



Avon Gorge Promontory Site Data Structure Report

June 2025

Abstract

During the excavation of the Avon Gorge Promontory Site in June 2025, one trench was dug and the contexts recorded. This report presents the results of the excavation and discusses their interpretation

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Abstract

Between the 23th and 25th of June 2025, at the Avon Gorge Promontory Site, a single trench was dug to investigate the archaeology beside an earlier trench which had been opened on a visit to the site in 2023 and further explored in 2024 (Ed Smith, 2024).

This earlier trench (Trench 5) had uncovered an area of large flat stones which may have formed a paved area. One of the trenches (Trench 6) dug in 2024 had uncovered a possible edge to the paved area. There were a number of finds in this area which have yet to be evaluated. Another trench (Trench 8) dug in 2024 may have uncovered a posthole. It also located a piece of pottery which has been informally assessed as medieval.

This June 2025 excavation, extends the area of investigation by digging a single trench which includes the area of Trench 8.

The layout of the trenches is shown in Figure 2.

The excavation did not uncover evidence to support the idea that Trench 8 had identified a posthole. Nor did the excavation find any sign that the paved area extended beyond the areas uncovered in 2023 and 2024.

There were four small finds which have yet to be assessed. Three of the finds are possible polishing stones.

Introduction

Background

The location of the Promontory Site (National Grid Reference NS 73512 52955 and Canmore ID 360740) is shown in Figure 1.

The promontory site consists of a large flat, sub-rectangular area measuring 30m in length, north to south and 20m east to west which protrudes from the edge of the gorge as it slopes steeply towards the river. The promontory has very steep sloping sides to the east and south, more gentle to the north and can be fairly easily accessed from the west, where there appears to be a raised path or ramp leading up to the promontory.

In previous excavations, undertaken as part of Archaeology Scotland's Adopt-a-Monument project and Attainment through Archaeology scheme, the remains of a possible causeway were identified as well as a cairn on the top of the promontory and a possible stone wall nearby.

In April 2023 a large trench (approximately 2m X 15m), referred to as Trench 5 in this report, was excavated and an area of flat stones uncovered which may have formed part of a paved floor.

In the 2024 dig, described in the report Avon Gorge DSR August 2024 (Ed Smith 2024), the excavation of Trench 5 was extended and a possible edge to the paved area was located.

The purpose of the 2025 excavation, described in this report, was to dig a single trench to see whether the edge found in 2024 could be located nearby. This trench also reopened Trench 8 dug in 2024, where a possible posthole had been located.



This is a view of the only trench excavated in June 2025 at the Avon Gorge Promontory site. The camera was facing south east.

Location: 3-Maps

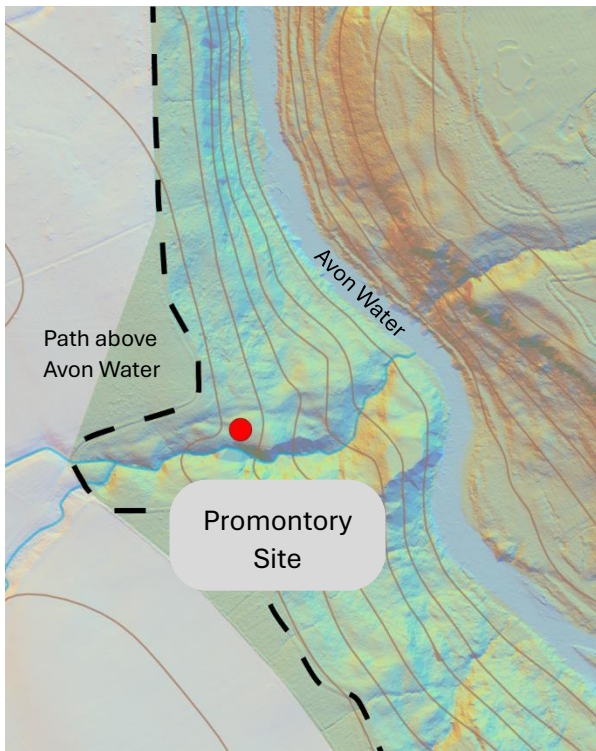
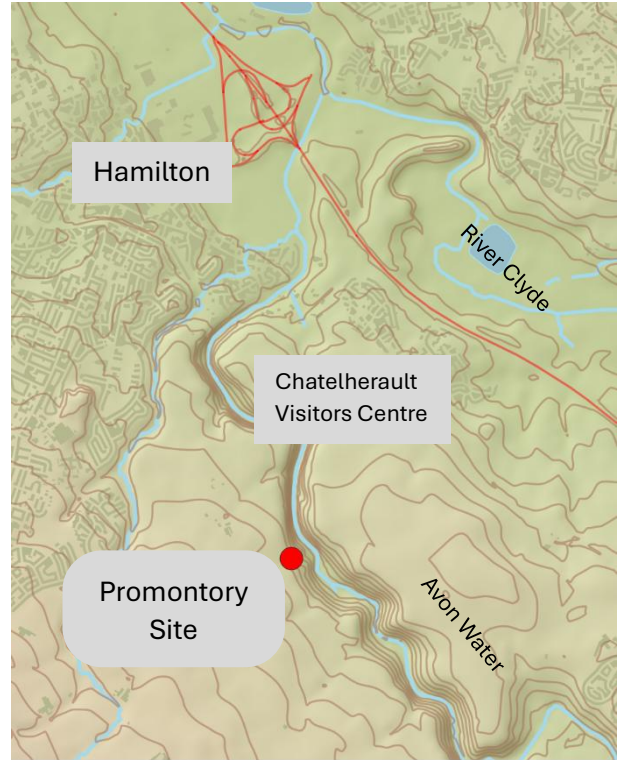


