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A Watching Brief at Colchester Institute car park.
for Colchester Institute

NGR: TL 9893 2535

Introduction

This report describes observations made during the installation of drains at a new car park adjoining Colchester Institute. The site, formerly a piggery, lies on the lower eastern slope of hilly fields within the boundary of the Sheepen Scheduled Ancient Monument.

The results are based on field records made between the 8th and 16th June 1999.

Results

Figure 1 shows the locations of the observed trenches. The major part of the drain installation (Trenches 2 and 3) took place within the scheduled area of the site, with an outfall pipe beyond leading north to the Chiswell stream (Trenches 1 and 4).

Car Park (Trenches 2 and 3)

Trench 2

Trench 2 was dug to house a large chamber. The bottom was freshly concreted and the sides were obscured by shoring, except for the northern side, adjoining Trench 3, which was cut by a deep modern pipe trench.

Trench 3 (Figs 2 and 3)

The central part of the drainage system was laid in a 45m long trench dug to an overall depth of 2.1 metres. The sides of the trench were stepped: the uppermost 1.2m was 3.5m wide and the lower part was 2m in width. The depths of individual layers in the upper part of the trench varied: recently deposited and relatively modern material (L20 and L21) typically occupied the uppermost 80cm, with the deeper foundations associated with the former piggery extending down to 85cm. Beneath these was a 30 to 45cm thick layer of earlier soil which appeared to be part redeposited and part long-term accumulation (L22). The uppermost levels of natural sand typically lay at overall depths of 1.1 to 1.3m but were also noted at 70 to 80 cms in places along the length of the trench.

The trench exposed early features and deposits which were recorded in the form of an annotated small-scale plan (Fig.2) together with a section (Fig.3) of the accessible lower parts of the trench. A brief description of the stratigraphy illustrated in the figures is given below:

Layer No.	Description
L20	Dark greyish brown sandy loam with common fragments of brick and concrete.
L21	Dark brown to dark greyish brown sandy loam with occasional small brick fragments.
L22	Mainly a mid-brown to dark greyish brown sandy loam with a low to medium content of small stones.
L30	Dark greyish brown sandy loam.
L31	Greyish brown sandy loam with no significant stone content

L32	Greyish brown sandy loam with no significant stone content.
L33	Dark brown sandy loam with high content of small stones.
L34	Mid-brown sandy loam.
L35	Mid- to dark brown sandy loam with a high gravel content.
L36	Pale brown sandy silt loam.
L37	Mid-brown loamy sand.
L38	Greyish brown sandy loam with a high content of small stones.
L39	Mid-brown loamy sand.
L40	Dark brown sandy loam.
L41	Grey clay.
L42	Mixed light to mid-brown loamy sand.
L43	Very dark grey sandy loam with a very high content of oyster shell.
L44	Very dark grey sandy loam with a very high content of oyster shell.
L45	Sand with a high content of small stones.
L46	Sand with greyish brown mottles.
L47	Dark brown sandy loam.
L48	Mixed, mainly dark greyish brown sandy loam merging to a loamy sand with dark mottles.
L49	Stoney sand.
L50	Mid brown loamy sand with a high content of small stones.
L51	Dark brown sandy loam with a high content of small stones.
L52	Dark brown sandy loam with a high content of small stones.
L53	Mixed, mainly mid-to dark brown loamy sand with rare charcoal flecks.
L60	Gravelly sand
L61	Root-flecked sand.
L62	Sand.
L63	Sand
L64	Gravelly sand.
L70	Dark brown loamy sand.
L71	Dark brown loamy sand with occasional small stones.
L72	Mid-brown sandy loam with medium content of small stones.
L73	Sand with lenses of mid brown loamy sand.

North of the car park (Trenches 1 and 4)

From the south-eastern end of the car park a 45cm wide trench was dug to house an outfall pipe leading down to the Chiswell stream. This part of the Chiswell is a popular spot with local treasure hunters. A sherd of discarded Roman grey ware (find no.14) and several abraded fragments of Roman brick and roof tile were noted in the bottom of the stream. The ground, which here lies beyond the Scheduled area, falls by approximately 2.8m from the car park to the edge of the stream. In the resulting section (Fig.4), the topsoil (L1) contained 19th - 20th century bottle fragments as well as occasional small pieces of residual Roman roof tile. Underlying this at the north-western end of the trench was an earlier thick deposit of dark brown fine sandy loam (L2), which extended to the natural sand (L3). The only dateable finds recovered from L2 were late Iron Age - Roman coarse ware pottery sherds and a post-medieval sawn cattle femur.

