

**UNDER WHITLE FARM,
SHEEN
STAFFORDSHIRE**

Report on the excavation of Trench 2



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SUMMARY

- Trent & Peak Archaeology was commissioned by the Tudor Farming Interpretation Group, to provide professional support to a community archaeology project, including community-based volunteer training, on land at Under Whittle Farm in the valley of the River Dove between Sheen and Longnor, Staffordshire (centred on NGR SK 1077 6405 at a height of c. 260m OD) as part of their Heritage Lottery funded 'Peeling Back the Layers' project.
- The work was carried out between the 20th June and 9th July 2016 in conjunction with other volunteer led investigations. The investigations reported on here corresponds to Trench 2 within the overall site record.
- The main focus of the work within this trench was the remains of a house and possible cellar at Under Whittle, probably demolished between c. 1845 and c.1870 but otherwise not well documented.
- The results suggest that this structure was originally a stone-built, two-unit, house constructed in the late 17th or early 18th century. The house had a fireplace in the north gable wall with steps leading down from this northern room into a cellar under the southern room. Following the disuse and collapse/robbing of the house the cellar was re-used, probably for storing agricultural produce, with the insertion of a barrel-vaulted roof and changes to the stairs and former cellar window. During the 20th century the cellar had become used for the disposal of rubbish and still contains in excess of 0.5m of rubbish deposits.

**Under Whittle Farm, Sheen, Derbyshire.
Report on the excavation of Trench 2**

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The Project Manager for the work undertaken was Steve Malone. The Project Team comprised Steve Malone, Adrian Turner, Tina Roushannafas, Tom Linington, Marius Ilie, Norma Oldfield and Lawrence Platt.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Trent & Peak Archaeology was commissioned by the Tudor Farming Interpretation Group, to provide professional support to a community archaeology project, including community-based volunteer training, on land at Under Whittle Farm in the valley of the River Dove between Sheen and Longnor, Staffordshire (centred on NGR SK 1077 6405 at a height of c. 260m OD) as part of their Heritage Lottery funded 'Peeling Back the Layers' project (Fig. 1).
- 1.2. The main focus of this work was the remains of a house and possible cellar at Under Whittle, probably demolished between c. 1845 and c.1870 but otherwise not well documented. The work was carried out between the 20th June and 9th July 2016 in conjunction with other volunteer led investigations. The investigations reported on here corresponds to Trench 2 within the overall site record.
- 1.3. The site is located on deposits of Bowland Shale Formation - Mudstone, Siltstone, and Sandstone; Sedimentary Bedrock formed approximately 313–335 million years ago in the Carboniferous period. No superficial deposits are recorded on the valley slopes (British Geological Survey).
- 1.4. Topographically the site lies on a small level platform on the lower slopes of the valley side to the northwest of the current Under Whittle Farm and the Dove Valley Activity Centre (Fig. 2).
- 1.5. In 2004, an archaeological survey undertaken by Jim Rylatt of the Peak District National Park (Rylatt 2005) identified a number of possible medieval or post-medieval features at Under Whittle Farm. Subsequent research by the Tudor Farming Interpretation Group uncovered documents establishing the existence of farms and families in the Tudor period.
- 1.6. Peeling Back the Layers is a hands-on educational, Heritage Lottery funded, project, run by the Tudor Farming Interpretation Group (TFIG). A wide range of people are investigating the history and archaeology of Whittle, Sheen and the surrounding landscape. Groups and individuals are joining together with the primary and secondary schools, young archaeologists, local history enthusiasts and mental health groups in this fascinating exploration of local heritage.

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND

2.1. Historical/Archaeological Background

2.1.1. The site has long been known to contain the remains of a barrel-vaulted stone-walled cellar with (presumed) stepped access down to a door opening from the north and another door/window opening to the south. During the 20th century the cellar had become used for the disposal of rubbish and was filled to within c. 1.4m of the roof.

2.1.2. Map evidence suggested that this had once belonged to an L-shaped structure, probably a farmhouse, existing until at least 1845, when it was depicted on the Tithe map for the parish of Sheen, but which had disappeared by the time of the earliest detailed Ordnance Survey mapping in the 1880s.

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1 The excavation stage of the project had the following themes/aims:

- to recover dating evidence for archaeological features highlighted as suitable for excavation by earlier surveys
- to find out what the various features are, how they were used and how this use may have changed through time
- to train volunteers in the skills of archaeological excavations
- to enable school children and other groups to learn about archaeological methods and processes and about the heritage of Whittle.

3.2 In the context of the building remains this included aims within the East and West Midlands Heritage strategies including

- to recover evidence that can address the medieval and post-medieval ceramics industries, an understanding of the development of manorial estates and the nature of rural settlements

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Fieldwork

4.1.1. In order to investigate the archaeological remains in this area, rubbish and vegetation growth were cleared from the cellar steps and a trench opened up extending back from the northern cellar wall to expose the remains of floor surfaces and wall foundations. All excavation was undertaken by hand.

