

# Further Palaeolithic Evaluation East Hall Farm Sittingbourne Kent



## Archaeological Evaluation Report



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## **Further Palaeolithic Evaluation, East Hall Farm, Sittingbourne, Kent**

### ***Archaeological Evaluation Report***

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## **Summary**

*In March 2011, Oxford Archaeology South undertook an evaluation at East Hall Farm, Sittingbourne, Kent for URS Scott Wilson Ltd on behalf of Countryside Properties, Ltd.*

*The evaluation took the form of five test pits excavated through a sequence of brickearth and Pleistocene gravel deposits believed to have significant potential for the recovery of palaeolithic artefacts.*

*The evaluation showed that the area had been extensively quarried for brickearth. Only one of the five test pits contained significant quantities of in situ brickearth, although three others displayed heavily truncated remnants/redeposited material.*

*Where sufficient brickearth survived in situ, samples were dry-sieved on site to establish the presence/absence of artefacts. Previous geoarchaeological assessment suggested that the highest potential for artefacts lay at the interface between the brickearth and gravel. 100 litre samples were therefore taken from three levels in each test pit, comprising the interface zone, the immediately overlying brickearth (where present), and the underlying gravel.*

*Sieving failed to recover any palaeolithic artefacts. A small number of probable later prehistoric struck flints were recovered from the disturbed brickearth/gravel interface in Test Pit 2, comprising five flakes. The level of truncation and disturbance to the brickearth in this test pit makes it clear that these finds were not in situ.*



## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Commission and planning background

- 1.1.1 In March 2011, Oxford Archaeology South (OA) undertook an evaluation at East Hall Farm, Sittingbourne, Kent for URS Scott Wilson Ltd on behalf of Countryside Properties, Ltd. The work was undertaken in accordance with a WSI prepared by A. Calder (URS Scott Wilson). The evaluation took the form of five test pits excavated through a sequence of brickearth and Pleistocene gravel deposits believed to have significant potential for the recovery of palaeolithic artefacts.
- 1.1.2 A phased programme of development has been ongoing in the vicinity of East Hall Farm, Sittingbourne, Kent (TQ 926 641) for a number of years. A desk-based assessment of archaeological potential was carried out in 2003 (CgMs 2003). This was followed up by field evaluation (OA 2004) and a series of excavations (OA 2005a, 2008). Those investigations were primarily concerned with investigating and recording Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman archaeological remains discovered during the evaluation trenching. However they also included an assessment of potential for palaeolithic archaeology within the underlying Pleistocene deposits (brickearth and gravel) (OA 2005b). This evaluation forms the final stage of the palaeolithic assessment. The development plot considered in this report is known to have suffered truncation from brickearth quarrying, and thus has no potential for the survival of later prehistoric and Roman remains. However the depth of the quarrying was unclear, leaving some potential for the discovery of palaeolithic artefacts. As the plot is now earmarked for development, KCC Heritage Conservation have requested a field evaluation of the Pleistocene deposits.
- 1.1.3 On 28th March 2011 OA excavated five test-pits to the surface of the gravels. This report outlines the results of the evaluation, the extent and significance of archaeological deposits identified, and the likely impact of the development upon them.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is located on the north-facing dip-slope of the North Downs, where it forms a shallow slope down towards the Swale Estuary, which separates the Isle of Sheppey from mainland Kent. The bedrock geology is primarily Cretaceous Chalk, but this is overlain in the area of the development by Tertiary Thanet Sand (BGS website). The surface of these deposits is notable for the accumulation of substantial northward-trending bodies of Head gravel and brickearth, which fill dry valleys in the landscape that drain towards the Swale. These deposits have probably formed throughout the Pleistocene (OA 2005b).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological potential of the development area has been the subject of a desk-based assessment and field investigations (CgMs 2003), the results of which are summarised below.
- 1.3.2 The previous investigations identified extensive later prehistoric and Roman archaeology, cut into the surface of the brickearth, in areas where quarrying had not taken place, within the fields to the north of the present evaluation. The later archaeology is the subject of separate reports, and is therefore not considered further here (OA 2004, 2005a, OA 2008).



