

**The Garden House  
Ringdale Manor  
Fernham, Oxon.  
NGR SU 2903 9272  
Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

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October 1999

The Garden House, Ringdale Manor  
Fernham, Oxon.

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Date: September 1999

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*27. 9. 99*

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HEAD OF FIELDWORK

Date:

*1/10/1999*

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*Summary*

*In August 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out a watching brief at Ringdale Manor, Fernham, near Faringdon, Oxon (NGR SU 2903 9272) during the construction of a new barn near the site of an Iron Age hillfort. No archaeological features were observed and no finds were recovered from the excavated foundation pits.*

**1 Introduction**

In May 1999 planning permission was sought for new a development at Ringdale Manor, Fernham, near Faringdon, Oxon (Fig. 1), by a Mrs F Williams. The development (FER/14415/1) involved the construction of a new barn at the site of an Iron Age hillfort. Planning permission was granted subject to an archaeological condition in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG 16) stipulated by the Deputy County Archaeologist for Oxfordshire (4<sup>th</sup> August 1999). The requirements of the condition were for a formal programme of observation and investigation during the groundwork.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (August 1999) detailing how the requirements of the County Archaeological Brief would be met, and carried out a watching brief on the site at the end of August 1999.

**2 Project Background**

*Geology and Topography*

The underlying geology of the site is limestone cornbrash, mixed with loam and sand, and the site lies at approximately 135 m above Ordnance Datum. The site of the development is located in an open field to the rear of the Garden House, which is part of the Ringdale Manor complex. The terrain was level at the time of the work and bounded on two sides by trees.

*Archaeological Background*

The development site lies due south of an Iron Age hillfort (SAM 207) that survives as an earthwork with a ditch and bank. The south part of the monument is not fully understood; there are traces of the ploughed bank to the south of the Garden House. Extra-mural settlement is known from other hillforts in the area, for example the fort at White Horse Hill, and prehistoric flint implements have also been found in the area.

Local knowledge has it that the whole area of the hillfort was converted for cereal production in the Second World War, and as a result the site has been heavily ploughed.

### **3 Strategy and Methodology**

A watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of the support footing pits for the new barn. The internal area of the barn was not affected by the groundwork, and was consequently not monitored. All features and deposits were issued with unique context numbers; context recording was in accordance with established OAU practice (OAU Field Manual, 1992). A photographic record of the work was made comprising colour transparency and black-and-white negative photographs. Site plans were drawn 1:100 and section drawings made at a scale of 1:20.

### **4 Results**

Ten foundation pits forming a rectangular arrangement were excavated by machine for the new barn (Fig. 2). Each of the pits measured 1.5 m by 1.0 m, and all were excavated to a general depth of c.1.2 m. The excavated deposits were identical in each of the pits, with local variation in depths. The deposits are summarised in table form below, and section drawings of each of the pits are shown in Figs 3 and 4.

At the base of each pit was a layer of reddish-brown limestone cornbrash mixed with sand (102, 202, 302 etc). This represents the natural bedrock. Above the bedrock lay a layer of yellow silty clay which was generally 0.3 – 0.4 m thick (101, 201, etc). No artefacts were recovered from this layer, which from its silty nature is thought to be a colluvial deposit (the natural soil forming on the hill-top). The layer was sealed across the site by the present topsoil (100, 200 etc), which was generally 0.4 – 0.5 m thick and consisted of a tenacious reddish-brown clay silt. No finds were recovered from the topsoil.

