Chapter 2: The Earlier Prehistoric Period

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INTRODUCTION

A number of early prehistoric sites were investigated along the route of the new road (Fig. 2.1). Though the remains were widely dispersed, in both physical and temporal terms, when considered together they make an important contribution to a greater understanding of this period in Gloucestershire and north Wiltshire.

A single Acheulian handaxe of Palaeolithic age represents the earliest object found during work on the road scheme, although its exact provenance is unknown (Fig. 7.3.24). The earliest traces of activity belong to the Mesolithic period with the discovery of a possible early Mesolithic microlith in a tree-throw hole at Cherry Tree Lane (Fig. 7.3.23), while less diagnostic flintwork was recovered from a number of other sites. An important series of pits containing flints, fired clay and pottery dating to the succeeding Neolithic period was recovered at Duntisbourne Grove. In addition, Neolithic flints were found at the sites of Birdlip Quarry, Hare Bushes North, Middle Duntisbourne, Norcote Farm and St Augustine's Farm South. Pottery and flints from the following late Neolithic/early Bronze Age period were discovered at the sites of Trinity Farm and Preston Enclosure and the ring ditches of two early Bronze Age barrows were investigated at St Augustine's Farm South. Later Bronze Age activity is rare and includes small quantities of residual pottery from St Augustine's Lane and St Augustine's Farm South. Additional material of probable early prehistoric date was recovered from the site of Duntisbourne Leer. In this chapter, each of these discoveries will be examined in detail and an assessment made of their local and/or regional significance.

PALAEOLITHIC AND MESOLITHIC ACTIVITY

The flint handaxe (Fig. 7.3.24) was discovered during the watching brief in the Latton area in gravel hardcore material brought into the site for construction. The source of the gravel hardcore is not precisely known and, therefore the exact provenance of the handaxe is uncertain. However, following consultation with the engineers it is believed likely that the gravel derived from the adjacent quarry at Latton Lands. Typologically the axe belongs to the Acheulian tradition of the Lower Palaeolithic, which is found widely over northern Europe (Barton 1997). Acheulian axes appear in a variety of sizes and are thought to be multi-purpose tools used for both domestic and hunting purposes. Acheulian industries are usually associated with the remains of *Homo erectus*, although such associations are extremely rare in Britain.

The discovery of an early Mesolithic microlith at Cherry Tree Lane (Fig. 7.3.23) supplements the scarce distribution of material from this period. Such microliths are thought to have been mounted in bone or wooden hafts to form harpoons or spears. Unfortunately, this isolated find adds little to our poor understanding of the early Mesolithic period in the vicinity of the road scheme. Other possible Mesolithic flintwork came from Trinity Farm, while other sites contained flintwork that could also be of this date. eg. Birdlip Quarry and Duntisbourne Grove (see Durden, Chapter 7). The Mesolithic of this region has been discussed by a number of authors (Saville 1984a; Darvill 1987, Holgate 1988). Evidence for the early Mesolithic in the Cotswolds and Upper Thames Valley is quite scarce in contrast to the number of later Mesolithic sites that are known from the same area.

THE NEOLITHIC AND EARLY BRONZE AGE PERIOD (4000–1750 CAL BC)

A number of sites produced evidence for small-scale activity of this date most of which can be described as being of domestic character. The only funerary monuments were the two contiguous barrow ditches of early Bronze Age date at St Augustine's Farm South. The evidence can be broadly divided into the following two phases: early and middle Neolithic (4000–2900 cal BC) domestic activity characterised by surface scatters and pit deposits; late Neolithic and early Bronze Age (2500–1750 cal BC) domestic and funerary activity characterised again by pit deposits, surface scatters and barrows. The first phase is associated with the recovery of small quantities of Plain Bowl and Peterborough Ware pottery, while the second is characterised by Beaker and early Bronze Age pottery. However, on sites where only flintwork was recovered it was only possible to assign either earlier or later Neolithic dates. Consequently, the Neolithic material from the road scheme is divided into earlier and later Neolithic categories.

Most of the recovered evidence consisted of flintwork and to a lesser extent pottery, while some of this material was also found associated with charred plant remains and animal bone fragments. The dating of sites and features had to rely on relatively small groups of material that often contained few diagnostic elements. Most of the earlier prehistoric pottery consisted of relatively small sherds (see Barclay, Chapter 7). Dates based solely on small groups of flint and small numbers of often poorly preserved pottery will always appear somewhat imprecise. Some

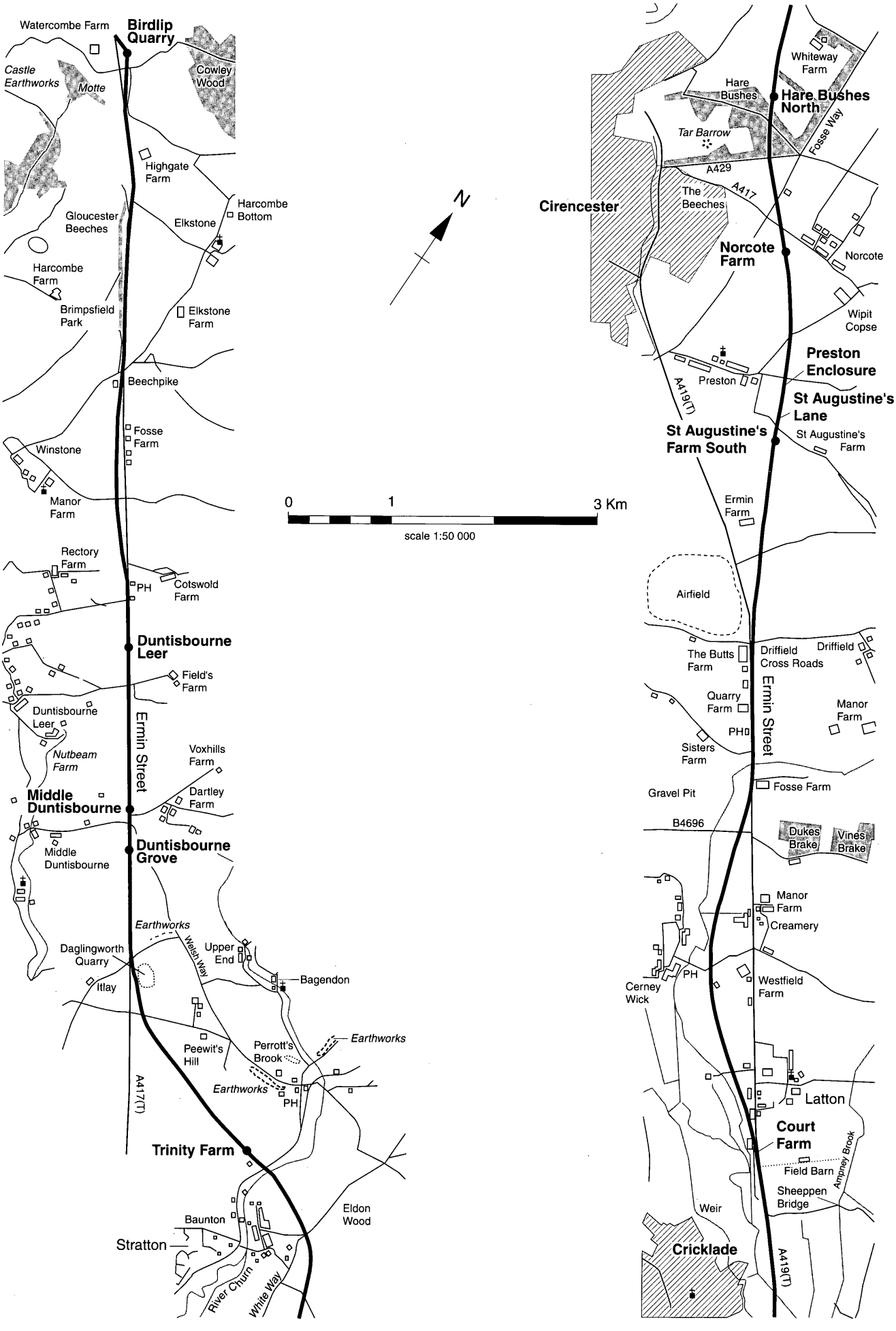

Figure 2.1 Locations of earlier prehistoric sites.

features clearly contained material of mixed date raising the possibility of residuality and redeposition. Many of the excavated features consisted of pits that were dug essentially to receive deposits of material culture together with assemblages of ecofacts. The composition of the material buried within these features may best be interpreted as the residue from domestic occupation that has been collected deliberately or even placed within a temporary midden prior to burial. Under these circumstances it would be easy to see how finds of earlier date could have become incorporated into deposits. Where pottery is present in these features it can be used to provide a reliable and refined date within the Neolithic and early Bronze Age. In certain cases radiocarbon determinations were obtained to verify the dates provided by the pottery and flintwork (see Appendix 1).

The early and middle Neolithic (*c.* 4000–2900 cal BC)

The route connects the Downs to the south with the Cotswolds to the north-west and cuts obliquely across the most western part of the Upper Thames Valley. To the south and just beyond Cricklade are the Marlborough Downs and to the east are the Berkshire Downs. A small number of early Neolithic long barrows are known from the Downs and these include the excavated examples at Wayland's Smithy and Lambourn (Kinnes 1992), while the massive early Bronze Age barrow cemetery at Lambourn is only 20 km to the south-east and the massive Neolithic and early Bronze Age monument complex at Avebury is only 25 km to the south-west. As the path of the road scheme cuts across the Upper Thames Valley it runs within 10 km of the Lechlade area. Lechlade sits at the confluence of the river Leech with the Thames and to the east is one of the major concentrations of early Neolithic causewayed enclosures to be found anywhere in southern England, while west and north of Lechlade are other monuments of this type. One of these enclosures known only as a cropmark is located at Down Ampney just 2 km from the line of the road, while the cropmark of a probable early Neolithic oval barrow and other ring ditches are also known (Leech 1977, map 3). Also at Lechlade are two cursus-dominated monument complexes, one of which, located at Buscot Wick may be a major example of its type (Darvill 1987, 76). Both cursus monuments were probably built in the middle Neolithic, while other monuments known from cropmarks at Buscot Wick could be even earlier in date (Barclay and Hey in press). To the north the road cuts across the Cotswolds and its northern extent runs near to the enclosures at Southmoor Grove, Rendcomb, Crickley Hill and Peak Camp (see Darvill 1987, 41), it also passes through the distribution of Cotswold-Severn long cairns.

Material of this date is scarce on sites excavated on the road scheme, but some of the flints and pottery found at Birdlip Quarry, Middle Duntisbourne, Duntisbourne Grove, Norcote Farm and St Augustine's Farm South may be early to middle Neolithic. Single sherds of early Neolithic pottery were also recovered from St Augustine's Lane and Court Farm.

The pre-Beaker late Neolithic (*c.* 2900–2250 BC) seems to have been a time of considerable social change, as the causewayed enclosures and long cairns which had characterised the latter part of the fourth millennium had largely been abandoned before the end of the 4th millennium BC. This phase of the Neolithic is characterised by the use of a new style of pottery known as Grooved Ware and by new monument forms such as henges, hengiform ring ditches and timber and stone circles. The evidence for activity of this period is very limited in the region generally, and on the sites excavated in the course of the road scheme, the only possible evidence was in the form of lithic artefacts. At Lechlade a number of finds of Grooved Ware have been made, while a hengiform ring ditch near the cursus may also date to this phase (Darvill 1987, 71; Barclay in prep. b).

