

Excavations at Housepit 104

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Housepit 104 was selected for testing and subsequent expanded excavation because of its unusual location on a small terrace remnant (Terrace 2) 40 m above the main part of the site (see Vol. III, Preface, **Figs. 1 and 2**). I suspected that one reason for the remote and isolated location of this and two other adjacent housepits (HP 105 and 106) was that they might have been used as special purpose structures such as shamanic lodges, women's seclusion structures, or secret society ritual and feasting structures. However, no such structures have ever been reported in the archaeological literature of the Plateau and ethnographers have not recorded the kinds of material culture associated with them. Thus, I had no definite expectations as to precisely how such special structures might differ from ordinary residences or how specialized structures might be recognized. However, I assumed that there should be some differences in the nature of food remains, stone tools, and perhaps features that would indicate unusual activities. A limited comparison of HP 104 remains with cases from other parts of the world that have been interpreted as ritual or feasting loci will be presented in the discussion part of this chapter.

Housepit 104 is a relatively small structure, measuring only about 7 m in diameter (**Fig. 1**). It is less than 10 m from HP 106 to the south and appears to have been occupied at the same time. Housepit 104 may have been re-roofed once or even twice with some minor architectural modifications, whereas HP 106 appears to have been roofed only once. Both structures are Protohistoric. The HP 104 floor was dated at 250 +/- 60 BP, while the HP 106 floor was dated to 220 +/- 70 BP. When it was realized

that these structures were not contemporaneous with the occupation of the core of Keatley Creek further excavations were suspended since it did not seem that these structures could appreciably contribute to the understanding of the social or political organization of the Classic Lillooet occupation of the site. These structures, are nevertheless of considerable importance since strong arguments can be advanced that they are, in fact, special ritual/feasting structures used in Protohistoric times, perhaps comparable to the specialized ritual compounds and structures of the New Guinea Highlands located in places remote from residential villages (Hampton 1999). If this is indeed the case, it would provide important new insights into Protohistoric sociopolitical organization on the Plateau.

Housepit 104 was tested in 1988 with a 50 cm wide trench in Squares A and B. More extensive excavations took place from 1994-1996. The original strata designations in Squares A and B were internally inconsistent (**Fig. 2**). Therefore, modified and simplified strata designations and descriptions were developed during the more extensive excavations. Every effort was made to conserve as much of the original stratigraphic system as possible.

Stratigraphic Descriptions

Stratum I: Stratum I (**Fig. 2**) is a typical surface loam, dark in color with low pebble and cobble frequencies (<10%).

Strata II and III: Both of these strata appear to be localized deposits relating to the Feature 1 hearth, either as fill or dumped material from the hearth. Both are rich in organics and bone, especially calcined bone. Stratum II is yellowish red (5 YR 4/6), while Stratum III grades from a light

gray ash (10 YR 7/2) to an almost black ash and charcoal enriched material extending almost to the surface.

Stratum IV: This stratum is unsorted glacial material with no cultural material.

Strata V and VI: These appear to be localized variations within the general roof deposits (Stratum VII), and have been subsumed under Stratum VII.

Stratum VII: This is roof deposit material. It is quite variable in places, ranging from unaltered redeposited till to dark gray (10 YR 4/1) or pale brown (10 YR 6/3) gravelly loams (up to 50% pebbles and 30% gravels) with pieces of burned charcoal (presumably from the burning of the roof). In the south portion of the roof that we sampled, there were a number of ashy deposits that looked like hearth cleaning dumps. Some areas of the roof are relatively rich in artifactual material including FCR, charcoal, flakes, and bones all mixed throughout. The fact that artifactual material is not restricted to the top of the roof deposits seems to indicate that the roof was replaced at least once. Detailed stratigraphy near the eastern walls in Square G indicate that there were at least 3 separate roof burning episodes.

Stratum VIII: This is identified as a floor deposit. It rests on sterile till and generally contains considerable amounts of bone, but few lithics (as might be expected of a Protohistoric occupation). It is generally a compact silty loam and is quite dark gray (10 YR 3/1) near the central hearth (Feature 1) but is underlain by a light tan silty floor in some places. These appear to be the remains of loessic material brought into the structure immediately after construction in order to render the floor softer. Traces of this loam flooring were observed in many places, but were especially obvious near the east wall in Square G where 2-3 cm of clean tan loam occurred between two

superimposed floor surfaces (**Fig. 2**). Pebbles tend to be infrequent (about 1-15% of the matrix). In some areas of the floor (notably Sq. A), charcoal twigs and small branches together with pine bark and bones were incorporated into floor deposits under charred roof beams and rested directly on sterile till. How and why these elements were incorporated into floor deposits is enigmatic. It is also worth noting that parts of the floor of Square A were littered with charcoal remains under collapsed roof beams as though there may have been some kind of simple furniture, planking, or wood construction in this area. Other areas were notable for their thin lenses of gray ash under floor deposits. A relatively thick layer of carbonized grass covered the floor deposits along the lower southern wall (**Fig. 3--Sq. C, Ssq.'s 13, 14**).

There were numerous dumps near the walls, perhaps located originally underneath benches. In some cases, these dumps were covered with fir needles and had rubified surfaces clearly indicating their association with the floor rather than roof deposits. These dumps varied in composition from almost pure organic/fine charcoal soft sterile deposits, to tan loams, to pebble dumps full of bones, birch bark, pine bark, fir needles, and lithics all with relatively random dips indicating their dumping contexts.

Stratum IX: This stratum appears to be a brown color variant of the floor deposits (Stratum VIII). At least in Square F, this deposit appeared to be floor dump material possibly accumulated or deposited under benches.

Features

Feature 1: Feature 1 (**Fig. 3 & 4**) can be described as an accumulation of pulverized charcoal and ash with much fish and mammal bone (over 260 unidentifiable mammal bone fragments all burned and mostly calcined)

associated with it. The feature is roughly circular and appears on the surface of the ground as a slight depression. The excavated portion was 105 cm across and 20 cm deep at the center. The shallow, surficial depression may be evidence of the subsidence of unconsolidated sediments, or the dissolution of ash contents over time, or more probably of an intrusive, post-collapse origin that was unassociated with the main occupation of the structure. The hearth is uncharacteristic of other hearths in the housepits at Keatley Creek in terms of its high ash content (perhaps a function of the ash having been leached out of the older housepit deposits), in terms of its high bone content with high proportions of calcined bones, and in terms of its shallow depth from the existing surface. Careful subsequent excavation of remaining portions of this hearth in 1995 seemed to indicate that dense concentrations of largely calcined bone actually cut through floor deposits (Stratum VIII), thus indicating a post-collapse intrusive origin for this feature. However, burned bones as well as ash and rubified floor deposits were also found in good floor deposit contexts concentrated in the vicinity of Feature 1, raising the possibility that a hearth feature was also present in that location on the floor during the occupation of the structure. Thus, it seems possible that the exact same location (the center of the house depression) was subsequently used after the structure collapsed for another hearth by a hunting party. This would be an unusual coincidence, but the extension of hearth remains almost to the surface and the surface depression of this hearth give the impression of possible post-collapse use. In any event, it seems probable that a hearth was in use at this location during the occupation. This is an unusual feature at the site and may relate to the special use status of this structure. Ethnographically, when women were secluded in special structures, they were prohibited from eating meat.

