A sandy loam topsoil (3) measuring c 0.30 m thick directly overlay the limestone gravel (Context 1; Sections 1 and 2). A north-east / south-west aligned ditch (6) was observed in section (Sections 3 and 4) in the eastern foundation trench of the garden wall. The fills comprised a primary fill of loose gravel (7) overlain by a c 0.1 m thick mid reddish brown silty clay deposit (8) in turn overlain by a mid-light grey sandy silt (9) which formed the main fill of the ditch.

## 5.2 THE LAKE (AREA 2 - Fig. 4, 4a and 4b (Plans): Figs 7-13, Sections 5-36)

5.2.1 The second phase of groundwork encompassed the remodelling of the lake. This involved the removal of topsoil over an area approximately 110 m x 60 m, followed by the extraction of the underlying gravel to create a batter between the new house and the existing lake.

5.2.2 Once the area was stripped, it revealed a number of potential archaeological features including a partially exposed ring ditch (group 98), numerous post-holes ('structures' 23, 105 and 106), a cremation (58), two east-west aligned gullies (groups 107 and 108) and a series of pits (eg.83).

5.2.3 The ring ditch (Group 98 - Figs 4 and 7) is likely to form part of the Bronze Age barrow cemetery identified from crop marks which are protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 119). Three slots were excavated across the exposed section of ring ditch in the north west corner of Area 2 (Fig. 7, Sections 21, 34 and 35). The ditch was approximately 2.5 m in width and a maximum of 1 m deep. The edges sloped gradually at c40° to a break of slope and then at c60° to a roughly V-shaped base. Several fills were observed, although none were deemed suitable for environmental sampling, the majority being a mixture of clay, fine silt and re-deposited gravel (Contexts 47-52, 91-97, 99-102) - presumably originating from erosion of the barrow and the subsequent silting up of the ditch.

5.2.4 Numerous post-holes were observed and planned within Area 2 (Fig. 4), and a number of them appeared to define structures. Structure 106 (Figs 4, 4a and 9), to the south of the site was approximately rectangular in plan. Three of the post-holes forming this 'structure' were excavated (10, 12 and 14) and one (14) produced two pottery sherds which were possibly Neolithic in date. The fills were composed of a mid grey-brown clay silt with 10% gravel inclusions (11, 13 and 15 respectively).

5.2.5 Post holes associated with two other potential structures (23 and 105) were also recorded. Some of the post holes defining Structure 23 (Figs 4, 4b and 8) were excavated (25, 27, 29, 33 and 35) and were between 0.5 and 0.65 m in length by 0.3 and 0.5 m wide and 0.3 and 0.5 m deep. All had similar fills composed of a

mid grey-brown clay silt with between 15 and 20% gravel inclusions (26, 28, 30, 34 and 36 respectively). Other post holes associated with this structure were also excavated and may have formed a separate structure (Structure 105 - see Discussion 6.1). Post holes 16, 21, 78 and 80 (Fig. 8: Sections 8, 10, 11 and 32) were of varying dimensions (ref. Fig. 8) although contained similar fills, predominantly a mid grey-brown clay silt with 10-15% gravel inclusions (Contexts 17, 22, 79, and 81 respectively). No finds were recovered from any of these features.

5.2.6 A cremation burial within a circular cut (58) was excavated immediately to the south of 23 and 105 (Figs 4 and 12). This produced no finds other than cremated bone and attributing a date to the cremation is therefore problematic.

5.2.7 Two east-west aligned, segmented gullies were also recorded (Figs 4 and 13, Groups 107 and 108). Sections were excavated across the termini of the gully segments (61, 74 and 76) although no finds were recovered. The fills differed from those of the other features excavated in that they were predominantly composed of a mixed deposit of mid brown clay silt and sandy gravel (Contexts 62, 63, 75 and 77).

5.2.8 A number of sub-circular features were also excavated (Fig. 10: Sections 9, 20, 27 and 36; Features 41, 44, 66, 68, 70, 72 and 103). Most of these were well defined, including feature 18 (Section 9) which was interpreted as a tree throw hole (see below). Of the remaining 'pits' excavated, all had very sterile mid brown clay silt fills, and their function is unclear. The exception to this was 83 (Fig. 11) which was approximately 0.80 m in depth and was vertically sided with a flat base. The lower fills (84 and 86) contained a high concentration of charcoal, bone, pottery (including several sherds of Grooved Ware), burnt flint and burnt stone. The lower fills were overlain by re-deposited gravel (87, 88 and 89) which appears to have been a deliberate deposition. This in turn was overlain by a mid brown clay silt deposit (90) similar to the sterile fills of the other 'pits' excavated.

5.2.9 A series of large features was observed in the north-east corner of Area 2. The majority of these were well defined in plan. A half section was excavated across one of these potential pits (Context 18, Fig. 10, Section 9), the edges of which were found to be quite irregular. Additionally, the limestone gravel through which it cut was badly disturbed. The upper fill (20) was very sterile and contained considerably more clay than the fills of the other features excavated. Consequentially, 18 was interpreted as a tree throw pit.

5.2.10 The remaining features in this corner of the site had a similar upper fill to 18 (20), and whilst some of the more regularly shaped features were partially excavated, no further recording was deemed necessary. Before the gravel was

extracted from the north-east corner of Area 2, the fills of these features were removed so that the quality of the gravel was not compromised. The removal of these deposits was closely monitored and no evidence that these represented archaeological features was observed.

5.2.11 A large area of re-deposited clay natural (which underlies the gravel) was also observed in this corner of Area 2 and was interpreted as the western extent of the gravel pit which had subsequently been backfilled.

5.2.12 A post-medieval linear feature (Group 57: Cuts 53 and 55) was also recorded to the east of the ring ditch (Fig. 10, Sections 22 and 23) and was interpreted as a possible plough furrow.

### 5.3 THE MAIN BUILDING AND ASSOCIATED WORK (AREA 3 - Fig. 3 & Sect 37, Fig. 6)

5.3.1 Topsoil was removed from the area within the footprint of the main building prior to the excavation of the gravel for the new basement. One undated pit was observed and recorded in plan and section (Figs 3 and 6). No other features were observed in this area.

5.3.2 Additional excavation was carried out during the construction of a new access road and installation of services associated with the new buildings. The southern extent of the quarry pit was evident from a deposit of 20th-century material (Fig. 2). In addition, a number of potential archaeological features were recorded in plan (Fig. 2) but were not recorded in detail as characterisation of the features was not possible given the limited impact of the trench.

### 5.4 FINDS

#### POTTERY

*Alistair Barclay*

5.4.1 A total of 18 sherds of prehistoric and Roman date were recovered during the Watching Brief. Most sherds were small and in a worn condition and with the exception of those from a Grooved Ware pit could all be considered residual.

5.4.2 The most significant sherds were recovered from pit context 84. These consisted of refitting sherds from a single decorated Grooved Ware bowl in a typical shell-tempered fabric. The decoration consists of horizontal plain and chain link cordons typical of the Woodlands substyle that can be paralleled with finds from Cassington and elsewhere in the Upper Thames Valley (Case 1982; Barclay 1999). Other earlier prehistoric pottery came from contexts 13 and 52. The two small crumbs of pottery from context 13 have a laminated fracture and sand and ?flint temper and could be of Neolithic date, perhaps Peterborough Ware. Two grog tempered sherds from context 52 are of broad



late Neolithic/early Bronze Age date, while this context also contained Roman sherds in fabrics R and R 37 and another small and very worn sherd of indeterminate date. Context 51 contained a small and worn sherd of Roman Grey Ware.

## 5.5 ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS

### ASSESSMENT OF THE CHARRED PLANT REMAINS

*Dana Challinor*

#### INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

5.5.1 Two soil samples were taken during the watching brief for the recovery of charred plant remains. The features sampled were a Neolithic pit and an undated human cremation burial. The volume of soil processed varied - the cremation sample was only 6 litres in size and the pit sample measured 18 litres. The samples were processed by flotation using a modified Siraf-type machine and the resultant flots were dried and scanned under a binocular microscope at x10 to x20 magnification. Fragments of charcoal were randomly extracted, fractured and examined in transverse section. Ring-porous taxa, and particularly *Quercus*, are easily recognisable at low magnification, although the identification of diffuse porous taxa (e.g. *Maloideae*, *Prunus* etc.) is tentative.