- 1.3.3 The desk-based assessment included mapping the extents of late 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century brickearth quarrying activity using historic maps and documentary sources (CGMS 2003). The assessment of palaeolithic potential in addition used data from geo-technical and archaeological investigations to map the thickness and lateral extent of Pleistocene deposits across the site, employing computer modelling software to identify significant deposits that may have escaped the quarrying activity (OA 2005b).
- 1.3.4 This concluded that the study area could produce palaeolithic archaeological finds, although brickearth extraction from the late 19th century to mid-20th century within the area had significantly reduced this potential.
- 1.3.5 Significant palaeolithic remains have been recovered from a similar sequence of deposits at Bapchild, c 1.5 km to the south-east of the East Hall Farm site. At Bapchild finds were made from at least three different horizons (Dines 1929). Large numbers of Levalloisian artefacts, similar to those found at Stone Cross, Chatham (Turner 1928) and at Crayford (Spurrell 1880) were recovered from the Head gravel/Coombe deposits underlying the brickearth. These are likely to have been somewhat reworked during deposition of the deposit in which they are found, but the fresh condition of many suggests a low level of disturbance. Large numbers of slightly abraded late Upper palaeolithic artefacts were recovered from a thin layer (0.3–0.5 m thick) of gravelly/sandy loam that lay at the base of the brickearth. These are likely to have been washed off the surface of the local landscape during deposition of this basal slopewash deposit, possibly during climatic amelioration of the Windermere interstadial, towards the end of the Devensian Ice Age. Large numbers of fresh condition late Upper palaeolithic or final palaeolithic artefacts were recovered from an area c 25 m x 25 m across and c 0.3 m above the base of the brickearth, possibly from an undisturbed site area, or possibly representing a slightly transported assemblage from a nearby site area on higher ground.
- 1.3.6 Two other palaeolithic finds are recorded in the general area in the Southern Rivers Project report (WA 1993). Firstly, eight handaxes and a Levallois flake have been found in the vicinity of Tonge Hill, Murston (TQ 938 648), immediately to the north-east of the East Hall Farm site. No information is known on their context. Secondly, a handaxe has been found near Teynham Church (TQ 966 636) c. 3km to the east.

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS

### 2.1 Aims and objectives

- 2.1.1 The evaluation follows a previous phases of palaeolithic assessment, which have informed the following objectives for the evaluation:
- 2.1.2 Generally the aims are:
- To confirm the presence/absence of palaeolithic remains across the site;
  - To establish the distribution and depth across the site of palaeolithic remains.
- 2.1.3 Specific objectives were as follows:
- To confirm the presence of, or potential for, undisturbed primary context palaeolithic occupation surfaces in the sediments encountered;
  - Establish the horizontal and vertical extent, sequence and sedimentological character of Pleistocene deposits across the site (if applicable);



- Interpret the depositional and post-depositional history of any artefactual or biological evidence found;
- Establish correlations of any Pleistocene deposits found with reference to adjacent and regional sequences, and to national frameworks (particular reference to Bapchild);
- Assess in local, regional, national and international terms, the archaeological and geological significance of any Pleistocene deposits encountered, and their potential to fulfil current research objectives.
- To establish whether or not these deposits have been truncated or disturbed by brickearth quarrying;
- To recover any evidence of flint working by dry sieving specific deposits considered to have potential to contain palaeolithic artefacts.

### 3 PROJECT SPECIFIC EXCAVATION AND RECORDING METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Fieldwork methods

- 3.1.1 The evaluation comprised five test pits, each up to 1.5m deep (2.5m by 1.8m in plan (Fig. 2). Where potentially significant geoarchaeological deposits were discovered, 100 litres of spoil from each horizon was dry-sieved on site, under the supervision of a specialist in prehistoric worked flint (M.Donnelly, OA).
- 3.1.2 Prior to excavation all trenches were scanned with a Cable Avoidance Tool to identify any unrecorded services. Excavation was carried out by a JCB 3CX wheeled excavator fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket. All mechanical excavation was undertaken under direct archaeological supervision.
- 3.1.3 All archaeological and pedological horizons were removed in successive, level spits.
- 3.1.4 Continuous assessment of the trenches was undertaken on site by a qualified archaeologist. If key geoarchaeological horizons were identified during the machine stripping, namely the brickearth, the brickearth/gravel interface and the underlying head gravels, 100 litre samples were retained and dry sieved to look for artefacts.
- 3.1.5 In some test pits the brickearth and brickearth/gravel interface were either very indistinct or only partly survived as a result of brickearth quarrying. In some of these test pits insufficient material was available to make up a 100 L sample, in which case all of the available material was sieved.

