

**An evaluation at
Abbotts Hall Farm,
Great Wigborough, Essex
Phase 2: exploratory trenching**

November 2000

**on behalf of
the Essex Wildlife Trust**



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CAT Report 111

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NGR: TL 971 140

Summary

A fieldwalking survey on the site for a proposed lake located a surface cluster of burnt flint. A series of machine trenches were dug to investigate the spot. The results were negative, other than one possible intrusion of indeterminate origin.

Introduction

This report covers Phase 2 of an archaeological evaluation commissioned by the Essex Wildlife Trust to investigate the archaeological implications of a proposal to construct a freshwater lake at Abbots Hall Farm. Phase 1 was a fieldwalking survey, carried out on 18th October. The Phase 1 results were presented in CAT Report 105, a full copy of which is appended.

Phase 2 of the evaluation took place between 2nd and 6th November and consisted of a series of machine-dug trenches. The purpose of the excavation was: firstly, to investigate an area in the south-western part of the site which, in the analysis of the Phase 1 finds distribution, had produced a statistically valid surface cluster of burnt flint (a find frequently associated with prehistoric activity); and secondly, trenches were also dug to check for the possible existence of earlier land surfaces at this coastal site.

The evaluation followed specifications contained in the site Evaluation Brief issued by Colchester Borough Council's Museums Service, observing the requirements detailed in Colchester Borough Council's *Guidelines on standards and practices for archaeological fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester* (1996a) and *Guidelines on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives to Colchester Museums* (1996b). Plans for the development were submitted to Colchester Borough Council on 21st August 2000 (Local Authority Application no F/COL/00/1344).

Methods

Trenches T1, T2 and T3 were situated within the three 20m-square fieldwalking grid boxes which were the focus of the burnt flint cluster (Figs 2 & 3). Trenches T4 and T5 were dug for environmental purposes at low points in the field occupying the eastern half of the site. All trenches were excavated in a succession of horizontal spits using a machine equipped with a toothless bucket.

Results

General stratigraphy

The overall stratigraphy was found to be as follows:

Layer 1 (L1)

Ploughsoil.

Greyish brown clay loam with occasional minute fragments of chalk, charcoal flecks and shreds of burnt stubble.

Layer 2 (L2)

Natural clay.

Yellowish brown London clay head with occasional darker brown or greyish brown mottles.

This simple sequence was repeated in all of the trenches, with slight variations in the thickness of ploughsoil (L1) and the sharpness of the interface between the ploughsoil and the underlying natural clay (L2).

The trenches

Trench 1 (Figs 4 & 5)

30.5m long, 1.5m wide.

The depth of ploughsoil L1 varied between 25cm and 30cm. Removal of the ploughsoil revealed only one feature of any possible antiquity (F3 in Fig 4), which was discernible as an interruption in the otherwise uniform surface of the natural clay. The main feature fill (F3A) was a greyish brown silty clay loam. To the west and possibly associated with F3A was a darker greyish brown clay loam (F3B) which extended beyond the west section of the trench. In the east-west section formed by the machined step, at point 'x', the feature appeared to be 30cm deep and flat-bottomed. On initial examination several flecks of charcoal were noted in

the surface of F3A. It was not possible to establish whether the charcoal was superficial contamination from the overlying ploughsoil (in which charcoal was fairly common), or a true fill inclusion, as subsequent trench collapse and flooding prevented further investigation in this part of the trench. The feature may well be a natural soil variation, rather than a man-made intrusion.

Trench 2

5m long x 1.5m wide x 0.5m deep.

This trench was located 5m to the east of T1. Natural clay (L2) was sealed by 25cm to 30cm ploughsoil (L1).

No features were discernible.

Trench 3

20m long x 1.5m wide x 0.5m deep.

Ploughsoil (L1) extended to a uniform depth of 30cm, where it displayed a sharp interface with the underlying clay (L2).

The trench was devoid of features.

Trench 4

2.4m long x 1.5m wide x 0.9m deep.

Ploughsoil (L1) merged into natural clay (L2) at a depth of between 30 to 40cm.

There were no intrusive features.

