Wessex Archaeology

SHEEP SHELTERS, BIGLEY FARM, ALVEDISTON, WILTSHIRE

Watching Brief Report

Ref: 62460.02

July 2006

Sheep Shelters, Bigley Farm, Alvediston, Wiltshire

Watching Brief Report

Prepared on behalf of:

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Report reference: 62460.02

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SUMMARY

In March 2006 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Mr. Dinely of Bigley Farm (also known as Bigley Buildings) to carry out an archaeological watching brief at Alvediston, Wiltshire, centred on National Grid Reference 397497 121580 (**Figure 1**).

A total of eight archaeological features were recorded. Two features were similar pits of Romano-British date containing quantities of unworked burnt flint. The remaining six features were a sequence of undated parallel linear features located in the south of the Site. These were considered to be Drovers' paths associated with the 'Ox Drove,' a trackway forming the southern boundary to the Site.

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Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Mr. Dinely of Bigley Farm, Alvediston. Wessex Archaeology would also like to thank associated groundworks staff for their co-operation during the course of the Site strip. Ms H Cave-Penny, County Archaeological Officer for Wiltshire County Council, approved the Written Scheme of Investigation for the works.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Stephen Legg, who also compiled this report, assisted by Dave Murdie. The analysis and reporting of the finds was provided by Lorraine Mepham. Environmental analysis was undertaken by Chris Stevens, the samples were processed by Lee Newton. The illustrations were prepared by Kitty Brandon and Mark Roughley. The project was managed by Peter Reeves on behalf of Wessex Archaeology.

Sheep Shelters, Bigley Farm, Alvediston, Wiltshire

Watching Brief Report

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Mr. Dinely to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks, associated with the construction of sheep shelters, on a plot of land to the north west of Bigley Buildings, Alvediston, Wiltshire; hereafter referred to as 'the Site', centred on National Grid Reference 397497 121580 (**Figure 1**).

1.1.2 The requirement for an archaeological watching brief was attached as a condition to planning permission (S/2005/349) granted by Salisbury District Council, and followed the advice of the Wiltshire County Archaeology Service that the site may contain features of archaeological interest.

1.1.3 The watching brief was carried out between 02 February 2006 and 06 February 2006. It involved the removal of soil horizons down to natural geology over an area of 2145 square metres (0.2ha), prior to the levelling and landscaping of the shelter area by cutting into the Upper Chalk.

1.2 Location, Topography and Geology

1.2.1 The Site occupies an area 55m by 39m (0.2ha) on a gentle to moderate south facing slope towards the brow of a Chalk Downland ridge, to the immediate north of a trackway known as 'Ox Drove,' which forms the southern boundary to the Site.

1.2.2 Bigley Buildings lie some 60m to the east on the south side of 'Ox Drove'. The area around the Site is a mixture of pasture and arable land.

1.2.3 The underlying geology of the area is Upper Chalk, the surface of which contains much nodular flint.

1.3 Archaeological Background

1.3.1 Prehistoric activities in the area are highlighted by a number of field system remnants, which include cross-ridge dykes to east and west. Tumuli, of likely Bronze Age date, are also visible along the ridge to both east (760m) and west (460m), although none are evident within the immediate area of the Site.

1.3.2 Approximately 200m to the north-east lies a 'dewpond' called by the Saxon name 'Wermere' in 1618 (VCH 1987, 7). This feature is nearly 60m in diameter and, on inspection, is probably a large solution hollow, with the central portion retaining water content into 'even the driest summer.' It has been tested for depth in recent times by driving drainpipe segments into the soft silts at its base. These were driven in to a depth exceeding 6m, the soft silts were perceived to continue beyond this depth (Mr. Dinely, *pers. comm.*). Aerial photographs have identified the remains of a field system that may or may not be associated with the pond.

1.3.3 The southern boundary to the Site is 'Ox Drove,' a drover's track with a central 'hollow way' along the south side of the ridge. This was certainly in use in the 19th Century (VCH 1987, 17). The 'Ox Drove' is an extensive trackway crossing a number of parishes in southern Wiltshire, only parts of which were metalled. It is highly probable, though not proven through archaeological research, that the trackway is significantly older forming an early prehistoric route across the downs. Cartographic analysis indicates older prehistoric monuments, round barrows and dyke systems, respecting the route of the trackway.

