

The University Surveyor

New Chemistry and Molecular Science Laboratory,
Mansfield College, Oxford.

NGR SP 5170 0692

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. 98/1961/NO

Oxford Archaeological Unit

October 1999

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Planning Ref. No. 98/1961/NO

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Date: 5/10/99

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Date: 8/10/99

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Date: 14/10/1999

Oxford Archaeological Unit

October 1999

Summary

In August 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at the site of the proposed new chemistry and molecular science laboratory, Mansfield Road, Oxford (NGR SP 5170 0692). No archaeological features were seen and no finds were retrieved.

1 Introduction (Fig. 1)

The development proposal (planning application no. 98/1961/NO) comprised the excavation of ten geotechnical test pits, in advance of the construction of the proposed new chemistry and molecular science laboratory.

The watching brief was commissioned by the University Surveyor's Office. It was undertaken to a brief set by and in consultation with the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service.

2 Background

The development site is located on the north edge of the historic core of Oxford, and in the vicinity of Oxford's Civil War defences. The site is bounded to the north by South Parks Road, to the east by Mansfield Road, to the south by Mansfield College and to the west by the Institute of Experimental Psychology.

There is evidence for extensive prehistoric activity in the area to the north of the site. Aerial photographs of the University Parks show a range of features from the ring-ditches of six Bronze Age barrows to a Roman field system. Excavations at the Rex Richards building in the University Science Area uncovered two concentric ring-ditches of a Bronze Age barrow and also revealed Iron Age activity. Excavations on the south side of Mansfield College, to the south-west of the development site, revealed a 7 m wide, east-west aligned Civil War defensive ditch which ran to the north of and parallel to the contemporary standing earthwork immediately to the east of Rhodes House.

The defensive ditches of the medieval town and castle were re-dug in preparation for the Civil War siege of 1646, in order to bolster the outer artillery fortifications. The nature of the Civil War defences has been the subject of much discussion and it has become clear, primarily through archaeological monitoring of various development projects, that far greater refurbishment of the medieval defensive works took place than previously was thought. This is particularly so in the case of the north ditch. The defensive works, in the form of a wide ditch, was recently identified during archaeological monitoring of the construction of new student accommodation at St Cross Road, a short distance to the north-east of the development site (OAU 1999).

Loggan's map of 1675 shows the site as gardens and grazing land, sitting between two lines of the Civil War defences. The defensive ditch along the western edge would have been the quarry and counterscarp of the inner of the two main artillery defences of the 1640s.

The fortifications on the north side of Oxford were the first to be constructed in 1642, but were destroyed when Oxford fell into Parliamentary hands. Works were recommenced when the city was retaken by Charles I on the 3rd of November 1642.

Further archaeological monitoring at Mansfield College in advance of the construction of a new building for the Institute of American Studies during 1998/recorded significant Roman archaeological remains. These comprised a large elongated 'U'-shaped feature with the unenclosed portion occupied by a line of possible former post-holes. Overall the feature appeared to represent the remains of a former structure. This large feature overlay a linear ditch also dated to the Roman period and which ran parallel to another contemporary ditch. Other Roman features included some small gullies and pits and a possible gravel surface. The Civil War ditch was also seen here during this exercise (OAU 1998).

and 1999

The site is located at NGR SP 5170 0692 (centred) and the geological survey map shows alluvial deposits over Oxford Clay; the Kellaway Beds are also known in the vicinity. Land use on the site is currently as a car park; previously it was the location of two large houses, or terraces, fronting onto South Parks Road.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

4 Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken on the 17th and 18th of August 1999 and a continuous presence was maintained on site during the excavation of all ten test pits; during this time the upcast from the boreholes was also examined. All excavation was by JCB.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits and features exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil description utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results (Figs 2 & 3)

Test Pit 1.

- (10) – a thin skim of sand and fine-coarse subrounded gravel, 0.09 m thick.
- (11) – mixed brick rubble, metal fragments, sand and gravel, 0.81 m thick.
- (12) – concrete slab floor.

TP 1 was aborted at 0.90 m depth, on encountering the concrete slab.

Test Pit 2.

(20) – brick and concrete rubble, 0.25 m thick.

(21) – heavily rooted mid brown/gray silty clay loam cut by modern services, 0.55 m thick.

(22) – heavily rooted light brown silty clay loam, 0.70 m thick.

