

Essex County Council
Learning Services

An archaeological evaluation at Carters Hill, Boxted Cross, near Colchester, Essex

February 2002

**on behalf of
Essex County Council Learning Services**



 **Babtie**



Colchester Archaeological Trust

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**commissioned by
Babtie Group
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CAT project ref.: 01/12a
ECC HAMP site code: BOXC 02
Colchester Museum accession code: 2001.233
NGR: TM 005 325 (centred)



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CAT Report 175
March 2002

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Brief written by the Heritage Advice, Management and Promotion group of Essex County Council

Essex Heritage Conservation Record summary sheet

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1 Summary

An archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at Carters Hill, Boxted Cross near Colchester, Essex revealed pits and ditches, two of which may be dated to the Iron Age forming part of a field system which is visible from the air as cropmarks.

2 Introduction

- 2.1** This is the report on an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching carried out by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT) at Carters Hill, in the village of Boxted Cross, near Colchester, Essex from the 5th to the 8th of February 2002. No planning application has as yet been submitted to the Local Planning Authority; however, Babbie Group, consultants to Essex County Council Learning Services, requested the Heritage Advice, Management and Promotion group of Essex County Council (ECC HAMP) to produce a brief for an archaeological evaluation of the site in advance of the submission of a planning application for a new school (see appendix).
- 2.2** The site is located 8.5km north of Colchester at National Grid Reference TM 005 325 (centred). It consists of part of a cultivated field, on the eastern side of Carters Hill, near the crossroads (Fig 1). The site is bounded by modern houses to the south-east and a hedge fronting Carters Hill to the south-west. The field is fairly level and is situated at between 47m and 48m OD.
- 2.3** The work was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by CAT in December 2001 which in turn follows the brief written by ECC HAMP. This report follows the standards set out in the IFA's *Standard and guidance for archaeological evaluations* (1999).

3 Archaeological background

- 3.1** The site lies in an area of high archaeological potential as described in a desk-top study by Babbie (Rowe 2001). The principal archaeological interest of the area is the large number of cropmarks around Boxted Cross. These include cropmarks representing linear features and possible pits in the field which includes the current site (EHCR no 7257), and cropmarks of linear features representing field boundaries and trackways in surrounding fields (EHCR nos 2769, 2777 and 2787). Although undated these are thought to be prehistoric. Of great interest is a discontinuous circular mark, a Neolithic henge (EHCR no 2768; Scheduled Ancient Monument 32414) which is some 500m north-east of the current site. It is possible that the cropmarks may be part of the same agricultural landscape as the henge.
- 3.2** Further to the south east, cropmarks of ring ditches in a sub-rectangular enclosure have been recorded which are thought to represent ploughed out Bronze Age burial barrows (EHCR 2775). To the north east two possible Bronze Age barrows have been recorded (EHCR 18792).
- 3.3** A number of medieval and post-medieval listed buildings, mainly timber-framed houses, are sited near the development area. The closest of these is Hill House Farm, which is 16th century in date.
- 3.4** The lack of a medieval church in Boxted Cross itself suggests that in the medieval period, the area was occupied by isolated farms rather than an actual village.
- 3.5** In 1992, CAT carried out a watching brief of water-mains renewal work between Boxted village and Boxted Cross. A possible early medieval ditch was observed in the cutting. Finds of flint flakes, flint tools and medieval pottery were made further to the north-west, along Parsonage Hill (EHCR 17689-17691; Crossan 1992).

4 Aims and objectives

The aim of the archaeological work was to locate, identify and record any surviving archaeological remains within the proposed development area.

5 Methodology

- 5.1** The evaluation was undertaken by a team of professional archaeologists from CAT: Kate Orr, Colin Austin, Simon Rulton and Nicole Weller. The total area excavated was 5% of the 1.325 ha development area.
- 5.2** Five trenches of varying lengths were dug to intercept the cropmarks visible on aerial photographs. These were excavated by machine with a toothless ditching bucket and cleaned by hand. Each trench was 1.8m wide, and their lengths varied between 61m and 105m. The depth of the trenches was determined either by the depth of archaeological features or the depth of natural subsoil.
- 5.3** Individual records of excavated contexts, layers, features and deposits were entered on pro-forma CAT record sheets.
- 5.4** Features exposed in each trench were planned at a scale of 1:20 or 1:50 (Figs 8-11). Sections of features were drawn, mainly at a scale of 1:10 (Figs 3-7).
- 5.5** All finds from contexts were retained and numbered on pro-forma CAT record sheets. Finds were examined by Howard Brooks, Philip Crummy and Stephen Benfield of CAT and by Dr Paul R Sealey of Colchester Museum. Modern finds were later discarded. Earlier finds were marked and bagged with the site code and find number.
- 5.6** Colour digital photographs and slides were taken of all contexts as well as general site shots.
- 5.7** A metal detector was used to scan the spoil heaps in Trench 1.
- 5.8** Soil samples were taken from suitable deposits.
- 5.9** OD heights of features were taken.
- 5.10** The work was monitored by Pat Connell of ECC HAMP and Elizabeth Rowe of Babbie on behalf of ECC Learning Services.

6 Results

6.1 Trench 1 (T1)

This trench was located near the northern boundary of the development site and was dug to a length of 105m and a depth of between 360mm and 470mm. Approximately 300mm of mid brown silty loam topsoil with abundant stones and occasional peg-tile (Layer or L1) sealed a layer of reddish brown silty sandy loam (L2) along the whole length of the trench. Natural subsoil varied between orange sand and gravel (L3) to light brown clay with iron oxide flecks (L4). The south-eastern half of the trench did not contain any features of archaeological interest. The extreme north-western part of the trench showed three ploughmarks of presumably modern date, running diagonally across the trench on a north-south alignment (Feature or F3, F5 and F6). These were all very shallow and were cut into L2 (Fig 2).

The features of archaeological interest occurred in the north-western half of the trench. Part of a pit (F1) was recorded at 500mm below ground-level. After cleaning and sectioning, this feature was found to be 2m wide and 1.1m deep (Figs 3, 4 and 8). It appeared to be filled with a mixture of the material that it was cut into, ie light brown clay lenses similar to L4; patches of grey brown silty loam similar to L1; and patches of reddish brown silty loam similar to L2. Early to mid Iron Age pottery was retrieved from the fill near the bottom of F1.

F1 was cut through L2 and also through natural sands and clays. However, on its southern side it cut through another feature (F9). This was a flat-bottomed ditch, cut into the natural and filled by a light brown silt with occasional charcoal flecks. F9 also contained prehistoric pottery, two flint flakes and three pieces of burnt flint. This ditch appeared to run across the trench in a north-east to south-west direction (Figs 4 and 8). It may have been up to 3.5m wide but its eastern edge was hard to distinguish from the natural clay (L4).

A second ditch was cut across the central part of T1 in a north-east to south-west direction (F10). It was 1.8m wide and 200mm deep. F10 was filled by a light yellowy brown silty clay which was almost stoneless and contained no finds. F10 cut into natural clay and sand and gravel (Figs 7 and 11).

A feature (F2) identified at the north-western end of the trench had very uncertain edges. It appeared to be a pit but was more likely to be a negative feature. When sectioned it proved to be a slight depression in the natural, filled by L2 (Figs 5 and 9).