Therefore, this structure is unlikely to have served as a women's seclusion structure.

Feature 2: This pit feature was unusual in shape, location, and content. Only half or less of the feature was excavated (in Sq. A, Ssq.'s 13 and 14; in Sq. G, Ssq. 16), and it appeared to abut the eastern wall of the housepit in Square G. Feature 2 appears oblong (about 130 x 40 cm--**Fig. 5**) and only about 20 cm deep (**Fig. 2**). It was composed of two distinctive fill units, one containing a large slab of pine bark (26 x 6 cm). A long spatulate bone object with an "x" lightly incised was recovered from the bottom of the pit, while a broken lahal gaming bone was found in the topmost fill. These objects may indicate that the pit was used for the storage of various kinds of paraphernalia. There were no lithics, although 3 fish heads were recovered from the lower fill unit, so that some fish parts may have also been stored in the pit. The emphasis on fish heads is interesting and parallels similar occurrences in HP's 9 and 105—also suspected to have special ritual roles.

Feature 3: This is a shallow basin in Subsquares 13 and 14 of Square C that seems to have been used as a garbage dump prior to housepit abandonment (**Fig. 6**). Rock, some bone, and dirt seem to have been thrown in the depression and piled up against the wall to a height of about 10 cm above floor level. The fill was very loose and unconsolidated, and it contained very little cultural material (one flake, 64 bone fragments [including a deer mandible], and no FCR), although there was a dense concentration of fir needles in the northern half of the depression. The intended use of this depression is problematical.

Postholes and Structural Remains

There were 5 major postholes excavated in HP 104 and most of them contained the remains of a burned post in situ. This was unusual for housepits at Keatley Creek. In most cases, it was clear that the useful posts had been removed prior to burning the roof superstructure. Moreover, the positioning of three of these posts near the housepit walls is very unusual for such a small structure. It may be possible that extra reinforcing was used for this structure due to heavy use of the smoke hole entrance rather than a side entrance.

While there were considerable sections of charred beams from the burned superstructure recovered from the floor contact and lower roof deposits, not enough area of HP 104 was excavated to make a clear-cut architectural pattern of the roof apparent. Pine bark and some cottonwood bark was found covering and underlying roof beams in several instances which is consistent with the general architectural model developed in Volume I. As in HP 106, we also recovered fairly good evidence that split poles and probably planks were used as roofing elements. Because these were likely more labor intensive to produce than using simple poles, these architectural features may reflect unusual labor investments in structures that could be expected with the construction of elite secret society lodges and shrines.

It might also be noted that there appears to be a remnant of an earlier roof collapse event that fills in an unusual concavity in the east wall (**Fig. 3**). It seems possible that there may have been a side entrance at this location for the initial construction of HP 104, but this entry may have been filled in with roof collapse during later re-roofing events.

Lithics

Because HP 104 was occupied during the Protohistoric period when some metal tools were probably available, we might expect significant differences between its stone tool assemblage and those that preceded it. However, the distinctive aspects of the lithic assemblage in HP 104 cannot easily be explained by the influence of metal tools alone. Heffner (Vol. II, Chap. 12) has carried out an analysis of the lithics from HP 104, and the modified tools do not seem substantially different from those in other housepits although the paucity of chipped stone in general may be an indication of the special ritual use of the structure, or alternatively of the effect of metal tools that might have been available. Excavators also noted a strong emphasis on billet flake debitage in many squares.

What is most distinctive, however, is the very high frequency of sandstone "abraders." We recovered far more fragments of sandstone abraders in HP 104 than from any other housepit at Keatley Creek. We also recovered 3 quite unique artifacts of sandstone including one or two fragments and one nearly complete example of sandstone "saws" (Vol. II, Chap. 13, Fig. 6B) which are generally attributed to working nephrite, as well as a unique thick bifacial sandstone grinding stone or abrader (Vol. II, Chap. 13, Fig. 6V) which may also have been used to grind nephrite. The large example of a sandstone saw may be the most complete specimen from the Plateau. I suspect that many of the fragmentary sandstone "abraders" were actually parts of sandstone saws or objects used to abrade nephrite. The unusual concentration of these tools in HP 104 seems to indicate an unusual emphasis on nephrite working in this structure, or some other similar specialized manufacturing activity. Paradoxically, we have no

nephrite debitage or other remains from our excavations, and we can only assume that individuals were being unusually tidy in their cleanup of nephrite debitage or perhaps that they were working other materials, although it is difficult to image what else would have required the use of sandstone saws. Abraders, of course, could be used for the production of bone tools such as the spatula and gaming piece described below.

We also recovered a unique projectile point from the HP 104 roof deposits (possibly associated with the post-collapse use of the Feature 1 hearth) that does not resemble any previous style in the region. This more or less bipointed projectile may be an attempt to replicate metal style arrowheads (see Vol. I, Chap. 3, Fig. 1). Other standard style Kamloops points were also recovered from HP 104.

Fauna

The faunal remains from HP 104 have been described in detail by Kusmer (Vol. I, Chap. 10, Appendix I). However, it is worth emphasizing some of her general conclusions. It is especially notable that Kusmer found that HP 104 has a much higher density of bones, particularly on the floor (by a factor of 10) than most of the other housepits at Keatley Creek. Many of these bones are also significantly larger than those in other housepits and there are articulated leg segments of deer and a number of articulated salmon vertebrae or heads or ribs. This reflects the subjective impression that excavators had of deer bones (especially leg and foot elements) on the floor being more frequently whole or minimally reduced when compared to other housepits. Articulated segments indicate that the bone remains were not heavily disturbed after deposition, and thus that use of the structure may not have been constant.

