

# A Fieldwalking Project At Sompting. West Sussex

by John Funnell

## Introduction

During March -and April 1995 the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society conducted fieldwalking in a field at Sompting West Sussex. The Field (Ref TQ157059) lies to the west of the ancient church of Sompting and slopes gently in a southerly direction towards the sea,

It is bounded on the western side by a lane and disused quarry also cuts into the edge of the field on this side.

The area was split into two sections by agricultural activity in a line running east/west from the quarry. The south section had been harrowed and sown with a crop of oats. The upper or north section was fallow and lightly covered with weed and grass.

Permission had been received from the landowner. Mrs. Cole, to walk all areas of the field. However after starting in the south section we were requested by the land manager not to disturb the recently sown crop and the field team moved to the north section of the field. The central section not walked in this project had previously been investigated by the Oxford Archaeological unit in their evaluations of the routes of the Worthing bypass. The weather during the exercise was warm arid sunny.

The southwest corner of the field was taken as the datum point for the grid. The area was divided into transects set 20 metres apart, with each line sub-divided into 20 metre sections Finds were collected from a 1 metre area either side of each line.

## The Finds

### Flintwork

A total of 144 flint pieces were found. The flint items consisted of typical downland material with either a grey or blue colouring some of the flakes had white cortex attached. The debitage contained mainly struck waste flakes with only a small selection (6.3%) of actual tools, of these most were scrapers. A single piece showed retouch and a solitary piece was soft hammered rather than hard hammered. The totals are listed below:-

### The Flint Assemblage

Debitage	Number of Pieces
Flakes	135
Scrapers	3
Piercer	1
Notched Flake	2
Blade	2
Blade (Fragment)	1
Total	144

## **Fire-Fractured Flint**

Number of pieces collected	1063
Total weight of pieces collected	30016 Grams

**Coins**—Penny of Victoria 1874

## **The Pottery**

The survey yielded a total of 122 pieces of pottery together with 36 fragments of burnt clay including 2 sections of clay pipe. The pottery ranges from the prehistoric through to the twentieth century. The fabrics are summarised below.

1. Prehistoric - Buff/black core buff/pink outer surface, Only partially oxidised generally reduced. both large and small angular flint inclusions (0 5-5mm in length)
2. Roman? Grog tempered ware signs of organic Inclusions.
3. Roman? Sand tempered ware base. Roman Shape not Medieval (line P2)
4. Saxo-Norman Wares? Buff/hard grey core. Small white flint inclusions,
5. Adur Valley DB Wares. Hard grey core/orange pink outer, large quantities of Small white flint Inclusions
6. Medieval Medium grey core. 1oxidised orange red outer surface. Very small amount of white flint Inclusions, (maximum length of inclusions 0.5mm.)
7. Grey/pink core. Oxidised orange outer surface. Small white flint inclusions (maximum length of inclusions. 0 5mm,)
8. Buff/pink Quartz inclusions with very small amounts of white and grey flint
9. Hard grey core/white to pink outer surface Minute traces of white flint inclusions.
10. Pink/grey with small -amount of quartz, some sherds glazed.

## **Post -medieval**

A total of 33 sherds of post medieval pottery were collected.

Fabric 1. 3 sherds,

Fabric 2. 1 sherd

Fabric 3. 1 sherd

- Fabric 4. 3 sherds
- Fabric 5. 1 sherd
- Fabric 6. 11 sherds including one rim section
- Fabric 7. 4 sherds
- Fabric 8 4 sherds
- Fabric 9. 16 sherds
- Fabric 10 12 sherds

### **Example pieces**

- a) Base Fabric 3. Sand Tempered. (No.1)
- h) Base Fabric 6. Grey core/orange red outer. (No.2)
- c) Handle Fabric 9. hard grey core/white to pink outer (No3)

### **Tile**

Two pieces of tile were found. Both fragments were poorly fired and seriously abraded. One fragment was stabbed and is probably either a floor or oven tile, however, no glaze was observed. The other tile possessed a corner, but no other distinguishing marks.

### **Molluscs**

A total of 14 fragments of marine molluscs were collected detailed below:-

- 1) Oyster (Genus Ostrea) 13 pieces
- 2) Scallop 1 piece

### **Foreign Stone**

13 pieces of foreign stone were noted.

## **Discussion**

The fieldwalking at Sompting produced very little material from the Roman period, only three sherds of dubious form. Most of the pottery collected (42%)” was of 14th century dating.

The sherds were dispersed with no concentrations. No evidence was found for early Saxon materials. Marine shell remains were focused on the lower south section of the field. It is not possible from the surviving fragments to determine when the molluscs were harvested, thereby indicating either Roman or medieval utilisation of these resources. No parasitic Incursions were observed.

The Flintwork dates from the late Neolithic to early Bronze Age but the low quantity of actual tools relative to flakes would suggest little industrial activity in this area during this period. The report compiled by the Oxford Unit (Lambrick) possessed similar concentrations. The Roman and Medieval pottery, the mollusca and the flintwork are all dispersed with no focus of attention. It is the pottery of Late Bronze Age dating and the significant concentration of unusually large quantities and weight of fire-fractured flint that are of particular Interest. The presence of burnt clay (daub) in association with the other finds suggest (some form of settlement within close proximity).