Figure 1

The Promontory Site is located at the edge of a gorge formed by the Avon Water inside Chatelherault Country Park. The Site is beside a path above the Avon Water which leads from the Visitors Centre. The area is similar to other promontory sites in the Clyde Valley and it may be that these sites will be surveyed as part of the Clyde Valley Archaeological Research Framework (2024).

OS Open Data © was used in the construction of these maps.

Project Aims and Objectives

The aim of the Avon Gorge Promontory Site excavation is twofold:

- to investigate the possible paved area which was uncovered in Trench 5 in 2023. Does this paved area extend beyond Trench 5?
- to further explore the possible posthole uncovered in Trench 8 in 2024.

Methodology

The field work was carried out by Clutha Archaeology Group between the 23th and 25th of June 2025. All excavation was undertaken by hand and a total of three trenches were dug. The work was carried out in conjunction with South Lanarkshire Council and in particular Chris McGinley, Countryside Ranger Team Leader of the Countryside & Greenspace Service, who provided invaluable help.

The participants were

Peter Dunn, Eric Gardner, Shona MacLean, Chris McGinley, Joanne Roberts, Calum Robertson, Ailsa Smith, Ed Smith, Jean Tumilty and Tom Tumilty.

Results

Trenches

Trench T9 was the 3m x 4m trench excavated in June 2025.

Trenches T6, T7 and T8 were excavated in 2024.

Trench T5 was excavated in 2023.