Two quite unusual bone artifacts were also excavated from the pit fill of Feature 2. One is a broken lahal gaming piece (possibly ivory), and the other is an enigmatic bone spatula (Vol. III, Chap. 2, **Fig. 9**). A delicate, flat bone awl was also recovered from the floor of HP 104 and two dog coprolites were recovered from the floor dumps in Square A. This, too, is an unusual occurrence in Keatley Creek housepits, perhaps reflecting either the keeping or consumption of dogs in HP 104.

Basketry

A unique fragment of carbonized coiled basket was recovered from the floor deposits of HP 104 in Square A (**Fig. 3**). It is apparently the only reported archaeological occurrence of coiled basketry from the Canadian Plateau. Small wrapping fragments from what was probably a coiled basket were also recovered from a dump along the eastern wall (Sq. G, Ssq. 12).

Discussion

Housepit 104 is unique in many respects. Its location on Terrace 2 is an unusual location. It is very isolated and hidden in a very confined area with natural earth embankments around it. The central hearth, thick with gray ash and calcined bone fragments is unique at the site. Its lithic and faunal assemblages are unusual. The unique occurrences of sandstone saws and abundant remains of sandstone "abraders" attest to some kind of specialized activity, while the density and size of faunal remains is quite exceptional when compared with other housepits at Keatley Creek. The bone artifacts are unusual and include a fragment of a gaming piece and an

enigmatic spatulate piece. Moreover, there is a unique fragment of coiled basketry, and it seems that the structure was burned with all of its roof support posts in place. The roof supports seem to be unusually near the walls. This is unusual when compared to all other excavated burned housepits at the site where posts were generally removed prior to burning the roof superstructure. There is also a unique deposit of burned grass lying against the inner southern wall of the structure.

Although we have only excavated about a fourth of the total floor of HP 104, there are already enough distinctive features to make it clear that the structure was the locus of special kinds of activities, especially when compared to the virtually contemporaneous remains recovered from the adjacent HP 106 structure where very little of anything was left. What might the specialized activities in HP 104 have been?

Given the copious faunal remains associated with the structure, it seems highly dubious that this structure was a women's seclusion lodge or any kind of a women's ritual lodge. On the other hand, one might assume that sandstone saws for manufacturing nephrite adzes would have been used by males, as would lahal gaming pieces. Moreover, the high density of animal bones has been used as an important criterion for identifying feasting or high status areas elsewhere in North America and the world. Emphasis on limb elements of deer as choice cuts has also been interpreted as evidence for high status or feasting contexts (Welch and Scarry 1995:405; Cleland 1965; Jackson and Scott 1995; Bogan 1983; Junker et al. 1994:348). Ritual/feasting locations have also been identified on the basis of their isolated locations (Byrd 1994:657; Blackburn 1976), the low density of modified artifacts associated with them (Byrd 1994:656), the intentional

burning of structures (Wilshusen 1986; Byrd 1994:657) and architectural plans that create central spaces lacking support posts.

Given some of these observations, what I would like to suggest is that the unusual aspects of HP 104 can be explained in a coherent fashion if one assumes that the structure was used for secret society rituals and/or feasting. First of all, the remote location is what one would expect of secret society ritual/feasting structures. As Wason (1994:150-1) notes, social inequality in communities is often reflected in restricted ritual spaces used by small subgroups of communities. The remote location of HP 104 and its small size all indicate that the users would have been a select group and access restricted. Blackburn (1976:236) notes that the Chumash ?antap elite secret society structure shrines were often located on "hill-tops, promontories, or in other remote spots in which sacrifices of money, seeds, or down were made or ceremonies were held." The location of HP's 104, 105, and 106 certainly conform to this locational description. Moreover, assuming that there might have been a guardian of ritual structures or secret society meeting places, it is worth noting that Tlingit shamans lived in separate houses with a shrine in the forest near the village (Oberg 1973:19). This may be a parallel situation to the archaeological remains of HP 104 and 106 at Keatley Creek where a shaman attached to the elites of a powerful corporate group might have acted as guardian (living in HP 104) for their secret society shrine (HP 106). Other arrangements of highly sacred structures housing sacred stones or other items adjacent to other structures used for feasting and food preparation in areas far removed from residential villages have been documented in the New Guinea Highlands (Hampton 1999). This provides another model for the use of HP 104.

Second, the high density of bone remains makes sense in terms of feasting, especially if remains were left under benches. The low level of bone reduction and the articulated sections of artiodactyl legs and salmon are also consistent with feasting contexts since there is generally more waste in feasting contexts (Wilson and Rathje 2001) and one might expect that feasting structures would be used episodically so that discarded articulated segments would be less likely to become dispersed from activities within the structure. On the other hand, the intensely burned and fragmented bone remains associated with the central hearth (Feature 1), may well be viewed as ritual sacrifices of food remains, not unlike some of the ritual sacrifices of the Chumash which were intentionally stirred to maximize the destruction of items placed into firepits. In fact, Maxwell (n.d.) interprets a highly burned deposit of bone in the Chumash area as a deposit of ritually burned remains.

Third, the occurrence of a lahal gaming piece and unusually valuable coiled basketry fragments in a small housepit such as HP 104 is unexpected since these are usually items associated with high status individuals. On the other hand, if the periodic users of HP 104 were members of an elite secret society, such occurrences would make sense. In particular, Croes (1977:359) has argued that coiled baskets were wealth items that could be cut up and the parts distributed as potlatch gifts. This may well account for the occurrence of the coiled basket fragment on the HP 104 floor.

Fourth, the intentional burning of HP 104 and 106 may reflect the ritual use of these structures. The covering of the floor with fine tan loess may also be an indicator of ritual structures and high status structures since Al Mackie (Personal communication) recorded that loess "clay" was spread over structure floors that were used for dancing in the Interior. The use of split pole roofing and planks may also have been an indicator of higher

status or ritual use, especially in such a small structure. The architecture of this structure is also unusual in terms of the substantial peripheral posts near the walls which have no counterpart in any of the other excavated or tested structures at Keatley Creek. These posts near the walls may have provided extra reinforcement for a roof that supported more foot traffic than normal. Ordinarily, one would expect a structure of this size to be entered by a side entrance (Vol. II, Chap. 15). However, smokehole entrances were probably the preferred mode of entry in ritual structures, just as they were in northeast Asia.

Fifth, the rather unusual position of a central hearth (as in HP 9 and 107) may be indicative of a ritual structure. In the Levant, Bryd (1994:656) noted that one of the distinctive features of ritual structures at Beidha was their central and rimmed hearths. At Keatley Creek, no other structures have centrally located hearths except those that have other indications of ritual uses (HP's 9,104, and 107), and of these HP's 9 and 107 are the only examples at the site to have rock rims.

