

Cae Uchaf, Menai Bridge

Archaeological Strip, Map and Sample



Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

Cae Uchaf, Menai Bridge, Isle of Anglesey

Archaeological Strip, Map and Sample

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL STRIP, MAP AND SAMPLE AT CAE UCHAF, MENAI BRIDGE

Summary

An area measuring some 1.6ha was stripped of plough and topsoil prior to the construction of an inert waste recycling facility at Cae Uchaf, Menai Bridge. A programme of archaeological strip, map and sample was carried out during groundworks due to the high probability of discovering unknown buried archaeological remains. Three pits were located, one of which contained a probable Neolithic flint within the fill. A further probable Neolithic fill was found during the general cleaning back of the stripped area.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Oaktree Environmental have commissioned The Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) to carry out an archaeological strip, map and sample at the location of a proposed inert waste recycling facility during initial ground clearance. The clearance area measures 1.6ha and is located at NGR SH 5361074770 (see figures 1 and 2) (see plates 1 and 2).

The development entails the creation of an inert waste recycling facility. The facility will receive materials arising from construction and demolition activities, store, screen and wash them to produce sand and aggregates for the building industry. The development will comprise creation of hard-standing for materials storage and to accommodate mobile treatment plant, three settlement lagoons and a reed bed (total area 500m²), an earth bund, associated services and a 350m access road (GAPS design brief **D1572**).

The archaeological mitigation has been completed as part of a planning condition (Planning Reference: **17C346D**).

2.0 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

In accordance with guidelines set out in Welsh national planning guidance (*Planning Policy Wales 2010*) and Welsh Office Circular 60/96 (*Planning and the Historic Environment: Archaeology*) Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (GAPS) has requested an archaeological strip, map and sample of the 1.6ha comprising the development area. This is in response to a design brief authored by GAPS which identified the development area as having of *good potential for archaeological remains to be encountered* (GAPS design brief **D1572**).

The purpose of this level of archaeological mitigation is to ensure that unknown buried archaeological remains that would otherwise have been impacted upon by the development works are identified and recorded.

In accordance with GAPS design brief (D1572) the programme of archaeological mitigation work included:

- Archaeological excavation of any remains encountered in accordance with Institute for Archaeologists (IFA) guidance.
- A drawn, written and photographic record of any significant archaeological details, features, structures and deposits that were identified.
- Appropriate plans, sections, written records and photographs.
- Preparation of a full archive report

3.0 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The site was mechanically stripped of ploughsoil and topsoil onto the naturally occurring glacial coluvium, prior to the commencement of the construction work. The stripping of soil

was closely monitored by suitably qualified archaeological personnel. A 1.50m wide toothless ditching bucket was used along with two conventionally tracked 360° excavators, and the removed soil was deposited in two sealed bunds at the southern end of the site. The soil was removed carefully in layers until either archaeological deposits were encountered, or until glacial deposits were reached.

All anomalous features encountered were evaluated to ascertain whether they were of archaeological origin. Confirmed archaeological features then had a drawn, written and photographic record taken, with plans and section drawings being taken at an appropriate scale. A Nikon DSLR set to high resolution was used for all photographs. All archaeological contexts located were sampled in order to define their function, date, and relationship to adjacent features.

The stripped area, all features identified, and drawing baselines were surveyed using a Trimble Global Positioning System (GPS). This data was then manipulated using AutoCAD and geographically represented using MapInfo.

The report conforms to the Institute for Archaeologists' (IFA) standards and guidance for an archaeological excavation (1995 rev. 2001, 2008).

4.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL RECORD

The development area is set within a rural landscape at approximately 60.0m AOD, and is currently used for agricultural grazing. The site is bounded to the north, east and west by hedgerows; it is surrounded by farmland except to the west, where there is a recycling facility on the site of a local authority landfill. A minor managed watercourse exists approximately 35.0m to the south of the site, which was formerly fed by a drain passing roughly north-south through the site (reproduced from GAPS design brief **D1572**).

The surrounding area is rich in prehistoric and Roman period archaeology, including the Scheduled Ancient Monuments of Bryn Eryr earthwork (An 100) located 910.0m to the northeast, and Dinas Cadnant hillfort (AN 048) located 1.9km to the southeast. Moreover, the two Scheduled standing stones of Ty-Wyn (AN 073) and Pen-y-Maen (AN 072) are located within 2.0km southeast of the site. At least four chance discoveries of prehistoric stone tools have been made within a 1.0km radius of the area, and a Roman hut circle settlement is located at Llansadwrn 900.0m to the southeast.