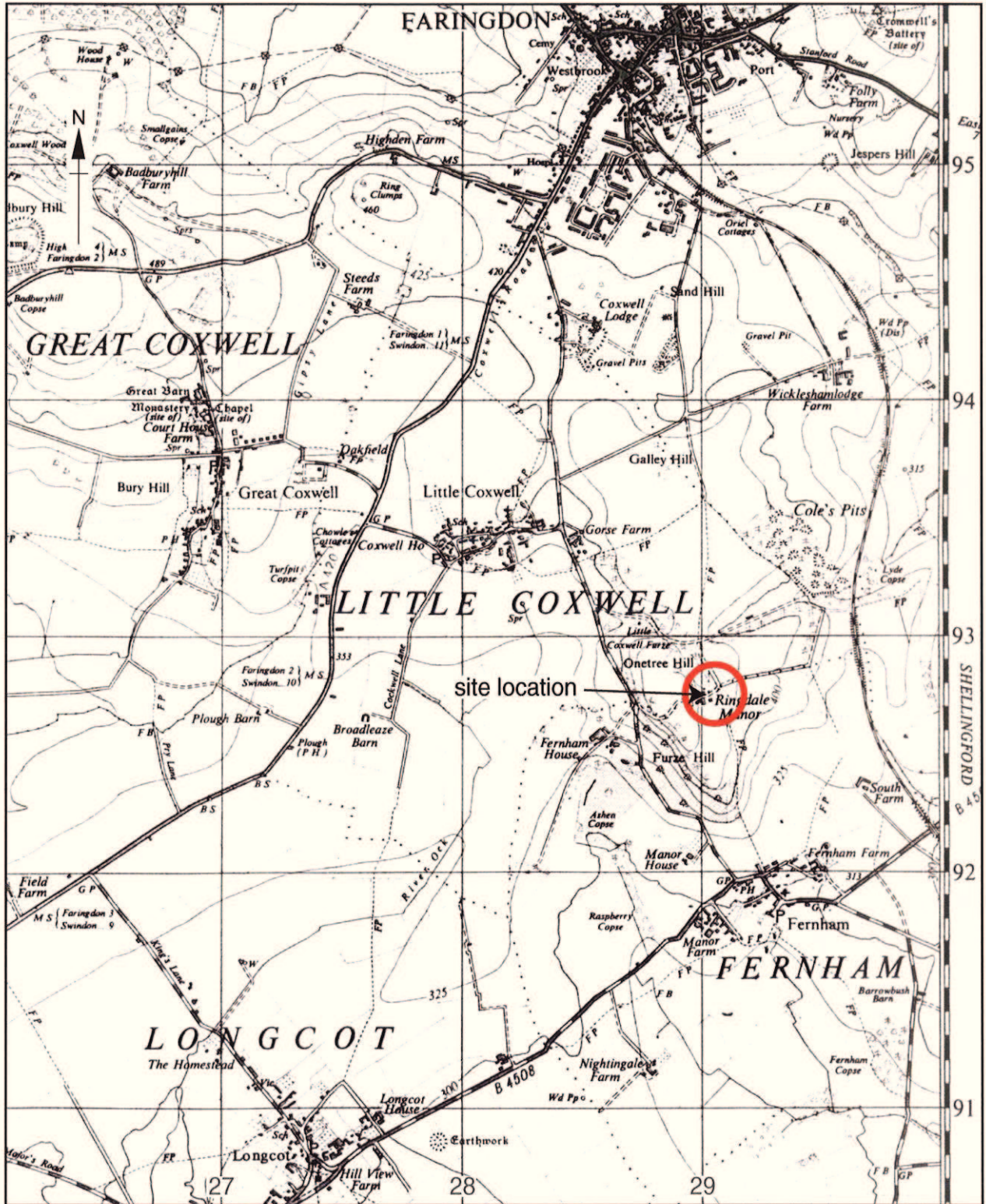
### **5 Conclusions**

The watching brief revealed that the soil layers are consistent across this part of the site. The bedrock was sealed by a consistent clay layer, presumably derived from hillwash on top of the hill, in turn sealed by the topsoil. There was no evidence for any occupation evidence that may have been associated with the hillfort; the absence of finds may simply be a reflection of the lack of activity on this part of the site, and not necessarily due to plough action.

J Hiller  
Oxford Archaeological Unit  
September 1999

**Table of Context Information**

Context	Type	Depth (m)	Comments
100	Layer	0.46	Topsoil
101	Layer	0.6	Silty Clay, colluvial hillwash
102	Layer	0.1+	Red-brown limestone cornbrash – natural
200	Layer	0.4	Topsoil
201	Layer	0.8	Reddish-brown limestone cornbrash – natural
202	Layer	0.05 +	As 201, more rock
300	Layer	0.5	Topsoil
301	Layer	0.34	Yellow silty clay, colluvial clay deposit
302	Layer	0.2 +	Same as 102, 201/2 etc
400	Layer	0.5	Topsoil
401	Layer	0.3	Same as 301
402	Layer	0.4 +	Same as 302
500	Layer	0.4	Topsoil
501	Layer	0.4	Same as 401
502	Layer	0.22 +	Same as 402
600	Layer	0.48	Topsoil
601	Layer	0.3	Same as 501
602	Layer	0.2 +	Same as 502
700	Layer	0.42	Topsoil
701	Layer	0.4	Yellow silty clay/colluvium
702	Layer	0.1 +	Natural
800	Layer	0.48	Topsoil
801	Layer	0.4	Same as 701
802	Layer	0.1 +	Same as 702
900	Layer	0.5	Topsoil
901	Layer	0.5	Same as 801
902	Layer	0.1	Same as 802
1000	Layer	0.3	Topsoil
1001	Layer	0.5	Yellow silty clay/colluvium
1002	Layer	0.1	Natural