The Sites and Monuments Records also shows the find of a bronze axe in this vicinity. It is conceivable that the considerable quantities of fire-fractured flint constitute the remains of a plowed out cairn. These features, resembling barrows are found within the Sussex area. A flint cairn was recorded at Eastwick barn on the Brighton bypass excavations. The cairn lay within a part of an Iron Age field system (Rudling forthcoming). The detailed survey of harrows in “Sussex Barrows” and ‘The Ancient Burial Mounds of England’ (Grinsell) suggest that if a cairn had existed then it had been removed or eroded by the earlier part of this century when these documents were published.

Evidence of Late Bronze Age occupation on the south facing slopes of the downs are well recorded. A Bronze Age enclosure and associated field systems are known to the east of site at Thundersbarrow Hill (Curwen 1937). Much of this archaeological landscape has been deliberately destroyed, Perhaps the evidence at Sompting Indicates similar farming policies in previous times: the fire-fractured flint concentrations increase in density towards the summit of the hill and other finds of burnt clay, pottery and metalwork suggest a site dating to the Late Bronze Age. Further examination of fields to the north and to the east of this project may he able to determine the extent arid nature of any settlement

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the landowner Mrs. Cole for allowing access to her land and to Mrs. Dot McBrien for setting up the project. Mr Chris Butler for his flint report and Mr Mark Gardiner for his examination of the pottery. I would also like to thank all members of the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society who assisted with the field walking.

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## Sompting - Flintwork by Chris Butler

A small assemblage of 112 pieces of prehistoric flintwork was recovered, and is detailed in Table 0.

The assemblage is made up of white and grey-blue flint, generally well patinated, which is typical of that found on the South Downs. The pieces are mostly battered and abraded from recent plough damage, and are likely to have been in the plough soil for some time.

The debitage is almost entirely hard hammer-struck flakes, with broad butts, large bulbs, and many hinge fractures. Most of the flakes are large, and comprise both longer blade-like flakes and squat stubby flakes. There is only one possible core, few initial flakes and little in the way of fragments or other flaking debitage, which would suggest that the initial working of cores and manufacture of implements was taking place elsewhere.

A high proportion of the assemblage is made up of implements (>10%), and may be the result of other debitage pieces not being recognised. The 10 scrapers are manufactured on larger hard hammer-struck flakes, with some having minimal retouch around the scraping edge, but are well abraded through use. Notched flakes and a single piercer are also present. A single knife manufactured on a longer flake, with invasive retouch along one edge, was also found.

The flintwork assemblage from Sompting is typical of that found in the Later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, with a small number of pieces possibly being earlier, and some likely to have originated in the Later Bronze Age. The lack of flint knapping debitage and the high proportion of implements would suggest that initial working of the flint was taking place elsewhere, and this assemblage is linked to some subsequent use of the flint, which required a large number of scrapers.

**Table 0. Sompting - Total Flintwork**

Hard hammer-struck flakes	86
Soft hammer-struck flakes	2
Blade & flake fragments	4
Axe-thinning flakes	1
Retouched flakes	2
Keeled? core	1
End scrapers	6
Side scrapers	4
Knife	1
Notched flakes Piercer	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>