The area is well represented on the first, second, and third edition (1889, 1900, and 1920) county series ordnance survey maps, and is depicted as an enclosed field much as it exists today. The only clear difference is the depiction of a field boundary running from south to north at the western end of the site on the 1889 map (see figure 3). This boundary is not depicted on the later 1900 and 1920 OS maps and it can be assumed that it had gone out of use between these dates.

5.0 RESULTS OF THE STRIP, MAP AND SAMPLE

The archaeological strip, map and sample was carried out from the 19th to 22nd September 2011, under conditions favourable for identifying archaeological features and deposits. A dark grey silt-sand ploughsoil, uniformly thin at approximately 0.1m depth, was removed across the length and breadth of the site onto a mid to dark grey topsoil layer. The topsoil varied in thickness and was shallowest at the western end of the site measuring approximately 0.2m in depth, and gradually increasing in depth to 0.45m deep at the far eastern end. The only artefactual evidence to be recovered from the plough and topsoil layers were fragments of modern 20th century ceramic and occasional corroded pieces of iron from farm equipment.

The plough and topsoil layers were removed onto a naturally occurring glacial coluvium (subsoil) of light yellow sand silt-clay with inclusions of small stones. Due to the contrast of the subsoil, a fairly large number of amorphous features were immediately identified, although once evaluation of these features had taken place it was ascertained that the majority were either of bio-turbid origin or had been created by the movement of water run-off across the site. Three features were found to be of archaeological interest, and were fully excavated (see below). A single waste flake of flint (finds no. 1) was found during the surface clean and is described below.

Pit 1 (context no. [004]) see figure 4. see plates 3 and 4.

A sub-oval pit measuring some 0.97m in length, 0.73m in width and 0.3m in depth was located at NGR SH 5359474771 towards the western part of the site. The pit was cut into the glacial subsoil and had sides that were near vertical to the northwest and gentler to the east. The base of the pit was mostly flat but occasionally undulated. The pit was partially filled to a depth of 0.2m with a firm, mid brown silt-clay (007) which contained a high frequency of medium sized sub-rounded stones resting on the base of the fill but also suspended within it. The stones were interspaced with smaller sub-angular stones, although no clear form or arrangement to them could be identified and it is probable that this primary fill represents a deliberate backfilling event. The remaining 0.1m of the pit was filled by a firm, dark brown silt-clay (005) which contained small flecks of charcoal. No artefactual evidence was recovered from any of the pit fills, although the presence of charcoal flecks in the upper fill prompted the collection of bulk samples.

The pit's section showed no clear evidence of having gradually silted or of depositional slumping, and as such it can be surmised that the pit was at least partially back-filled and did not remain open for any great length of time. The stones present within the lower fill (007) did not display any clear form or arrangement, and it is probable that they were included within the initial backfill. The upper fill (005) is most probably the result of alluvial deposition over time, in every likelihood of loose silts being washed down the gentle hill slope. The date and function of the pit remains unclear.

Pit 2 (context no. [011]) see figure 5. see plates 5 and 6.

A large sub-oval pit measuring some 1.74m in length, 1.26m in width and 0.29m in depth was located at NGR SH 5359174772 towards the western part of the site, approximately 1.40m to the west of pit 1 [004]. The pit was cut into the glacial subsoil and had gently sloping sides, slightly steeper to the east. The base of the pit was generally flat towards the east and more undulating towards the west. The pit was filled with a single fill of compact light brown-grey, silt-sand (012) with inclusions of burnt clay, charcoal flecks, and the occasional small angular stone. Five larger fairly flat angular stones were laid on the base of the pit, but no evidence of fire damage or form could be attributed to them. An irregular waste core fragment of flint (finds no. 2) was found within the fill and is described below. The flint, although not datable by type, is most likely of Neolithic origin. The presence of charcoal flecks and burnt clay within the fill prompted the collection of a bulk sample.