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figure 1: site location

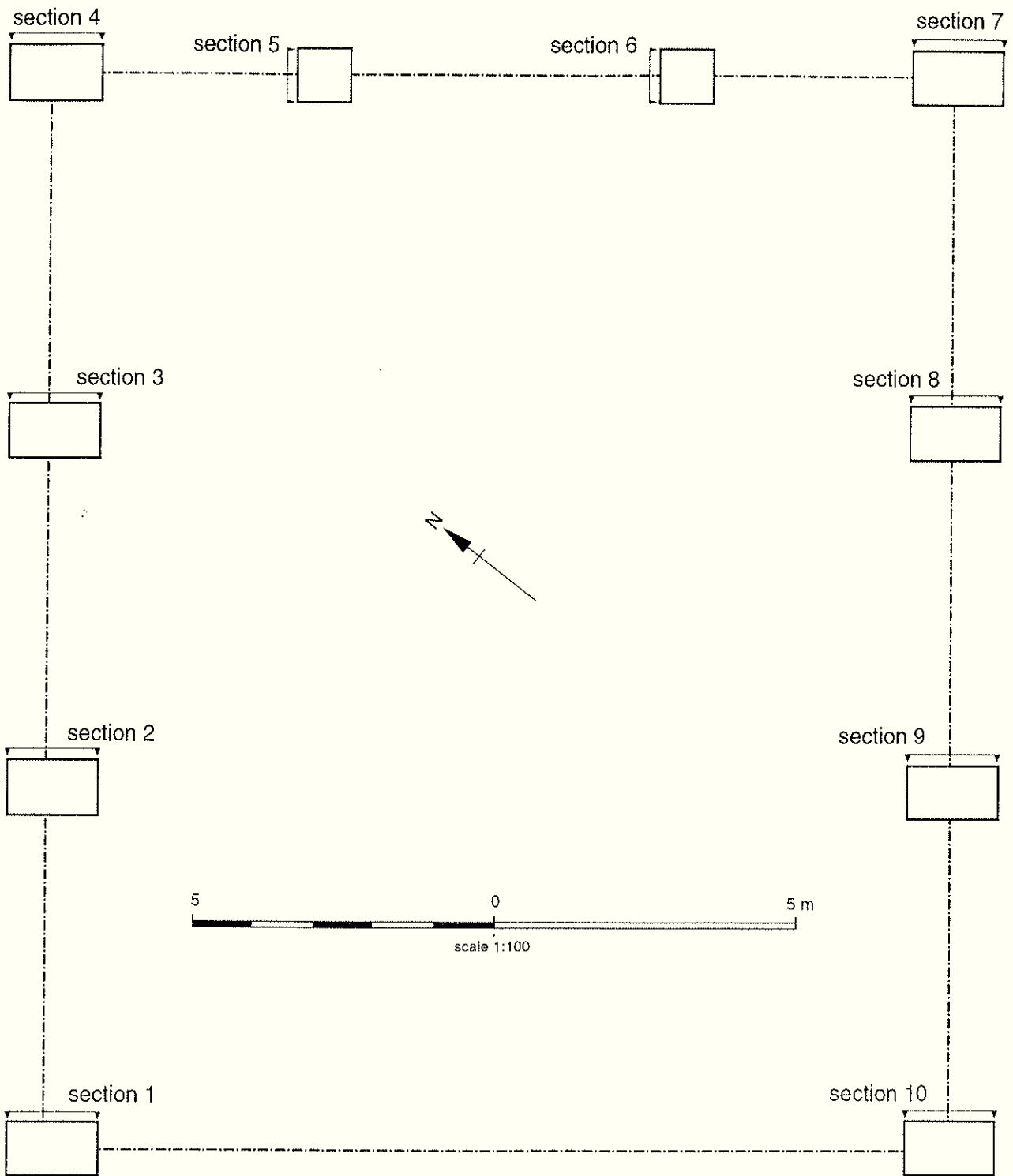


figure 2: plan of test-pits 1 - 10

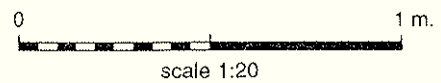
