



An Exploratory Excavation at Whitman's Hill Coppice, Cradley



**Report prepared by
Christopher Atkinson, Community Archaeologist**

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Herefordshire Archaeology is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, maintains the county Sites and Monument Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects. The County Archaeologist is Dr. Keith Ray.

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Summary

This report was commissioned by the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) as part of their investigations into Malvern Hills historic resource.

The report discusses the results of a trial excavation into a ridge top boundary with the potential to signify early medieval or Anglo Saxon land use. The feature was identified as a result of an earlier woodland survey of Whitman's Hill Coppice, Cradley, Herefordshire. Each of the archaeological deposits encountered during the course of the excavation are described, illustrated and an interpretation provided.

This report is accompanied by an EXCEL archaeological context database (Appendix 1) produced to record the information obtained through the excavation of the ridge top boundary.

The overall aim of the project was to enhance knowledge and raise public awareness of and interest in Whitman's Hill Coppice. The information would be made accessible for use by the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust Volunteers (Earth Heritage Champions) when guiding people around the woodland.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. National Grid References are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50 and 0.02m at 1:20m

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1. Introduction

Whitman's Hill Coppice is a semi-natural ancient woodland located to the southwest of the village of Storridge in the parish of Cradley, Herefordshire. Whitman's Hill quarry, a large 20th century quarry that ceased operations in 1988 is located within the centre of the woodland.

In 1999 the quarry was designated as a Regionally Important Geological Site for its educational value, interesting rock formations and the abundance of fossils – mainly corals, brachiopods, trilobites, crinoids, algae and bryozoans.

In 2005 Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust obtained a ten year lease, and following the completion of the extensive safety and face clearance works, the site has been used as an educational and research resource. Cradley Heritage Group have researched the history of the quarry and recorded memories of quarrying at Whitman's Hill from local community members.

As part of a survey of the archaeology of the Malvern Hills AONB, Herefordshire Council's Archaeology Service carried out walkover surveys of the majority of woodlands in the AONB between 1999 and 2002. The survey of Whitman's Hill highlighted a range of archaeological features such as ridge and furrow, lynchets, woodland boundaries, woodland management features and quarrying. The evidence demonstrates how one piece of the Herefordshire landscape has gone through significant changes in its land use over time and this evidence epitomises much of the Herefordshire landscape.

Stage 1 of the current project successfully mapped, using Geographic Information System (GIS), the extent of archaeological features surviving within Whitman's Hill Coppice. This was followed up in Stage 2 with a small scale test excavation of a potentially early medieval or Anglo Saxon land division that follows the ridge top to the southeast.

The project aims to make the initial survey data more accessible through more detailed survey work and the integration with the information being presented by the Earth Heritage Trust through their Earth Heritage Champion volunteers.

2. Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of the investigation was to identify the form, origins and record in detail the surface features associated with the ridge top boundary identified during the course of an earlier woodland survey of Whitman's Hill Coppice. The feature (HSM 52190), consisting of a linear bank was the focus for small scale archaeological trial excavation. The importance of the monument lies with its potentially contemporary association with the cross-valley dyke to the south that forms the current parish boundary separating Mathon and Cradley. The association between the two monuments indicates the potential for a well preserved Anglo-Saxon landscape.

The aim of the three day trial excavation was to:

- Excavate by hand a trial trench measuring no more than 1m wide (northwest-southeast) by 6m (northeast-southwest).
- To identify the character and form of the boundary; how was it constructed and what materials were used? Does it have any supporting ditches? Does it hold any comparisons with boundaries investigated elsewhere?
- To uncover any associated artefacts to indicate a possible date/period of construction.
- To locate the presence of a preserved buried surface onto which the boundary was constructed. On doing so, a box sample of the surface would be collected as a sample and stored for later analysis in order to determine past environment conditions (subject to funding).
- Each deposit encountered through the process of excavation would be recorded on site and a paper record maintained which would later be transferred to an Excel Spreadsheet (Appendix 1).
- At each stage of the investigation the deposits would be drawn both as a measured plan (1:20 Scale) and as a measured section plan (1:10 Scale) (Appendix 2).
- The trench would also be drawn (1:50) in relation to its position along the ridge top boundary using a *Leica TCR110* in order to note the local topography (Appendix 2).

The excavation would involve full volunteer participation, from Earth Heritage Champions, The Cradley History Group and the Bromyard and District Local History Society. All of the volunteers will receive full training and gain experience in general earthwork survey, excavation techniques, trench recording techniques and sampling techniques.

3. Location and Geology

Whitman's Hill Coppice (SO 7472 4828) is located within the county parish of Cradley, Herefordshire where it forms part of the northern foothills of the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The woodland is located upon the northern end of a ridge that extends to the southeast, forming the eastern limit of the Mathon Valley. The north and east facing slopes of Whitman's Hill are defined by steep slopes. The west and south facing slopes (though steep) are much gentler in comparison and lead toward the foot of the Mathon Valley. Whitman's Hill stands between 200m and 210m above sea level. Whitman's Hill Coppice consists of enclosed mixed woodland.

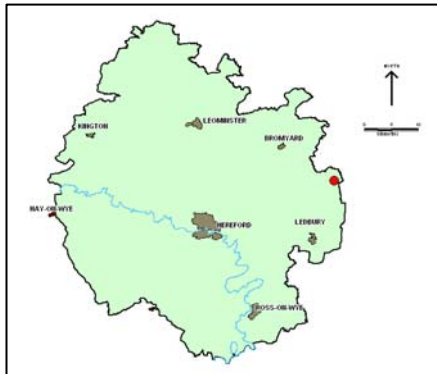


Figure 1: Location of Whitman's Hill Coppice in relation to the main towns and city of Herefordshire. © Herefordshire Council.