4.1.2 The location of any artefacts recovered in the subsoil or in features was recorded three-dimensionally or by context as appropriate. All artefacts were treated in accordance with UKIC guidelines and First Aid for Finds (1998).

4.1.3 All excavations were recorded at an appropriate scale by EDM survey, measured drawing and photography. The features and deposits encountered were recorded on individual context recording sheets. Sections of excavated features were also recorded (at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate). Spot heights were recorded relative to Ordnance Datum.

4.1.4 All excavated contexts were fully recorded on written context records giving details of location, composition, shape, dimensions, relationships, finds, samples, cross-references to other elements of the record and other relevant contexts, etc.

4.1.5 All finds were recorded by context; and individually significant finds were also individually labelled with a code and recorded three-dimensionally. All artefacts recovered were retained and removed from site for conservation (if necessary) and specialist examination/analysis. All recording, cleaning, storage and conservation of finds has been carried-out in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (2001, revised 2008).

5. RESULTS

(Figures 2-5)

5.1. Trench 2

5.1.1. Trench 2 was triangular in shape, 4m in width at its widest adjacent to the cellar steps, and up to 7m in length along its north-east edge (Fig. 3). A small extension was subsequently added along this edge, amounting to c. 4.5m x 0.7m, in order to clarify the extent of some features (Fig. 4).

5.1.2 Beneath topsoil (102) two main deposits were identified: a dark grey brown sandy silt with pinkish mottles and frequent charcoal flecks and burnt shale fragments (103)/(107) in the northern angle of the trench and a wider area of stone rubble (112) across the southern part of the trench adjacent to the cellar steps. The fill over the cellar steps (105) was similar in character to the topsoil, but incorporated a considerable amount of broken glass and other domestic rubbish akin to that filling the cellar void (121).

5.1.3 Rubble (112) was the later deposit, overlying surviving structural remains; burnt deposit (103) appeared to respect an earlier wall line (111), but overlay another (128), so does not appear to have accumulated during the lifetime of the building, but perhaps through dumping of material after its disuse and partial demolition.

5.1.4 Beneath stone rubble (112) remains of wall foundations and a floor surface were uncovered just to the north of the cellar steps. The walls (122) were 0.6-0.65m in width, of block in course masonry with a dressed quoin evident at the northern corner. Two wall courses survived where best preserved on the outer edge of the northern gable, but only a single course otherwise, rising off an offset foundation at least 0.9m in width (but the full depth of which was not revealed). The floor surface (118) was of large stone slabs, up to 0.8m x 0.7m, laid on a bed of mortar (127). In the south-western quarter of the room the slabs were broken into smaller pieces, but apparently still *in situ*. Recessed into the northern gable end wall was the base of a fireplace floored with similar slabs, but incorporating a rectangular ash pit (119), 0.55m x 0.35m and c.0.5m deep with a moulded rim (presumably once holding the grate, a fragment of which was retrieved from the base of the pit). The ash pit contained burnt deposits (120), (123) incorporating fragments of coal, presumably a remnant of last use. The room thus defined was 3.22m in width and at least 4.44m long (up to 4.8m if the central fireplace within the northern gable is included).

5.1.5 A less substantial wall (128) butted up against the outside of the north gable end. Of coursed rubble and just 0.4m in width with little in the way of foundation, this most likely represents the remains of a single storey (perhaps lean-to) extension. Deposit (103) overlay the remains of this wall but was confined to the area north of (122) and if belonging to the lifetime, or immediate disuse, of the building does not add much to its interpretation.

5.1.6 The steps to the cellar led down from the south-east corner of this room turning through 90 degrees at the bottom to pass under an arched stone lintel into the cellar to the south. The stairway was 0.72m in width with steps formed of stone blocks up to 0.3m deep (129). The steps were somewhat irregular in tread depth and rise height, varying from 0.28-0.37m for the former and between 0.12m and 0.37m for the latter. In the wall opposite the steps at the bottom was a small recess, c. 0.3m x 0.2m by at least 0.15m deep. Some 0.8m of fill was removed from the stairway but a similar amount at least probably remains to a depth which would allow easy passage under the stone lintel.

5.1.7 The cellar itself was 2.8m in width (E-W) and 3.8m in length (N-S). Walls were of coursed stone, at least 1.2m in height, with a barrel-vaulted stone roof rising off to an overall height of 1.85m. The cellar was filled with at least 0.5m of 20th century rubbish (121). In the centre of the south wall was a splayed window opening, 1.1m in height, 0.9m across internally and 0.6m externally with moulded jambs. Remains of lead came were

evident low down on both sides, including a small piece of glass *in situ* in the bottom south-east corner, indicating that the window had once been glazed..