#### RESULTS

5.5.2 Both flots contained some modern contamination in the form of roots and modern seeds. Molluscs were also present in both flots, but these appeared to be burrowing species. The flot from context 59 was particularly small in size and produced only a few fragments of *Quercus* sp. (oak) charcoal. The flot from the pit (context 84) produced a larger quantity of wood charcoal and included a range of mixed taxa - *Alnus/Corylus* (alder/hazel), *Quercus* sp. and *Maloideae* (hawthorn, apple, pear etc). A small amount of *Corylus* nutshell was also present.

Context	Feature	Sample no.	Sample size (l)	Flot size (ml)	Charcoal	Taxa
59	cremation	1	6	15	+	<i>Quercus</i> sp.
84	pit	2	18	92	+++	<i>Quercus</i> sp. <i>Maloideae</i> <i>Alnus/Corylus</i>

+ = <5, ++ = 5-25, +++ = 25-100, ++++ = >100

Table 1: Summary of sample results

## DISCUSSION

5.5.3 The charcoal from the cremation burial (context 59) is likely to represent the remains of the cremation pyre, and the identification of *Quercus* charcoal is typical of cremation deposits. It has been suggested that the frequency of *Quercus* or *Fraxinus* (ash) in cremation deposits, compared to other species, is a result of the pyre structure; the timber from these trees providing the supports in a central position, less likely to have been totally reduced to ash (Gale 1997, 82). However, the assemblage is too small in size to provide detailed information. The pit sample (context 84) produced a better sized assemblage with a range of taxa, which are all appropriate for the period. The apparent use of mixed taxa as fuelwood may suggest that the wood was not deliberately selected, but gathered randomly from available resources. The presence of hazelnut shell in the assemblage suggests that the charcoal is hazel rather than alder, but it is not possible to distinguish between the two at low magnification. In any case, charred hazelnut shells are commonly found in Neolithic assemblages and may indicate the gathering of wild resources for food.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Attempting to characterise Structures 23 and 105 (Figs 4 and 8) was problematic. Whilst it is difficult to state definitively that 23 is a single structure, the similarity of the dimensions of the post-holes excavated (25, 27, 29, 33 and 35 in particular) would suggest that they belong to the same structure. A number of the remaining post-holes in this area (16, 21, 78 and 80) appear to form a sub-circular structure (105) which encircles 23, and it is possible that 23 represents an internal sub-structure within 105 (see Fig. 4). The similarity of the fills of these post holes - predominantly a mid grey-brown clay silt with 10-20% gravel inclusions - may also suggest that they are contemporary, although many features across the site had a similar fill. Whilst only a sample of the post-holes in Area 2 were excavated, and little dating evidence recovered, it is possible that structures 105, 106 and 23 - together with pit 83 - represent part of a Neolithic settlement which pre-dates both the Beaker cemetery excavated in 1937 and the Barrow cemetery within the scheduled area.

6.2 Whilst the evidence from the post-holes is somewhat tenuous, the Grooved Ware recovered from the associated pit (see 6.3 below) suggests that there was some form of domestic activity within or close to the development site during the Neolithic period.

- 6.3 Feature 83 was interpreted as a rubbish pit which had been partially backfilled and then left to silt up. It is more than likely that a number of the unexcavated pits in the vicinity of 83 had a similar function as they were of a similar dimension and shape in plan.
- 6.4 It is possible that the gullies observed within Area 2 formed a part of an enclosure around 'structures' 23 and 105, perhaps delineating between the structures and the rubbish pit(s) - although this can be no more than conjecture as the extent of the gullies was not revealed and no dating evidence was recovered from either the gullies or the post-holes.
- 6.5 The features observed in the north-east corner of Area 2 were initially thought to be large pits associated with the potential structures to the south, or possibly even grave cuts associated with the Bronze Age cemetery excavated in the 1930's. However, from the location of the burials excavated in the 1930's, it would seem that the majority of the graves were concentrated to the south of the quarry pit and did not extend this far north. If the cemetery did extend westward, it would seem more likely that burials would be encountered to the south-east of Area 2. No such features were observed during the gravel extraction in this area. Whilst the possibility that some of these features may have represented pits cannot be entirely discounted, it can be stated with a reasonable degree of confidence that they represented tree throw pits. The north, south and eastern edges of the existing lake are wooded and it seems likely that the trees once extended around the north western corner of the lake.
- 6.6 The ring ditch (Group 98) is undoubtedly part of the scheduled Barrow cemetery (SAM 119). The majority of the pottery sherds recovered from the upper fills of the ditch were Roman, suggesting that the upper fills were deposited during the Roman period.

**APPENDIX 1      SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS**

**Site name:** Foxley Farm, Eynsham, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** EYFF 00

**Grid reference:** SP 4190 0808 **Type of watching brief:** Foundations for new buildings and landscaping.

**Date and duration of project:** Phased visits during November 2000 and August-September 2001.

**Summary of results:** Evidence for extension of Barrow cemetery (SAM 119) in addition to possible Neolithic settlement.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OAU, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES.

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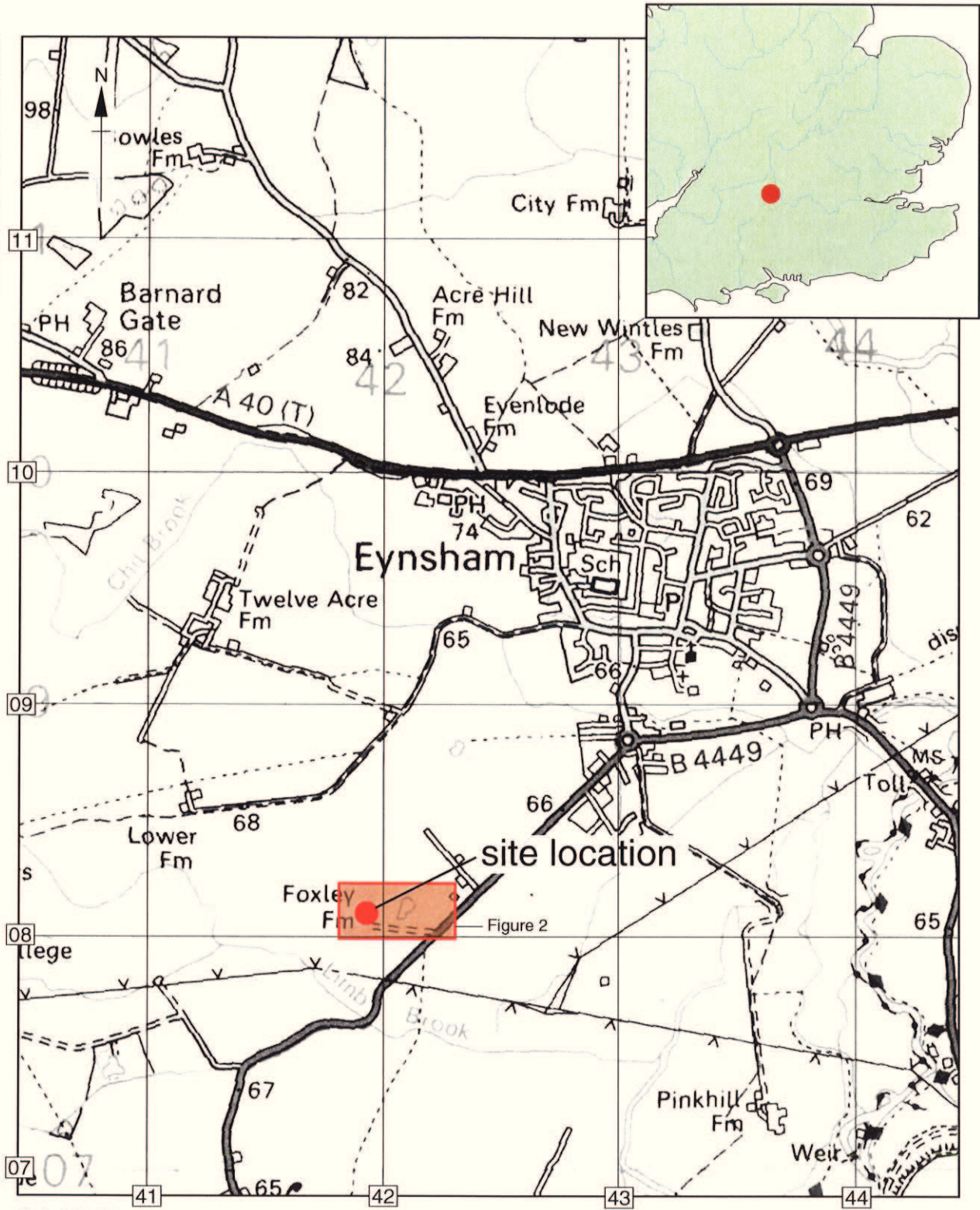
## Context Inventory:

Context	Type	Comment	Finds	Date	Group
1	Layer	Natural Gravel			
2	Layer	Subsoil			
3	Layer	Topsoil			
4	?Cut	Possible Pit		Unknown	
5	Fill	Fill of 4	None		
6	Cut	Ditch		Unknown	
7	Fill	Primary Fill of 6	None		
8	Fill	Secondary Fill of 6	None		
9	Fill	Main Fill of 6	None		
10	Cut	Post Hole		Uncertain	106
11	Fill	Fill of 10	None		
12	Cut	Post Hole		?Neolithic	106
13	Fill	Fill of 12	Pottery	?Neolithic	
14	Cut	Post Hole		Uncertain	106
15	Fill	Fill of 14	None		106
16	Cut	Pit/Post Hole		Unknown	
17	Fill	Fill of 16	None		
18	Cut	Tree Throw Pit			
19	Fill	Fill of 18	None		
20	Fill	Fill of 18	None		
21	Cut	Pit		Unknown	105
22	Fill	Fill of 21	None		
23	Structure/Grp	Cntxts 24-40 & 46		Unknown	
24	Fill	Fill of 46	None		
25	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	23
26	Fill	Fill of 25	None		
27	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	23
28	Fill	Fill of 27	None		
29	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	23
30	Fill	Fill of 29	None		
31	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	23
32	Fill	Fill of 31	None		
33	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	23
34	Fill	Fill of 33	None		
35	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	23
36	Fill	Fill of 35	None		
37	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	23
38	Fill	Fill of 37	None		
39	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	23
40	Fill	Fill of 39	None		
41	Cut	Pit		Unknown	
42	Fill	Fill of 41	None		
43	Fill	Fill of 41	None		
44	Cut	Possible Post Hole		Unknown	
45	Fill	Fill of 44	None		
46	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	23
47	Cut	Ring Ditch		Bronze Age	98

48	Fill	Fill of 47			
49	Fill	Fill of 47			
50	Fill	Fill of 47			
51	Fill	Fill of 47	Pottery	Roman	
52	Fill	Fill of 47	Pottery	Roman and Bronze Age	
53	Cut	Ditch/Furrow		Post Med	57
54	Fill	Fill of 53	Pottery	Post Med	
55	Cut	Ditch/Furrow		Post Med	57
56	Fill	Fill of 55	None		
57	Group	Post Med Furrow?		Post Med	
58	Cut	Cremation Cut		Uncertain	
59	Cremation	Cremation	Bone (60)		
60	Cremated Bone	Cremated Bone			
61	Cut	Gully Terminus		Uncertain	107
62	Fill	Fill of 61	None		
63	Fill	Fill of 61	None		
64	Cut	?Pit		Unknown	
65	Fill	Fill of 64	None		
66	Cut	Pit		Unknown	
67	Fill	Fill of 66	None		
68	Cut	Pit		Unknown	
69	Fill	Fill of 68	None		
70	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	
71	Fill	Fill of 70	None		
72	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	
73	Fill	Fill of 72	None		
74	Cut	Gully Terminus		Unknown	108
75	Fill	Fill of 74	None		
76	Cut	Gully Terminus		Unknown	108
77	Fill	Fill of 76	None		
78	Cut	Post Hole		Unknown	105
79	Fill	Fill of 78	None		
80	Cut	?Post Hole		Unknown	105
81	Fill	Fill of 80	None		
82	Fill	Fill of 78	None		
83	Cut	Rubbish Pit		Neolithic	
84	Fill	Fill of 83	Pottery/ Bone/Flint/ Stone/Burnt Stone	Neolithic	
85	Fill	Fill of 83			
86	Fill	Fill of 83	Pottery/Bone		
87	Fill	Fill of 83			
88	Fill	Fill of 83			
89	Fill	Fill of 83			
90	Fill	Fill of 83			
91	Cut	Ring Ditch		early Bronze Age	98
92	Fill	Fill of 91	None		
93	Fill	Fill of 91	None		
94	Fill	Fill of 91	None		
95	Cut	Ring Ditch		early Bronze	98

				Age	
96	Fill	Fill of 95	None		
97	Fill	Fill of 95	None		
98	Group	Cuts : 47, 91 & 95		early Bronze Age	
99	Fill	Fill of 95	None		
100	Fill	Fill of 95	None		
101	Fill	Fill of 95	None		
102	Fill	Fill of 95	None		
103	Cut	Pit		Uncertain	
104	Fill	Fill of 103	None		
105	Group	?Structure		Uncertain	
106	Group	?Structure		?Neolithic	
107	Group	Segmented Gully		Uncertain	
108	Group	Segmented Gully		Uncertain	





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Figure 1: Site location.

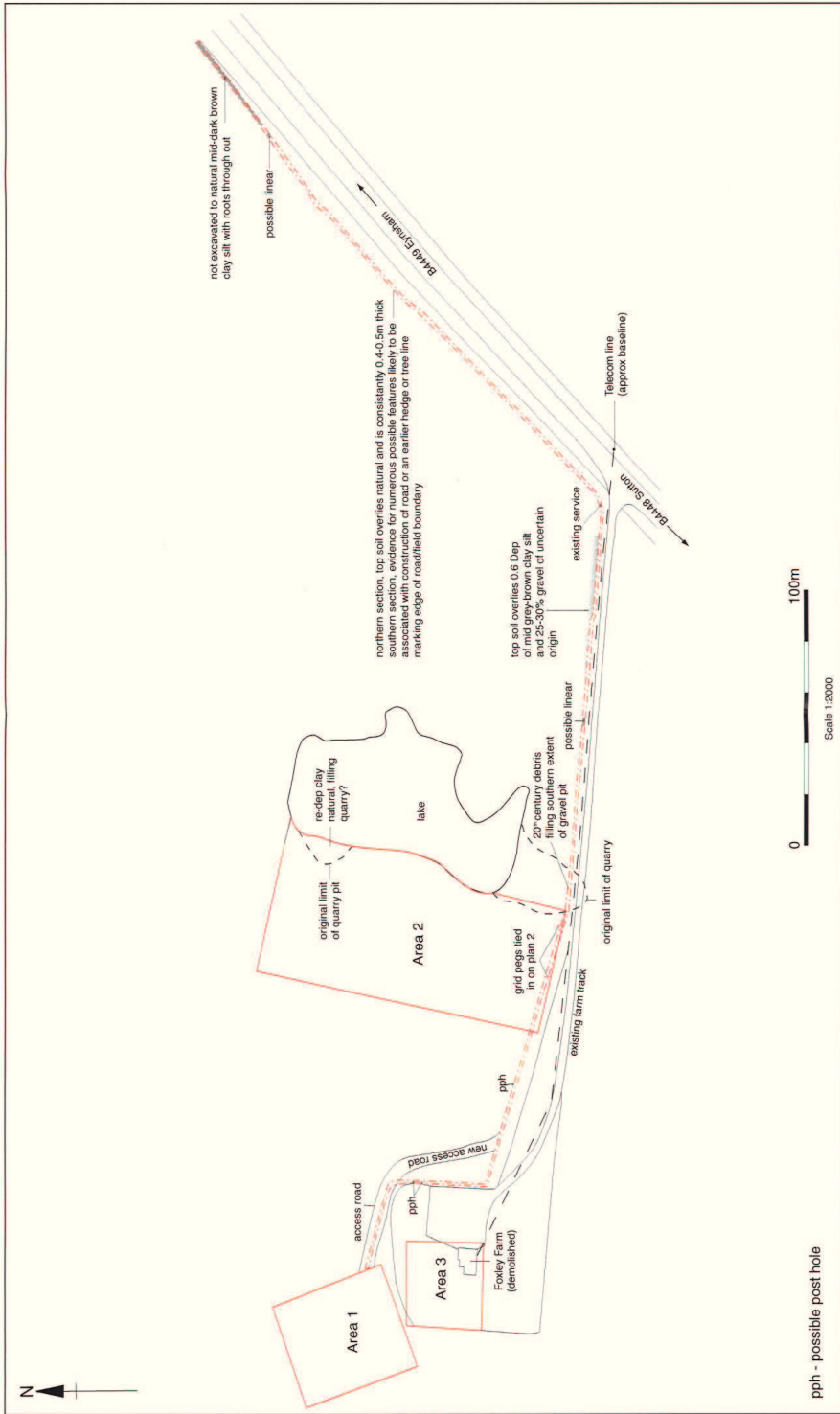


Figure 2 : Overall Site Plan Showing Location of Areas 1-3 and Drainage Trench.