The pit's section showed no clear evidence of having gradually silted or of depositional slumping, and as such it can be surmised that the pit was deliberately back-filled in one clear event and did not remain open for any great length of time. The stones present within the base of the fill displayed no evidence of arrangement or fire damage, despite there being burnt clay and charcoal within the fill. The flint, although most likely of Neolithic origin, may possibly be residual and thus the date of the pit remains uncertain. Moreover, the function of the pit remains unclear.

Pit 3 (context no. [008]) see figure 6. see plates 7 and 8.

A small circular pit measuring some 0.60m in diameter, and 0.18m in depth was located at NGR SH 5357774790 towards the north-western part of the site, and approximately 21.5m

northwest of pit 1 [004]. The pit was cut into the glacial subsoil and had gradually gently sloping sides with a slightly undulating base. The pit was initially filled with a thin 0.01m thick compact, light grey silt-sand-clay (010) upon which a 0.17m thick fill of loose mid-grey sand-silt (009) lay. No artefactual evidence or inclusions were found within either fill and thus a bulk sample was not taken.

The pit's section showed reasonably clear evidence of having gradually silted in the base, thus suggesting that the pit was open for a time. It is not clear whether the upper fill was a deliberate back-filling event or whether this represents a later phase of hill wash material into the open feature. The function of the pit is uncertain, however the small dimensions and fairly uneven profile suggests that the pit may have been created by root action rather than the being man-made.

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The development area at Cae Uchaf was considered to be of high potential for unknown buried archaeological remains, due to the quantity and frequency of primarily prehistoric archaeology within fairly close proximity. However, only three features of archaeological interest were found during the programme of archaeological strip, map and sample. The three features found were all pits, although doubt remains over whether pit 3 [008] was created by natural processes. The date and function of pits 1 [004] and 2 [011] also remains unclear, however it seems likely in both cases that they were deliberately back-filled rather than remaining open for any great length of time. There was no evidence in any of the three pits of reuse or re-cutting, and the occurrence of stones within pits 1 and 2 does not appear to have had any clear bearing upon their intended function. Indeed, the presence of a probable Neolithic flint within pit 2 is by no means diagnostic of the pit's age, as it is clear from the discovery of a second flint during the general surface clean that flint working was being carried out in the nearby vicinity, and the flint within pit 2 could well be residual. Despite the presence of charcoal flecks within the fills of pits 1 and 2 and the subsequent collection of bulk samples, it has been determined by the development control archaeologist that no further processing of these samples is required, and thus they have been discarded.

Despite careful monitoring of the stripped area, no evidence of the field boundary depicted on the 1889 county series Ordnance Survey map could be seen. This could be due to the boundary having been a hedgerow or temporary boundary which would have had limited impact upon the underlying glacial soils. Although, even if the boundary had been a wall or ditch/bank, the fairly deep ploughsoil horizon may have acted as a buffer zone and reduced any physical impact upon the underlying glacial horizon.

7.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Historic Environment Record

OS Maps

1st edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map, Anglesey Sheet XIX.2 of 1889

2nd edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map, Anglesey Sheet XIX.2 of 1900

3rd edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map, Anglesey Sheet XIX.2 of 1920

OS 1:10 000 Series sheet SH 57 NE and NW

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Welsh Office Circular 60/96 1996 *Planning and the historic environment: archaeology*, Cardiff

APPENDIX I: SPECIALIST LITHICS REPORT

(by Smith.G. 2011)

LITHIC ARTEFACTS

RF1. Context Topsoil. Waste flake.

Material: Yellow-brown flint from a rolled cobble nodule of a reasonable size.

Technology: A complete primary waste flake struck by a hard hammer using a natural platform. 30mm long, 33.5mm wide and 9.5mm deep.

Comment: A thick flake with a sharp distal point created by chance with no secondary working or visible use-wear. The freshness of and lack of damage to the edges and point show that it probably derived from a context that had not been greatly re-worked, such as a ploughsoil. Soil adhering shows it came from a fine sandy soil.

Such flint cobbles derived from the glacial drift and were probably sourced from a few exposures where particular glacial conditions occurred that caused accretions of larger flint material because such nodules do not seem to be present in most glacial till. The flint was therefore probably imported to the site.

Not datable by type but a Neolithic date seems most likely.