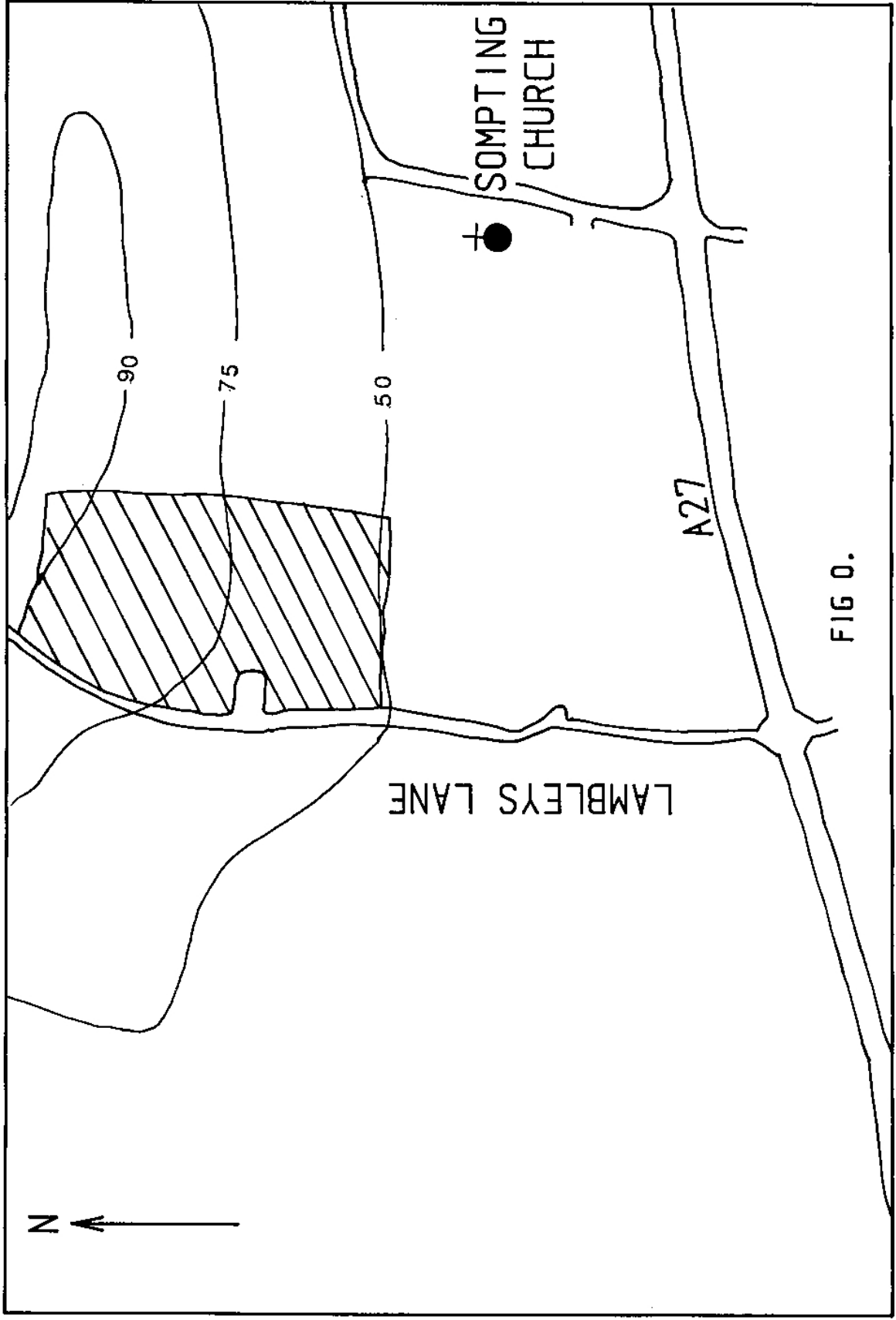
