

London Road, Newbury Berkshire

Archaeological Evaluation

Oxford Archaeological Unit

1994

LONDON ROAD, NEWBURY, BERKSHIRE

SITE CODE: NEHR94

NGR: SU48876741

LIST OF CONTENTS

- 1 Summary
- 2 Introduction
- 3 Topography and geology
- 4 Archaeological and historical background
- 5 Methodology and strategy
- 6 Results
- 7 Conclusion

Appendices

- 1 Summary of Deposits
- 2 Detailed Trench Description

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Figure1 | Trench location; extent of site |
| 2 | Plans of Trenches 2, 4 and 5 |
| 3 | Sections 1-4 |

1 SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a field evaluation at London Road, Newbury (Planning Application No.144160) on behalf of Dreweatt Neate from the 9th to the 13th of May 1994. Five trenches were positioned to provide a representative 4% sample of the areas to be affected by the proposed residential development.

Three trenches located in the waterlogged southern end of the site revealed similar stratified sequences which comprised of a humic topsoil which overlay two peaty layers, above the natural gravel. This sequence was interrupted in places by recent levelling.

The two trenches located at the northern end of the site revealed a silty sand topsoil which overlay layers of make-up above natural gravel. The make-up layer were cut by an E/W-aligned linear trench which contained modern material and was believed to be a recently constructed sewage trench. In the southern end of the N/S-aligned trench the edge of a water course was observed which represents the boundary between the two contrasting stratigraphic sequences identified on the site.

No archaeological features were identified and the dating evidence recovered on site falls between the 18th and 20th century. A piece of residual burnt flint and possible flint flake were recovered.

2 INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a field evaluation at London Road, Newbury, Berkshire, on behalf of Dreweatt Neate. Archaeological fieldwork began on the 9th of May and finished on the 13th of May 1994. An area of approximately 6310 sq. m. is to be redeveloped, as part of a residential development. The five excavated trenches represent a 4% sample of the area to be redeveloped.

The aim of the evaluation was to begin assessment of the nature, location, extent and significance of surviving archaeological remains.

3 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site lies within an area of waste land, South of London Road and approximately 1 Km to the East of Newbury town centre (NGR SU48876741; Figure 1). The site is densely overgrown and there is a gradual gradient from North to South, towards the river Lambourne which bounds the southernmost extent of the site.

The sites is situated in the base of the Kennet valley on the river and valley bottom gravels.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The proposed development site lies within an area which may contain significant archaeological remains. Evidence for prehistoric activity has been identified to the east and south of the site including Mesolithic tools from Hambridge Farm. An area of prehistoric activity has been located from aerial photographs and fieldwalking to the north-east. Evidence has also been recovered for possible 12th century occupation close to Hambridge Farm.

5 METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGY

- 5.1** The evaluation strategy was carried out in the form of five trench excavations. The trenches measured 30 x 1.5 m, which represented a 4 sample of the area covered by the proposed residential development. The positioning of the trenches was restricted by the waterlogged nature of the site and the dense vegetation. The site is a listed conservation area.
- 5.2** The non-archaeological overburden was excavated mechanically using a JCB3CX with a 1.5 m toothless ditching bucket. Mechanical excavation continued down to the first significant archaeological horizon or in their absence to the natural subsoil. The resulting surfaces were cleaned, planned, levelled, and photographed; where appropriate a sample section was excavated through the fills of any potential features.
- 5.3** To comply with health and safety regulations and to ensure that the trench would in no way be hazardous, no excavation would continue beyond a depth of 1.2 m.
- 5.4** During excavation of the southernmost trenches (Trenches 1, 2, and 3) flooding occurred immediately after the removal of the lower peaty silt which acted as a seal. A water pump was used in these trenches to enable necessary recording.

6 RESULTS

- 6.1** In trenches 4 and 5, Natural gravel (409) was overlain by a series of make-up layers (402, 403, 404, 507), which were cut by a large E/W-aligned linear feature (406) with vertical sides and a width of 5.4 m. The cut was filled by a loose light yellowish brown silty sand (405) which contained plastic and barbed wire and was observed to the extent of excavation. Both sides of the cut were visible in trench 4 although only the fill and part of the southern edge were visible in trench 5. One side of a possible contemporary N/S-aligned cut (504) was visible in trench 5 which may represent a N/S-alignment branch of the same feature. This was not visible in trenches 1 and 3, but probably continues West beyond the evaluation trenches.

