

Hanson Aggregates

**Rollright Quarry
Archaeological Watching Report
NGR SP 2307 4280
Planning No. W97/1494**



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Date: 27th September 1999

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Date: 28th September 1999

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Date: *1/10/1999*

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report
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Summary

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief during topsoil and subsoil stripping at Rollright Quarry during August and September 1999, on behalf of Hanson Aggregates. The existing stone quarry here is to be extended. The watching brief was requested by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services because of known archaeological finds from the site, and its proximity to the megalithic complex of the Rollright Stones to the east. The finds were limited, perhaps due to previous stone quarrying here. Two naturally formed frost fractures/wedges and a single pit of Iron Age date were observed, together with another possible pit feature. Two quarry holes of probable Victorian or 20th century date were also observed; the remainder of the deposits were modern.

1 Introduction

Following the review of planning permission for mineral extraction at the existing limestone quarry at Little Rollright, Oxon (NGR SP 2307 4280), the County Archaeological Services (on behalf of the Minerals Planning Authority) issued a brief for a formal programme of archaeological work to fulfil Condition 23 of the planning consent for the site. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) in June 1999, detailing how OAU would implement the requirements of the County Brief for the project; OAU undertook a watching brief during topsoil and subsoil stripping at the quarry in August and September 1999.

2 Site Location, Topography and Geology

The quarry site (Fig. 1) comprises 16 hectares and is located north of Little Rollright, a small village to the north of Chipping Norton on the Oxfordshire–Warwickshire border. The quarry is situated on a high spur of oolitic limestone overlooking the Stour Valley in Warwickshire. The new extraction site lies at c. 246 m OD.

3 Archaeological Background

The site is situated just off the Saltway to Great Rollright road (the Cotswold Ridgeway or Jurassic Way) which is the ancient road linking the east Midlands to the south-west. There is an early prehistoric megalithic complex and barrow cemetery at the Rollright Stones to the east, together with Iron Age and Roman settlement evidence. A Saxon cemetery has also been identified near the Stones

(Lambrick, 1988, 1). From the quarry there is a record of a prehistoric beaker vessel found in the 1940s (*Oxoniensia* 1951, 80); at the time of the work here a pit of Iron Age date was clearly visible in the quarry face.

4 Project Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to investigate and record any archaeological remains (if present) which the ground works would remove or damage within the development area. In the event of significant remains being discovered, OAU would signal to all parties that an archaeological find had been made, for which the resources allocated were not sufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard. Consideration would at that point be given to a suitable means of mitigation by excavation and recording, or other methods of preservation. The final aim was to make available the results of the investigation at the end of fieldwork.

5 Strategy

The strategy of the watching brief was in the first instance to monitor the topsoil and subsoil strip in accordance with the contractors' programme. The topsoil and subsoil were stripped using 360° hymax machines equipped with toothless buckets and the material was removed using dumper lorries. The cleaned surface of the site was monitored for the presence of archaeological features and finds. 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. A site plan was made at a scale of 1:1250 and 1:50 plans were drawn for detailed features. Section drawings were made at a scale of 1:20.

6 Results

The whole area of the new quarry was machined to the top of the limestone (Fig. 2). There was evidence of terracing of the stone suggesting that there has been previous stone working on this part of the site, and therefore disturbance of the subsoil and potential archaeological deposits.

Prehistoric Archaeological Features

At the east face of the existing quarry was a circular feature (Fig. 3). The feature (104), a pit, was 0.45 m deep and measured 2 m across. The pit had gentle concave sides sloping to a rounded base. The earliest fill of the pit (120) was a light greenish-grey tenacious clay with occasional limestone inclusions. A single sherd of middle Iron Age pottery was recovered from this deposit. This was overlain by fill 102, a tenacious greyish-green silty clay containing fired clay and charcoal flecks. A second possible pit (106) was identified in the south face of the new quarry area. This feature was 0.4 m deep and 1.5 m wide, and was filled with a grey-brown clay loam (107).

Natural features

Two linear features set into the bedrock were observed, and these are interpreted as naturally formed frost wedges/fractures. Features 108 and 119 were both aligned north-south; feature 108 was traced for a distance of 20 m and feature 119 was observed for a length of 30 m. Feature 108 was recorded in section (Fig. 4), where it was observed to be 1.8 m wide and 0.35 m deep. The base fill (118) of the frost wedge was a light brown clay, overlain by a very dark brown silty clay (117). This clay fill was sealed beneath part of the bedrock (116 = 105).