The underlying geology of the northwest-southeast orientated ridge consists largely of Silurian, Much Wenlock Limestone, with the Coalbrookdale Formation forming the northeast face of the ridge.

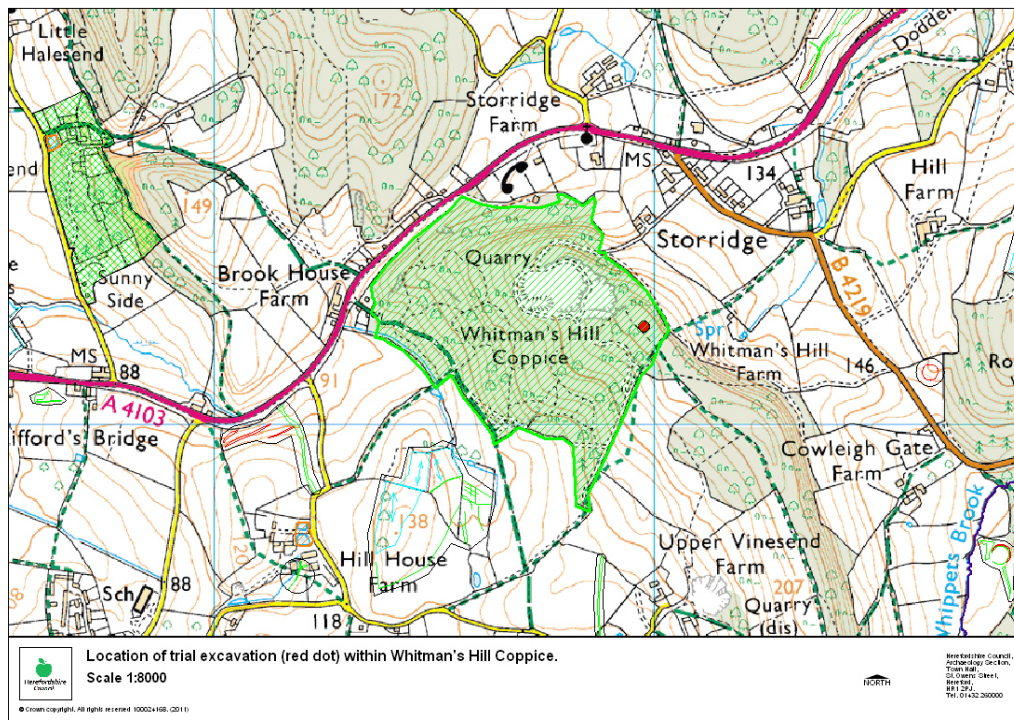


Figure 2: Whitman's Hill Coppice, area of investigation and trench location. (OS crown copyright 100024100 & Herefordshire Council).

4. Methodology

The location of the trench was chosen so as to avoid damage to the surrounding tree coverage and to prevent disturbance to nesting wildlife. The trench was orientated northeast-southwest and measured 6m long by 1m wide. In order to comply with Health and Safety Regulations the excavation would not exceed a depth of 1.2m. The excavation was carried out by hand employing the use of spades, shovels, mattocks and trowels. The spoil was located 1m to the northwest of the trench.

Each deposit encountered was ascribed an archaeological context number and recorded in the field using a paper record that was later transferred to a digital EXCEL spread sheet (Appendix 1). Each archaeological feature and deposit encountered was photographed to provide a visual record. A measured record drawn to a scale of 1:20 was made of each deposit and feature encountered and a record kept both in original drafting film format and digital format (Appendix 2). A site plan (Appendix 2) was made to a Scale of 1:50 and a section plan (Appendix 2) was produced at a scale 1:10.

Any artefacts recovered were to be, geographically recorded, adequately labelled listing the site code, date, and context number. Artefacts would be appropriately cleaned depending on type and sent for specialist interpretation.

A regime of soil sampling was undertaken depending on the circumstances of each archaeological deposit encountered in order to retrieve environmental evidence and potential datable material that could place the ridge top boundary into context. Samples were stored for future investigation.

5. Past Fieldwork

The record for the ridge top boundary identified during the walkover survey is listed below:

Ridge Top Boundary, Whitmans Hill Coppice, Cradley

SMR Number: 52190

Grid Reference: SO 74992 48204

Parish: CRADLEY, HEREFORDSHIRE

Ridge top boundary that runs from the cliff top of the large quarry on Whitman's Hill, southeast where it eventually links with the cross dyke that now marks the border between the parishes of Mathon and Cradley. There is a potential for the boundary to relate to Anglo-Saxon landscape divisions. The boundary consists of a broad bank ranging from 2m wide to 0.2m high and increases to the south to 5m wide at its base to 2m at its summit; it stands 1m-1.4m high. No clear indication for an associated ditch, though it may simply be silted. To the southeast the boundary is cut by an area of quarrying and a later woodland boundary.

Monument Type(s): Boundary

6. Survey Results

A linear boundary was identified at the summit (HSM 52190). It followed the northwest-southeast ridge of Whitman's Hill, and consists of a broad bank that stands a maximum of 5m wide at its base and narrows to 2m wide at its summit (see *Appendix 3*). The monument stands up to 1.4m high. No associated ditch/ditches were recorded, but it is likely that they once existed and have silted up over time.