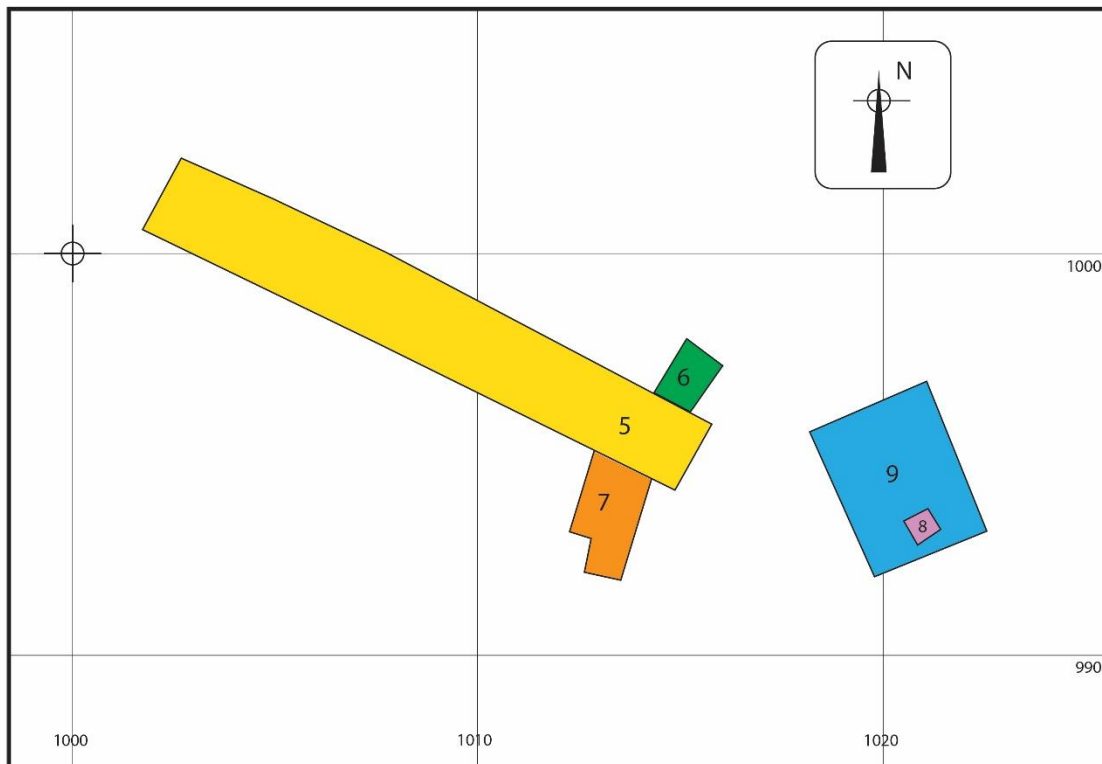


Figure 2. This figure shows the trenches which are mentioned in this report. They are drawn in the Local Coordinate System which is used for all the excavations at this site.

Contexts for Trench T9

Description

901	Thin layer of turf and topsoil and organic matter
902	Layer of compact red-brown sticky clay with some organic matter lying below 901. A small number of stone inclusions.
903	Thick layer of highly compacted red clay with a small number of small grey sub-angular stones, particularly in North West corner. Several larger grey stone flag stones, tree trunks and tree roots. Contained the small finds; SF1, SF2, SF3 and SF4.
904	Several large sub-angular grey flagstones.
905	Similar to 904 but smaller stones. These stones are not big enough to be called "flagstones".
906	Grey clay with small stones. Below roots.

Interpretation

901	Topsoil containing organic matter
902	Clay layer with organic matter below the topsoil.
903	Red clay layer, similar to the red clay layer in Trenches 5, 6 and 7. It contains tree stumps and small stones. It holds the large stones which form 904.
904	Stones held by the red clay (903). Similar to the large flat stones in the other trenches.
905	These stones are smaller and unlike the large flat stones in the other trenches.
906	This Grey Clay is different from the Red Clay (903). This clay lies below the other Contexts as it does in Trench 6. Depth = 0.25m below surface.

Small Finds Register

SF number	Context	Description	Material	Photo at home	Photo in field	Date
SF1	903	Quartz Piece	quartz	2241 2242	2150 2151 2152 2153 2154 2155	Day 2 = 24 June 2025
SF2	903	Possible Polishing Stone	stone	2243 2244 2245	2156 2157 2158 2159	2
SF3	903	Possible Polishing Stone	stone	2246 2247	2160 2162 2163	3
SF4	903	Possible Polishing Stone	stone	2248 2249	2161 2164 2165	3

