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DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST LTD

**REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
AT OS 5713, LLANILAR, CARDIGANSHIRE, 10-21
OCTOBER, 1994**

(DAT PRN 29509)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Summary

The area immediately E of St Hilary's Church, Llanilar, has, since 1980, been known to be the location of a bronze age cremation cemetery, in addition to neolithic activity. As a result of a planning application on the E section of an adjacent field to the E, OS 5713, an archaeological evaluation was commissioned in order to assess the likelihood of archaeological features extending E into the development area. A long N-S trial trench and 6 side trenches were accordingly excavated, in addition to 5 trial pits. In the event, no firmly dateable archaeological features were encountered but one small feature may be prehistoric.

1.2 Purpose

In July 1990 the owner of OS 5713 applied for planning permission to develop the E section of the field, much of which had been subject to previous development and archaeological investigation. The application area was known to possess great archaeological potential, being adjacent to a neolithic occupation site, an established bronze age cemetery and a number of cropmark sites.

Ceredigion District Council were informed of the archaeological sensitivity of the site by Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Development Control officer on 20 August 1990. The application was approved 5 February 1991, with a condition 5 recommending archaeological investigation prior to the commencement of works. Further to the receipt of detailed plans, the Trust's Principal Archaeological Officer (Curatorial) accordingly drew up a brief specifying the nature of archaeological work to be undertaken. Through the offices of R W Thomas of Colleys Professional Services, the landowner agreed, on 6 September 1994, to commission Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Field Section to undertake a 2 week archaeological evaluation during October 1994.

The evaluation was commissioned in order to establish whether the archaeological features extended into the proposed development area.

1.3 Location

Llanilar is situated 7.5 kilometres SE of Aberystwyth on the gentle N slope of a fluvio-glacial terrace on the S side of the Afon Ystwyth. The site of the excavation (SN 627 751) lies E of the village centre between 30 and 40m above sea level, on well-drained fertile ground. The field within which the site lies, OS 5713, is now rough pasture and displays no physical evidence of former ploughing; however small quantities of lime field dressing was encountered during excavation. The neighbouring field to the E (OS 8005) supports a barley crop.

1.4 Site History

The importance of Llanilar in prehistoric archaeology first became apparent in 1980 when at least 5 early bronze age cremations, 2 accompanied by collared urns, were revealed by salvage excavation during pipe trenching for a housing development within the SW part of OS 5713, at SN 625 751 (Benson *et al*, 1982). 9677

In advance of a second phase of development, controlled excavation over 1600 sq m was carried out from February - June 1983 on a site immediately NE of the 1980 discoveries (together DAT PRN 9677). An early-middle neolithic presence was demonstrated by the presence of residual pottery. Activity continued into the later neolithic period and was represented by pits, post-holes and hearths mainly accompanied by Peterborough and grooved wares, possibly indicating a ritual function. The excavation confirmed that the 1980 cremations lay within a slight, polygonal bank and ditch enclosure, and revealed a further cremation in an enlarged food vessel, some distance to the E and possibly within a further enclosure (Taverner *et al*, forthcoming).

The possibility that the early bronze age features, at least, represent part of a much more extensive complex was enhanced by the discovery of a number of adjacent circular cropmarks possibly representing contemporary ring ditches, on aerial photographs (DAT PRN 13228). One of these cropmarks lies within OS 5173 immediately W of the proposed development area.

1.5 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the evaluation was to:-

a) Establish the extent of neolithic activity and bronze age funerary/ritual features, and the possible presence of any further archaeological features, in order to establish

b) Whether such features were under threat from the proposed planning application.

The objective of the evaluation was to incorporate the results of the investigation into any mitigation strategy deemed necessary prior to the commencement of the works.

2.0 METHODOLOGIES AND RESULTS

The evaluation was undertaken by means of archaeological excavation. The excavations were of 2 forms:-

a) Trial trenches (fig. 10.2)

A series of trenches were excavated by a machine using a toothless bucket, to an average depth of 0.3m. The width of the bucket, 1.5m, dictated the final width of the trenches which averaged 3m after 2 parallel strips were excavated.

A N-S trench (T1), 97m in length, was cut down the length of the field. The trench extended almost to the field's N and S boundaries, its location corresponding to the planned main access road through the development, and at the S end, planned building plot 1.