Trench 5

2.2m long x 1.5m wide x 0.75m deep.

Ploughsoil (L1) merged into natural clay at a depth of 30cm. No features.

Conclusion

The trenches revealed no conclusive evidence of either prehistoric activity or earlier land surfaces.

Archive

The evaluation archive, consisting of site records, plans and photographs, will be deposited permanently at Colchester Museum under cover of museum accession code 2000-133.

Acknowledgements

The evaluation was commissioned by the Essex Wildlife Trust and took place with the aid of machinery provided by the Environment Agency. We would particularly like to thank the following for their assistance in the course of the work:

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Martin Winter - Archaeological Officer, Colchester Borough Council

*Carl Crossan
November 2000*

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Appendix

A fieldwalking evaluation at Abbots Hall Farm, October 2000

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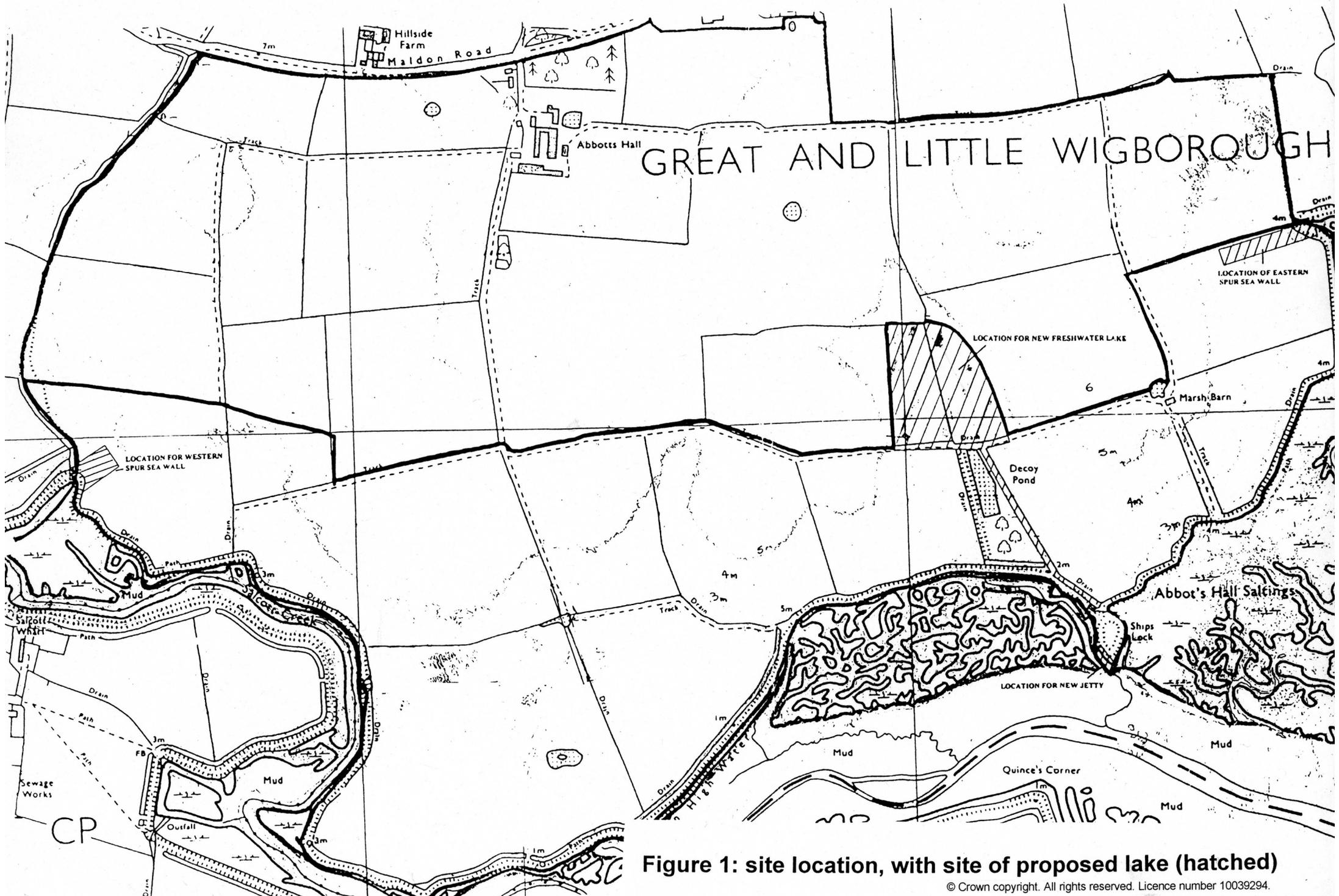