(23) – mid yellow sandy gravel natural.

Groundwater was encountered at 4 m depth, and Oxford clay at 4.5 m depth at which point TP 2 was terminated.

Test Pit 3.

(30) – 0.05 m tarmac.

(31) – 0.85 m brick and concrete rubble.

(32) – concrete slab floor.

TP 3 was aborted at 0.90 m depth, on encountering the concrete slab.

Test Pit 4.

(40) – tarmac and coarse gravel makeup, 0.30 m thick.

(41) – mid brown/gray very mixed silty clay loam with lenses of sand and fine-coarse subrounded gravel, 0.75 m thick. This deposit contained a bottle dump, the top of which lay 0.80 m from the ground surface, and the bottom of which lay 1.5 m from the ground surface; besides bottle glass this feature contained housebrick, metal fragments, slate and transfer-printed willow pattern. Additionally, a large modern service pipe was seen in the east section at 1 m depth.

(42) – light brown silty clay loam, slightly rooted with some rounded pebbles and small stones, 0.60 m thick.

(43) – natural sandy gravel at 1.65 m depth.

Groundwater was encountered at 3.7 m depth, also a coarser yellow natural gravel. The Oxford clay was not seen here and the test pit was terminated at 4.3 m depth.

Test Pit 5.

(50) – light brown sandy clay loam, 0.45 m thick.

(51) – brick and concrete rubble in a matrix of light brown sandy clay loam with lenses of dark gray clay, 0.50 m thick.

(52) – mid gray/brown silty clay loam, 0.50 m thick.

(53) – mid reddish brown silty clay loam, 0.45 m thick.

(54) – natural gravelly sand at 1.9 m depth.

Groundwater was encountered at 3.65 m depth, and the Oxford clay was seen at 4.2 m depth at which point the test pit was terminated.

Test Pit 6.

(60) – tarmac and hardcore makeup; the makeup material consisted of coarse yellow subangular gravel which contained a very high percentage of whole and fragmented red housebrick, 0.25 m thick.

(61) – mid brown slightly pinkish silty clay loam with some roots, 0.44 m thick.

(62) – natural sandy gravel at 0.85 m depth.

(63) – natural coarse yellow gravel with some sand.

Groundwater was encountered at 3.05 m depth, and the Oxford clay was seen at 3.60 m depth. The test pit was terminated at 3.80 m depth.

Test Pit 7.

(70) – tarmac and coarse gravel makeup, 0.20 m thick.

(71) – dark gray silty clay loam with whole and fragmented red housebrick and some coarse subangular gravel, 0.13 m thick.

(72) – mid brown slightly pinkish silty clay loam with whole and fragmented red housebrick and fragments of transfer-printed willow pattern, c. 0.62 m thick.

(73) – natural sandy gravel at c. 0.95 m depth.

Groundwater was encountered at 2.60 m depth, and the Oxford clay was seen at 3.2 m depth, at which point the test pit was terminated.

Test Pit 8.

(80) – tarmac and hardcore makeup, 0.20 m thick.

(81) – dark gray silty clay, 0.15 m thick.

(82) – mid pinkish brown silty clay loam with fragments of white china and red housebrick, 0.75 m thick.

(83) – natural sandy gravel at 1.10 m depth.

(84) – yellow coarse gravelly sand at 2 m depth.

Groundwater was encountered at 2.9 m depth, and the Oxford clay was seen at 3.60 m depth at which point the test pit was terminated.

Test Pit 9.

(90) – tarmac and hardcore makeup, the makeup material contains a high percentage of whole and fragmented red housebrick, 0.15 m thick.

(91) – heavily rooted dark gray silty clay, 0.05 m thick.

(92) – gritty mid brown silty clay loam, 0.20 m thick.

(93) – mid brown slightly pinkish silty clay loam, fairly well rooted, 1.15 m thick.

(94) – natural sandy gravel at 1.55 m depth.

(95) – dark yellow gravelly sand at 1.90 m depth.

Groundwater was encountered at 2.85 m along with the Oxford clay. The test pit was terminated at 3.30 m depth.

Test Pit 10.