6 E-W trenches were cut at right angles to the axial T1 numbered in ascending order from S to N (T2-T7). These were from 15m to 22m in length. They corresponded to proposed building plots 2-6.

With the exception of T5, T6 and T7 (see below) the trenches were hand cleaned and features, where present, planned, recorded and photographed. Soils and geology were recorded throughout.

Soils from all archaeological features and possible archaeological features, as well as charcoal, were sampled for possible future analysis. All finds were recorded and retained.

The total area of the trenches represents approx. 10% of the application area. However, it must be noted that their disposition, while covering a wide area, leaves large intervening areas that were not subject to investigation.

b) Trial pits (fig. 10.2)

5 trial pits (TP1-TP5), averaging 2m sq, were machine excavated to a depth of just over 1m. In each the sections were hand cleaned and 1 section drawn, recorded and photographed. The pits permitted analysis of the underlying geology and archaeology, where present, in section. Their locations corresponded to the proposed access roadway into the site (TP1), building plot 7 (TP2), plot 3 proposed garage (TP3), the proposed foul sewer main (TP4), and plot 4 proposed garage (TP5).

Both trenches and pits were surveyed conformable to the OS 1:2500, and levelled, in their entirety.

The work was undertaken during 2 unseasonably warm and dry weeks in October, and features were readily visible. Nonetheless, owing to the variable nature of the subsoil a number of areas were arbitrarily excavated by hand as a control.

2.1 Soils and Geology (fig. 10.3)

The site lies on a fluvio-glacial terrace which slopes gently downhill northwards, before a pronounced drop down to the Afon Ystwyth.

The subsoil horizon occurred at a depth generally between 0.3 and 0.4m and was immensely variable in nature. In the majority of the trial trenches silty clay loams (the 'B' horizon of the modern soil profile) displayed natural hollows of variable size. The smaller hollows contained waterworn medium-large shale pebbles; hollows up to 1m in diameter contained more conglomerate angular small-medium shale gravel. However, some gravel areas were seen in the trial pit sections to anastomose with the silty clay loams in a form of cross-bedding, in TP1, TP4 and TP5 forming deep horizons themselves.

In T4 the silty clay loams were absent. Instead the gravels were mixed with very compact and very fine pale grey gleyed clays. A manganese deposit defined the edges of some clay areas.

The trial pit sections (fig. 10.3), moreover, displayed a variety of subsoils. TP1, TP3 and TP4 displayed profiles comparable to that described for the majority of the site, in TP3 the silty clay loams descending to a depth of 0.9m. In TP2 the very fine compact gleyed clay occurred, whilst TP5 displayed a sequence of alternating bands of loose gravels and grits.

In all trial pits very fine rounded fluvio-glacial grits in a loose dark matrix occurred in the bottom of the section, between 0.8m and 0.9m in depth.

The slopewash noted to the E of OS 5713 in 1980 and 1983 (Benson *et al*, 1982; Taverner *et al*, forthcoming), was not encountered. The 2 excavations (*ibid.*) encountered archaeological features at the base of the silty clay loams, suggesting that soil formation and /or recent agricultural practice had destroyed the original stratigraphy above this horizon. However, the modern topsoil is generally rather shallow and there is little evidence of former ploughing save some fragments of lime dressing that were encountered. At any rate, Benson *et al*, *op cit*, concluded that the bronze age soil level was at least as high as at present.

2.2 Trial Trench Evaluation

a) T1

The majority of contexts occurred in T1.

The most striking feature of the site was the deep, modern deposit (2) that occupied the N 18m of T1 and the entire lengths of T6 and T7 (fig. 10.2). This comprised a sequence of layers of redeposited gravels and grits, laid against a steep N downhill slope (cut?) in the subsoil 18m from the N end of T1. On trowelling an area of this deposit, the surface was seen to be sterile excepting the presence of one piece of refuse glass. The bottoms of T6 and T7 were likewise sterile, the E 2/3 of the

latter comprising a dump of pure pale grey grit. T6 and T7 were accordingly left untrowelled.

