

Talbot Street, Ellesmere, Shropshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT



Talbot Street, Ellesmere, Shropshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT

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June 2006

Report for J Ross Developments

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

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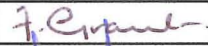
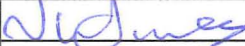
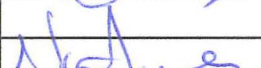

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CONTENTS

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 LOCATION
- 3 FIELD EVALUATION
- 4 CONCLUSIONS
- 5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- 6 REFERENCES

APPENDIX 1: SITE ARCHIVE

APPENDIX 2: SPECIFICATION

FIGURES

- Fig. 1 Trench location
- Fig. 2 Trench 1 plan and section
- Fig. 3 Trench 2 plan and section
- Fig. 4 Trench 3 plan and section

PLATES

- Plate 1 Trench 1
- Plate 2 Trench 2
- Plate 3 Trench 3

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (henceforward CPAT) was asked by Capita Symonds, on behalf of J Ross Developments to provide a quotation for an archaeological desk-based assessment of a proposed development area along Talbot Street in Ellesmere, Shropshire. The request was made in mid-October 2005 and the archaeological assessment was conducted in the early part of November, following the acceptance of CPAT's quotation.
- 1.2 An initial report was produced in December 2005 (Grant and Jones 2005), detailing the results from the desk-based assessment, and this was submitted to the local planning authority as a result of which the Historic Environment Officer for Shropshire County Council requested a further stage of field evaluation, comprising three excavation trenches. Although a curatorial brief was not prepared for the second stage of archaeological works a specification (see Appendix 2) was produced by CPAT which was approved by the Historic Environment Officer.
- 1.3 This report presents the results of the second stage of field evaluation, which was undertaken in March 2006.

2 LOCATION

- 2.1 The development area forms a curving strip of land, running parallel to, but south of the area of Ellesmere known as Swan Hill, and leading off from Sparbridge and Talbot Streets (Fig. 1; SJ SJ40093499).
- 2.2 The development plot was occupied until recently by the Lower Talbot Caravan Park, and is currently overgrown with turf above the former track and hard-standing plots for the caravans. At the south-western end, shrubberies and the access road to this and the property to the south, occupy the former street frontage plots, whilst a timber-built wash-block sits further back with a septic tank nearby. A brick revetment wall, *c.* 3m high, forms part of the south-eastern boundary, with brick-built buttresses and at least two phases of construction. Part of the hedged northern boundary is formed by a shallow, dry ditch at the rear of the gardens on Swan Hill.
- 2.3 The majority of the development plot falls within, but on the north-east fringe of, the historic core of the town of Ellesmere as defined by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (Buteux 1996).
- 2.4 The underlying geology consists of undivided Triassic sedimentary rocks, overlain by glacial deposits and topography forming the classic mere and moraine landscape of northern Shropshire.

3 FIELD EVALUATION

- 3.1 The evaluation comprised three trenches, each measuring 12 x 1.5m (Fig. 1). The aim of the evaluation was to identify the nature and possibly the dating of any archaeological features within the development area.
- 3.2 The modern and post-medieval overburden was removed by machine under close archaeological supervision, with all subsequent cleaning and excavation being carried out by hand. The numbers in brackets in the following text refer to contexts given to those features and layers which were identified during the excavation. A drawn, written and photographic record was maintained throughout the duration of the evaluation (see Appendix 1).
- 3.3 During the course of mechanically excavating the trenches it became clear that the plot had been previously levelled, possibly in association with its use as a caravan park. Towards the south-

eastern boundary the upper deposits had been removed, while conversely to the north-west levelling material including building rubble, had been deposited.

Trench 1

- 3.4 Trench 1 was located immediately to the east of the parking area alongside the wash-block and to the south of the existing access track.
- 3.5 Removal of the overburden (01) revealed the undisturbed subsoil at the south-west end of the trench, which consisted of a firm orange clay (02). After investigation, linear features running approximately east to west across the trench proved to be the truncated upper surfaces of a succession of naturally deposited alluvial layers, infilling a low-lying area to the north and overlying deposit (02). These deposits comprised a pinkish-grey mottled silty clay (30), a mid grey silty clay (29), an orange plastic clay (28), a pinkish-grey silty clay (27), a firm grey clay (13), and bright orange, soft clay with darker mottling and patchiness (12). The last of these deposits contained several sherds of abraded medieval (13th-14th century) pottery.
- 3.6 At the north-eastern end of the trench, overlying deposit (12), was a further accumulation of dark greyish-brown silty clay (05), with c. 10% small pebbles and gravel, coal and cinder fragments, and 17th-18th century ceramics. This material had been cut by a shallow linear gully, or possibly an elongated oval pit (03), containing a fill of dark greyish-brown soft silty clay (04) with associated 19th-century ceramics.