Finds

The late Iron Age and Roman pottery from the Colchester Institute car park
by Stephen Benfield

The very small quantity of late Iron age and Roman pottery from the site, consisting of 15 sherds weighing just under 0.5 kg (see Table), is directly comparable to material in the large pottery assemblages from previous excavations at Sheepen which span the late Iron age - early Roman periods from circa 5 AD - 60 AD (Hawkes & Hull 1947 & Niblett 1985). Though none of the sherds are necessarily of late Iron age date some probably are, for example the thick, mostly hand made, jar rim

(find number 4), and possibly the Terra Rubra beaker (find number 3), also some at least of the storage jar sherds may date from the pre-conquest period. Some sherds present are certainly of Roman (post-conquest) date, most obviously that from the bowl of form CAM 218 B/C (find number 6) which dates from the Claudio-Neronian period - early 2nd century (CAR 10 p.477). Though the large storage jar form CAM 273 (find number 14) has previously been suggested as probably post-dating 60 AD (Hull 1958 p.285) more recent examples have come from earlier dated contexts (CAR 10 p.480). In summary there is nothing in the small assemblage here which is inconsistent with a date range within the known main period of occupation at Sheepen of circa 5 - 60 AD.

Table: pottery listed by layer number
(pottery fabric codes as per CAR 10: BA samian, UR Terra Nigra type wares, DJ coarse oxidised wares, GX other coarse mostly local grey wares, HZ heavily tempered grey wares)

layer no.	find no.	fabric group	weight grms.	comments	date range
L2	16	DJ	60	2 body sherds, probably part of a flagon	?late Iron age - Roman
L2	16	GX	20	rim of jar, upright with bead, profile & fabric suggest an early Roman date	Roman 1st - earlier 2nd century
L32	6	GX	25	rim and shoulder of bowl, CAM form 218 B/C.	Claudio-Neronian - early 2nd.
L32	7	DJ	5	body sherd, probably from a flagon.	late Iron age - Roman
L41	4	GX	40	rim of jar, CAM form 263 or 264, comb decorated on body below bead under rim, thick sherd probably mostly hand made.	late Iron age - ?early Roman
L48	9	HZ	45	partial rim sherd and neck sherd in heavily tempered fabric from a large storage jar.	late Iron age - Roman
L52	12	GX	20	sherd in coarse sandy fabric, oxidised red but probably should be categorised as fabric GX, probably part of a lid, burnt on broken edges.	probably Roman
L53	2	BA (SG)	20	Samian dish, Dragendorf form 18, probably a south Gaulish product (SG), imported, possible traces of burning on one edge.	1st century AD
L53	8	HZ	2	small body sherd in heavily tempered fabric, possibly from a small storage jar.	late Iron age - Roman
L53 (?)	3	UR (TR)	15	probably Terra Rubra (TR), imported, body sherd from a girth, globular or butt beaker (possibly CAM form 112), lattice decorated and burnished.	late Iron age - Claudian
L70	13	HZ	55	body sherd from a large storage jar with comb decoration.	late Iron age - Roman
L72	11	UR	20	part of base with small foot-ring from a plate or dish in coarse fabric imitating a Terra Nigra form.	Late Iron age - early Roman (prob. Claudio-Neronian) period
unstrat.	14	HZ	130	rim sherd from a large storage jar, CAM form 273.	Roman (Claudian - 2nd-3rd century)

Animal Bone by A. Wade

The watching brief recovered three pieces of animal bone from two contexts, one a Late Iron Age or Romano-British layer (L48) and the other undated (L2). The bone was in fair to poor condition with the material from the dated context appearing slightly more eroded than that from the undated layer. This other layer contained a very large immature cattle femur which had been sawn cleanly through its shaft. Both the size of this bone and the precision of the saw cut suggest the origin of this bone to be post-medieval.

Finds by Layer

- L2 find no. 15 The sawn off proximal end of an immature right cattle femur.
L48 find no. 5 A cattle horn core and an unidentified fragment of large mammal bone, perhaps a piece of a scapula.