The S edge of (2) corresponded with a shallow, but sharply defined double break of slope running across part of the field from SW-NE (fig. 10.2). Its E and W edges were less well defined but do not appear to run to the boundaries. It appears that some deliberate landfill has occurred here in the recent past, and that it has later slumped down the slope. Due to the nature of the subsoil here the N edge of the terrace before it drops to the river may always have been vulnerable to collapse, exacerbated by the cutting of a track into the field nearby. It seems unlikely that the deposition of the landfill predates any of the modern hedge boundaries.

The remainder of the trowelled surface of T1 displayed the base of the silty clay loams, with gravel areas (particularly at the S end) and pebble filled hollows.

Surface charcoal was slight, and confined chiefly to individual flecks. Only 3 larger pieces were encountered; these were sampled and their locations are marked on fig. 10.2. The remainder of the surface, and the sections, were sterile.

Features excavated and assigned contexts were mainly concentrated in the N 1/3 (fig. 10.4a). Of these, the majority (15), (16), (19), (20) and (21) were found upon excavation to represent animal disturbance. The fill of (20), however, contained a fairly extensive charcoal deposit; however, like the remainder of the fills, the deposit had clearly been derived from higher up through animal action.

Features (17) and (18) represent 2 of the 3 more convincing, possibly archaeological, features on the site. They excavated as fairly well defined small shallow scoops, but their fills were sterile and they can be assigned neither function nor date.

Further S in T1 feature (4) was found on excavation to represent animal disturbance. Features (22) - (24) were areas of gravel and pebbles that were excavated on the possibility of their representing fills; they are natural hollows (fig. 10.2).

b) T2

In T2 the conglomerate shale gravels predominated. The surface, and sections, were sterile.

Feature (26) represents the third possible archaeological feature on the site (Fig. 10.4b). Although shallow and amorphous, the fill (25) - a similar silty clay loam to the surrounding horizon - displayed heat reddening and contained approx. 10% charcoal. The surrounding soil appeared to display no heat reddening and it is thus suggested that the fill was not burnt *in situ*. Like all fills excavated, (25) was sampled for future analysis.

c) T3

In T3, like T2, the trowelled surface displayed much gravel. The surface, and sections, were sterile.

No archaeological features were encountered.

d) T4

The trowelled surface of T4 displayed a very varied horizon, described above, p7 . The surface, and sections, were sterile.

No archaeological features were encountered.

e) T5

As a control, T5 was excavated to a greater depth, which reached almost 1m at the E end. However, the level reached still displayed the same silty clay loams and gravels as seen in T1-T4. Their greater depth in this area was confirmed by the section of TP3 (see above, p7). The surface was nonetheless left untrowelled.

The surface, and sections, appeared sterile.

No archaeological features were encountered.

f) T6 & T7

T6 and T7 were cut through modern landfill (2) described above, p7.

2.3 Assessment of Results

It can be seen there very little evidence for human activity was recovered from the site. Charcoal, though evenly distributed, was limited. Artefacts were absent. Of the 3 possible archaeological features - scoops (17) and (18) and feature (26) - only the latter is open for any interpretation.

However, (26) may suggest prehistoric use of the area.

Post-medieval activity likewise appears limited. Only 3 ceramic sherds, of 19th century date, were encountered in the topsoil, and a fourth in the section of TP3. Later activity is confined to the deposition of landfill (2).

3.0 DISCUSSION

The results of the evaluation are markedly different from those obtained during 1980 and 1983 further E in the same field.

3.1 Possible Prehistoric Activity

Possible features (17) and (18) are too doubtful to be interpreted as forming part of a group or alignment, and prehistoric activity is suggested only by the presence of one feature, (26). The 1983 excavation encountered a group of similar pits which contained deposits of burnt soil. Taverner *et al*, forthcoming (2), assign a late neolithic date to these features, although (26) lacked the lining and seal of redposited subsoil seen in the 1983 examples. However, the relatively low proportion of charcoal to burnt soil is consistent. The interpretation of the 1983 pits is that the fills, which can contain burnt bone, were derived from the bases of 'funerary pyres' located elsewhere, and were carefully and deliberately deposited on the site (*ibid*, 5-6).

However, in the absence (as yet) of any corroborative dating evidence, the precise nature of fill (25) and feature (26) can only remain a suggestion.