Trench 2

- 3.7 Trench 2 was located to the north-east of Trench 1, again to the south of the existing access track.
- 3.8 As in Trench 1 the removal of 0.18m of topsoil (06) revealed an orange clay natural subsoil (07) at the south-west end of the trench. A sondage revealed that this material overlay a light grey and mottled orange clay (32), and was itself overlain by a succession of naturally deposited clay layers (see fig. 3 section C-D), apparently filling a low-lying area to the north. The sequence of deposits comprised a mid grey clay with iron staining and occasional charcoal flecks (31), a mid brownish-grey silty clay (09), a light pinkish-grey clay sand (10), a light grey clay with iron staining and occasional charcoal flecks (11), a mid brownish-grey clay with iron staining and patches of sand (08), and an uppermost deposit of orange-brown silty clay (26). Deposits (10) and (26) contained sherds of abraded medieval (13th-14th century) pottery.
- 3.9 The only archaeological features identified within the trench consisted of two modern, square post-holes (34) and (36).

Trench 3

- 3.10 Trench 3 was located on the north side of the existing access track.
- 3.11 The removal of the topsoil (14) revealed a spread of loose brick rubble and redeposited clay (15 and 16) up to 1.0m thick. Due to the unstable nature of the rubble and the resultant health and safety considerations, the upper level of the trench was extended in width to 2.5m. Below the rubble deposit, the trench was excavated to a width of 1.5m, revealing a buried topsoil (17) with a buried turf on top, and an underlying possible cultivation soil (18). These layers sealed an accumulation of naturally deposited layers (19-21) of grey clay with bands of decayed organic material. A sondage was excavated at the south-western end of the trench to test these deposits, which revealed further organic material (22) including a well-preserved tree trunk or large branch at the very base of the sondage.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The desk-based assessment identified a limited number of known archaeological sites within the proposed development area, concentrated at the western end of the plot. Cartographic evidence identified several blocks of buildings present on the site in the 19th century, including a large building (Site 1), apparently sub-divided into individually occupied properties along the southern edge of the former Sparbrook (the north-western boundary of the development site). Separated from these buildings by a road or lane, and fronting on to the main Sparbridge Street (now Talbot Street) were two adjacent, early 19th-century buildings, nos 1 & 3 Talbot Street (PRN 12485). The land immediately to the east of these buildings was sub-divided into plots with small out-buildings, presumably associated with the main properties.
- 4.2 The field evaluation was carried out in accordance with a specification (see Appendix 2) approved by the Historic Environment Officer and was designed to investigate the archaeological potential of the rear part of the plot. The results from the evaluation have demonstrated that in recent years the area has been subject to significant levelling, presumably in association with its use as a caravan site.
- 4.3 In all three trenches the removal of the topsoil revealed a sequence of natural deposits. In Trenches 1 and 2 these were seen to dip noticeably to the north-east, representing natural infilling of a hollow, probably indicating a shrinking in the extents of the mere and represented in its final stages by the course of the Sparbrook. This interpretation is supported by the modern contour pattern and the mapped former course of the brook which reflects exactly the topography depicted in the tipping deposits. As infilling continued, layers of clay were deposited, with probable periods of vegetative growth during pooling and marshy phases, as depicted in Trench 3, allowing lenses of organic material to develop in the sequence.
- 4.4 The infilling of the hollow appears to have continued until relatively recently, with the uppermost deposits relating to this process in Trenches 1 and 3 containing post-medieval ceramics. Truncation by levelling activity for the creation of the caravan park in the 20th century appears to have removed these later layers from Trench 2, but here and in Trench 1, a few sherds of abraded medieval pottery were retrieved. The incorporation of marl into a post-medieval deposit in Trench 3 might indicate a period of cultivation, or attempted soil improvement in this damp area. The pottery sherds might thus have resulted from incorporation during cultivation or from the deposition of waste material at the edge of the settlement.
- 4.5 The evaluation did not, however, reveal any evidence for occupation within the areas investigated and the results suggest that the area to the rear of the street frontage remained as a cultivated area, or possibly as waste, since the medieval period.
- 4.6 As a result of the proposed reuse of the existing access road and siting of new dwellings away from the street frontage it is considered unlikely, on the basis of existing evidence, that the proposals will impact upon any surviving subsurface remains along the street frontage. The results from the evaluation have not indicated any potential for buried archaeological deposits within the main area of the development.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 5.1 The evaluation was undertaken with the assistance of Brian Williams. Thanks are also due to Mr M Watson, Historic Environment Officer for Shropshire County Council.