Figure 1: site location, with site of proposed lake (hatched)

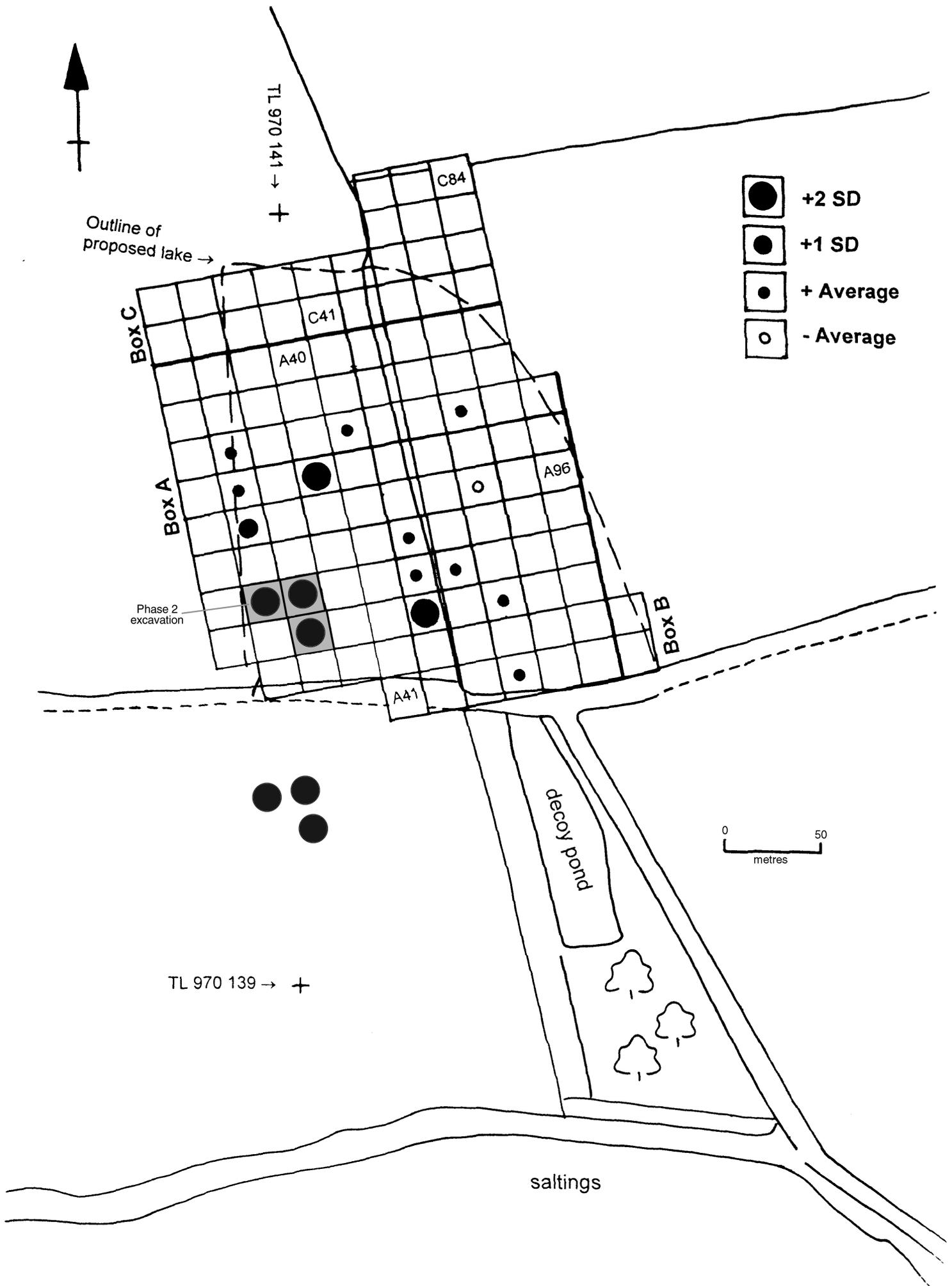


Fig 2 Distribution of burnt flints.

