

## 4. THE EXCAVATION

### 4.1 Introduction

A trench measuring *c* 12m by 13m was excavated to encompass the entire extent of the burnt mound (*illus 2*). The size of the trench was defined by access constraints, the presence of large trees and the need to bund the topsoil within the road corridor. A combination of machine and hand excavation was used. All machine excavation was conducted using a tracked excavator with a flat-bladed bucket under constant archaeological supervision. The ground and the field bank were reinstated by machine on completion of the excavation. *Illus 3* is a much-simplified plan of the excavation trench. For the sake of clarity many of the baulks are omitted, though they appear in the sections (*illus 4–8*).

Weather conditions during the excavation were challenging. Frequent rain made for muddy conditions and the need to transport spoil up from a low-lying trench entailed the use of wooden walking boards. Heavy overnight rain in mid September caused the burn to overflow and flood the site. The trench was pumped out and hosed down to remove accumulated silt without the need for re-cleaning, but further rain and constant water seepage from the adjacent burn dogged the excavation from then on.

The stones which made up the burnt mound formed a discrete area with clear margins, and although it had been disturbed over the years, the matrix in which the stones were laid contained substantial quantities of charcoal, suggesting that the bulk of the material from which the mound was composed had not moved significantly since its original deposition.

Five phases of deposition and human activity on the site were recognised and are described below.

### 4.2 Phase 1 – Fluvial deposition of silts with evidence for vegetation

Overlying a creamy-blue natural boulder clay (C050), a widespread deposit of fluvial fine sand and silt (C057, C060, C061, C073; *illus 4*) contained substantial and frequent degrading vertical roots and incorporated infrequent lumps of charred peat and lenses of organic silts. More localised deposits of peat (C065) were also noted. Overlying these deposits, at two stratigraphically unconnected locations on either side of the field drain (C036), were deposits of anthropogenic origin.

### 4.3 Phase 2 – Deposition of burnt stone and charcoal into the palaeochannel

In Phase 2 (*illus 3–5*, Sections A–B, C–D), a layer of burnt stones and charcoal (C040), 0.2m deep at most was dumped on the Phase 1 fluvial sand and silt. The location may have been accompanied by a marker post, represented by a square-section stake-hole (C044), 0.15m deep and 0.08m wide. In profile the base of C040 is slightly concave and it appears that it was dumped into a natural gully. Deposit C040 was distinguished from others of similar material by being composed of stones that were not reddened by oxidation in heat or by subsequent exposure to air. Samples of hazel charcoal in C040 were dated to 2460–2030 cal BC (GU-14990–1, *table 3*).

To the north (*illus 3, 6*, Sections E–F, G–H), what may be the terminal of a peat-filled palaeochannel (C049, C095) had apparently been modified by limited shaping of the edges and was further defined by the adding of a number of large stones (C070, C102). After abandonment, this feature became filled with a mixed deposit comprising reworked peat, degrading heat-affected stone and charcoal (C012, C069, C100, C103–4).

### 4.4 Phase 3 – Fluvial deposition of silts with evidence for vegetation

Overlying C040 were further laminated silt and sand deposits (C039/C048, Phase 3) with a depth of 0.3m, representing a second period of fluvial deposition. Charcoal from within it was dated to between 2550 and 2040 cal BC (GU-14988–9, *table 3*). The overlying silt (C047) was a brighter yellow than C039/C048 but a suggestion that it was heat affected is not supported by soil tests. Deposit C047 appeared to have been laid onto a truncated surface as the laminations within C039 were inclined at *c* 30°. It is therefore different in origin and a manifestation of changing, but ongoing, activity in the area.

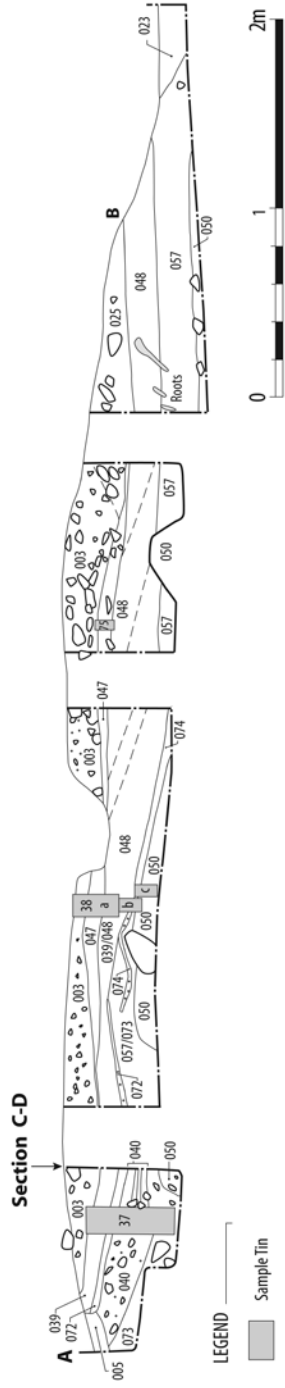
Overlying the palaeochannel terminal, a thick layer of creamy-yellow fine sand and silt (C019/C035/C091) was again stratigraphically unconnected to those to the south but may equate to C039/C048.