RF2. Context (12). Irregular waste core fragment

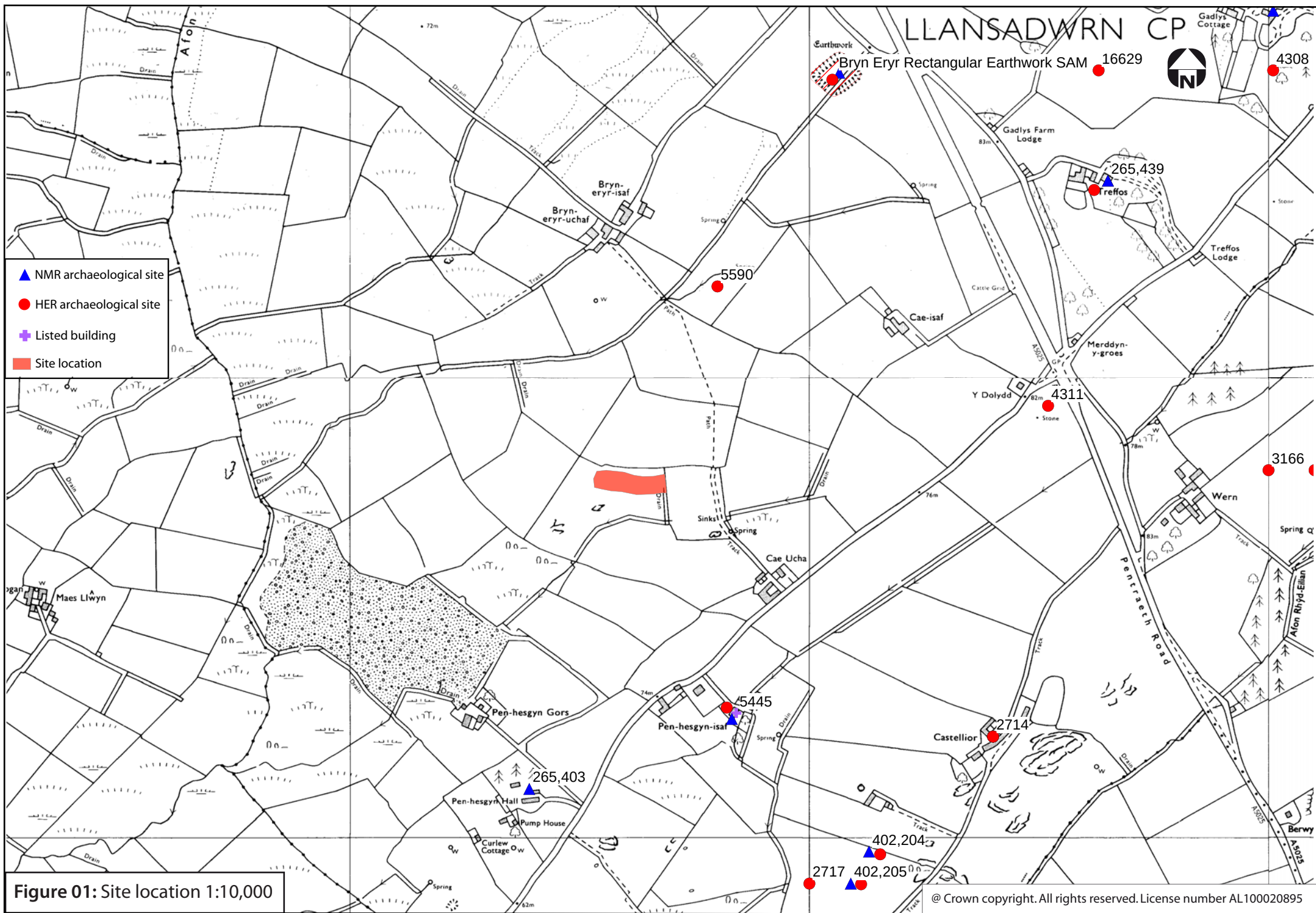
Material: Black chert.

Technology: An irregular, thick secondary fragment from a core with negative and positive facets, quite fresh and undamaged and one probably natural facet. 25mm long, 27mm wide and 12mm deep.

Comment: Remnant from working a difficult material. Black chert is found in tabular bands in the limestone on the east side of Anglesey, outcropping locally but widely exposed in the coastal cliffs at Red Wharf Bay and Benllech. Erratic cobbles of black chert also occur quite widely in the glacial till (Greenly 1919, 643-8 and 715).