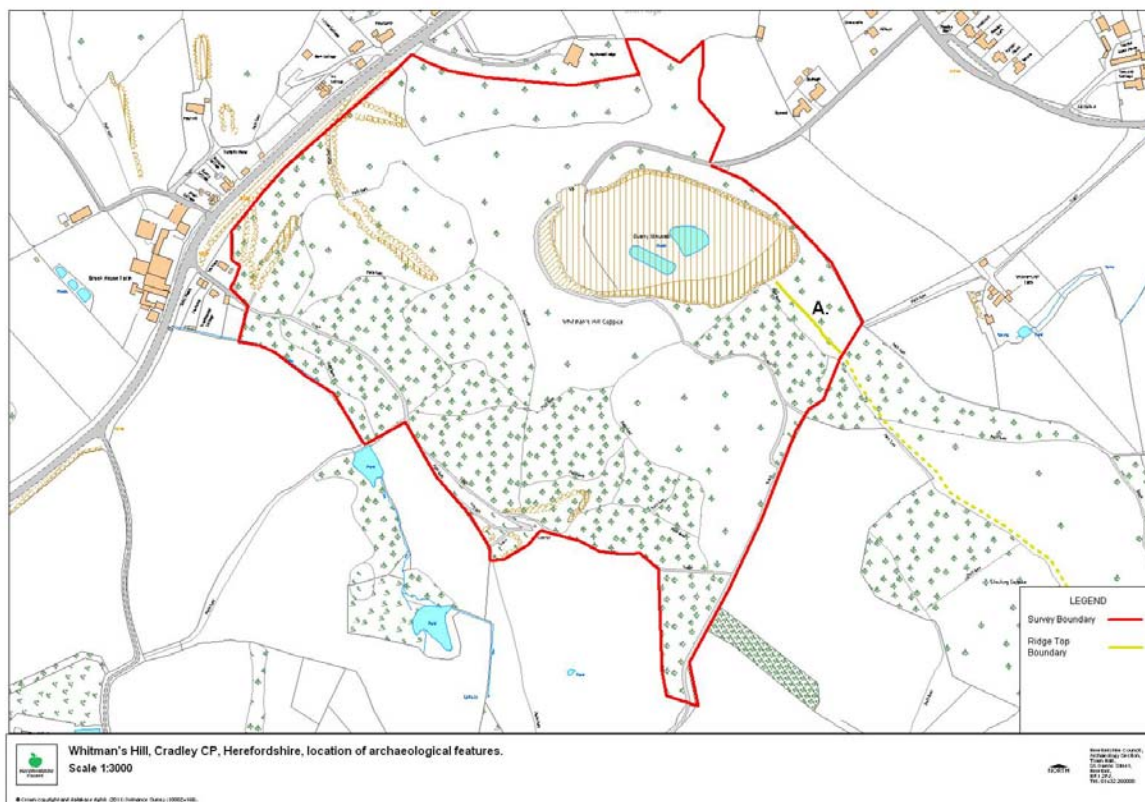


Figure 3: Location of ridge top boundary within Whitman's Hill Coppice (A). © Herefordshire Council.

It is plausible that the boundary represents the earliest archaeological monument identified over the course of the walkover survey. It is overlain by later archaeological features, and can be traced following the natural ridgeline to the southeast where it peters out north of West Malvern. The feature is associated with - and appears to be contemporary with - the known dyke (HSM 13606) which now forms the Mathon/Cradley parish boundary.

The association with the dyke (HSM 13606) may indicate the presence of a more substantial network of early medieval land divisions than have previously been recognised in this vicinity, and could represent a system of Anglo-Saxon enclosure.

One possibility is that the feature formed the original county boundary dividing Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Anglo-Saxon settlers are likely to have seen the natural ridge as a significant boundary (which may, indeed, have had similar importance for the early British communities displaced by the Anglo-

Saxons). This theory is further strengthened by the probable long-standing importance of the dyke that separated the parishes of Cradley (Herefordshire) and Mathon (Worcestershire) prior to the Norman Conquest.

Figure 4: Ridge top boundary (viewed from the southeast) located at the summit of Whitman's Hill. © Herefordshire Council.



The earliest map based evidence for Whitman's Hill comes from the 1086 Domesday record where the boundary of the Anglo Saxon Hundred of Wimundestreu is traceable following the course of the Whitman's Hill ridge (rather than the current Parish and County boundary that is located 1.5km to the east). This further adds to the potential antiquity of the surviving early medieval boundary HSM 52190 (A).

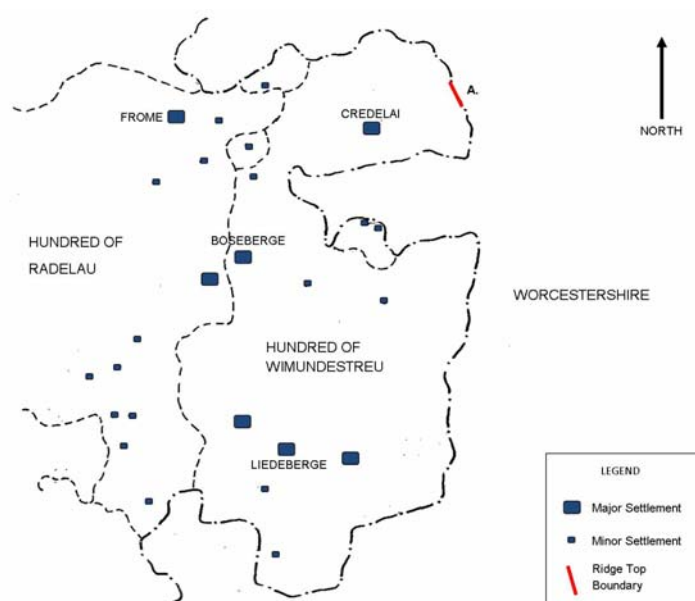


Figure 5: Location of the ridge top boundary (A) in relation to the Herefordshire and Worcestershire border in 1086. © Herefordshire Council.

The area to the south of 'Credelai' (Cradley) represents the Parish of Mathon which remained part of Worcestershire prior to the 13th century. The northern boundary of Mathon was and is demarcated by the early Medieval/Anglo-Saxon dyke HSM 31808.