6.2 Trench 2 (T2)

Trench 2 was dug to 65m in length and 500mm in depth. L1 topsoil overlaid L2 which sealed natural sand and gravel (L3) at 500mm below ground-level. The only feature in this trench was a very shallow pit (F4) in the north-western end. This was cut into natural sand and gravel and was filled with mid brown sandy silt (Figs 6 and 10). There were no finds from this fill.

6.3 Trench 3 (T3)

This trench was dug to 61m in length and 400mm in depth. L1 topsoil overlaid natural sand and gravel (L3). One ploughmark, lying on the same north-south alignment as those observed in the other trenches, was recorded 6m from the north-western end of the trench, cutting L3. This was a very shallow feature with no finds.

6.4 Trench 4 (T4)

This 70m-long trench was dug to between 400mm and 420mm depth. L1 topsoil overlaid natural sands and gravels (L3). In the north-western end of the trench, a possible ditch-like feature (F7) proved to be an area of uneven topsoil-stripping. The only other feature was a ploughmark (F8) which was 27cm wide, lying on roughly the same north-south alignment as the other ploughmarks observed on the site. It was filled with a grey sandy silt with small and large stones.

6.5 Trench 5 (T5)

This trench was dug on the Carters Hill side of the site and measured 67m in length. The trench depth varied between 370mm and 500mm. L1 topsoil overlaid natural sands and gravels (L3). Three ploughmarks were recorded along the length of the trench, varying in width between 15cm and 5cm. Again these followed the same north-south alignment as the other ploughmarks and were very shallow.

7 Finds

Apart from the pottery and flint in F1 and F9 and the peg-tile in L1 in T1, all the artefacts came from the spoil heap or the surface and were fairly rare. There were no metal finds although the spoil heap of T1 was metal-detected.

7.1 Prehistoric pottery

Table 1: Quantity and weight of prehistoric pottery by context.

Context	Finds bag no	Weight in g	Description/date
T1, F1	1	35	4 small sherds of early to mid Iron Age pottery, locally made; includes sand- and flint-tempered wares. c 600-75 BC.
T1, F9	5	36	14 small sherds of early to mid Iron Age pottery, locally made; includes sand- and flint-tempered wares. c 600-75 BC.

The prehistoric pottery consisted of abraded body sherds which made more detailed typological descriptions impossible.

7.2 Flint

Table 2: Quantity and weight of flint by context.

Context	Finds bag no	Weight in g	Description
T1, F1	1	54	1 broken piece of flint, probably broken off naturally
unstratified surface find	3	18	1 burnt piece of flint
T1, F9	5	15	2 flint waste flakes
T1, F9	5	100	3 burnt pieces of flint

There were no signs of working on any of the flints and they are virtually undatable. The flint in pit F1 was probably just a piece of flint in the ground that had been broken by the plough and not by any deliberate human activity. The waste flakes from ditch F9 were possibly discarded during tool-making in the prehistoric period. The burnt flints in F9 may have been burnt in recent times. Alternatively, they could have been burnt to provide temper for pottery in the Iron Age; this interpretation would fit in with the flint-tempered pottery found in the same context. Flints were also heated in the Bronze Age and Iron Age to boil water for cooking.

7.3 Medieval and later finds by Howard Brooks

Introduction

This is a basic list of the medieval and later finds extracted from material excavated by the CAT on a site at Boxted Cross, near Colchester, Essex in February 2002 (NGR: TM 005 325 centred). The archive will be deposited at Colchester Museum under accession code 2001.233. Fabric descriptions are after Cotter 2000.

Comment

There is no stratified medieval material.

Table 3: quantity and weight of medieval and later finds by context.

			date? quant	date? wt	med quant	med wt	PM quant	PM wt	mod quant	mod wt	Comments/date
	Con- text	Bag no									
T1	F1 top	6	1	1							Fe scrap - nail?
T1	F1 top	6	0	0							Fabric 48d, modern ironstone - 19th/20th century
T1	L1	2	0	0			2	30			peg-tile fragments - discarded
	us	4	0	0			1	15			Fabric 40, post- medieval red earthenware - 16th-19th century
	us	4	0	0	1	5	0	0			Fabric 21, sandy orange ware - 13th-16th century
	us	4	0	0			0	0	2	3	Fabric 48d, modern ironstone - 19th/20th century
	us	4	0	0			1	6			Fabric 45, German stoneware - 17th century
	us	4	0	0			1	3			Clay tobacco- pipe stem fragment
	us	4	1	4							Pencil-shaped shale or slate object - marker of some kind?
		Totals →	4	18	3	12	3	261	2	30	

Key:

PM = post-medieval	med = medieval
mod = modern	us = unstratified
quant = quantity	wt = weight (in g)

8 Discussion

- 8.1 Archaeological features start at 500mm below ground-level (apart from the plough-marks), and they seem to be limited to the northern and western parts of the site.
- 8.2 The fill of pit F1 produced early to mid Iron Age pottery. F1 was cut into the fill of an earlier ditch (F9) which also contained early to mid Iron Age pottery plus two flint waste flakes. It seems likely that the ditch F9 is Iron Age in date. It appears to coincide with the more westerly cropmark showing on aerial photographs (Fig 1). Although F9 is approximately 4m away from the cropmark on the plan, if one allows for inaccuracies in cropmark plotting then they may coincide. Therefore, if all the cropmarks are contemporary, then the evaluation provides evidence of Iron Age field boundaries or stock enclosures on the site. Pit F1 must have been dug after F9 was filled in as it was partly dug into its fill. Either it could be Iron Age in date or it could be much later, with the Iron Age pottery occurring residually. F1 was cut into L2 and so must therefore post-date its formation. Unfortunately we have no finds to date L2. Ditch F9 was sealed by L2.
- 8.3 One could speculate that the feature in T2 (F4) is the butt end of F9, but it is filled with different material and there is no dating evidence from it.
- 8.4 Ditch F10 did not correspond to any of the cropmarks showing from the air but it was probably too shallow to show up as a cropmark. It produced no dating evidence, and therefore it is not known whether it had been cut recently or whether it is contemporary with F9.
- 8.5 There is little early or mid Iron Age pottery from north-east Essex. The main assemblage comes from a settlement enclosure in Stanway, just west of Colchester (Crummy forthcoming). A smaller group was found recently as part of excavations at Abbotstone, near Stanway (Benfield & Brooks 1999). Another group comes from Ardleigh, to the south east of Boxted (Brown 1999, 76).
- 8.6 Most of the the ditches and pits revealed during the evaluation were not datable. However, given the early to mid Iron Age pottery found within two of the features and the nearby Neolithic henge and Bronze Age barrows we may suppose that the cropmarks form part of an agricultural landscape spanning the Neolithic to Iron Age or possibly later periods.

9 Archive deposition

The full archive, including a copy of this report, the bagged and boxed finds, digital photographs and transparencies, plus section drawings and plans on hanging strips, digital data on disk and a summary, will be permanently lodged at Colchester Museum under accession code 2001.233.