6 REFERENCES

Unpublished Sources

Buteux, V. 1996 *Archaeological Assessment of Ellesmere, Shropshire*, Central Marches Historic Towns Survey, Hereford and Worcester CAS Report.

Capita Symonds, 2005. *Former Lower Talbot Caravan Park, Ellesmere: Desk Study*.

Grant, F, & Jones, N W, 2005. *Talbot Street, Ellesmere, Shropshire: archaeological desk-based assessment*. CPAT Report No. 756.

Watson M D 2002. *Mere Frontage and Castlefield Site, Ellesmere: Archaeological Assessment*. SCCAS ESA5898.

Maps

SRRC = Shropshire Records and Research Centre, Shrewsbury

Map of Shropshire by Roque 1752 (copy in Ellesmere Local History area, Ellesmere Library)

Map of Shropshire by Baugh R 1808 (SRRC)

Plan of Ellesmere by Wood J 1835 (SRRC 3551/1)

Tithe Survey of Ellesmere Township, Ellesmere Parish 1839 (SRRC PF105/12/4 [122/12])

Plan of the Township of Ellesmere showing the Countess of Bridgewater's Properties 1842 (SRRC 380/3)

Plan for the Proposed Improvement of Drainage of Ellesmere 1857 (SRRC 380/20)

Ordnance Survey 1:10560 map, Sheet 13NW 1874

Ordnance Survey 1:10560 map, Sheet 13NE 1874

Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, Sheet 13.02 1893

Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, Sheet 13.03 1893

Ordnance Survey 1:2500 SJ 4035-4135 1975

Ordnance Survey 1:10000 SJ 43NW 1980

APPENDIX 2

SPECIFICATION

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust has been approached by J Ross Developments to prepare a specification for undertaking a programme of archaeological work on the site of the former Lower Talbot Street Caravan Park, Ellesmere, Shropshire. The proposals relate to a planning application (N/05/1337/EU/96) for the erection of eight new dwellings. A desktop assessment has already been undertaken which indicated that there was the potential for unrecorded buried archaeological deposits within the site and full planning permission has been granted with the following condition:

No development shall take place until a programme of further archaeological work to determine whether the site contains evidence relating to the history of the Town has been agreed by the Local Planning Authority. The programme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details prior to the commencement of the development. Should any historic artefacts be found during the programme or during the construction works the development shall halt and the advice of the County Council's Historic Environment Officer shall be sought.

- 1.2 Although a curatorial brief has not been prepared for the evaluation, it has been agreed with the Historic Environment Officer for Shropshire County Council that, subject to his approval, the following specification of works shall act instead of a brief, providing details of the Phase 1 programme of works required to meet the needs of the planning condition. Any further phases of work which may be required will be dependent on the results of Phase 1 and will be determined through consultation with the County Council's Historic Environment Officer.
- 1.3 The area concerned occupies a street frontage plot along the north-east side of Talbot Street and was formerly in use as a caravan site. As a result of the proposed reuse of the existing access road and siting of new dwellings away from the street frontage it is considered unlikely, on the basis of existing evidence, that the development will have a significant impact on any surviving subsurface remains along the street frontage. In addition, geotechnical investigations have indicated that the north-eastern end of the plot has been levelled by the deposition of building rubble. The programme of evaluation has therefore been designed to assess the archaeological potential of those areas which at present appear to be relatively undisturbed, but will be directly affected by the proposals.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of the Phase 1 archaeological works are:
- 2.1.1 to reveal by means of field evaluation, the nature, condition, significance and, where possible, the chronology of the archaeology within the area of the proposed development in so far as these aims are possible;
- 2.1.2 to record any archaeological deposits identified during the field evaluation;
- 2.1.3 to prepare a report outlining the results of the evaluation, incorporating sufficient information on the archaeological resource for a reasonable planning decision to be taken regarding the future management of the archaeology and any Phase 2 archaeological works which may be required, the nature of which will be determined by the County Council's Historic Environment Officer.

