

ASH HILL DRIVE, PINNER GREEN
LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

Site Code: AHD95

TQ 111 899

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OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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1 SUMMARY

Eight trenches were dug within the former Eastern Electricity Pinner Depot. Over most of the site the trenches revealed that the topsoil had been stripped away during the construction of the depot. Although the natural clay had also been disturbed, the survival of subsoil archaeological features was demonstrated by two ditches and a pit. The exact date of these features is uncertain but the character of their fills and a struck flint and daub fragment from the ditches indicate a possible prehistoric date.

There was no evidence for Grim's Ditch crossing the site on the line suggested by Horace Stone in 1935. A wide topographic slope was located on the projected line of Grim's Ditch. Two features were cut into the natural clay at the bottom of this slope, a ditch and pit, which probably date to the early 17th century. The topographic depression had been filled and levelled off during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

A sequence of post-medieval deposits was located in the former car park area adjacent to Ash Hill Drive. A considerable quantity of red clay roof tile was recovered, possibly indicating tile production nearby in the 17th century.

2 INTRODUCTION

Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook an evaluation of the site of the proposed Tesco development at Ash Hill Drive, Pinner Green, including the former Eastern Electricity Depot. The work was carried out between September and October 1995.

Location (see Fig. 1)

The former Eastern Electricity depot lies on the west side of Ash Hill Drive, off Rickmansworth Road and Pinner Green. It is bound by Ash Hill Drive to the east. The Metropolitan Underground Line runs along the southern boundary and Cuckoo Hill and the rear of Camden Row Cottages form the northern boundary. An area of 50% of the site is still covered by buildings of the disused Eastern Electricity Pinner depot (South Herts Area).

Geology

The site is generally level at between 59 m and 59.50 m above Ordnance Datum (OD). The geology is Woolwich and Reading Beds with London Clay outcrops to the east and west of the site.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A detailed archaeological discussion and bibliography can be found in 'Tesco Stores Development Pinner, Specialist Appraisal of Cultural Heritage Impacts' (OAU client desktop report December 1993).

The Greater London Sites and Monuments Record records no archaeological sites on or in the immediate vicinity of the site. The medieval settlement of Pinner is first mentioned in 1315 (VCH 1971, 177) and in 1336 Pinner was granted a weekly market and fair.

In 1935 Horace Stone projected the line of the Pinner Grim's Ditch, running north-south across the eastern area of the site (see Fig. 2) and continuing to Harrow Weald Common to the NE. The date and purpose of Grim's Dyke or Ditch is uncertain. The name is given to several linear earthworks which run north of London.

Recent work has been carried out by Castle, at a well preserved section near Stanmore (the Pear Wood section is a Scheduled Ancient Monument: SAM 120). Castle tentatively suggests the Stanmore Grim's Ditch is part of the Harrow and Pinner Dyke system and dates to the 5th century AD (Castle 1975).

The Tesco site lies at the southern end of grazing land known as Pinner Green or Common. There appears to have been some encroachment onto the Common by the 18th century (1759 Isaac Messeder map).

Bibliography:

Castle S A 'Excavations in Pear Wood, Brockley Hill, Middlesex, 1948-1973' *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.*, 26, (1975) 267-277.

Stone, Horace J W, 'The Pinner Grim's Ditch', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.*, NS 7 (1935) 284-301.

4 EVALUATION STRATEGY (see Fig. 2)

Eight trenches were machine excavated with a JCB equipped with a five foot toothless ditching bucket. The positioning of the trenches was designed to establish the presence and extent or absence of archaeological remains within the development area. The layout of the trenches was restricted by the location of upstanding buildings and the presence of underground cables and other services.

The primary purpose of the trenches can be summarised as follows:

Trench 1 Locate any medieval activity located around Pinner Green.

Trench 2 General exploratory trench.

Trench 3 To see if the cottages in Camden Row had medieval precursors or if any medieval boundaries or pits extend into the development area.

Trench 4 Orientated across the projected line of Grim's Ditch.

Trench 5 To locate one of the early ponds shown on the early Ordnance Survey plans.

Trench 6 General exploratory trench.

Trench 7 Locate any medieval activity located around Pinner Green.

Trench 8 Continuation of Trench 4, across the projected line of Grim's Ditch.

The reinforced concrete was broken with a concrete breaker and trenches were mechanically excavated down to the first archaeologically significant horizon. Features revealed in each trench were then hand excavated to establish their condition, character and quality and to recover artefactual evidence to date the archaeological remains present.

5 RESULTS (see Fig. 2 & Fig. 3)

For dimensions of deposits, features and trenches see Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (see Fig. 6)

Trench 1 was orientated approximately N-S and positioned in the north west corner of the depot, adjacent to the western end of Camden Row. Trench 1 was designed to locate any traces of medieval activity associated with Pinner Green.

Natural undisturbed geological clay (104) was exposed at 59.32mOD, 0.83m below the present concrete surface. There were no archaeological features present. The natural clay was overlain by a layer of disturbed clay (103) which contained dark intrusive black silt patches and blue grey discolouration. The disturbed natural clay had a fairly constant thickness of 0.35m.

The disturbed natural clay was overlain by a brick and concrete rubble hardcore layer (102), which was immediately below the reinforced concrete surface for the depot.

Trench 2 (see Fig. 6)

Trench 2 was orientated approximately E-W and positioned in the western end of the depot just east of an electricity transformer building. This trench was designed to be of a general exploratory nature.

Natural undisturbed geological clay (204), was exposed at 59.08 mOD, 0.70m below the present concrete surface. The sequence of deposits was similar to Trench 1, with a layer of disturbed natural clay (203) overlain by brick and concrete rubble hardcore (202), which formed a bed for the concrete.