- (100) – tarmac and hardcore makeup, 0.30 m thick.
- (101) – a thin skim of gray clay, 0.10 m thick.
- (102) – mid gray/brown silty clay, 0.30 m thick.
- (103) – an elongated lens of subangular coarse orange gravel, 0.10 m thick.
- (104) – mid brown pinkish silty clay loam, with fragments of transfer-printed willow pattern, 0.40 m thick.
- (105) – light brown silty clay loam at 0.70 m thick.
- (106) – natural sandy gravel at 1.90 m depth.

Groundwater was encountered at 2.95 m depth, and the Oxford clay at 3.10 m depth. The test pit was terminated at 3.40 m depth.

6 Finds

Finds were examined on site but not retained; all were dated to the 19th/20th centuries and, with very few exceptions, were confined to demolition deposits associated with the demolished houses fronting onto South Parks Road.

7 Environmental results

Due to the absence of any significant archaeology, no environmental soil samples were taken.

8 Reliability of the Evidence

The test pits were relatively small keyholes into the archaeology of the site, and the absence of archaeological deposits from the majority of them is not thought especially to be of significance. Further, the nature of excavation coupled with the collapse of unstable sections meant that of necessity sections were recorded very swiftly. The relative simplicity of the sequences observed in most of the test pits suggests that no significant archaeological deposits or features were missed in any of the test pits.

9 Discussion

The watching brief located substantial amounts of demolition rubble in the northern half of the site, deriving from the houses which previously occupied this portion of the site. The presence of this material has raised the ground level here by almost a metre in places and has caused disturbance of buried deposits to a depth of at least 1.70 m.

In the southern half of the site, the test pits located the natural gravel deepening from 0.85 m in TP6 to 1.90 m in TP 10. The deposits sealing the natural in TP 10 were not particularly informative, producing only 20th-century pottery, the reason for the change in depth is unclear, although it is possibly due to the presence of one of the infilled Civil War ditches. If TP 10 struck only the edge of one of these features then this is likely, as its upper fills, as seen elsewhere in the city, contain pottery of this type and date, deriving from the final backfilling of the ditches in the early part of this century.

TP 7 was monitored especially closely due to its proximity to the location of the Roman archaeology located on the site of the new Institute of American studies, however nothing was seen.

References.

OAU 1998 Institute of American Studies, Mansfield College, Oxford. Archaeological Watching Brief Report.

OAU 1999 New Student Accommodation, St Cross Road, Oxford. Archaeological Watching Brief Report.