10 Acknowledgements

The Colchester Archaeological Trust is grateful to the following for their co-operation at various stages of the project:

Essex County Council Learning Services
Elizabeth Rowe and Ralph Ward of Bابتie Group
Pat Connell, HAMP Officer for Essex County Council
Dr Paul R Sealey of Colchester Museum for the prehistoric pottery identification

11 References

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- Rowe, E, 2001 Desk-top study of Boxted Cross, Essex, unpublished Babbie report

Kate Orr, March 2002

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Distribution list:

Babbie Group
Pat Connell, ECC HAMP

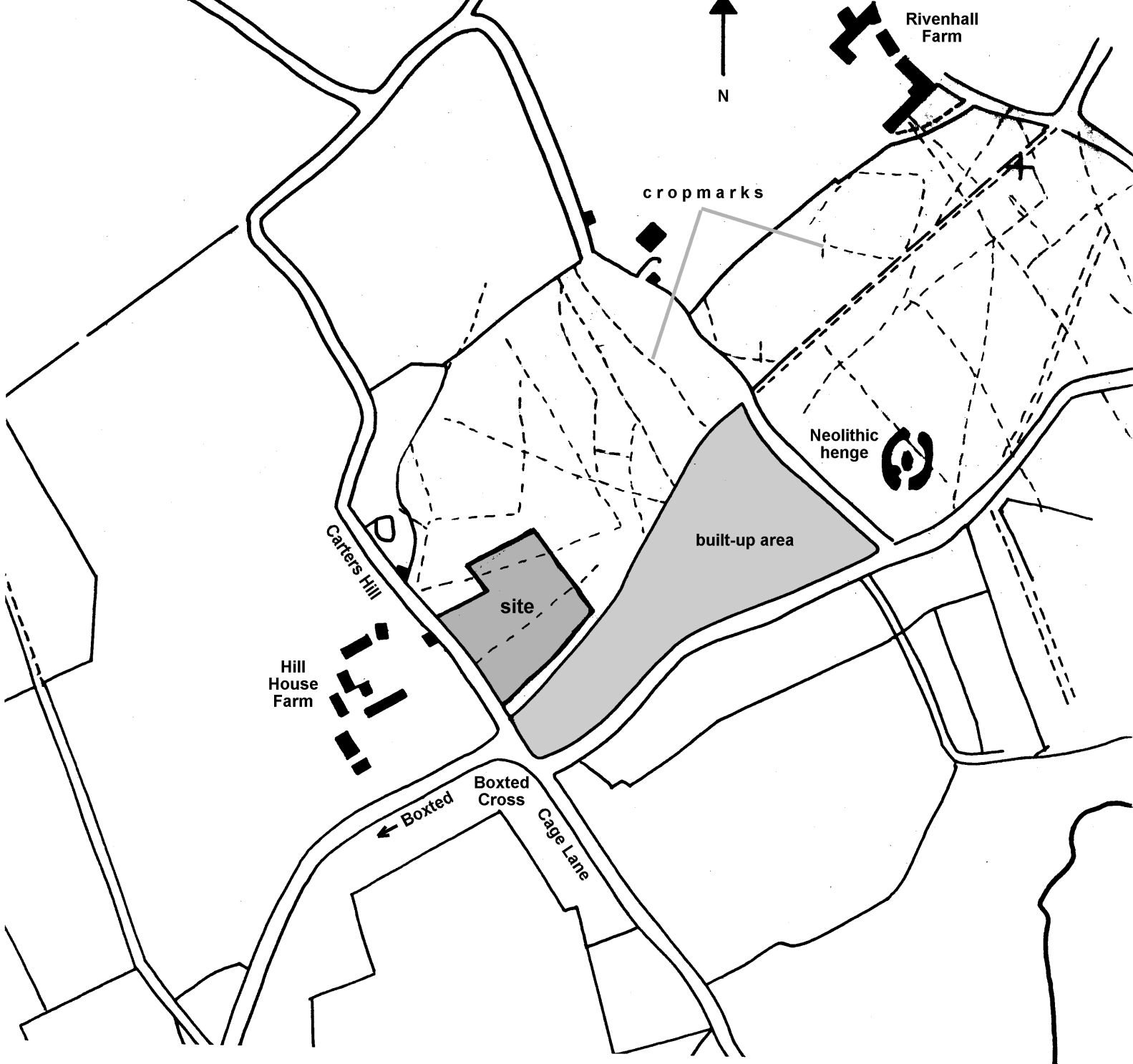


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Date: 13.03.02



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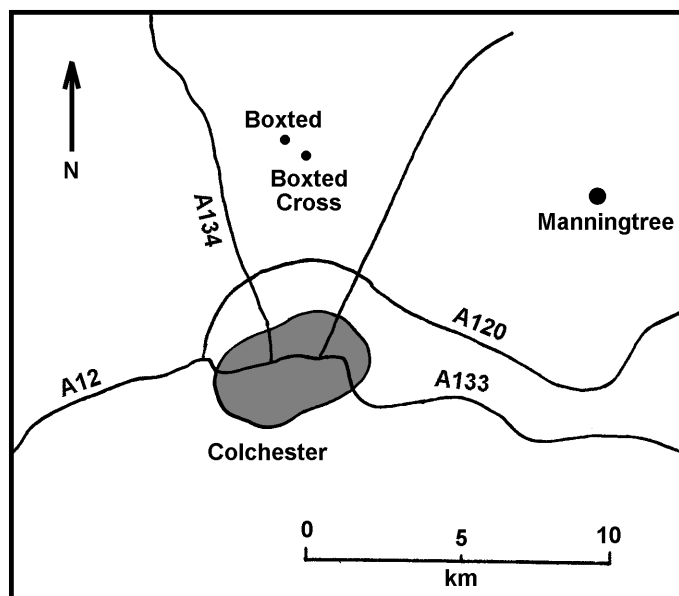


Fig 1 Site location (inset) and plan showing cropmarks.