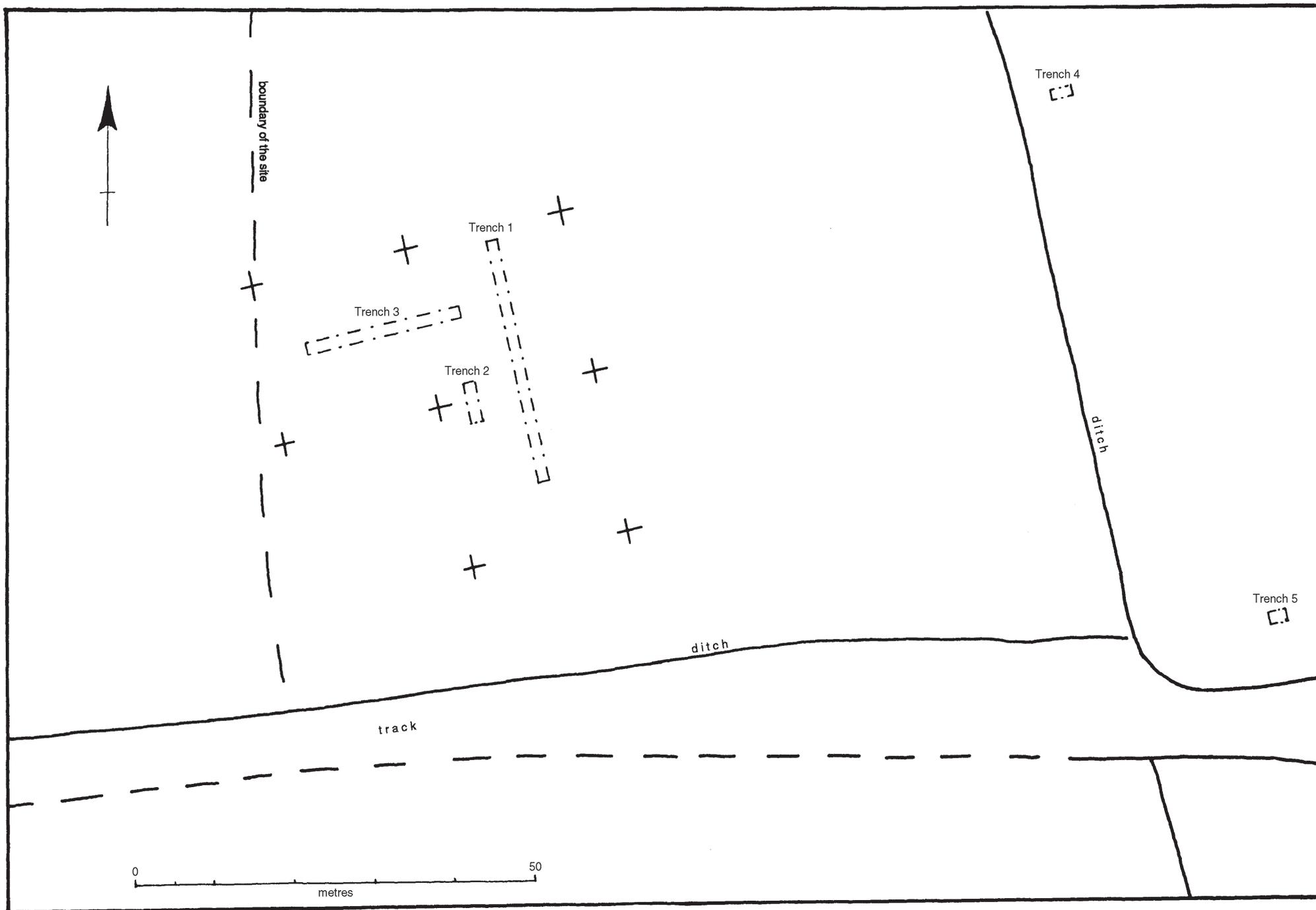


Fig 3 Trench locations.