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

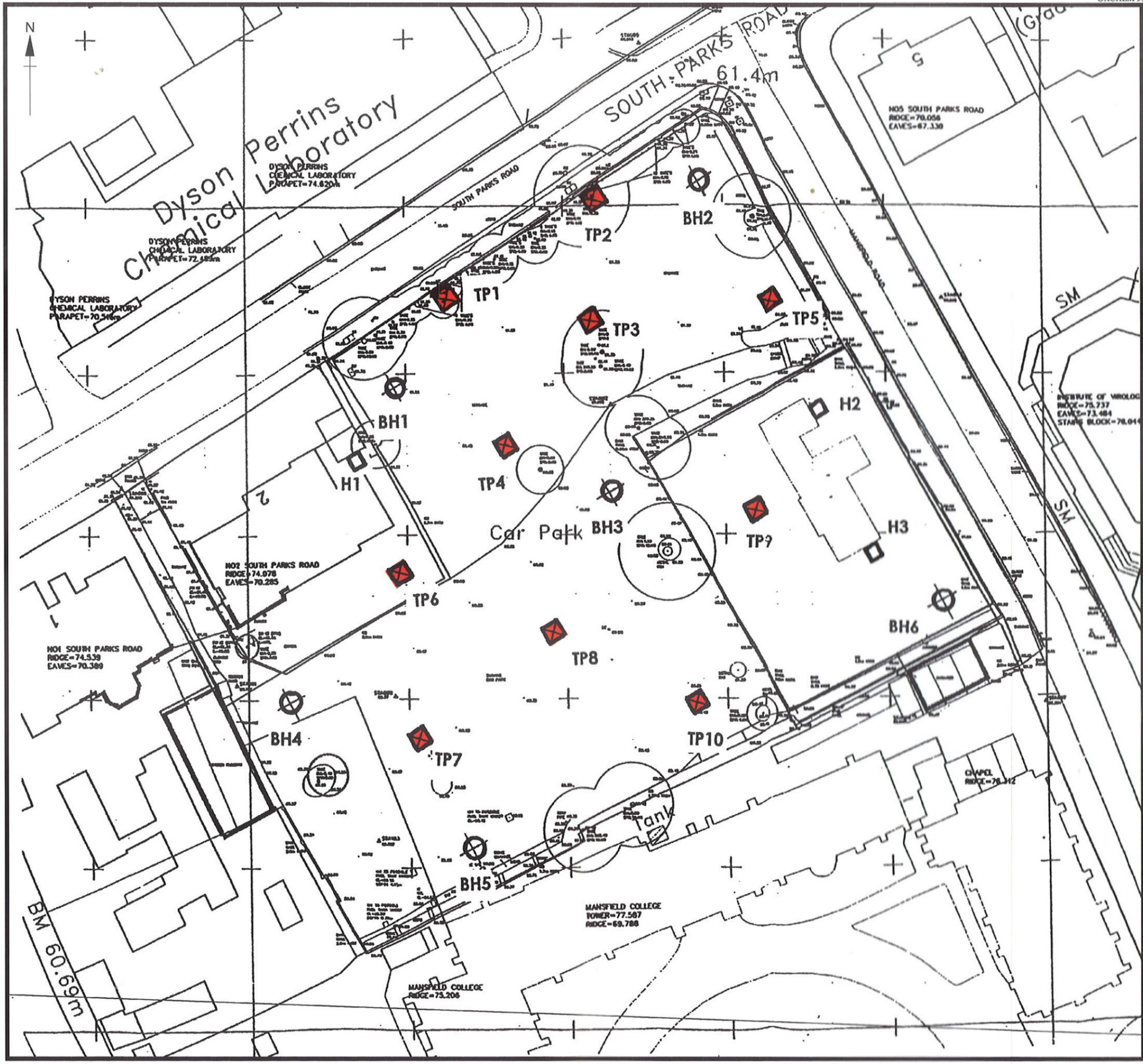
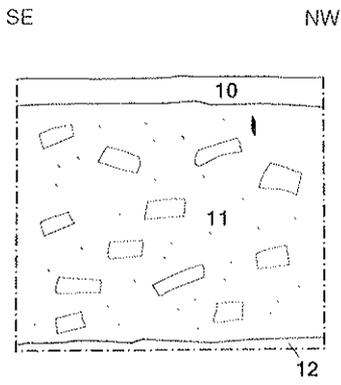
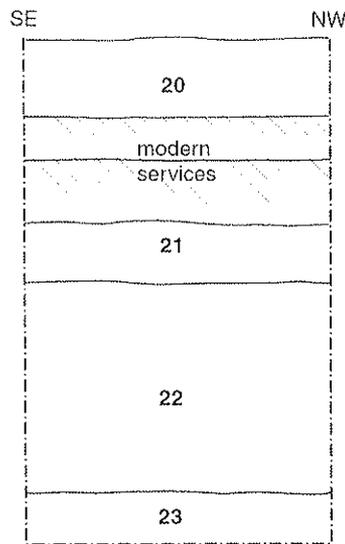


figure 1 : site plan showing test pit locations

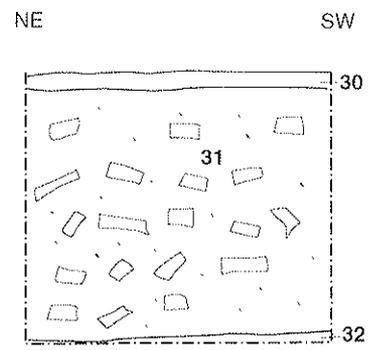
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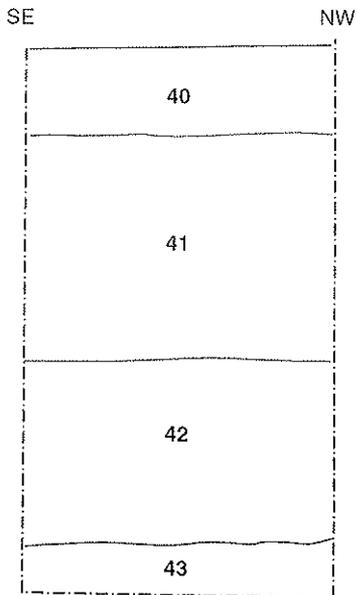
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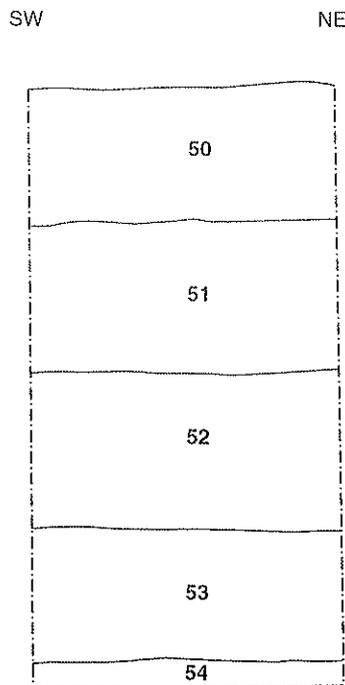
Test Pit 3