### 4 RESULTS

#### 4.1 Presentation of results

- 4.1.1 The descriptions of the test pits is presented below. A comprehensive listing of individual test pits and associated context data can be found in Appendix A. This should be referred to for factual dimensions which are not generally included in the descriptive text.
- 4.1.2 Individual contexts have been uniquely numbered by test pit starting at the 100's for trench one (e.g. The first context used for Test Pit 1 would be 101).



4.1.3 As very few finds were recovered, the finds report is incorporated in the main text. Relevant details are included in the detailed trench descriptions and summary information following the trench descriptions. Relevant dating information is also included within the Appendix A tables, where present.

4.1.4 No palaeoenvironmental samples were recovered and no deposits suitable for sampling were observed during the evaluation.

## 4.2 Soils and ground conditions

4.2.1 The land to be evaluated consisted of two fields, separated by an access road (Fig.2). Both fields have been subject to groundworks in recent years, as they were used for spoil storage during the main archaeological excavation in 2007 (OA 2008). The weather during the fieldwork was sunny and dry, the ground was free-drying and at no time was ground water met.

## 4.3 Test Pit descriptions

### *Field 1, Test Pit 1*

4.3.1 A single test pit was located in Field 1 to the west of the access road and noticeably below the level of the main road and surrounding fields. Here, the level of modern truncation was most obvious with a much thinner topsoil than was the norm for Field 2. The topsoil (101) contained numerous pieces of modern slag, CBM, glass, and displayed numerous lenses of sandy gravel, indicative of very recent disturbance. This topsoil overlay a very thin deposit of remnant brickearth (Plate 1, context 102), however, this band was not immediately observable during the stripping and was removed with some of the topsoil at the gravel interface and stored separately. The gravels (103) below this brickearth were very clean and consisted of light yellowish brown sandy-pebbly gravels with occasional larger flint inclusions up to around 0.15m in maximum length. Sieving of layers 102 and 103 failed to yield any struck flint.

### *Field 2, Test Pits 2 to 5*

4.3.2 As with Field 1, the evaluation area was significantly lower-lying than the level of the adjacent previously investigated fields, probably as a result of brickearth quarrying (OA 2004; 2005a; 2008).

4.3.3 The most complete sequence was present in Test Pit 3 (Plate 4), which was located at the eastern end of the evaluation area where the north-eastern corner of the field rose up to a level slightly below the adjacent fields to the north, which have not been quarried for brickearth. A 0.75m thick deposit of brickearth (302) was found overlying the gravels (303). Below this was a light yellowish-brown sandy gravel (304) to a depth of 1.5m. Grey clays were seen below the gravel. Despite extensive sieving (300 litres), no struck flints were recovered from Test Pit 3.

4.3.4 Test Pits 2 and 4 revealed indistinct traces of the brickearth, immediately below a very shallow disturbed topsoil. The surviving (disturbed) brickearth was not readily distinguishable from the topsoil – It seems likely that brickearth quarrying in this area exposed the surface of the gravel, leaving discontinuous patches of remnant brickearth. For completeness the surface of the gravel and the overlying material were sieved for artefacts, recognising that the contexts were disturbed.

4.3.5 In Test Pit 2 (Context 202, Plates 2 and 3) the brickearth may survive as a thin wedge of material. The underlying sandy gravel was 1.1m thick. Grey clay was seen beneath



the gravel, at a depth of 1.5m. A small assemblage of struck flint was recovered from the disturbed and intermingled brickearth and the surface of the gravel, but is clearly not *in situ*. These flints are believed to be redeposited artefacts of later date, consistent with Neolithic / Bronze Age material found in the adjacent excavations (Fig. 2, OA 2008).

