

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT TWO LOCATIONS ON
THE GENTLEMAN'S WALK
HAFOD, CEREDIGION
DECEMBER 2000



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By

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY	2
INTRODUCTION	2
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	3
DESCRIPTION OF THE GENTLEMAN'S WALK	3
EXCAVATION RESULTS	4
<i>Trench 1</i>	
<i>Trench 2</i>	
DISCUSSION	7
REFERENCES	8
APPENDIX 1.	9
SPECIFICATION	
HAFOD: GENTLEMAN'S WALK	
SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL	
INVESTIGATION	

Figure 1. Location of Trench 1.

Figure 2. Location of Trench 2.

Figure 3. Trench 1.

Figure 4. Trench 2

Photograph 1. Trench 1.

Photograph 2. Trench 2.

Cover Photograph: Trench 2 during excavation.

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SUMMARY

Small-scale excavations at two locations on the Gentleman's Walk were undertaken in December 2000. Constructional techniques used on the walk were demonstrated to be very simple, and essentially comprised the digging of a c. 1.00m - 1.10m wide terrace or shelf into hillsides and steep slopes to provide a route for the walk. Only materials immediately at hand were used in the walk's construction. A hard surface to the walk was found in both trenches; it was considered that this was the result of trampling by walkers rather than a deliberately laid layer. Boulders placed on the outer lip of the terrace or shelf in Trench 2 defined the edge of the walk.

INTRODUCTION

The Hafod Estate lies in the Ystwyth valley, Ceredigion, between the villages of Pontrhydygroes and Cwmystwyth, approximately 15 km east-southeast of Aberystwyth (National Grid Reference SN 7573). Hafod is known for its naturalistic picturesque landscape developed by Thomas Johnes in the late 18th-century and early 19th-century. Johnes established several walks at Hafod linking natural landscape elements, such as waterfalls, with built structures including caverns and summer houses, and from which views across the estate and beyond could be obtained. One of these walks, the Gentleman's Walk lies on the south side of the Ystwyth and is the subject of this study.

A programme of works has recently been initiated on the Gentleman's Walk by the Forest Enterprise/Hafod Trust Partnership as part of the wider restoration project of the Hafod Estate. In order to inform the restoration a topographic survey of most of the Gentleman's Walk circuit and an archaeological excavation of two trenches across the line of the walk was needed. Forest Enterprise/Hafod Trust requested Cambria Archaeology to undertake both these elements. Costed specifications were submitted by Cambria Archaeology on 8 November 2000. These were accepted by Forest Enterprise/Hafod Trust and a contract issued on 1 December 2000. The two elements ran concurrently. Fieldwork for the survey started in December 2000 and continued intermittently through to spring 2001. Excavation of the two trenches was undertaken in the week prior to Christmas 2000. Trench 1 was partly re-excavated in June 2001 in order to obtain photographs.

The archaeological excavation had two main objectives:

as part of a continuing research programme into the character, construction techniques and form of Thomas Johnes's walks

to inform the restoration process

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Only a very brief summary of the historical background is given here in order to provide the reader not familiar with Hafod with an historical context. William Gilpin provides the first reference to the Gentleman's Walk in 1789 (1782, 78). He describes it as a circuit of about six miles. Published a few years later, George Cumberland's *An Attempt to Describe Hafod* of 1796 is undoubtedly the most useful text for the Gentleman's Walk. Cumberland called the Gentleman's Walk the 2nd Walk. Cumberland's 1st Walk (the Lady's Walk of Gilpin) lies on the north side of the Ystwyth. It is uncertain whether first and second refer to the order in which the walks were constructed by Thomas Johnes or to the order in which Cumberland choose to describe them. What is clear is that the Gentleman's Walk was well established when Gilpin wrote in 1789 and when Cumberland visited Hafod in 1794 and 1795. Later accounts of several other authors (for example: Lipscomb 1802, Plumtre 1799, Malkin 1804, Rees 1815) indicate that the Gentleman's Walk continued in use throughout Thomas Johnes's lifetime. Following Johnes's death in 1816, the subsequent history of the walk is not clear. In c. 1837, Thomas Roscoe (p21) described the walks at Hafod as having become 'quagmires'. However, long sections of the Gentleman's Walk (and other walks) were still in use when the Ordnance Survey carried out their first large scale mapping of mid-Wales in the 1880s (Ordnance Survey 1888).