Not datable by type but a Neolithic date seems most likely.

The presence of two waste pieces close together indicates that there was an activity area nearby. Consideration of the local topography and occurrence of the finds, e.g. whether these were the only finds from a large area or from a small exposure, might suggest whether this might be random flint-working or a possible part of a more extensive settlement area.



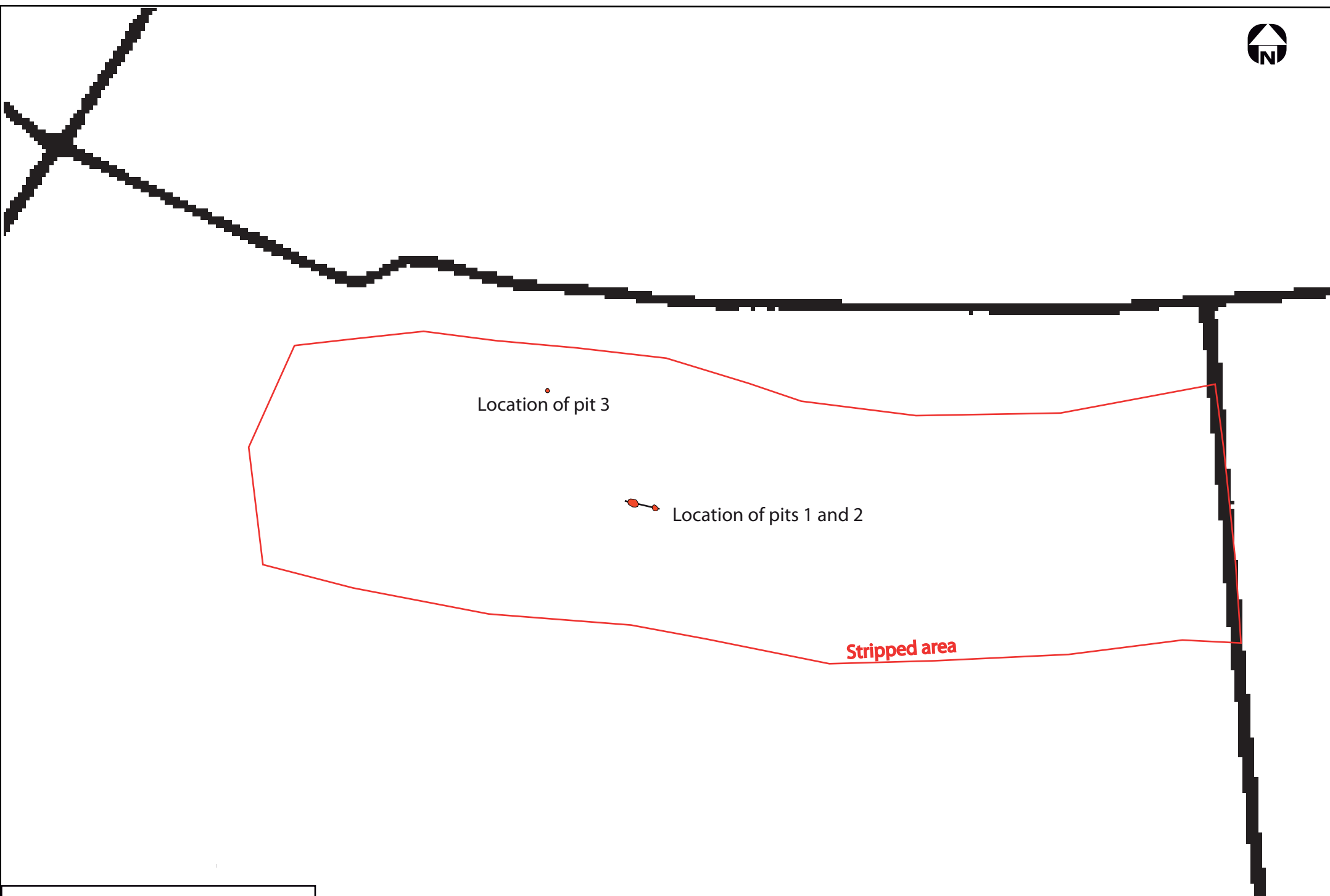


Figure 02: Location of features 1:750

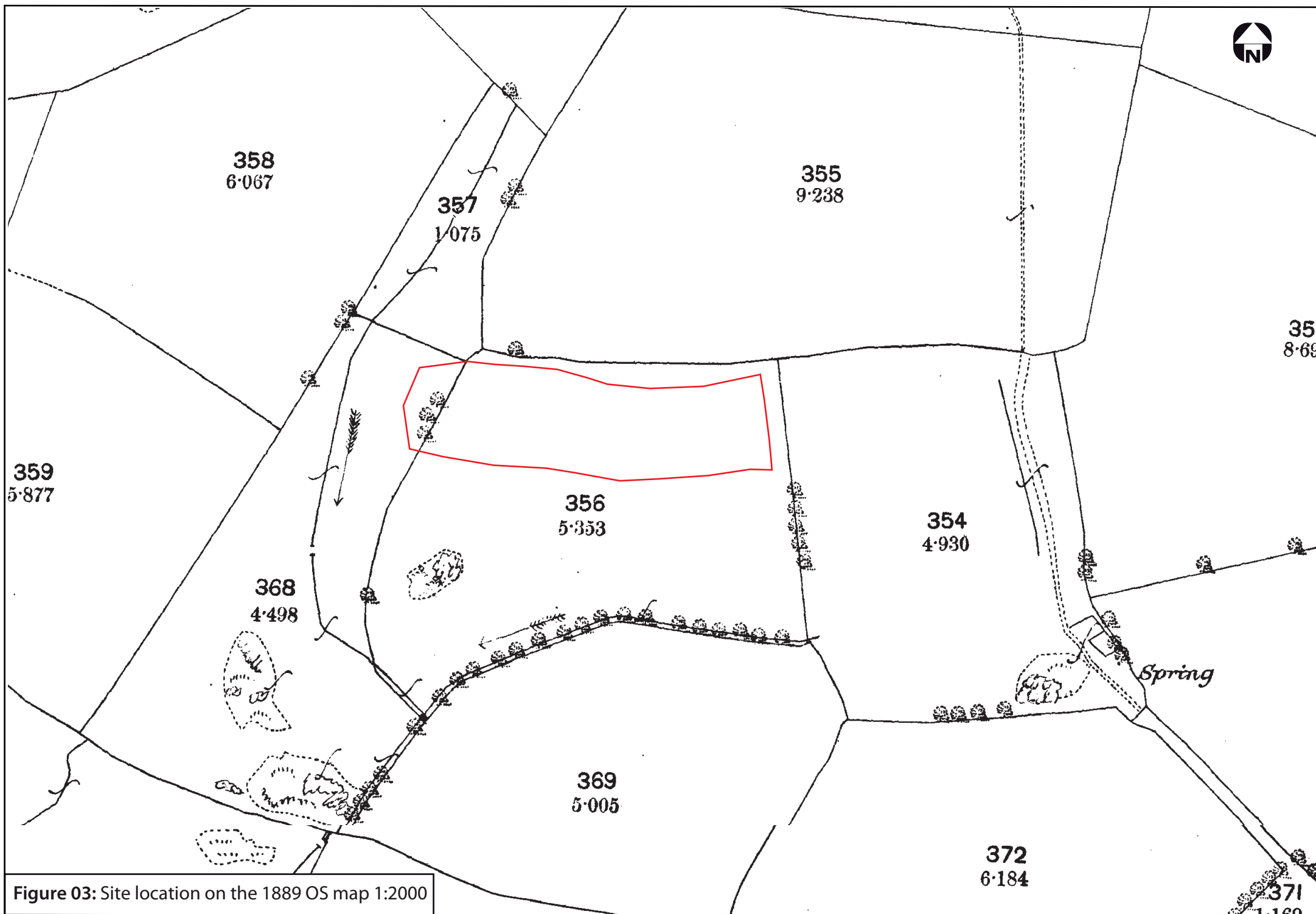


Figure 03: Site location on the 1889 OS map 1:2000

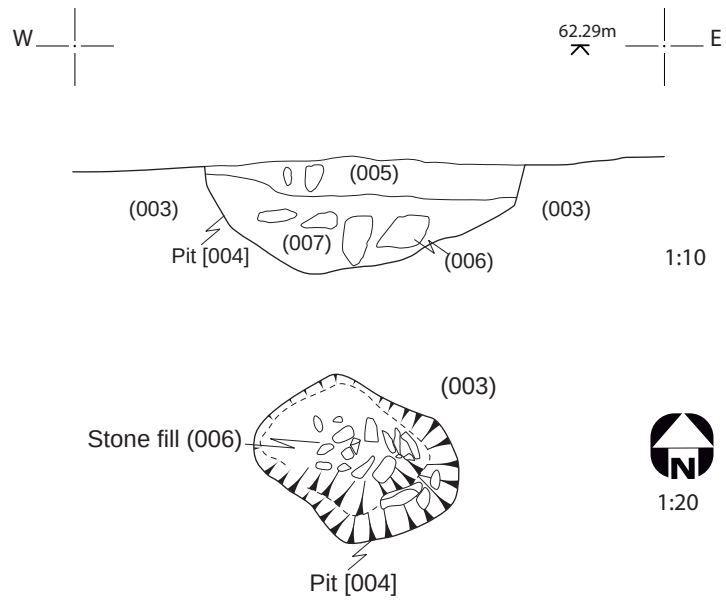


Figure 04: Pit 1 [004]