Modern Quarry Activity

Two substantial quarry pits (110 and 112 – Fig. 4) were discovered at the south-west end of the new quarry area. Both quarries measured c. 20 across and contained modern materials including ropes, presumably part of a pulley system used to haul the rocks from the quarry.

Other deposits

The bedrock was sealed beneath a 0.2 m thick layer of reddish-grey soil (103), which represents the remains of the modern subsoil that had been mixed during previous stone working on the site. This layer was in turn overlain by the present topsoil and vegetation (101). At the time of the work the east side of the new site was covered by a stone spoil heap (100), which was removed in the course of the stripping operation.

7 The Finds

Few finds were recovered from the investigation. During preliminary site reconnaissance, G Lambrick recovered a single body sherd of Iron Age pottery and a few pieces of burnt limestone from the lower fill of pit 104. The shelly fabric and thickness of the sherd is comparable to middle Iron Age pottery known from the Iron Age enclosure close to the Rollright Stones to the east (Lambrick 1988, 93-96) and another unstratified sherd of similar character was recovered near to the pit. Five further sherds of contemporary pottery were recovered from the upper fill of pit 104. One sherd is a shelly fabric similar to the sherd found in fill 120; the other four are of a fine sandy fabric.

The upper fill of pit 104 contained two pieces of unidentifiable animal bone, burnt stones and a single cast iron object which is intrusive in the feature fill and dates to the 18th century or later. The object is pointed and riveted, and probably came from a plough. The only other finds of note comprise a small collection of antler bones from the subsoil.

8 Conclusions

The presence of naturally formed frost wedges/fractures across the site has been noted elsewhere in the vicinity; several are known from excavations on the limestone spur at the Rollright Stones (Robinson in Lambrick, 1988, 105).

There was no indication, either from finds or deposits, of any further Beaker period activity to go with the beaker recovered in the 1940s. It seems likely that this was an isolated occurrence, or that any associated activity did not extend as far as the present area of working.

The presence of two substantial quarries of relatively recent date together with the fact that there has been stone working and terracing of the quarry site has diminished the potential for archaeological remains to survive. The presence of a pit, a further possible pit and the few sherds of pottery suggest that there may have been some form of settlement on or near the site. On the basis of the limited amount of pottery, the evidence of occupation at Rollright Quarry may be dated to the middle Iron Age. There is no likelihood that any further features have survived the quarrying activity here and it must be assumed that any further occupation evidence has been destroyed.

Report and Archive

The site report and the archive including the finds are deposited with the Oxfordshire Museums Service.