- 6.2** Two contrasting sequences of deposition were observed. In the northern end of site (trenches 4 and 5) a series of make-up layers (401, 402, 403, 404, 507, 501) were above natural gravel within a dry environment, whilst in the southern end of site (Trenches 1, 2, and 3) waterlogged humic silts/peats were encountered (101, 103, 201, 202, 205, 301, 303, 307, 308, 309) above the natural sands and gravel (204, 203, 112, 311). In the southern end of trench 4, the edge of a water course was observed (figure 2) which represents the boundary between these two contrasting stratigraphic sequences.
- 6.3** A mixed layer of light yellowish brown clay (302, 403), beneath the topsoil in Trench 3 and below a layer of make-up in Trench 4 was observed with an undulating boundary between the waterlogged silts/peats below (303 and a sharp level boundary between the make-up and topsoil above (301 and 402). This suggests that it has been used to level the site and perhaps to seal the waterlogged deposits below.
- 6.4** The waterlogged condition of the peaty silt deposits in trenches 1, 2 and 3 suggest a high potential for the recovery of environmental data. However modern material such as tile and red brick was recovered from some of these deposits and none produced evidence of a more ancient origin. After the removal of the peaty silt deposits, the seal to the water table was broken and flooding occurred which subsequently hampered recording.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1** The construction of the E/W-aligned Sewage trench (503, 406) observed in the northern end of the site, which possible extends in a N/S-alignment (505) as observed in Trench 5 ¹ would have destroyed any archaeological evidence in this portion of the site. Its associated construction work would also have destroyed any archaeology that may/ or may not have been present within the surrounding area; all trenches with the exception of Trench 2 exhibit evidence of levelling likely to be contemporary.
- 7.2** A piece of residual burnt flint and a worked flint were found in Trench 1 (110). No other finds pre-dating the 19th century were recovered. The relative absence of residual finds would suggest that it is unlikely that the site was occupied extensively in the past.
- 7.3** The waterlogged conditions of the deposits identified at the southern end of the site, suggests a high potential for the recovery of environmental data. However, none of the waterlogged deposits observed suggested an ancient origin and may have been recently disturbed.

¹ Although a N/S-aligned cut was observed in trench 5, no further traces were visible in trenches 1 and 3, perhaps indicating that the sewage trench alignment continues to the West of the excavated trenches.

7.4 The dense vegetation , the waterlogged conditions and the abundants of modern debris (remains of an old car found in Trench 3) on site, suggest that it would be unsuitable for geophysical investigation.

Rob Early, Oxford Archaeological Unit, May 1994

APPENDIX 1 SUMMARY OF STRATIGRAPHY

Context No.	Type of Context	Depth (m)	Level Top (mASL)	Comments
101	Deposit	0.35	70.61	Topsoil
102	Deposit	0.2	70.41	?Surface
103	Deposit	0.3	70.11	Peat
104	Fill	0.3		Fill of 107
105	Fill	0.3		Fill of 107
106	Fill	0.2		Fill of 107
107	Cut	0.5		Modern Construction cut
108	Deposit	0.2	70.74	
109	Deposit	0.15	70.69	Peat
110	Deposit	0.15	70.54	Water borne sand
111	Deposit	0.5		Peat
112	Deposit	Unknown	69.91	Natural sand/gravel
201	Deposit	0.25	70.33	Topsoil
202	Deposit	0.2		Clayey silt
203	Deposit	0.2	69.93	Natural flinty gravel
204	Deposit	Unknown		Natural sand/gravel
205	Deposit	0.2	70.13	?Waterbourne
301	Deposit	0.25	70.63	Topsoil
302	Deposit	0.3	70.38	Deliberate dump
303	Deposit	0.4		peat
304	Deposit	0.25		Deliberate dump

305	Deposit	0.15	70.43	Modern gravelly layer
306	Deposit	0.2	70.28	??modern ground surface
307	Deposit	0.15	70.41	Water lain sandy silt
308	Deposit	0.05	70.36	Silty sand
309	Deposit	0.1	70.26	Sandy silt
310	Deposit	0.18	70.08	peat
311	Deposit	Unknown	70.03	Flinty gavel
401	Deposit	0.2	71.57	Topsoil
402	Deposit	0.2	71.37	Make-up
403	Deposit	0.6	71.17	Make-up
404	Deposit	0.15	70.57	Make-up
405	Deposit	Unknown	70.73	Deliberate dump
406	Cut	Unknown		Sewage trench
407	Deposit	0.45	70.57	Modern Peaty layer
408	Deposit	0.1	70.63	Boundary between gravel and peat
409	Deposit	Unknown	72.15	Natural Gravel
410	Deposit	0.3		Derived from 401
501	Deposit	0.20	72.45	Topsoil
502	Fill	Unknown		Fill of 503
503	Cut	Unknown		E/W-aligned Sewage Trench
504	Fill	Unknown		Fill of 505
505	Cut	Unknown		N/S-aligned Sewage Trench
506	Deposit	Unknown	70.36	Natural Gravel
507	Deposit	0.30		Make-up