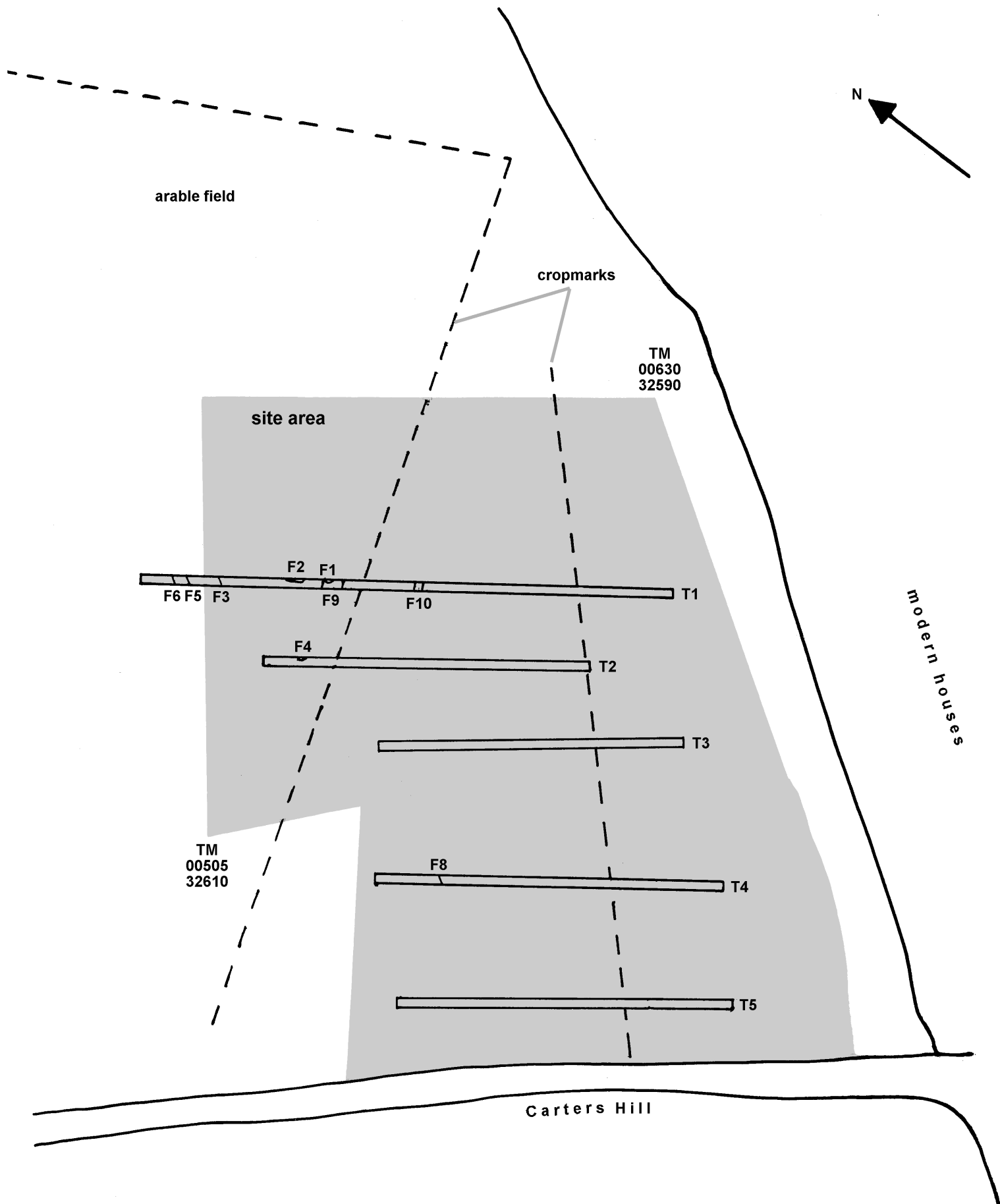
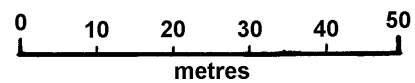


Fig 2 Trench location plan, scale 1:1000.



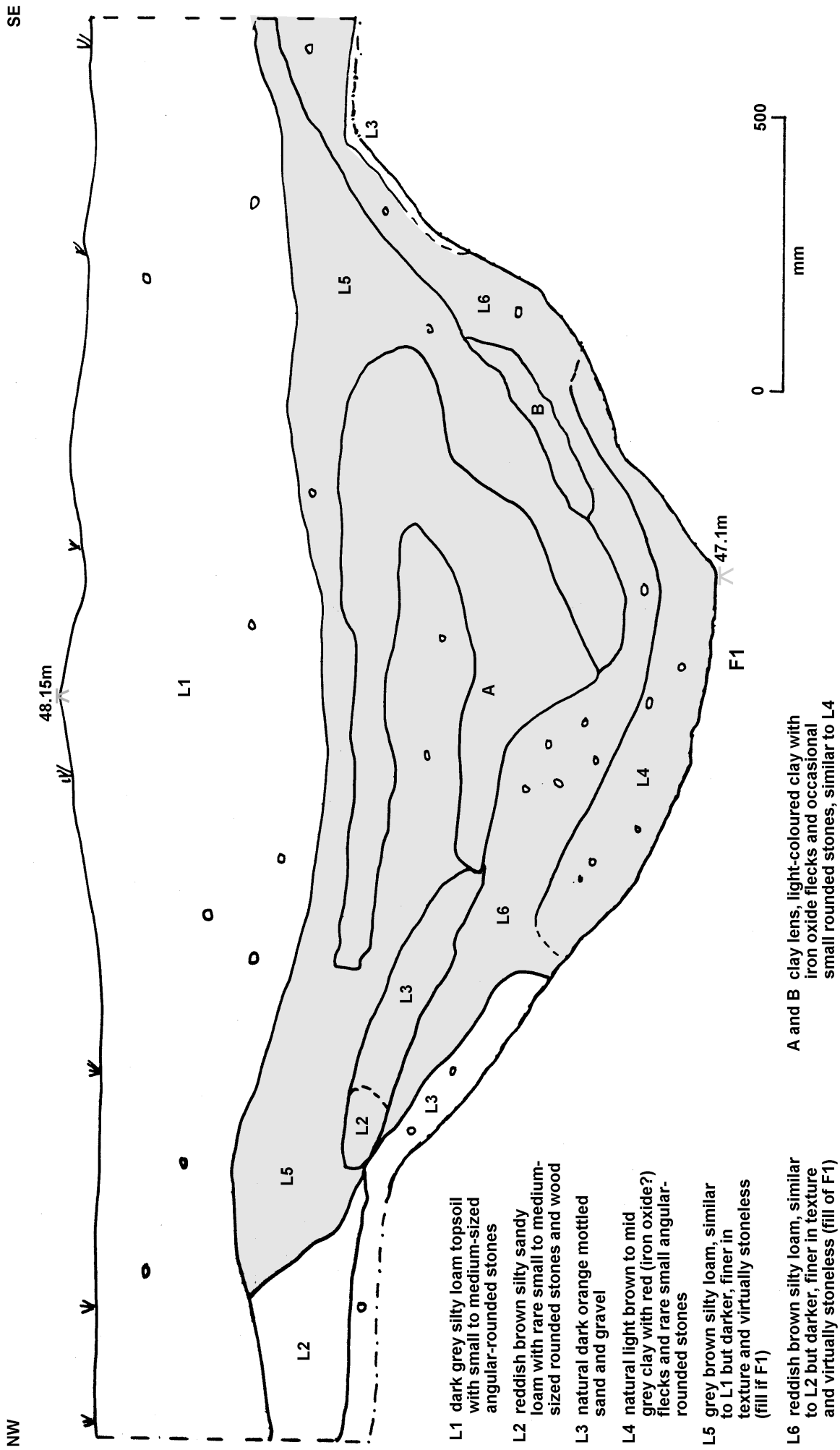
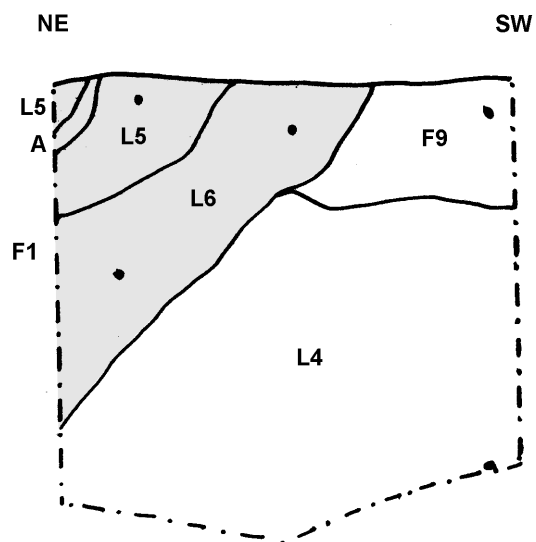
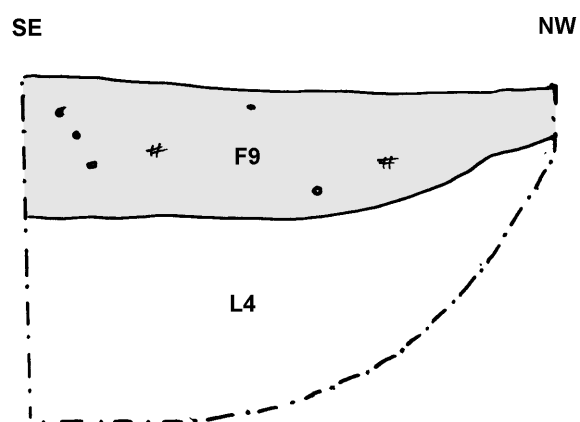


Fig 3 Section 1, F1, scale 1:10.