Sixth, although we did not encounter any unusually large storage pits within this small structure (as we did in HP's 9, 105, and 107), there are at least 3-4 very large storage pits on Terrace 2, in close proximity to the structures on this small terrace remnant. Thus, if large cache pits were being used at secret society shrines or custodian houses in order to store food reserves and ritual paraphernalia or other resources of the secret societies, the outside cache pits on Terrace 2 may have been serving this function, perhaps with the more valuable items stored in inside pits such as Feature 2. On the other hand, there may still be a large storage pit in the unexcavated portion of HP 104.

Seventh, the paucity of chipped stone tools may reflect the predominant use of HP 104 as a ritual and feasting structure, rather than a structure where normal domestic maintenance work was carried out.

Eighth, there is an unusual abundance of fir needles associated with many parts of the floor in HP 104, as well as thick grass coverings along the south wall. These are additional unique features of this structure at Keatley Creek and seem more consistent with special ritual coverings of floors with fir boughs and the padding of seating areas for greater comfort to an extent not generally taken in normal domestic structures, especially small structures of the poor.

Finally, the unusual importance and size of sandstone abraders and saws in the structure may either represent the occupational specialization (nephrite working) of its principal resident, his slave, or of activities of secret society members used to “while away” down time during their meetings. In the more remote Maya Highlands, it is extremely common to find municipal officials spending large parts of their slow days engaged in some relatively simple craft activity such as basket or bag making with local sisal fibers. Something similar may account for the unusual concentration of sandstone abraders in HP 104. In the Near East, at Hallan Cemi, Rosenberg and Davis (1992) have noted that the “public” architecture is associated with the manufacturing of prestige items such as copper and obsidian items.

Given all these observations, as well as unusual finds such as the dog coprolites, especially in conjunction with the dramatically different assemblage recovered from contemporaneous HP 106 only a few meters away, I feel that there is strong reason to propose that HP 104 was either the residence of a ritual (shamanic) guardian who hosted post-ritual feasts, or that the structure was simply used for feasting after the most important

secret society rituals that were held in HP 106. Such an interpretation would be bolstered by the discovery of other similar pairs of structures with similar characteristics. In fact, HP 9 and 107 appear to closely parallel the situation of HP 104 and 106. However, examples from other large sites on the Plateau would provide much greater support for this interpretation if they could be found.

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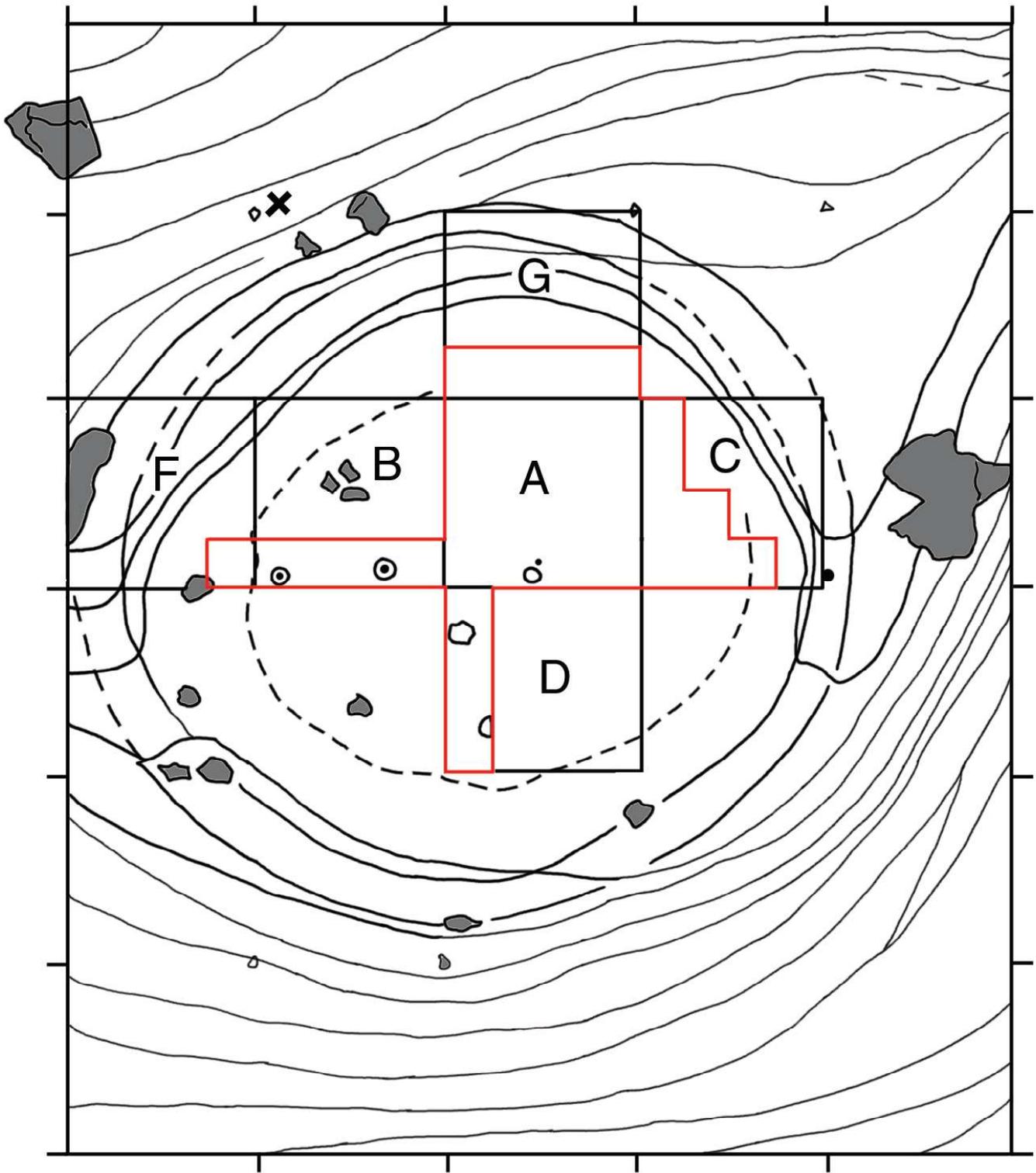
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Figures

- Figure 1: Overall configuration of HP 104 indicating the location of excavation squares.
- Figure 2: Stratigraphic sections of HP 104.
- Figure 3: Floor plan of HP 104 with the east wall shown in detailed colouring, where there may have been an early side entrance which was later filled in.
- Figure 4: Feature 1, a hearth in the center of the structure showing apparent intrusion from the surface.
- Figure 5: feature 2, an oblong pit containing unusual bone artifacts, including one lahal bone fragment.
- Figure 6: Feature 3, a shallow, rock and bone filled basin of unknown function.