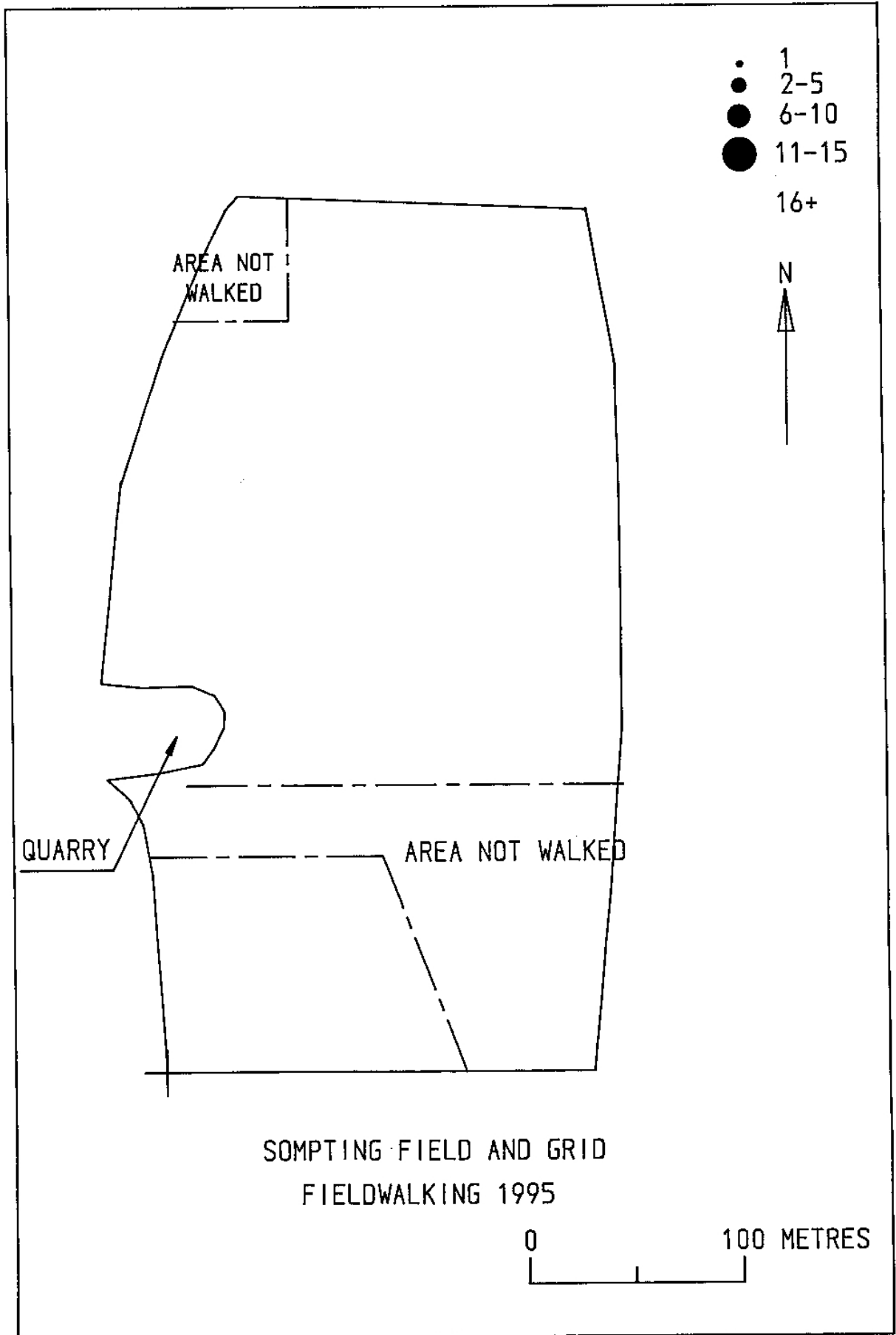
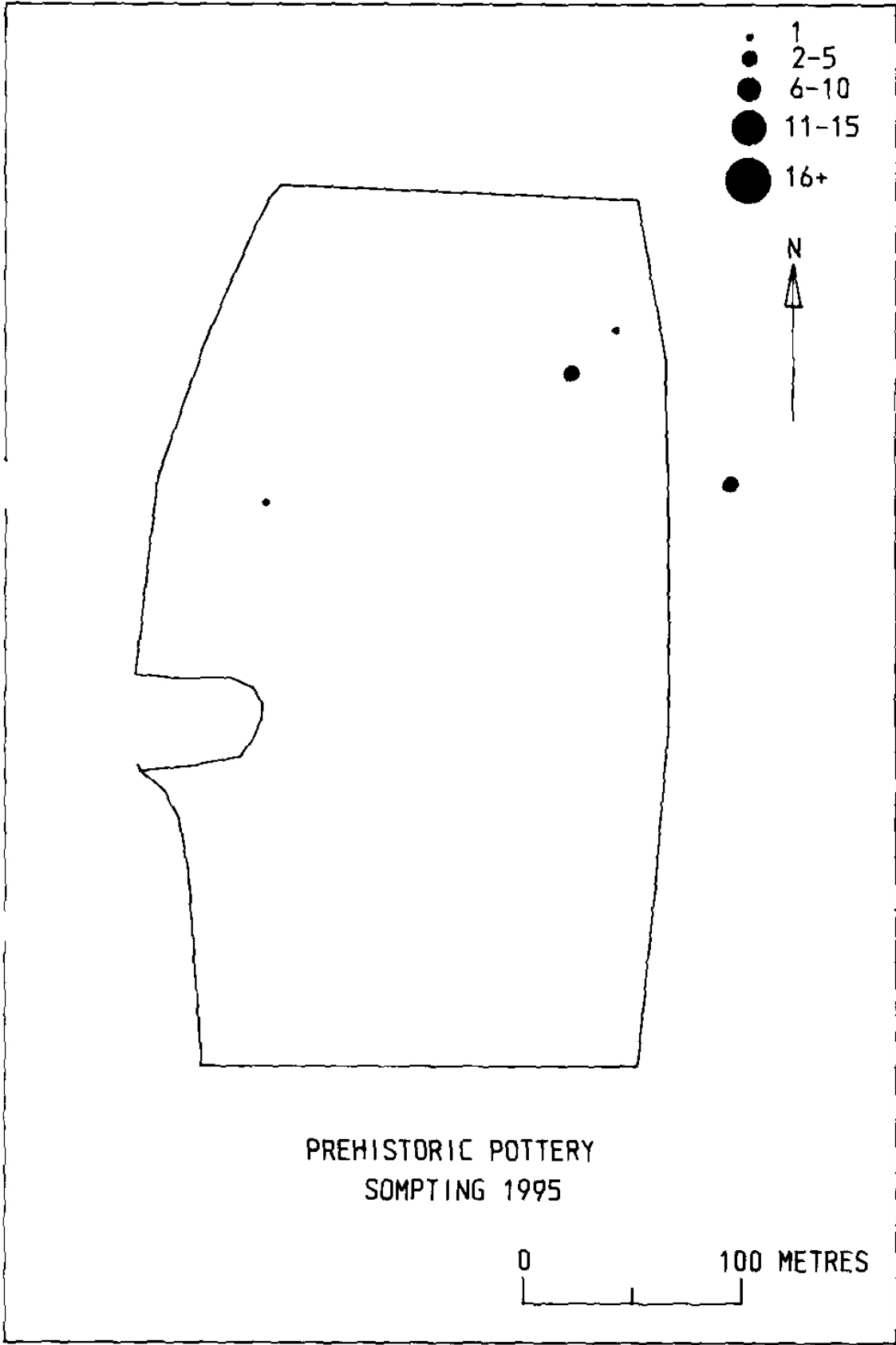
