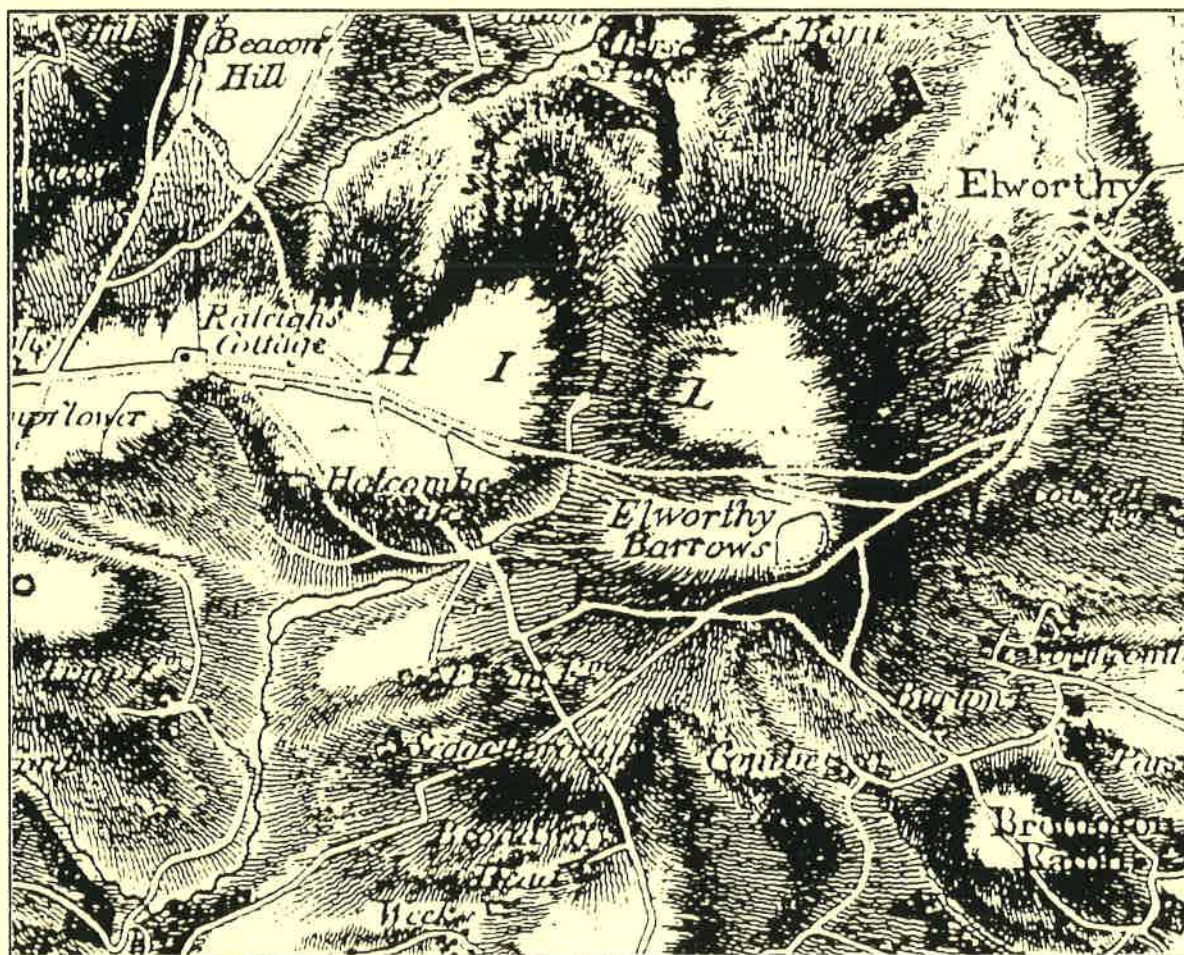


# Elworthy Barrows, Brompton Ralph, Somerset

NGR ST 0705 3378

Archaeological Evaluation



Oxford Archaeological Unit

December 1996

**WOOD FRAMPTON  
FOR  
ORANGE PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS  
SERVICES LIMITED**

**ELWORTHY BARROWS, BROMPTON RALPH,  
SOMERSET.**

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT***

**ST07053378**

**GDO/96/011**

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Prepared by: <i>S. Macnaught</i> Date: <i>16/12/96</i>
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*ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION*

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## SUMMARY

*The Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Elworthy barrows hillfort on behalf of Orange Personal Communications Services Limited. The evaluation revealed a large quarry pit of uncertain date and several geological features.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 LOCATION AND SCOPE OF WORK

In December 1996 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a field evaluation at Elworthy Barrows on behalf of Wood Frampton for Orange Personal Communications Services Limited, in respect of a planning application for a new telecom mast and the extension of the present telecommunication station compound (Planning Application No. GDO/96/011). The development site lay just to the south of the English Heritage scheduled monument (Elworthy Barrows hillfort, Fig. 1) and is 270 sq metres in area.