Settlement sites of Neolithic date as defined by groups of pits and postholes are comparatively rare in the region (Darvill 1987). In general pit digging is perhaps more common in the mid-late Neolithic and early Bronze Age. Consequently, the series of early Neolithic pits found at Duntisbourne Grove and the Beaker pits from Trinity Farm represent significant discoveries.

In the following section each of the sites which produced Neolithic material will be discussed in greater detail, and where possible, will follow the chronological sequence outlined above. In addition, a number of later sites produced residual finds details of which can be found in the specialist reports below (see Chapter 7).

Birdlip Quarry

A considerable number of small flint flakes were recovered from the sieving of two contexts; 81, one of a number of fills in a Roman period corn dryer (see Chapter 4 below), and 89, the fill of an oval-shaped shallow pit (88), both found in the northern part of the site (Fig. 2.2). Indeterminate prehistoric pottery sherds were recovered from fill 89, and also from a Roman occupation layer, 253. Small numbers of flints were recovered from a large number of other Roman contexts (Fig. 7.4.25–7). A number of other possible pits were found in the vicinity of pit 88, but none contained any artefacts. A summary of Neolithic/early Bronze Age pit contents appears in Table 2.2.

Most of the flint flakes were small and broad, though there were smaller amounts of blade-like material. The material had been produced using a combination of hard and soft hammers; a fragment of a flint hammerstone was recovered from context 81. A small blade core, a blade core fragment, part of a core tablet and a leaf-shaped arrowhead attest to earlier Neolithic activity on the site, however, the presence of broad flakes, multi-platformed flake cores and a steeply flaked scraper would appear to suggest a later Neolithic date for some of the material that was recovered. Though much of the material was derived

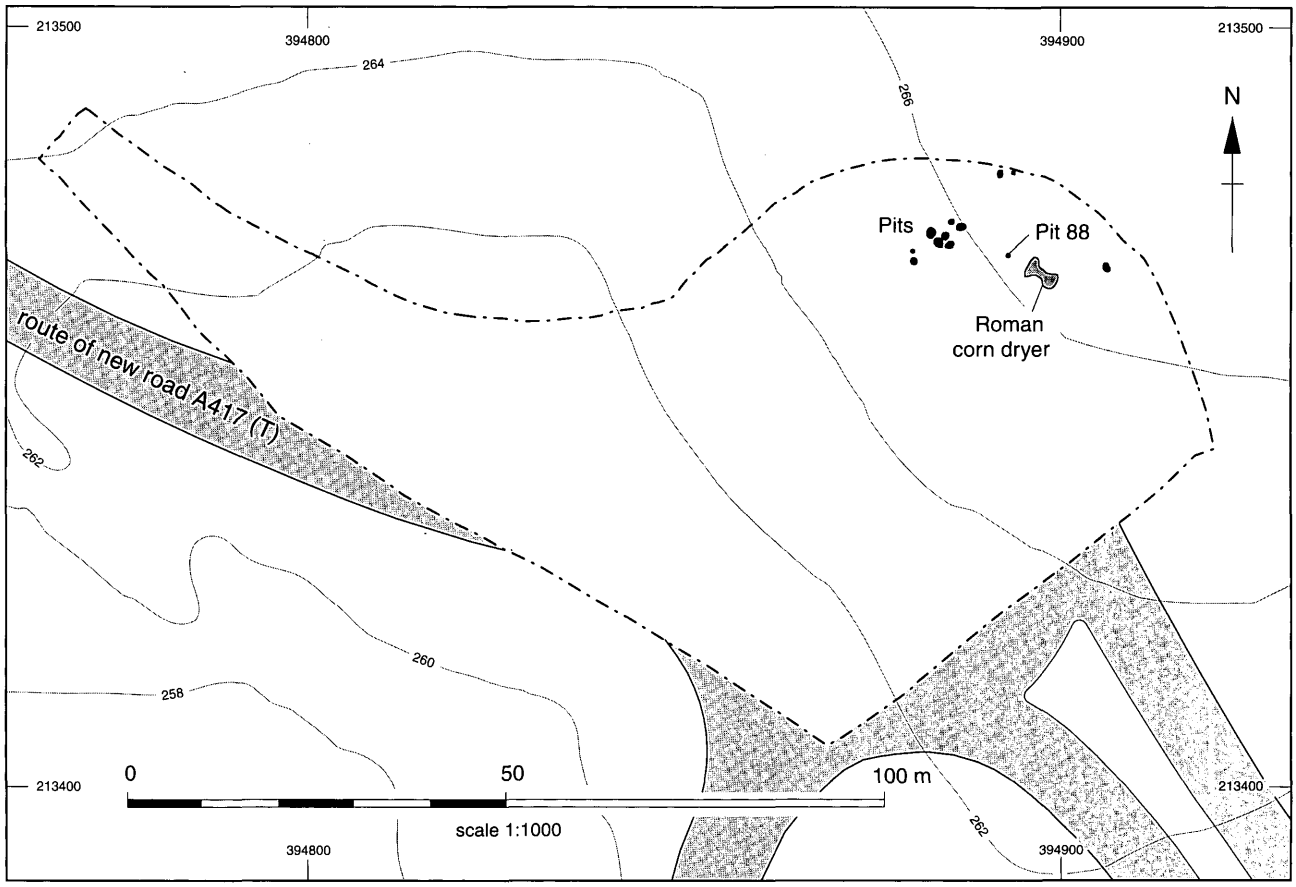

Figure 2.2 Birdlip Quarry, Neolithic features.

from disturbed contexts, the northern part of the Birdlip Quarry site had clearly been a focus of human activity for much of the Neolithic period.

Hare Bushes North

The presence of a Neolithic/early Bronze Age flint scatter previously noted in the topsoil suggested that earlier prehistoric features might be present.

Due to the presence of an overhead cable the site of Hare Bushes North was divided into two areas; Area 1, a trapezoidal area *c.* 38 x 80 m and to the south, Area 2, a lozenge shaped area *c.* 15 x 50 m. Removal of the topsoil revealed a pattern of widely scattered features in both excavation areas (Fig. 2.3). Upon closer investigation the majority proved to be either periglacial in origin or tree-throw holes.

The only feature of interest in Area 1 was a tree-throw hole (1011) (Fig. 2.4) which contained nine worked flints (Fig. 7.4.28–9), including four serrated flakes, and two fragments of a pebble hammer (Fig. 7.41.679). Pebble hammers have been found in assemblages ranging in date from the Mesolithic through to the Bronze Age. The flint assemblage from the whole site consisted of 17 pieces, including flakes, serrated flakes and a flake core. A later Neolithic date is likely though an early Bronze Age date would also be possible. The presence of the pebble hammer fragments and the four serrated flakes may perhaps indicate a structured deposit of some significance. Serrated flakes have a date range from the Mesolithic to the early Bronze Age.

It should be remembered that the position and orientation of the road corridor dictated the location of both Areas 1 and 2 and hence the location of the main density of the surface flint scatter remains unexcavated to the west. The excavated area may be on the periphery of any early prehistoric activity.

Four features located at this site may well be of prehistoric date. Unfortunately, no datable artefacts were recovered from either a roughly circular pit (1005), located towards the southern edge of Area 1 of the excavation, or a possible posthole (1013), located in the south-eastern corner (Fig. 2.4). Similarly, no dating evidence was recovered from 1019, a circular pit with an irregular profile and 1025, a sub-circular pit, both located in the south-western part of Area 2.

Duntisbourne Grove (Table 2.1)

The excavation at Duntisbourne Grove was designed to investigate a rectilinear cropmark identified on aerial photographs (Fig. 3.41). Evaluation of the feature in 1990 interpreted the cropmark as a middle-late Iron

Table 2.1 Summary of Neolithic/early Bronze Age pit contents

Site	Context	Contents
Early-middle Neolithic		
Birdlip Quarry	Pit 88	Worked flint, pottery (indeterminate date)
Duntisbourne Grove	Pit 62	Worked flint, early Neolithic pottery, charcoal
	Pit 94	Worked flint, late Neolithic pottery, charcoal, fired clay, hazelnut shells, saddle quern rubber fragments, burnt animal bone
	Pit 142	Worked flint, charcoal, fired clay, hazelnut shells
	Pit 144	Worked flint
	Pit 182	Worked flint, charcoal
Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age		
Trinity Farm	Pit 8	Worked flint, Beaker pottery, hazelnut shells, burnt limestone
	Pit 10	Worked flint, Beaker pottery, hazelnut shells, burnt limestone
	Pit 12	Worked flint, Beaker pottery

Age enclosure, which had been cut by later Romano-British quarrying activity. Consequently, most of the archaeology at Duntisbourne Grove is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. However, south of the enclosure in the south-west corner of the site, lay a small group of shallow prehistoric features (Fig. 2.5–6). At first they were obscured by the density of natural features in this area, but intensive cleaning highlighted a number of areas with a greyer soil which, on investigation, filled various pits and postholes.

The features seemed to be of two main types; pits containing stony fills which produced few or no finds (type 1), and pits which were rich in prehistoric artefacts and contained varying amounts of charcoal or other burnt deposits (type 2) (see Fig. 2.7). The prehistoric artefacts consisted largely of flint, dating predominantly to the Neolithic period, and sherds of contemporary pottery. The type 1 pits are, however, of uncertain date and need not be associated with the Neolithic activity. The largely stony fills could indicate a natural origin.

Type 1 pits

Pit 223 was located over 15 m to the east of 182 (Fig. 2.6), but contained a stony fill similar in character to the primary fill of pit 182 and to that seen in pits 243 and 241 (Fig. 2.7). Though no finds were recovered from the associated fill (224), pit 223 may have originally formed part of the group of prehistoric features found in the south-western portion of the excavated area. The pit was truncated on its eastern side by the large Iron Age enclosure ditch 8.

Pit 241 was located 0.50 m to the south-west of 243 (Fig. 2.6) and, like the former, contained a stony fill which incorporated no dating evidence (Fig. 2.7). Despite the lack of comparable finds, the location of pit 241 strongly suggests that it was associated with the other prehistoric features in the vicinity.

Pit 243 was the easternmost feature in the group (Fig. 2.6). It was roughly circular and contained a single very stony silt clay fill (Fig. 2.7). Though located in the same area as the artefact-rich pits no finds were recovered from this feature. Feature 243 was unusual in that it seemed to be associated with an arc of five postholes (196, 194, 261, 264 and 217) arranged fairly evenly at a distance of 0.15–0.25 m around its west and south-western edge. No dating evidence was recovered from any of the postholes and their original function remains enigmatic.

Type 2 pits

Pit 62, located 0.70 m to the north-east of pit 142 (Fig. 2.6), was the smallest of the prehistoric pits excavated in the south-western part of the site. It was approximately circular in shape and like pit 142 had been cut into an underlying periglacial feature. The primary fill (84) was completely sterile and may even have been part of the periglacial deposit (Fig. 2.7). The upper fill (63), however, contained charcoal flecks, numerous pieces of flint and five sherds from an earlier Neolithic bowl (Fig. 7.6.36).