5.1.8 Amongst the rubble deposits remaining over the building various pieces of architectural masonry were recovered including parts of a window mullion and a moulded fireplace mantle both of which can give some assistance in dating (see below).

6. DISCUSSION (PLATES 1-7)

6.1. The house is orientated north-west to south-east but for ease of reference within this discussion it is described as having its long axis orientated north to south.

6.2 The partially excavated two-unit house is stone built with quoins, the width of the walls indicating that it was two to three storeys in height. Stone roof flags were recovered from the rubble overlaying the site suggesting that the building was roofed in stone. It has a fireplace in the north gable wall. The northern room has a stone flagged floor with an ash pit to the south of the fireplace. In the south-east corner is a set of stairs leading down to the entrance of the cellar that extends beneath the southern room. The opening for the cellar stairs would originally have been covered with a trap door. In the west wall of the stair well, by the doorway into the cellar, is a niche for a candle or taper. It is likely that the entrance into the northern room was via a door in the west wall opposite the steps into the cellar with a door to the west of the cellar stairs providing access between the two rooms. The southern room would have had a timber plank floor over the cellar. A window in the south gable, later perhaps converted into a doorway, provided light into the semi-subterranean cellar. The width and depth of the stonework abutting the north gable wall is suggestive of a single storey extension.

6.3 Following the collapse and robbing of the house the cellar was re-used, its size suggesting that it was probably an agricultural storeroom rather than a workshop. The barrel vaulted roof was inserted as it can clearly be seen abutting the earlier cellar walls to north and south. A lintel was also re-used and placed over the cellar's north entrance. An extra flag was added to the top of the steps in the northern room. It is likely that at this time the cellar window was converted into a doorway.

6.4 A number of stone architectural pieces were recovered from the excavation including a chamfered flat splay mullion, a type found in other houses within Derbyshire dating to between 1615 and 1763 (Alcock and Hall 2002, 38). Fragmentary remains of a bolection moulded fireplace mantle was also recovered which is likely to date to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century.

6.5 Typically two-unit houses would have a single heated room functioning as the principal living room, much like a hall would in earlier buildings though they were never open to the roof, having a bedroom or loft above. Access to the floor above was usually via a newel stair tucked into a recess alongside the fireplace or by an external staircase, sometimes on the gable wall or by a turret located along the rear wall. The second room would be a service room, often agricultural rather than domestic in nature. Two-unit houses were generally built between c.1625 – c.1825 (Brunskill 1981, 105) therefore supporting the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century date suggested for this former property. Further excavations might elucidate the precise locations of the staircase to the upper floor and where the principal entrance into the house was. It would also be interesting to establish the extent of the northern extension and whether the building extended to the west.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The simple two-unit house is relatively typical of its time and place (late 17th C). Documentary evidence refers to a house built by John Harrison in the late 17th century. Hearth Tax documents indicate that that house had three hearths (whilst only one hearth is evidenced here) and the cost of construction apparently left John Harrison in debt, so something rather more extensive might be suspected. Although it would be usual for a simple two-unit house like this to have just one heated room, it would be possible for there to have been another hearth on the second floor of the same stack. However, if the south-eastern cellar wall coincides with the SE gable (as it seems it must given the

presence of the window in that wall) then there is no scope for another stack at this end. On the other hand, the presence of the window mullion and moulded fireplace mantle here indicate some architectural pretension, so it is possible that this building was more extensive and of higher status than current excavations have managed to demonstrate.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Brunskill, R. W., 1981 *Traditional Buildings of Britain*

Rylatt, J. 2005 *Under Whittle, Sheen, Staffordshire. Archaeological Field Survey for the Peak District Environmental Quality Mark Scheme*. Derbyshire: Cultural Heritage Team PDNPA

Cartographic references

anon. 1845 Tithe Award for Sheen. Lichfield Record Office

BGS British Geological Survey: England and Wales (online) Solid and Drift Geology: 1:50,000