Trench 3 (see Fig. 3)

Trench 3 was orientated approximately ENE-WSW and positioned in the northern area of the depot, running parallel to the rear boundary of Camden Row. The trench was designed to establish if Camden Row had any medieval precursors and if so, whether any medieval boundaries, pits or outbuildings extended into the development area.

Natural undisturbed geological clay (304) was found at 59.21 mOD, 0.58m below the present concrete surface. The sequence of deposits was similar to those seen in Trenches 1 and 2. The natural clay was disturbed to a depth of up to 0.32m.

Two features were located, both cut into the natural clay: a ditch (305) and a pit (307). The ditch was near the east end of the trench and ran WNW-ESE. It had a steep sided U-shaped profile and measured 0.43m in depth and 0.73m in width. It was filled with a bluish grey and orange brown mottled silty clay (306) which was very similar to the natural clay. The fill produced a small fragment of daub.

The pit (307) was found immediately south of the ditch (305). It measured 1.75m across and 0.75m in depth. This feature was not fully exposed in the trench and no finds were recovered from the fill (308) which was similar in character to that of the adjacent ditch.

Trench 4 (see Fig. 4)

Trench 4 was orientated approximately ENE-WSW and positioned in the eastern area of the depot near to the entrance gate. The trench was designed to cross the projected line of Grim's Ditch with the intention of establishing the depth and nature of any remains of the ditch.

Natural undisturbed silty clay (407) sloped down towards the east. It was revealed at 58.76 mOD (0.80m below the present concrete surface) in the west end of the trench and at 58.33 mOD (1.26m below the concrete) at the east end.

Two archaeological features were located cut into the natural slope: a pit (406) and a ditch (408). Both these features were found in the trench section towards the bottom of the slope at the east end of Trench 4.

Pit 405 had a U-shaped profile and was 0.88m deep and up to 1.50m wide. The pit fill (405) produced red roof tile and early post-medieval red earthenware which can be placed in a date range of between the late-15th to the late-16th/early-17th century. The pit was sealed by layer interpreted as the soil horizon (404) which produced red tile and pottery of a similar date to the pit.

The ditch (408) was not fully exposed in the trench but is thought to have run approximately ENE-WSW. The ditch was cut into the natural clay (407) to a depth of 0.48m and was at least 0.92m wide. The ditch had two fills (409 and 410) which produced red roof tile and pottery from the late-15th to early-17th century, similar to that from pit 405. The ditch was also sealed by layer 404.

The top of layer 407 was initially interpreted as the top of the natural silty clay deposits. However the possibility remained that this material could have been a clean silty fill of Grim's Ditch. A machine dug sondage was therefore excavated in the eastern end of the trench to clarify this doubt. The sondage was halted at the level of a light grey clay (413) which had intermixed irregular brown silt clay patches (412). The results from this sondage confirmed that the initial interpretation was correct.

Layer 404 which sealed the pit and ditch sloped down to the east. The exact character of this deposit was a little unclear and it was stained and contaminated by diesel.

Layers 403 and 415 probably represent the level prior to the construction of the Eastern Electricity Depot. These deposits were not stripped away prior to the construction of the depot as the ground had been further raised and levelled with rubble layer 402 associated with the construction of the depot.

Two sherds of residual medieval pottery was recovered from pit 406 and one from layer 416.

Trench 5 (see Fig.6)

Trench 5 was orientated approximately NNW-SSW and positioned in the eastern area of the depot in the car park adjacent to Ash Hill Drive. The trench was designed to explore the potential of one of the old ponds shown on the early Ordnance Survey plans.

The trench had to be shortened due to adjacent services and the former pond was not located. A sequence of recent deposits was recorded. The earliest deposit (504) produced clay tobacco pipe fragments and modern pottery. Natural undisturbed geological clay (505) was revealed 0.90m below the present concrete surface at 57.80m OD.

Trench 6 (see Fig. 5)

Trench 6 was orientated approximately ESE-WNW and positioned in the southern area of the site between two buildings.

Natural undisturbed geological clay (604), occurred at 59.06m OD, 0.44m below the present concrete surface. This was overlain by a disturbed layer of natural clay (603) which was 0.05 to 0.16m thick.

The natural clay was cut by a ditch (606) which had a broad U-shaped profile and was orientated NNW-SSE. The ditch was 1.30m wide and 0.48m deep, with its top 0.30m below the present concrete surface. It contained a single undiagnostic struck flint.

Although the whole length of the ditch was excavated to maximize finds recovery, no further finds were located.

Trench 7 (see Fig. 6)

Natural undisturbed geological clay (706) was found at 57.95m OD, 1.00m below the present concrete surface. A well preserved sequence of 19th and 20th century deposits was revealed throughout the trench.

Trench 8 (see Fig. 6)

This trench formed a continuation of Trench 4 which due to a fence had to be dug as two parts.

Natural undisturbed geological clay (706) was revealed at 57.95 mOD, 1.00m below the present concrete surface.

Deposits in the eastern part of the trench had been removed by recent activity (cuts 805 and 809). The only preserved sequence occurred at the western end of the trench adjacent to Trench 4 where a dipping layer (807) sloped down to the west and produced late 18th to 19th century finds. It is likely that layer 807 is the same as layer 404 in Trench 4.

6 ARTEFACTUAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

A total of 122 sherds of pottery weighing 2,197 g were recovered from the evaluation. There were, in addition, seven earthenware bottles and just over 100 fragments of red roof tile. The majority of the pottery and tile was recovered from the eastern area of the site (Trenches 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) where stratified sequences of post-medieval deposits were found to survive.