HP 104 Terrace 2



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meters

 Surface rocks

 Posthole

 Excavated area

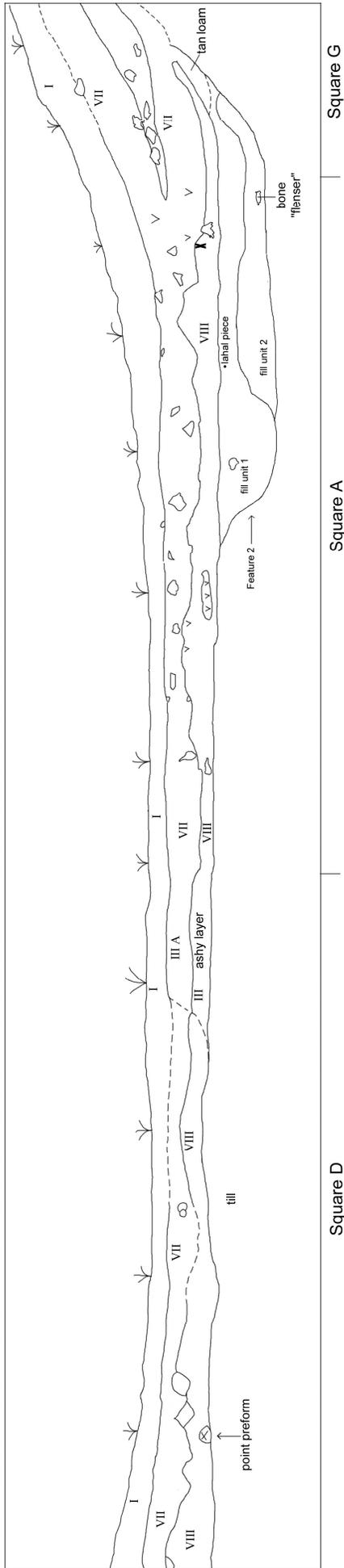
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Figure 1. Overall configuration of HP 104 indicating the location of excavation squares.

Figure 2. Stratigraphic sections of HP 104.

Housepit 104 - North Wall Profile



HP 104 Profile
WEST WALL

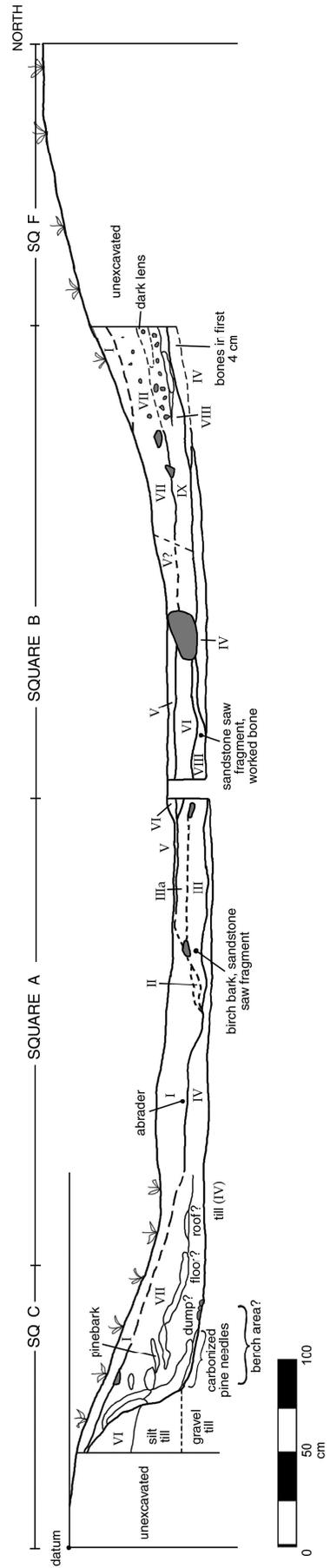


Figure 4. Feature 1, a hearth in the center of the structure showing apparent intrusion from the surface