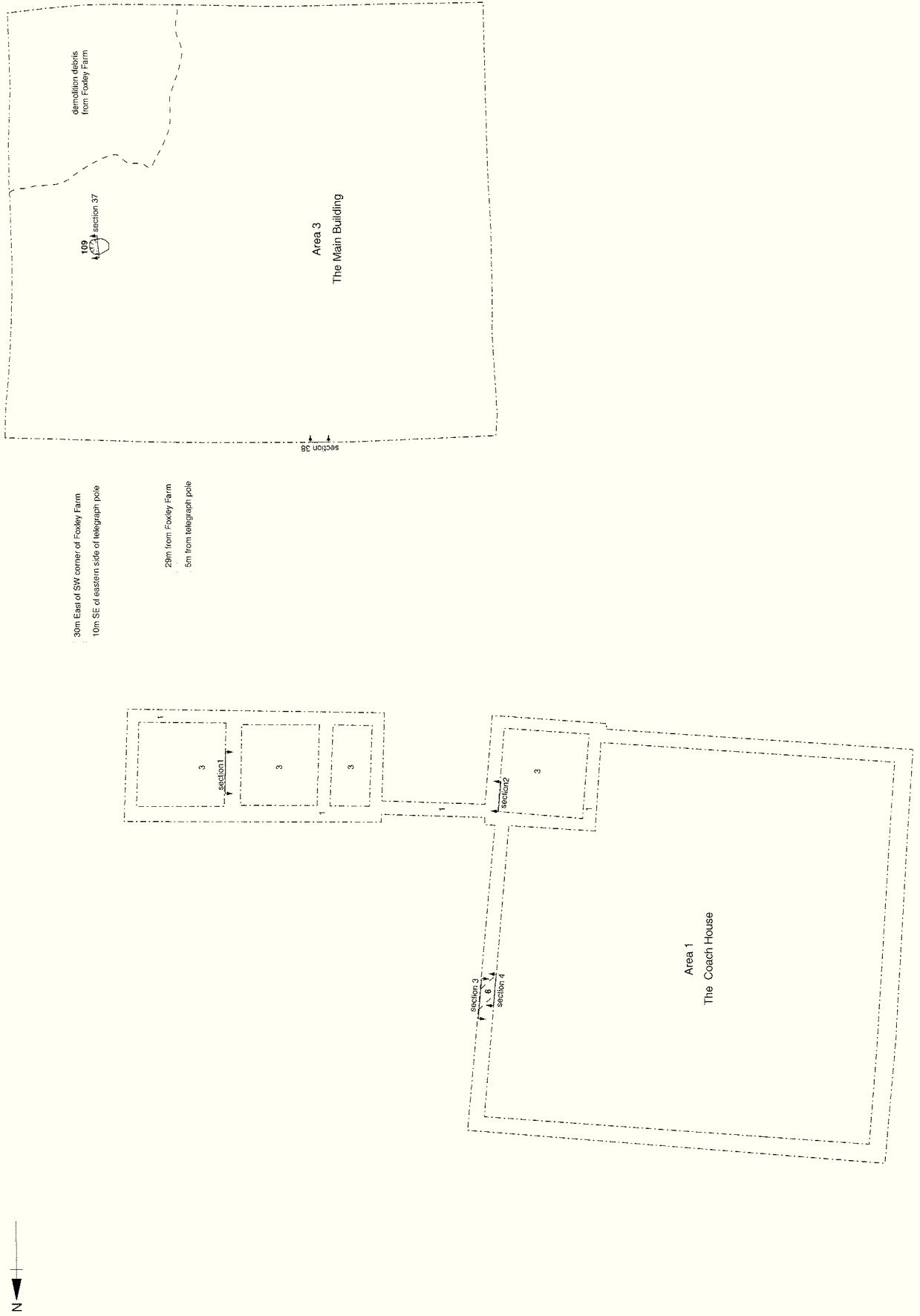
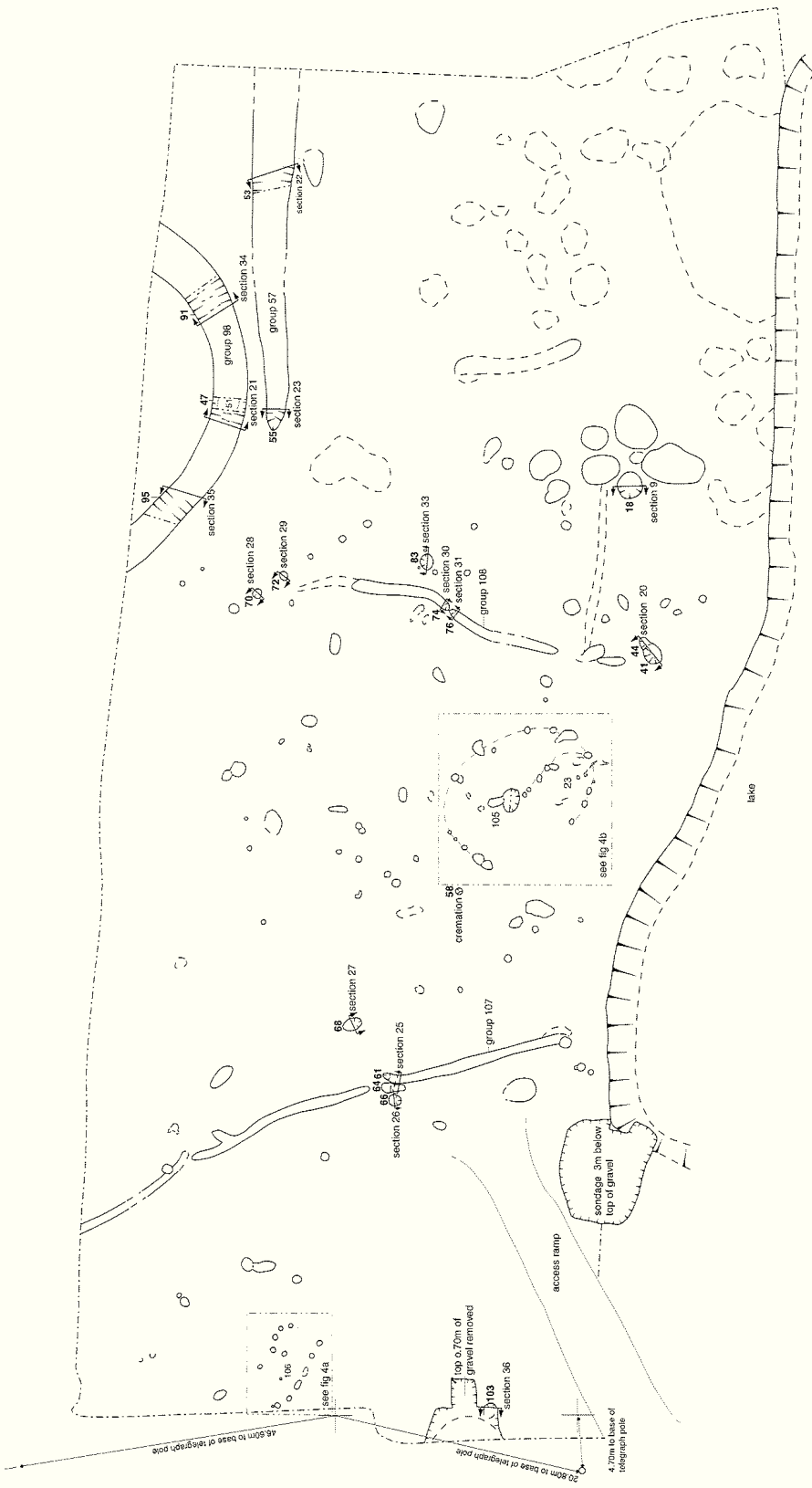
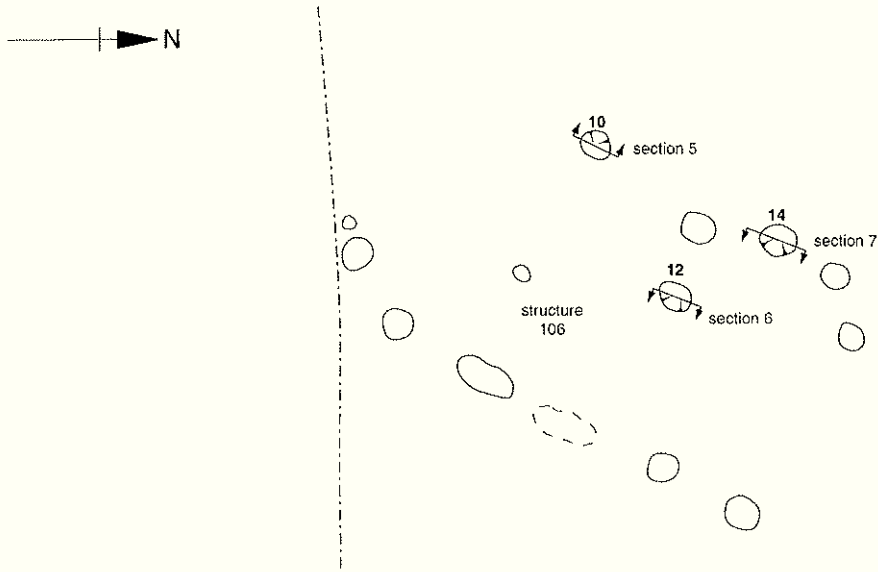