The pottery from pit 406 and ditch 408 was predominantly early post-medieval earthenware dating to the period between the 15th and the late-16th/early-17th centuries. They included a cooking pot, a large pan base and a fragment of a 17th century tankard.

Pit 406 contained three sherds of residual medieval London type ware (1150-1350), one of which was a jug with white slip decoration and splashed glaze. The other sherd was a Coarse Border ware (1350-1500).

A small quantity of bone was recovered from Pit 406 and Ditch 408.

None of the deposits or features demonstrated any environmental potential. In particular, Trench 5 did not locate any environmental deposits associated with a former pond where potential was expected.

7 CONCLUSIONS

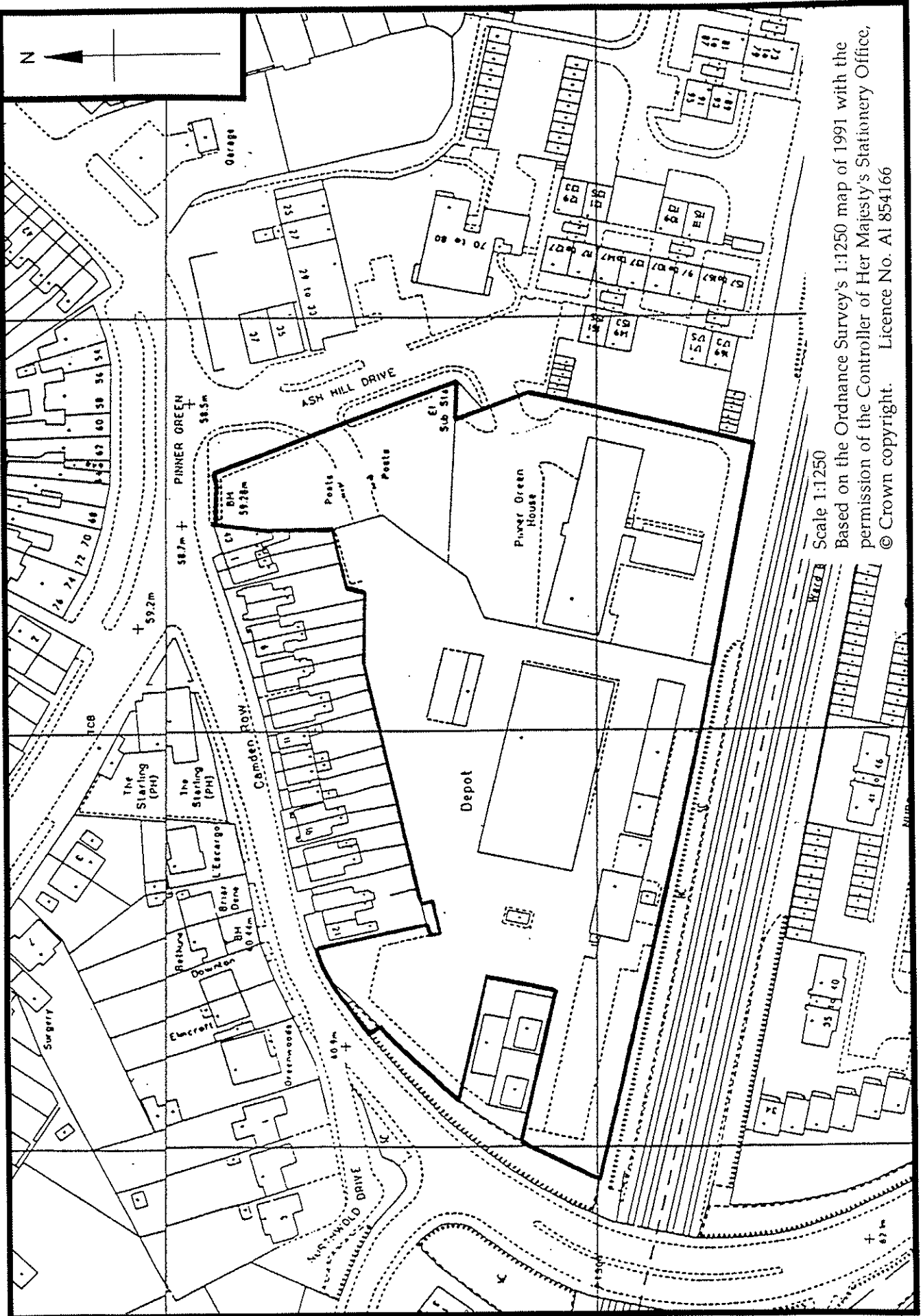
There was no evidence to support Stone's hypothesis that Grim's Ditch followed a line which crossed the site. A natural change in slope can still be discerned at the present ground surface and in the car park of Blenheim House and was located in the evaluation trenches on what had been thought to be the line of Grim's Ditch. Two archaeological features were cut into the natural clay at the bottom of this slope and can be dated on artefactual evidence to the early 17th century. These two features and the topographic depression had been subsequently sealed and levelled off by a build up of deposits during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

The trenches in main area of the former Pinner Eastern Electric Depot (Trenches 1, 2, 3, and 6) revealed that the topsoil and any earlier layers had been stripped away during the construction of the depot. Although the construction of the depot had also disturbed the top of the natural clay to a depth of between 0.05m and 0.35m, the survival of features cut into this clay was demonstrated by two ditches and a pit. The date of these features is uncertain but the character of their fills and a flint and daub fragment from the ditches tentatively indicate a prehistoric origin.