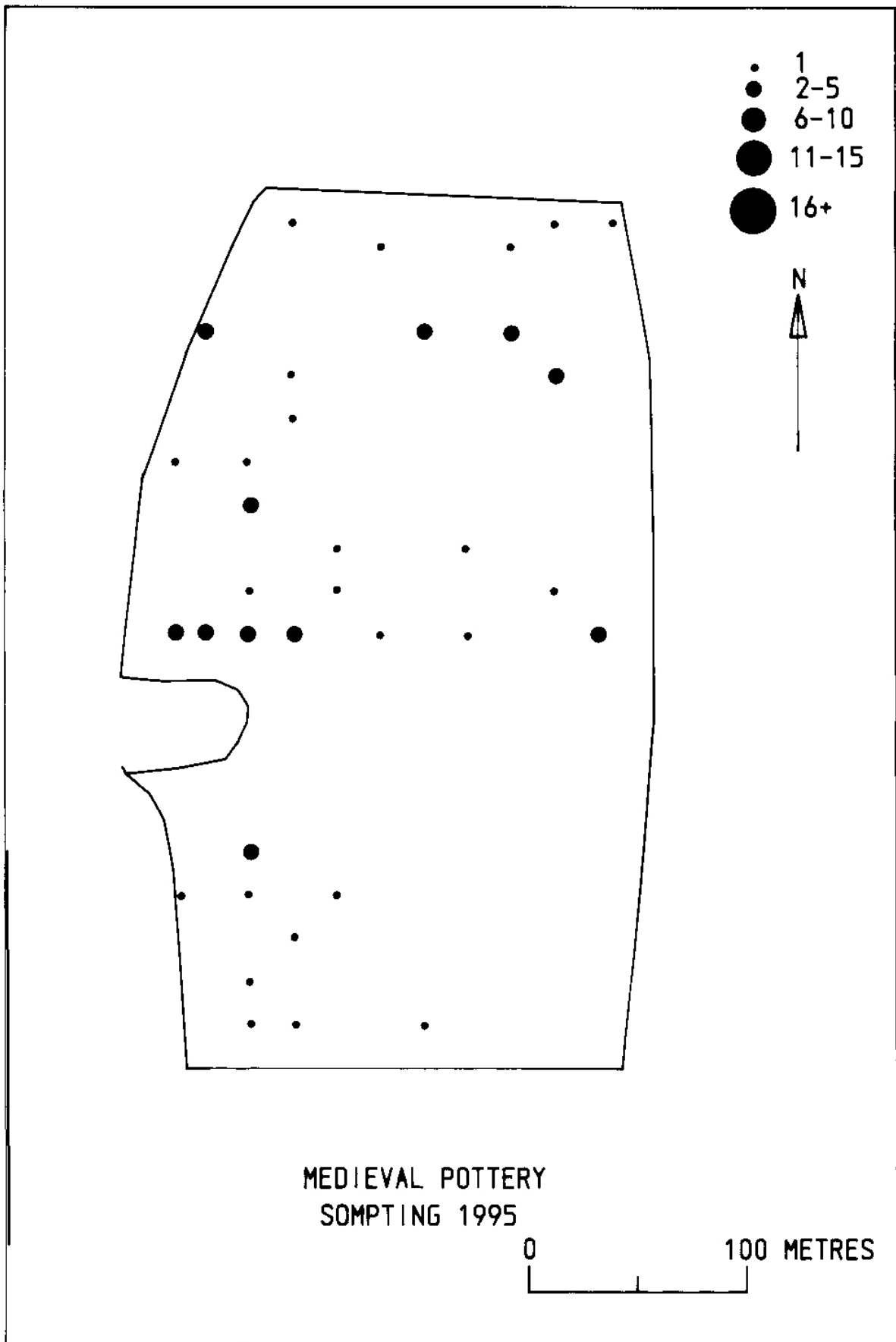