That more evidence of human occupation was not encountered is rather surprising given the proximity of the established neolithic and bronze age activity. In particular, a possible cropmark representing a possible ring-ditch is located just 20m W of T4, while a better defined cropmark, again a possible ring ditch, lay 40m W of T2 (now built over).

However, between the S of these cropmarks, and the 1983 excavation, and the 1994 evaluation site lies a sharp uphill break of slope, on a N-S alignment cresting approx. 20m W of T1. It probably represents a moraine or similar glaciation feature. Nonetheless, even though running out northwards, the landform forms a natural boundary defining a lower-lying area to the W and dividing it from slightly higher ground to the E. Possibly it defined the limits of, if not neolithic activity, then the bronze age cremation cemetery.

3.2 Later Activity

Later activity on the site can, again, not be closely dated. There is no evidence to suggest that the landfill at the N end of the site predates the hedge boundaries, and indeed it appears to run out to the N, W and E, representing the fill of a hollow caused by landslip along an unstable scarp. The presence of a trackway at the apex of the field will undoubtedly have contributed.

However, 2 occasions when such large scale earth moving might have occurred present themselves. Whilst the mansion at Hafod Uchtryd, Cards., was undergoing (re)construction in the late 18th century, the owner, Thomas Johnes, occupied Castle Hill, the

mansion to which the land still belongs (C S Briggs, RCAHM, *pers. comm.*). There is documentary evidence that Johnes performed some landscaping of the grounds. Alternatively, the construction of the railway to the N in the 1880s, and associated buildings, will have created the spoil required for the deposit.

The opinion of a villager of Llanilar that the deposit is derived from spoil produced during the 1983 development is unlikely; the pasture over the deposit is long established and there has been some topsoil formation.

The presence of small quantities of lime scattered through the topsoil demonstrate that the field has, at some time, been treated with lime.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The evaluation excavation at OS 5713, Llanilar, during October 1994 demonstrated that mid-late neolithic activity known from previous archaeological investigations in the SW of the same field may have extended into the SW corner of the planning application area. However, the single feature that may represent this activity, contexts (25) and (26), has not been closely dated and for the moment its interpretation must remain a supposition.

No features relating to the early bronze age cremation cemetery known to lie to the E of the site were identified, despite the presence immediately to the E of cropmarks possibly representing ring-ditches.

Later activity is represented by an area of landfill at the N end of the site, probably belonging to the 18th-19th centuries and as a response to landslip.

The evaluation permitted the examination, in the trial pit sections, of the underlying fluvio-glacial gravels and grits.

5.0 THE FINDS

Finds were remarkably limited.

Topsoil (1);-

3 body sherds white enamelware, ?19th century.

1 rim sherd blue and white *chinoiserie* ware, 19th century.

Landfill (2):-

1 piece clear white glass refuse, date?

6.0 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

The full excavation archive will be deposited with RCAHM(Wales), Crown Buildings, Plas Crug, Aberystwyth, Dyfed SY23 1NJ.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Peter Loxdale, landowner, for commissioning and funding the evaluation, and Robert Thomas of Colleys Professional Services, for his assistance. To my colleagues at Dyfed Archaeological Trust, in particular Heather James and Emyr Morgan for making the project possible, and George Williams for his advice. To Dr Stephen Briggs of RCAHM for his comments. To Ian Darke of Dyfed Archaeological Trust for his assistance during the evaluation.

8.0 LIST OF SOURCES CONSULTED

Benson, D. G., Briggs, C. S., Davies, J. L., and Williams, G. H., 1982, *A Bronze Age Cemetery at Llanilar, Cardiganshire*, Ceredigion Vol. 9, No. 3.

Taverner, N., Marshall, E. C., Murphy, K., and Williams, G. H., forthcoming, *A Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Site at Llanilar, Dyfed*.

9.0 APPENDICES

9.1 Trench Areas

T1	97m x 3m	291m ²
T2	18m x 3m	54m ²
T3	20m x 3m	60m ²
T4	21m x 3m	63m ²
T5	17m x 3m	51m ²
T6	15m x 3m	45m ²
T7	17m x 3m	51m ²
Total trench area		<hr/> 615m ²

Approximates to 10% of area of planning application.