1.3.4 Bigley Buildings located to the south east of the Site formerly comprised a Drover's Inn. Some of the original architectural features are retained and preserved in the modern building.

1.3.5 To the immediate west of these buildings another dewpond is also reported to have existed, although it was back-filled in the 1930s following the drowning of a young boy (Mrs. Dinely, *pers. comm.*).

1.3.6 The northern portion of the ridge on which the Site is situated was formerly occupied by Goscombe Copse - recorded extent of 5 acres in 1664 (VCH 1987, 7). Although still extant within the landscape the copse has shrunk. Goscombe Copse was probably part of a larger area of woodland linking Elcombe Copse to the east and Manwood Copse to the south.

1.3.7 Bigley Buildings, or rather, the Drovers Inn formerly at this location, is ideally situated for a break in long distance movement of cattle and may have

been an important locus in the past. In addition to buildings for the comfort of the drovers, the cattle would have had the use of two ponds and the shelter and grazing afforded by the woodlands. The possible Saxon date for the Wermere may be accurate as similar long distance droveways are known in Surrey that originate from this period.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1.1 The objectives of the watching brief were to locate, identify, investigate and record the presence/absence of any significant archaeological features or deposits within the area affected by the groundworks. If significant archaeological features or deposits were located, then the watching brief would establish the extent, date, character, relationship, condition and significance of archaeological features, artefacts and deposits within the area impacted or revealed by the groundworks.

2.1.2 A tracked mechanical excavator using a wide toothless ditching bucket, undertook the stripping of topsoil on Site and was under constant archaeological supervision.

2.1.3 All archaeological features and deposits were assigned a unique context number, and recorded using the Wessex Archaeology *pro forma* recording system. Where time and conditions allowed such features and deposits were characterised by the manual excavation of an appropriate sample.

2.1.4 A full graphic record was maintained throughout. Plans and sections were produced at a scale of 1:20 and 1:10 respectively, except for the main Site plan which was drawn at a more appropriate scale of 1:100.

2.1.5 A full photographic record was also maintained, using SLR and digital cameras, including colour transparencies and black and white negatives (on 35mm film).

2.1.6 Two environmental samples, each comprising 30lts, were retrieved during the course of the site investigation.

3 RESULTS

3.1.1 Detailed descriptions of the archaeological features and deposits **(Figure 2)** are presented in **Appendix 1**, and summarised below.

3.1.2 Topsoil (**101**) varies in depth from 0.25m toward the north end of the Site to 0.56m adjacent to 'Ox Drove' in the south. It was a flint-rich plough-soil

containing very few pieces of struck or burnt flints. Despite the mixing of materials by ploughing this suggests a lack of prehistoric settlement activities on the Site although there is evidence for prehistoric farming in adjacent areas.

3.1.3 Where the plough-soil is deeper in the south it overlies subsoil (**102**), which has also formed under successive ploughs and is better preserved. No archaeological features were observed within this horizon.

3.1.4 The increased depth of plough-soil and the presence of underlying subsoil, in the southern area of the Site, has preserved the northern edge of the original 'Ox Drove'. Post-medieval farming practises have resulted in the former trackway being encroached upon by the current field system. Geomorphologically the chalk ridge becomes steeper towards the north, although recent farming practise has caused the surface contours of the field here to become degraded.

3.1.5 Plough scars evident upon the surface of the Upper Chalk show cross-ploughing activities. The natural geology also shows evidence of peri-glacial features most notably 'tiger stripes'. A number of pockets of 'Clay-with-flints,' were probably formed, as a direct result of tree root penetration into the underlying Upper Chalk and are evidence of the former extent of woodland. The presence of copses on the ridge tops to the north and south support the suggestion that the former woodland extended across the area bounded by the Site.