Section 2, F1 and F9



Section 3, F9

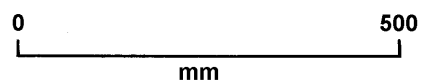


Fig 4 Sections of F4 and F9, scale 1:10.

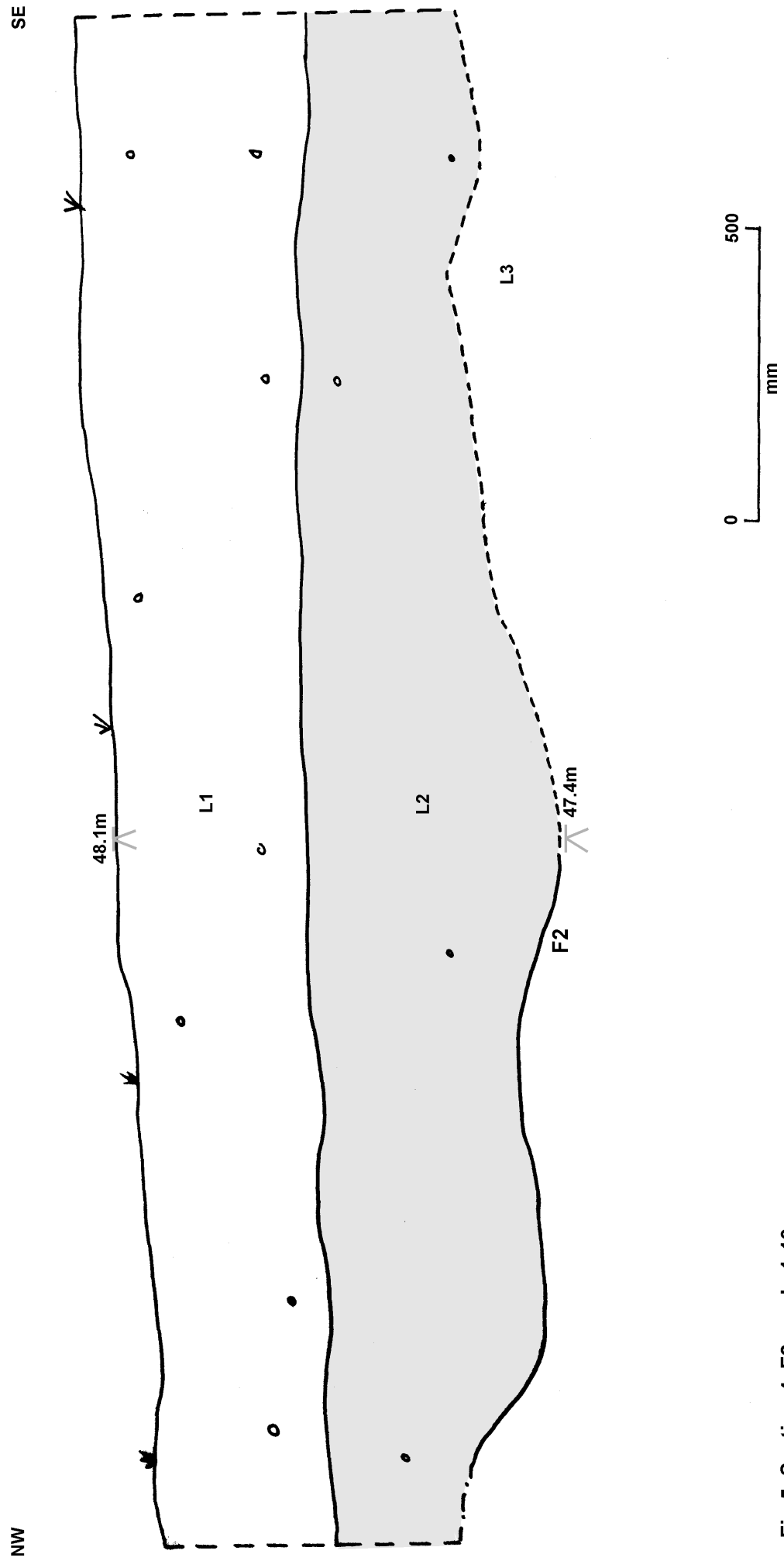


Fig 5 Section 4, F2; scale 1:10.