Also 6 trial pits at 2m x 2m 24m²

9.2 Finds Policy

Dyfed Archaeological Trust normal policy is, with the landowners consent, the deposition of finds retained from excavations with the nearest approved museum that will take them. In this case it would be Ceredigion Museum, Aberystwyth. In the event, the finds were of minimal importance and all were discarded.

9.3 Site Record Numbers

Contexts 1 - 27

Drawings 1 - 11

Photographs 1 - 36 (b/w)
 1 - 16 (colour slide)

9.4 Contexts Sampled

- 3 (fill of ?feature 4)
- 5 (fill of ?natural hollow 15)
- 6 (fill of ?feature 16)
- 7 (fill of feature 17)
- 9 (fill of feature 18)

- 10 (fill of ?feature 20)
- 11 (fill of ?natural hollow)
- 13 (fill of ?natural hollow)
- 14 (fill of ?feature 21)
- 22 (fill of ?natural hollow)
- 23 (fill of ?natural hollow)
- 24 (fill of ?natural hollow)
- 25 (burnt fill of feature 26)
- 27 (decayed stone; discarded)

In addition, 3 charcoal samples (A, B & C) were retained.

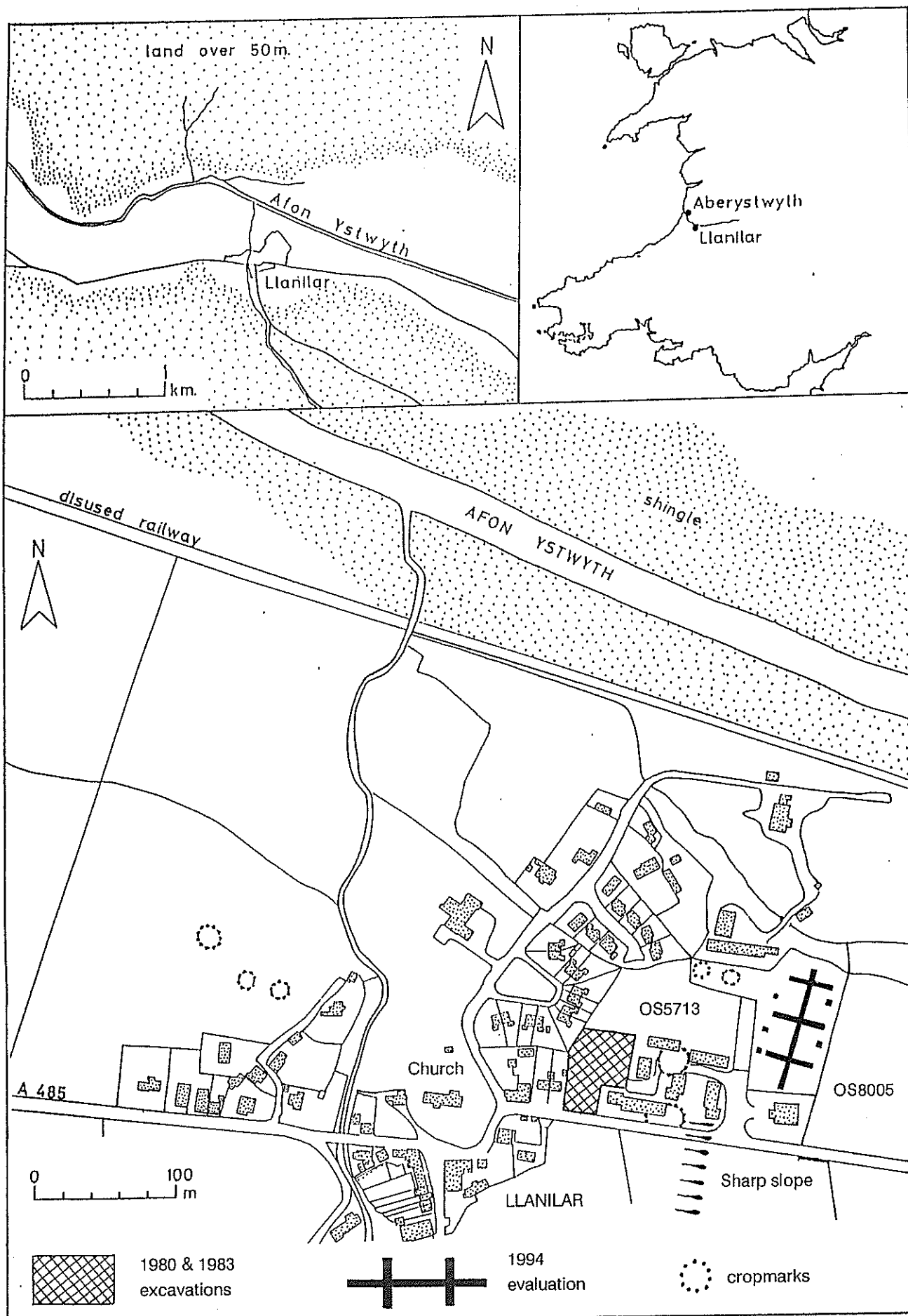


Fig. 10. 1: Location map of Site at Llanilar
(also showing 1980 and 1983 excavations)

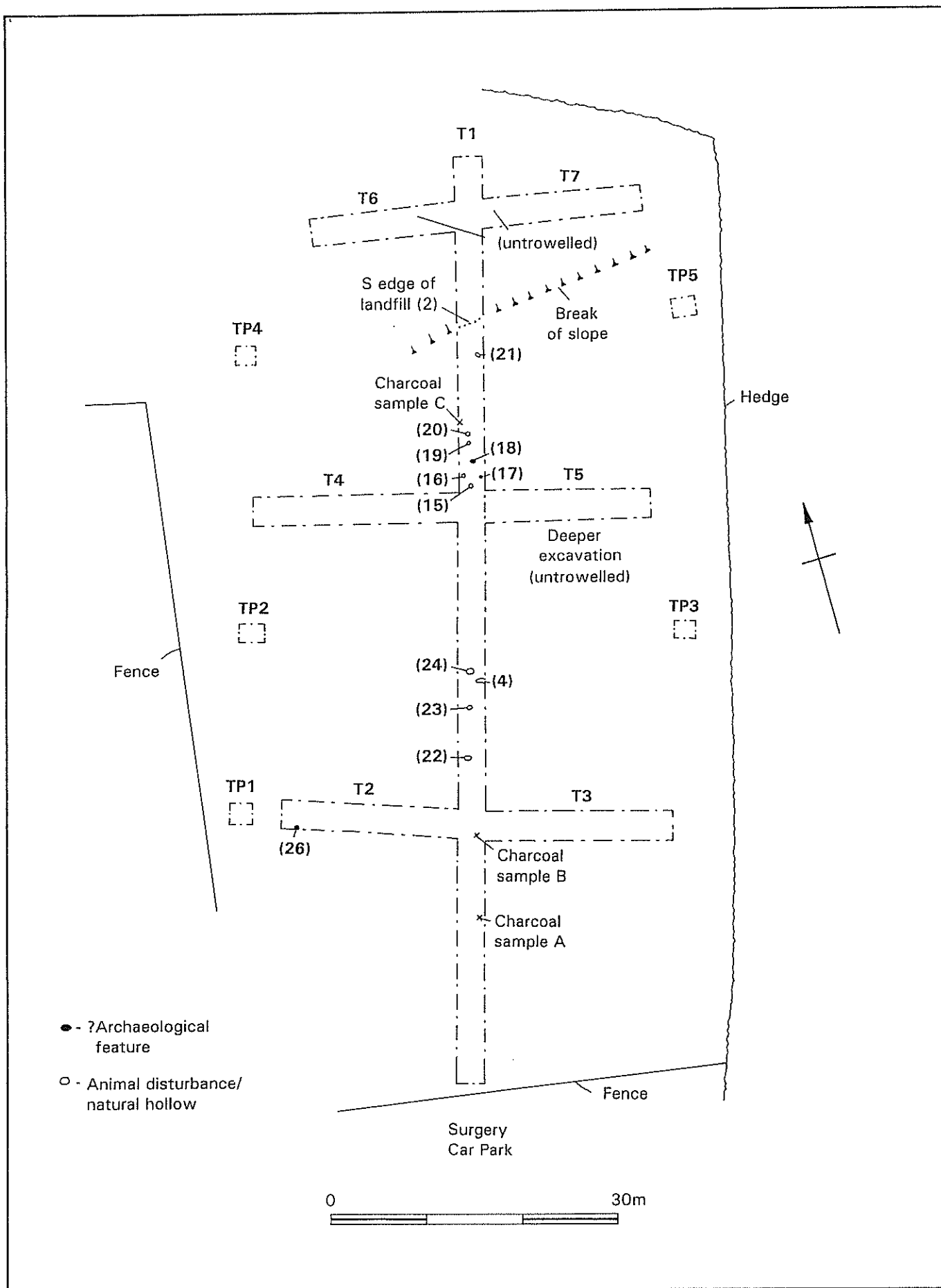
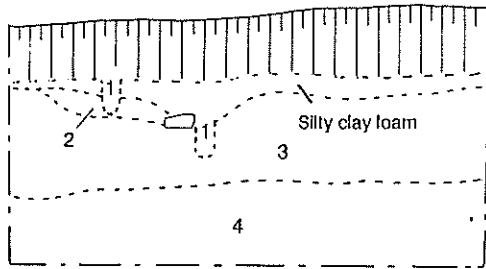