A sequence of post-medieval deposits was located in the former car park area adjacent to Ash Hill Drive. Due to the former low lying nature of land to the east, a considerable depth of material had been deposited, most probably in an attempt to level up the site in the 17th and 18th and 19th century. The ground was further raised by the construction of the car park. A considerable quantity of red clay roof tile occurred throughout these deposits, notably 26 fragments in pit 405. Although possibly derived from a building, the roof tile may indicate tile production nearby in the 17th century, perhaps accounting for some of the encroachment onto Pinner Common, as shown on the Isaac Messeder map of 1759. Four residual sherds of medieval pottery recovered from pit 406 indicate nearby activity in the medieval period.

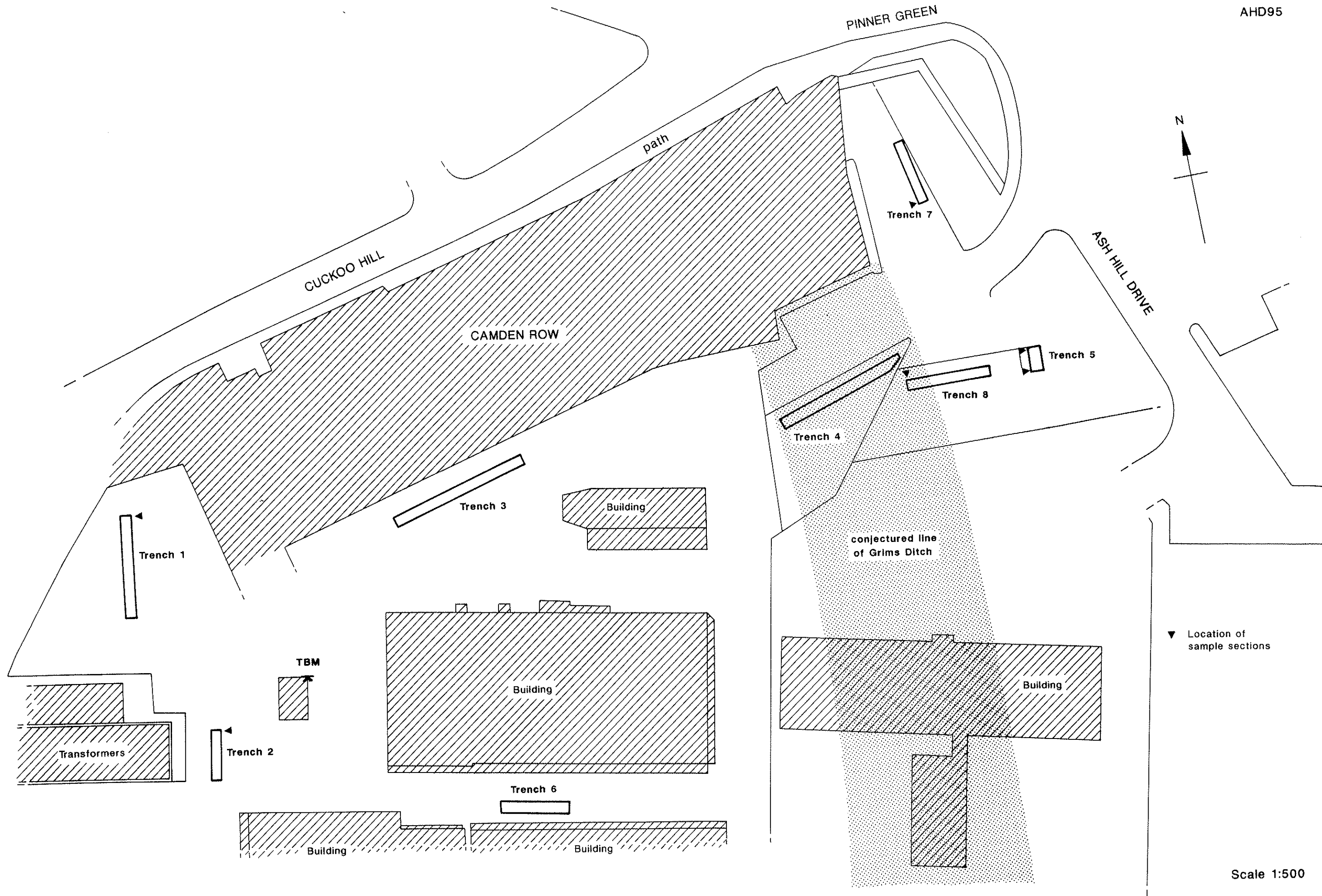
The trenches provided a good coverage of the development area and provided a section across the projected line of Grim's Ditch. During the trenching the length of some of the trenches was restricted by the presence of additional services, mainly in Trenches 2 and 5. This did not significantly affect the results. Although the former pond was not found in Trench 5, a depression in the far corner of the site to the east of Trench 5 suggests that this feature lay near the boundary of the development area.