OS Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Landranger Map

Ordnance Survey Maps: All editions 1859–1992

Appendix 1 Table of Contexts

Context No.	Context type	Description	Interpretation
101	Layer	Dark grey brown clay silt loam	Topsoil (S end)
102	Layer	Dark grey brown clay silt loam	Topsoil (N end)
103	Layer	Loose dark grey brown sandy silt, freq charcoal flecks, freq burnt shale fragments	Dump of burnt material and ash
104	Layer	Friable mid grey-brown clayey silt	Subsoil
105	Layer	Dark grey brown clay silt, freq broken glass	Fill of cellar steps
106	VOID		
107	Layer	Mottled dark pink grey clayey silt, freq charcoal flecks, freq burnt shale fragments	Dump of burnt material and ash
108	Layer	Medium brown loose silt	Topsoil
109	Layer	Dark greyish brown clay silt	Soil within rubble deposit (112)
110	Layer	mid grey-brown clayey silt	Subsoil
111	Structure		NE-SW wall foundation
112	Layer	Numerous stones in soil matrix (109)	Demolition deposit
113	Structure	Linear stones	Wall foundation
114	Layer	Stone rubble	Rubble overlying stone slabs leading to cellar
115	Layer	Mortar and rubble layer	
116	Layer	Brownish grey clay	
117	Layer	Dark brown and orange clay silt	Burnt area above slab surface
118	Structure	Stone slabs	Paved floor surface
119	Structure	Stone recess with moulded rim	Ash pit in hearth
120	Fill	Loose dark brown/orange burnt silty clay	Upper fill of (119)
121	Fill	Rubbish deposit within cellar	
122	Structure		Group number for wall comprising (111) and (113)
123	Fill	Mid grey brown silty clay, freq burnt shale frags/coal	Lower fill in (119) ash pit
124	Structure	Stone-walled, barrel-vaulted, underground room	Cellar
125	Structure	E-W line of worn stone (Tr2 south)	Pathway/possible wall foundation
126	Layer	Dark grey brown clay silt	Fill in south cellar window opening
127	Structure	Concrete	floor
128	Structure	Linear stone	Wall foundation
129	Structure	Stone blocks	Steps down into cellar

PLATES



Plate 1: General view of the northern room under excavation, viewed looking north.



Plate 2: General view of the northern room, viewed looking south-east. Note the later stone flag at the top of the cellar steps and the re-used stone arched lintel leading into the cellar.



Plate 3: The ash pit and east base of the fireplace surround in the north gable wall, viewed looking north-west.



Plate 4: The chamfered flat splay mullion recovered from rubble deposit (112).



Plate 5: The moulded fireplace mantle recovered from rubble deposit (112).