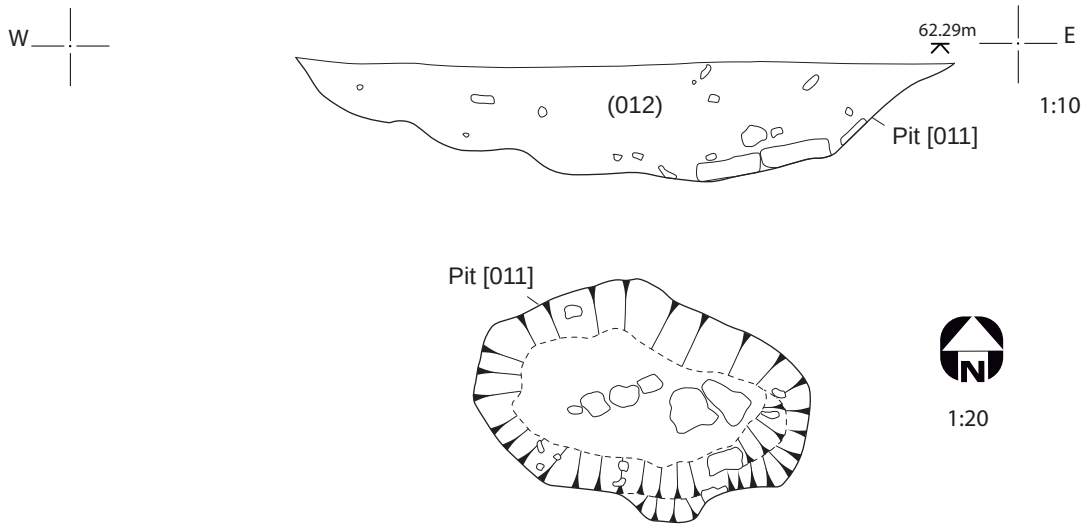


Figure 05: Pit 2 [011]

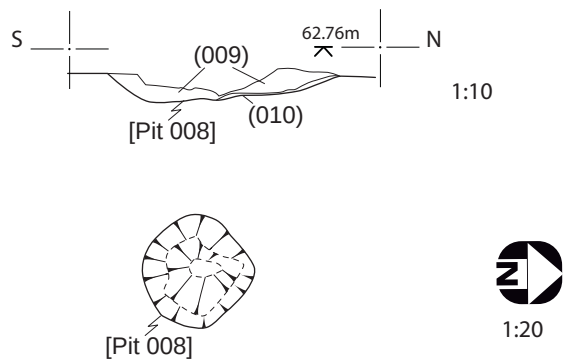


Figure 06: Pit 3 [008]



Plate 01: Stripped 1.6ha area. Photograph taken from the east.



Plate 02: Stripped 1.6ha area. Photograph taken from the west.



Plate 03: Section through pit 1 [004]. Photograph taken from the south. 0.5m scale.