#### 1.2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies on palaeozoic shale and slate at 380 m above OD just west of the South Western Electricity Boards (SWEB) telecommunications station. It is situated on the south-facing slope of a prominent hill on the eastern extremities of Exmoor National Park. The land is currently not in use owing to the presence of the SWEB station but has probably been used for pasture, rather than arable, due to its exposed location. The top of the hill is occupied by Elworthy Barrows hillfort, and its southern bank is approximately 10 m upslope from the site. The south bank of the monument is partially incorporated into a high field bank, beech hedge and wall which divides the site from the hillfort itself.

#### 1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The archaeological background to the evaluation is limited. The site is adjacent to Elworthy Barrows hillfort, an English Heritage Scheduled Monument (198), details of which are held in the Somerset Sites and Monuments Record (SMR file 33351). It is an approximately circular camp defended by a bank and ditch, which is thought to be a fine example of an unfinished hillfort. Previously believed to be Neolithic in date, it has been suggested that it is probably Iron age (Aston and Burrow, 1982) and one of a large number of similar "fortified settlements" constructed at the same time at or near geological and topographical boundaries. Other examples located on the edges of Exmoor include Bats Castle, Black Ball, and Kings Camp and on the Quantock Hills, Trendle Ring, Dowsborough Fort and Plainsfield. Finds evidence from the interior of Elsworth Barrows include several flint cores and three leaf-shaped arrowheads discovered when the site was last ploughed in 1943, and a polished stone axe. The development area is situated close to the south bank of the hill fort and it is possible that ploughed-out earthworks

or other associated features relating to the hillfort's construction or usage may be located within the development area.

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

i) The general purpose of the evaluation was to establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains on the site.

ii) To determine, as far as is reasonably possible, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeology and environmental/ ecofactual remains.

iii) It was conjectured that features associated with the hillfort construction and usage may extend into the development area, and it was hoped that the evaluation might pick up these features and therefore provide an insight into the date and use of the hillfort.

## 3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 SAMPLE SIZE

The evaluation was based upon a 9 % sample of the development area, and consisted of a single trench (Fig. 2) measuring 10 m long and 3 m wide, positioned 2 m to the west of the existing compound and orientated NNW to SSE (Fig 2).

### 3.2 FIELDWORK METHODS AND RECORDING

The overburden was removed by a Ford Special (JCB type) mechanical excavator, using a toothless ditching bucket, under close archaeological supervision.

The trench was 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 excavated, and their sections drawn at 1:20 scale. All features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson, 1992).

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 GEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS AND FEATURES

The trench (Fig. 3) was excavated to natural shale (001) which varied in colour (pink, grey and orange) depending on how degraded it was. Two possibly geologically derived features were discovered cutting into the natural. The first (007) [006], was thought to be a natural gully created via water off flow and frost action from the top of the slope. The second (009) [008], was an oval shaped feature (0.94 m long x 0.70 m wide x 0.42 m deep) which was probably created either by similar geological processes of water seepage and frost shattering as in [006], or by tree fall, with a resulting hollow silting up with naturally derived erosion deposits.

## 4.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS

A third feature [003] was also located at the western edge of the excavation area. To enable a better examination of the features extent two trench extensions, one at the north and the other at the south ends of the trench, were excavated. The feature was not found to extend to the south, but was found in the northern extension to be 6.30+ m in diameter and 1.14 m deep. The western edge of the feature was not located. This feature is thought to be either a quarry pit or ditch, and contained eight different fills, including initial erosion deposits (010) and (011), and later, backfill and erosion deposits (005) (016) (015) (004) and (014). Fills (005) and (015) also contained burnt deposits which were sampled. A fragment of dark green glass dateable to the late 19th century was recovered from one of the uppermost fills (004). A dump of shale (013) was the latest deposit in the quarry, this was probably deliberately dumped to level off the ground. Another dump of gravel (012), similar to the gravel surface within the present compound, was found to rest directly on natural over a large area of the north end of the trench. This suggests that topsoil was removed and some possible levelling activity was undertaken when the compound was built. The final deposit is a layer of topsoil (002) that covers the entire trench.