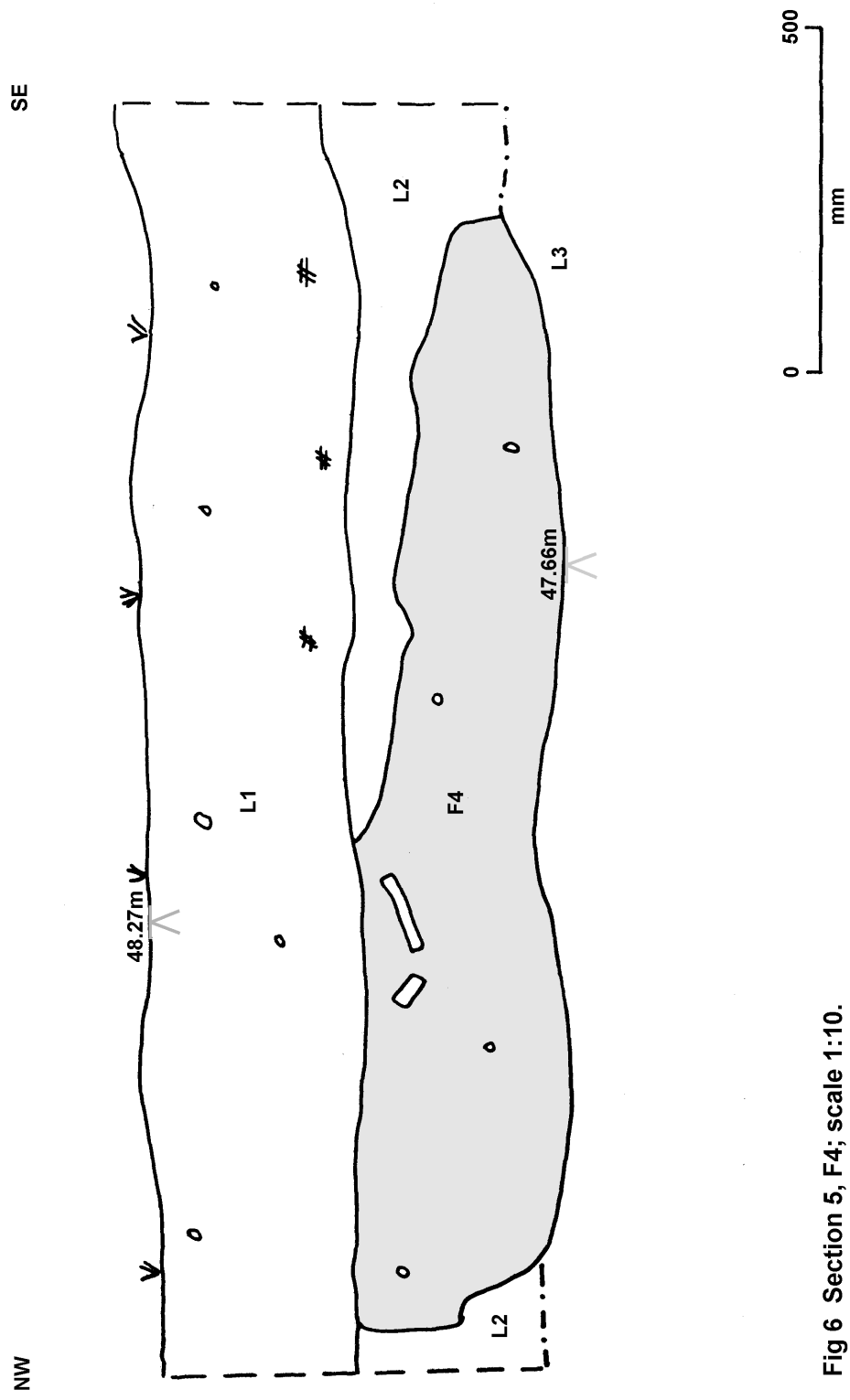


Fig 6 Section 5, F4; scale 1:10.

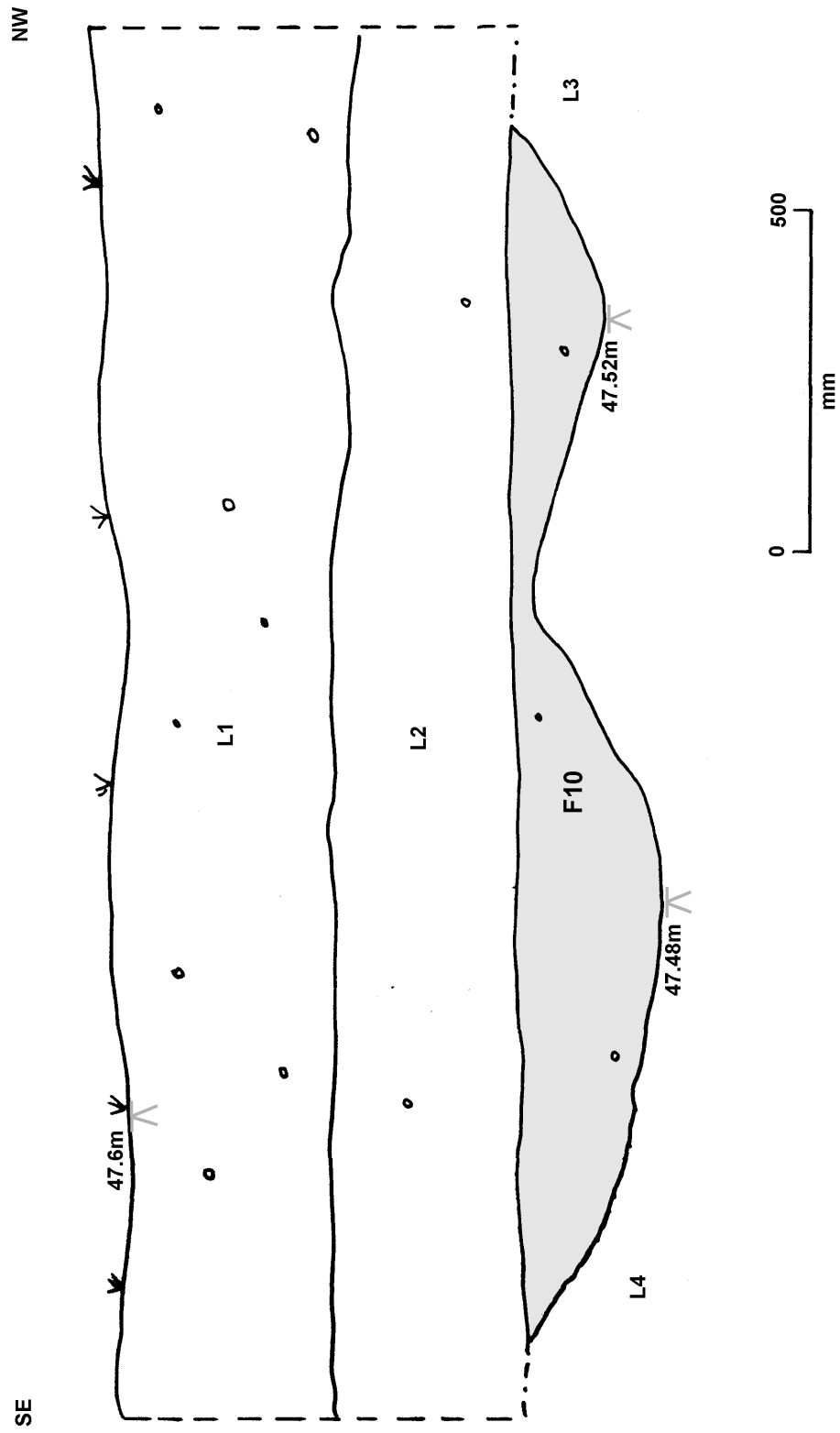


Fig 7 Section 6, F10: scale 1:10.