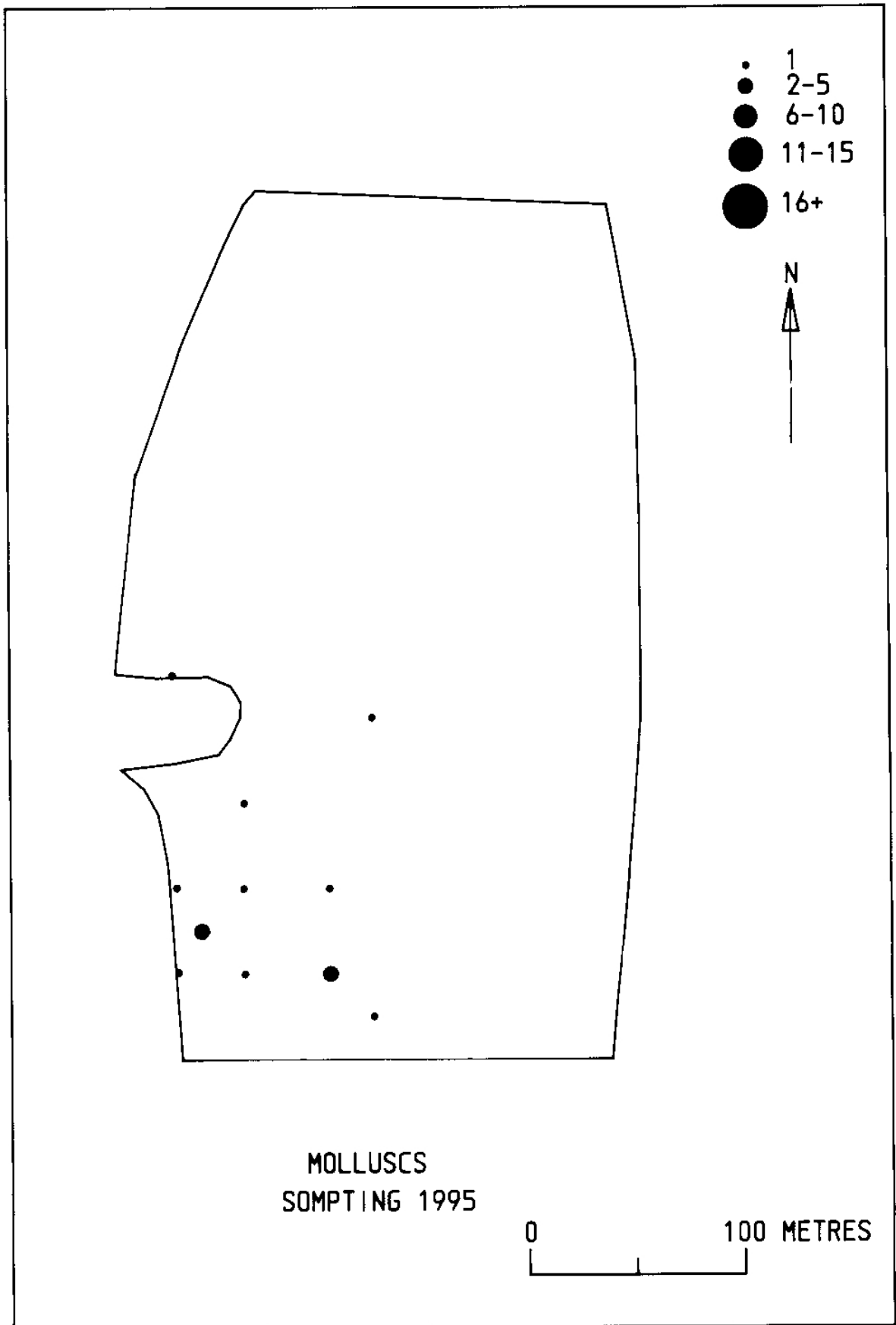
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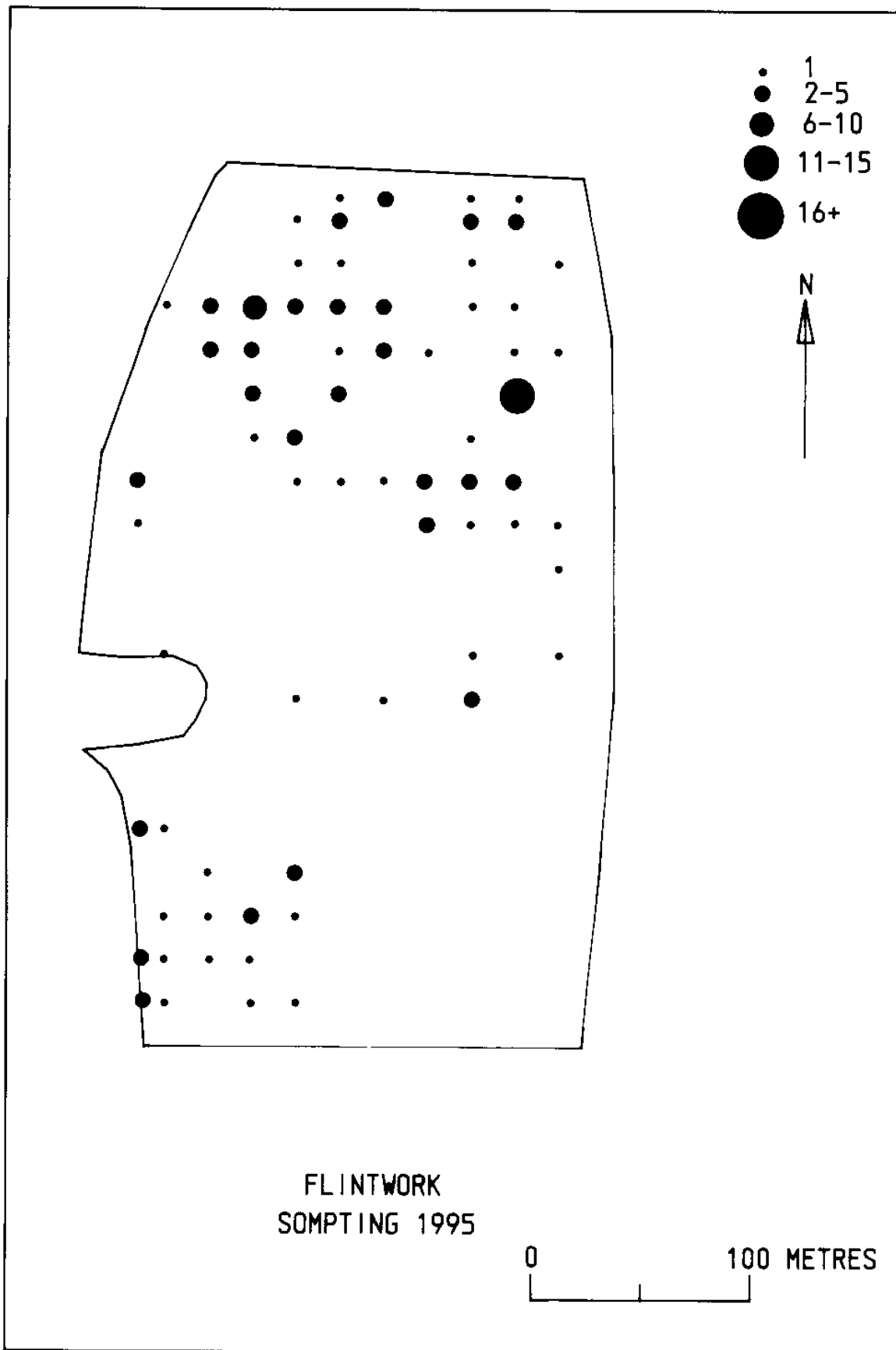