Pit 94 located approximately 1 m west of pit 241 was another slightly larger circular pit (Fig. 2.6), which contained a sequence of three fills (Fig. 2.7). The primary deposit (113) consisted of a heavily burnt clay silt mixed with large quantities of charcoal and burnt animal bone. It also contained numerous flint flakes, including a crested flake (Fig. 7.5.35), a small number of flint tools including two leaf arrowhead tips (Fig. 7.5.30), two later Neolithic pottery sherds and four fragments of fired clay. The sherds are Peterborough Ware, possibly of the Fengate substyle (Fig. 7.6.37). This material presumably relates to domestic activity in the vicinity of pit 94, as there were no signs of burning on the sides or base of the feature. The hazelnut shells from this fill have provided an earlier Neolithic radiocarbon date of 3654–3370 cal BC (95% confidence) (4761±57 BP; NZA-8671, R24151/15). This is supported by the flintwork, but the pottery would seem to be slightly later in date.

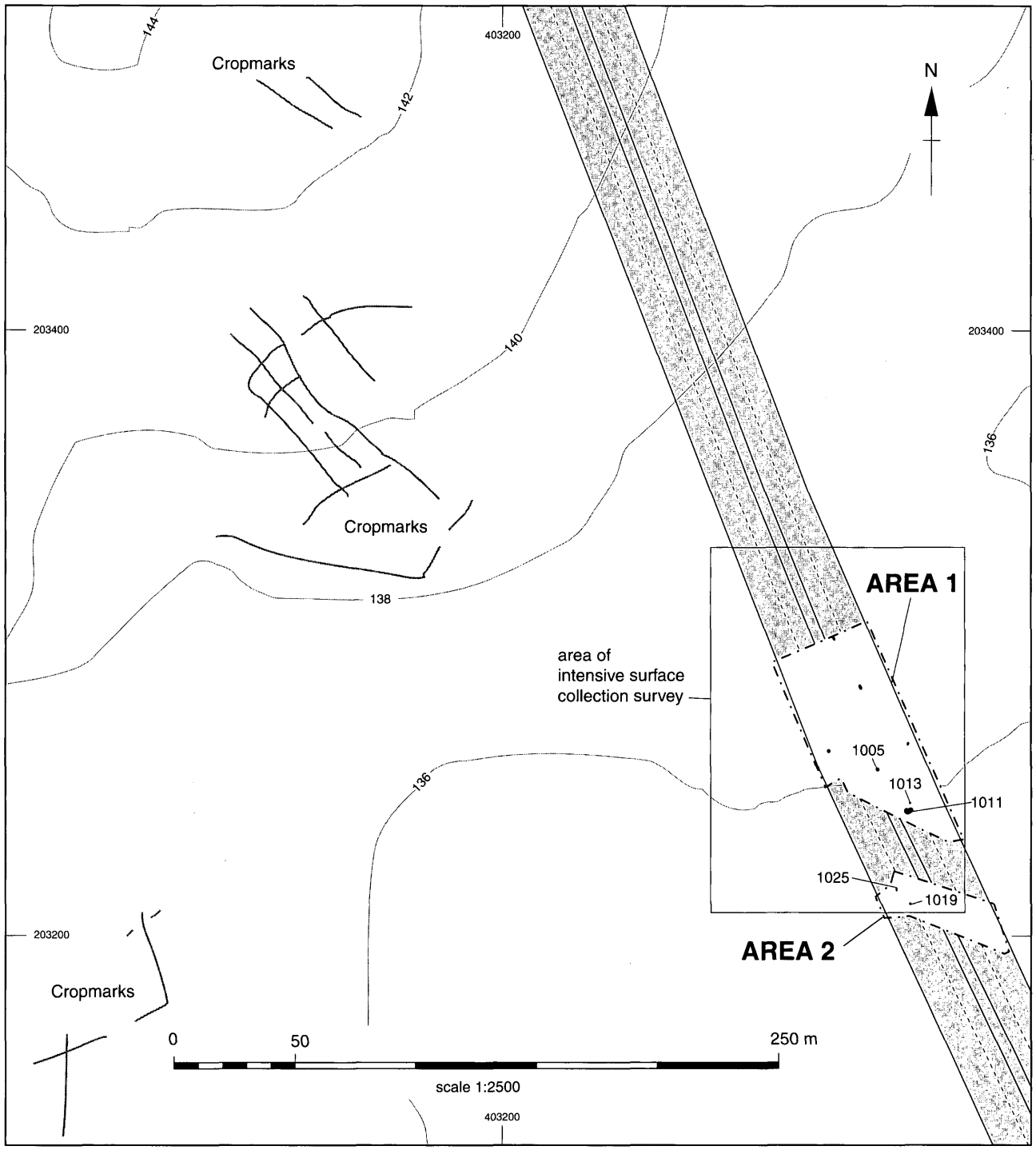

Figure 2.3 Hare Bushes North, location of trenches.

The secondary and tertiary fills (111 and 95) were much cleaner and quite different in character. Both deposits contained reasonably large quantities of flint debitage, but had very few natural inclusions. A crude chisel arrowhead (Fig. 7.5.31) of later Neolithic date was recovered from fill 95. Other signs of domestic activity included occasional flecks of charcoal in both deposits and two fragments of saddle quern rubbers made from May Hill sandstone from context 111 (Fig. 7.41.680–681).

Pit 142 was located less than a metre to the north-east of pit 94 (Fig. 2.6). This feature also contained a sequence of three fills (Fig. 2.7) and was cut by linear pit 144 (see below). The primary fill (191) was completely sterile, representing gradual erosion of the periglacial feature into which the pit had been cut. The secondary and tertiary fills (168 and 143) contained relatively large quantities of flint flakes, including four serrated flakes (Fig. 7.5.32–4), two from each fill. Fill 168 also contained charcoal flecks and

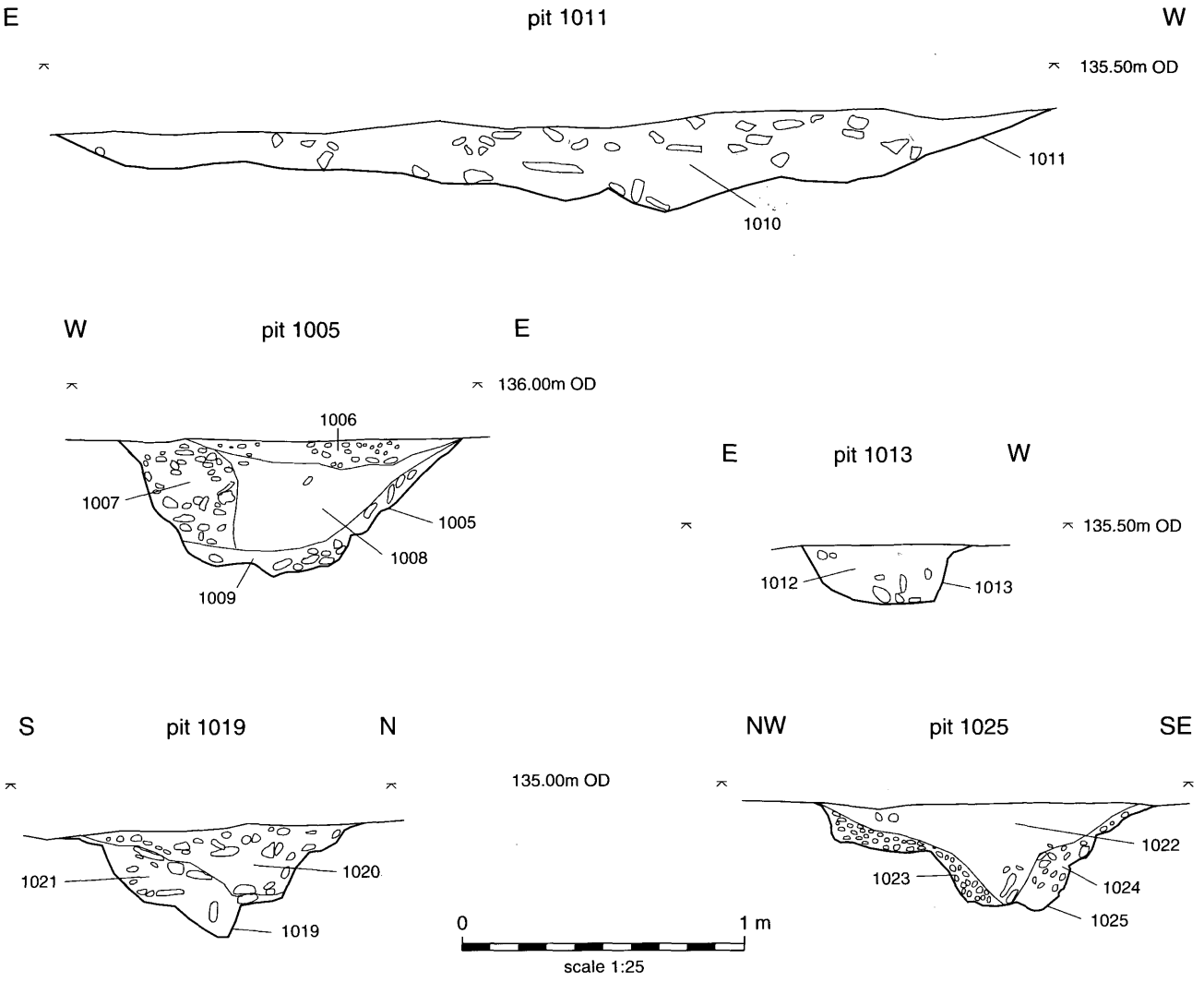

Figure 2.4 Hare Bushes North, sections.

156 fragments of burnt clay. Hazelnut shells from 168 have provided an earlier Neolithic radiocarbon date of 3641–3354 cal BC (95% confidence) (4717±60 BP; NZA-8672, R24151/16), a date broadly in accordance with the associated lithics.

Pit 144 was located less than a metre to the north-west of pit 62 and in contrast to the rest of the prehistoric features was elongated in plan rather than circular/oval (Fig. 2.6). This difference in plan does not seem to have corresponded to any major difference in function, as both fills were similar to those in pit 144 (Fig. 2.7). They also contained flintwork of a broadly Neolithic date similar to that seen in pits 94, 142 and 62. The only retouched piece was a burnt and broken serrated flake, however, the feature was obviously later in the chronological sequence of pits, as it truncated both pits 142 and 182 (see below).

Pit 182 was initially though to be part of pit 144 mentioned above. However, subsequent excavation revealed that 182 was a small circular pit which had been truncated by pit 144 (Fig. 2.6). The primary fill (227) was stony and devoid of finds, but a few flints were recovered from a secondary silty clay deposit (183), which also contained flecks of charcoal (Fig. 2.7).