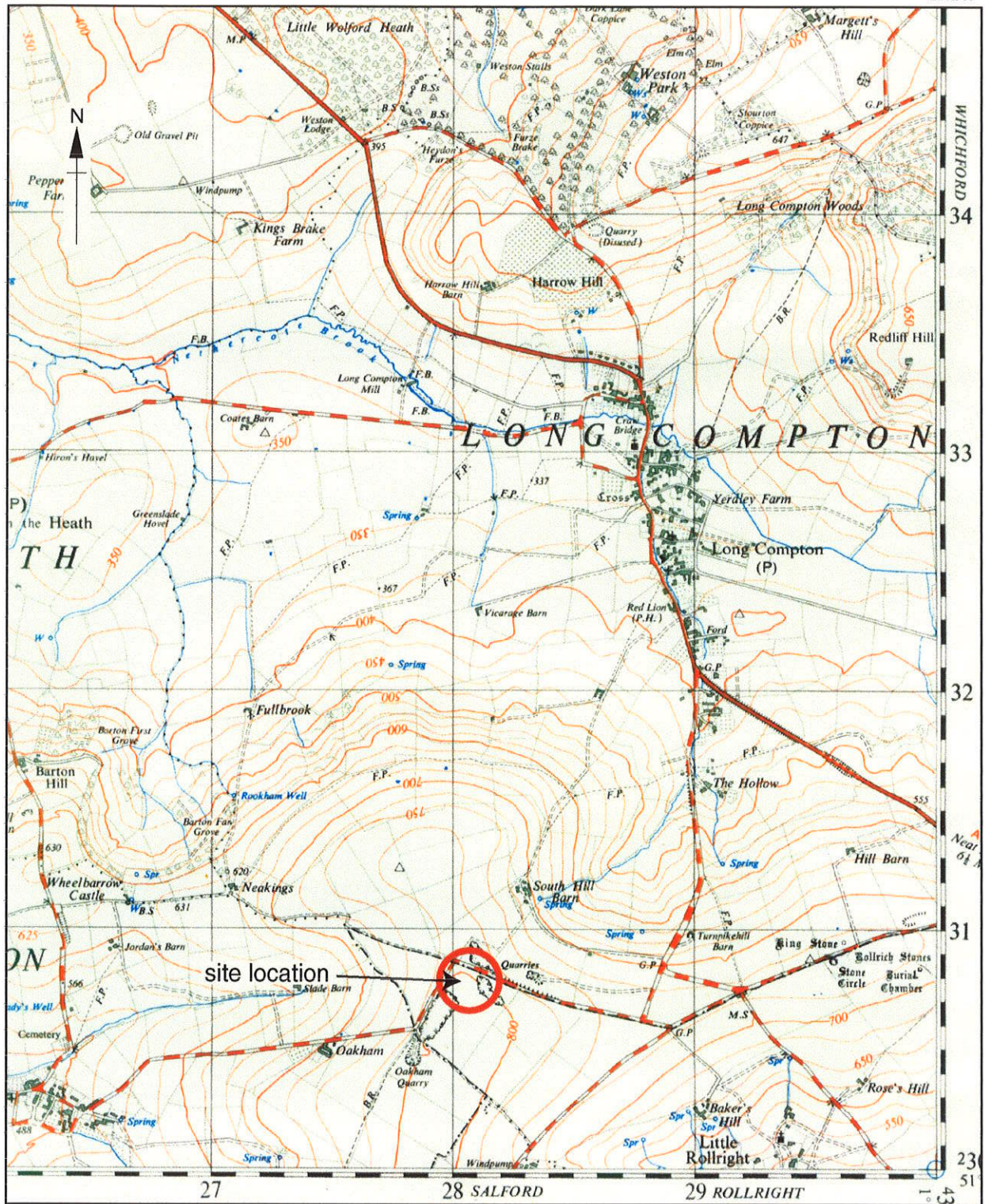
J Hiller/G Lambrick
Oxford Archaeological Unit
October 1999

Table of context information

Context	Type	Depth	Width	Comments
100	Layer	1.2 m	4 m	Stone spoil bund
101	Layer	0.32 m	-	Topsoil
102	Fill	0.42 m	-	Fill of 104
103	Layer	0.2 m	-	Natural mixed clay subsoil
104	Cut	0.45 m	2 m	Possible Iron Age pit
105	Layer	4 m+	-	Natural oolitic limestone
106	Cut	0.4 m	1.5 m	?Pit feature
107	Fill	0.4 m	1.5 m	Fill of 106
108	Feature	2 m	0.4 m	Frost wedge/fracture
109	Fill	0.12 m	2 m	Fill of 108, same as 118
110	Cut	-	21 m	C18/19 quarry
111	Fill	-	21 m	Fill of 110
112	Cut	-	20 m	C18/19 Quarry
113	Fill	-	20 m	Fill of 112
114	Layer	0.46 m	-	Soil Layer
115	Layer	0.3 m	-	Soil Layer
116	Layer	0.25 m	-	Stone layer, ?bedrock
117	Fill	0.2 m	-	Fill of 112
118	Fill	0.12 m	-	Same fill as 109 in 108
119	Feature	2 m	-	Frost wedge/fracture
120	Fill	0.14 m	-	Base fill of 104
121	Quarry	5 m+	-	C20 present quarry edge

References

- Lambrick G, 1988 The Rollright Stones: Megaliths, Monuments, and Settlement in the prehistoric landscape. English Heritage Archaeological Report, 6
- Oxoniensia, 1951 *XVI*