3.1.6 Two of the tree root hollows were present in the prehistoric period as two sub-rectangular 'pits' were cut into such hollows on the eastern side of the Site. These features (**104**, **125**) were filled with unworked burnt flint. There was no evidence of *in situ* burning so this material had either been deliberately dumped into the hollows, or had entered the archaeological record through colluvial process.

3.1.7 Given the distinct paucity of struck and burnt flints within the plough-soil colluvial build-up is unlikely, which suggests a more deliberate process of deposition. No other features of this date were observed within Site limits.

3.1.8 Pit **104** was dated to the Romano-British period on the basis of a curved body sherd of grog-tempered pottery. The absence of struck flakes from the burnt flint assemblage is also generally indicative of a Romano-British date for this context. Pit **125** was allocated a contemporary date on the basis of context similarity. Both pits were sampled for environmental and artefact collection.

3.1.9 Six linear features, all relatively shallow and truncated by ploughing, cross the Site in the south. The features were aligned generally parallel to each

other and to 'Ox Drove.' The linear features were not regular enough in spacing with each other to represent cart ruts, and probably represent the paths of livestock straying down the moderate northern slope as it falls away from the track. Within deeper deposits of subsoil the linear features survive to their greatest depth.

3.1.10 The northernmost of these features – **116** – existed for a length of only 18m, and was also the shallowest of the linears. The others – **111**, **113**, **118**, **120** – were traceable for 55m (the full length of the Site). Linear **122** – the southernmost linear – was barely visible because the bulk of its length lay below the un-stripped portion of the site nearest to the fence line.

3.1.11 The linear features varied slightly in width and depth as they proceeded across the Site. They generally contained small angular flints, which showed signs of compressive fracturing and are often embedded into the chalk base of the feature. Such flints are often found in proximity to road/track surfaces, but no 'metalled' surface could be located. If a metalled surface had existed it is most probably located along the present course of the 'Ox Drove' and its associated hollow way.

3.1.12 Compressive fracturing and embedding of this nature is considered to represent weight of traffic. If this is not by cart, or other wheeled vehicle, then a more pedestrian interpretation may be appropriate. The most applicable explanation for this recognises that droving of animals is occurring along the trackway. The linears may therefore represent ditches defining the northern edge of the fixed route, varying in location when they were recut to define the width of the Ox Drove. Boundary markers for droveways generally have to be replaced quite regulary due to cattle straying across them. The collective trample weight occurring along such ditches would account for the fracture patterns on flints within the linear channels.

3.1.13 No dating evidence for any of these linears was obtained. The few pieces of burnt flint present can be explained as residual finds, especially given the presence of the 'truncated' burnt flint pits to the north. General similarities between these features in terms of alignment with each other, and with 'Ox Drove,' imply they are broadly contemporary in date, and functionally similar in use.

3.1.14 Modern usage of the 'Ox Drove' track, by farm and recreational off-road vehicles, has caused deep wheel ruts. The linears are unlikely to relate to such damage, having been severely truncated by plough and obscured by subsoil for some time.

4 FINDS

4.1.1 The evaluation produced a very small quantity of finds, deriving from topsoil and from three discrete features. **Table 1** (below) presents a quantification of all finds by context.

Table 1: Finds by context (number / weight in grammes)

CBM = ceramic building material

Context	Description	Burnt Flint	CBM	Fired Clay	Worked Flint	Iron	Pottery
101	topsoil	1/9	3/51		4/28	1/69	
105	pit 104	31/1078					
106	pit 104	2/27		13/59			2/46
112	linear 111	1/5					
119	linear 118	3/44			1/1		
	TOTALS	**38/1163**	**3/51**	**13/59**	**5/29**	**1/69**	**2/46**

4.1.2 Of this small assemblage, only the pottery is closely datable; the two sherds recovered (both from pit **104**) are of Romano-British date, one in an oxidised sandy fabric and the second grog-tempered. Fragments of ceramic building material (from the topsoil) are undiagnostic but probably post-medieval, as is the large iron bolt and attached washer from the same context. The fired clay (pit **104**) comprises small, featureless and abraded fragments of uncertain date, possibly of structural origin. Worked flint flakes (topsoil and linear **118**) are patinated and edge damaged; they are prehistoric but not chronologically distinctive. Burnt, unworked flint constituted the most commonly occurring material type (concentrated in pit **104**); this material type is frequently (but not exclusively) associated with prehistoric activity.