Examination of the walk on the ground indicates that several changes of course were made during their lifetime. The overall style and method of construction of these changes suggested that they were made by Thomas Johnes, and not by later owners of Hafod. Following the Forestry Commission's purchase of the Hafod estate in the 1950s, large tracts of land through which the Gentleman's Walk runs were planted with coniferous trees. For much of its course the line of the walk was obscured by these plantations. In the 1990s, parts of the course of the walk were rediscovered by several fieldworkers operating independently or in unison.

DESCRIPTION OF THE GENTLEMAN'S WALK

A full account of the Gentleman's Walk is best achieved through a combination of maps, written descriptions and photographs. This is beyond the scope of this study, and therefore only a short report describing the type of physical remains encountered is provided here to assist the reader unfamiliar with Hafod.

For most of its course the Gentleman's Walk contours along steep hill-sides and valley-sides. On the surface the construction methods used seem fairly constant throughout the length of the walk, although there are several variations designed to take account of local topography, to provide a good viewing position or to enhance the anticipation of the walker. The most commonly used construction method comprises a shelf or terrace cut into the hill-side the spoil from which was cast down-slope to increase the width of the terrace. The width of the resulting walk-terrace varies from c. 1m to over 2m. On very steep slopes and/or where rock outcrops occur, the down-slope side of the terrace was on occasions revetted with a dry-stone wall. Where the walk traverses rock-faces a shelf or ledge was cut out of the rock. In some instances the shelf was carved out of a cliff so that the rock overhangs the walk-terrace.

No archaeological investigation was undertaken where the walk is cut into a cliff face as the walk's construction technique is fairly clear from surface observation. It was considered that unnecessary damage would have been inflicted by excavation on sections of the walk revetted by dry-stone walls and so these locations were avoided. The two areas chosen for excavation both conformed to the simple type of walk construction - that representative of most of the circuit of the Gentleman's Walk.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

Trench 1

Trench 1 was excavated across the line of the Gentleman's Walk on the western side of Pant Melyn (National Grid Reference SN 772730). There are two courses to the Gentleman's Walk at this location (Fig. 1). The course described by Cumberland and shown on the map which accompanies his text runs up and over the summit of Pant Melyn, although at its highest point the line of the path has been destroyed by a coniferous plantation. The second line traverses the eastern, northern and western sides of Pant Melyn. The paths meet to the southwest of Pant Melyn. From Cumberland's description and accompanying map it would seem that the first course was walked by him in 1794-95, and it is not therefore unreasonable to assume that this is the earlier, but this cannot be demonstrated conclusively. Typically the walks on Pant Melyn are represented by terraces or shelves about 1m wide cut into the hillside. None of the walks on Pant Melyn are in use, but a modern worn path now runs around the hill several metres higher up the slope than the second line of the Gentleman's Walk. Pant Melyn is under a larch plantation, but sufficient older deciduous trees and tree stumps survive to indicate that the pre-coniferous plantation vegetation comprised open beech woods on the hill crest and upper slopes with open mixed-oak woodland on the lower slopes. A dense mat of sphagnum moss underlies the larch plantation.

Prior to excavation the walk was identified by a terrace at approximately 220m O.D. Although it is readily recognisable, the path is covered in a dense mat of sphagnum moss which obscures detail. The course of the path in this area slopes gently down from north to south.

The location selected for the excavation lies on the second line of the Gentleman's Walk, and is representative of the walks at Pant Melyn. The exact position of the trench was determined by the many larch trees and larch stumps on Pant Melyn.

A single trench, 5.5m long across the path and wide along the path was excavated (Fig. 3, Photo 1). On the southern side of the trench a 0.6m wide section was excavated down to c. 0.4m below the ground surface in order to examine details of the walk's construction. This narrow trench was back-filled on completion of the excavation; the remainder of the excavation was left open to permit examination as part of the restoration process.

Following the removal of sphagnum moss a layer of leaf mould and topsoil lay across the full width and length of the trench (1). On excavation this proved to be about 0.1m to 0.12m thick and consisted of very dark brown to black silty clay loam with a very high humic content. On removal of this layer, subsoil and the walk's surface was revealed. Subsoil (3) comprised a loose and friable yellowish-brown silty clay loam with frequent small angular stones. At a depth of c. 0.20m - 0.25m the subsoil merged into undisturbed fluvio-glacial deposit (4) comprising a slightly more compact, but nevertheless friable, orangy-brown silty clay loam containing approximately 30% - 40% small- and medium-sized angular stones. Layer 3 had been cut into on the up-slope side to form a terrace for the walk. The profile of the terrace compared with the projected pre-walk ground profile suggests that material from the cut was deposited on the outer lip of the walk, although there was no detectable difference between the material on the lip of the path and the subsoil (3). The surface of the path was marked by a thin, 10mm - 20mm, 1.10m wide, compacted layer (2) of a gleyed, light greyish-brown silty clay loam containing frequent small stones. This lay directly on the subsoil (3). It was not possible to demonstrate whether this layer was directly derived from the subsoil and had been formed by the passage of feet compacting the loose silty clay loam, or whether it had been deliberately laid down. The gleying of this deposit may have been the result of standing water and a muddy layer forming over this compact layer during use.