## 4.3 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

Two samples were recovered from the large quarry hole. These were processed to try and elucidate the nature and date of the feature as artefactual evidence was extremely sparse.

Sample 1 from fill (015) produced evidence of burnt roots and tubers, and therefore we can conclude that this particular fill had originally been a turf line or that a fire had been built using turves as the fuel. Sample 2 was taken from the bottom of the primary fill (005), this produced much wood charcoal some of which was identified as oak. The environmental report is held in the archive.

These sample results, unfortunately, do not give us any further hint as to whether this feature is related to the hillfort, or to quarrying activities associated with the construction of the field boundaries in the mid 19th century.

## 5.0 OVERALL INTERPRETATION

The evaluation revealed one feature of archaeological importance, a large quarry hole of uncertain date, located to the west of the area where the new telecommunications mast is to be erected. The location and the piece of late 19th century glass from an upper fill could suggest that the feature was dug in the mid 19th century for material to build the field bank to the north and west of the trench area. However, the close proximity of the southern bank of the hillfort could suggest an earlier date and link this feature into its construction (Fig. 6). The lack of good artefactual evidence means that either interpretation is possible.

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation produced archaeological deposits to the west of the development area which could be associated with the construction of the hillfort or the field bank to the north of the trench, but none in the proposed area for the foundations of the new telecommunications mast.

Neil Macnab  
December 1996.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992).

Aston, M & Burrow, I *The Archaeology of Somerset*  
(eds) 1982

Somerset Sites and Monuments Record : SMR file 33351



## Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory

Trench	Ctxt	Type	width (m)	thick (m)	Comment	Finds	No.	Date
001								
	001	layer			natural shale			
	002	layer		0.33	topsoil			
	003	cut	6.3+	0.98	quarry pit			
	004	fill		0.52	fill of 003	glass	1	late 19th century
	005	fill		0.46	fill of 003			
	006	cut	0.85	0.16	natural gully			
	007	fill	0.85	0.16	fill of 006			
	008	cut	0.70	0.42	natural hollow			
	009	fill	0.70	0.42	fill of 008			
	010	fill	1.10	0.22	fill of 003			
	011	fill	0.70	0.22	fill of 003			
	012	layer	4.0	0.20	dump of gravel			modern
	013	fill		0.24	dump of shale			
	014	fill		0.08	fill of 003			
	015	fill		0.38	fill of 003			
	016	fill		0.28	fill of 003			