3 Methods

- 3.1 The evaluation will consist of three trenches, each measuring 12 x 1.5m, the approximate locations of which are depicted on the accompanying plan.
- 3.2 All excavations will be undertaken using a machine excavator with a toothless bucket to remove modern overburden down to the level of the first recognisable archaeological horizon. Thereafter, all excavation will be conducted by hand unless otherwise agreed with the County Council's Historic Environment Officer in advance. The evaluation will be essentially non-destructive and designed to determine the depth at which archaeologically sensitive deposits survive, together with their nature condition and significance. The depth of natural deposits will be determined to assess the extent of any stratified deposits which may be encountered.
- 3.3 It has been assumed that the area in question has sufficient access for a JCB or other mechanical excavator. Excavated material will be temporarily stored adjacent to the trench, which will be reinstated with this material upon completion. No provision has been made for stripping or relaying any surfaced areas, or for fencing the trenches during the excavation.
- 3.4 Contexts will be recorded on individual record forms and be drawn and photographed as appropriate. All photography will be in 35mm format black and white print and colour slide. All plans will be drawn at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50 and sections drawn at either 1:20 or 1:10. All features will be located as accurately as possible with respect to buildings and boundaries identified on modern Ordnance Survey maps and levels will be related to Ordnance Datum where possible, with the use of total station surveying.
- 3.5 All artefacts will be related to their contexts from which they were derived and treated in a manner appropriate to their composition and will be processed by trained CPAT staff. Provision has been included for undertaking sampling for environmental or technical evidence where appropriate. Any samples taken will be in bulk to a minimum of 10 litres, taken only from contexts considered to have a high potential and at this stage used only as a basis for assessing potential further analysis.
- 3.6 Following the on-site work an illustrated and bound report will be prepared in A4 format, containing conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Archaeological Background; Evaluation; Conclusions and References, together with appropriate appendices on archives and finds.
- 3.7 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991), to be deposited with the Regional Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). All artefacts will, subject to the permission of the owner, be deposited with Shropshire Museum Service, who will be contacted before the project commences to determine a suitable repository for the archive and any finds.

4 Resources and Programming

- 4.1 The assessment will be undertaken by a small team of skilled archaeologists under the overall supervision of Mr RJ Silvester, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA). CPAT is an IFA Registered Organisation.
- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist who conducted the evaluation.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that the evaluation will be completed within 5 days. The report will be completed within 2 weeks of the completion of on-site works. A draft copy of the report will be forwarded to the Client and County Council's Historic Environment Officer for approval prior to the production of the final report. Copies of the final report will be provided to the client and the Regional SMR. The County Council's Historic Environment Officer will be informed of the

timetable in order to arrange for monitoring if required. At present, CPAT would be in a position to commence the work during March 2006, subject to sufficient advance notice.

4.4 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.

4.5 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance.