4.1.3 This small assemblage of finds is not recommended for long term curation.

5 ENVIRONMENTAL

5.1.1 Two bulk samples were taken from burnt flint filled features of Romano-British date and were processed for the recovery and assessment of charred plant remains and charcoal.

5.1.2 No charred material associated with settlement activities were recovered.

5.1.3 The bulk samples were processed by standard flotation methods and the results are presented in **Table 2** (below). Preliminary identifications of dominant or important taxa are noted below, following the nomenclature of Stace (1997).

Table 2: Assessment of environmental samples

				Flot							Residue	
Feature type/no	**Context**	**Sample**	**size litres**	**flot size ml**	**Grain**	**Chaff**	**Weed seeds uncharred**	**charred**	**Charcoal >4.0/2.0mm**	**Other**	**Charcoal >5.6mm**	**analysis**
?Later Prehistoric Burnt Flint Features												
104	106	601	30	120^{30}	-	-	-	-	40/15ml	_	-	-
125	124	602	30	250^{30}	-	-	-	-	40/20ml	_	-	-

KEY: A** = exceptional, A* = 30+ items, A = ≥10 items, B = 9 - 5 items, C = < 5 items, (h) = hazelnuts, smb = small mammal bones; Moll-t = terrestrial molluscs Moll-f = freshwater molluscs; Analysis: C = charcoal, P = plant, M = molluscs, C14 = radiocarbon suggestions

NOTE: [1]flot is total, but flot in superscript = ml of rooty material. [2]Unburnt seed is in lower case to distinguish it from charred remains

5.1.4 The flots were generally quite large with high amounts of wood charcoal. There were generally low numbers of roots and modern seeds that may be indicative of stratigraphic movement, reworking or the degree of contamination by later intrusive elements.

5.1.5 No charred material other than wood charcoal was seen within the samples. The charcoal comprised mainly larger fragments of possible heartwood, and no roundwood, twig or branch material was seen. Several of the fragments could be seen to be ring-porous most characteristic of oak wood. The quantities are recorded in **Table 2**.

5.1.6 No material was found indicative of general later prehistoric settlement activities, such as cereal grains or chaff that are often recovered from Later Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British sites. Such material is often absent from earlier Bronze Age sites, although given that only two features were examined, such absence may not be significant. While the high amounts of charcoal are undoubtedly associated with the burnt flint no other material that may help date the feature was seen.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1.1 No significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered during the watching brief.

6.1.2 The earliest features on the Site are represented by two pits (**104** and **125**) comparatively dated to the Romano-British period. The pits are cut into earlier tree root hollows and were utilised in the deposition of quantities of burnt flint. The absence of *in situ* burning evidence suggests that this material had been transported to this location for dumping.

6.1.3 There is a distinct lack of 'worked' and burnt flint from the topsoil across the Site. This implies that the burnt flint found in the pits does not enter the archaeological record through colluvial processes, and so is a deliberate dump of material derived from elsewhere. There were no other features attributable to this period over the stripped area.

6.1.4 Six undated linear features lying generally parallel to each other and to 'Ox Drove' – a trackway bounding the south – occur only in the south of the Site. Four of these (**111**, **113**, **118**, **120**) proceed for over 55m, a fifth (**116**) to the north is severely truncated by plough, the sixth (**122**) to the south was only partially observed. The linears are deepest where they exist below subsoil (**102**), although they are still partially truncated by plough.

6.1.5 Inclusions within the fills of the linears mainly comprise fractured flints with associated chippings. Most of this material is explainable through compressive fracturing, in this case weight of trample. For this reason the linears most likely constitute a number of related paths along which people and animals have passed over some period of time.