Figure 3 : Plan of Areas 1 and 3.

Figure 4 : Plan of Area 2.



Detail of Area 2 : 4a



Detail of Area 2 : 4b

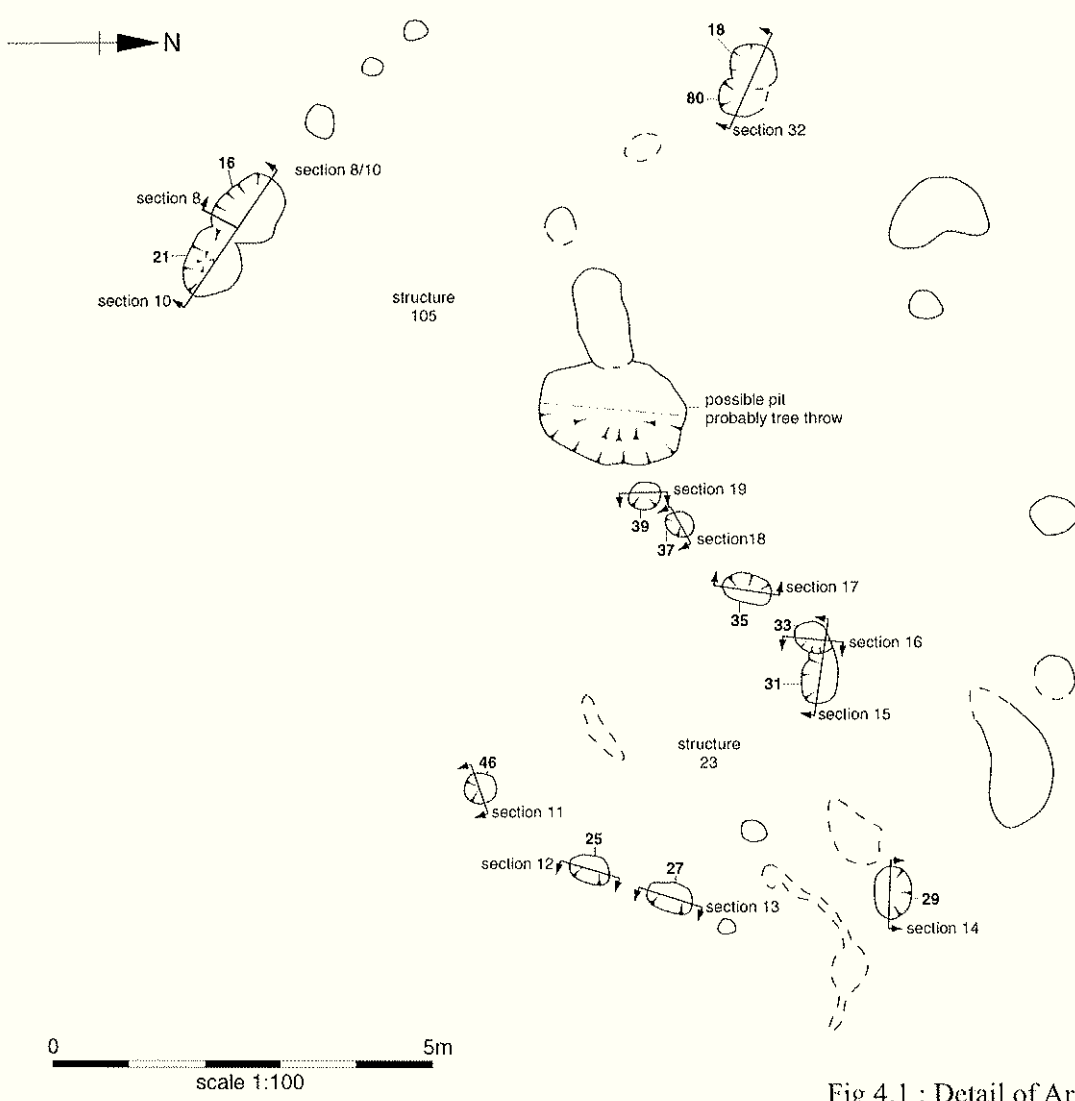
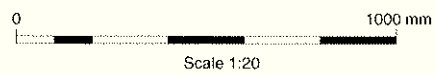
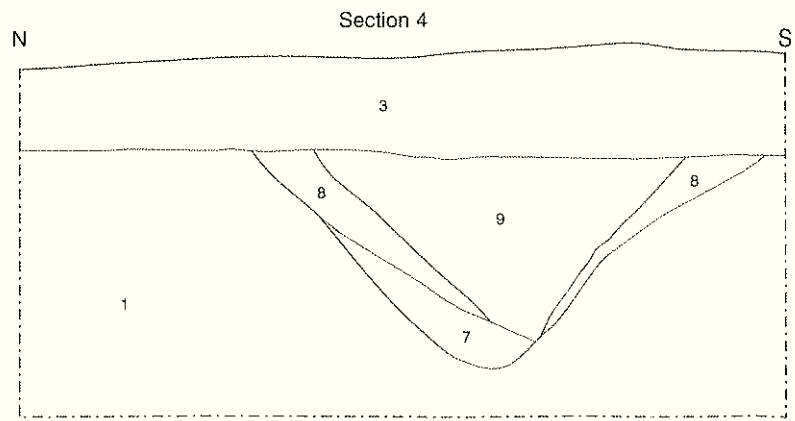
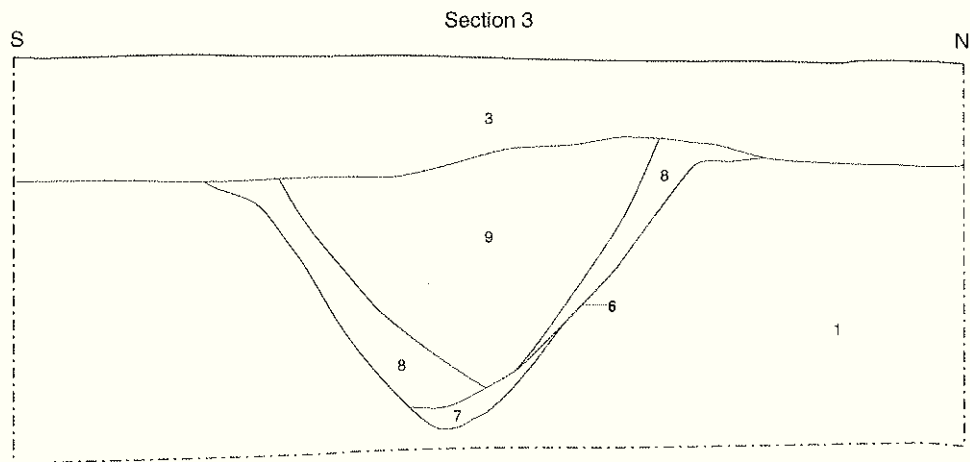
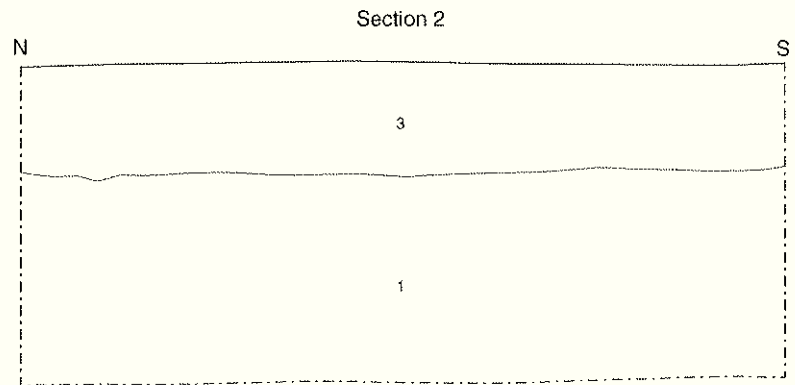
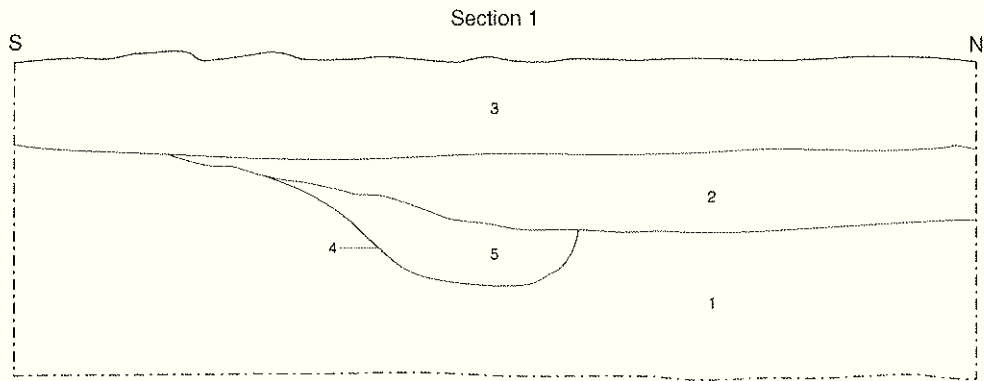