070

071

072

ELBAREV 96

073

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B3224

B3224

Elworthy Barrows Hillfort

Figure 2

the site

Pleasant View

David's well

070

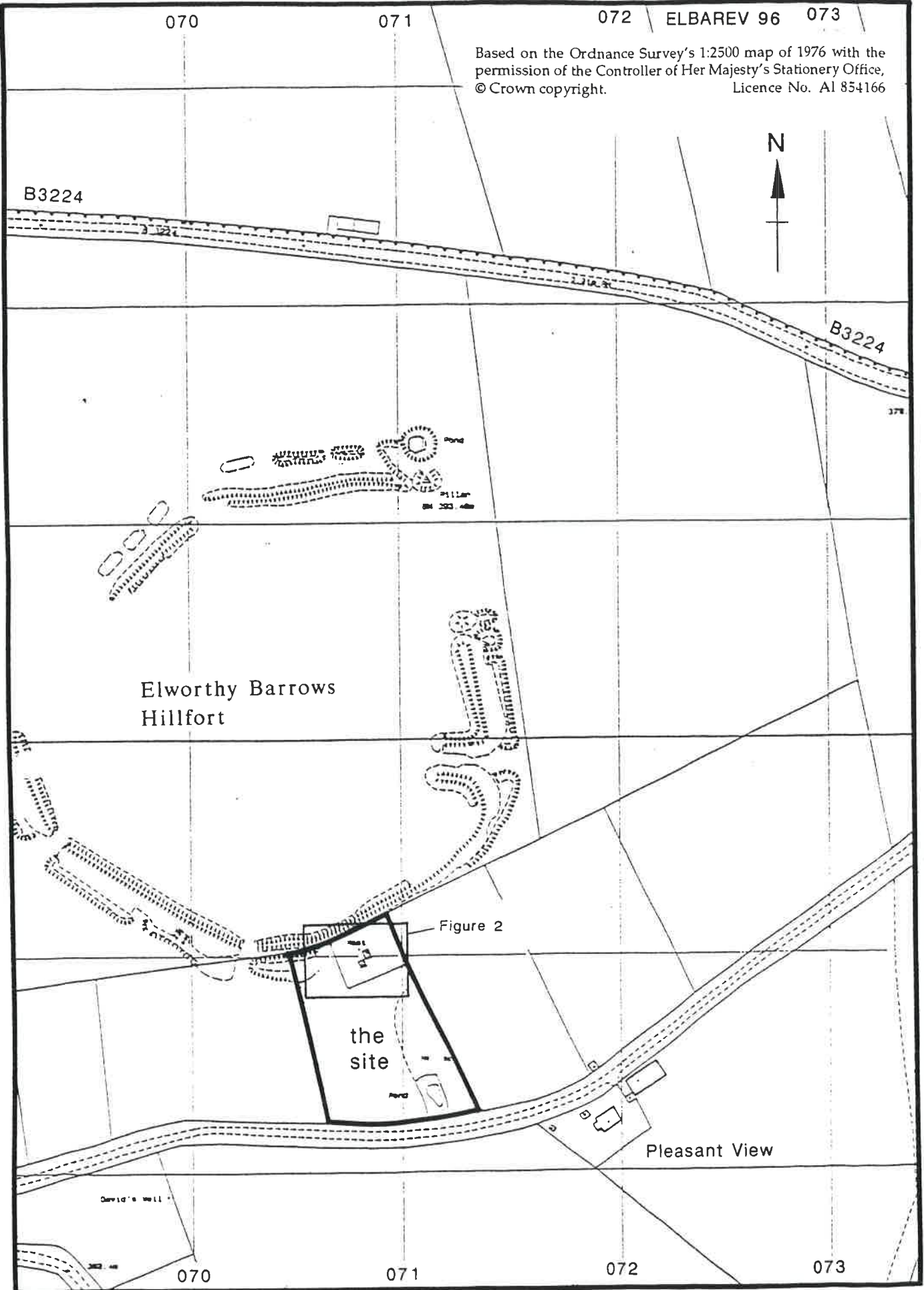
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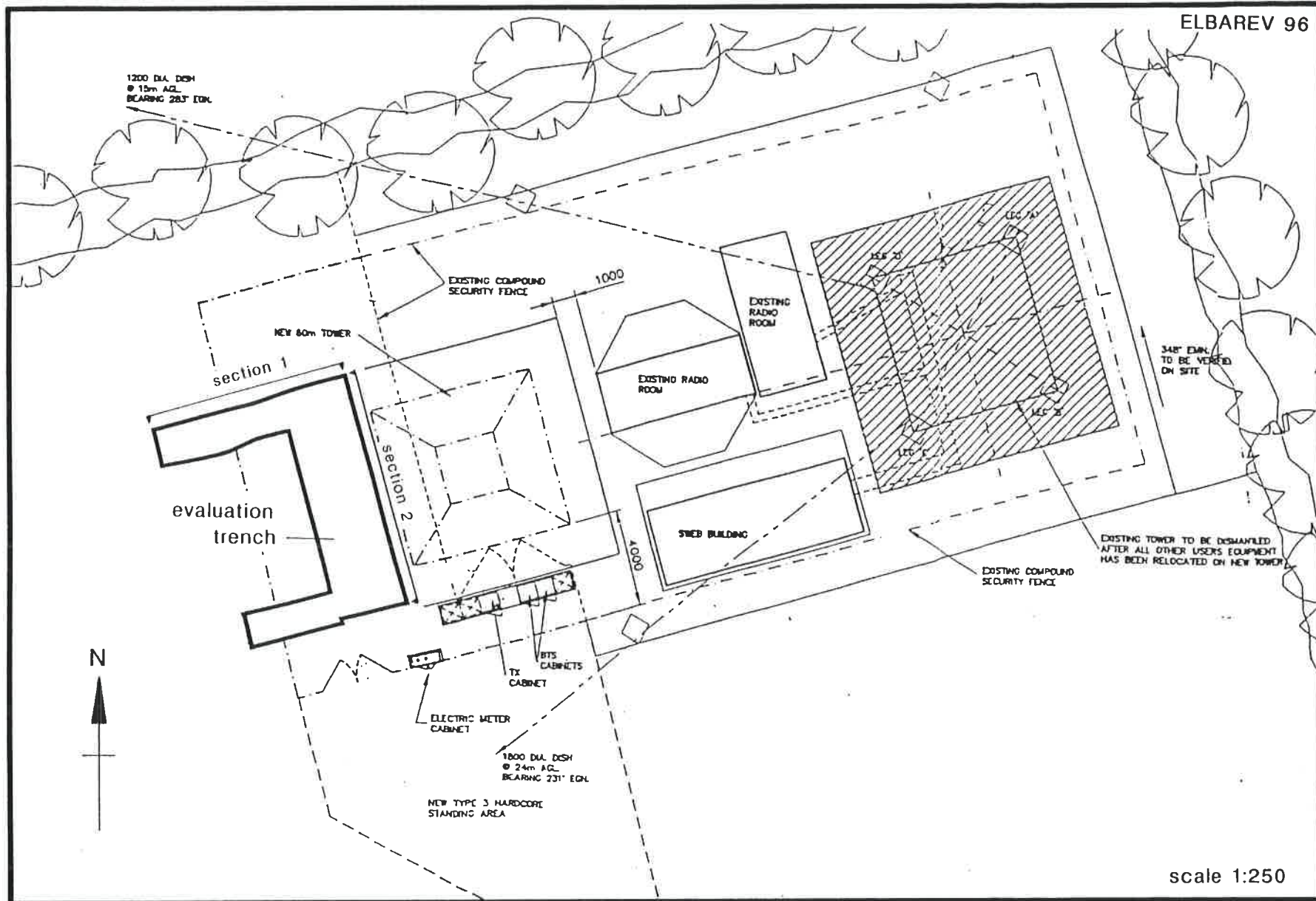
072