APPENDIX 2 DESCRIPTION OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Trench 1

A loose light greyish white sand (112) which contained occasional gravel was

revealed at the extent of excavation at 69.91 m OD. This was overlain by three layers; a tenacious dark brown peaty silt (111), a tenacious mid-reddish brown peaty silt (103) and a loose light reddish brown clayey sand (110).

A tenacious dark brown peaty silt (109) which was disturbed by root activity and contained occasional shell, overlay 110 and was stratigraphically below a tenacious mid-brown sandy silt (108). These two layers exhibited an orange stain in places. 108 was cut by an irregular feature (107) of unknown shape, that had a shallow sloping western side (eastern side not visible). This was filled by three layers; a tenacious mid-reddish brown silt (106), a tenacious light greyish brown silty sand (105) and a tenacious mid-greyish brown silt (104).

The peaty silt 103 was overlain by a compact mid-reddish brown sand (102) which contained 50 % gravel and occasional clinker and was possible a recent surface. Layers 102, 104 and 111 were overlain by a tenacious dark brown peaty silt (101), the present topsoil.

Trench 2

A loose light greyish white sand (204) which contained occasional gravel was revealed at the extent of excavation, 70.40 m at the northern end and 70.27 m OD at the southern end of the trench. A loose mid-grey sand (203) which contained 70 % flinty gravel overlay 204 and was overlain by a tenacious mid-brown clayey silt (205) which exhibited evidence of root disturbance. A tenacious mid-greyish brown peaty silt (202) was stratigraphically above 202 and below a tenacious dark brown peaty silt (201), the present topsoil.

Trench 3

A loose mid-grey sand (311) which contained 70% flinty gravel was revealed at the extent of excavation 70.03 m OD. This was overlain by a dark brown peaty silt (310) which was stratigraphically below three bands of dark grey sandy silt (309, 308, and 307). A friable light reddish brown peaty silt (306) overlay 307 and was overlain by a similar layer (305) which contained 60 % pea grit and flint. A friable dark greyish brown sandy loam (303 and 304) which contained 20% modern debris (including part of an old car) was above 305 and had a sharp undulating boundary below a tenacious yellowish brown clay (302), possibly a levelling layer. 302 was overlain by a tenacious mid-greyish brown peaty silt (301), the present topsoil.

Trench 4

A loose mid-yellow sand which contained 80% gravel was revealed at the extent of excavation, 72.15 m OD. This was overlain by a loose dark brown peaty silt which contained 70% gravel (408) and represented the interface between 409 and 407. A tenacious dark brown peaty silt disturbed by root activity (407) overlay 408.

A tenacious mid-yellowish brown clayey sand which contained 50% gravel (404), overlay 408 and was cut by a E/W-aligned linear feature (406) with steep sides and a width of 5.4 m. This was filled by a loose light yellowish brown silty sand (405) which contained 70% gravel and modern debris. A yellowish brown clay (403), possibly a levelling layer overlay 404.