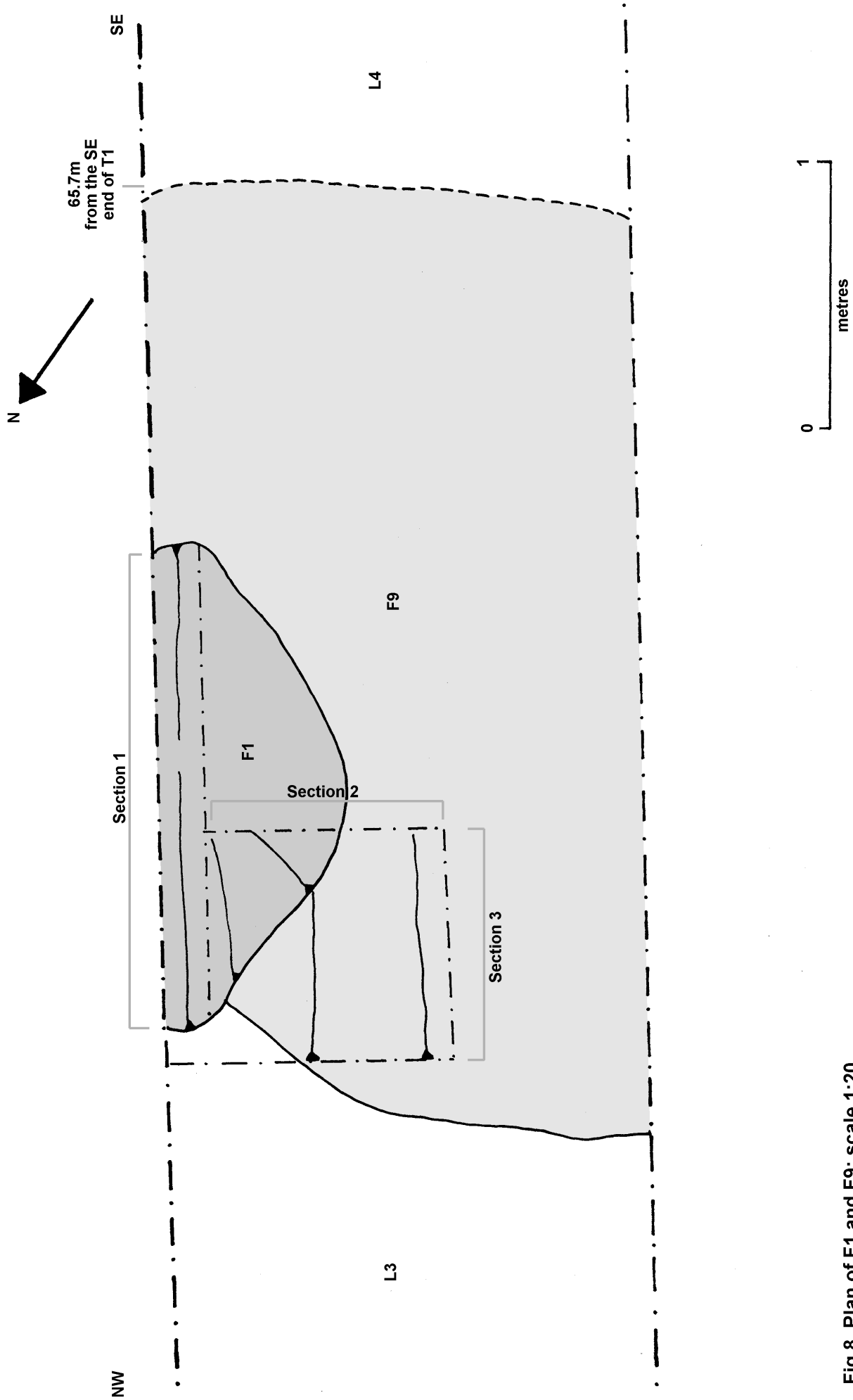


Fig 8 Plan of F1 and F9; scale 1:20.

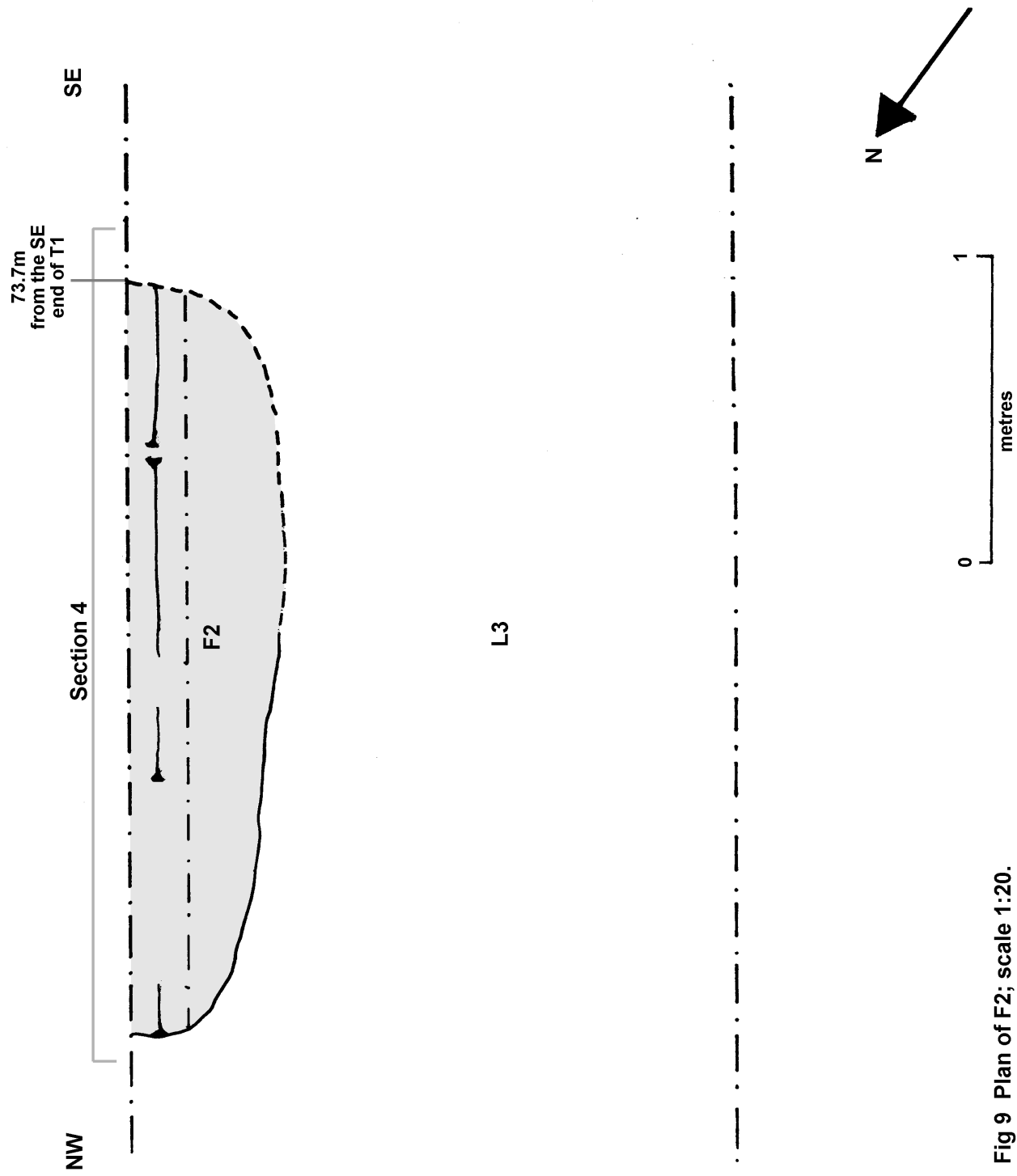


Fig 9 Plan of F2; scale 1:20.