Discussion

Due to the circumstances in which the watching brief was carried out, the stratigraphy in the machine-cut main trench (Trench 3) was subject only to superficial manual examination and a minimal level of finds recovery. Since no systematic investigation took place, detailed interpretation is impossible. It is, however, clear that early features were exposed. Distinct linear features were represented by the outlines of L36, L39, L45, the clay-filled L41 and the edge between L53 the natural sand L64. Some appear to be ditches: part of L39 was discernible in the lower section of the trench, showing a ditch-like profile, although the clay (L41) apparent as a parallel feature situated three metres to the north-west would be unusual for ditch fill and may have some structural significance. Among the larger areas recorded as single layers, L35, L48 and L53 are almost certainly more complex than shown in plan and appear to incorporate pits within their outlines.

From the available dating evidence this is late Iron Age - early Roman activity contemporary with the occupation elsewhere within the monument at Sheepen.

Archive

The fieldwork archive, consisting of one indexed binder containing site and processing records, one box of finds and twenty colour transparencies will be deposited with Colchester Museum for permanent storage under cover of museum accession code number 1999-84.

Abbreviations

CAR 10 Robin Symonds & Sue Wade, Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971 - 86

References

Hawkes C F C, & Hull M R, 1947 Camulodunum, first report on the excavations at Colchester 1930 - 39, RRCSAL 14.

Hull MR, 1958 Roman Colchester, RRCSAL 20

Niblett R, 1985 Sheepen, an early Roman industrial site at Camulodunum, CBA Res Rep, 57.

Acknowledgements

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C.E.Crossan
Colchester Archaeological Trust