The Tithe Map, produced in 1839, provides further information concerning the extent of landscape change across Whitman's Hill Coppice. A number of the relict compartment boundaries recorded during the survey, including the potentially earlier course of the ridge top boundary (A), are identifiable on the Tithe Survey.

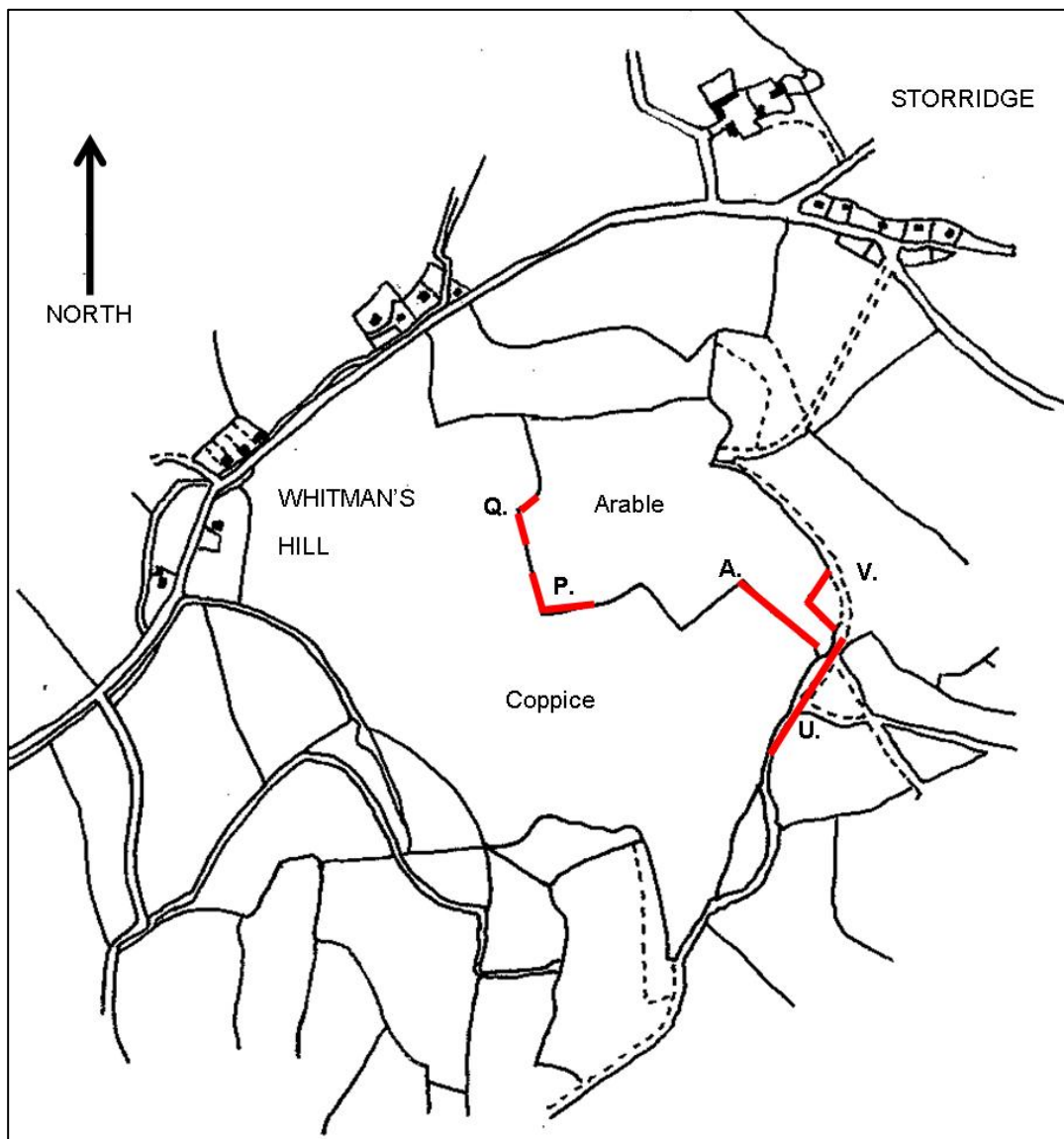


Figure 6: Extract of the 1839 Tithe Map with the surviving boundaries highlighted in red. © Herefordshire Council.

It is evident that at the time of the Tithe Survey Whitman's Hill Coppice was considerably smaller than is currently the case with the north-eastern half of the hill being under cultivation. It is interesting to note the continued use of the ridge top boundary (A) as an important boundary at this date (and the coincidence of this feature with the earthwork recorded in the present survey).

7. Evidence for Early Landscape Divisions

Evidence for early landscape divisions survive across the entirety of Britain in the form of linear banks or more substantial banks and ditches. The most evident of these are the boundary dykes, famously Offa's Dyke that marked the western boundary of Anglo Saxon Mercia during the 8th Century. It has already been noted that the ridge top boundary at the summit of Whitman's Hill is closely associated with, if not contemporary with, a dyke to the south that currently marks the boundary between the two parishes of Cradley and Mathon.

Many such dykes have early Medieval/Anglo Saxon origins and are representative of either the extent of colonisation at different periods of time, or simply divisions between particular kingdoms or estates. The latter is likely to explain the construction of the Cradley/Mathon Dyke which is known to have demarcated not only the parish boundary but also the county boundary prior to the 13th century¹. A similar example for landscape divisions can be derived from a number of dykes investigated within eastern Montgomeryshire in the vicinity of the Kerry Ridgeway. Investigations² examined the relation between Wantyn Dyke, Double Dyche, Upper Short Ditch and Lower Short Ditch.