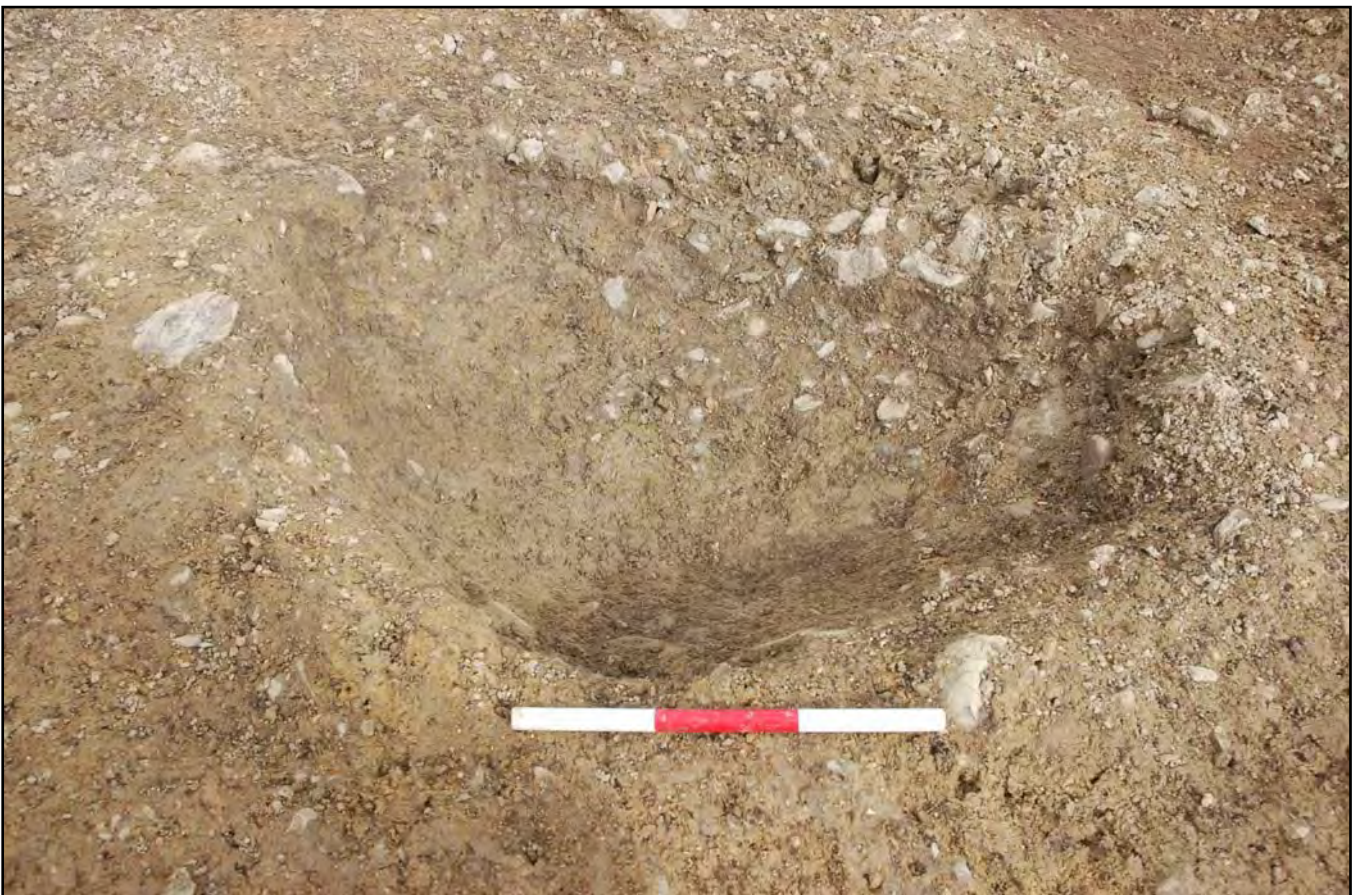


Plate 04: Pit 1 [004] excavated. Photograph taken from the south. 0.5m scale.



Plate 05: Section through pit 2 [011]. Photograph taken from the south. 1m and 0.5m scale.



Plate 06: Pit 2 [011] excavated. Photograph taken from the east. 1.0m scale.



Plate 07: Section through pit 3 [008]. Photograph taken from the east. 0.5m scale.



Plate 08: Pit 3 [008] excavated. Photograph taken from the east. 0.5m scale.



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