No artefacts were discovered during the excavation of the trench and no deposits suitable for sampling for environmental analysis were identified.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was excavated across a straight, fairly level section of the Gentleman's Walk between Pant Melyn and Nant Bwlch Gwallter to the east (Fig. 2). This section is occasionally used by walkers. The trench was located at approximately 203m O.D. (National Grid Reference SN 770729). On the straight section between Pant Melyn and Trench 2 the walk is relatively wide - the best preserved sections are between 2m and 2.5m wide - suggesting that it could have been used as a track as well as a walk. To the west of Trench 2 the walk is narrower, approximately between 1m and 1.3m wide. The overall topography on this section of the walk is a steep, north-facing valley side. The walk runs along a terrace cut into the slope. A track or path runs down the steep valley side to the northeast, branching from the Gentleman's Walk at approximately the location of Trench 2.

The immediate area of Trench 2 has not been planted with coniferous trees, although the general environs have been. The vegetation type close to Trench 2 is open beech woodland with other occasional tree species. A large beech tree that had stood on the outer, northern, lip of the walk fell in the late 1980s causing extensive damage to the walk. The root-plate ripped out a hole across the walk c. 6m diameter and 4m deep. This hole has revealed two ready-made sections across the path, with a particularly good exposure on the western side. As walkers now have to scramble up the steep slope above the walk to avoid the root-plate hole, the walk immediately at the edges of the hole are no longer used. As it was not intended to back-fill the excavation but leave it open for inspection as

part of the restoration programme, the location of a trench immediately on the western side of the root-plate hole with its ready-made section and little danger of post-excavation disturbance by walkers was an ideal position.

The hill-slope in this location is very steep, and therefore a relatively short trench across the path of 3.6m was sufficient to reveal all the constructional elements of the walk. The trench width along the path was *c.* 3m (Fig. 4, Photo 1 and report cover photograph). Along this straight section of the walk on the very steep slope small outcrops of bedrock are apparent at many locations, including at the site of the excavation trench. Removal of leaf mould and the vegetation mat revealed a thin topsoil deposit, 0.1m thick on average (1). On the steepest part of the slope, below the walk, the topsoil was extremely thin, as little as 10mm in places. Topsoil consisted of a dark brown to black, humic, silty clay loam with occasional small stones. Removal of the topsoil revealed constructional elements of the walk. Geological deposits comprised a friable, pale grey-brown silty clay loam with *c.* 40% small- to large-sized angular stones and occasional angular boulders up to 0.4m long (3). Bedrock emerged at the surface down-slope of the walk at the western end of the trench. As with the walk in Trench 1, a walk shelf had been constructed simply by cutting into the steep slope. Rock outcrops and other irregularities precludes the possibility of projecting the original slope profile onto the excavated section (Fig. 4), but it would appear from an examination of the deposits that the sharp outer lip of the walk did not consist of soil deposited from the cutting of the walk shelf into the slope, but was a natural break of slope, including a rock outcrop. However, this outer lip of the walk had been enhanced by the positioning of boulders along its length. Some of these boulders have slipped down the slope. They are too few to ever have formed an outer revetment to the walk shelf, and even calling them a kerb suggests an element of construction that they probably never possessed. It is most likely that they were derived from the geological deposits during cutting of the walk shelf and were placed on outer lip of the terrace to provide definition to the walk. A *c.* 1m wide, 20mm thick, band of compact, slightly gleyed, mid grey-brown clay loam with *c.* 60% small- to medium-sized angular stones (2) defined the surface of the walk. This material, though little different from the underlying geology, from which it was undoubtedly derived, had the appearance of a laid surface, although it is entirely possible that its creation was the result of several decades of trampling, causing a hard crust to form on the exposed geological deposits. As with the surface in Trench 1, the gleying is probably the result of water lying on the compacted surface. It is clear from the excavation plan that the walk curved around the site of the fallen tree. It was not possible to determine whether this was part of the original layout of the walk, or whether it developed through the passage of feet as the tree grew on the outer lip of the walk.