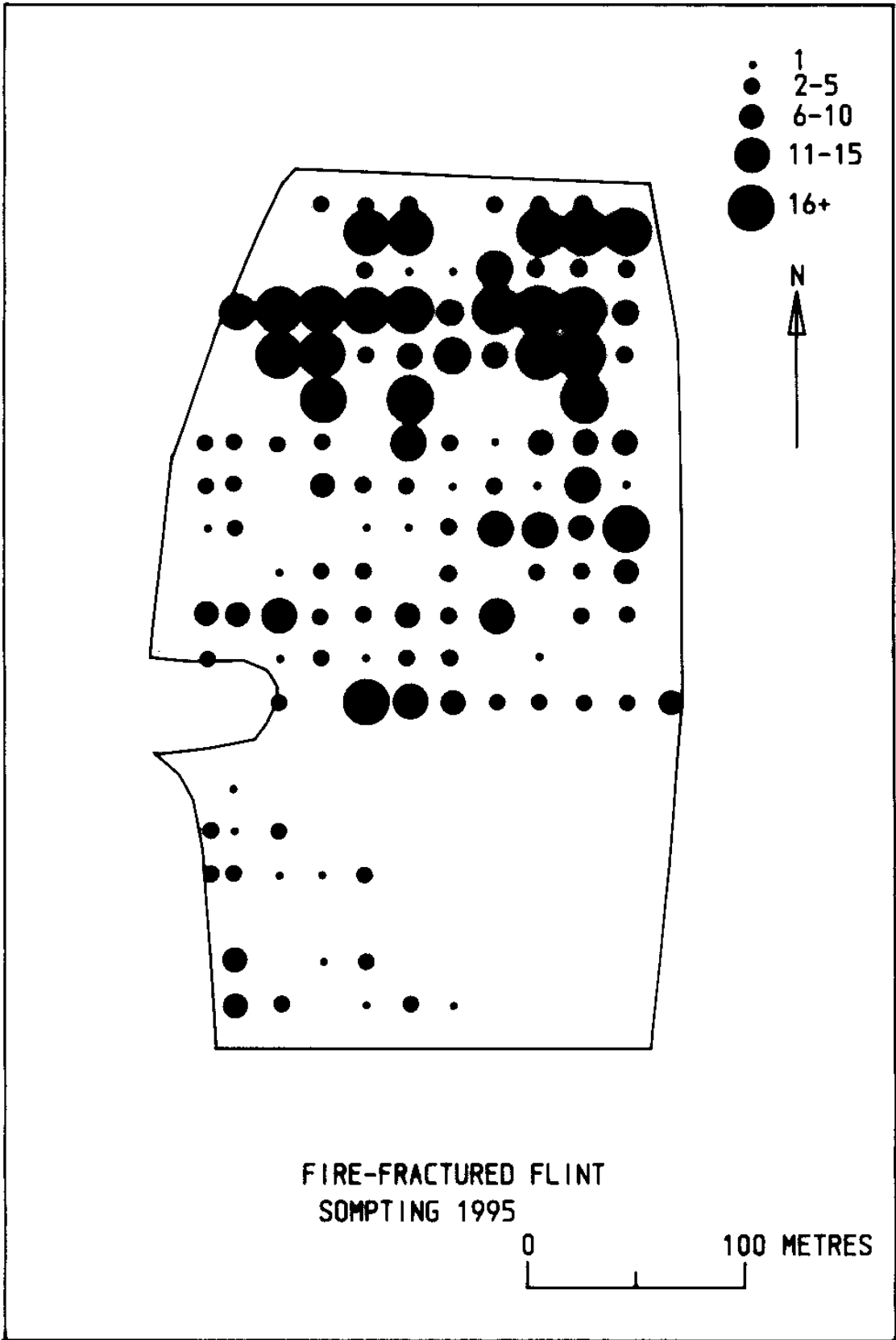


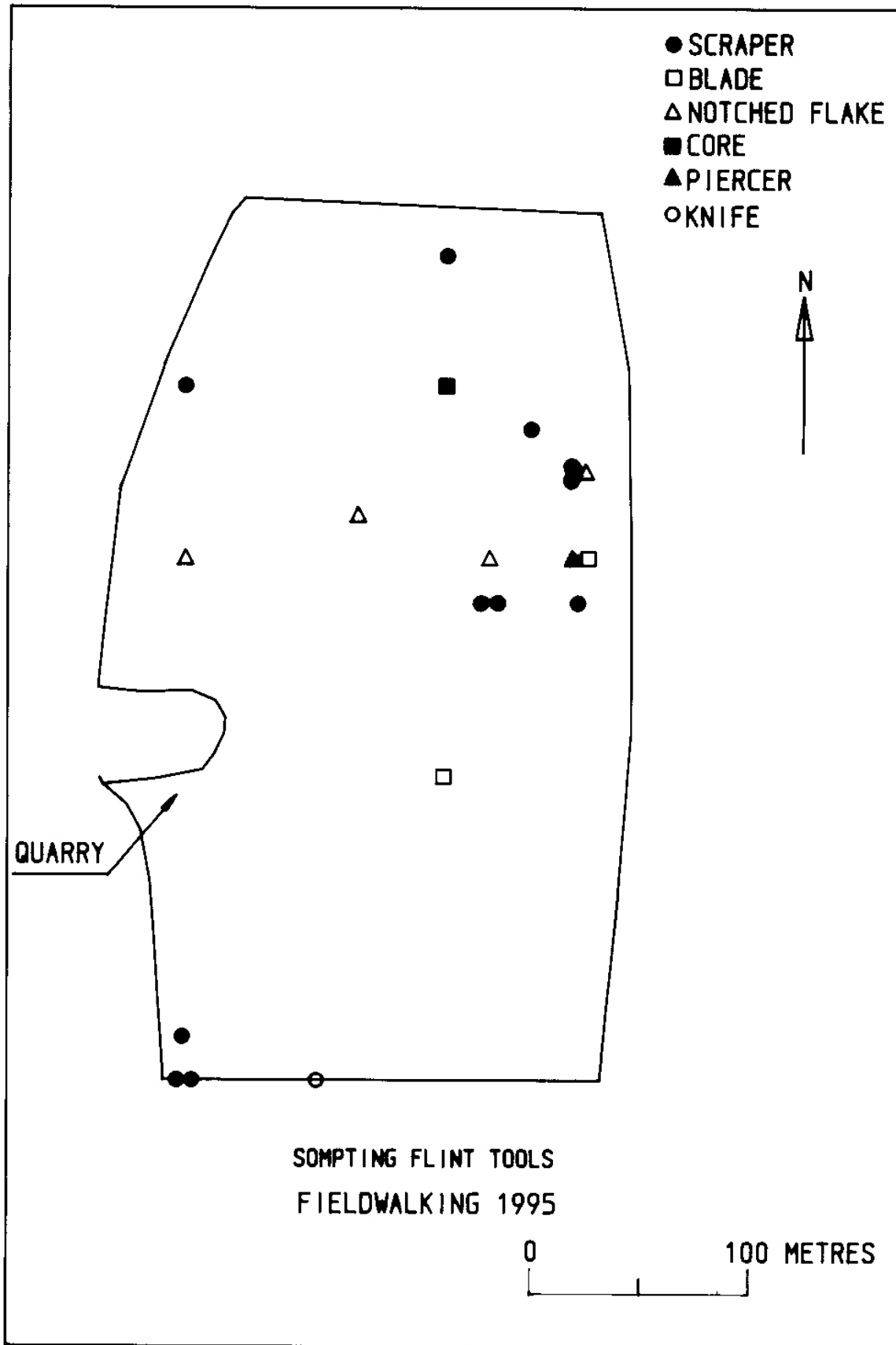


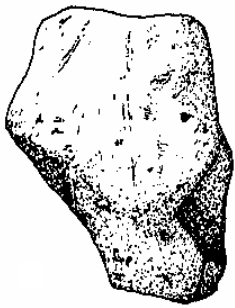












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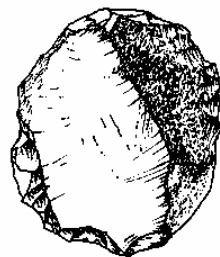
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FINDS FROM SOMPTING