Contexts in Trench T9

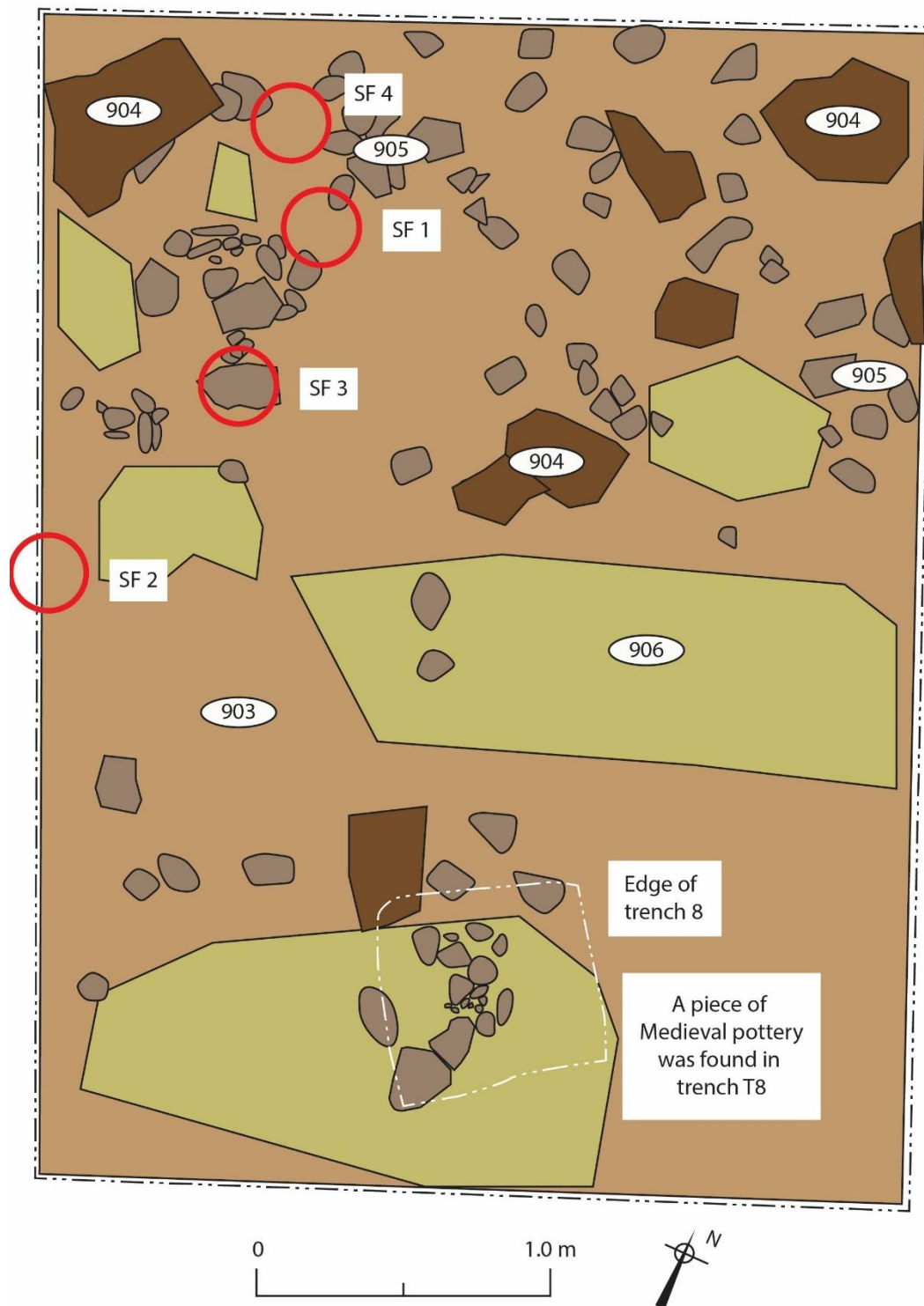


Figure 3. This shows the Contexts for trench T9 (approximately 3m x 4m). Trench T8 was excavated in the previous year and lies inside T9. The location of the small finds SF1, SF2, SF3 and SF4 are shown by red circles. They were all found in the red clay (903) among the smaller stones (905).