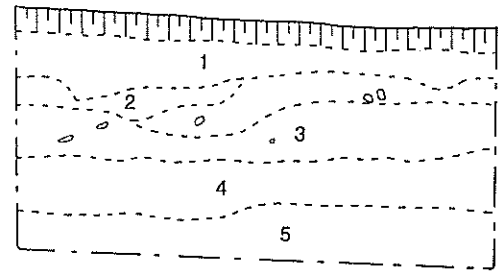
Fig. 10.2: Overall plan of trenches

TP1. West facing section



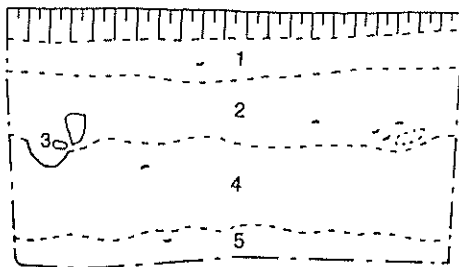
- 1 - Feature? Animal disturbance?
- 2 - Shale gravel in sandy matrix
- 3 - Shale gravels and worn pebbles in silty clay loam matrix
- 4 - Shale gravels and worn pebbles in fine loose grit matrix

TP2. East facing section



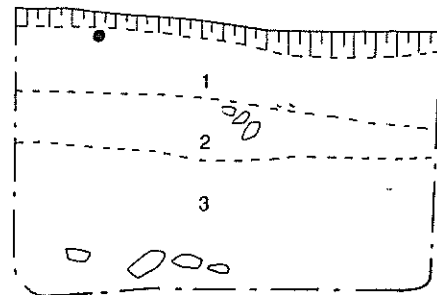
- 1 - Base of topsoil
- 2 - Fine sandy loam
- 3 - Silty clay loam
- 4 - Compact, very fine grained gleyed clay
- 5 - As (4) but darker
- 6 - Shale gravels and worn pebbles in fine loose grit matrix

TP3. South facing section



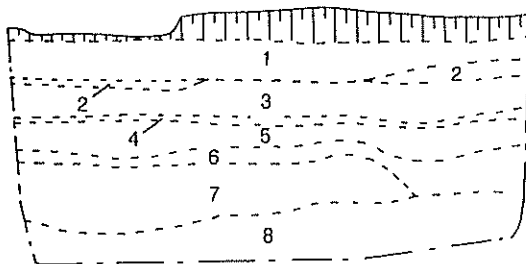
- 1 - Base of topsoil
- 2 - Silty clay loam
- 3 - Feature?
- 4 - As (2) but with some shale gravel
- 5 - As (4) but with many worn pebbles

TP4. North facing section



- 1 - Silty clay loam
- 2 - Shale gravels in sandy matrix
- 3 - Shale gravels and worn pebbles in fine loose grit matrix

TP5. South facing section



- 1 - Fine loose grit in dark matrix
- 2 - Fine loose grit in orange matrix
- 3 - As (1)
- 4 - As (2)
- 5 - As (1)
- 6 - Shale gravels in purple matrix
- 7 - Very compact shale gravels in sparse clay matrix
- 8 - Shale gravels and worn pebbles in fine loose grit matrix