### 4.5 Phase 4 – Deposition of spread of burnt stone and charcoal

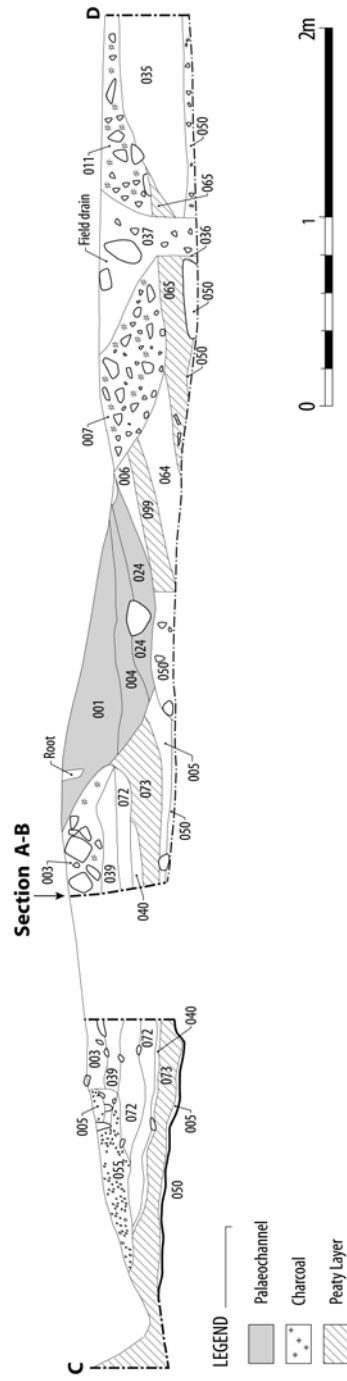
The Phase 3 deposits of water-lain fine sand and silt were overlain by the burnt mound itself (C003, C007, C011, C021, C025, C055). Now measuring *c*



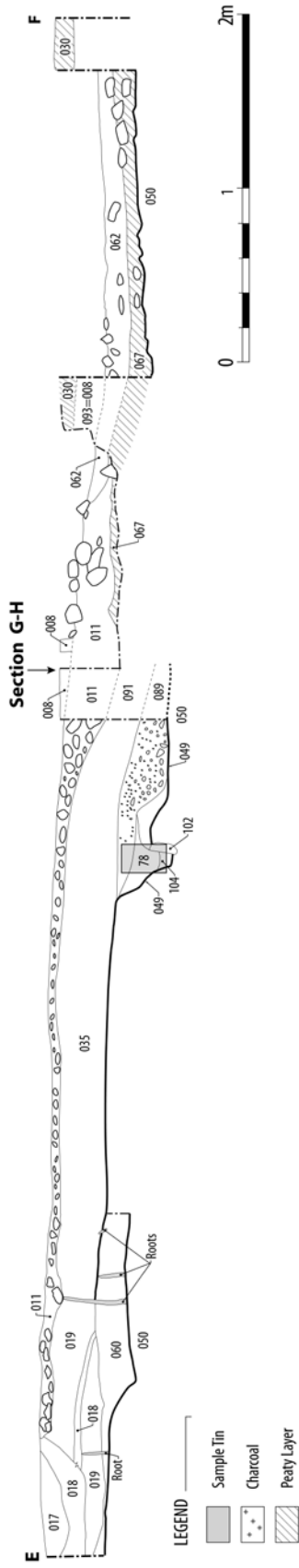
*Illus 3 Pre-excavation plan of the burnt mound showing section locations*



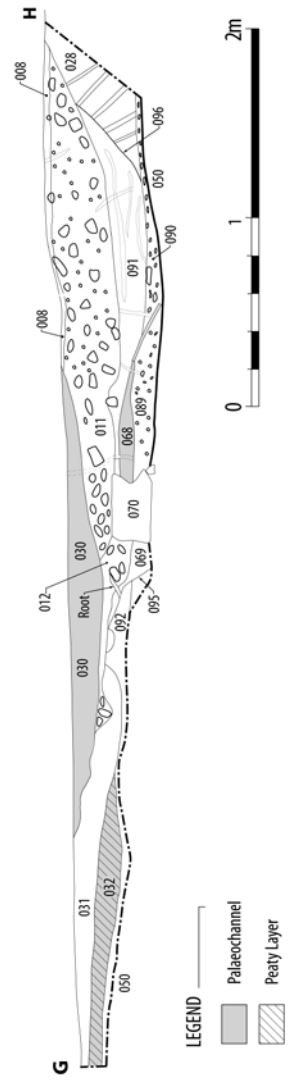
*Illus 4 Section A-B through the burnt mound*