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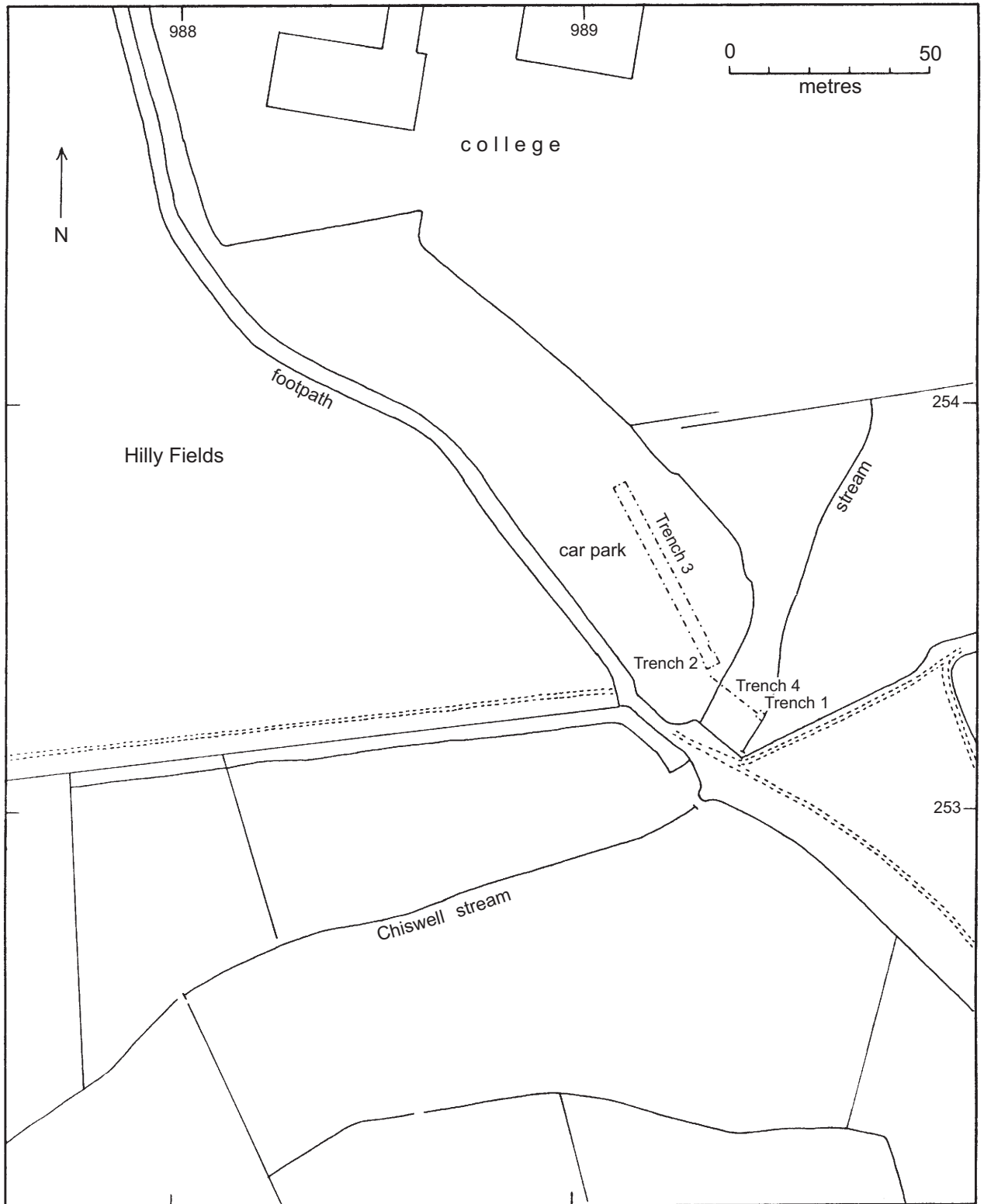
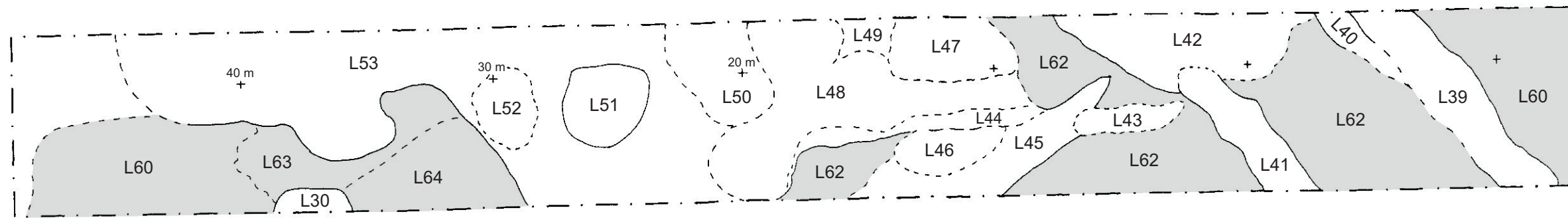
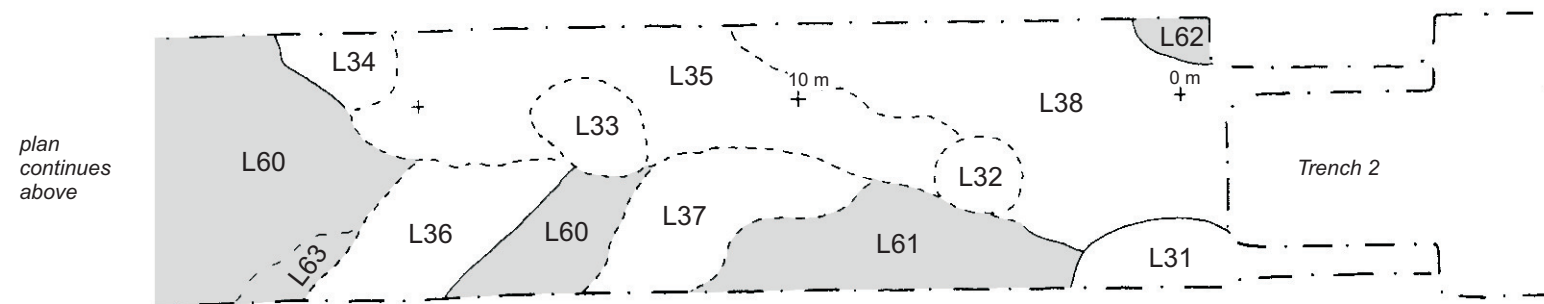


Fig 1 Location plan.



Trench 3 (north)



Trench 3 (south)



Fig 2 Trench 3: plan.