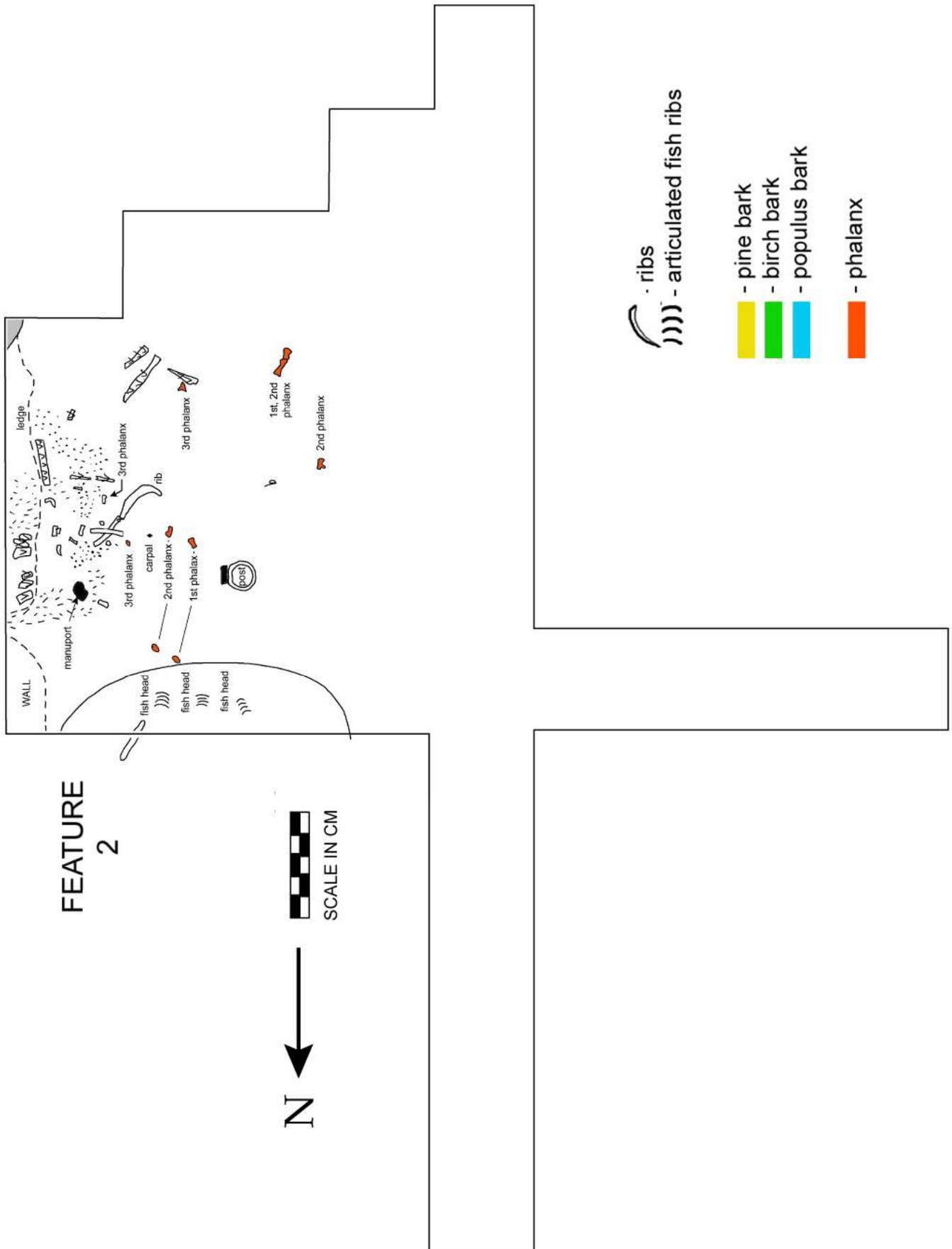
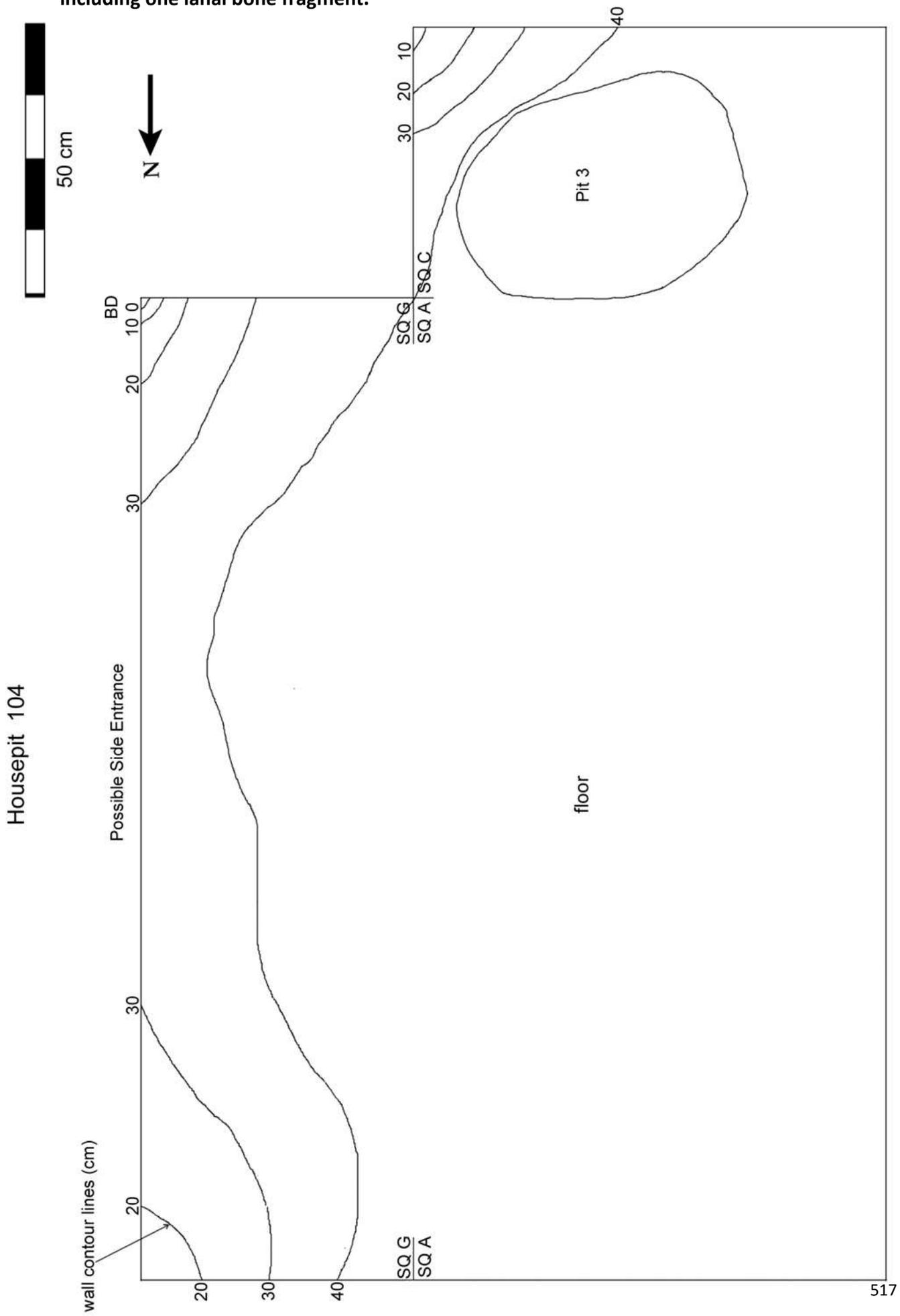


Figure 5. feature 2, an oblong pit containing unusual bone artifacts, including one lahal bone fragment.