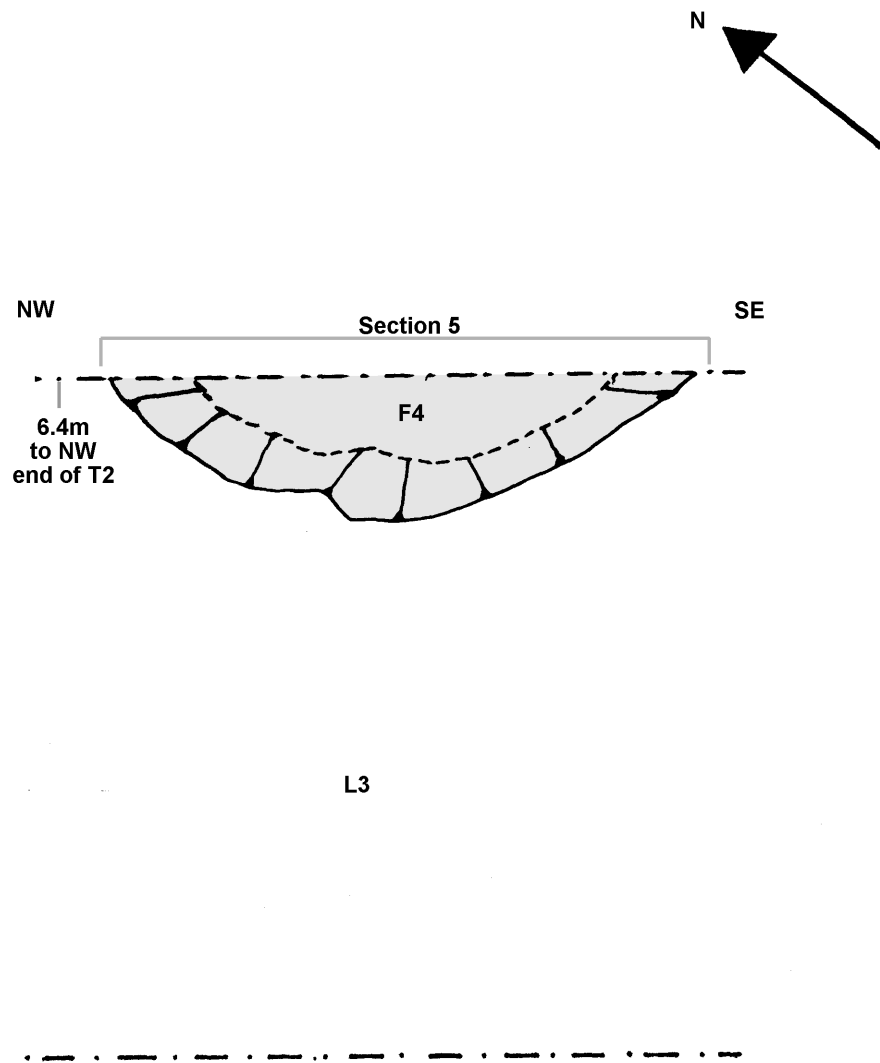


Fig 10 Plan of F4; scale : 1:20.



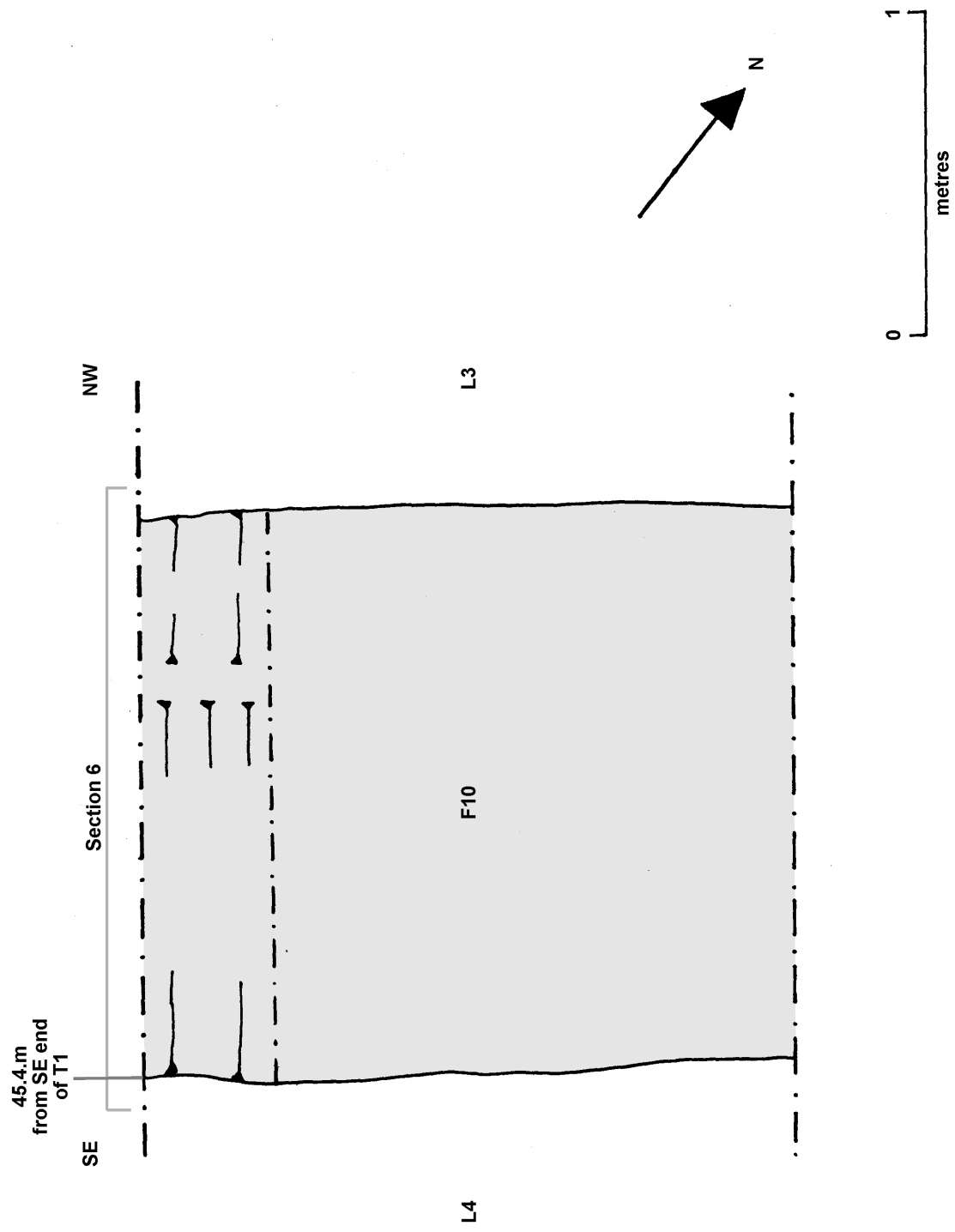


Fig 11 Plan of F10; scale 1:20.

**Essex Heritage Conservation Record/
Essex Archaeology and History**

Summary sheet

Site name/address: Carters Hill, Boxted Cross, near Colchester, Essex	
Parish: Boxted	District: Colchester
NGR: TM 005 325 (centred)	Site code: BOXC 02
Type of work: Evaluation	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: February 2002	Size of area investigated: 1.325 ha
Location of finds/curating museum: Colchester Museum	Funding source: Developer
Further seasons anticipated? -	Related EHCR nos: 7257, 2768-2769, 2787, 17689-17691
Final report: CAT Report 175 and summary in EAH	
Periods represented: Early to mid Iron Age	
Summary of fieldwork results: An archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at Carters Hill, Boxted Cross, near Colchester, Essex revealed pits and ditches, two of which may be dated to the Iron Age and form part of a field system which is visible from the air as cropmarks.	
Previous summaries/reports: N/A	
Author of summary: Kate Orr	Date of summary: March 2002