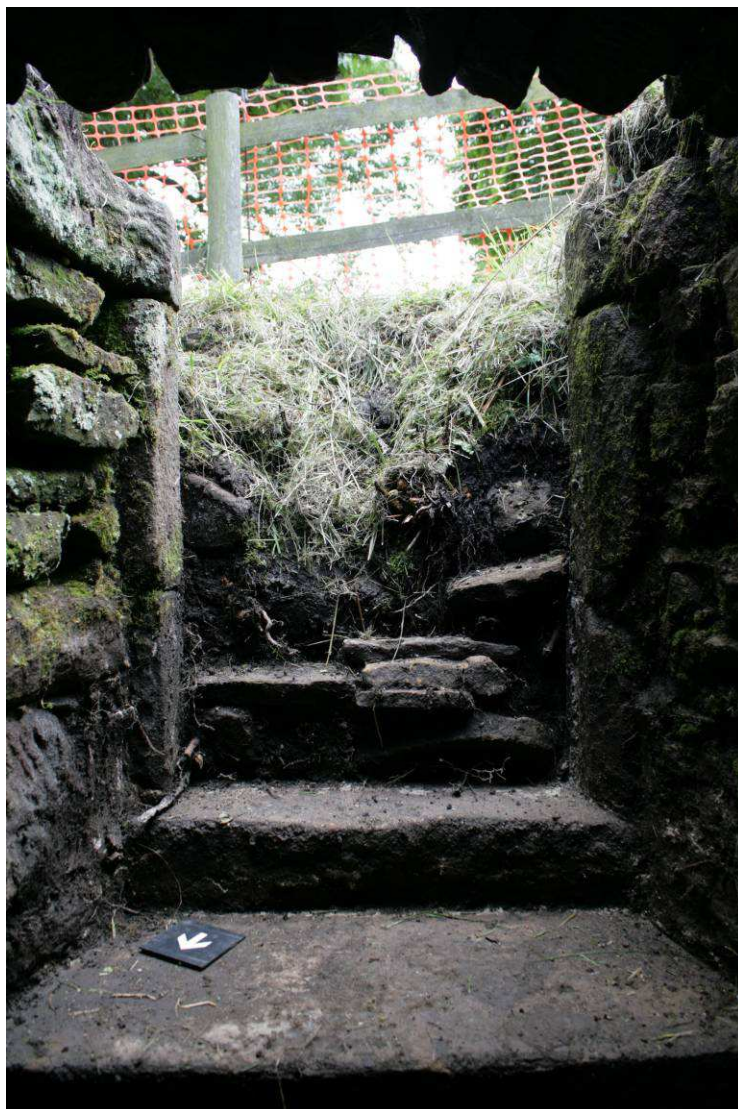


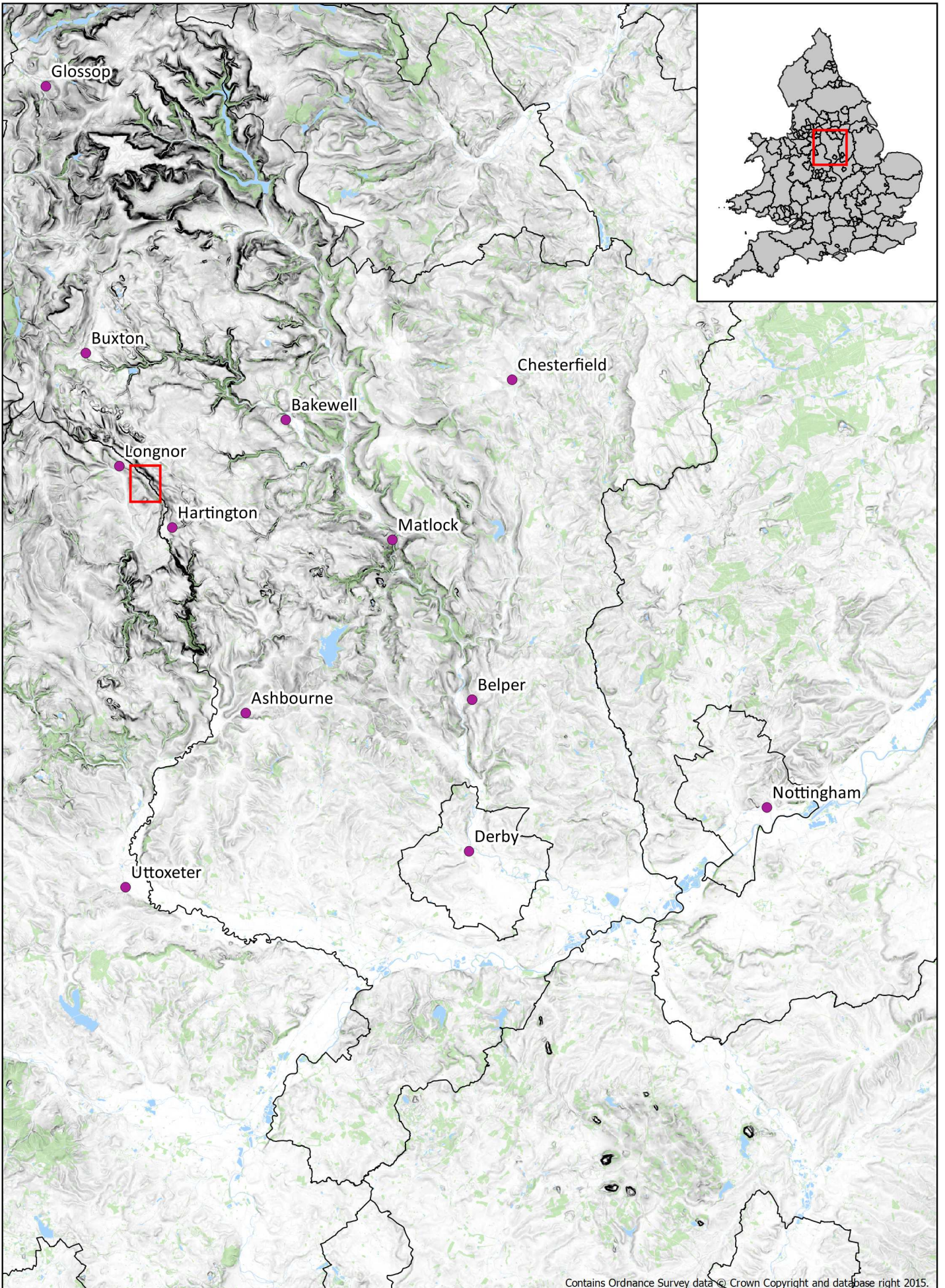
Plate 6: View from the inside of the cellar of the window in the south gable, looking south-east.



Plate 7: The barrel vaulted roof of the cellar abutting the earlier south gable wall.