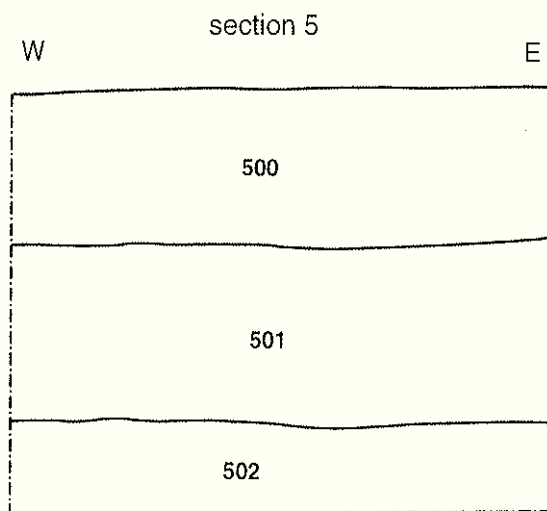
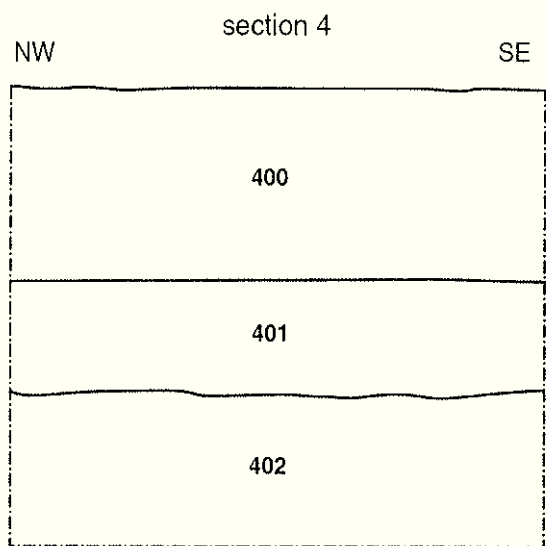
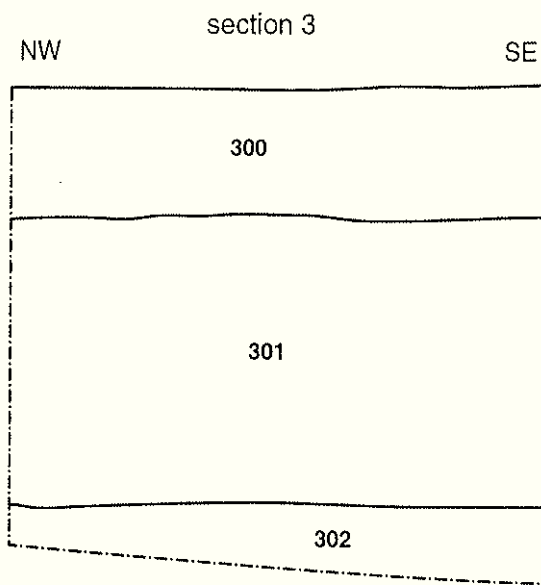
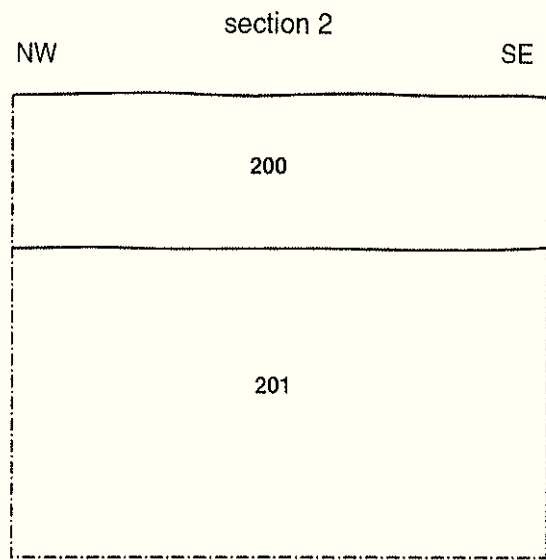
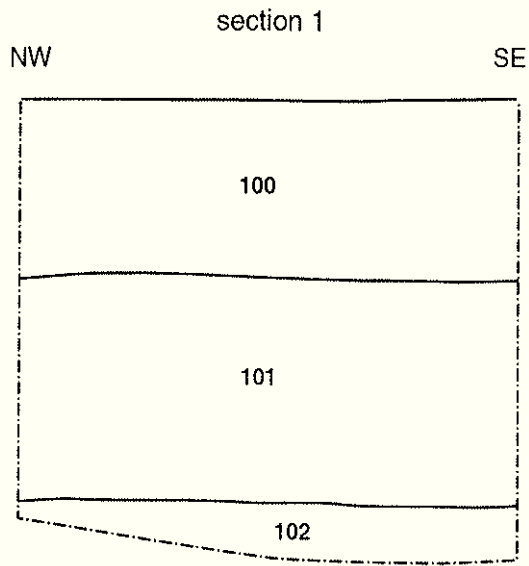