073

Scale 1:2500

Figure 1 Site Location





scale 1:250

Figure 2 Trench Location

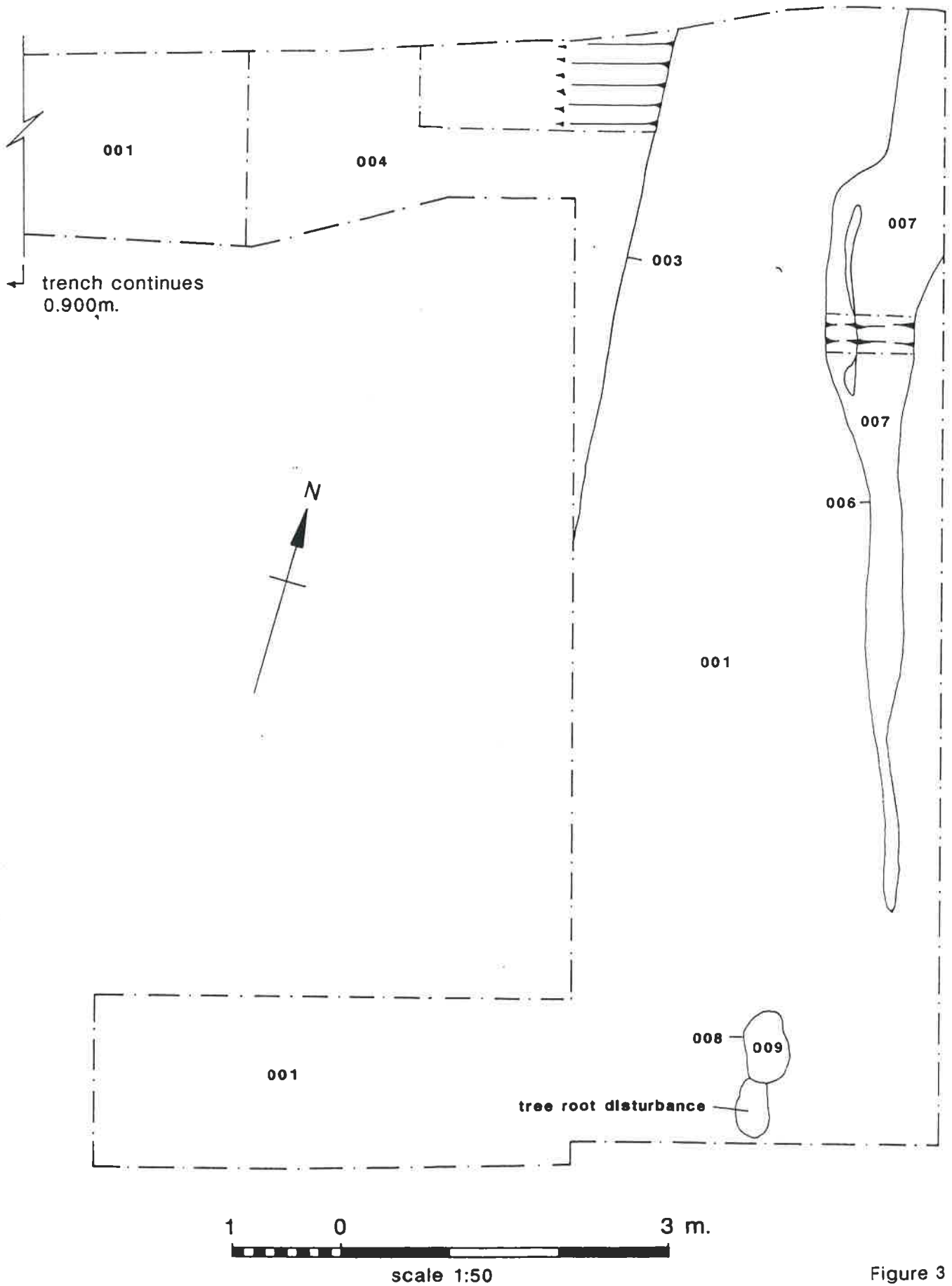


Figure 3

Section 1

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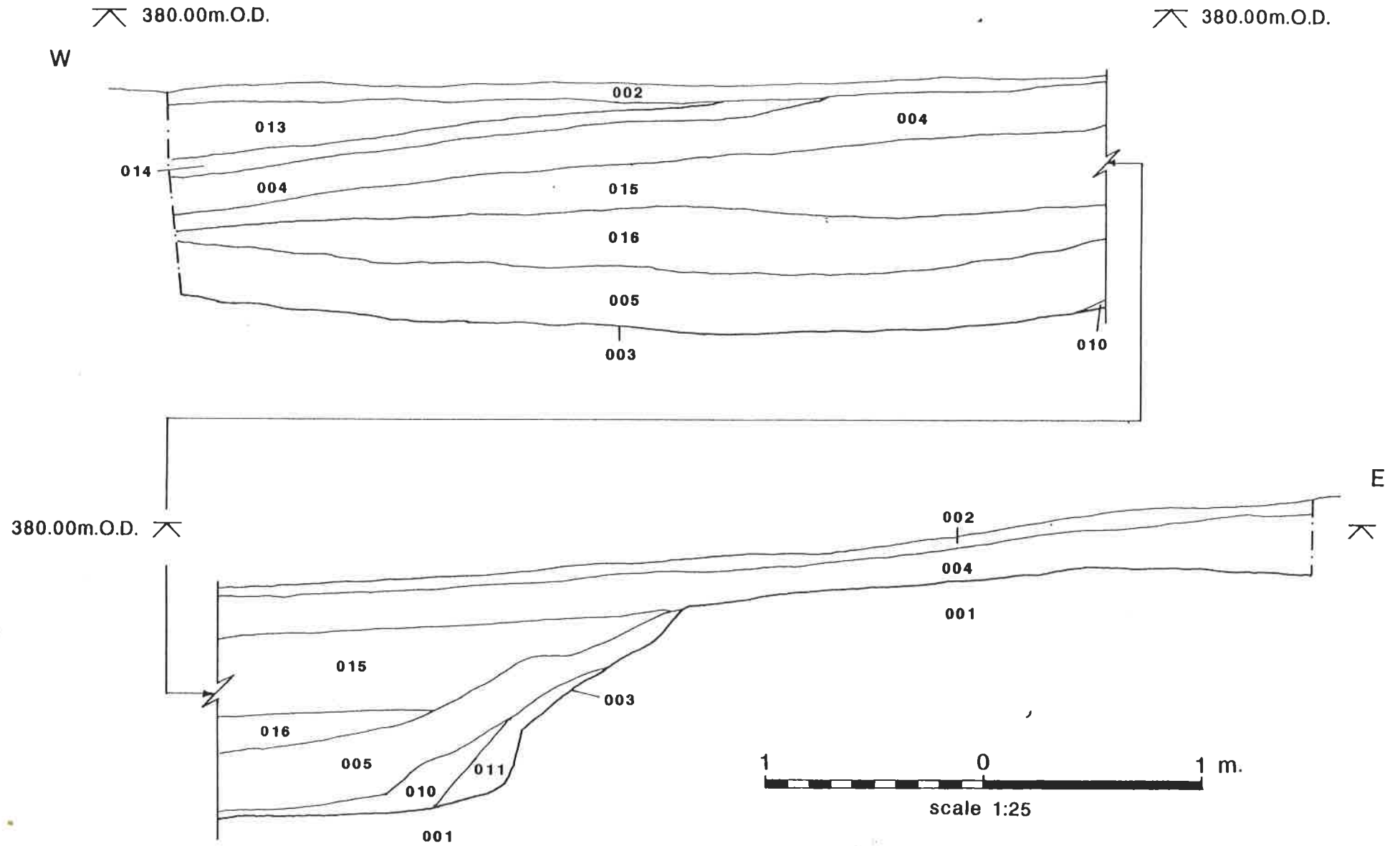