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Oxford Archaeological Unit
November
1995



Scale 1:1250
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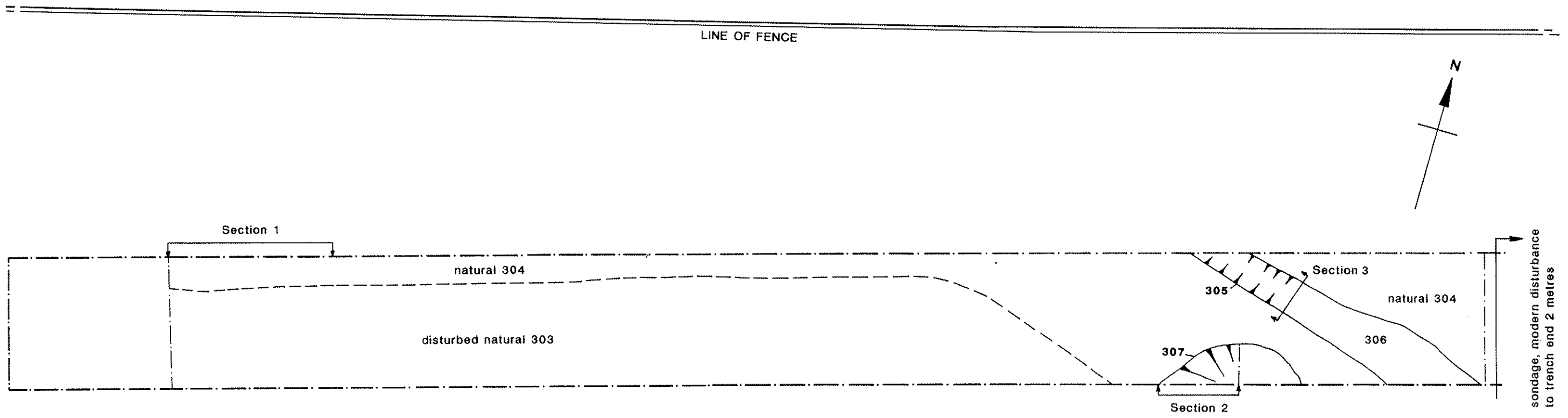
figure 1



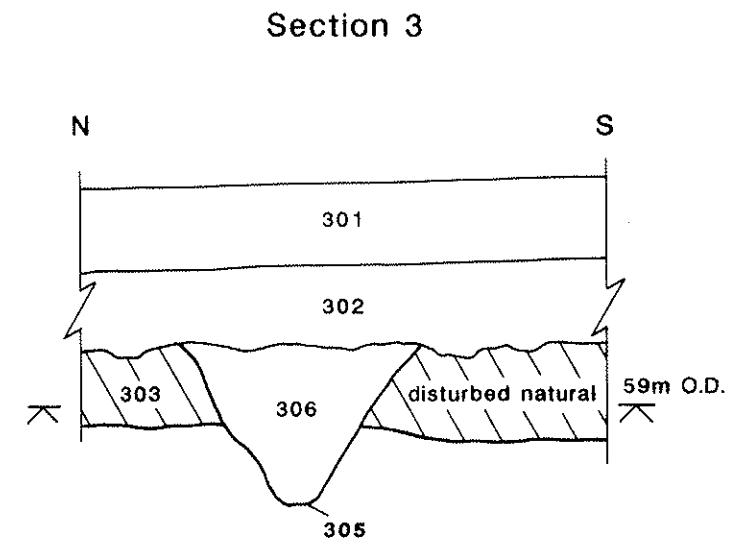
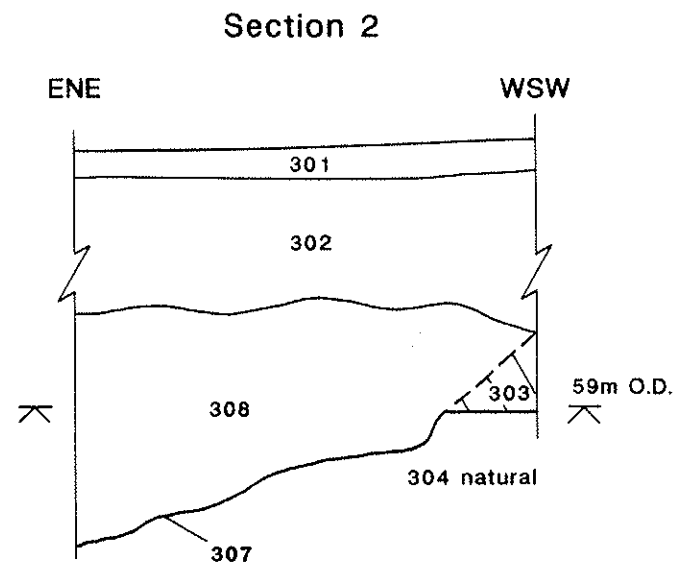
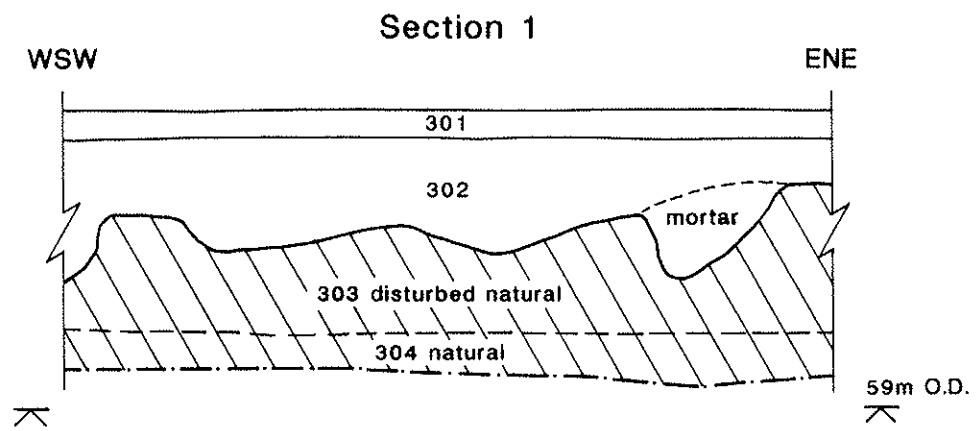
Scale 1:500