N.W. Jones

24 February 2006

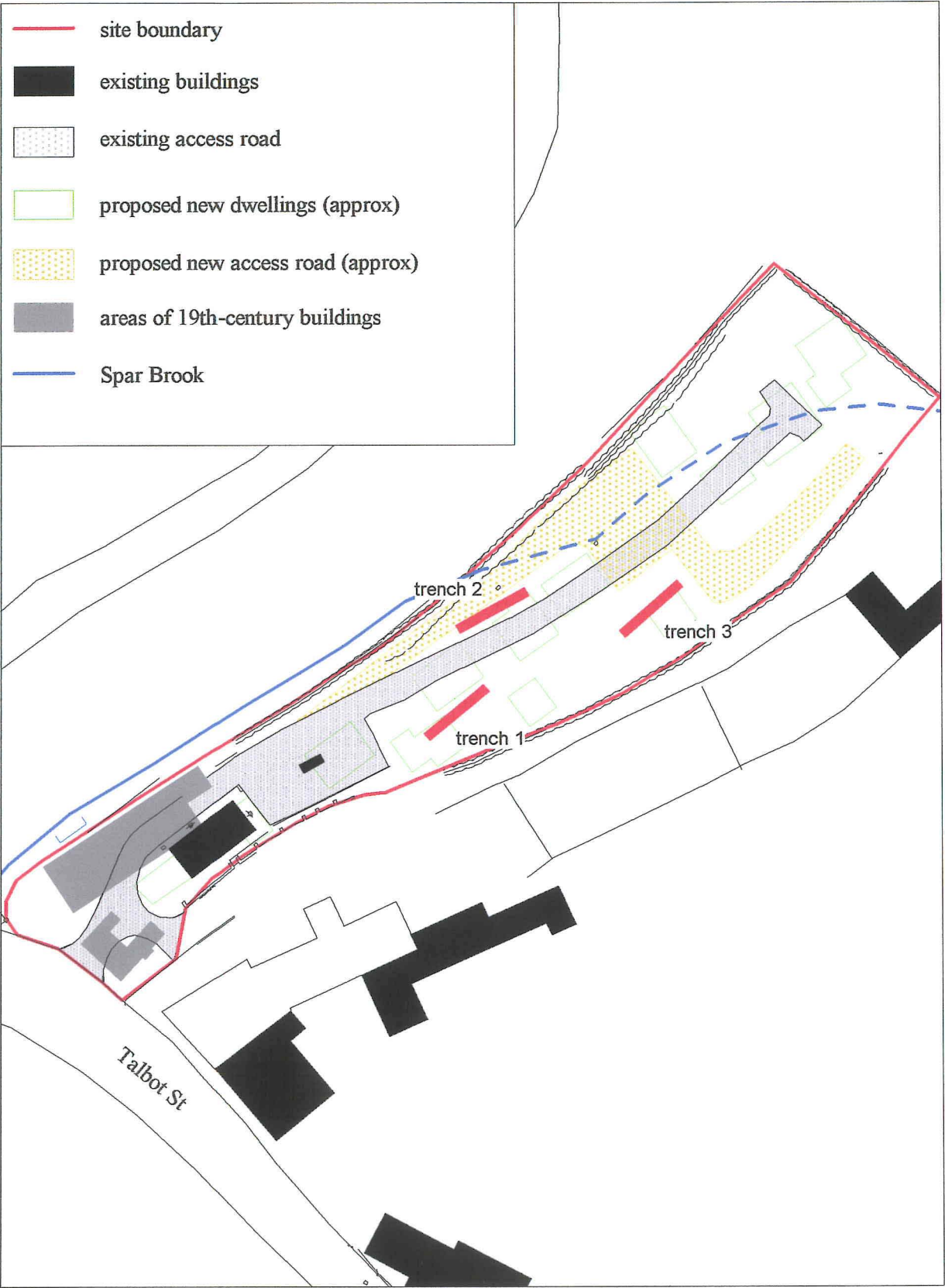


Fig. 1 Talbot Street, Ellesmere: trench locations

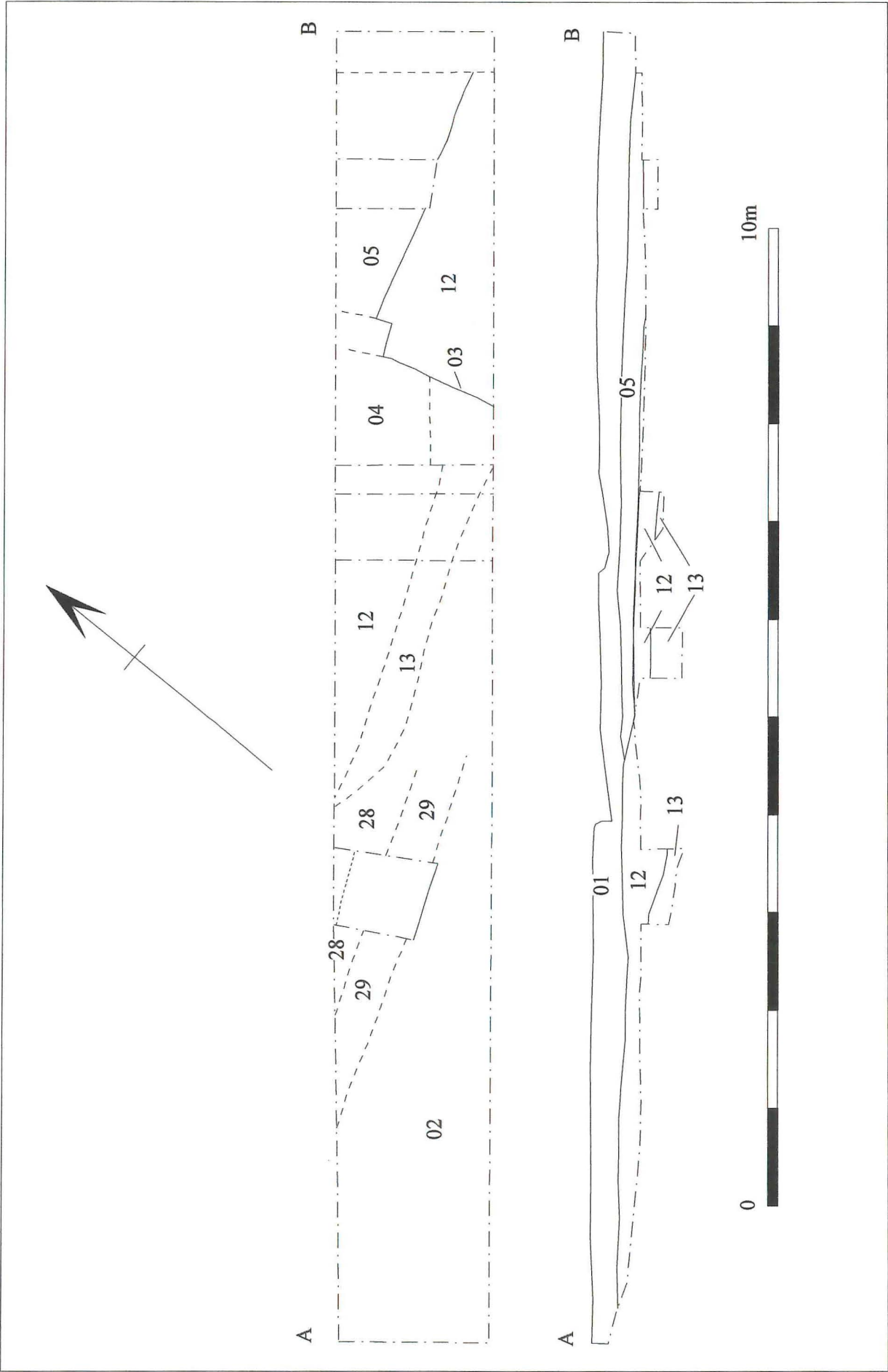