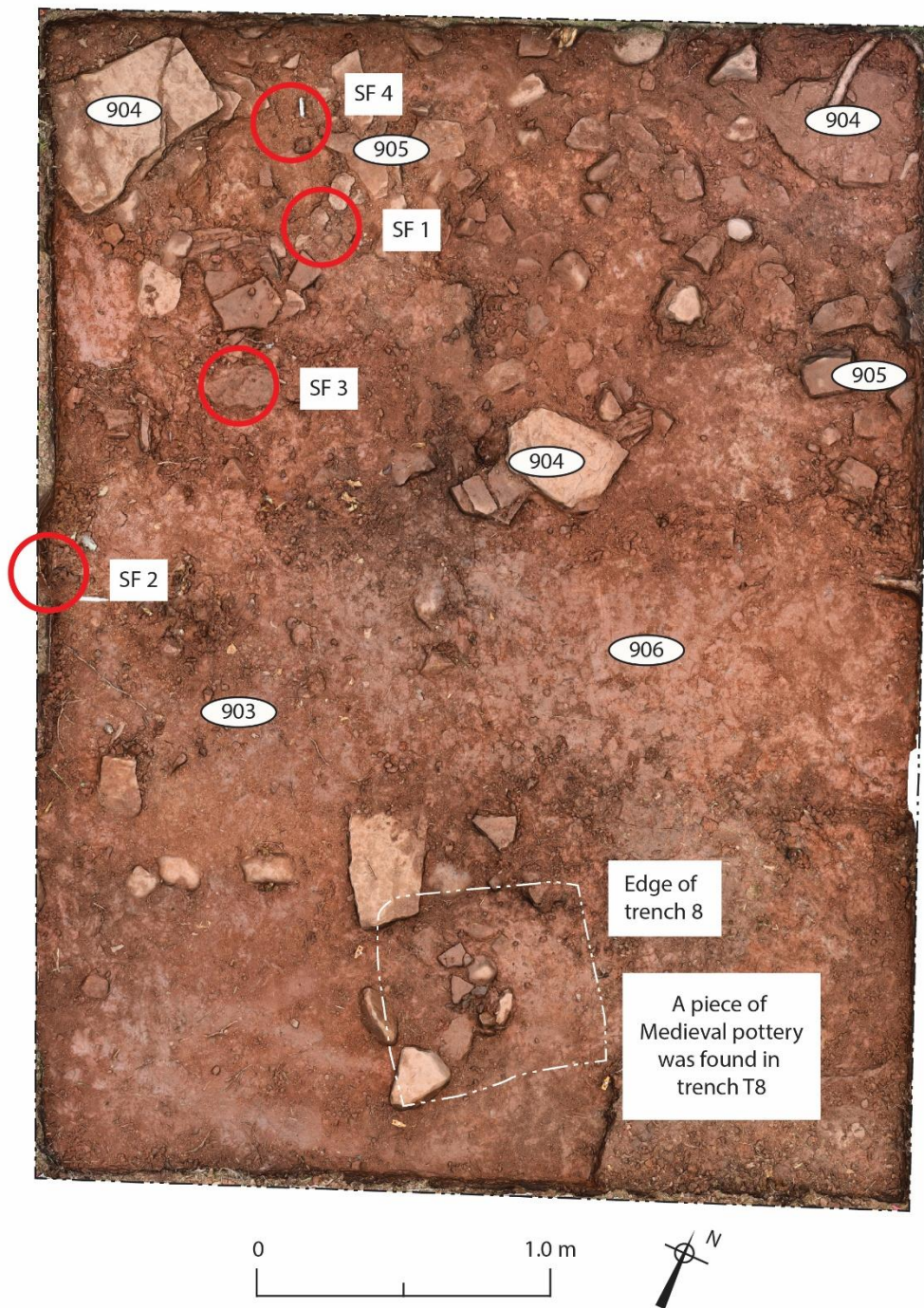


Figure 4. This is the photograph of trench T9 (approximately 3m x 4m) which was used to draw the Contexts shown in Figure 3.

Discussion

Contexts

Two of the main contexts, in the Avon Gorge Promontory Site, are

- the “floor”, first identified in trench 5, and
- the red clay, found in trenches 5 to 9, where many of the small finds were located.

In 2023, the excavation of trench T5 uncovered part of a possible “floor” (515*). The 2024 excavation of trench T7 uncovered more of this “floor”. However, the excavation of trench T6 did not find any sign of it and instead, there was a row of stones (603) which may have formed an edge to this “floor”. In addition, trench T6 had a spread of stones (604) within which there were some of the small finds from that year.

The June 2025 excavation of trench T9 uncovered some large flagstones (904) which are similar to the stones which form the possible “floor” (515). But, in trench T9, the large stones do not form any clear pattern and there is no sign of a “floor” in trench T9. However, the smaller stones (905) in trench 9, are similar to the smaller stones (604) in trench T6. Also, all of the small finds were found in the red clay (903) within the scatter of these smaller stones (905). This is the same as the situation in trench T6 where many of the small finds came from in the red clay (602) within the scatter of smaller stones (604).

All the small finds in trench T9 were in the red clay which holds the stones forming context 905. Also the small find in trench T8, which may be a piece of medieval pottery, came from the same red clay (803).

What happened to the “floor” which can be seen in trench T5 but not in T9. There may be an edge to this “floor” in the space between T5 and T9.

There is considerable uncertainty about the large patches of Grey Clay (906) in the lower half of the trench. The shape of the 906 areas is based on the photograph in Figure 4 above where the Grey Clay is lighter than the Red Clay.

Conclusion

There is probably an edge to the “floor” between trenches T5 and T9. We should look for it.

There should be more pieces of pottery in the red clay of trench T9 but the nature of the soil makes it difficult to find them. How do we tackle this problem?

* These 3-figure numbers are the Contexts.