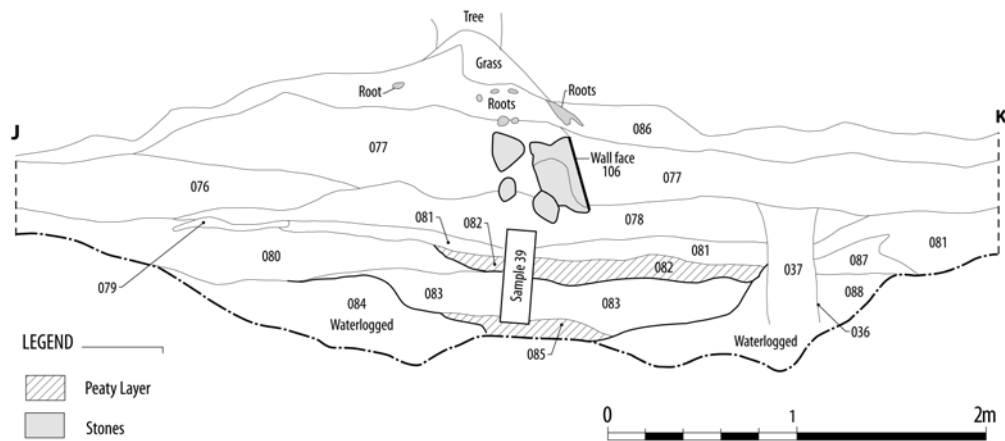
*Illus 5 Section C-D through the burnt mound*



Illus 6 Section E-F through the burnt mound



Illus 7 Section G-H through the burnt mound



*Illus 8 Section J–K through the field bank and underlying palaeochannels*

11m by 7m, this spread had been divided into three discrete deposits, none of which was over 0.35m deep and much of which was reduced to 0.1m or less. The deepest part was C007, where section C–D (*illus 5*) shows that it, and the southern part of C011, filled what may be a palaeochannel with a concave section, as was the case with C040. Elsewhere, deposition appeared to have been onto the surfaces of sandbanks. Charcoal in C003 was dated (GU-14992–3, *table 3*) to between 2210 and 1900 cal BC. Whereas C011 and C007 were homogeneous in nature, the main (C003), most elevated spread of burnt material in the south of the site contained two areas of brighter-red stones (C025, C055), caused by oxidation in a relatively dry location. This area was overlain by numerous roots running under the burn from the mature alder trees to the south and the matrix around the stones had been disturbed, probably by root action; indeed vertical roots were mistaken for wooden stakes during the evaluation. Post-depositional compaction was evidenced by stones being pressed into the underlying deposits (eg C017, C047).

#### 4.6 Phase 5 – Fluvial erosion of burnt material, excavation of field drain and formation of field bank through site

The Phase 4 burnt mound had been affected by more recent fluvial erosion and human activity. This led to it being cut into three discrete deposits (C003/C025/C055, C007 and C011/C021). To the north-west (*illus 3, 6, 7*) of C011/C021, eroded deposits were preserved in a shallow palaeochannel.

There, overlying the natural subsoil (C050) in the base of the palaeochannel was a thin deposit of peat (C067), which was overlain by C011 which contained frequent reddened stones. Deposit C011 was overlain by C062, which was charcoal-rich, with few incorporated stones, and would appear to have been eroded from the main area of burnt material. Finally, C062 was overlain by a mixed deposit of peat and charcoal flecks (C008) with more sterile peat (C030) filling a second palaeochannel (*illus 7*), overlying the first.

Further palaeochannels (C005, C023) cut the burnt mound to the east and west of the main deposit. The bases of both were filled with a mixture of small cobbles, finer material and degrading wood. That to the east (C005) was not fully revealed in the excavation trench but was at least 3m in width and was responsible for vertically truncating the edges of C003, C039, C040 (Section A–B, *illus 3–4*), exposing this sequence of deposits. The palaeochannel to the west (C023) was filled with similar material, with both being similar to that filling the existing canalised burn. All contrast with those in the palaeochannels (eg C030) to the north which may have been formed by different streams originating as runoff from the fields to the north (*illus 2*).

In the east-facing trench section, (Section J–K, *illus 8*), two palaeochannels were present. The earlier example was predominantly filled with peat (C085) under sand, small gravel and burnt stones (C083) and appears to be a continuation of C023. The latter contained a brown humified peat (C082), with charcoal flecked silts (C078, C081) above. These deposits were overlain by the field bank (C075) with its stone face (C106).