Fig. 2 Trench 1 plan and section

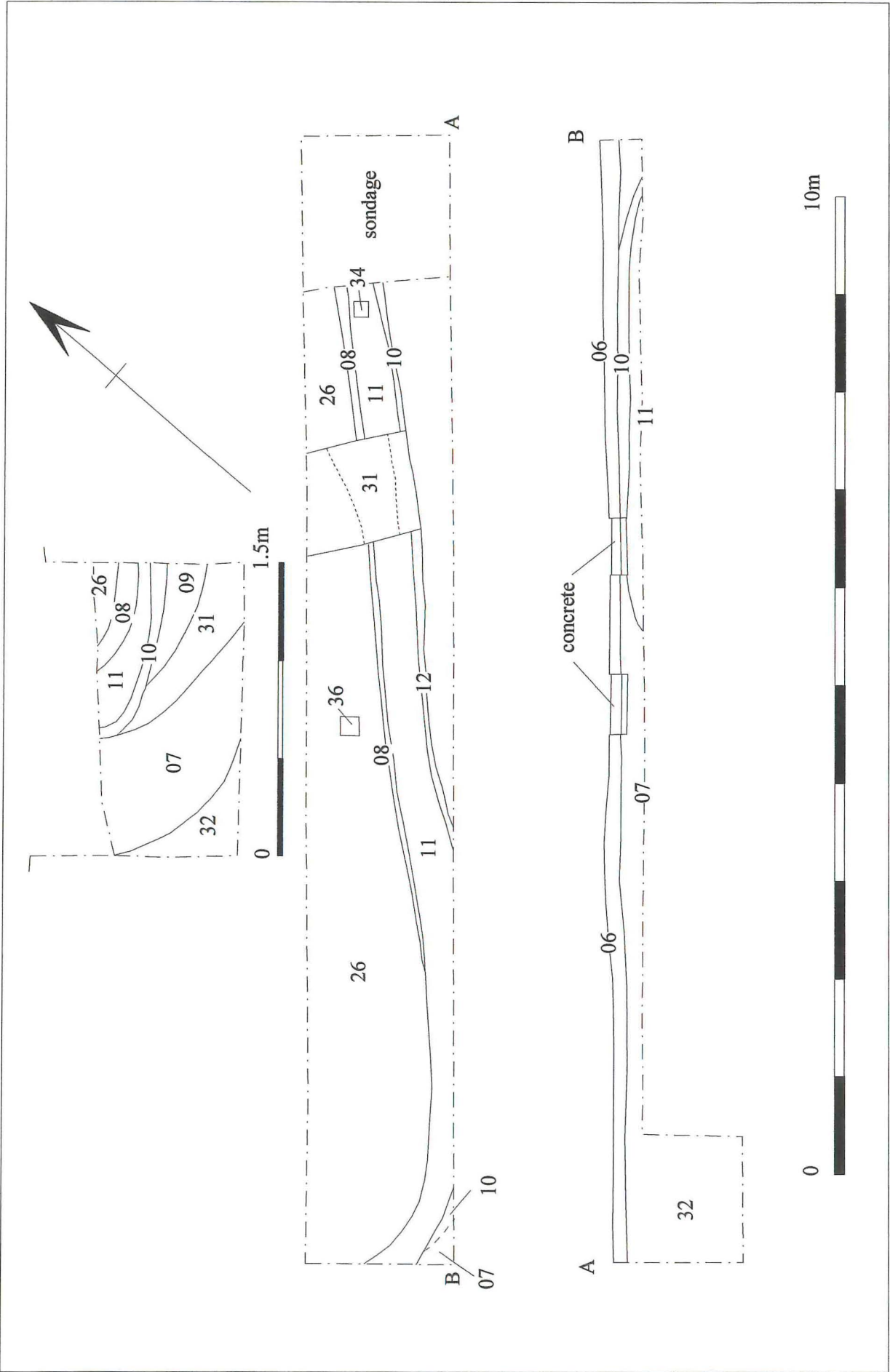


Fig. 3 Trench 2 plan and section

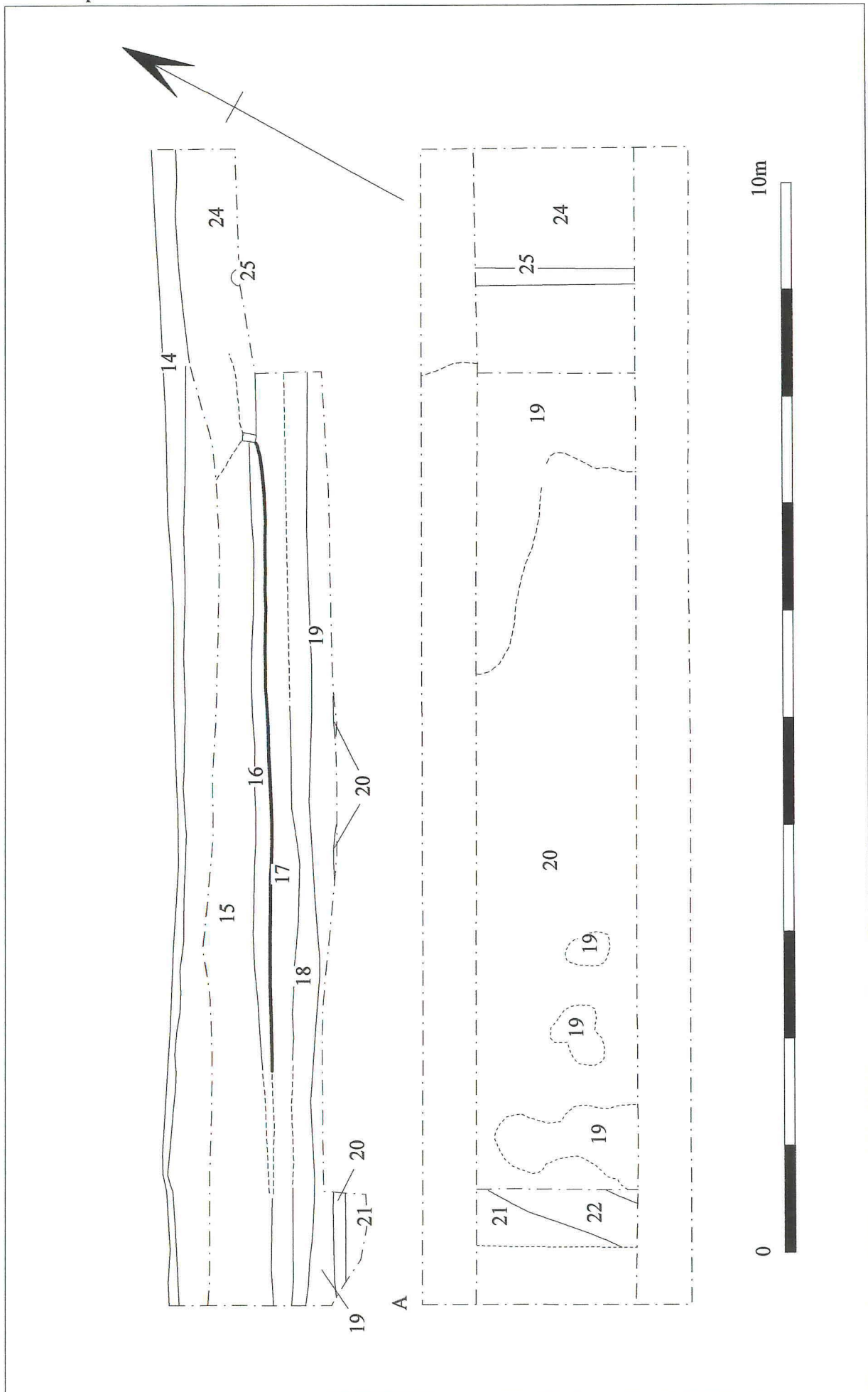