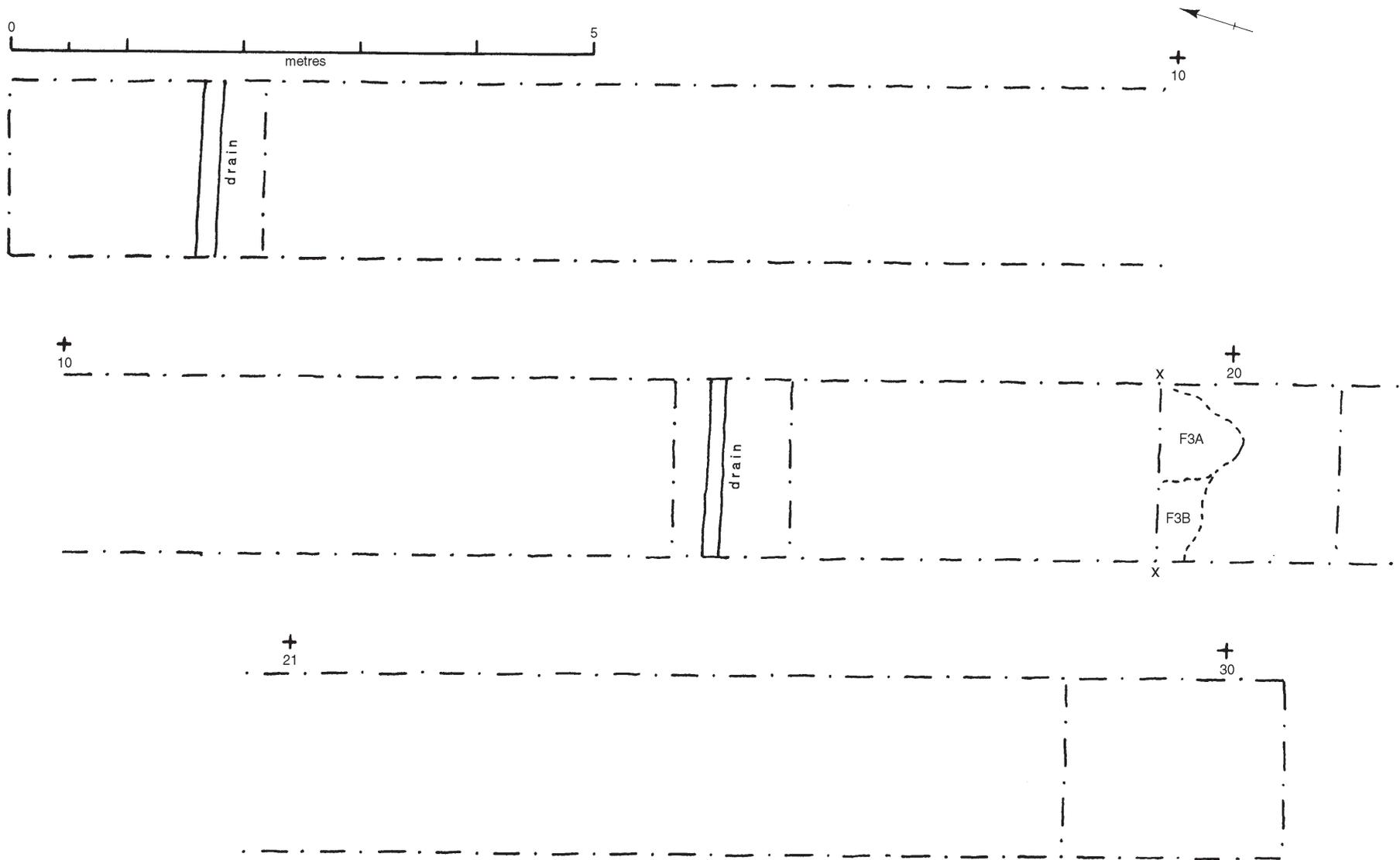


Fig 4 Trench 1 plan.