Fig 4.1 : Detail of Area 2 : 4a and 4b



EYFFWB\*Fonley Farm, Eynsham\*RMS\*14.09.01

Figure 5 : Area 1: Sections 1-4

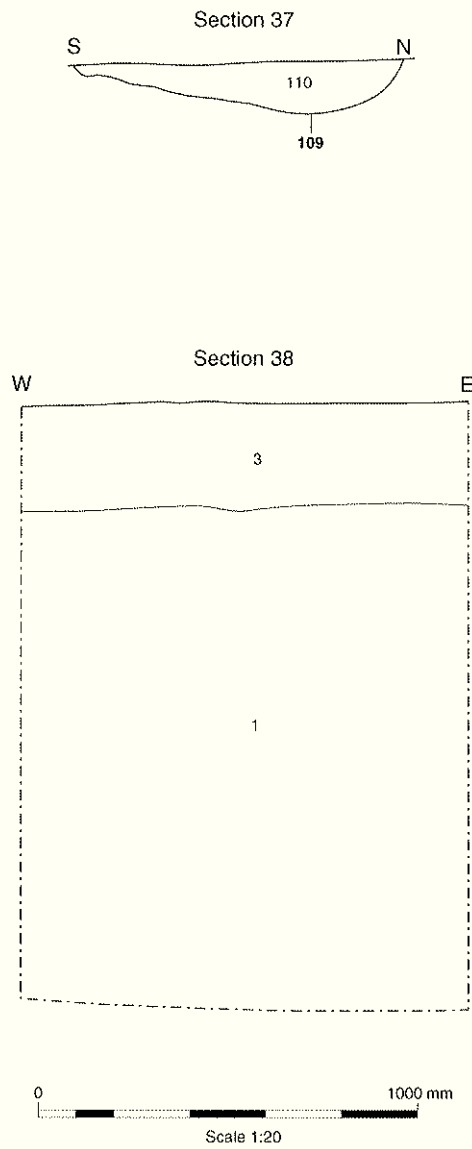
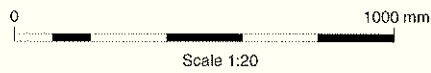
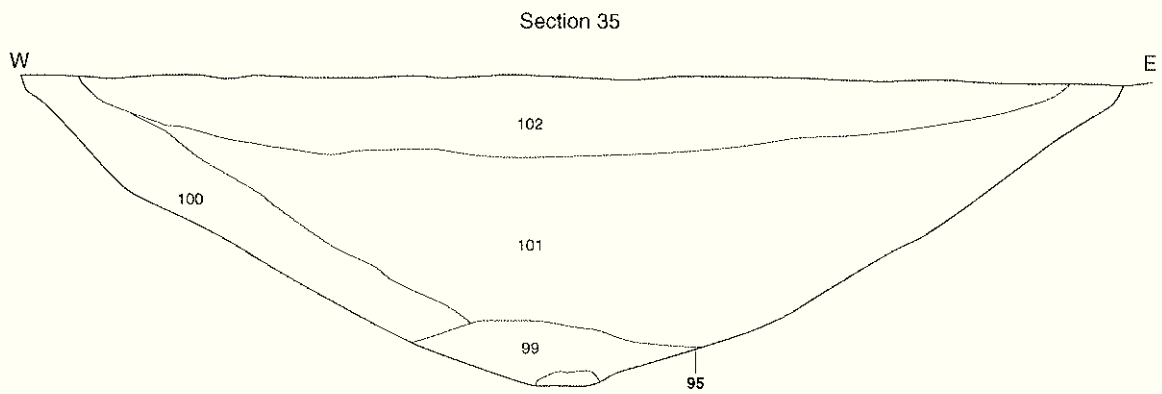
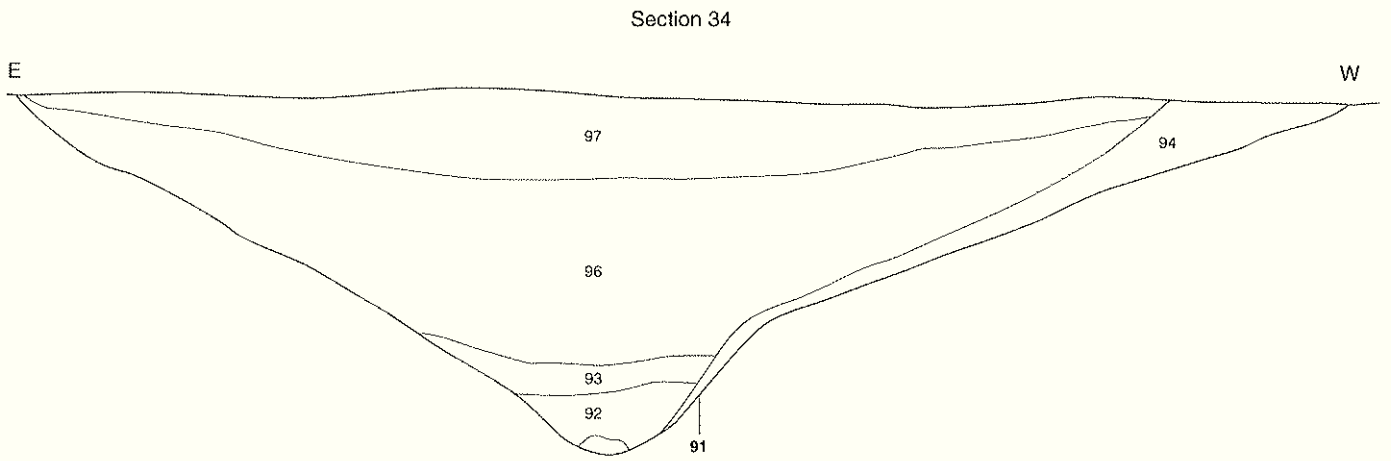
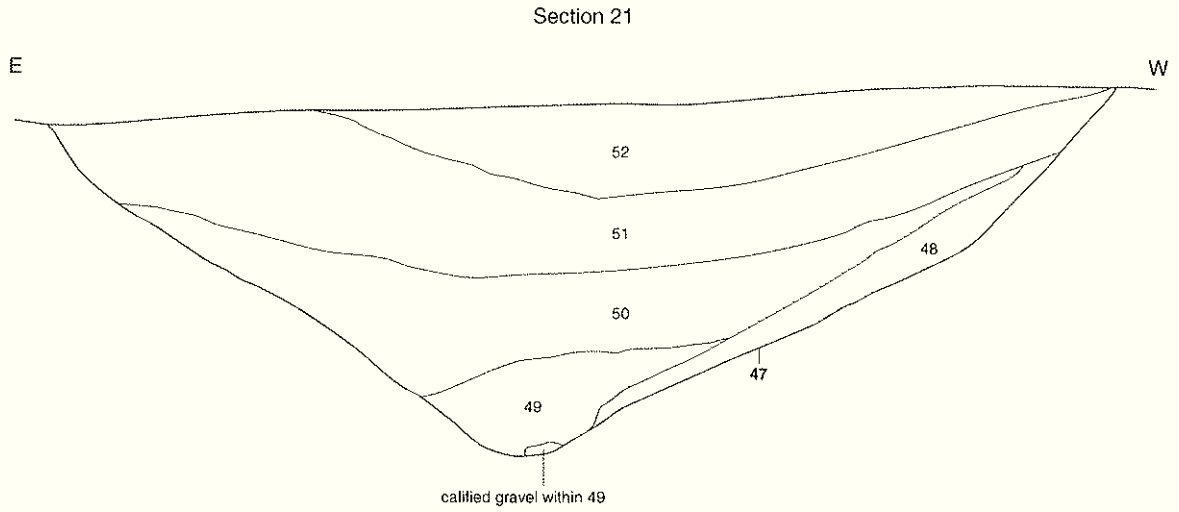