Discussion

Flint artefacts from a number of the pits, including leaf arrowheads, blades, a partly discoidal flake core, a possible tortoise core, serrated flakes and an almost complete crude chisel arrowhead, indicate a date range from the earlier to the later Neolithic for these features. Radiocarbon dates indicate an earlier Neolithic date for pits 94 and 142, a date which is generally supported by the character of the lithics from the same fill. The latter pit also contained earlier Neolithic bowl pottery. Pit 94 is of interest, however, as the primary fill also contained sherds of middle

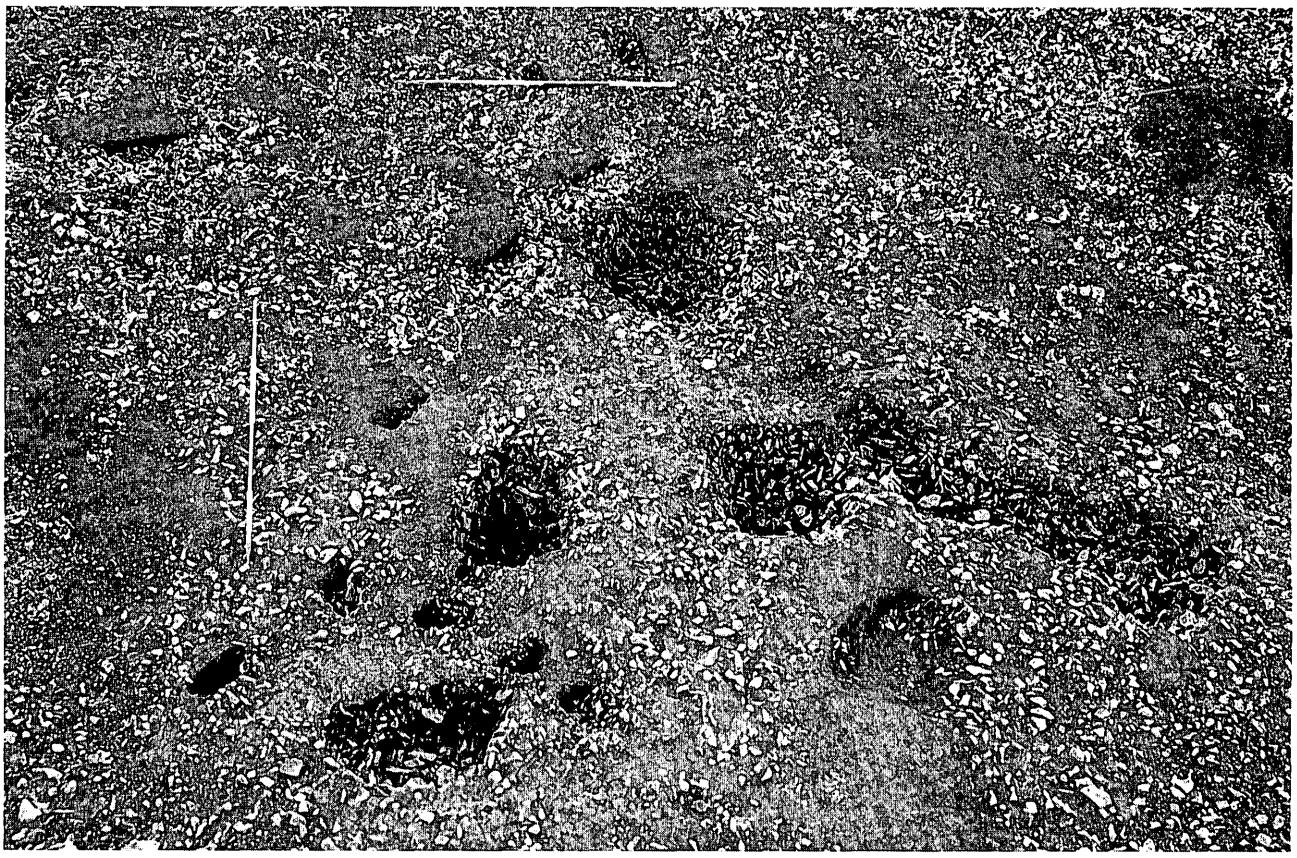

Plate 2.1 Duntisbourne Grove, group of Neolithic pits. looking south-west.

Neolithic Peterborough Ware, and the upper fills some lithics which are typical of the later Neolithic, namely the chisel arrowhead and the tortoise core. This would suggest that the pit had been open for a considerable length of time.

Analysis of the soil from the primary fills of pits 94 and 142 indicated the presence of occasional grains of *Triticum* sp. (wheat) and *Hordeum* sp. (barley). A glume base of *T. spelta* found in the uppermost fill of pit 142 (context 143) indicates that this layer contains some later contamination, as *T. spelta* is not known prior to the Bronze Age. A single stone of *Crataegus* sp. (hawthorn) was also identified, together with numerous hazelnut shell fragments. The *Crataegus* sp. stone may have been introduced with firewood, while the latter are likely to represent edible resources collected in the wild. Three samples also contained identifiable charcoal including Pomoideae (hawthorn etc.). Such an assemblage is typical of the Neolithic, where cereal cultivation is represented but plays a minor role in the diet compared to collected wild plant resources (Moffett *et al.* 1989; Thomas 1991, 20).

The original function of these pits remains unclear, but the association of worked flint, pottery, saddle quern rubbers, fired clay and burnt plant remains strongly suggests the presence of domestic activity in the vicinity. Thomas has suggested, however, that many of the isolated pits which have been interpreted as the remnants of Neolithic settlements may in fact have had ritual and emotive, rather than functional, origins (1991, 56–78). In his schema the Neolithic population was relatively mobile and did not continuously inhabit specific locales. By intentional burial of materials redolent of domestic contexts, charcoal, bones, pottery etc., Neolithic peoples were concept-ually 'fixing' the notion of domesticity and social order on the largely untamed landscape. If this were the case, then the earlier Neolithic date for some of the pits combined with the presence of some later Neolithic pottery and flintwork is interesting; it suggests that the concept of exerting a cultural influence over nature (by deliberate deposition of items charged with domestic affinity) may have been of long lasting importance in Neolithic society. It is possible that the arc of postholes around pit 243 may also be connected with this activity.

Though apparently restricted to the south-western part of the excavation area, the possibility remains that other shallow features of a similar date may have been removed from other parts of the site by later activity. Most of the pits were clustered together in apparent isolation just to the south of the large Iron Age enclosure ditch. Perhaps upcast from this ditch formed a protective layer over these features. Significantly, the natural limestone does seem to change at just this point; north of the enclosure ditch it is angular and frost shattered, whereas to the south (i.e. where the pits are located) the natural is much more rounded as if it had been protected from the frost.

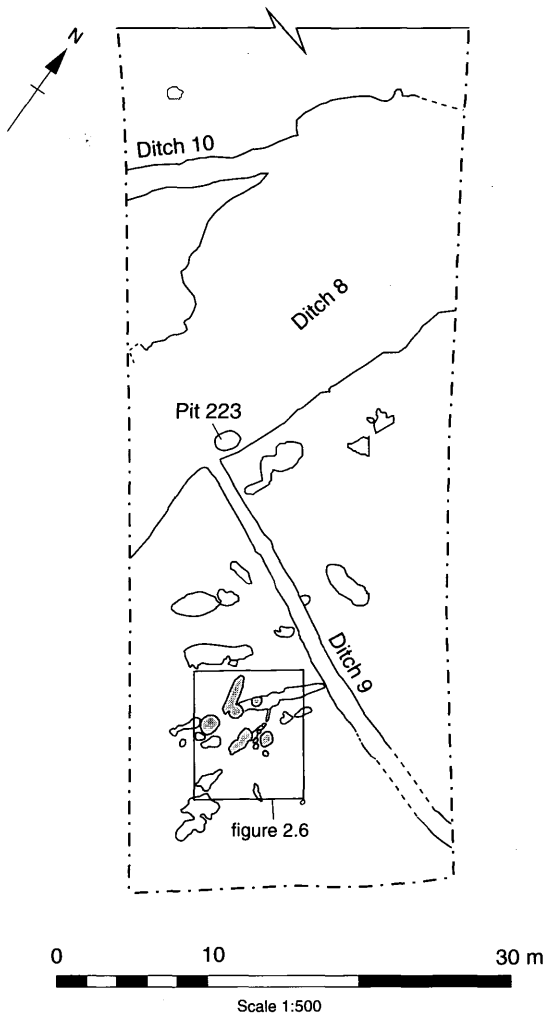

Figure 2.5 Duntisbourne Grove, Neolithic pits: location in relation to late Iron Age ditches.

Middle Duntisbourne

A total of 20 flints was recovered from the excavation at Middle Duntisbourne. All were derived from contexts thought to date to the late Iron Age/early Roman period (see below Chapter 3, Fig. 3.35), but typologically most of the material relates to the Neolithic period. One of the flints, an unfinished leaf arrowhead (Fig. 7.3.22), is typical of the early Neolithic.

Norcote Farm

The Stage 2 assessment had identified a possible flint scatter in the Norcote Farm area. This scatter contained material ranging in date from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age. However, only 19 flints were recovered from 40 test pits targeted on this putative scatter, and many of the remaining 20 flints from the site were found in either medieval/post-medieval plough furrows, or were derived from the remnant of an earlier ploughsoil seen at the southern end of the site. This ploughsoil probably dates to the Roman period (Figs 3.31–2). The assemblage comprised a mixture of material of likely Neolithic date, including narrow and broad flakes, a blade core fragment and a serrated flake. A fragment of a small, keeled flake core, made of grey chert, formed part of the assemblage. It is similar in appearance to Portland Chert and may, therefore, have been imported from the south coast. Similar cherts, however, have been found in the Pebble Beds and other Tertiary deposits in central southern England (Holgate 1988, 64). These deposits extend into parts of the Thames catchment, so it is possible the chert had not been brought such a great distance.

A substantial ditch (235/239) was oriented north-south across the site. Although no dating evidence was recovered from its fills, its sinuous nature and division into two segments was reminiscent of the probable Iron Age and indeterminate prehistoric ditches found at St Augustine's Farm South and St Augustine's Lane. There was a single break in the ditch towards its southern end. The section north of the break (235) was up to 2 m wide and 0.8 m deep with a regular profile. The section running south after the break (239) was shallower, at 0.47 m deep, and also narrowed to the south to 0.76 m. The ditch contained two or three silty clay fills, all devoid of finds.

St Augustine's Farm South

A total of 20 flints was recovered from the excavation at St Augustine's Farm South. The material consisted mostly of broad flakes of probable Neolithic date, but was derived from a variety of features which date to later periods (Figs 3.2–3). The original focus of this

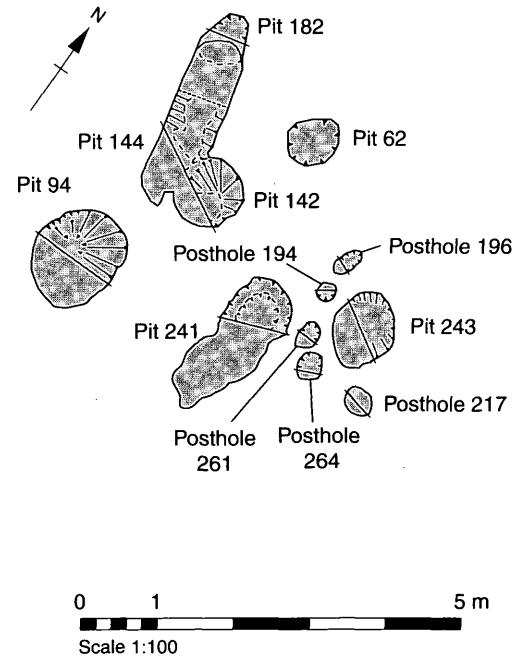

Figure 2.6 Duntisbourne Grove, plan of Neolithic pits.