References

Jepson A. (2021) 'Avon Gorge, Excavation' in Thoms, J. (ed) Discovery and Excavation Scotland, Vol. 22, 2021, pp. 164-165

Jepson A. (2022) 'Avon Gorge, Excavation' in Thoms, J. (ed) Discovery and Excavation Scotland, Vol. 23, 2022, pp. 166

Jepson A. (2023) 'Avon Gorge, Excavation' in Thoms, J. (ed) Discovery and Excavation Scotland, Vol. 24, 2023, pp. 173-174 or 176?

Smith, E. (2024), 'Avon Gorge, Community research excavation' in Thoms, J. (ed) Discovery and Excavation Scotland, Vol. 25, 2024, pp. 148

Photographs of the Small Finds, taken at home

SF1 = large piece of quartz



SF1 side A



SF1 side B

SF2 = rounded stone



SF2 side A



SF2 side B

SF3 = rounded stone



SF3 side A



SF3 side B

SF4 = rounded stone



SF4 side A



SF4 side B

Also, in Trench T8, a piece of medieval pottery was found in 2024. This small find was catalogued as SF20 in the 2024 Data Structure Report (Ed Smith 2024).



SF20 side A



SF20 side B

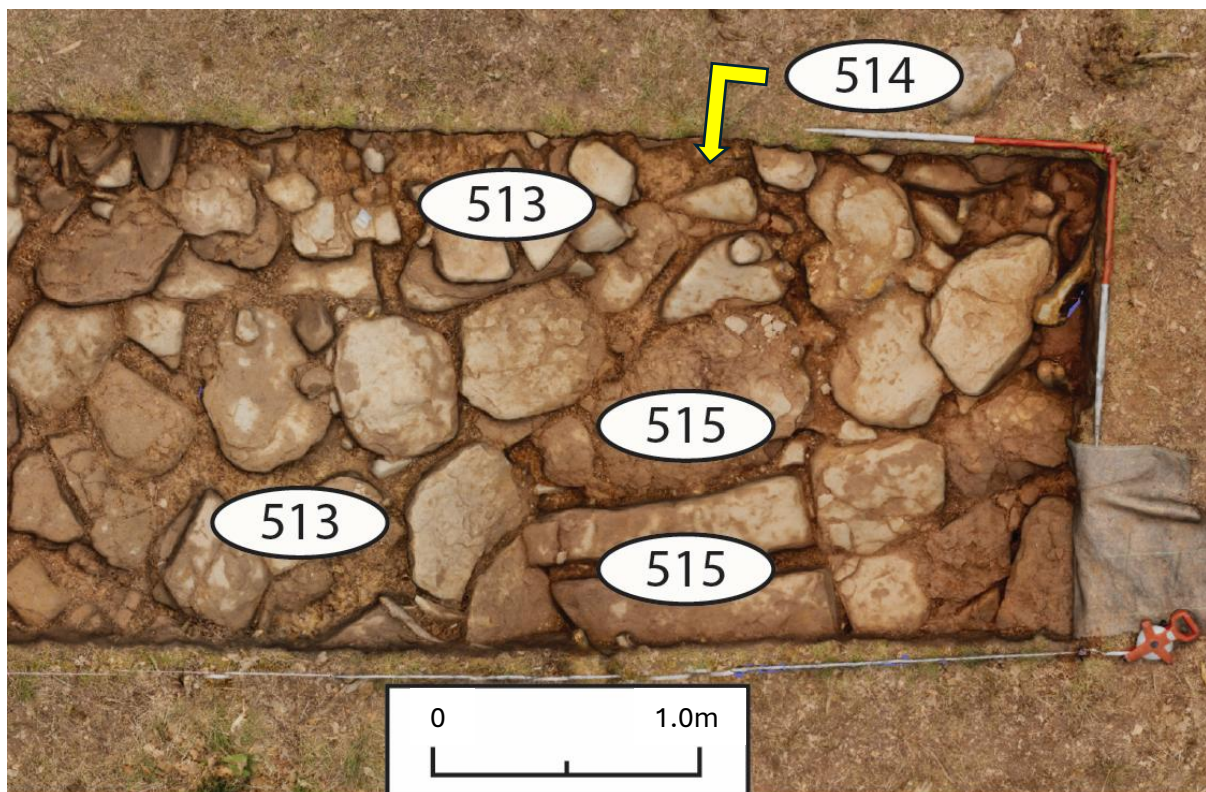


SF20 edge A



SF20 edge B

Appendix: Contexts from the 2023 excavation



Contexts

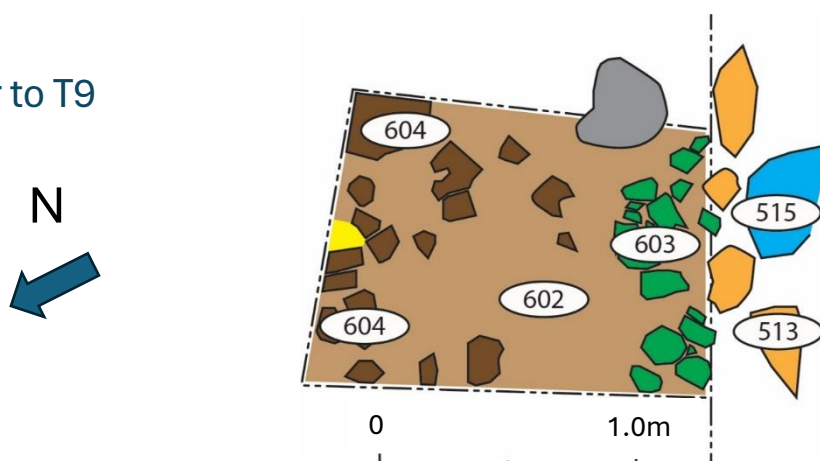
513	Medium to large mid-grey flattish stones abutting each other. The stones are smaller than 515.
514	Compact dark reddish-brown sticky clay.
515	Medium to large sub-rectangular and sub-oval mid-grey flat stones abutting each other in a linear pattern. The stones are larger than 513.

Interpretation

513	Possible floor surface and edging.
514	Soil matrix. This covers most of the site just below the topsoil.
515	Possible floor surface.