No artefacts were discovered during the excavation of the trench and no deposits suitable for sampling for environmental analysis were identified.

DISCUSSION

Previous archaeological work on the walks at Hafod (Murphy 1998, Phillips 1994) demonstrated that simple constructional techniques were employed and that locally obtained materials were used. On the Lady's Walk (Murphy 1998) locations for excavation were targeted where there appeared on the surface to be evidence of external revetments. This was confirmed by excavation. Very few locations on the Gentleman's Walk appear to have an external revetment, and therefore the two trenches selected for excavation were positioned on what seemed on surface evidence to be representative of the majority of the walk. It is highly likely that where the Gentleman's Walk is revetted with a dry-stone wall on its down-slope side the constructional methods used will be identical to those employed on the Lady's Walk and examined in the 1998 excavations. On the Gentleman's Walk, in both Trenches 1 and 2, a very simple constructional technique was uncovered. A terrace or shelf was cut into a hill-slope and the resulting spoil probably deposited on the outer lip of the walk. As the geology through which the terrace was cut - a loose, fairly well-drained silty clay loam with small stones - compacted into a fairly hard crust, there was no need to import material to surface the walk. Any large stones uncovered during the cutting of the shelf were placed on the outer lip of the walk. There was no evidence for the re-cutting of the shelf or for maintenance, but given the simple constructional techniques used it is unlikely that this would be archaeological detectable. Only materials immediately at hand were used in the walk's construction.

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**APPENDIX 1. SPECIFICATION
HAFOD: GENTLEMAN'S WALK
SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION**

Background

Forest Enterprise/Hafod Trust intend to restore sections of the Gentleman's Walk at Hafod. Part of this programme includes a small archaeological excavation. The main purposes of the excavation are twofold:

as part of a continuing research investigation into the character, construction techniques and form of Thomas Johnes's walks

to inform the restoration process

This specification has been prepared in accordance with *Hafod - Archaeological Guidelines*.

Archaeological investigation

Two trenches will be excavated. Each will be approximately 2m wide and positioned across the line of the walk. The length of the trenches will depend on local topography, but it is expected that each will be 6m to 8m long. The position of the trenches has yet to be established, and their final location will be determined in the field, however it is expected that one will be positioned at Pant Melyn on a section of the walk that is now not frequently used, and the other close to the tunnel above Nant Bwlch Gwallter where the walk lies on a built shelf. At the first location it is hoped to obtain information of the original walk's surface, and at the second location it is anticipated that structural remains relating to the walk's construction will survive.

In each trench superficial deposits will be removed down to the latest path surface. A deeper section, 0.5m or 1.0m wide, will then be excavated to examine the walk's structure. Following excavation, the deeper excavation will be back-filled, but the walk's surface will be left open to enable examination by contractors employed on the restoration programme.

Trenches will be located on the Pant Melyn, Nant Bwlch Gwallter and Cae Gwartheg topographic survey. Plans will be made at 1:20 scale. Sections will be drawn at 1:10 scale. Each archaeological entity will be recorded using Cambria Archaeology's single context recording system. Digital photography will be used. All heights will be related to OS data. Artefacts will be retained and provision made for their analysis. Any deposits encountered that may contain useful palaeoenvironmental evidence will be sampled. Specialist advice will be sought prior to any programme of sampling. Analysis will be undertaken by Astrid Caseldine, Department of Archaeology, University of Wales Lampeter.

Reporting

Six copies of the report detailing all the findings of the investigations will be provided. Copies of the report will be lodged with the National Monuments Record and the regional SMR. An archive of the investigation will be prepared. This will be lodged with the National Monuments Record.