figure 3: sections 1 - 5



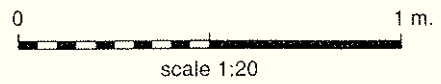
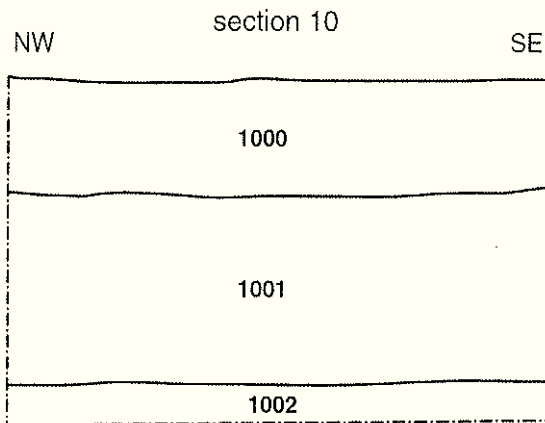
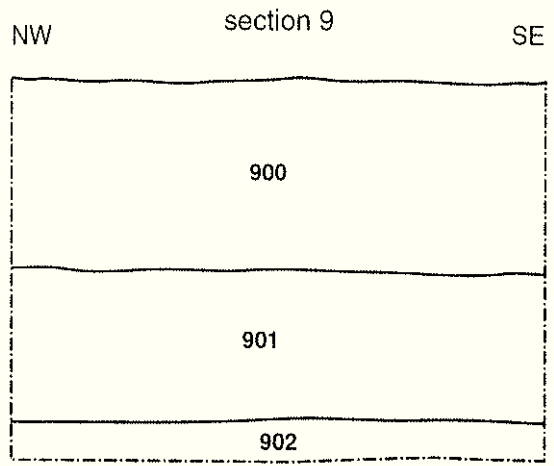
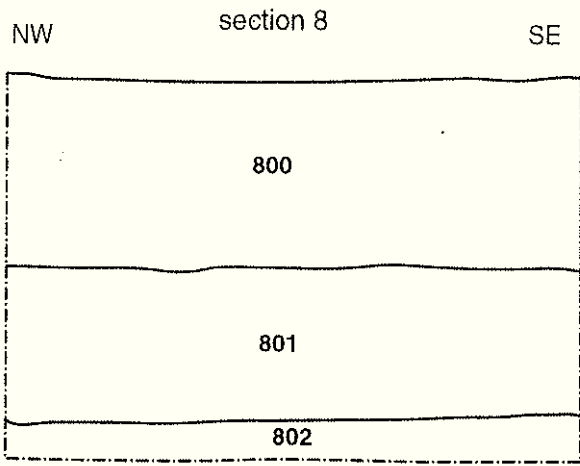
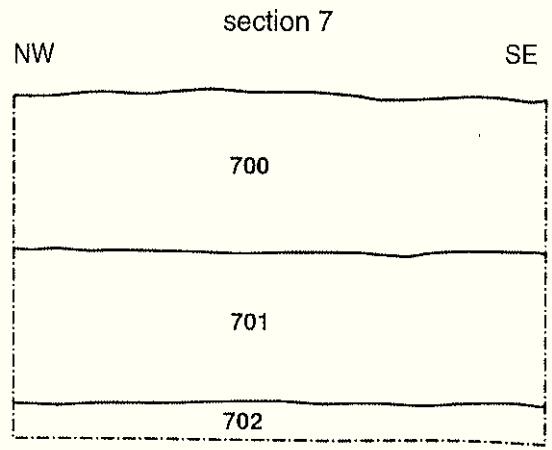
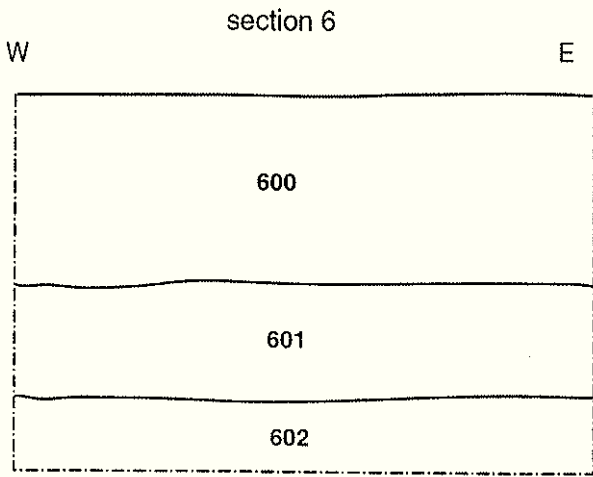


figure 4: sections 6 - 10



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