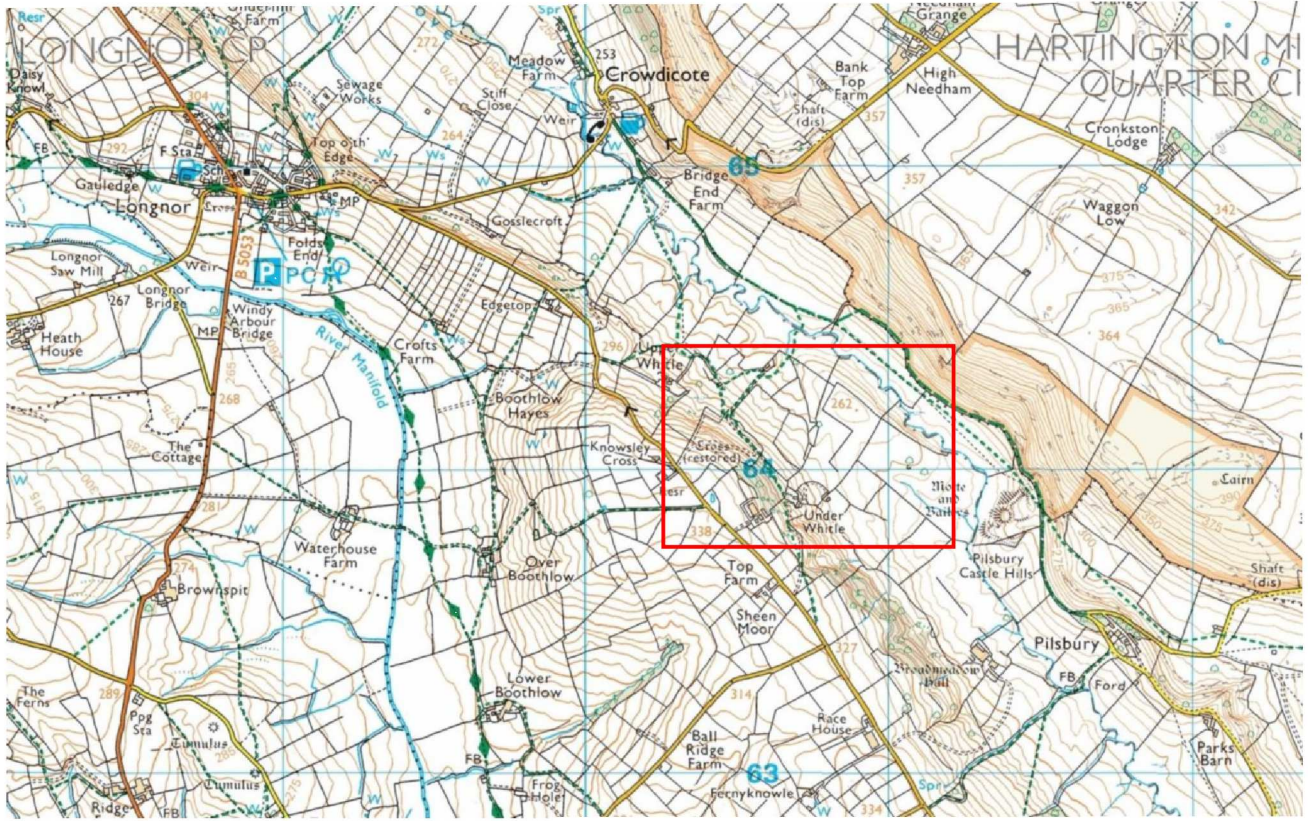
FIGURES





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Figure 1 UWC - Under White. Site location. Main map 1:375000 @ A4