Each dyke is characterised by a supporting west facing ditch with a division between each of the dykes utilising a particular geographical feature such as the Caebitra Valley that links the southern end of Wantyn Dyke with the northern end of Upper Short Ditch. This would suggest that rather than representing a defendable frontier they were constructed to mark territorial divisions within the landscape. Trial excavation and environmental sampling of the underlying peat deposits at Upper Short Ditch provided a radiocarbon date of 540-660AD. As with tribal divisions amongst Anglo Saxon communities, the dykes and boundaries investigated represent territorial divisions amongst British communities in what was later to become Wales. Such a date cannot be ruled out for the ridge top boundary identified at Whitman's Hill.

There is a potential for these boundaries to relate to much earlier activity, of which the ridge top boundary at Whitman's Hill may be an example. Further examples of ridge top boundaries have been identified within Frith Wood, Ledbury and along the Malvern Hills range known as Shire Ditch.

The boundary within Frith Wood³ has a striking resemblance to that identified on Whitman's Hill, being similar in form, with the exception of a barrow at the ridge summit that represents the earliest archaeological monument within the woodland. Similarly the boundaries hug the ridge tops and descend utilising the summit of natural spurs. Field observations and survey⁴ of the Shire Ditch have suggested that the boundary is earlier than the Iron Age hill top

¹ Domesday Book, 1086

² CPAT Project 929, 2002/06

³ Clegg, S, 2008

⁴ Bowden, M, 2005

settlements of British Camp and Midsummer Hill and is at least late Bronze Age in construction. Like the boundaries identified along the summits of Whitman's Hill and Frith Wood, the Shire Ditch hugs the ridge top, utilising the natural topography so as to accentuate the monument within its wider setting. At the time of this report it is reputed that a possible contemporary boundary extends from the Shire Ditch down slope to the southwest. However this needs to be confirmed through further survey.



Figure 7: Shire Ditch overlain by British Camp (centre right) © Herefordshire Council.

Due to similarities between each of the three monuments discussed it is plausible that they represent the remains of a late Bronze Age system of land division that utilised natural geographic barriers.

This is a pattern of land division that would hold similarities (if it is indeed correct) with late Bronze Age activity identified on Dartmoor. The coaxial field systems across Dartmoor are characterised by primary 'axial' boundaries that follow the summit of valleys with linear 'coaxial' boundaries at right-angles extending downslope toward the valley bases⁵

Further exploration and investigation into the potential early boundaries within this region of eastern Herefordshire could clarify the relationship that they have in regards to modern parish and county boundaries. It has already been noted that the Dyke (HSM 13606) associated with the ridge top boundary at Whitman's Hill marks the current parish boundary of Mathon and Cradley. However, with each of the boundaries discussed there is further evidence for their continuation within the course of modern boundaries, although this is in a truncated or absent form, having been replaced by a succession of boundary types that have respected the original course. It is of further note that many of the boundaries, like current parish and county boundaries, utilised natural features within the landscape. An example is the dyke HSM 13606 which terminates at the course of a brook which also serves as a parish boundary.