6.1.6 The 'Ox Drove' is part of an extensive trackway along the chalk ridge in southern Wiltshire, but it is only intermittently metalled. Given the former presence of a Drover's Inn at the Bigley Buildings and the presence of one, formerly two, ponds that could be used for watering, it is not unreasonable for alternative paths around this area to be expected. This would account for the presence of, and similarities between the linears observed adjacent to the mapped route of the Ox Drove. The constraints of the area stripped and the present brief cannot determine whether such pathways are specific to the current location, occur periodically along the route, or are a general feature of the 'Ox Drove.'

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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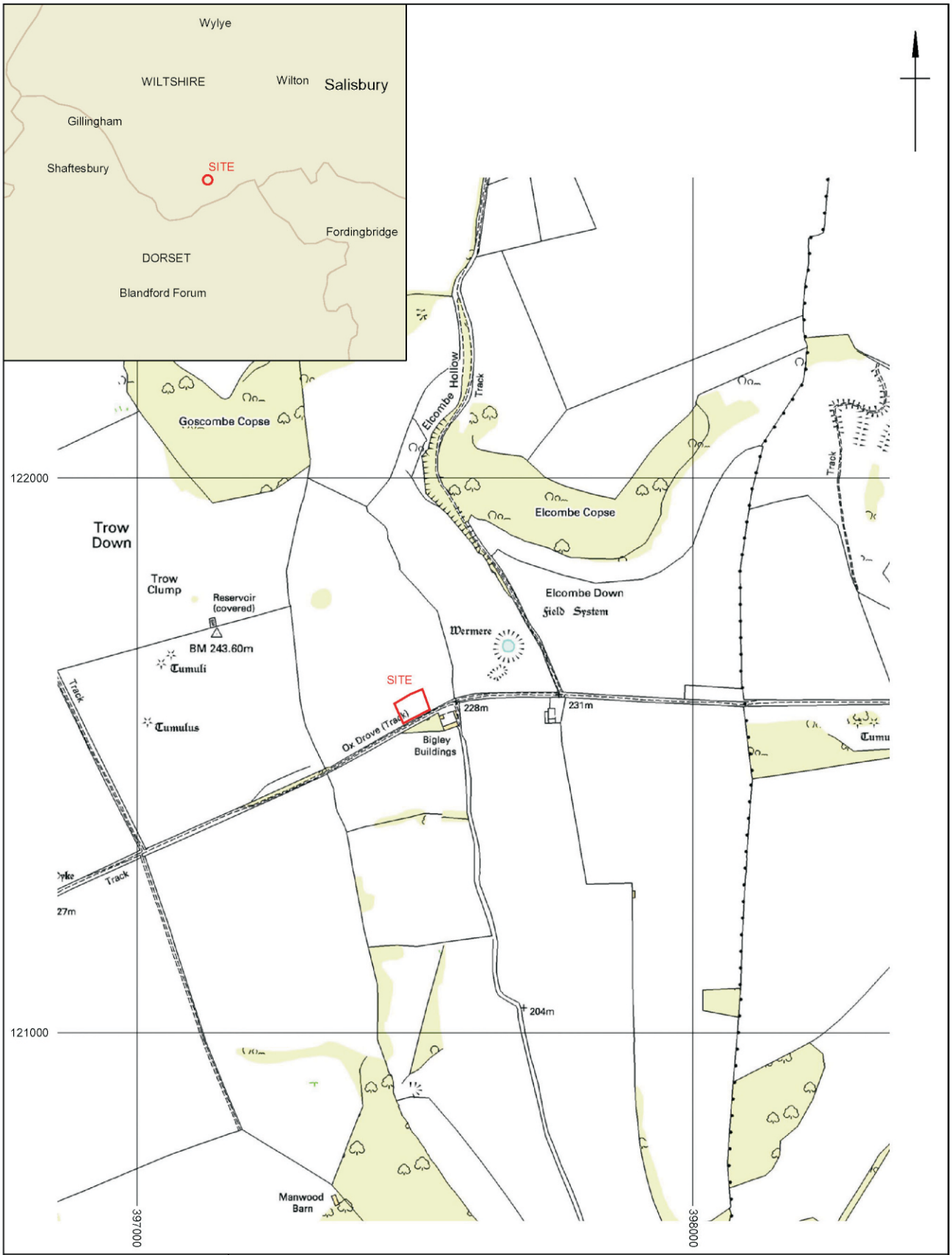
APPENDIX 1 – Context Descriptions