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figure 1: site location

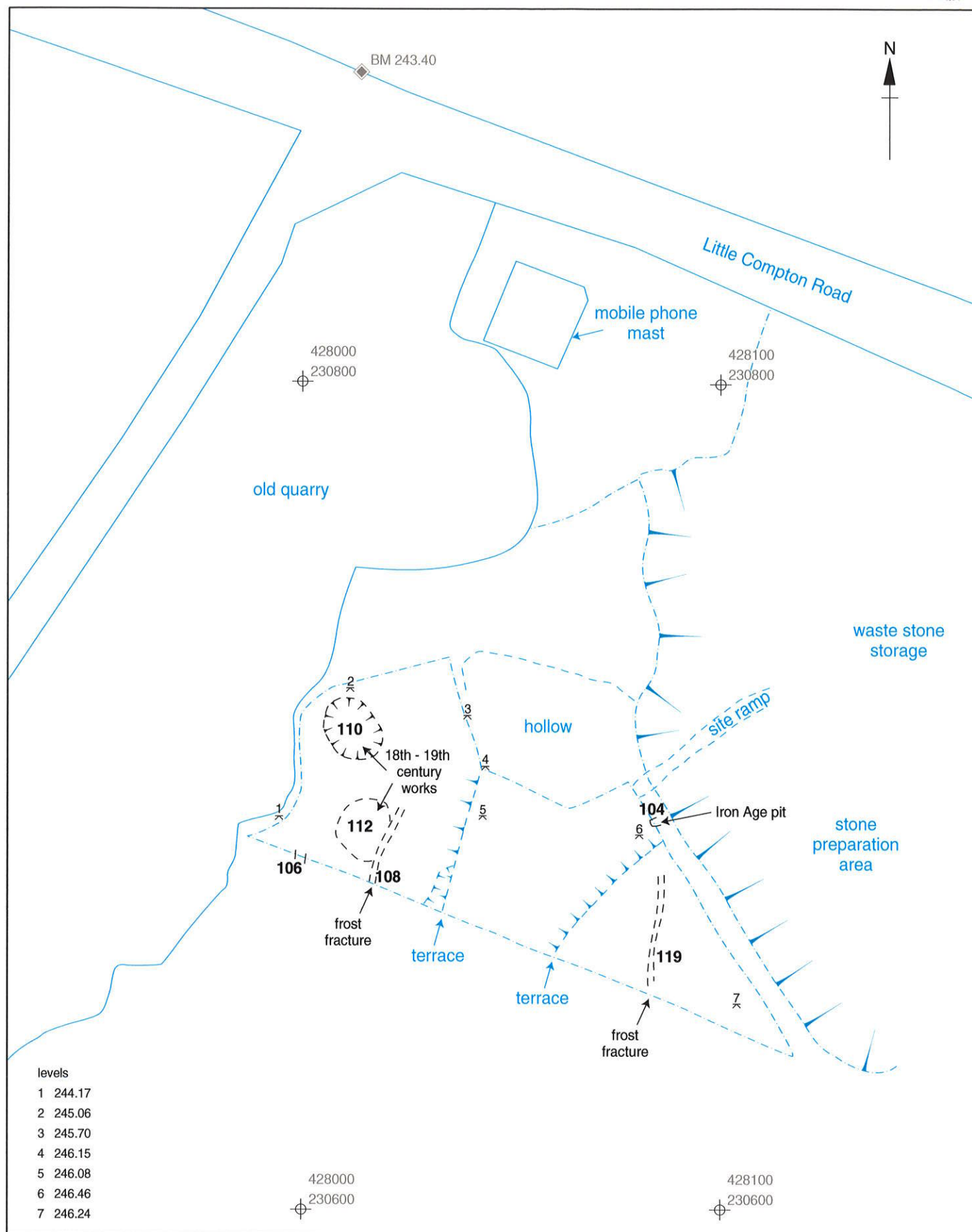
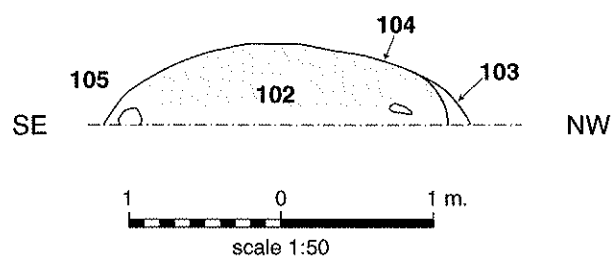