K Murphy. Cambria Archaeology. 8 November 2000
Revised 28 November 2000

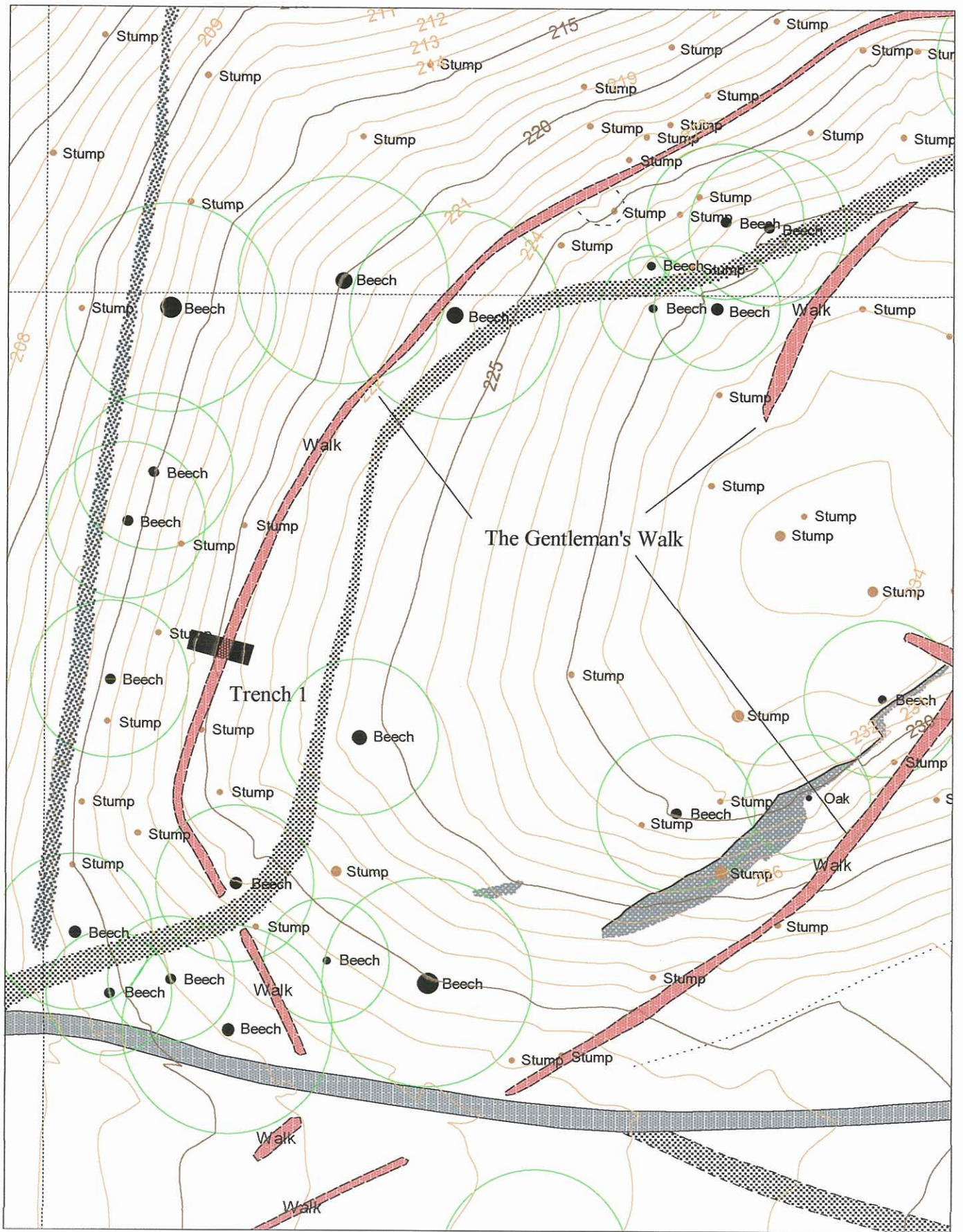


Figure 1. Location of Trench 1. Scale 1:500. Contours at 1m intervals. North to top of map.