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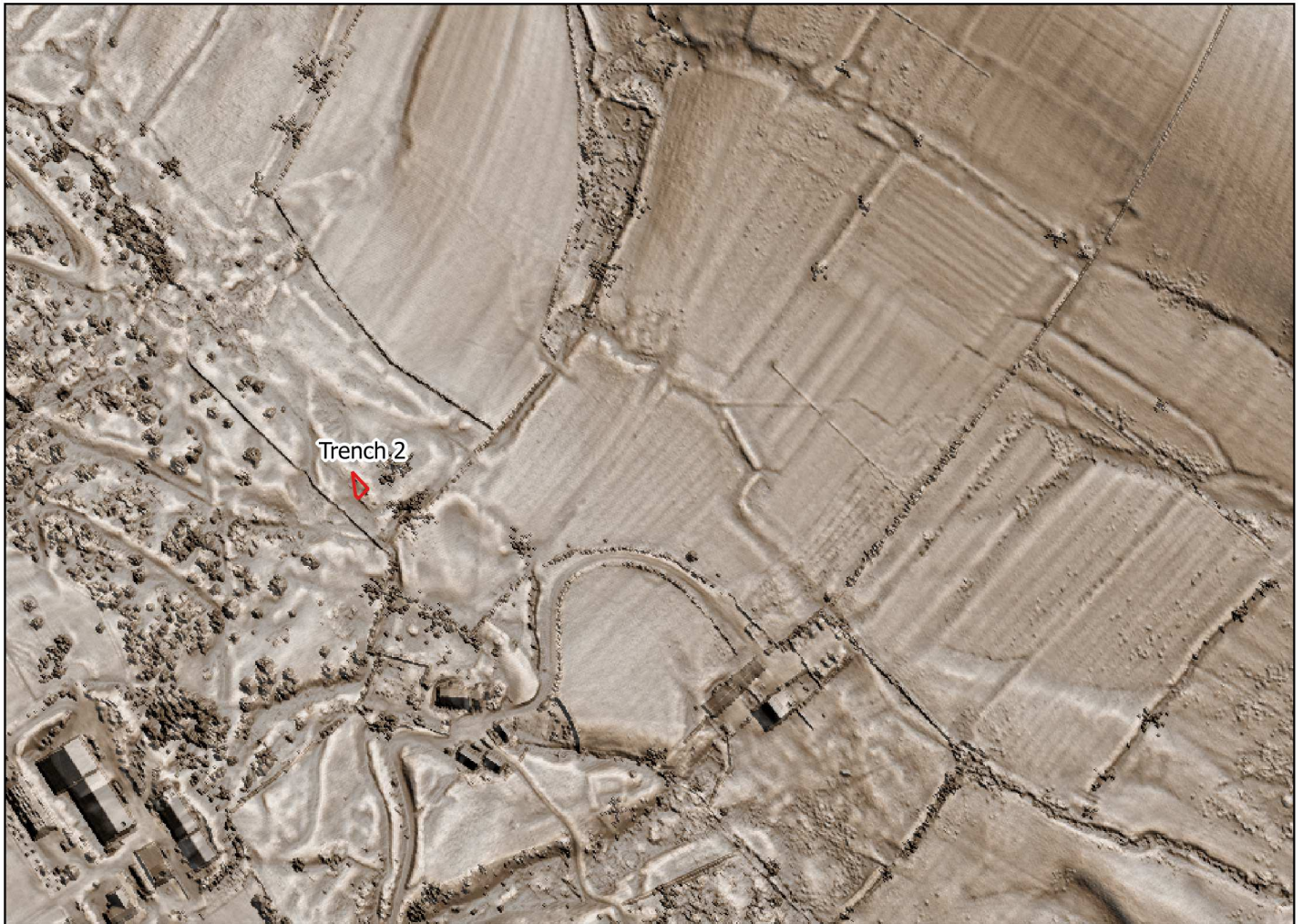
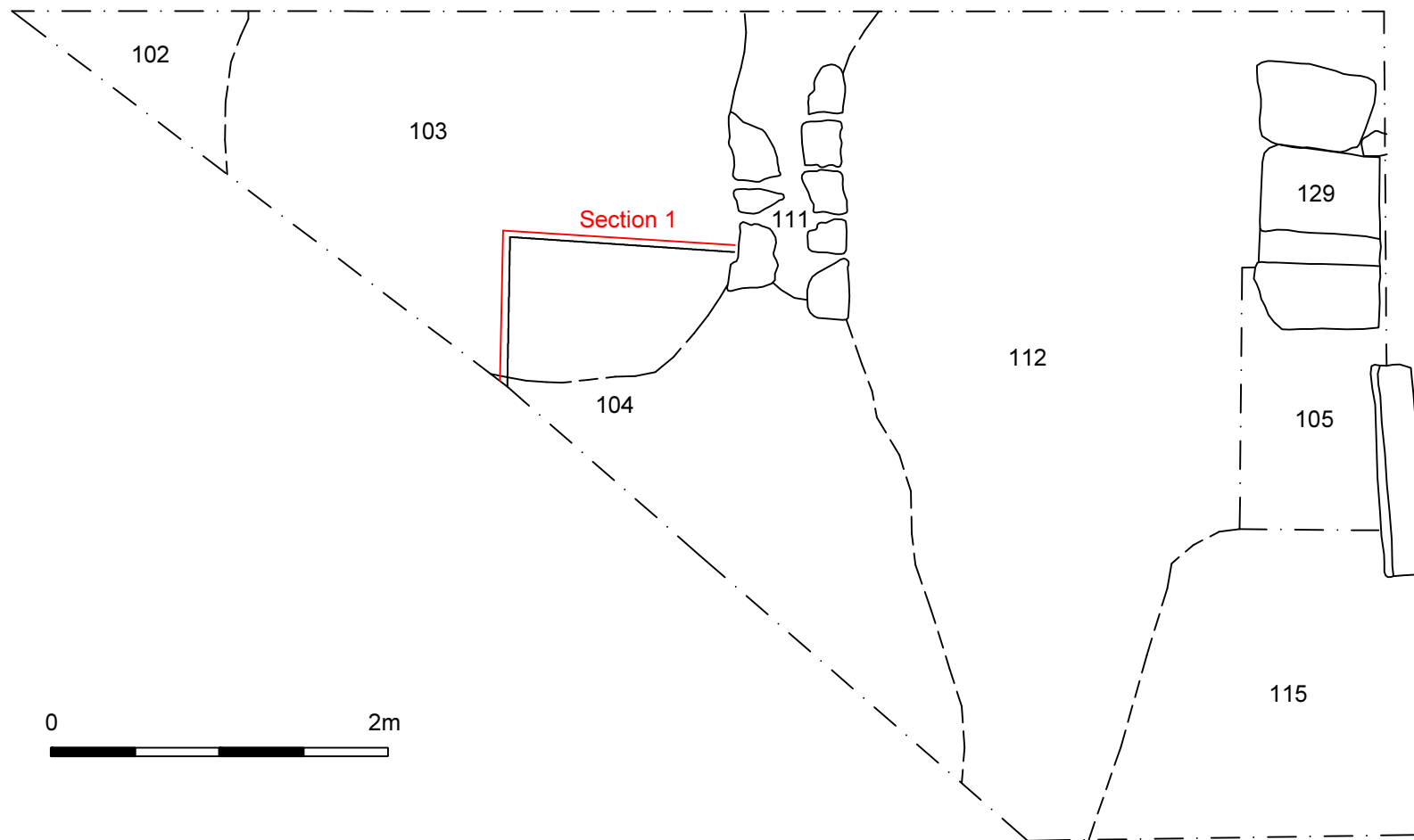
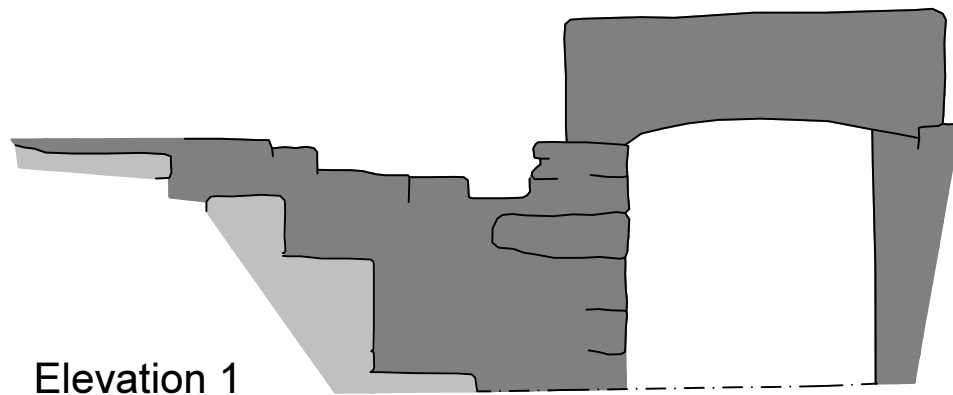