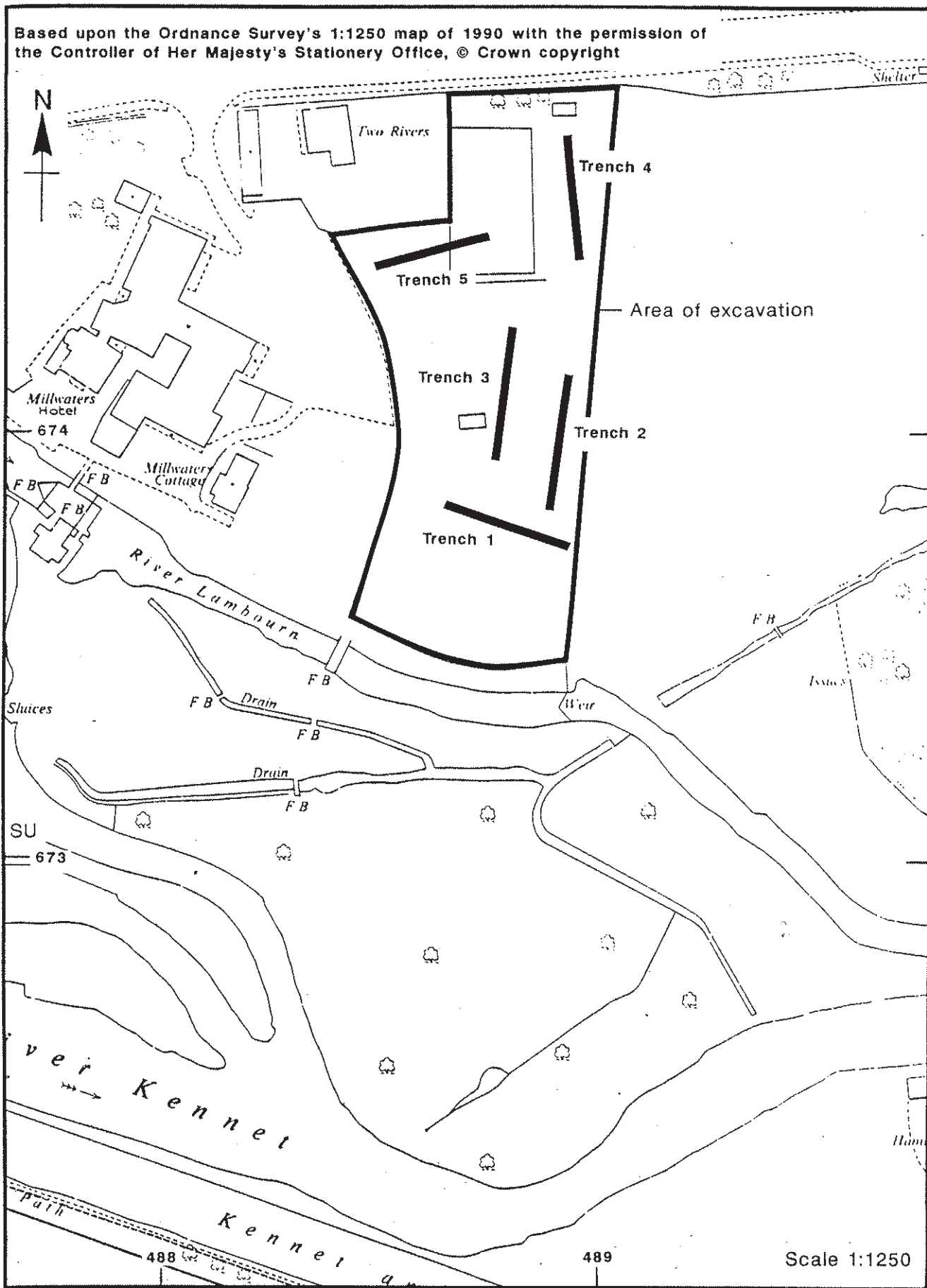
A loose light yellow sand which contained 70% gravel overlay 403 and sealed cut 406. This was overlain by a friable mid-greyish brown silty sand which contained 20% gravel, the present topsoil.

Trench 5

A loose mid-yellow sand (506) which contained 80% gravel was revealed at the extent of excavation at the eastern end of the trench, 71.43 m OD. This was overlain by a loose mid-yellowish brown clayey sand (507) which contained 50% gravel. This was cut by a N/S-aligned feature (only eastern extent visible not excavated) (505), which was filled by a loose yellowish brown silty sand (504) which contained 70% gravel.