⁵ Champion, T, 2009

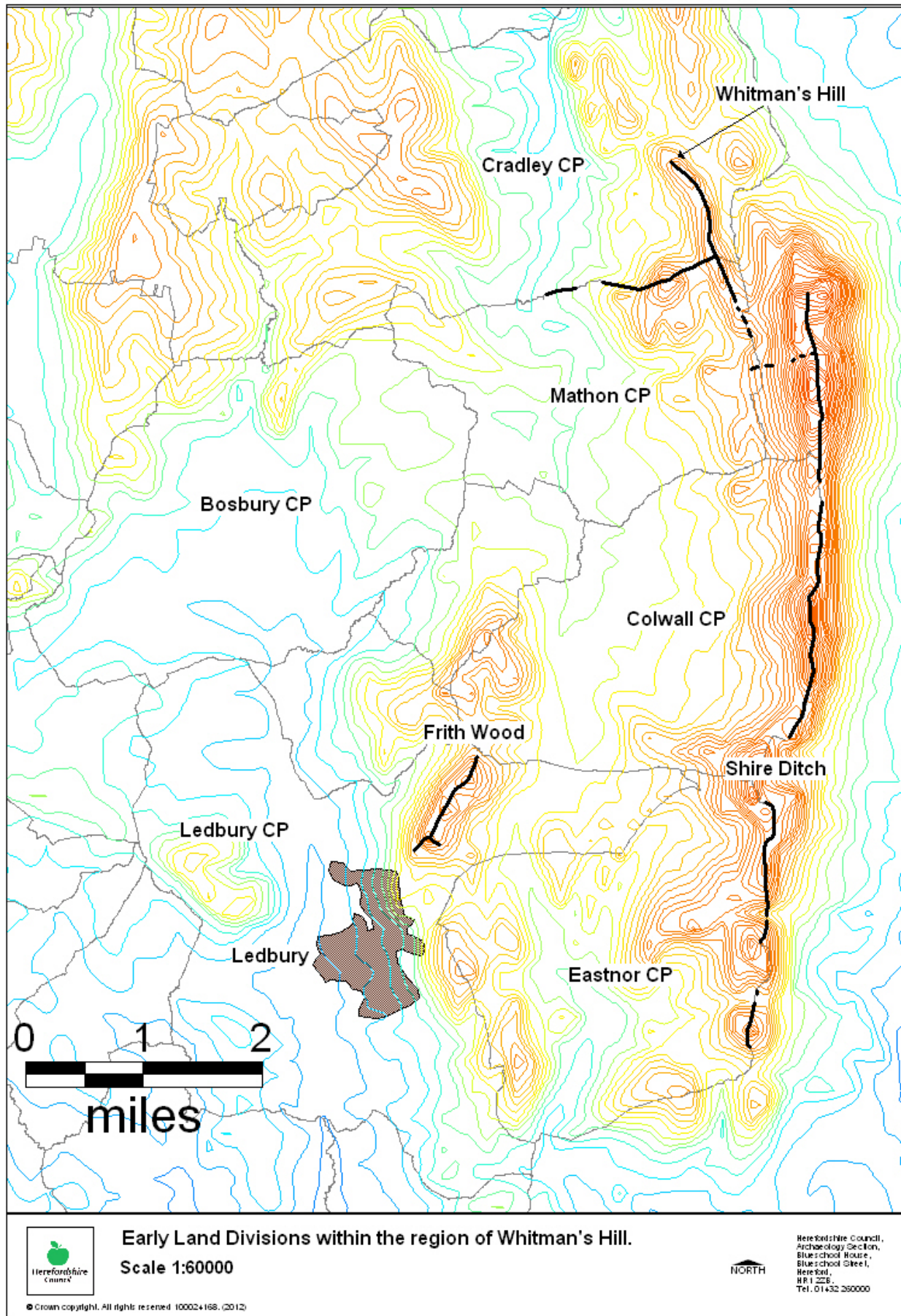


Figure 8: Land divisions with the east of Herefordshire © Herefordshire Council

8. Excavation Results

The trench was located at SO 74977 48223 along the ridge top of Whitman's Hill. The trial excavation centred across the probable early medieval boundary measured 1m wide (northwest-southeast) and 6m long (northeast-southwest).

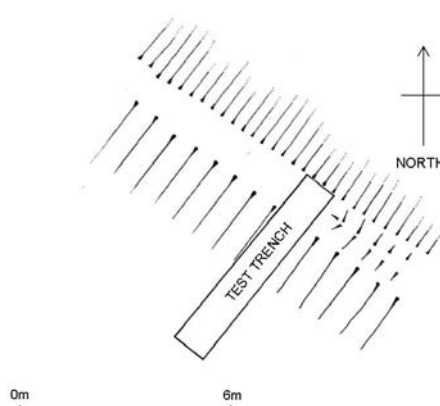


Figure 9: Site plan (above) indicating the location of the trench across the northwest-southeast orientated boundary. © Herefordshire Archaeology.

Figure 10: The site of the trench (left) marked out and viewed from the southwest prior to excavation. © Herefordshire Council.

The topsoil (001) consisted of a humic leaf mould measuring between 0.05m and 0.1m deep. It was dark brown and highly friable once dry; the inclusions were mostly organic with occasional tree roots.

This deposit overlay a horizon of moderately compact yellow brown clay (002) with occasional inclusions of rounded limestone measuring a maximum size of 0.10m x 0.08m x 0.04m. Further inclusions included tree roots and charcoal flecking; the horizon is a natural deposit.

Underlying the natural horizon (002) was a spread of loosely compacted limestone (003) identified as slump material that once formed the summit of a constructed bank that had been truncated in the past through partial levelling.

Figure 11: The slump bank material (003) under excavation. © Herefordshire Council.

The slumping stone horizon (003) came to an end at the foot of the slope to the southwest where it partially filled a shallow cut [007] and was overlain by a compact yellow clay deposit (004) which also served as the fill of the shallow cut.





The cut [007] orientated northwest-southeast and linear in form with a level base measured no more than 0.10m deep and 0.80m wide. It was cut into the underlying limestone bedrock (005) and was possibly extracted in order to produce construction material to erect the ridge top bank.

Figure 12: Partially excavated cut [007] viewed from the northwest. © Herefordshire Council.

An alternative interpretation however, is that the cut was the result of a natural geological process, as it is evident that the bedrock rises up at this location.

Within the northeast of the trench at the summit of the bank, the slump bank material (003) ended abruptly due to the partial demolition of the monument. At the summit the original in-situ bank material remained (006) consisting of a yellow brown moderately compact clay and limestone mix. The largest of the stones measured 0.12m x 0.10m x 0.05m. The bank material (006) was located approximately 0.30m beneath the current ground surface and measured 0.20m deep, it was overlain by both the natural clay horizon (002) and the stone spread (003).



Figure 13: Exposed In-situ bank material (006), the overlying slump bank material (003) is visible within the right of the photograph. © Herefordshire Council.

The bank (006) was constructed above a thin (0.05m) deposit of silty clay (008) that had the potential to represent an environmental rich buried soil horizon. As a result the deposit was sampled in order to investigate the horizon at a later date. Future investigation into the samples could identify evidence for past environmental conditions at the time of the monuments construction.

Directly beneath the buried soil was the natural limestone bedrock (005). The trench was excavated to the level of bedrock across half of the trench in order to certify the depth of deposits and the limit of archaeology.

Figure 14: The underlying bedrock revealed following the removal of the bank material (006). © Herefordshire Council.



North-West Section

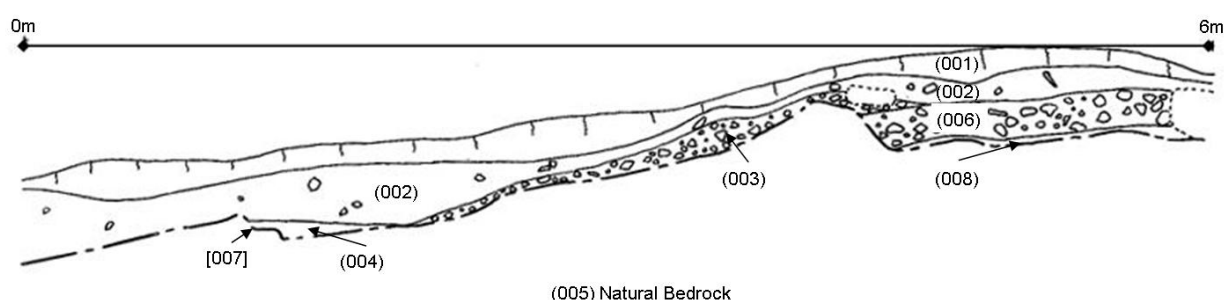


Figure 15: North-west section plan of the test trench across the ridge top boundary. © Herefordshire Council.