✂ - Charcoal

● - Sherd of 19th century brown glazed ware



Fig. 10.3: Annotated Sections of Trial Pits TP1 - TP5

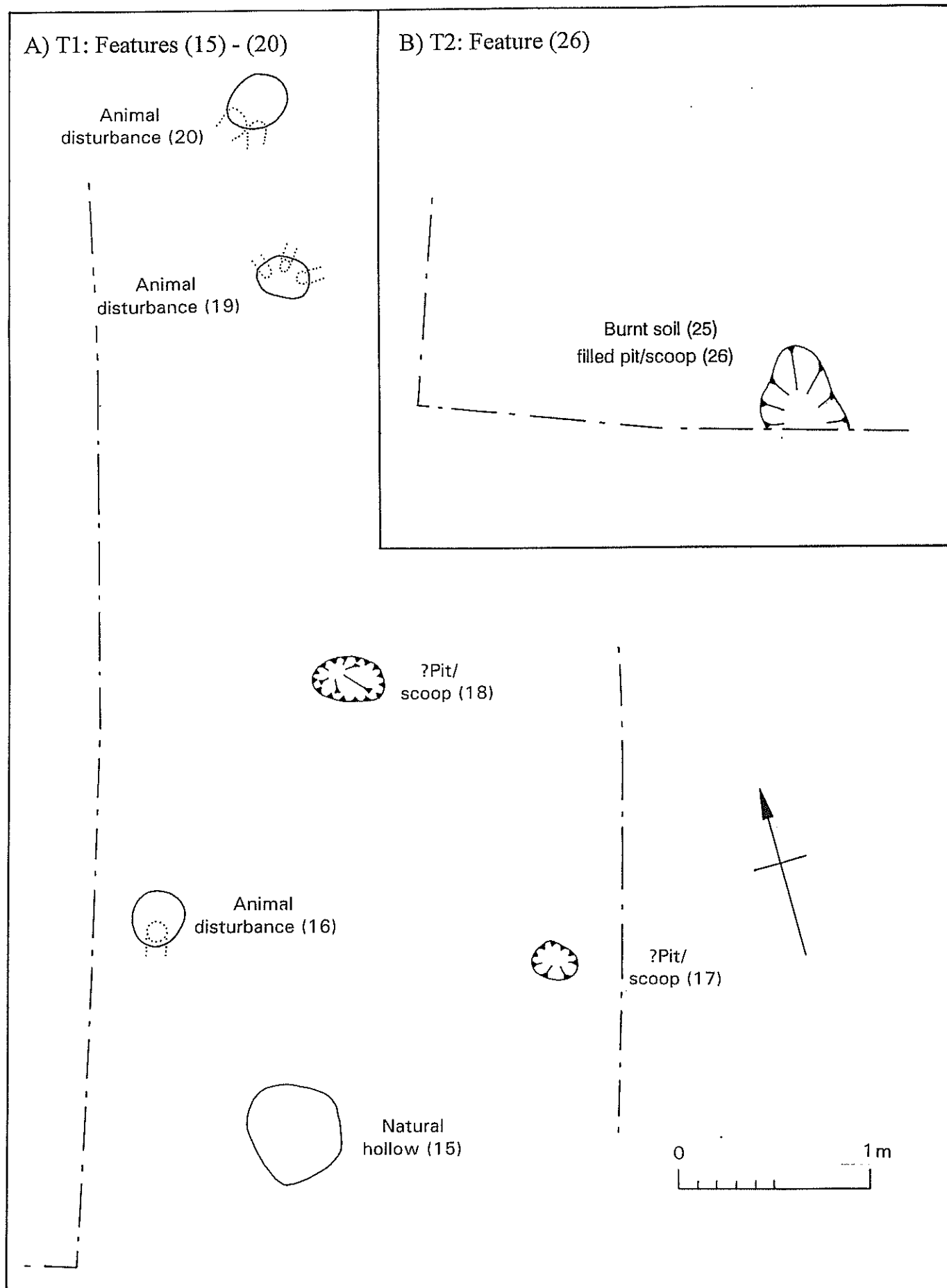


Fig. 10.4 a) T1: Features (15) - (20)
b) T2: Feature (26)