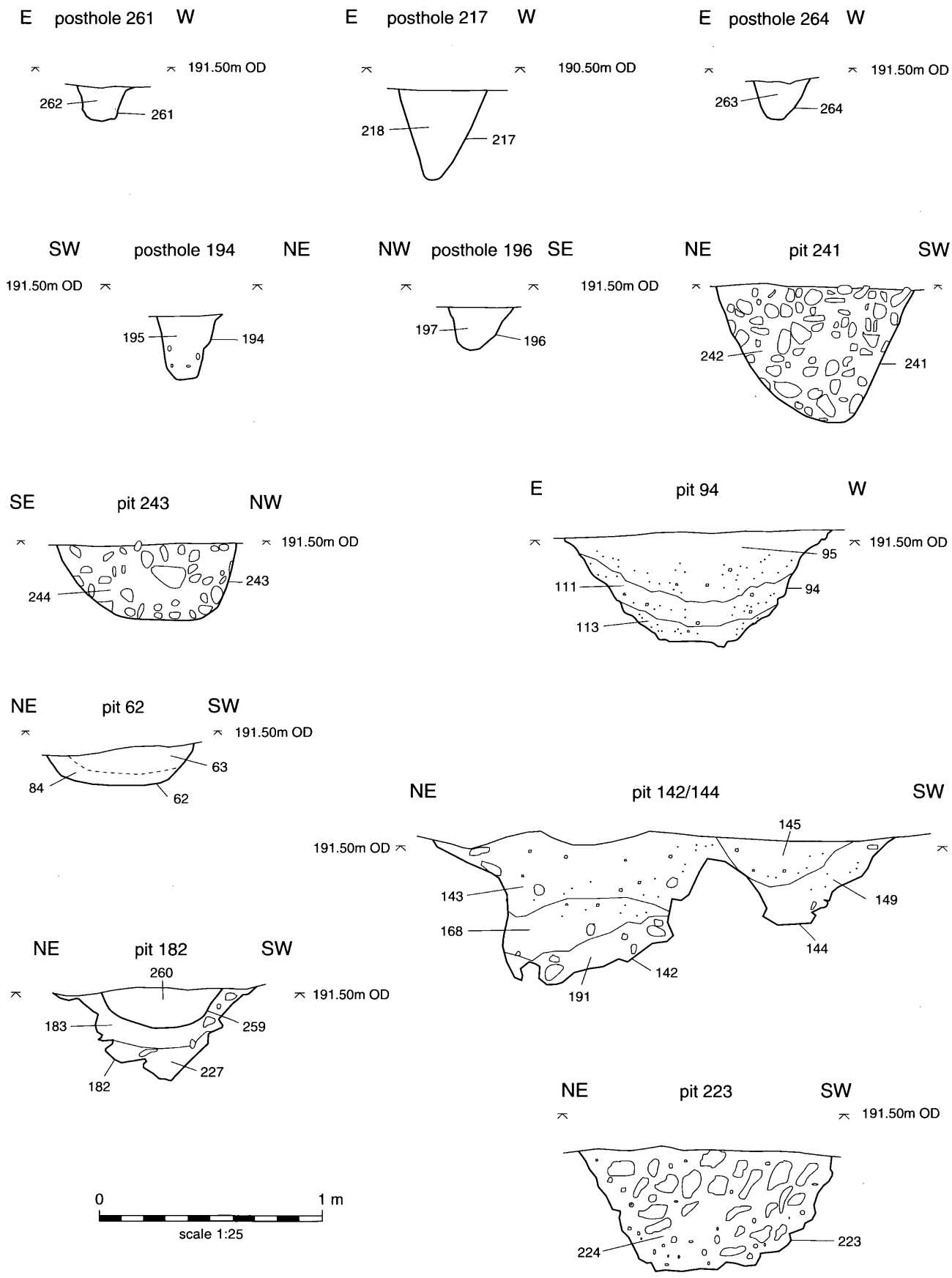

Figure 2.7 Duntisbourne Grove, sections through pits and postholes.

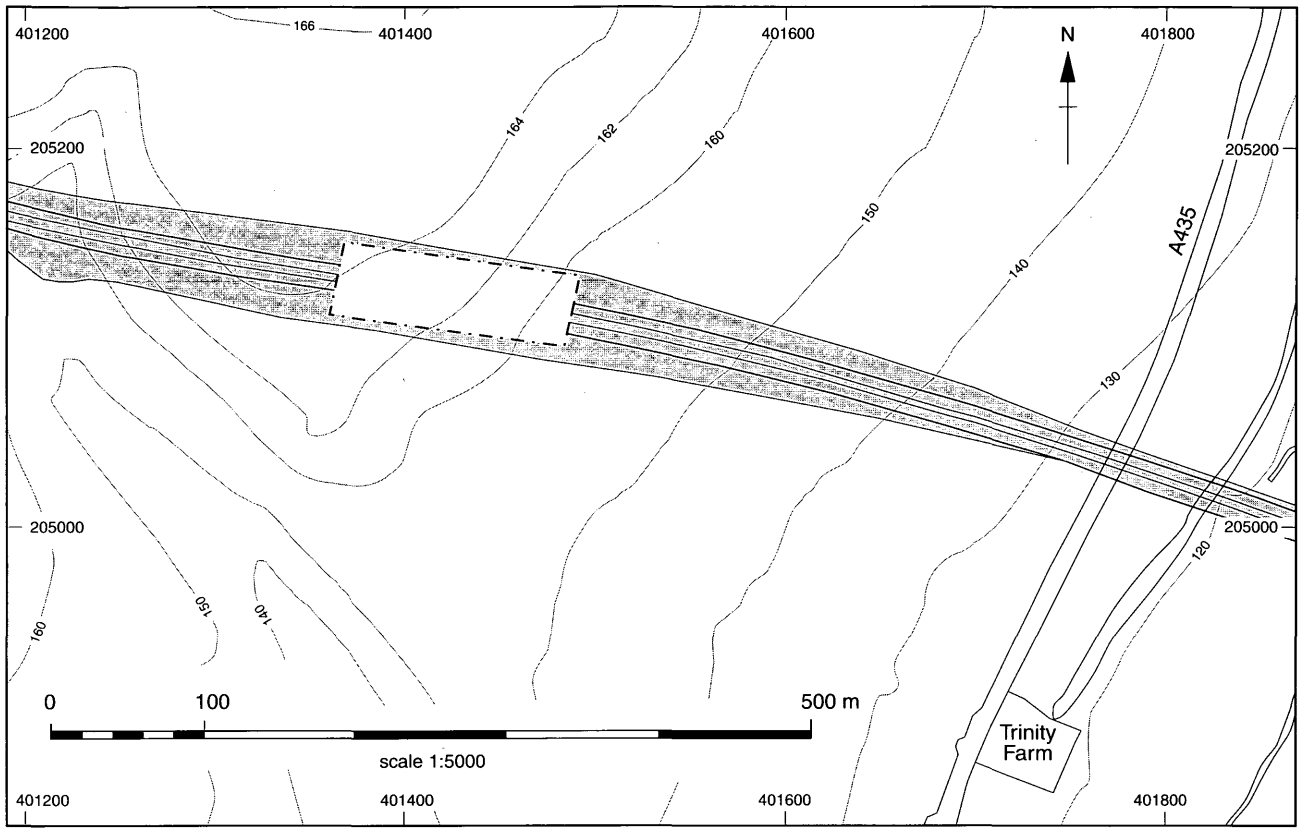

Figure 2.8 Trinity Farm, location of excavation area.

Neolithic activity has either been destroyed by later activity or was located outside the excavation boundary. The presence of Neolithic activity in the vicinity is also attested by an early Neolithic sherd found in the fill of one of the Iron Age segmented ditch sections (context 3165, ditch 3123, segment 3114; see Barclay, Chapter 7). A second sherd from this context may also be early Neolithic.

Court Farm

A residual early Neolithic sherd was recovered from Court Farm.

The late Neolithic/early Bronze Age period

Beaker pottery and associated flintwork dating to the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age (*c.* 2500-1700 BC) was found on four sites on the road scheme: Trinity Farm, Preston Enclosure, St Augustine's Lane and Court Farm. A large number of sherds were recovered from Trinity Farm, while only two sherds were found at Preston Enclosure, with only single sherds from St Augustine's Lane and Court Farm. The series of pits from Trinity Farm, which contained an important group of stylistically 'early' Beaker pottery, was the most significant of these discoveries. The sherds from the other sites appear to be residual. The contiguous ring ditches at St Augustine's Farm South represent the ploughed-out remains of round barrows, and date to the early Bronze Age period (*c.* 2000–1700 BC).

Trinity Farm

Three heavily truncated pits (8, 10 and 12) containing struck flint and 164 Beaker sherds were located in the north-east corner of the Trinity Farm excavation area (Fig. 2.8). The pits were arranged in a linear fashion on a north-north-west – south-south-east alignment (Fig. 2.9). It is possible that some of the sherds from separate pit fills derive from the same vessels. In addition, a tree-throw hole (context 28) found to the south-west of this group also contained a Beaker sherd. No other prehistoric features were encountered within the trench but it remains possible that other related features may have existed beyond the edge of the excavation area.

Pit 8

Pit 8 was the most southerly of the three pits. Roughly circular in plan, it measured 0.86 m in diameter, had a maximum depth of 0.18 m and contained a single dark brown clay silt fill (7) (Fig. 2.10). The pit was totally excavated, producing 29 sherds of Beaker pottery (Fig. 7.6.38–42), flint scrapers, cores and flakes (Fig. 7.1–2: 12–5), and fragments of burnt limestone. A number of the pottery sherds were decorated with