- 4.3.6 In Test Pit 4 (Context 402) the brickearth only survived in slight, unconnected lenses. The underlying sandy gravels (403) were 0.7m thick, and a layer of greenish-grey clay (404) was encountered below the gravels at 1.1m below ground level. No artefacts were recovered.
- 4.3.7 Test Pit 5, which lay along the southern edge of Field 2, had a somewhat different sequence from the other test pits, comprising a deep deposit (502) of banded yellow/green sand (possibly Thanet Sand), which was encountered immediately below the topsoil (501) and continued to a depth of over 1.2m. No sieving of artefacts was undertaken and no finds were observed during excavation of this deposit.

#### **4.4 Finds reports**

##### ***Worked flint***

*by Mike Donnelly*

- A.1.1 Contexts 102, 202/203 (interface), 203, 302, 303, 304 and 403 all yielded 100 litres of soil, which were dry-sieved immediately on-site, for struck flints. Context 101 only produced around 50 litres of material while context 402/403 only generated around 30 litres for sieving. As the evaluation was mainly concerned with establishing the presence/absence of artefacts, no residues were retained.
- A.1.2 Five pieces of struck flint were recovered from Test Pit 2. Four of the pieces originated from the brickearth/gravel interface (202/203) and one was recovered from the gravel itself (203). However the patchy survival of the brickearth and the mixed, disturbed appearance of the overlying soil indicates that intrusive material is very likely in this case. Consequently, it is likely that most if not all of the flints recovered from Test Pit 2 are of post-palaeolithic date. Further sieving of material from Test Pits 1, 3 and 4 failed to recover any flints.
- A.1.3 The assemblage consists of undiagnostic flakes in very fresh condition. The exception to this is the flake from context 203 which clearly displays signs of edge damage. Some of the flakes recovered could have been struck accidentally during modern groundworks or earlier quarrying.
- A.1.4 Overall the assemblage is very small, essentially unstratified and most likely to be of later prehistoric date.

##### ***Modern finds***

- 4.4.1 Numerous and diverse modern finds were present in all of the test pits, usually restricted to the topsoil, but in some instances, material had been reworked to the surface of the underlying gravels. Modern finds were not retained, but their presence was noted in the context record.



## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

### 5.1 Distribution and significance of archaeological deposits

- 5.1.1 The evaluation has confirmed suspicions that the fields under study have been extensively quarried for brickearth, and subject to subsequent modern ground disturbance. Given the depth and extent of disturbance and truncation, the potential for palaeolithic material being found in the surviving remnants of brickearth in these fields is negligible.
- 5.1.2 A small area was identified in the north-east corner of the site in which a 0.6m thick layer of remnant brickearth was present (Test Pit 3). However this coincides with an area of distinctly higher modern ground level and appears to be an isolated survival. Sieving of the surviving *in situ* brickearth produced no artefacts from the base of the brickearth or the surface of the gravel.
- 5.1.3 The small assemblage of struck flints recovered from the evaluation is most likely to be of Neolithic/Bronze Age date, and was recovered from a clearly disturbed context. The finds are consistent with the previous discoveries of Bronze Age and later archaeology in the fields immediately to the north (which had not been subject to brickearth quarrying).



## APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Test Pit 1						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Test Pit 1 contained a very narrow band of brickearth overlying gravel, however, this was located directly below thin topsoil and contained significant levels of modern contaminants.					Avg. depth (m)	1
					Width (m)	1.8
					Length (m)	2.2
Contexts						
context no	type	Height OD (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
101	Layer	11.5	0-0.3m	Topsoil, mid greyish-brown silt/sand/clay with modern CBM and disturbed gravel lenses	no#	Modern
102	Layer	11.2	0.3-0.45m	Mid-light reddish brown structureless sandy-clayey-silt, 'brickearth' occasional flint pebbles	no	?
103	Layer	11.1	0.4m+	Mid-light yellowish-brown, sandy-pebbly gravels, occasional silt lenses	no	?