Housepit 104 - Square A
 Feature 1 and Associated Cultural Material

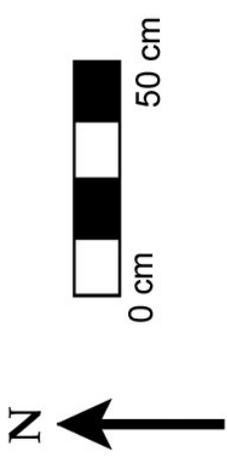
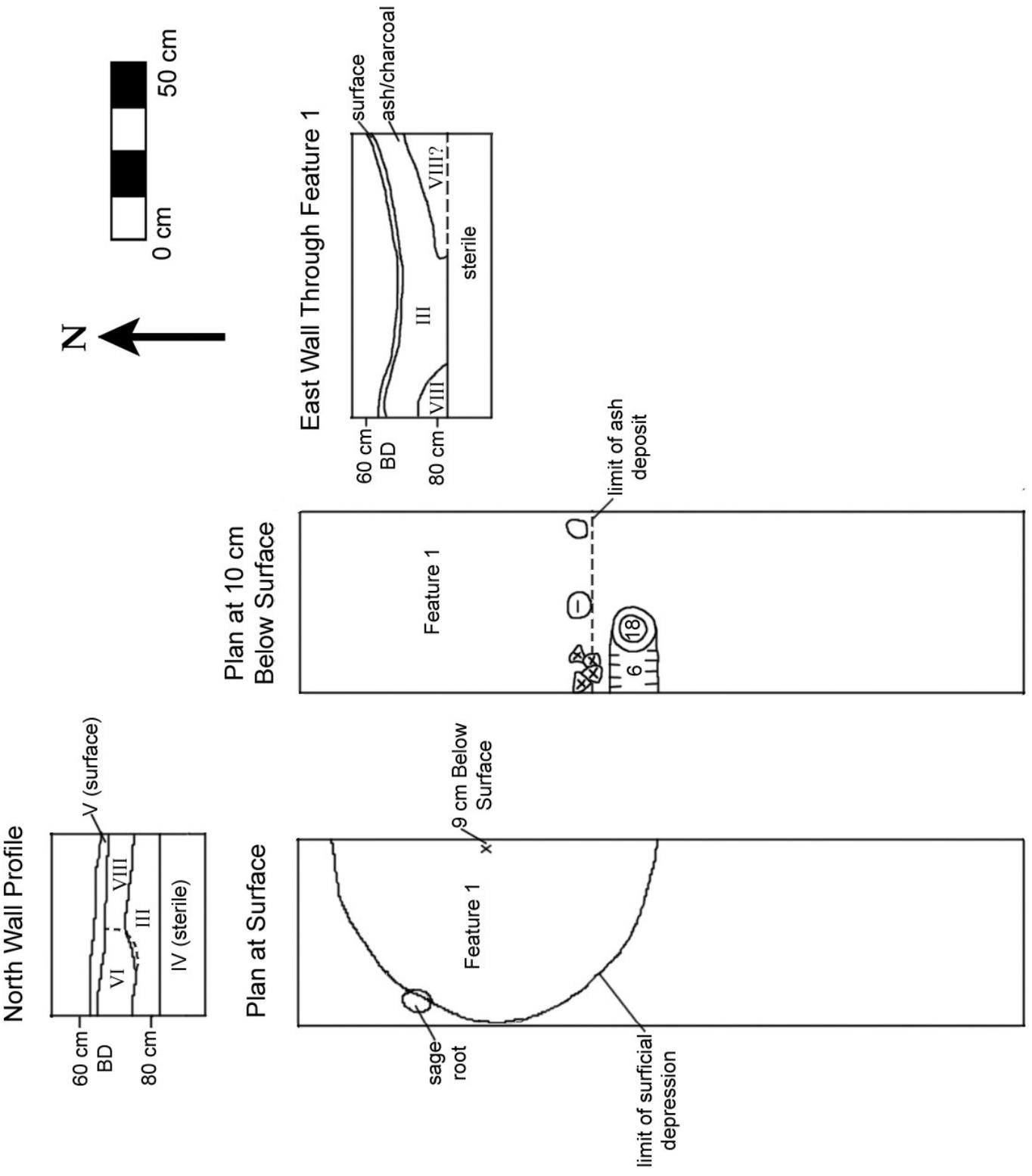
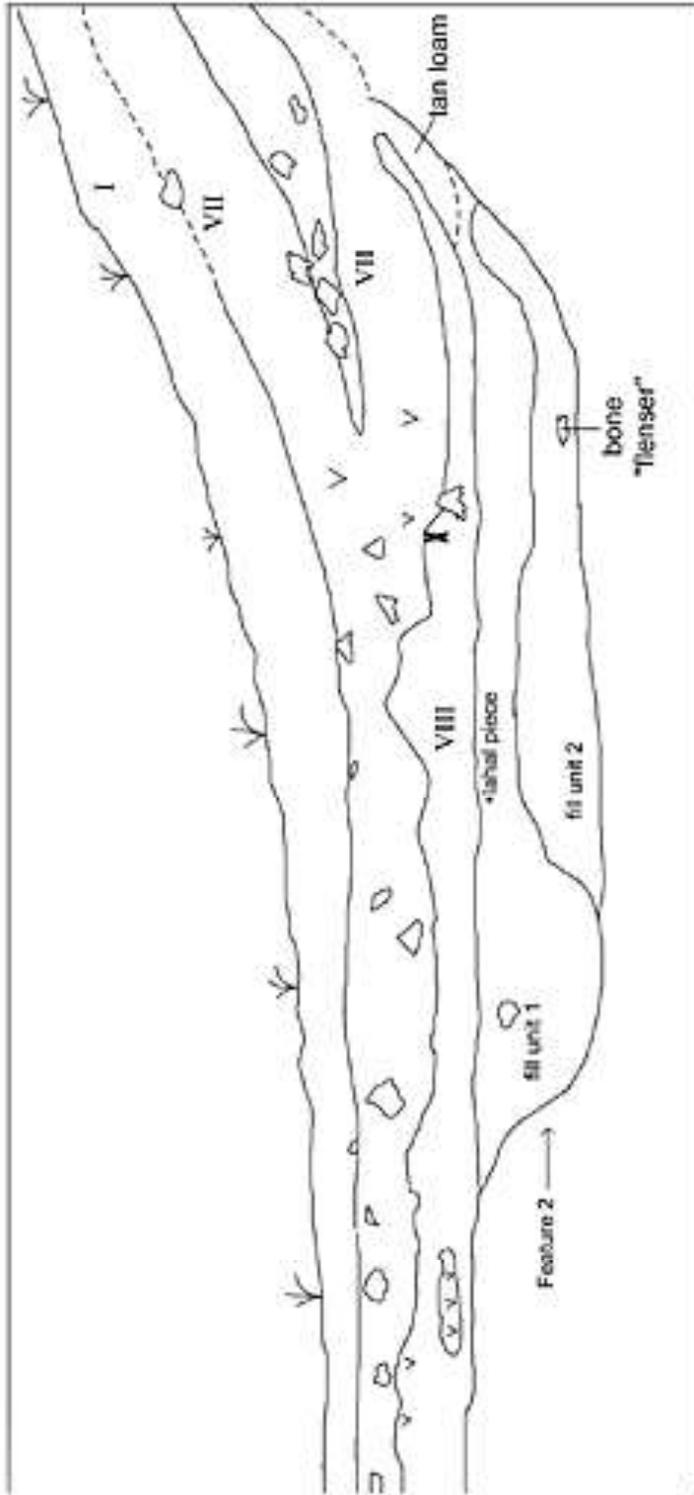
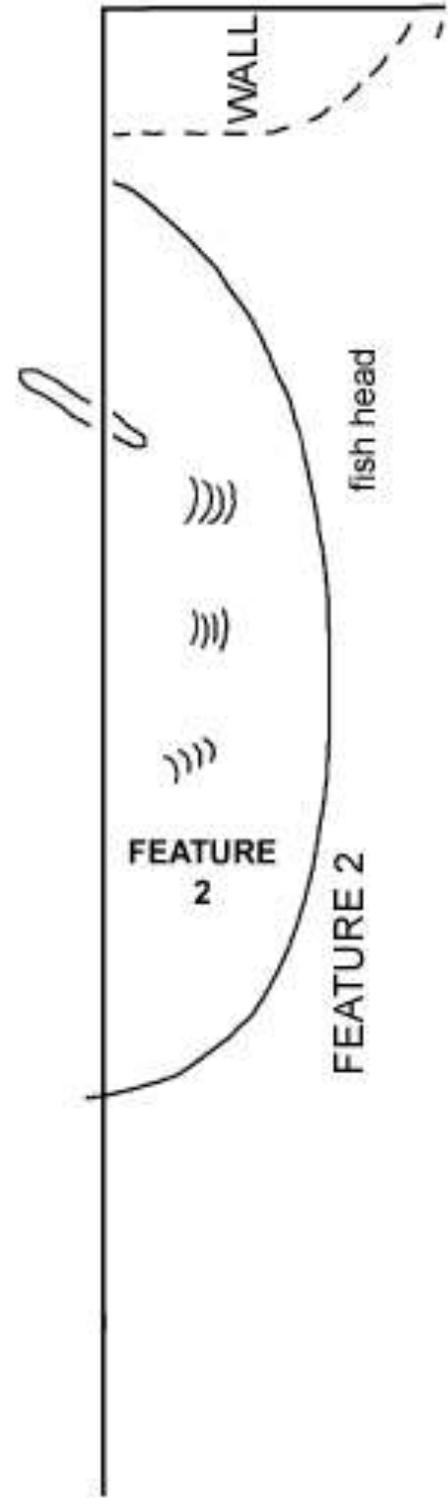