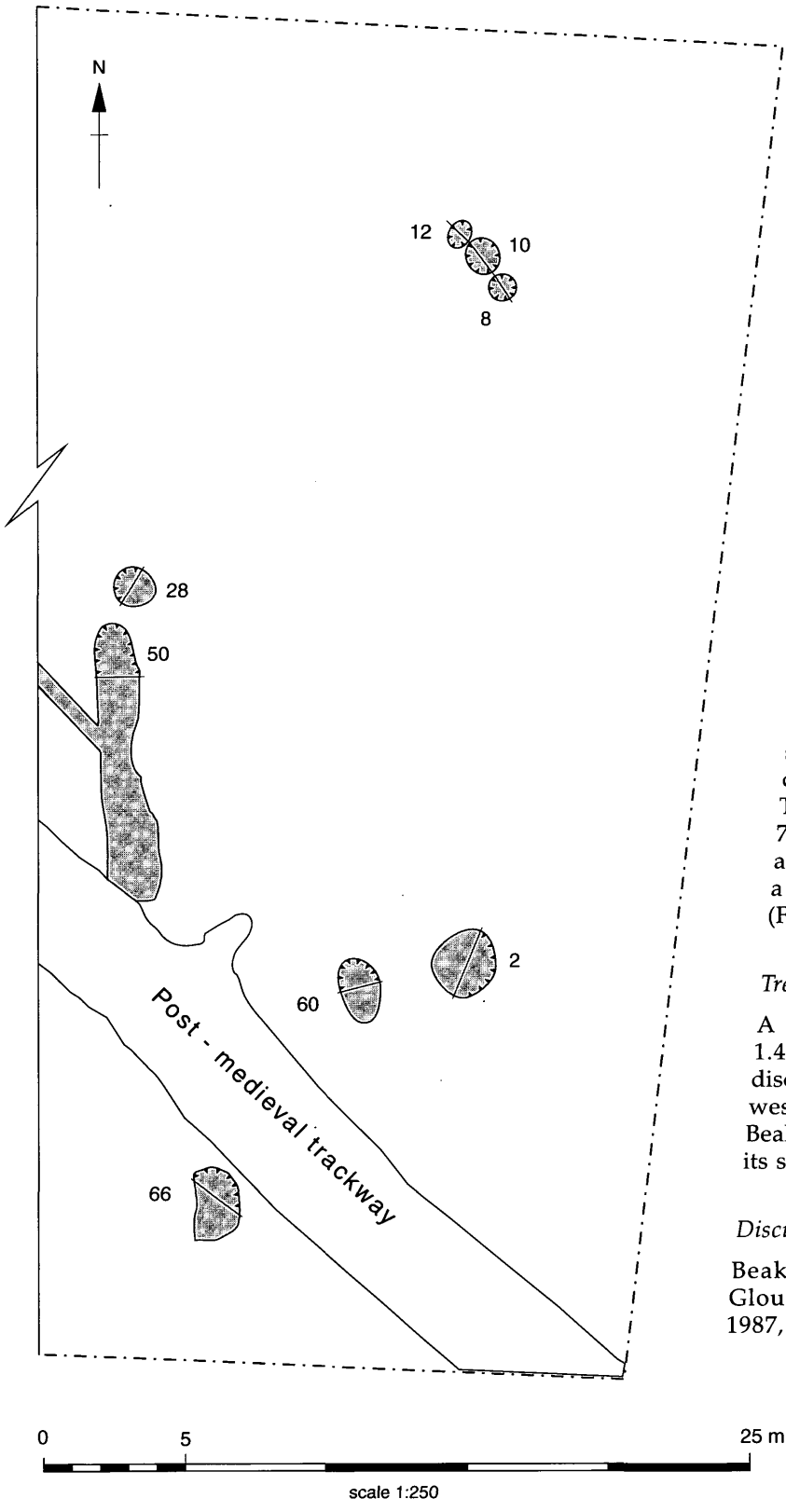

Figure 2.9 Trinity Farm, plan of Beaker pits and other features.

comb and finger-nail decoration characteristic of the Wessex/Middle Rhine style dating to the early Beaker period. Hazelnut shells from the fill of this pit were radiocarbon dated to 2476–2142 cal BC (95% confidence) (3876±57 BP; NZA-8673, R24151/17), a date which would support that provided by the pottery.

Pit 10

This was the central pit and was slightly larger and a little deeper than the other two, measuring 1.20 m in diameter, with a maximum depth of 0.22 m (Fig. 2.10). The single associated fill (9) was a dark brown clay silt which contained 122 sherds of Beaker pottery (Fig. 7.6.43–9), pieces of burnt limestone and ten flint scrapers (Fig. 7.1.1–5, 7.1.7–11, 7.2.16–17), including a thumbnail scraper, a type characteristic of the Beaker period. Hazelnut shells from the pit fill were radiocarbon dated to 2462–2047 cal BC (95% confidence) (3836±58 BP; NZA-8674, R24151/18), a date which would support that provided by the pottery.

Pit 12

The northernmost feature, pit 12, was the smallest of the three; measuring 0.60 m in diameter and 0.06 m in depth (Fig. 2.10). Thirteen sherds of Beaker pottery (Fig. 7.6:50–2) were recovered from the single associated clay silt fill (11), together with a small number of flint flakes and a scraper (Fig. 7.1.6).

Tree-throw hole 28

A roughly circular tree-throw hole (28), 1.4 m in diameter and 0.26 m deep, was discovered approximately 15 m to the south-west of pit 8 (Fig. 2.10). A single sherd of Beaker pottery was found on the surface of its single clayey silt fill (27).

Discussion

Beaker domestic assemblages are rare in Gloucestershire (Ellison 1984, 115; Darvill 1987, 81–8). The fact that the Trinity Farm pits contain pottery of what can be described as early within the Beaker sequence, which is relatively unusual in southern England compared to the more numerous assemblages of coarser domestic ware, increases the importance of this discovery. Comparable assemblages of fine vessels are recorded from Roughground Farm, Lechlade (Darvill 1993) and the Marlborough Downs area (Cleal 1992). Part of a fine beaker was also found at Crickley Hill (Dixon 1971, fig. 8.15), however, the only vessel with typological affinities with the

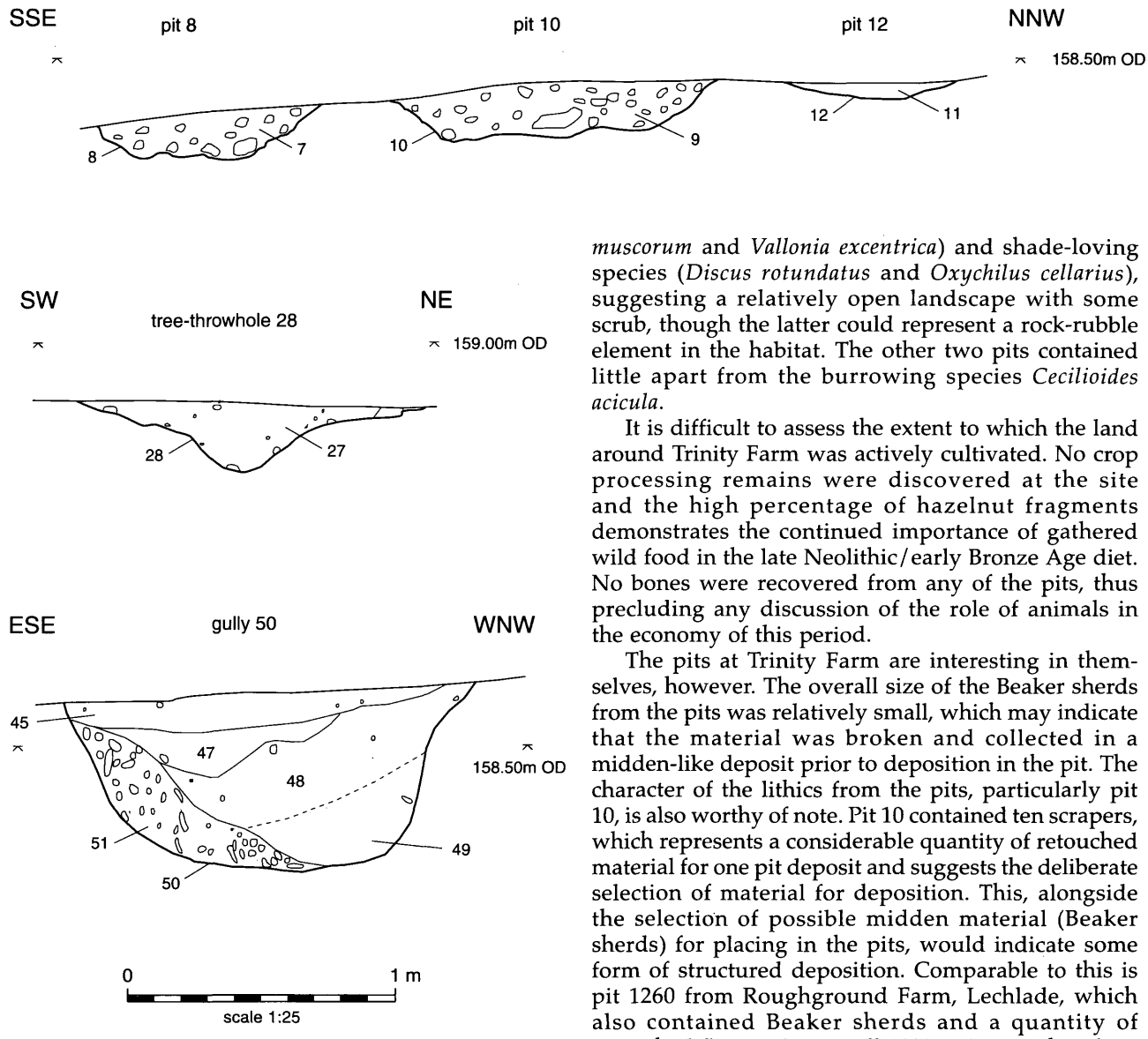

Figure 2.10 Trinity Farm, sections.

material from Trinity Farm is a probable Wessex/Middle Rhine funerary beaker from Sale's Lot, Withington (O'Neil 1966).

As material of this date is scarce in the region extensive samples were taken from all the pits for environmental remains. The samples all contained large numbers of nut shell fragments of *Corylus avellana* (hazel), while pit 10 also contained occasional grains of *Hordeum* sp. (barley) and a spikelet fork of *Triticum* sp. (wheat). Charcoal identified as *Quercus* sp. (oak), *Corylus* (hazel) and Pomoideae (hawthorn etc.) was also recovered from pit 10. Such assemblages are typical for settlement sites of late Neolithic/early Bronze Age date.

Mollusc samples taken from the pits provide additional insight into environmental conditions in the vicinity of the later Neolithic/early Bronze Age features. One pit contained both open-country (*Pupilla muscorum* and *Vallonia excentrica*) and shade-loving species (*Discus rotundatus* and *Oxychilus cellarius*), suggesting a relatively open landscape with some scrub, though the latter could represent a rock-rubble element in the habitat. The other two pits contained little apart from the burrowing species *Cecilioides acicula*.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the land around Trinity Farm was actively cultivated. No crop processing remains were discovered at the site and the high percentage of hazelnut fragments demonstrates the continued importance of gathered wild food in the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age diet. No bones were recovered from any of the pits, thus precluding any discussion of the role of animals in the economy of this period.

The pits at Trinity Farm are interesting in themselves, however. The overall size of the Beaker sherds from the pits was relatively small, which may indicate that the material was broken and collected in a midden-like deposit prior to deposition in the pit. The character of the lithics from the pits, particularly pit 10, is also worthy of note. Pit 10 contained ten scrapers, which represents a considerable quantity of retouched material for one pit deposit and suggests the deliberate selection of material for deposition. This, alongside the selection of possible midden material (Beaker sherds) for placing in the pits, would indicate some form of structured deposition. Comparable to this is pit 1260 from Roughground Farm, Lechlade, which also contained Beaker sherds and a quantity of retouched flintwork (Darvill 1993, 18). It is, therefore, difficult to speculate how representative of everyday domestic activity the material from these pits might be (cf. Thomas 1991, 56–78).