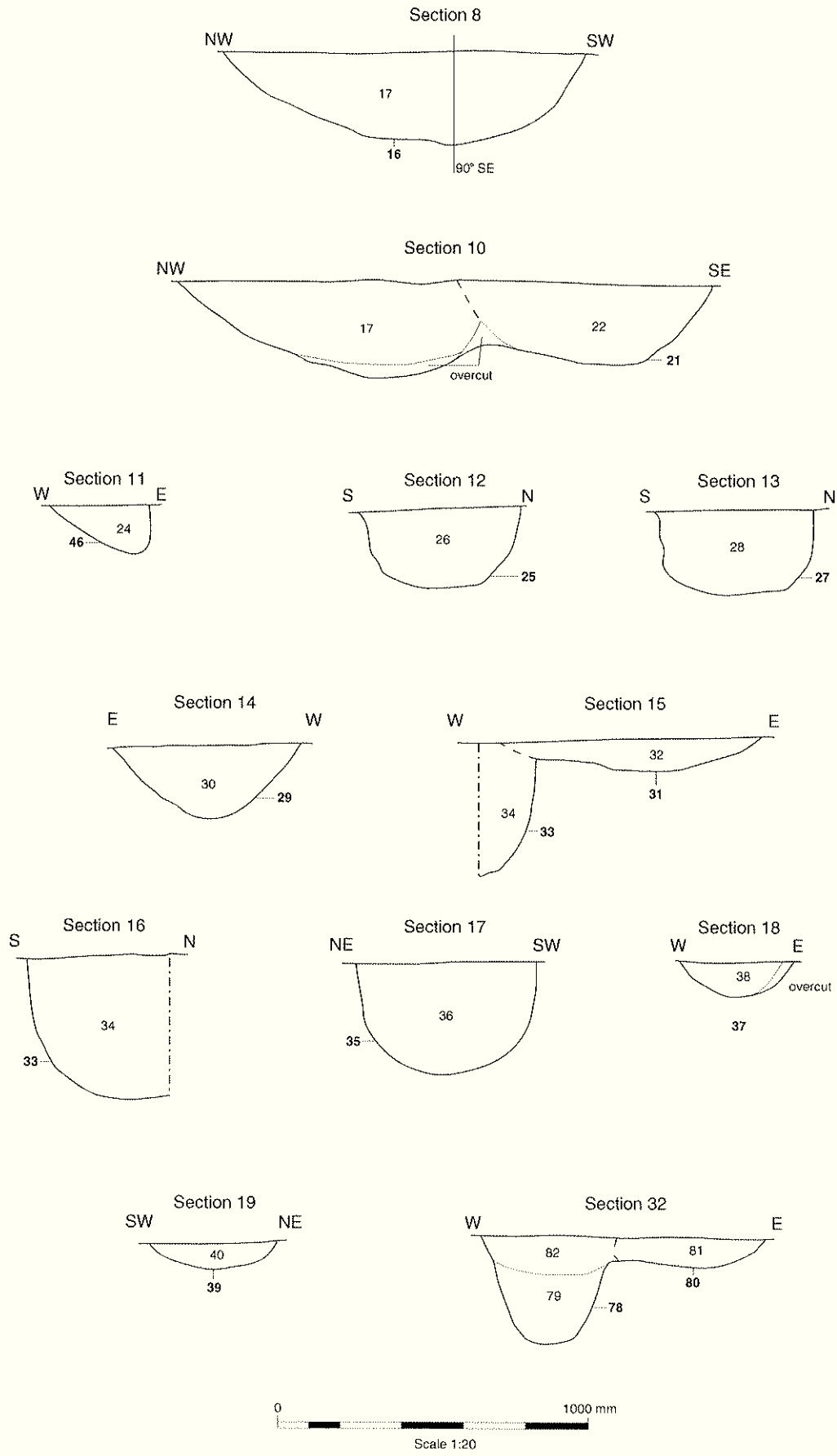
Figure 6 : Area 3: Sections 37 and 38



EYFFWB\*Fosby Farm, Eynsham\*RAMS\*17.09.01

Figure 7 : Area 2: Group 98: Ring Ditch Sections 21, 34 and 35





EYFFWB\*Foxley Farm: Eynsham\*RMS\*17.09.01

Figure 8 : Area 2: Structures 23 and 105: Sections 8,11-19 and 32

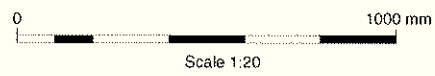
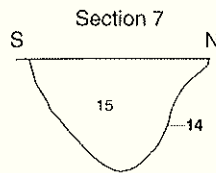
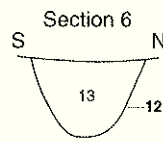
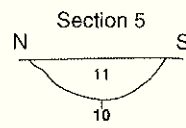