# Modern finds not retained

Test Pit 2						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Test Pit 2 contained only an extremely thin wedge of surviving brickearth overlying gravels, which had clearly been subject to disturbance. Sieving of this material yielded five struck flints (almost certainly post-palaeolithic).					Avg. depth (m)	0.9
					Width (m)	1.8
					Length (m)	2
Contexts						
context no	type	Height OD (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
201	Layer	11.42	0-0.4m	Topsoil, dark reddish-brown sand/clay/silt with modern CBM, slag and glass	no#	Modern
202	Layer	11.02	0.4-0.45m	Light reddish brown structureless sandy-clayey-silt, 'brickearth' occasional flint pebbles	Struck flints	?
203	Layer	10.96	0.4m+	Light yellowish-brown, sandy-pebbly gravels, occasional silt lenses	Struck flint	?

# Modern finds not retained



Test Pit 3						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Test Pit 3 was situated on the highest point of ground within the evaluation area and revealed the only partially intact sequence of brickearth an any of the test pits. Extensive sieving of brickearth, brickearth/gravel interface and gravel deposits failed to recover any struck flints.					<b>Avg. depth (m)</b>	1.5
					<b>Width (m)</b>	1.8
					<b>Length (m)</b>	2.2
Contexts						
context no	type	Height OD (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
301	Layer	11.97	0-0.6m	Topsoil, dark reddish-brown sand/clay/silt with modern CBM, slag, glass and disturbed gravel lenses	no#	Modern
302	Layer	11.38	0.6-1.1m	Light reddish brown structureless sandy-clayey-silt, 'brickearth' occasional flint pebbles	no	
303	Layer	10.85	1.1-1.3m	Mid yellow-brown/greenish-brown sandy-clay with flint pebble and cobbles	no	
304	Layer	10.65	1.3m+	Light yellowish-brown, sandy-pebbly gravels, occasional silt lenses	no	

# Modern finds not retained

Test Pit 4						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Test Pit 4 possibly contained very faint traces of truncated brickearth as isolated blocks of similar material sitting on gravel deposits. This test pit differed from its northern neighbours in that it also revealed a band of grey clay, possibly alluvial in nature.					<b>Avg. depth (m)</b>	1.2
					<b>Width (m)</b>	1.8
					<b>Length (m)</b>	2.8
Contexts						
context no	type	Height OD (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
401	Layer	11.51	0-0.4m	Topsoil, dark reddish-brown sand/clay/silt	no#	Modern
402	Layer	11.16	0.35-0.4m	Mid-Light reddish brown structureless sandy-clayey-silt, 'brickearth' occasional flint pebbles	no	
403	Layer	11.08	0.4-1.1m	Light yellowish-brown, sandy-pebbly gravels, occasional silt lenses	no	
404	Layer	10.42	1.1m+	Pale greenish grey clay	no	

# Modern finds not retained



Test Pit 5						
<b>General description</b>					<b>Orientation</b>	N-S
Test Pit 5 contained apparent Thanet sands directly below the topsoil. These displayed clear laminations within the body of material, rather than a structureless block as typifies brickearth.					<b>Avg. depth (m)</b>	1.5
					<b>Width (m)</b>	1.8
					<b>Length (m)</b>	2.8
Contexts						
context no	type	Height OD (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
501	Layer	11.44	0-0.4m	Topsoil, dark reddish-brown sand/clay/silt with modern CBM, slag, glass and disturbed gravel lenses	no	
502	Layer	11.04	0.4m+	Banded light yellowish-brown/mid yellowish-grey silty sand, possibly Thanet Sands?	no	

# Modern finds not retained

## APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX C. APPENDIX B. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** East Hall Farm, Sittingbourne, Kent  
**Site code:** SIEHF 11  
**Grid reference:** TQ 9280 6380  
**Type:** Evaluation  
**Date and duration:** 28th March 2011  
**Area of site:** 50 sq.m in 5 test pits (2.5m by 2m)