figure 2

Trench 3 Plan



Scale 1:50



Scale 1:20

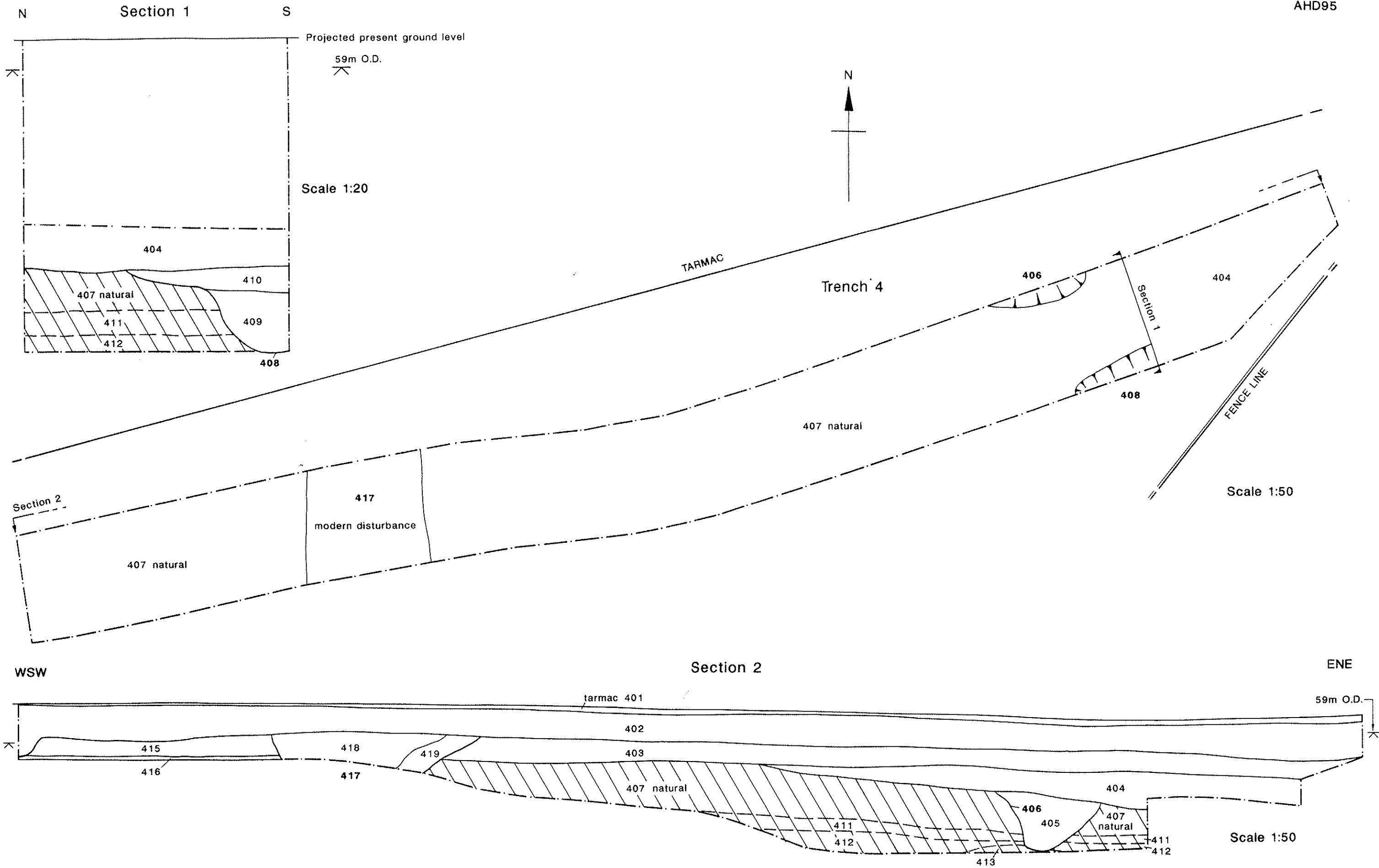
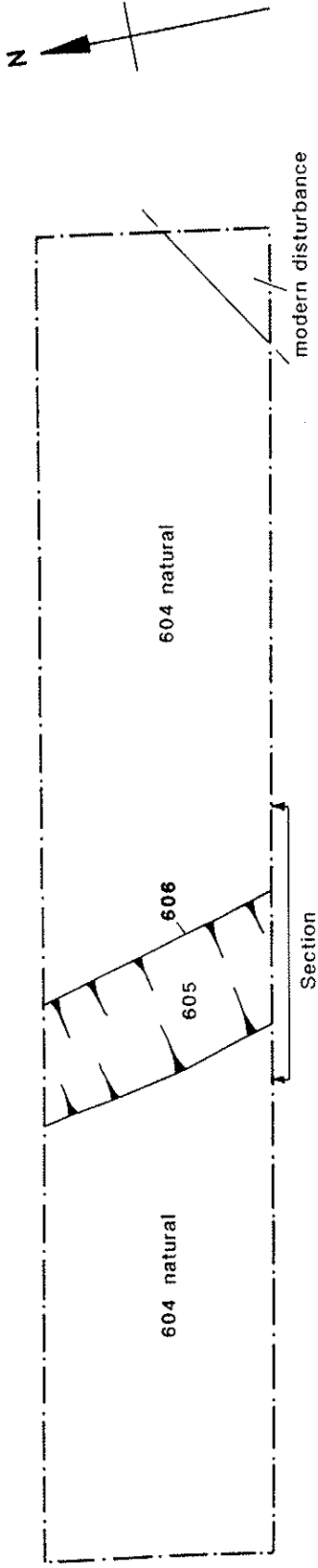