Fig. 4 Trench 3 plan and section

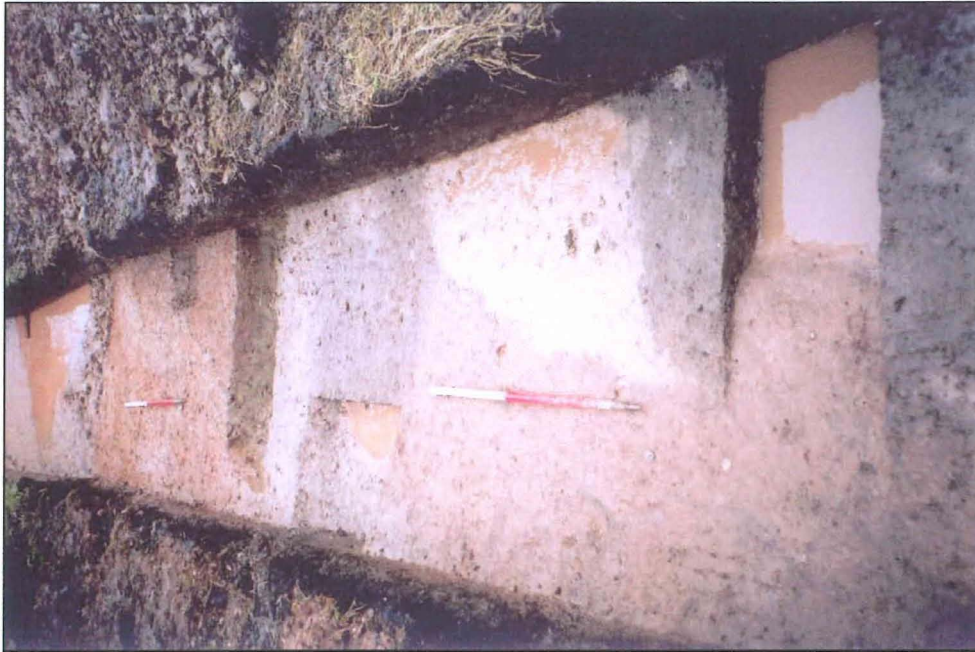


Plate 1 Trench 1 from northeast showing deposit (05) and pit (03)

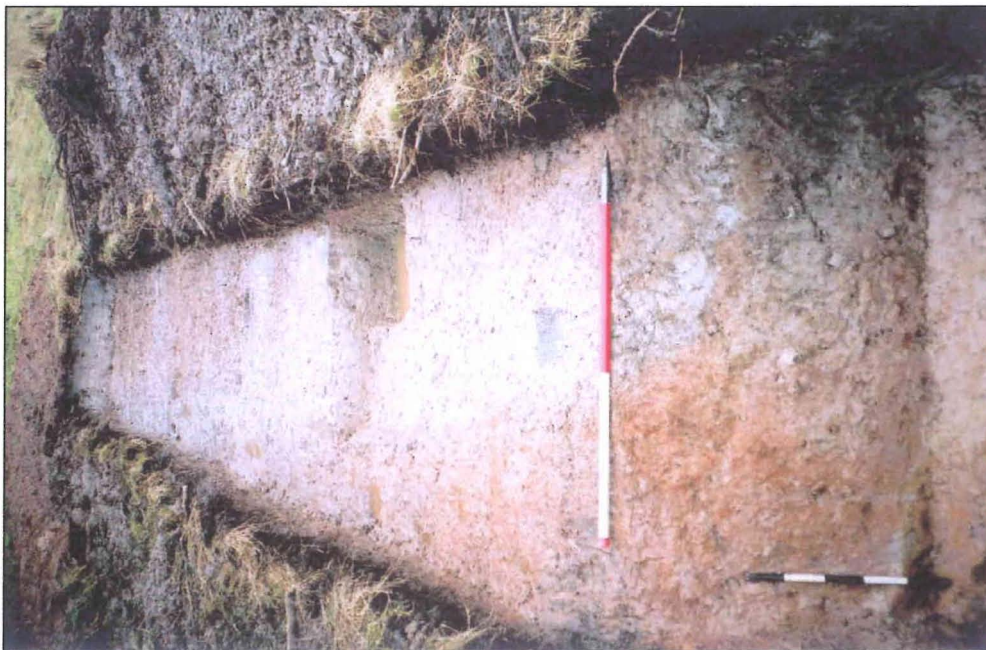


Plate 2 Trench 2 from northeast showing sondage through deposits



Plate 3 Trench 3 from northeast showing organic-rich deposit (20) in base of trench