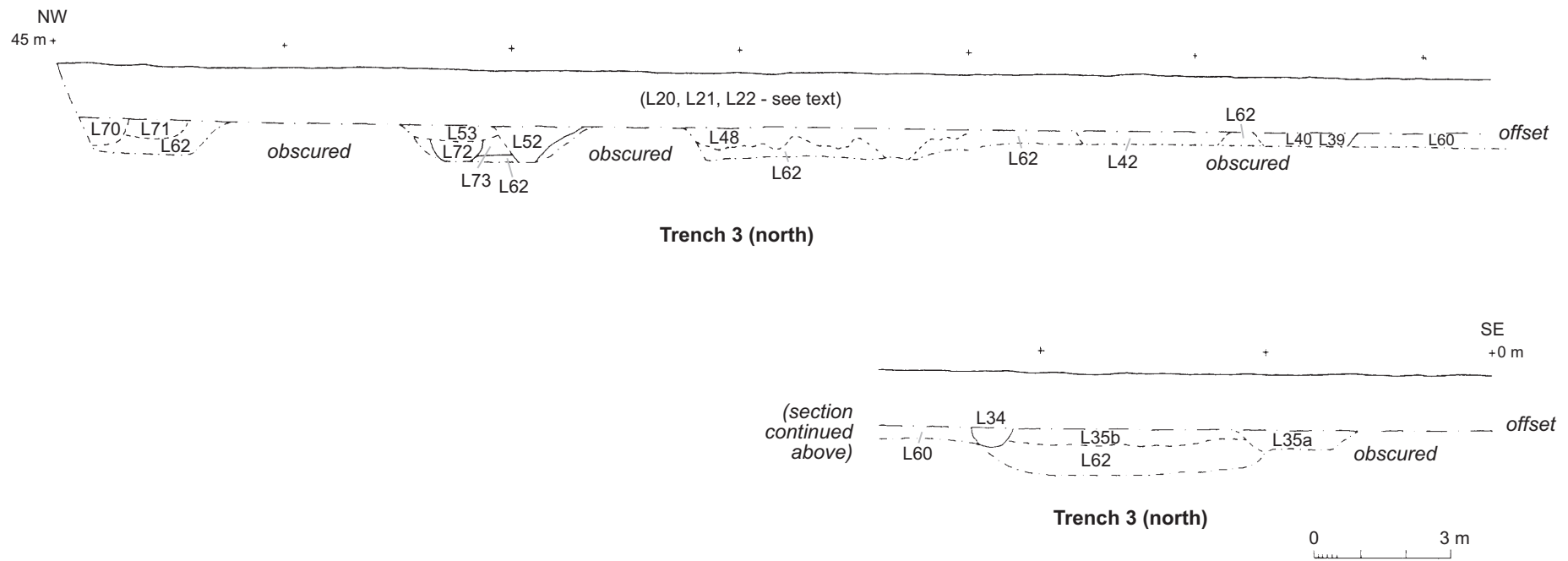


Fig 3 Trench 3: section.

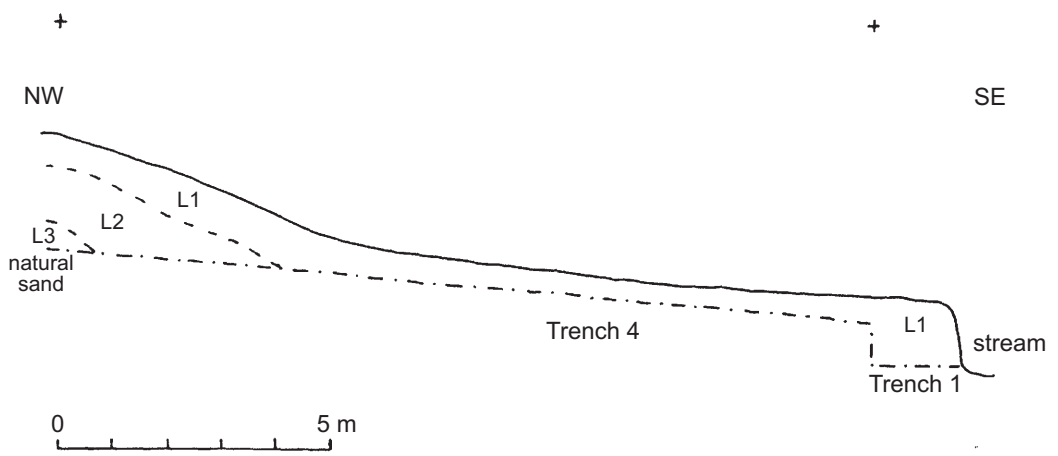


Fig 4 Trench 1 and Trench 4: section.