Figure 4

Section 2

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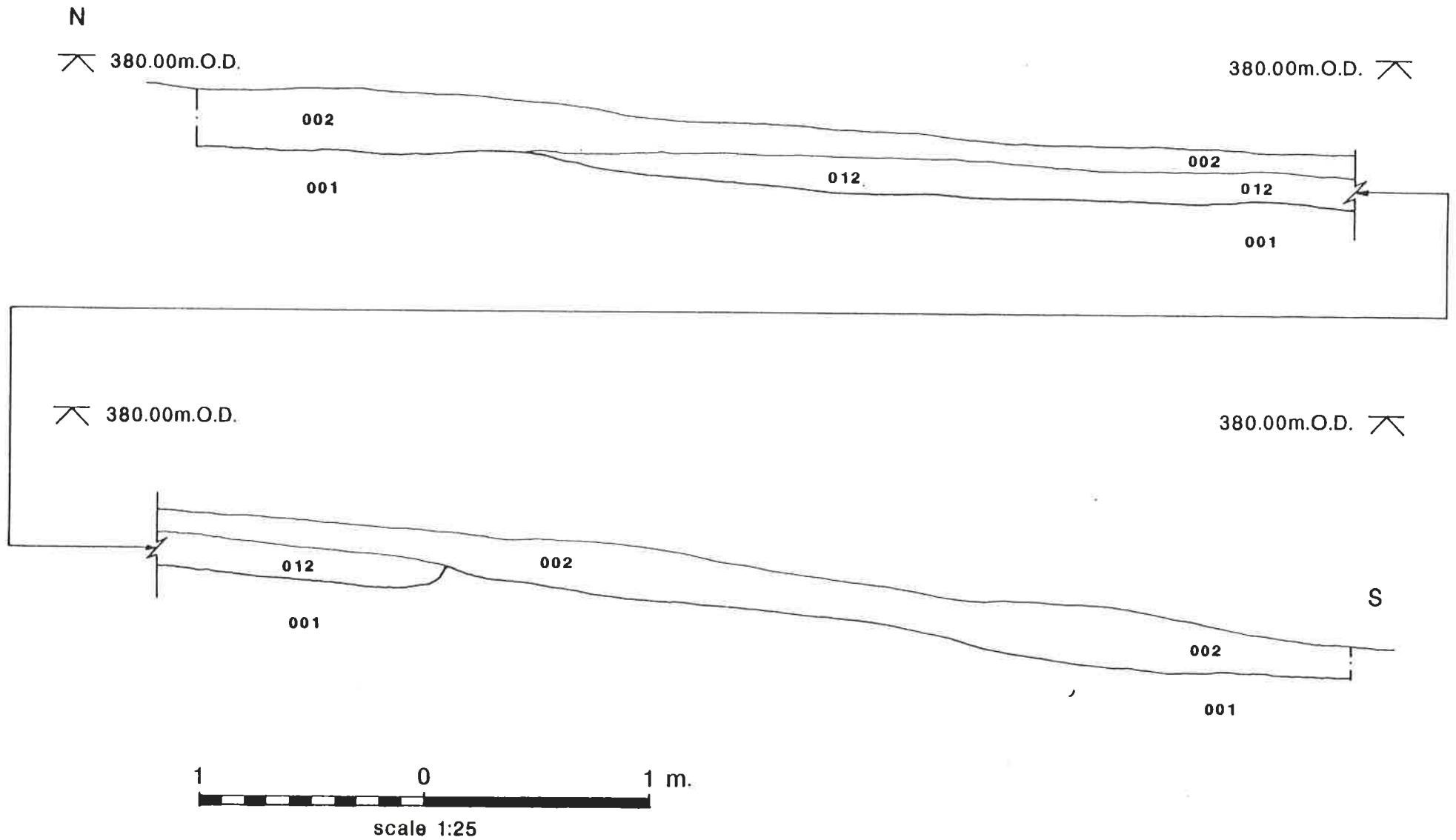