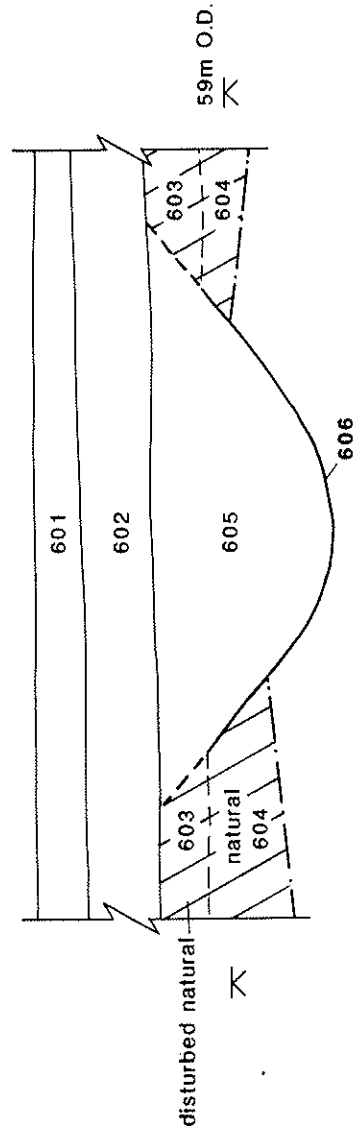
figure 4

Trench 6 Plan



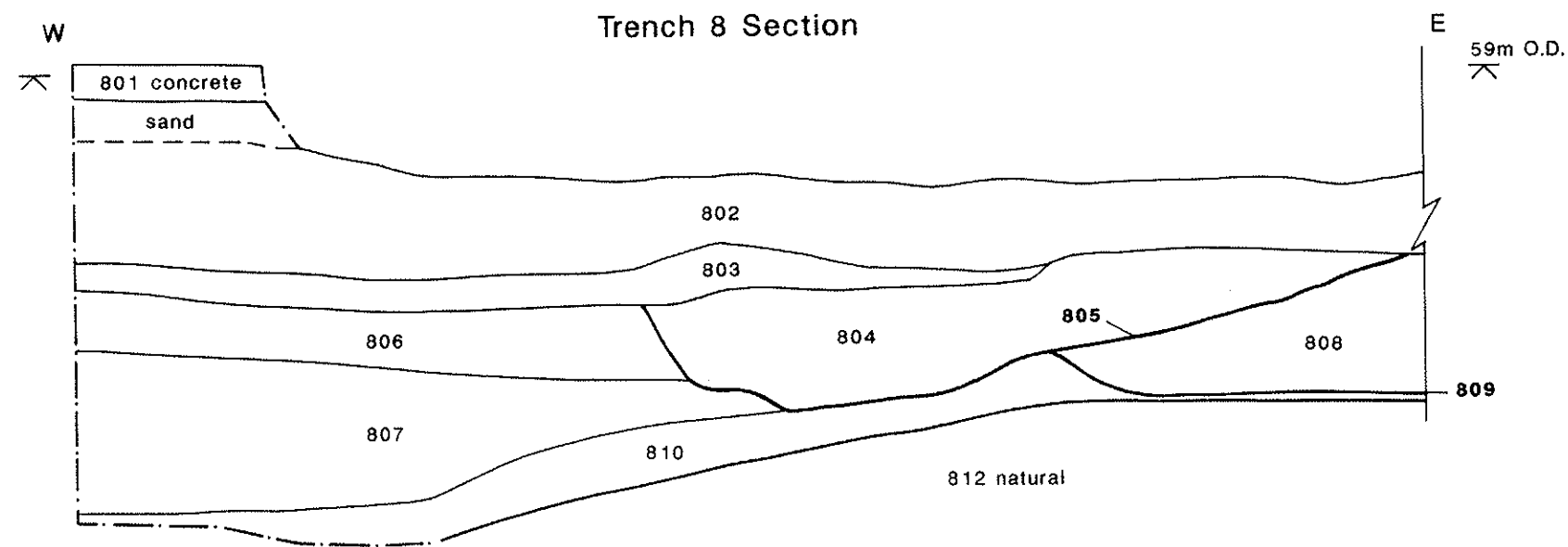
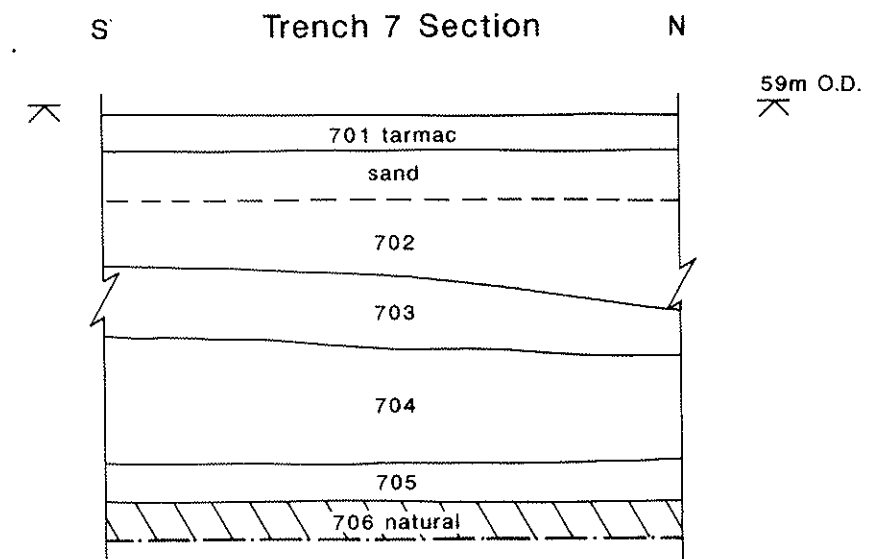
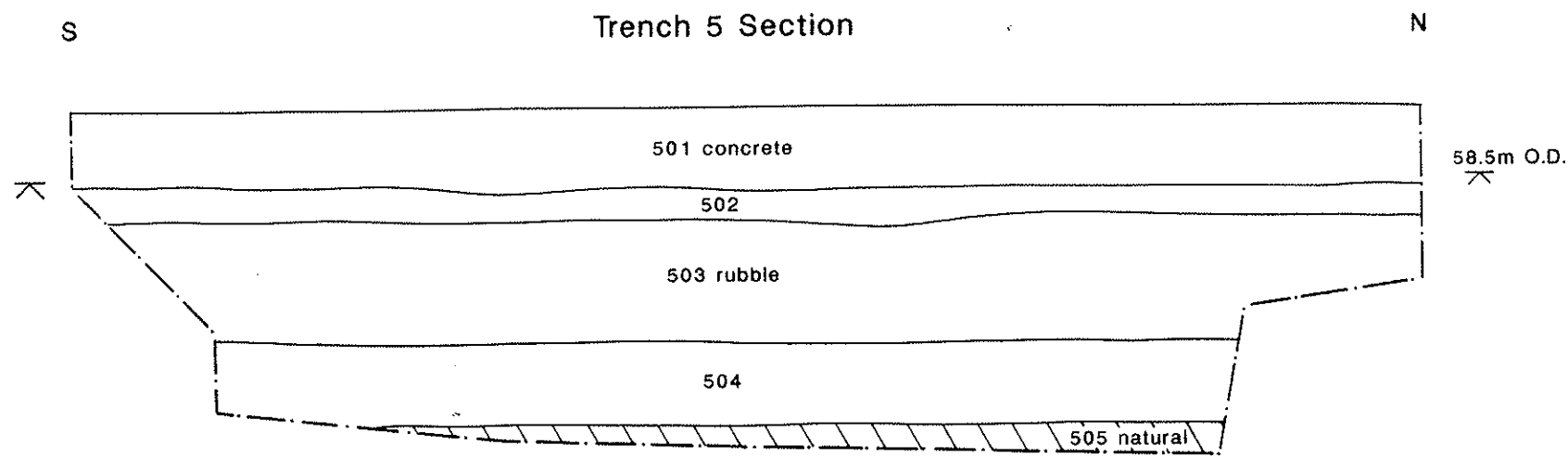