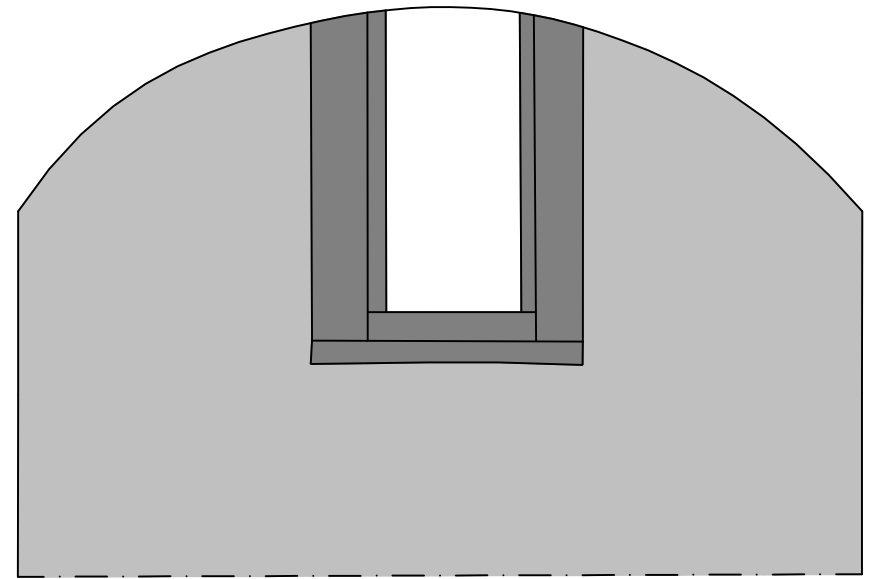
Fig. 2 Under White: Location of Trench 2. Upper map 1:25000. Lower map (lidar DTM background) 1:2500 @ A4



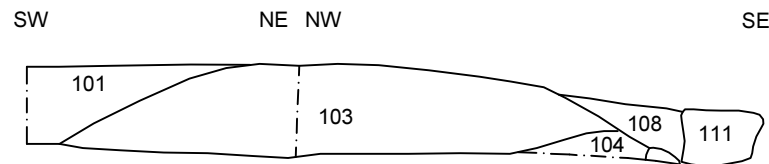




Elevation 1



Elevation 2



Section 1