Figure 6. Feature 3, a shallow, rock and bone filled basin of unknown function.

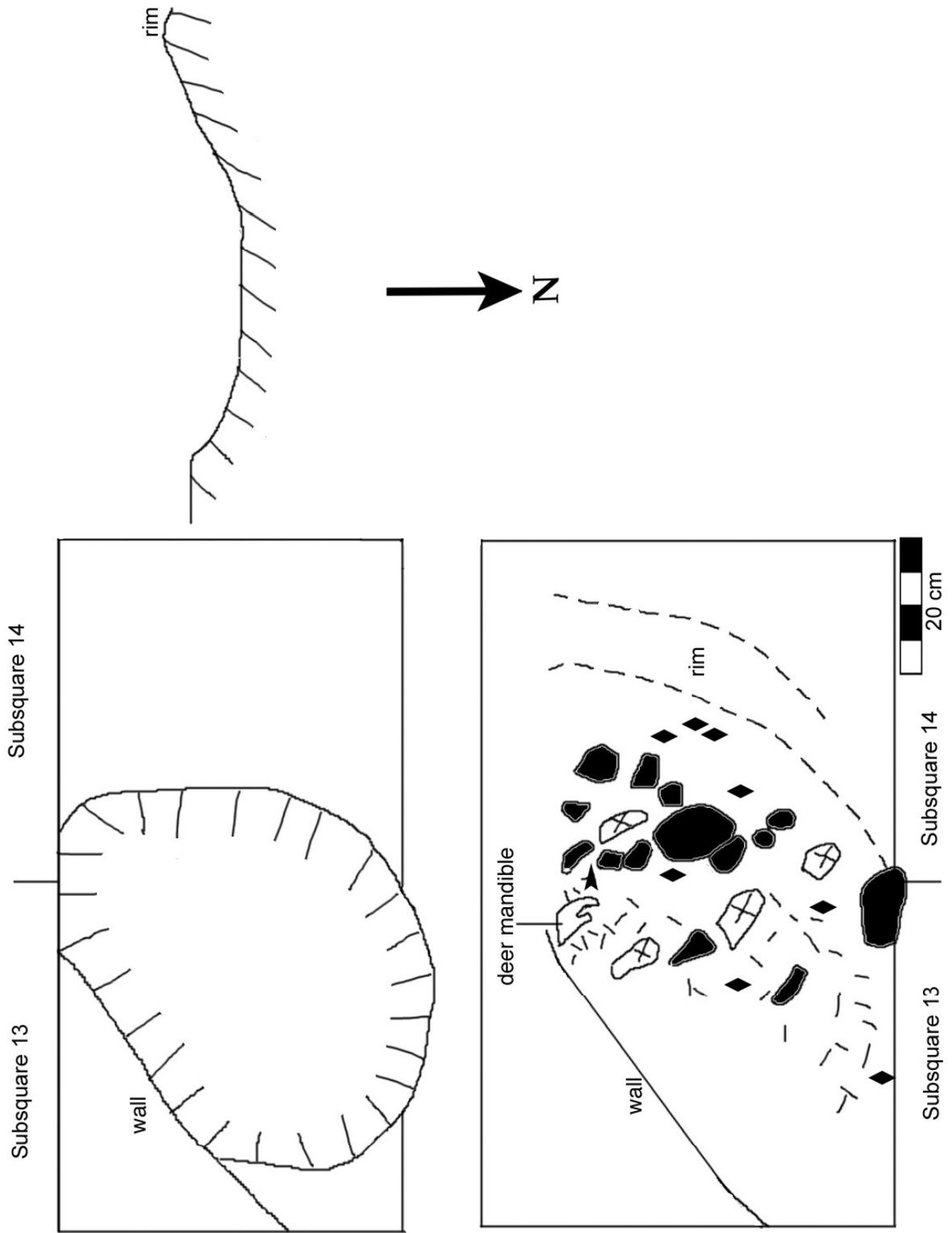


Square G

Square A



Housepit 104



Feature