Context	Description	Depth below surface
101	Topsoil/plough-soil. Dark, to very dark, greyish brown silty loam, with frequent angular and sub-angular flints (<140mm). Sparse to occasional chalk inclusions, generally in lower portion of profile. Crop remnants present. Depth is 0.25m in north deepening to 0.56m in south. Friable consistence. Modern finds of CBM, slate and iron; residual finds of struck flint.	0.00m – 0.56m
102	Subsoil. Mid, to dark, yellowish brown silty clay loam, with common to frequent angular and sub-angular flints (<75mm). Friable consistence. Occurs below active bioturbation zone of (**101**). Probably a result of ploughing activities. Occupies southern 5m to 7m of Site.	0.50m – 0.64m
103	Geological natural. Peri-glacially affected Upper Chalk with common 'nodular' flints at surface level. Disturbed by tree root penetration and some possible solution hollows. Plough scars evident.	0.25m +
104	Pit. Sub-rectangular feature oriented north-south on eastern side of Site. Appears to cut into fill (**108**) of tree root hollow **107**. Very steep regular sides to an even, slightly irregular, base. Filled with burnt flint deposits. 2.65m by 1.20m by 0.27m. Comparable to **125**.	0.30m – 0.57m
105	Upper, central fill of pit **104**. Dark greyish brown silty loam with common burnt flint inclusions (not burnt *in situ*), and rare charcoal. Sparse to occasional angular and sub-angular flints (<120mm) also present. Rare chalk. Friable consistence. Possibly a mixture of (**101**) and (**106**).	0.30m – 0.48m
106	Basal fill of pit **104**. Very dark greyish brown silty loam with sparse angular and sub-angular flints (<100mm). Common to frequent burnt flint (not burnt *in situ*); Pottery and fired clay present. Friable consistence. Deliberate dump? **Romano-British**. Sample <**601**> retrieved from this context.	0.30m – 0.57m
107	Irregular sub-rectangular feature 'truncated' by pit **104**. Cuts geological natural (**103**). Irregular sides and base evidence root activities. 2.66m by 1.20m by 0.35m. Tree root hollow.	0.30m – 0.65m
108	Fill of **107**. Mid yellowish brown clay loam at surface becoming an olive grey loamy clay towards base of profile. Moderate chalk, occasional angular and sub-angular flints (<120mm). Soft consistence. Colour of lower portion probably a result of leaching from (**106**). No finds. Undated/prehistoric.	0.30m – 0.65m
109	Cut for possible posthole, which on examination resolved into a taproot hollow from tree disturbance. Not archaeological. Diameter is 0.26m.	0.40m – 0.54m