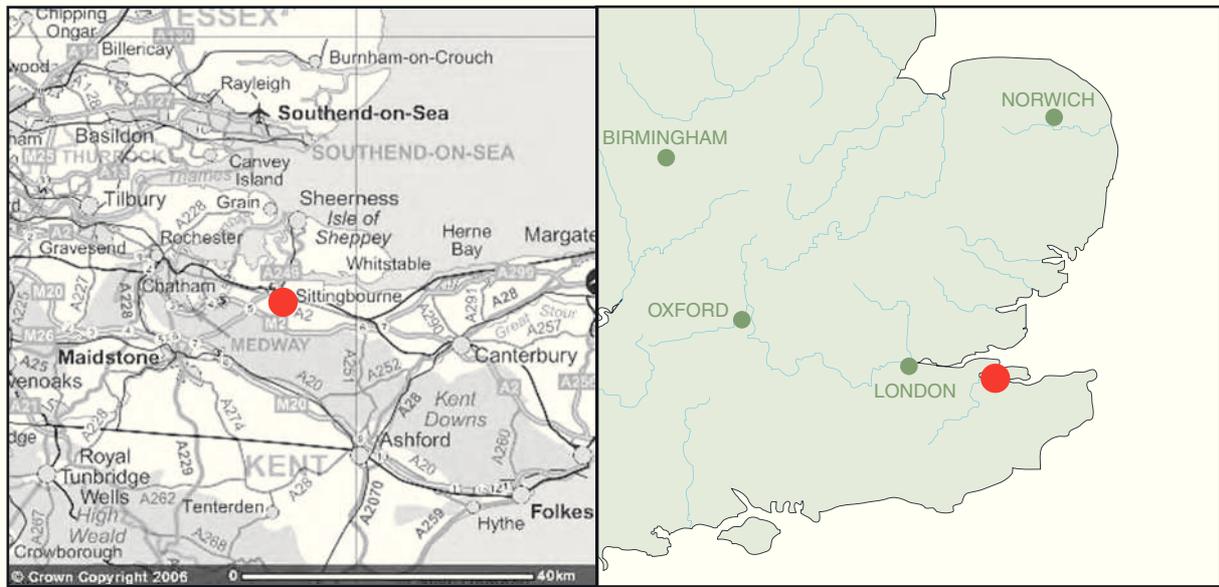
### Summary of results:

In March 2011, Oxford Archaeology South undertook an evaluation at East Hall Farm, Sittingbourne, Kent for Scott Wilson Ltd on behalf of Countryside Properties, Ltd.

Five test pits were excavated in an area believed to contain a sequence of brickearth and gravel deposits with potential for the recovery of palaeolithic artefacts. However, the evaluation showed that the area has been extensively quarried for brickearth and at only one location was significant quantities of in situ brickearth discovered. The dry-sieving on site of surviving brickearth, brickearth/gravel interface and underlying gravels failed to yield any palaeolithic artefacts.

### Location of archive:

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES. As there are currently no museums in Kent accepting archaeological archives, material will be retained in Oxford until a suitable permanent repository becomes available.



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location



**Key**

- Test pit
- Area of evaluation
- Previous investigation area
- OS coordinate



Figure 2: Test Pit locations

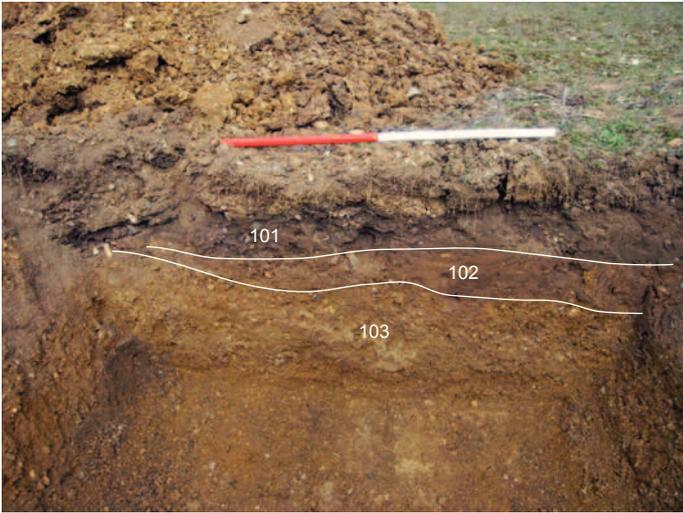


Plate 1: Brickearth layer in Test Pit 1



Plate 2: Brickearth layer in Test Pit 2



Plate 3: Close up of brickearth/gravel interface in Test Pit 2



Plate 4: Partially truncated brickearth sequence in Test Pit 3





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