Test Pit 4



Test Pit 5



Test Pit 6

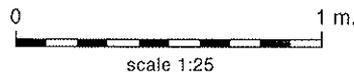
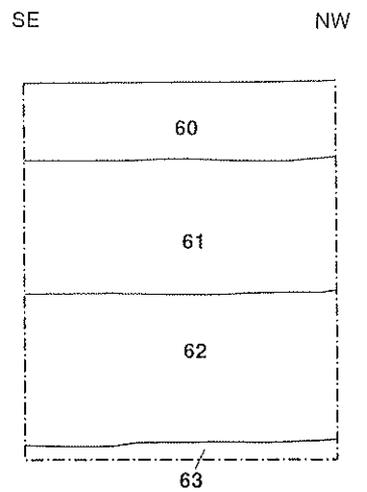
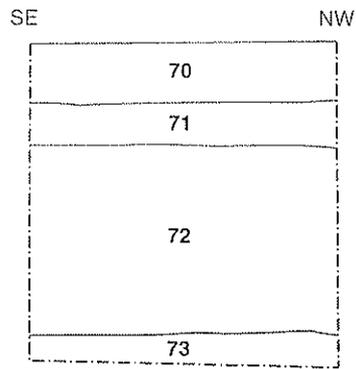
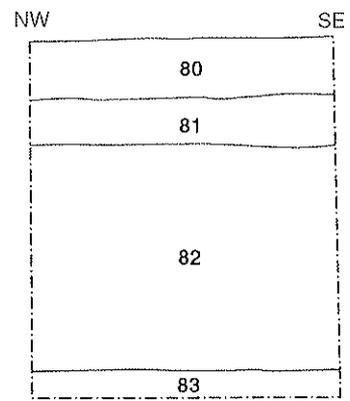


figure 2: Test Pits 1 to 6, sections

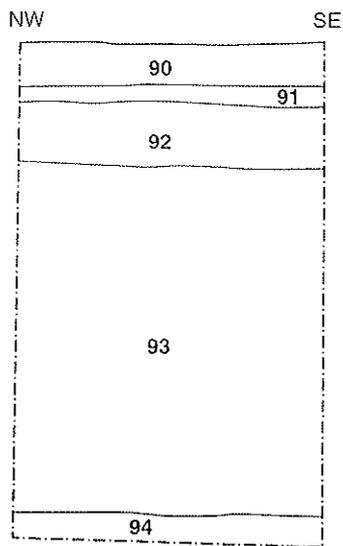
Test Pit 7



Test Pit 8



Test Pit 9



Test Pit 10

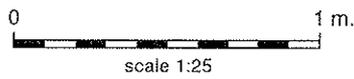
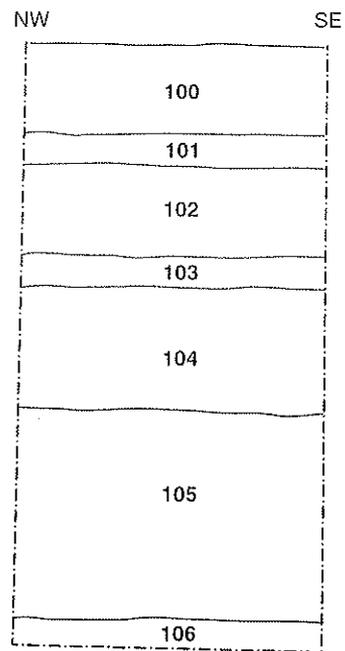


figure 3: test pits 7 to 10, sections



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