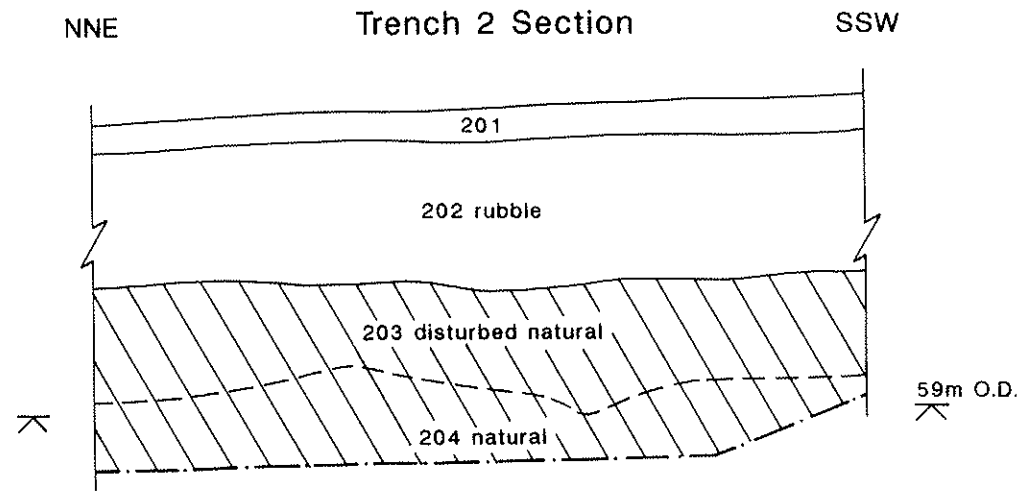
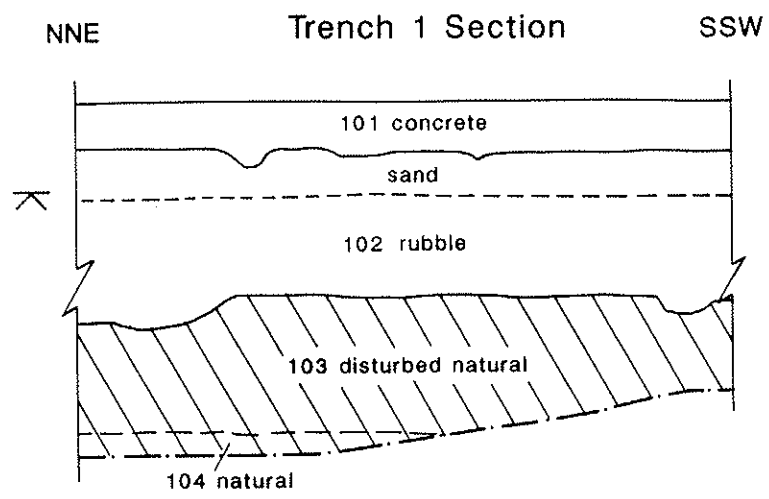
Scale 1:50

Section ESE WNW



Scale 1:20

figure 5



Scale 1:20

figure 6



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