Figure 5

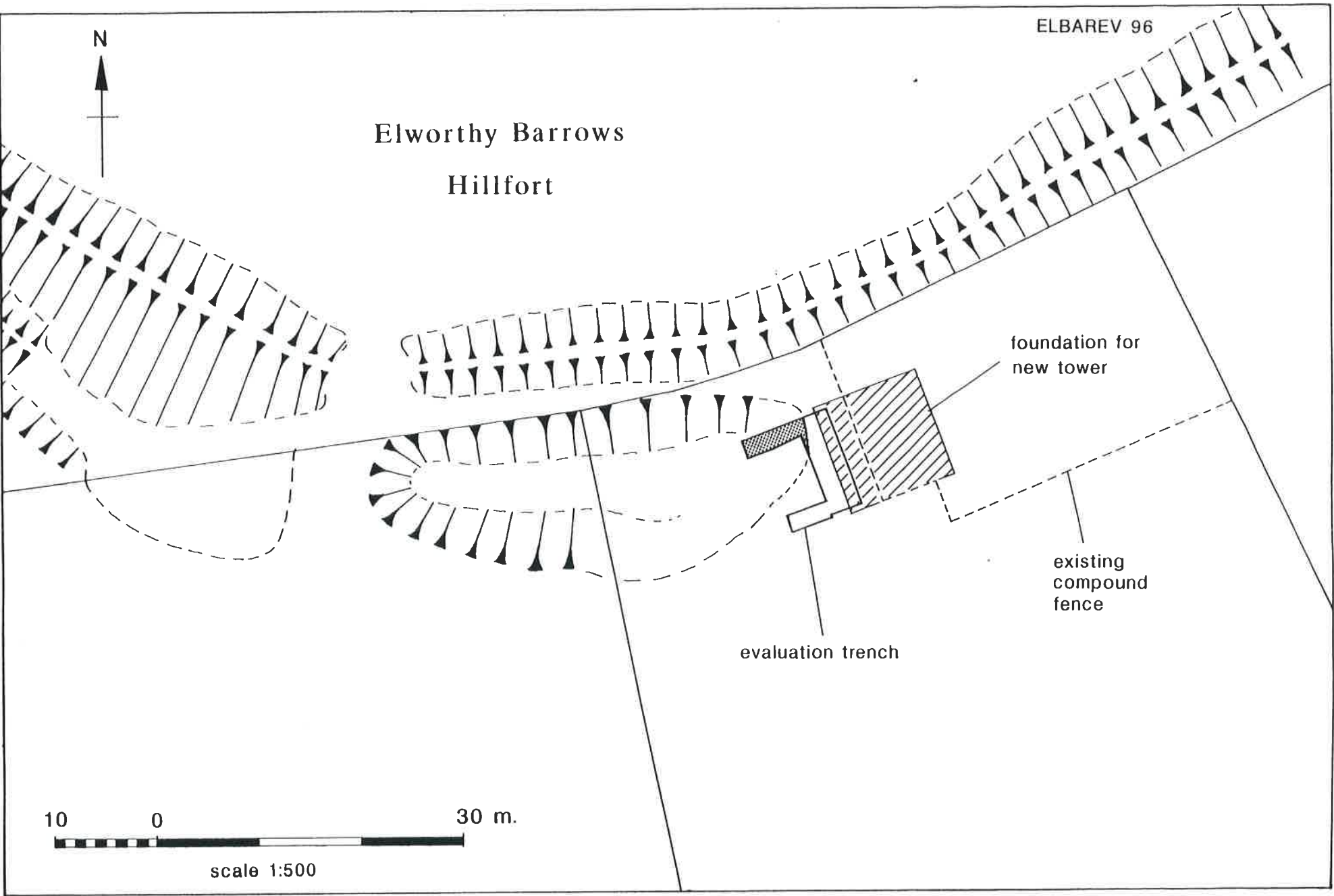


Figure 6



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