figure 2: site plan

plan of feature 104



section1

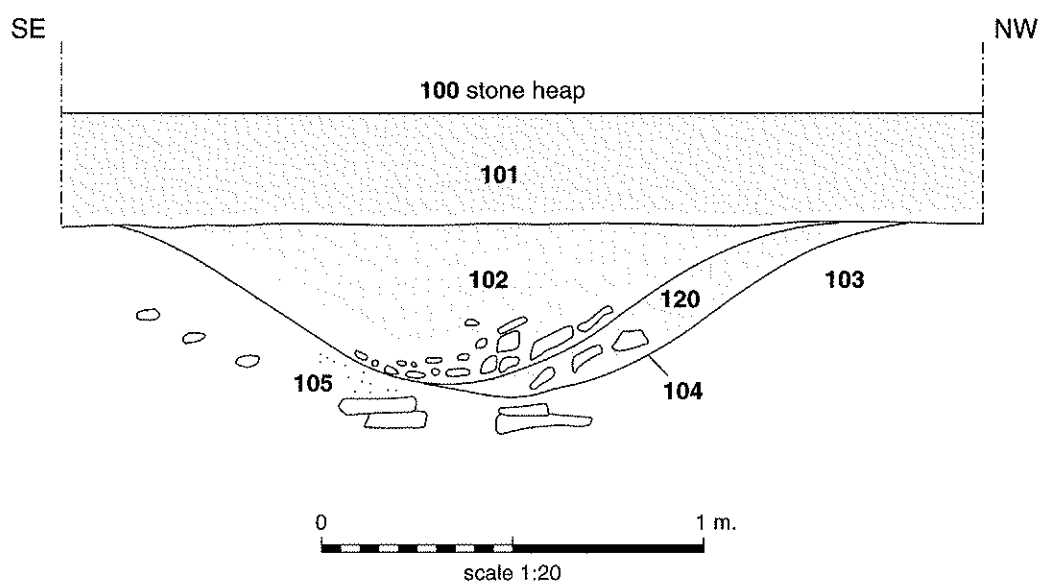


figure 3: feature 104, plan and section

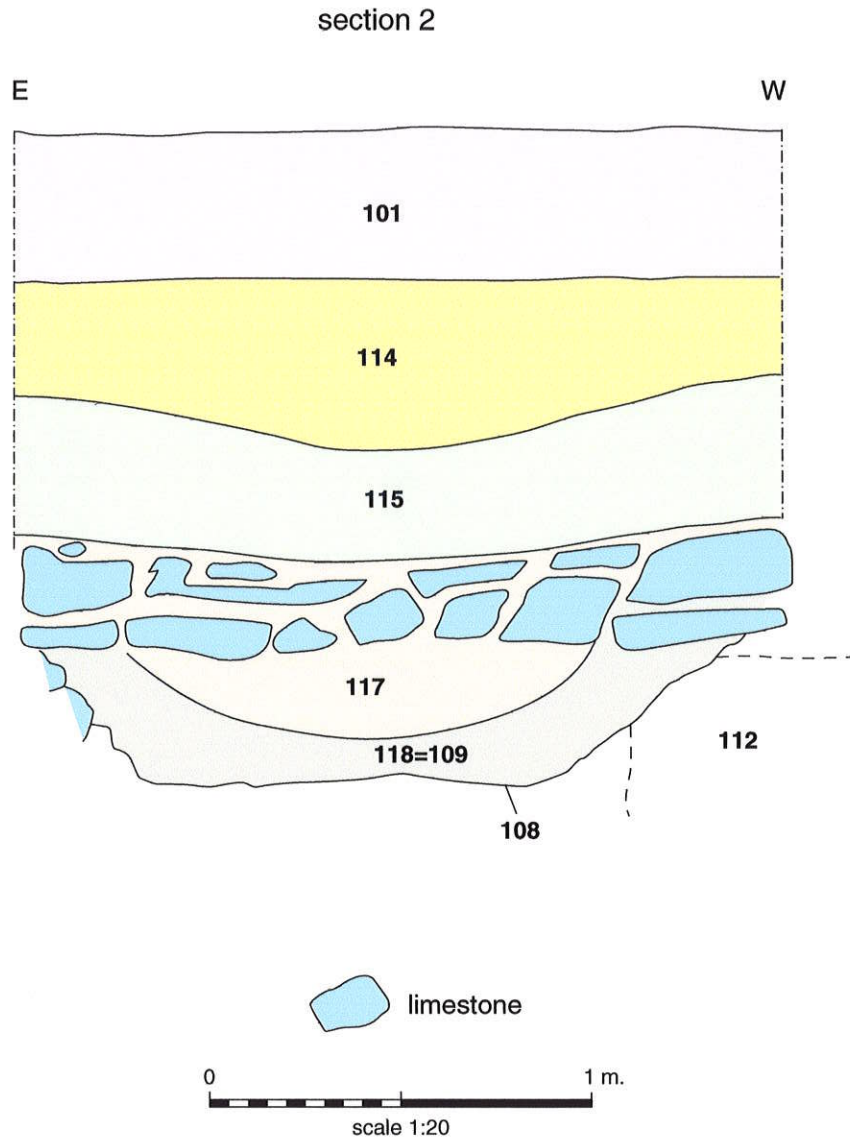


figure 4: section 2



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