Contexts from the 2024 Excavation

Trench T6 similar to T9



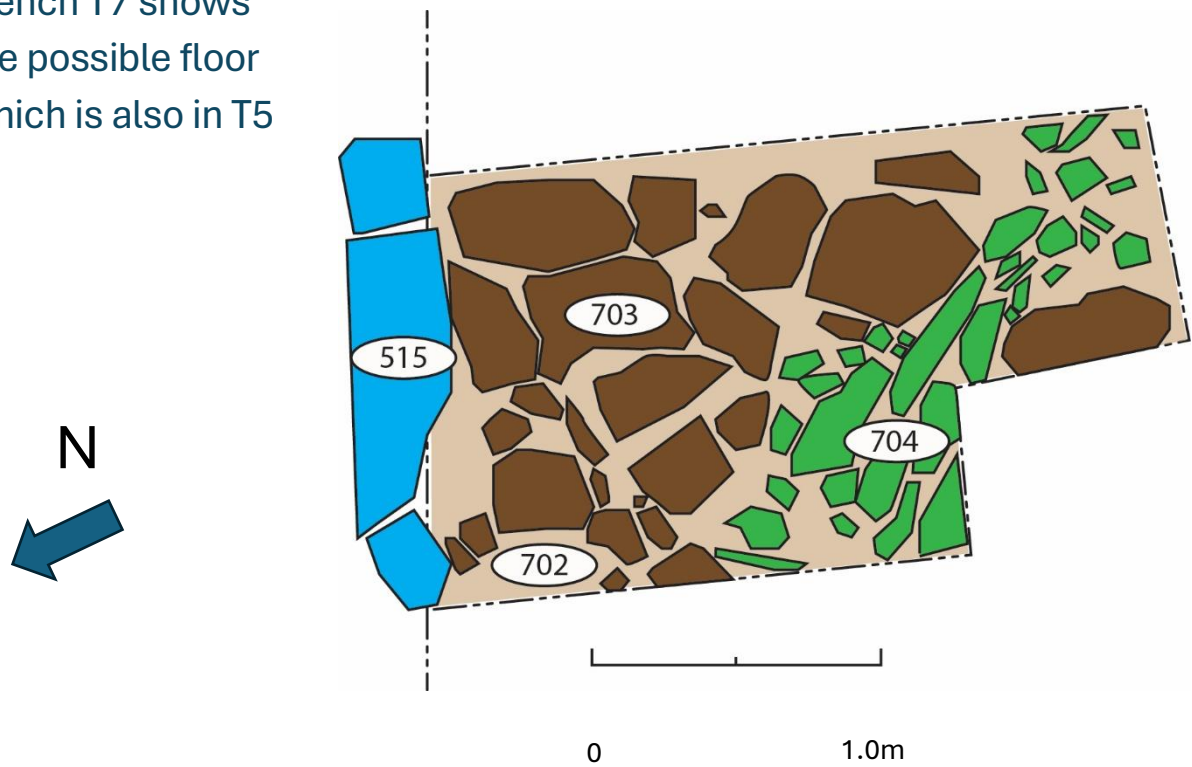
Contexts

601	Dark brown silt, heavy root laden.
602	Compact dark reddish-brown sticky clay.
603	Similar to 515 but with smaller stones like 513. Small to medium sub-rectangular mid-grey flat stones. The stones are next to each other in a roughly linear pattern.
604	Mixture of sub-rectangular and sub-rounded sandy brown stones. Some are similar to 'hammer stones'. Random pattern of stones. There were finds among these stones.
605	Compact dark reddish-brown sticky clay similar to 602 but with patches of white clay. There are fewer stones in this context than in layer above (602).
606	Stones similar to 604 but fewer of them.
607	Similar to 605 but with more white clay. There were no stones found in this context.

Interpretation

601	Turf and topsoil
602	Below 601
603	Stones embedded in 602. This may be an edge to the 'floor' in Trench 5 formed by 513 and 515. Is this the edge we were looking for?
604	Stones embedded in 602. Some of these are 'hammer stones' which may have been formed by the river which went on to create the incised valley. The finds and 'hammer stones' may indicate human activity at the edge of the site.
605	This context lies below 602. It may be a natural process that the clay changes with depth.
606	Stones 606 embedded in 605.
607	This context lies below 605. The clay continues to change with depth. Probably natural.

Trench T7 shows the possible floor which is also in T5



Contexts

701	Same as 501: Dark brown silt, heavy root laden.
702	Same as 514: Compact dark reddish-brown sticky clay.
703	Similar to 513: medium to large sub-rectangular mid-grey flat stones. The stones are level and lie next to each other in a way similar to a floor surface.
704	Similar to 703 but the stones are edge-on rather than flat.