9. Discussion

The small scale excavation sought to test the potential of a ridge top boundary (identified through the course of an earlier woodland survey) as representing an early medieval or Anglo Saxon land division, due to its association with a known Dyke to the south. The trench measured 1m (northwest-southeast) by 6m (northeast-southwest) and was excavated and back filled by hand over a period of three days. Each of the archaeological deposits were described and recorded noting relationship with surrounding soil deposits using a paper record that was later transferred to an Excel spread sheet (Appendix 1). Archaeological deposits were recorded through the production of measured plan, both in general plan and in section plan. These were supported by a localised topographic survey at 1:50 scale.

The excavation determined that the material used to construct the bank (006) was probably extracted from a shallow, linear cut [007] made into the limestone bedrock (005) to the southwest, however there is a possibility that the cut represents natural geological processes. The cut was filled by compact yellow clay (004) which was subsequently sampled due to the potential for well-preserved environmental evidence. The bank was enhanced at this location by the natural bedrock, which rose to form a knife edge, thus enhancing the height and prominence of the monument.

The bank (006) was constructed against the natural knife-edge's northeast face (005) and extended, at its base 1.60m to the north overlaying a buried soil that was sampled in order to identify any preserved environmental evidence. The bank (006) stood c.0.20m high after the summit had been levelled off during the past. The stone spread (003) identified over the southwest face of the boundary can be attributed to this period of partial demolition.

Following the partial demolition of the boundary the feature appears to have been abandoned allowing for the natural topsoil horizons (001) and (002) to accumulate sealing the feature. Though no datable evidence was retrieved through the process of excavation, the accumulated depth of the topsoil; 0.30m-0.50m thick would suggest an early date for the monument, at least medieval.

An investigation into the environmental samples obtained during the excavation will potentially inform on the local environmental conditions at the time of the monuments construction.

10. Acknowledgments

A special thank you is due to the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, for commissioning Herefordshire Archaeology to investigate and promote the archaeological remains of Whitman's Hill Coppice alongside the investigations of the Earth Heritage Trust.

Thanks must be given to the Madresfield Estate and the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth heritage Trust for supporting and allowing access to Whitman's Hill Coppice.

A special thank you to all of the volunteers who took part in the investigations, without their commitment and enthusiasm the project to investigate this potentially important historic monument would not have been possible.

Thank you to: Robin Aitken
 Ian Dampney
 Jeff White



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Validation

Herefordshire Archaeology operates a validation system for its reports, to provide quality assurance and to comply with Best Value procedures.

This report has been checked for accuracy and clarity of statements of procedure and results.



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County Archaeologist
Herefordshire Archaeology

Appendix 1: Context Database

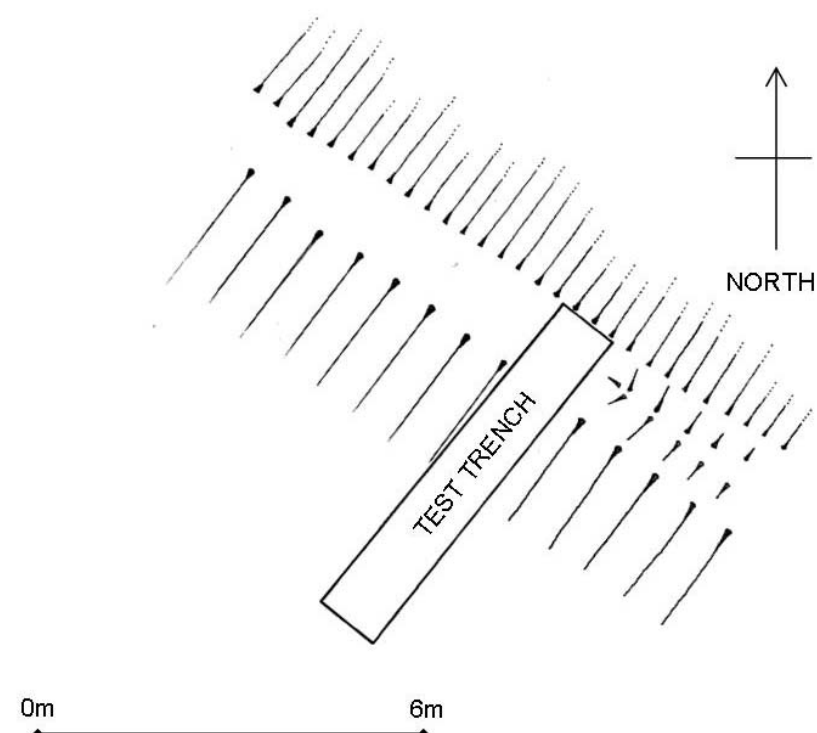
Site Code	WHC12	Location	Trench 1	
Context/Unit	Type	Colour	Composition	Description
001	Layer	Dark Brown	Leaf Mould	Topsoil, friable with occasional tree root inclusions. The topsoil measured 0.05m deep.
002	Layer	Yellow Brown	Clay	Natural accumulated deposit of clay, moderately compact with inclusions of rounded shale limestone (0.1 x 0.08 x 0.04). The horizon overlays potential fill (004) and stone slump (003).
003	Layer	Yellow Grey	Limestone	Demolition slump bank material extending down the southwest face of the bank. Moderately compact with root and occasional charcoal flecking.
004	Layer/Fill	Yellow	Clay	Potential clay fill of cut [007]. Consists of compact clay with occasional charcoal and stone inclusions.
005	Layer	Yellow Grey	Bedrock	Natural limestone shale bedrock. The bedrock rises to form a knife edge at the summit of the ridge; this enhances the overlying bank (006). Between the bank the material and bedrock is a thin lens representing a possible buried soil (008).
006	Layer	Yellow Brown	Clay	Bank material consisting of moderately compact rounded and angular limestone within a clay matrix. Occasional charcoal flecking and root action. The stone slump (003) represents a sequence of demolition at the summit of the bank.
007	Cut			Possible cut associated with the construction of the bank and filled by clay horizon (004). The feature is characterised by a sharp cut into the bedrock along its southern edge whereas the northern edge is characterised by a gentle south-facing slope. The cut measures 0.5m wide and 0.2m deep. The feature may represent a natural fault within the limestone.
008	Layer	Yellow Brown	Silt Clay	Thin lens sealed by bank material (006). The horizon measures c.0.05m thick and overlays the bedrock (005). The horizon may represent a buried soil.