St Augustine's Farm South

St Augustine's Farm South comprised three separate excavation areas; Area O, Area N(a) and Area N(b) (Fig. 2.11). Area O was approximately rectangular in shape, measuring 100 x 35 m. It was the southernmost of the three excavation areas and was purposely located to examine two contiguous ring ditches which lay in the path of the proposed road. Stripping of the topsoil revealed parts of two contiguous ring ditches in the north-western portion of the excavated area. Approximately half of both ring ditches lay within the excavation area so that only one junction between the two fell within it. Examination of this junction suggested that the northern ring ditch (3005) had been attached or joined onto the southern ring ditch (3012). The evaluation revealed that no upstanding barrow

Plate 2.2 Cropmarks in the vicinity of St Augustine's Lane, with Preston Enclosure (middle left). Reproduced by permission of RCHME (ref. NMR 4637/41).

earthworks had survived and that ploughsoil covered the natural subsoil.

Southern ring ditch 3012

This ring ditch had been investigated during the evaluation by excavating a single trench across its interior (Fig. 2.12). A sherd from a Collared Urn was discovered from the subsoil context 6 (see Barclay, Chapter 7 and Fig. 7.6.53) and could originally have come from a cremation deposit. Ring ditch 3012 had an internal diameter of *c.* 18 m (Fig. 2.12). Its excavation had clearly involved the exploitation of natural weaknesses in the bedrock, as it was not quite circular in plan. The ditch varied considerably in both width and depth around its circuit. The northern section was some 1.6 m at its widest point and reached a maximum depth of 0.56 m. The southern section in comparison measured 1.20 m across at its widest extent and was only 0.30 m deep (Fig. 2.13, 3018, section 43).

The ditch fills consisted of a primary eroded natural layer, followed by a stony deposit, which may represent partial collapse/subsidence of the covering mound, since removed by ploughing. The uppermost fills consisted of the largely stone-free silty clay soil seen in many of the features on the site. Unfortunately, no dating evidence was recovered from any of the sections excavated through ring ditch 3012. Only four flint flakes were recovered and these were not diagnostic of any particular period.

Plate 2.3 Bronze Age ring ditches and sinuous Iron Age boundary ditches at St Augustine's Farm South and St Augustine's Lane. Reproduced by permission of RCHME (ref. NMR 15425/10).

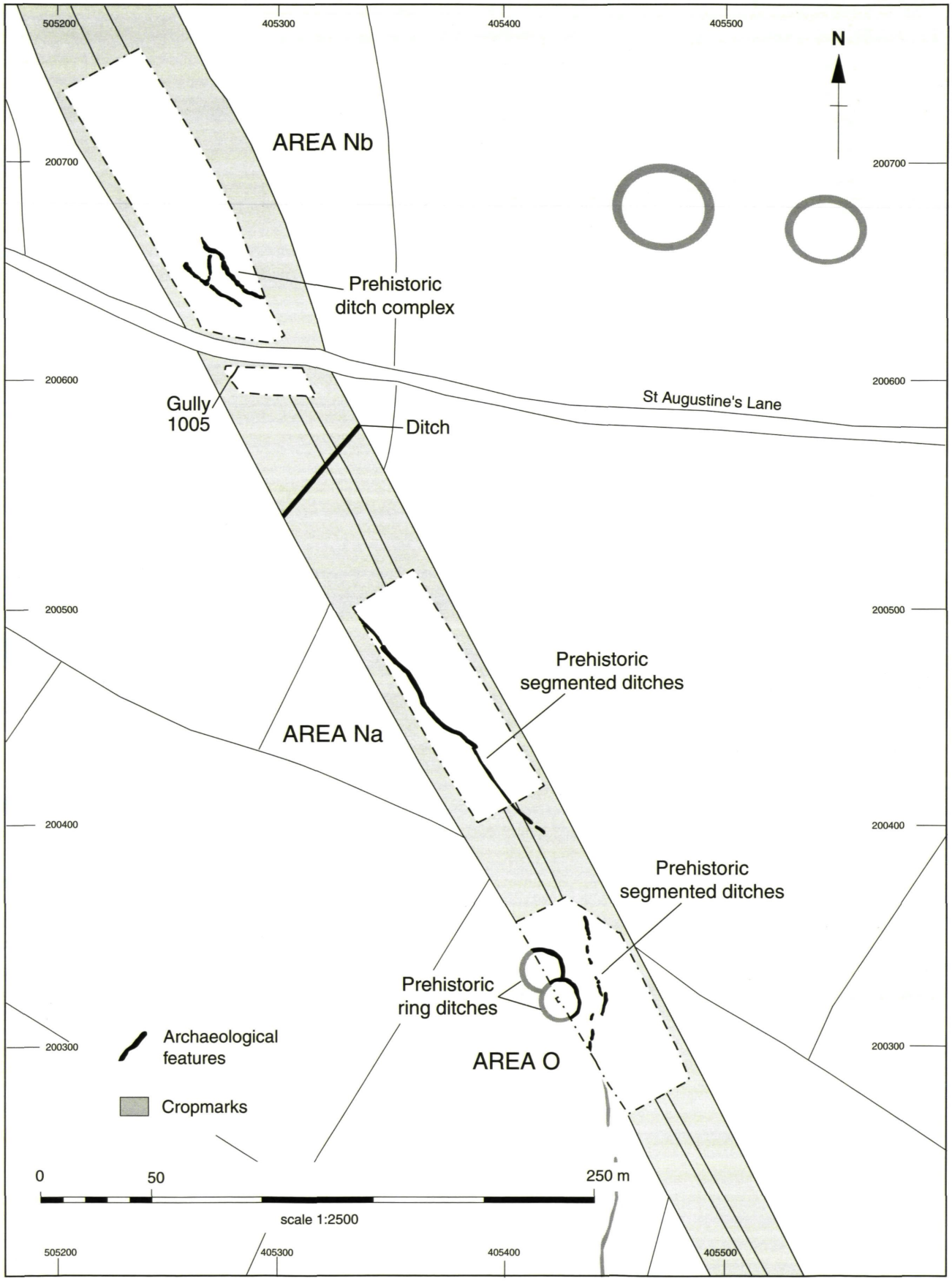

Figure 2.11 St Augustine's Farm South and St Augustine's Lane, excavated features and cropmarks, all areas.

Plate 2.4 St Augustine's Farm South, segment 3097 through the northern ring ditch 3005, looking north-west.

Stripping of the interior of the ring ditch revealed a single, nearly central cremation deposit (3109) and three small, circular features (3058, 3060 and 3062). The former was irregular and roughly triangular in plan, 0.85 x 0.74 m in extent and contained frequent pieces of oak charcoal and small fragments of burnt bone set within a dark, clay silt matrix (Fig. 2.13, section 64). No grave goods were recovered, and as the cut was very shallow, it is likely that most of the cremation and any associated grave goods could have been ploughed away. Three possible postholes, placed on an east-west alignment, were found in the south-east quadrant on the barrow's interior. All had irregular profiles and were located on the line of natural joints in the bedrock (Fig.2.13). It is uncertain whether they were real or natural features. No finds were recovered from them.

Northern ring ditch 3005

With an internal diameter of *c.* 15 m, the northern ring ditch was smaller than its southern counterpart (Fig. 2.12). Conversely, the ditch, which contained four or five fills, proved to be slightly more substantial with a maximum depth of 0.66 m (Fig. 2.13, section 44). The

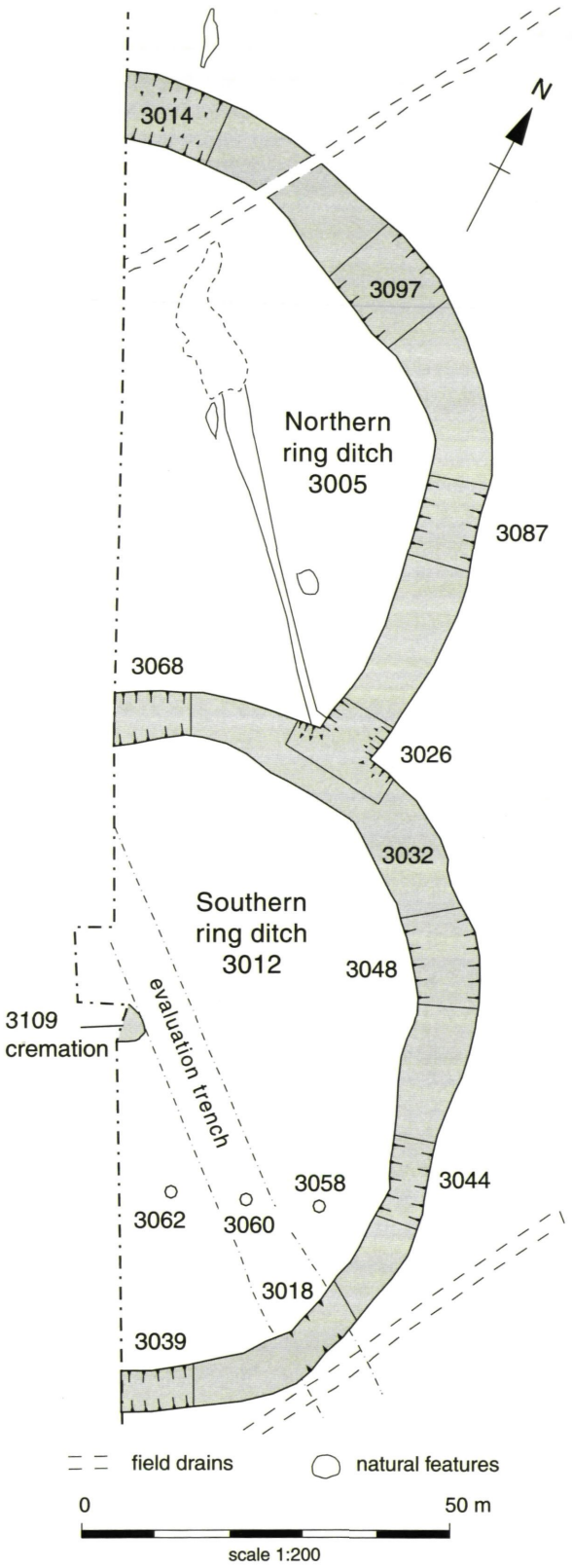

Figure 2.12 St Augustine's Farm South, Area O, plan of Bronze Age ring ditches and internal features.