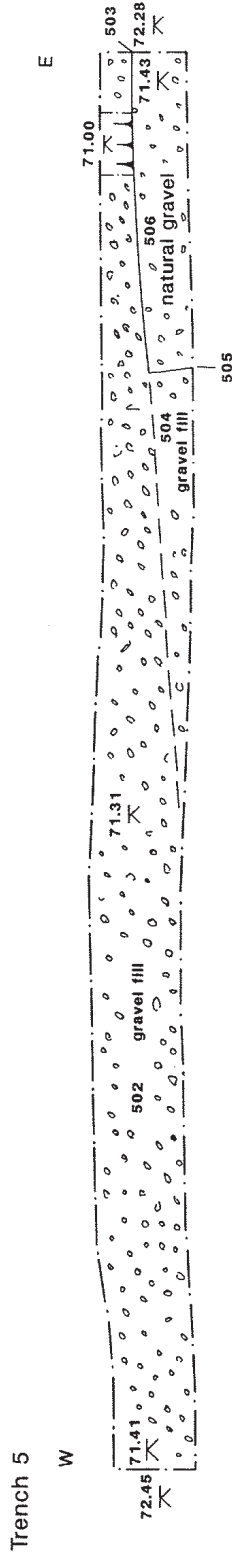
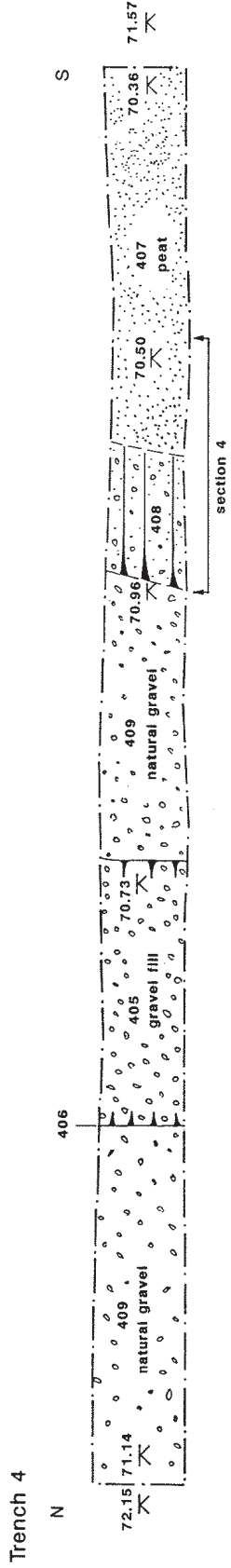
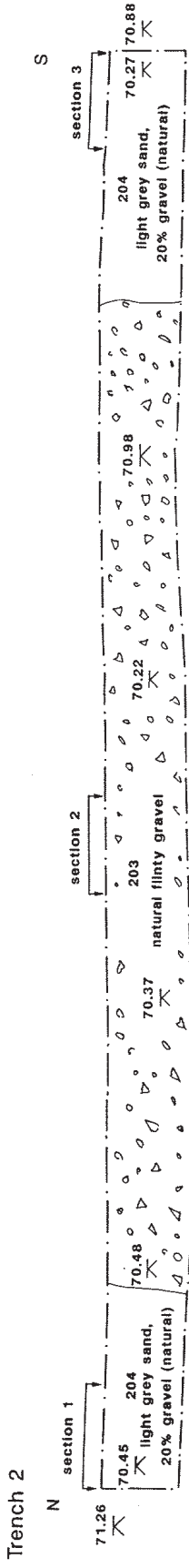
Fill 504 was cut by a E/W-aligned linear feature (503) which had a steep southern side and was observed running the length of the trench. This was filled by a loose light yellow silty sand (502) which contained 70% gravel and was stratigraphically below a friable mid-greyish brown silty sand (501) which contained 20% gravel, the present topsoil.

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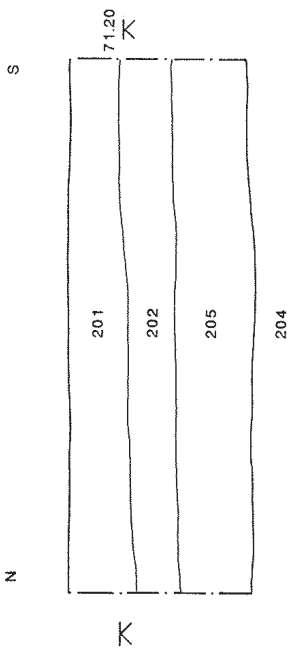
Location of trenches

Figure 1

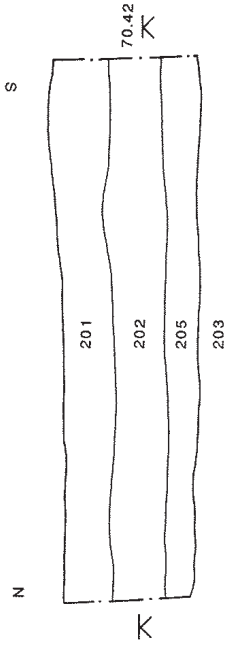


Scale 1:100

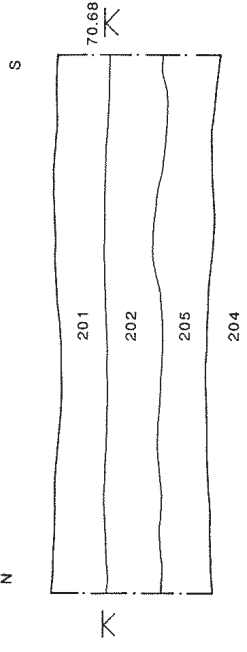
Trench 2
Section 1



Section 2



Section 3



Trench 4 Section 4