Appendix 2: Site Plans

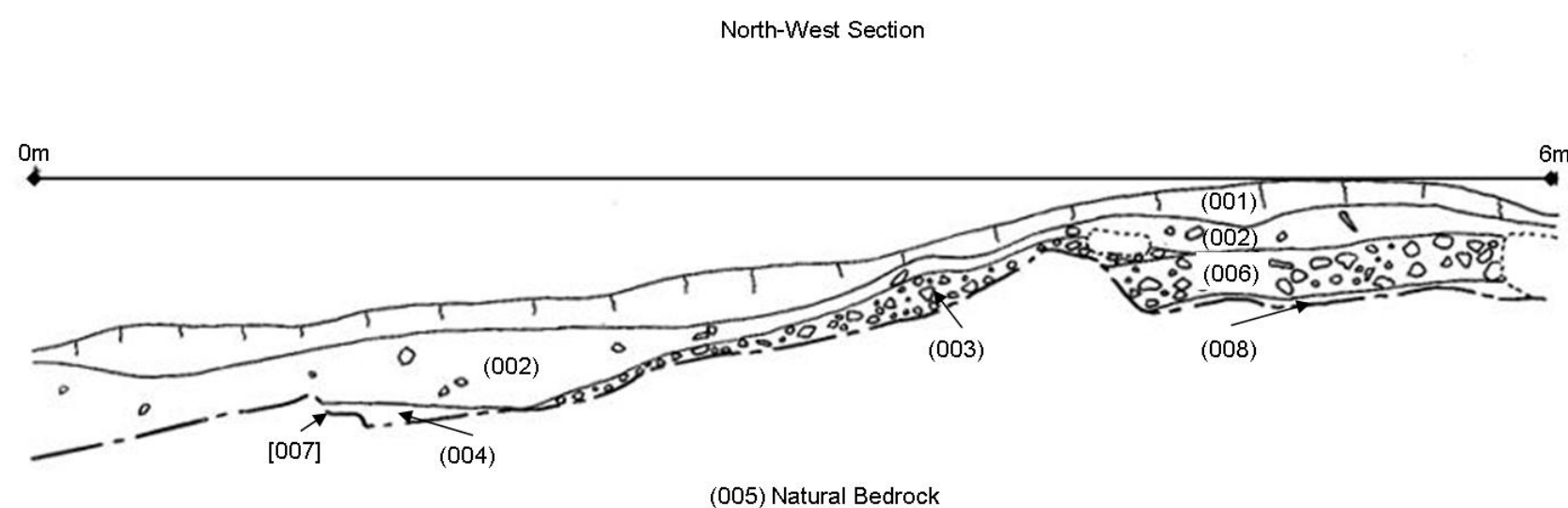
Herefordshire Archaeology: Drawing Register				
Plan No.	Section No.	Date.	Drawn By.	Description.
1		20/03/12	CA	Full trench plan indicating the bank material (006) and stone spread (003).
2		21/03/12	CA	Full trench plan at the end of excavation indicating the underlying bedrock (005) following half section.
	1	21/03/12	CA	Plan of northwest section of trench indicating the chronological order of each horizon encountered.
3		21/03/12	CA	Trench location plan in relation to the ridge top boundary.

Appendix 2: Site Plans

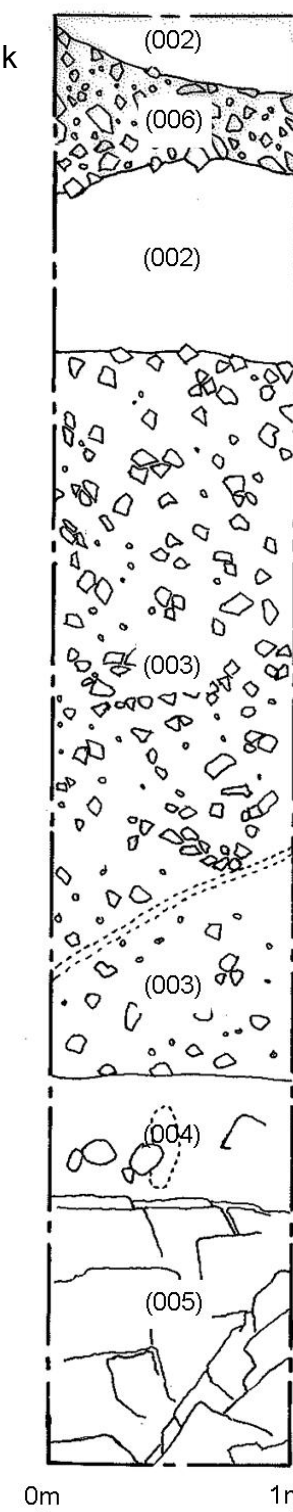
Plan 1: Initial trench plan indicating bank material (006) and stone spread (003)



Plan 3: Trench Location Plan



Section Plan 1: Plan of the North-West Section across the Ridge Top Boundary



Plan 2: Trench plan at the end of excavation

Appendix 3: Site Matrix