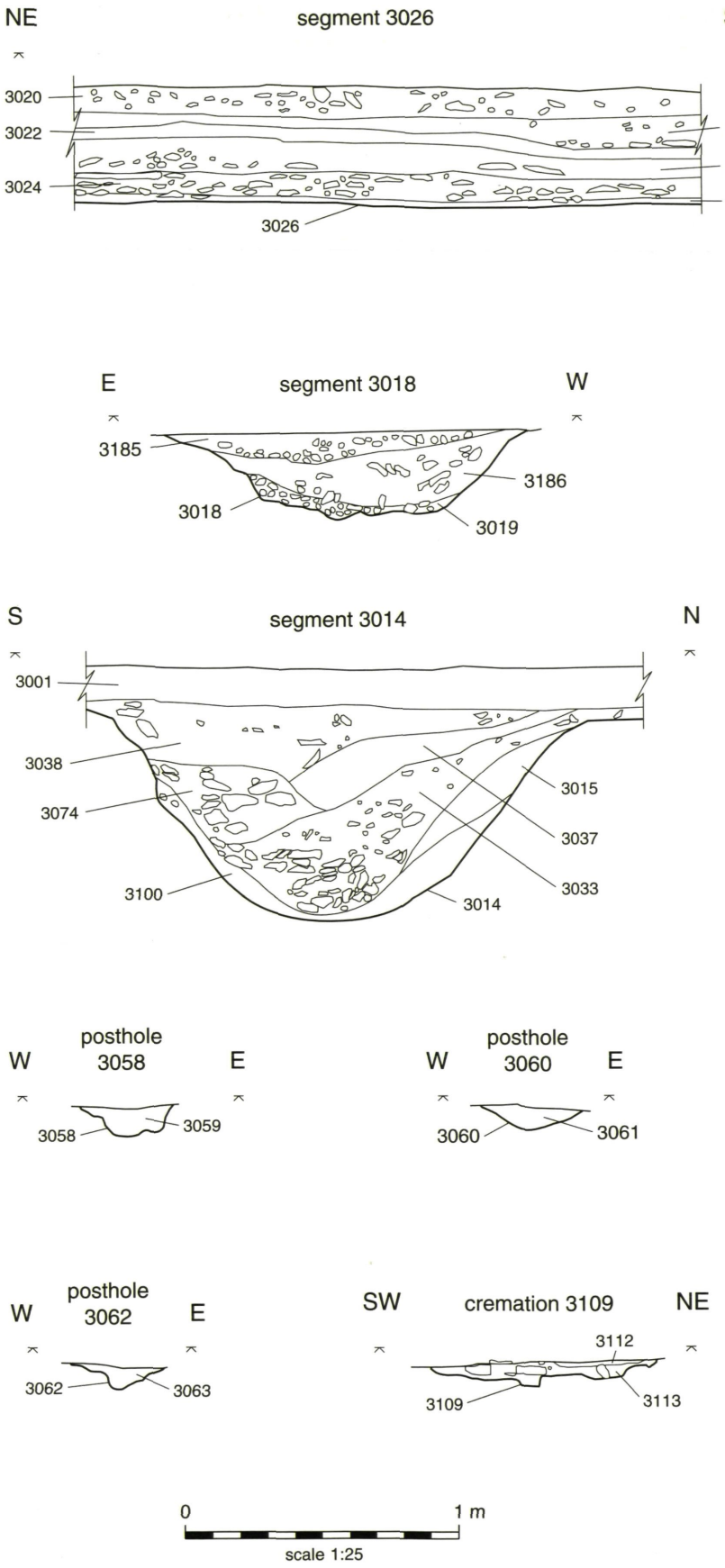

Figure 2.13 St Augustine's Farm South, sections.

sequence of ditch deposits was nearly identical to that seen in the southern ring ditch. A single small sherd from an early Bronze Age urn was recovered from the largely stone-free upper fills. Despite this sherd being redeposited, its manufacture is likely to be broadly contemporary with the construction and primary use of the monument. Ten pieces of flint were also recovered from the ditch fills, including a fragmentary flake core from the primary fill. The flint was not particularly diagnostic, though a broad Neolithic/early Bronze Age date would be appropriate. An early Bronze Age radiocarbon date of 1940–1644 cal BC (95% confidence) (3482±60 BP; NZA-8614, R24151/12) was obtained on bone from context 3094, the lowest fill of the ring ditch. This date is in accordance with the early Bronze Age date suggested by the monument form and the pottery sherd. No internal features were located apart from a deep natural feature, interpreted as a frost crack.

Discussion

The two ring ditches appear to form part of a dispersed cemetery with at least two other barrows known from cropmarks (Fig. 2.11, NMR SP0500/6, 11). The ring ditches of many such barrows are known from the area of the road scheme, mostly from aerial photographs (see Leech 1977, maps 1–3; Darvill 1987, 95). The majority of ring ditches are thought to belong to early Bronze Age barrows, though it should be noted that some might be mid or late Neolithic (Kinnes 1979), while others could represent cremation enclosures belonging to the middle Bronze Age (Barclay *et al.* 1995). The area contains few large barrow cemeteries and instead is characterised by relatively small barrow clusters. No large barrow cemeteries like the ones that exist around the Oxford area of the Upper Thames or for that matter Lambourn on the Downs are known. In fact the small group of barrows from St Augustine's Lane is typical of the area. Contiguous barrows are rare within the Upper Thames valley, although a number are known from sites around Oxford. Sometimes they are found to form part of linear barrow groups, although others like the one under discussion

Plate 2.5 St Augustine's Farm South, segment 3044 through the southern ring ditch 3012, looking south.

here appear isolated. Their form may be related to so-called twin or multiple barrows, where a single ditch is found to enclose more than one mound or to multiple ditched barrows. As Bronze Age barrows exhibit great variety in shape and size there is no reason to see this barrow as being particularly unusual.

It is unfortunate that so little of the central deposit from the southern ring ditch remained, as this may have allowed further refinement of the date of this monument. It is likely, according to the stratigraphic evidence, that it predates the northern ring ditch, but it is uncertain by how much. Logically the partial ring ditch is attached to the complete one and therefore later, although this is not absolutely certainly the case since it would have been possible to have done it the other way round or to have dug both simultaneously. The fills indicate that both ditches were open and then filled in together. Despite the truncation of the cremation deposit, it is not unusual to find an unaccompanied cremation at the centre of a barrow in the Upper Thames Valley. The row of three postholes found within the interior of the same barrow, could be unrelated or of uncertain origin, but one possibility is that they belong to a pyre structure as similar arrangements have been found at other sites (Harden and Treweeks 1945, fig. 8).

Area N(b)

Gully 1005

Located immediately to the south of St Augustine's Lane and oriented north-east to south-west, gully 1005 was the only feature of archaeological significance which appeared in area N(b) (Fig. 2.11). The gully was extremely regular in appearance, *c.* 0.60 m wide and

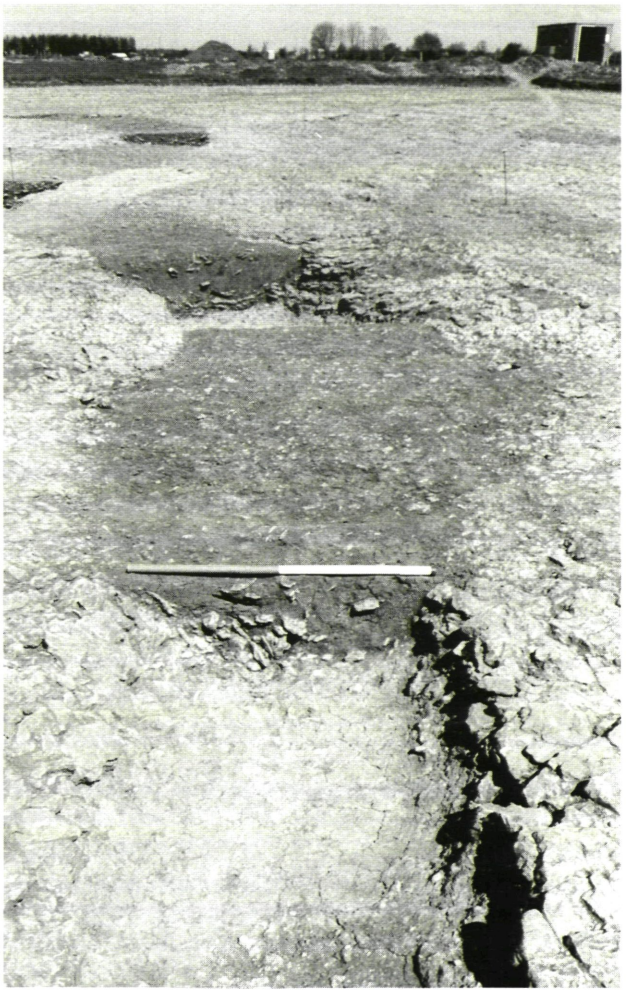

Plate 2.6 St Augustine's Farm South, segment 3039 through the southern ring ditch 3012, looking west.

fairly shallow, surviving to a depth of some 0.20 m over most of its length, except in its centre section where it had been heavily truncated by a plough furrow. There was a suggestion that the gully had begun to curve slightly at its southern extent but this may have been an effect produced by later ploughing.

The only find that was recovered from the fill of this gully was a single sherd of indeterminate prehistoric pottery. Consequently, the relationship between this feature and the Iron Age segmented ditch system seen in Areas N(a) and O to the south-east remains unclear. Given that the gully was oriented on a completely different alignment and was not made up of different sections, it would seem safer to assume that they were not related.

A watching brief in the area between Areas N(b) and N(a) revealed a second gully or ditch 1.4 m wide on a similar alignment to 1005 (Fig. 2.11). Whether the features were contemporary and part of the same land division is not clear, but again it seems unlikely that this second gully was related to the Iron Age segmented ditch system uncovered in Areas N(a) and O.

LATER BRONZE AGE

Pottery identified in both the evaluation and excavation represents the only evidence for later Bronze Age activity along the road scheme. None of this pottery is diagnostic and its date is not certain. Some, as suggested in the pottery report, could be Iron Age (see Barclay, Chapter 7). In addition, a residual sherd of probable late Bronze Age date was recovered from a later feature at Court Farm.

UNDATED EARLY PREHISTORIC FEATURES

Duntisbourne Leer

Two small areas, situated 223 m apart, were excavated at the site of Duntisbourne Leer. The excavation areas were positioned to examine two pairs of parallel linear ditches which aerial photographs and the Stage 2 evaluation suggested were Romano-British trackways or minor roads running at right angles to Ermin Street (Fig. 4.2). A group of features of possible prehistoric date, including a gully and four pits, was revealed between the two trackway ditches in Area 1. No earlier prehistoric pottery was recovered. Six pieces of struck flint were found on this site, including a barbed and tanged arrowhead (Fig. 7.3.18) from the ploughsoil. The latter would be of Beaker/early Bronze Age date.

Gully 49

A shallow linear gully with a terminal at the south-western end was observed running north-east to south-west for a length of 7.5 m before being truncated at its north-eastern end by later ploughing. Three sections were excavated across the gully, but the only find that was recovered was a thick flint flake.

Pits 4, 41 and 43

Three closely spaced pit features (4, 41 and 43), situated just beyond the gully terminal, were on the same alignment as gully 49. Pits 41 and 43 were oval in shape, shallow and filled with a 'clean' reddish brown subsoil. Neither of the pits contained any finds. In contrast, pit 4 produced a flint scraper, a burnt core fragment and a flake. Analysis of the reddish brown fill of pit 4 (deposit 3) revealed carbonised material and more than 700 fragments of hazelnut shell, *Corylus avellana*. Though cereal remains were absent, the hazelnut shells and the flint scraper suggest a broad Neolithic/early Bronze Age date for the deposit. The discovery of a barbed and tanged arrowhead from the surface adjacent to Area 1 suggests that an early Bronze Age date is perhaps more likely.

'Pit' 46

Another feature, 'pit' 46, was situated on the southern edge of the excavated area. The full extent of the feature was not exposed, but if it was originally a pit it was much larger than any of the pits seen immediately to the south-west of gully 49. The fill of feature 46 was a reddish brown silt which contained occasional charcoal flecks. No other finds were recovered from the deposit.