Interpretation

701	Turf and top soil.
702	Same as elsewhere on the site.
703	Possible extension of the 'floor surface' in Trench 5
704	Context 703 may have been turned by possible land slip near the vertical drop.

Appendix: Photographic Register

This is a list of the photographs and the day on which they were taken. They are mainly photographs of the small finds. There were other photographs, particularly the many drone photographs of trench T9, which were not recorded.

Day 2 = 24 June 2025

Photo. No.	Jpg No.	Description	Day
1	2150	SF1 quartz piece. Side A	2
2	2151	SF1 quartz piece. Side A	2
3	2152	SF1 quartz piece. Side B	2
4	2153	SF1 quartz piece. Side B	2
5	2154	SF1 in situ	2
6	2155	SF1 in situ	2
7	2156	SF2 polishing stone	2
8	2157	SF2 polishing stone	2
9	2158	SF2 polishing stone	2
10	2159	SF2 in situ	2
11	2160	SF3 polishing stone in situ	3
12	2161	SF3 polishing stone in situ	3
13	2162	SF3 polishing stone Side A	3
14	2163	SF3 polishing stone Side B	3
15	2164	SF4 polishing stone	3
16	2165	SF4 polishing stone	3
17	2166	Grey Clay North West corner of trench T9	3
18	2167	Grey Clay North West corner of trench T9	3
19	2168	Grey / Red Clay boundary line. South side of trench T9	3
20	2168	Grey / Red Clay boundary line. South side of trench T9	3
21 +	2170 to 2229	Photogrammetry of trench	3

Photographs of the Small Finds, taken in the field

DAY 2



Jpeg image 2150



Jpeg image 2151



Jpeg image 2152



Jpeg image 2153



Jpeg image 2154



Jpeg image 2155



Jpeg image 2156



Jpeg image 2157



Jpeg image 2158



Jpeg image 2159

DAY 3



Jpeg image 2160



Jpeg image 2161



Jpeg image 2162



Jpeg image 2163



Jpeg image 2164



Jpeg image 2165

Photographs of the grey clay context



Jpeg image 2166



Jpeg image 2167

Photographs of the grey clay / red clay boundary



Jpeg image 2168



Jpeg image 2169