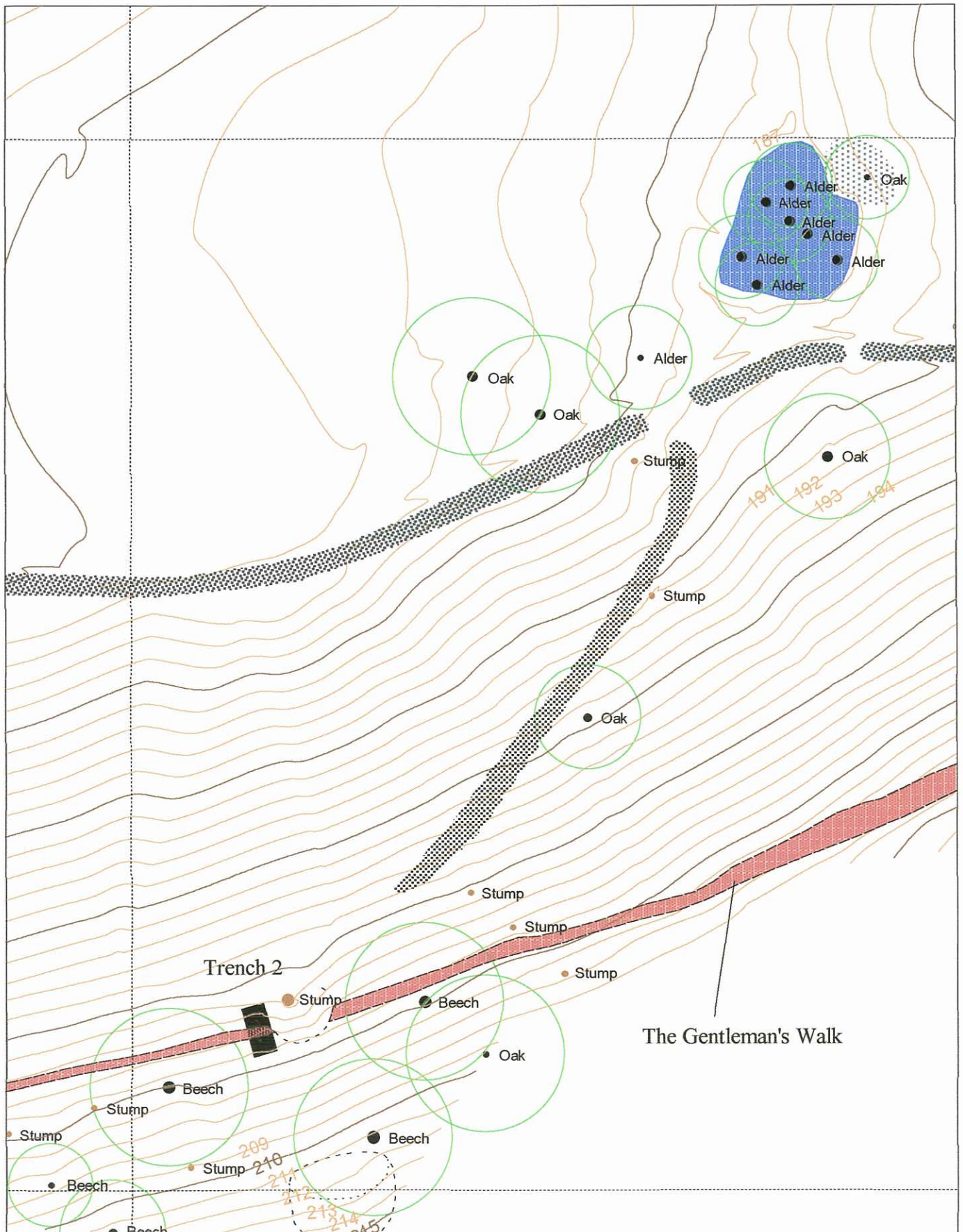


Figure 2. Location of Trench 2. Scale 1:500. Contours at 1m intervals. North to top of map.