Context	Description	Depth below surface
110	Dark greyish brown silty loam very similar in appearance to plough-soil (**101**). Soft consistence. Texturally similar to (**108**). No finds. Undated.	0.40m – 0.54m
111	ENE-WSW linear. Parallel to **113**, **116**, **118**, **120**, **122** and 'Ox Drove.' Cuts geological natural (**103**). Severely truncated by plough. Very steep sides, even, but irregular base. Length >55m. Width varies 0.60m to 0.80m. Drover's pathway.	0.45m - 0.58m
112	Fill of linear **111**. Mid yellowish brown slightly loamy silt with common angular and sub-angular flints (<80mm, mostly <35mm). Rare to sparse chalk. Flint shows compressive fracturing and many are firmly embedded in chalk at cut edge/base. Relatively compact, truncated by plough (plough scars at surface of deposit). Residual burnt flint noted. No finds. Undated.	0.45m - 0.58m
113	ENE-WSW linear. Parallel to **111**, **116**, **118**, **120**, **122** and 'Ox Drove.' Cuts geological natural (**103**). Severely truncated by plough. Moderate to steep, slightly concave sides with an even, but irregular, base. Length >55m. Width varies 0.50m to 0.90m. Drover's pathway.	0.36m - 0.48m
114	Fill of linear **113**. Mid, to dark, yellowish brown slightly loamy silt with common angular and sub-angular flints (<85mm, mostly <20mm). Sparse chalk. Flint shows compressive fracturing and many are firmly embedded in chalk at cut edge/base. Relatively compact, truncated by plough (plough scars at surface of deposit). No finds. Undated.	0.36m - 0.48m
115	Deleted! Originally thought to be a cut containing (**102**), until (**102**) proven to be a subsoil component.	
116	ENE-WSW linear. Parallel to **111**, **113**, **118**, **120**, **122** and 'Ox Drove.' Cuts geological natural (**103**). Severely truncated by plough. Moderate, slightly concave sides with a concave, but irregular, base. Length 18m. Width varies 0.26m to 0.70m, mainly due to truncation effects. Northernmost linear. Drover's pathway.	0.32m –0.39m
117	Fill of linear **116**. Mid, to dark, yellowish brown slightly loamy silt with common angular and sub-angular flints (<85mm, mostly <20mm). Occasional chalk. Flint shows compressive fracturing and many are firmly embedded in chalk at cut edge/base. Relatively compact, truncated by plough (plough scars at surface of deposit). No finds. Undated.	0.32m – 0.39m
118	ENE-WSW linear. Parallel to **111**, **113**, **116**, **120**, **122** and 'Ox Drove.' Cuts geological natural (**103**). Truncated by plough. Occurs below subsoil (**102**). Very steep sides, even, but irregular, base. Length >55m. Width varies	0.63m – 0.85m

	0.40m to 0.65m. Drover's pathway.	
Context	**Description**	**Depth below surface**
119	Fill of linear **118**. Dark yellowish brown slightly loamy silt with common angular and sub-angular flints (<55mm, mostly <20mm). Sparse chalk. Much flint shows compressive fracturing and many are firmly embedded in chalk at cut edge/base. Relatively compact, truncated by plough (plough scars at surface of deposit). Residual finds of burnt and possible struck flints. No finds. Undated.	0.63m – 0.85m
120	ENE-WSW linear. Parallel to **111**, **113**, **116**, **118**, **122** and 'Ox Drove.' Cuts geological natural (**103**). Truncated by plough. Occurs below subsoil (**102**). Steep, concave northern edge, very steep, concave southern edge. Even, but irregular, base. Length >55m. Width varies 0.30m to 0.70m. Drover's pathway.	0.70m – 0.96m
121	Fill of linear **120**. Mid, to dark, yellowish brown slightly loamy silt with occasional angular and sub-angular flints (<60mm). Moderate to common chalk inclusions (<10mm). Some flint shows compressive fracturing and some are firmly embedded in chalk at cut edge/base. Relatively compact, probably truncated by plough. No finds. Undated.	0.70m – 0.96m
122	ENE-WSW linear. Parallel to **111**, **113**, **116**, **118**, **120** and 'Ox Drove.' Cuts geological natural (**103**). Possibly truncated by plough. Occurs below subsoil (**102**). Moderate, slightly concave, northern edge. Base and southern edge not encountered. Length >5m observed. Width averages 0.35m. Southernmost linear. Drover's pathway.	0.65m – 0.85m
123	Fill of linear **122**. Mid, to pale, yellowish brown slightly loamy silt with sparse angular and sub-angular flints (<45mm). Common chalk inclusions (<5mm). Some flint shows compressive fracturing and a few are firmly embedded in chalk at cut edge/base. Relatively compact, probably truncated by plough. No finds. Undated.	0.65m – 0.85m
124	Fill of pit/tree throw hole **125**. Dark greyish brown silty clay, with frequent angular and sub-angular flints (<100mm). Common burnt flint inclusions (not burnt *in situ*); fired clay and charcoal flecks also present. Fairly compact. Undated, but may be contemporary with **104**. Sample <**602**> retrieved from this context.	0.30m – 0.51m
125	Pit/tree throw hole. Sub-rectangular feature oriented north-south on eastern side of Site. Sides and base are irregular. Cuts geological natural (**103**). Filled with burnt flint deposit (**124**). 2.00m by 1.10m by 0.21m. Comparable to **104**.	0.30m – 0.51m