Figure 9 : Area 2: Structure 106: Sections 5,6 and 7

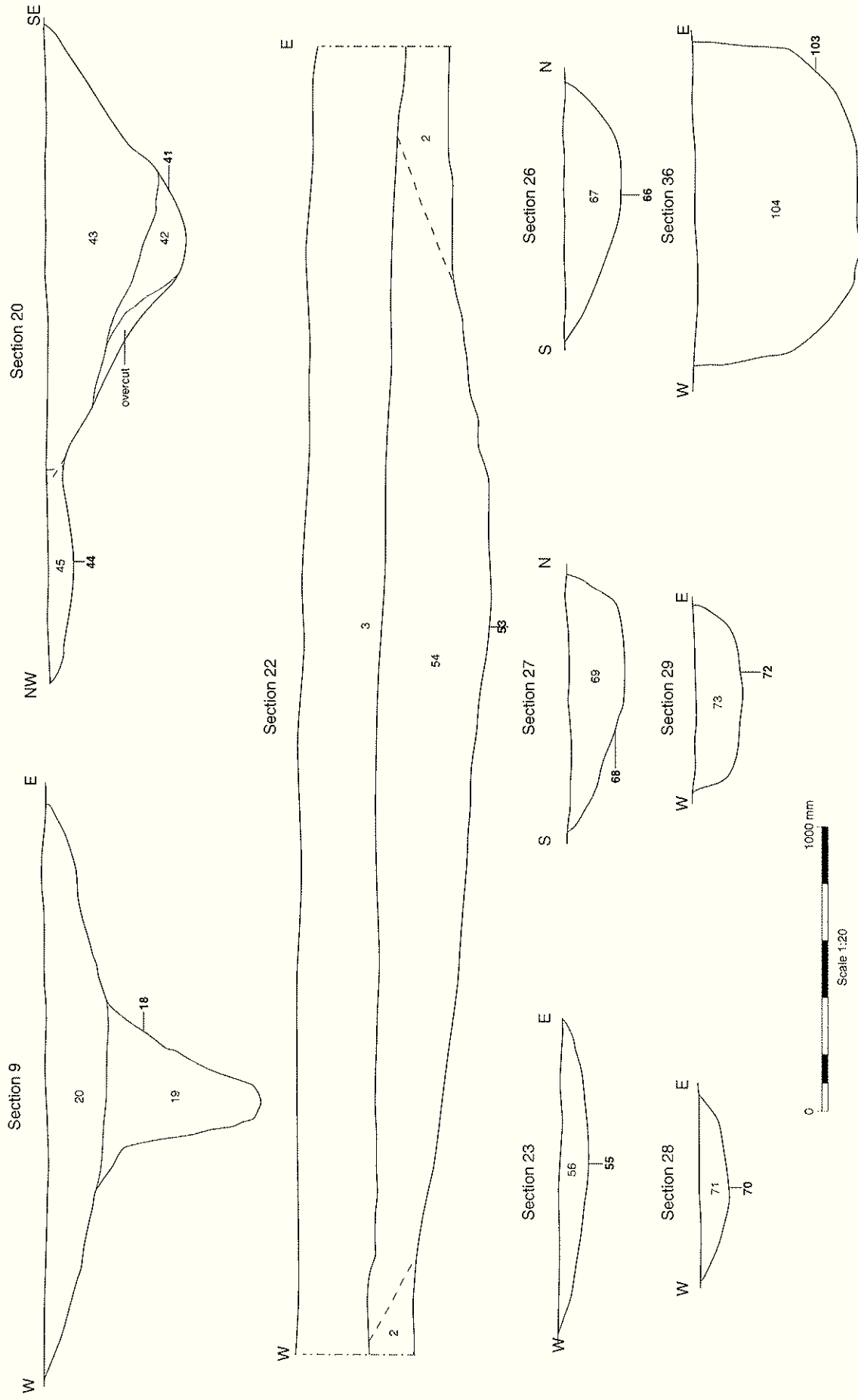


Figure 10 : Area 2: Sections 9,20,22,23, 26-29 and 36

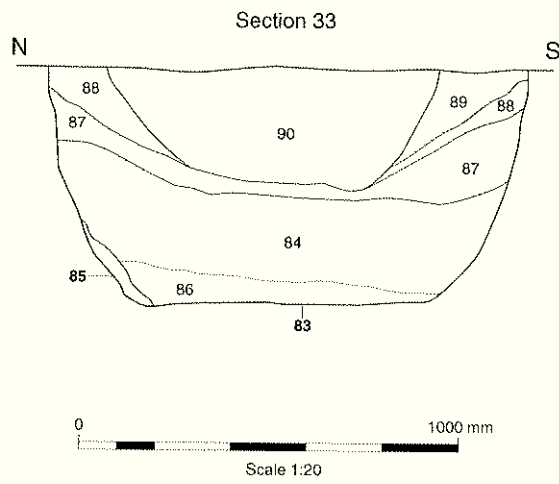


Figure 11 : Area 2: Sections 33

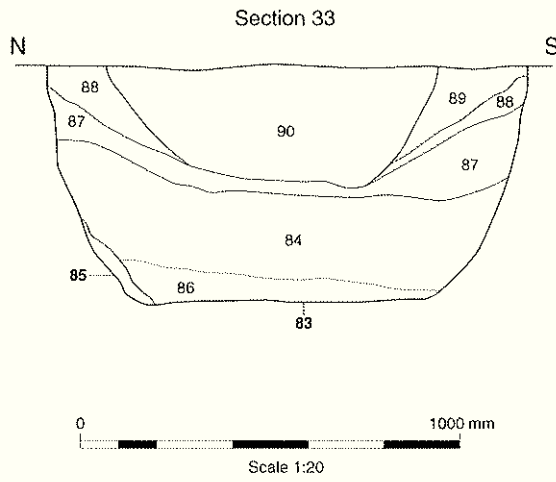


Figure 11 : Area 2: Sections 33

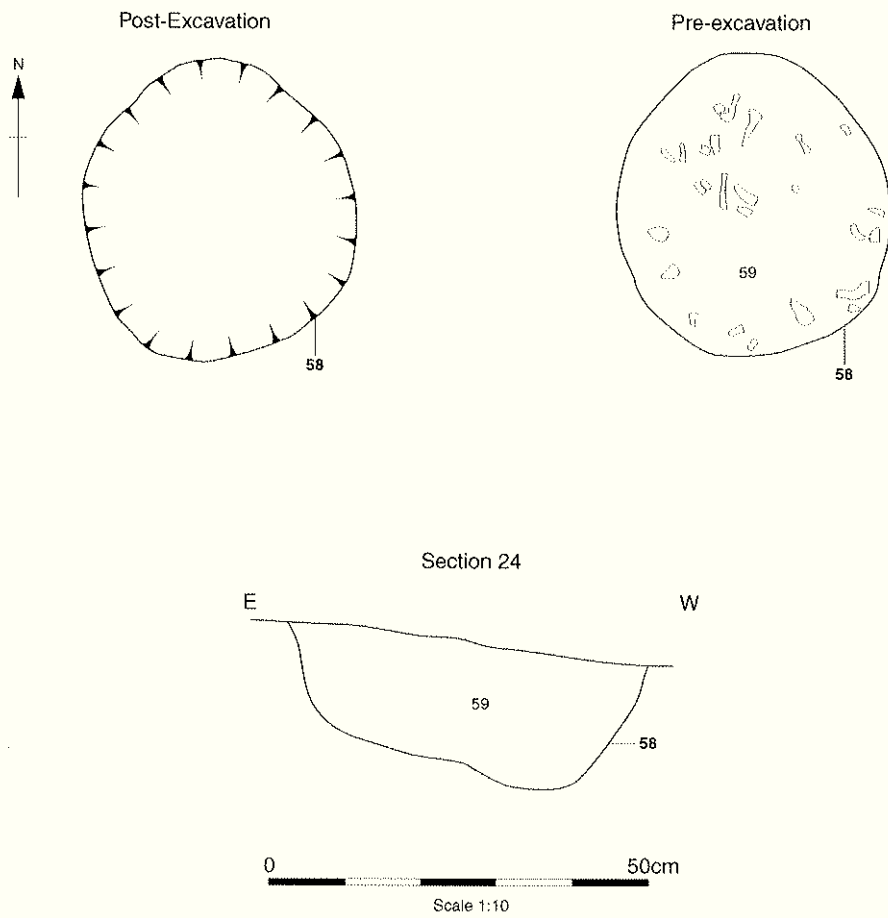


Figure 12 : Area 2: Plan and Profile of Cremation

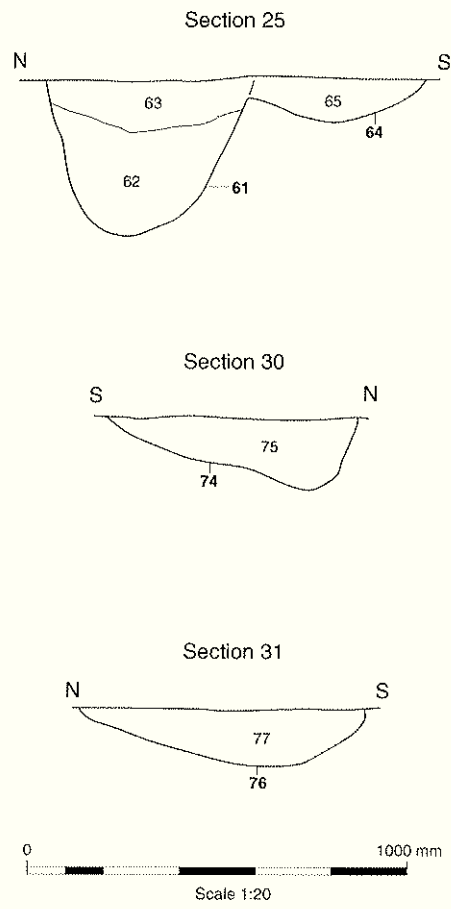


Figure 13 : Area 2: Gully Groups 107 and 108: sections 25,30 and 31



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