Trench 1

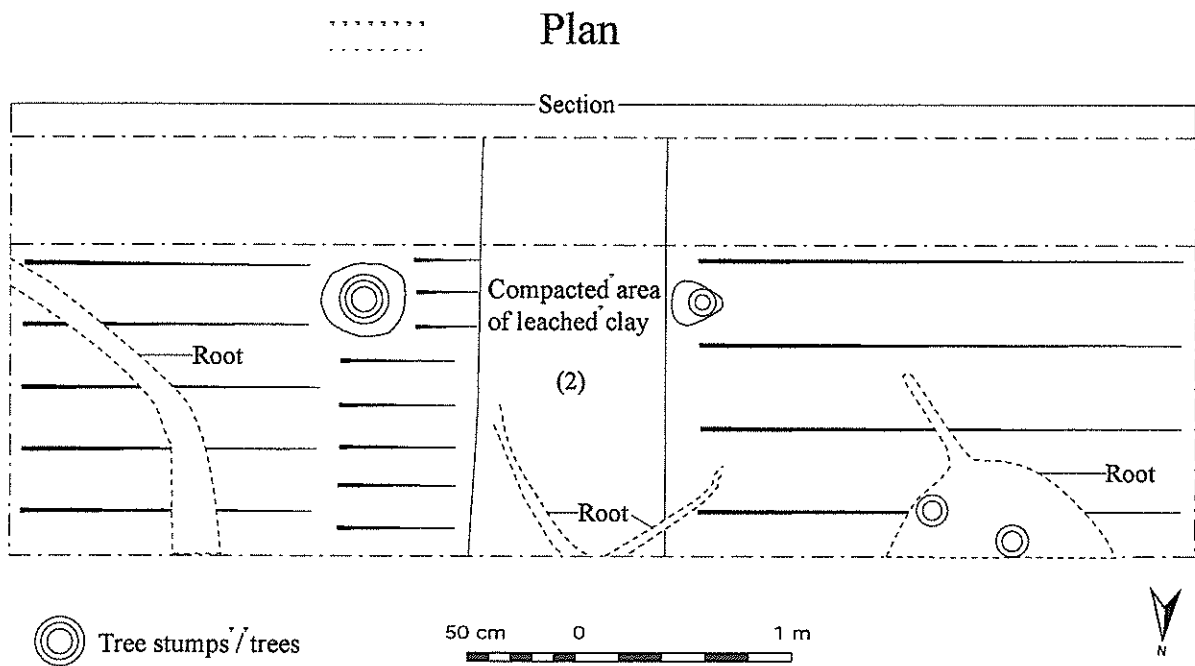
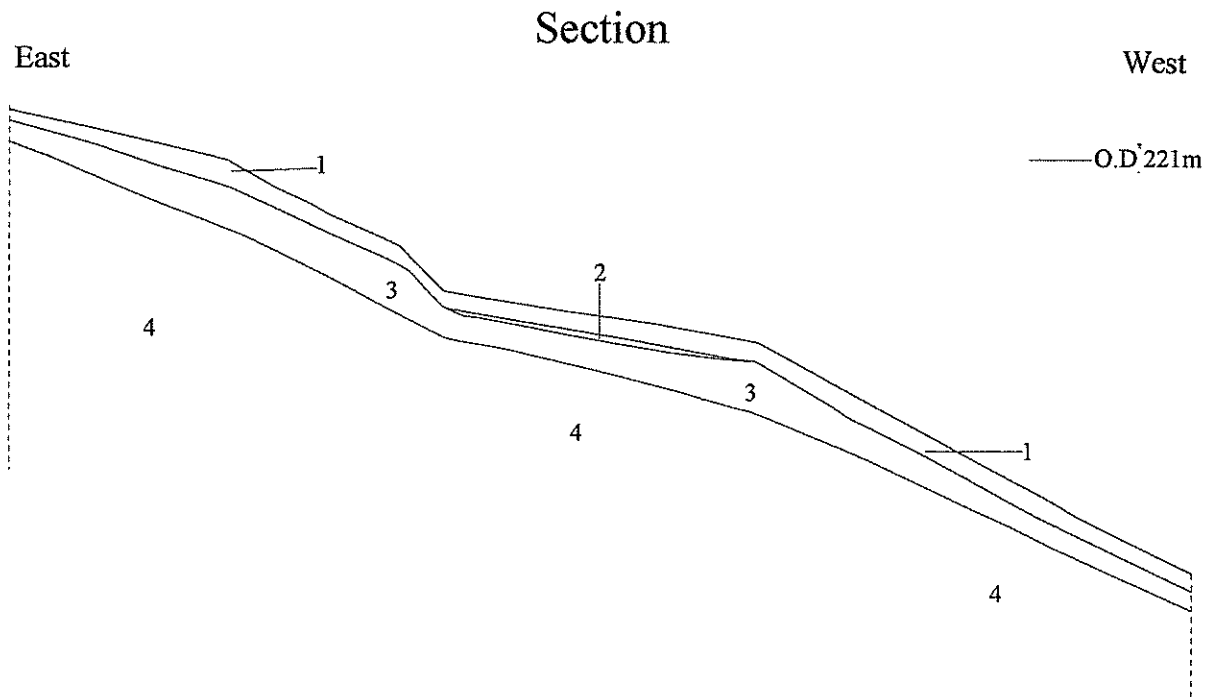