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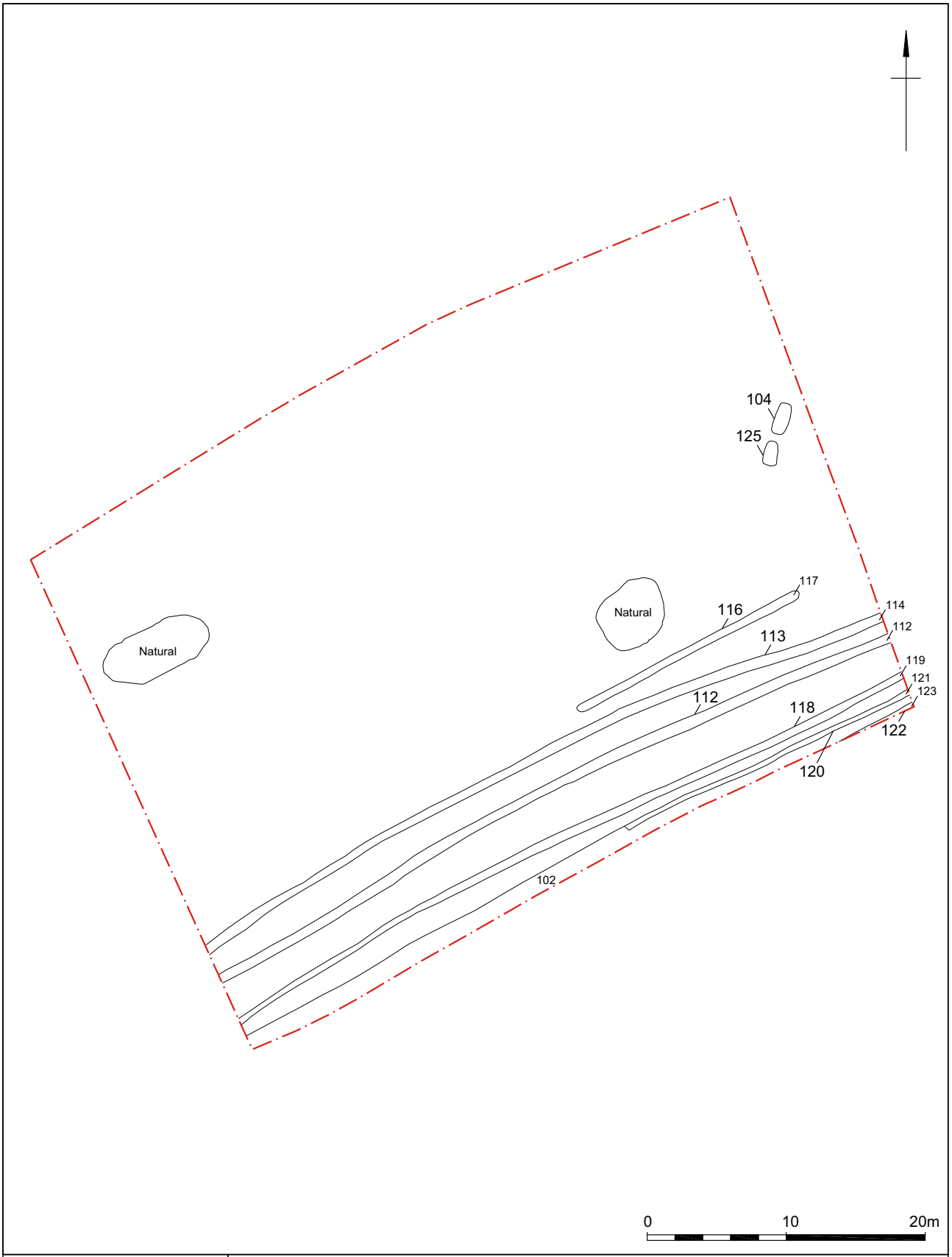
Wessex Archaeology

Site location

Figure 1



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Wessex Archaeology

Site plan

Figure 2

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