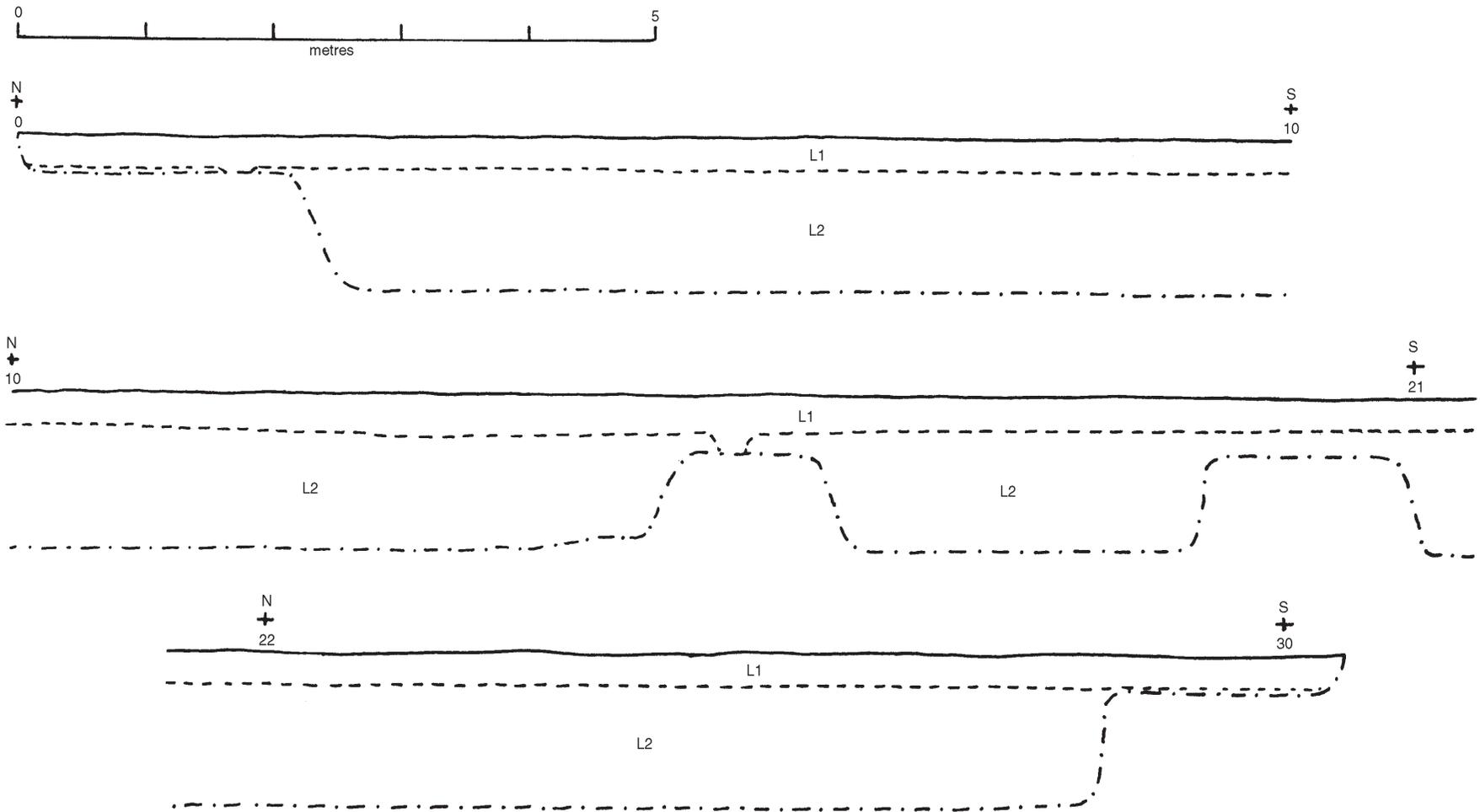


Fig 5 Trench 1 section.