Fig. 3

Trench 2

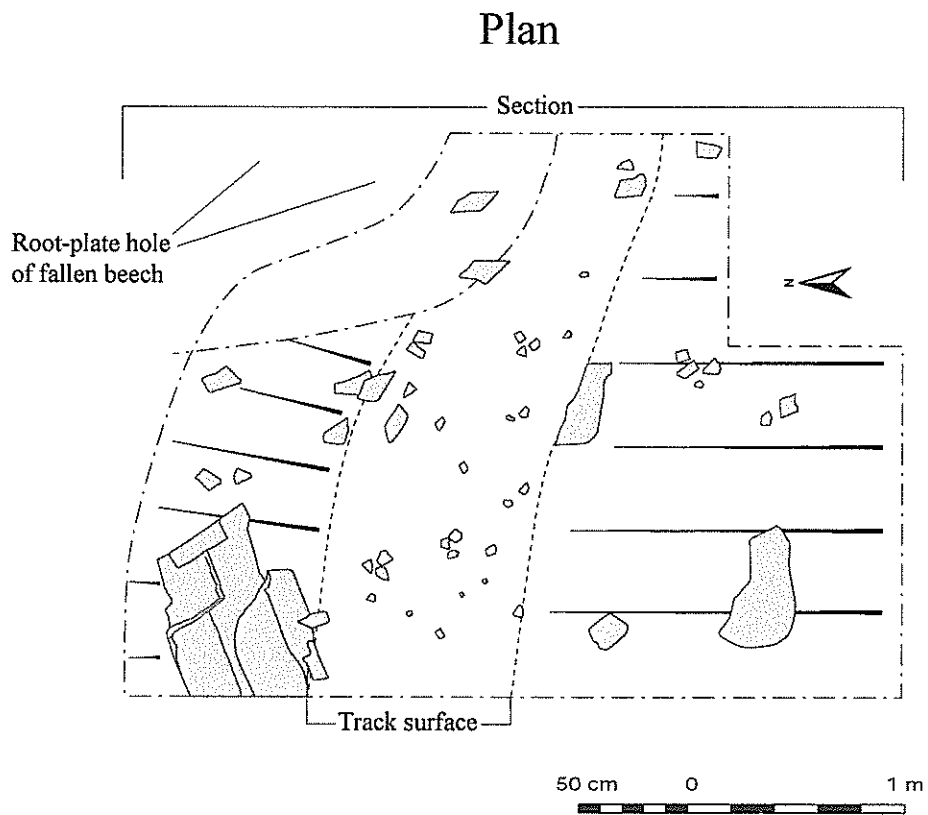
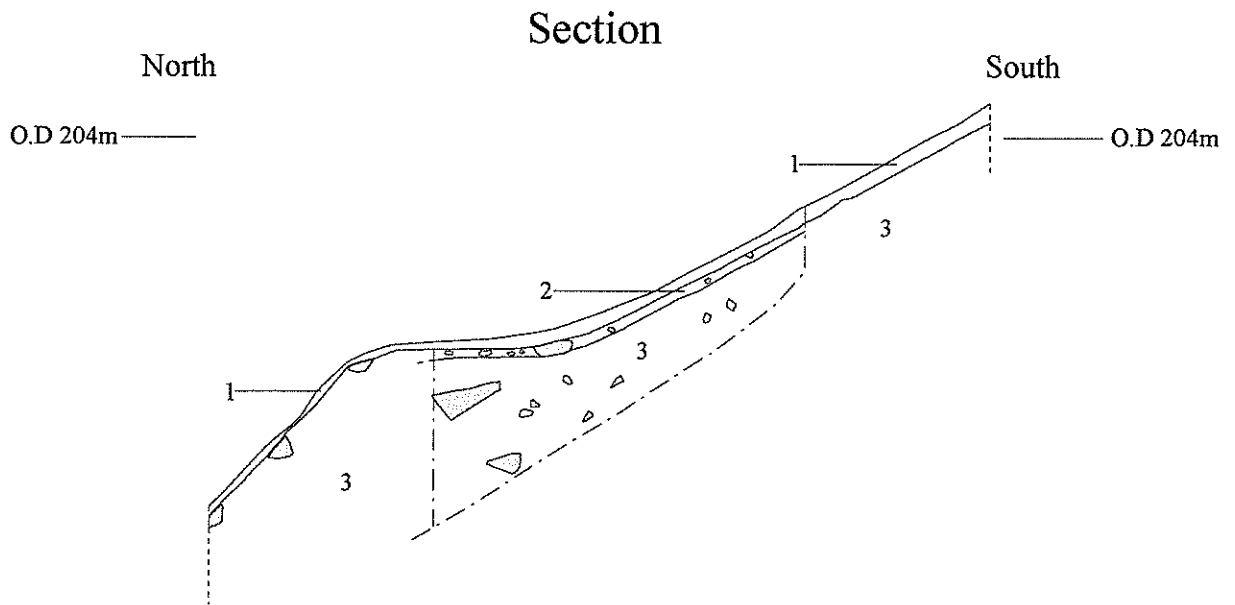


Fig. 4



Photograph 1. Trench 1 viewed from the south showing the path shelf cut into the steep hill-side.



Photograph 2. Trench 2 viewed from the northwest showing the path shelf cut into the steep hill-side and the stones/bedrock on the outer lip of the walk.

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Signature  Date 21 June 2001

This report has been checked and approved by G Hughes on behalf of Cambria Archaeology,
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Position Director

Signature  Date 21/6/01

As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any comments you may have
on the content or presentation of this report