

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF FIELD WORK

EXCAVATION WAS RESTRICTED to machine-cut trenches through the vicinity of the mill, in order to determine if the site possesses integrity. Ten trenches, beginning at the south end of the project area, were cut June 26 and 27, 1990. No artifacts were collected, and the trenches were backfilled as soon as they were measured. Loose sandy fill and a high water table rendered hand work in the trenches unsafe.

All the work was performed with a Gradall, equipped with a bucket two feet wide. Virtually all the cutting consisted of digging away fill that had been placed over the site after the last fire, within living memory. There was, therefore, little need to be concerned with dating layers of material.

Trenches south of Mill Alley

Trenches 1-5 were perpendicular to the street (FIGURE 8, FACING PAGE) south of the main activity area of the Wagamon Mill complex. These tests were sunk to determine the presence or absence of earlier remains, such as a prehistoric site or an undocumented early domestic site.

In all four trenches, the thin topsoil overlay a stratum of clean white sand fill, which in turn capped a yellow sandy subsoil. The street and sidewalk elevations in all three locations were considerably higher than the surrounding ground surfaces. In trenches 3 and 4, the slope was filled with brick rubble. Lenses of hard, shelly, sand in trenches 1 and 2 may have resulted from compaction under a roadway.

A deposit of brick rubble in trench 4 may be a robbed footer or demolition waste. Overall, these four trenches appear to confirm reports that this area served as a borrow pit before the twentieth-century buildings were erected. Across the street, the steep sides and flat bottom of the former pit are more obvious.

Mill Alley

Mill Alley intersects Mulberry Street at an angle. As the name suggests, it originally connected the mill with the center of town, up hill to the east. Today it is still open, as a mere trace. When the mill was standing, a blacktop driveway at the loading bays covered part of the alley. Immediately south of the alley was a warehouse building, with gas pumps to fuel company vehicles.

Trench 5 was cut parallel to the alley and slightly to the south of its present trace. The old tarred surface of the street was encountered below a thin layer of sand fill. Below the tar, the soil was striped gray and smelled of petroleum products.

Trench 9, along the sidewalk, contained the blacktop driveway apron, under which was a pipe that also was identified in Trench 6. Brick rubble under the blacktop on the north end of the trench appears to be demolition debris. This trench filled quickly with water at about thirty inches below grade, at which point the soil appeared to be fill.

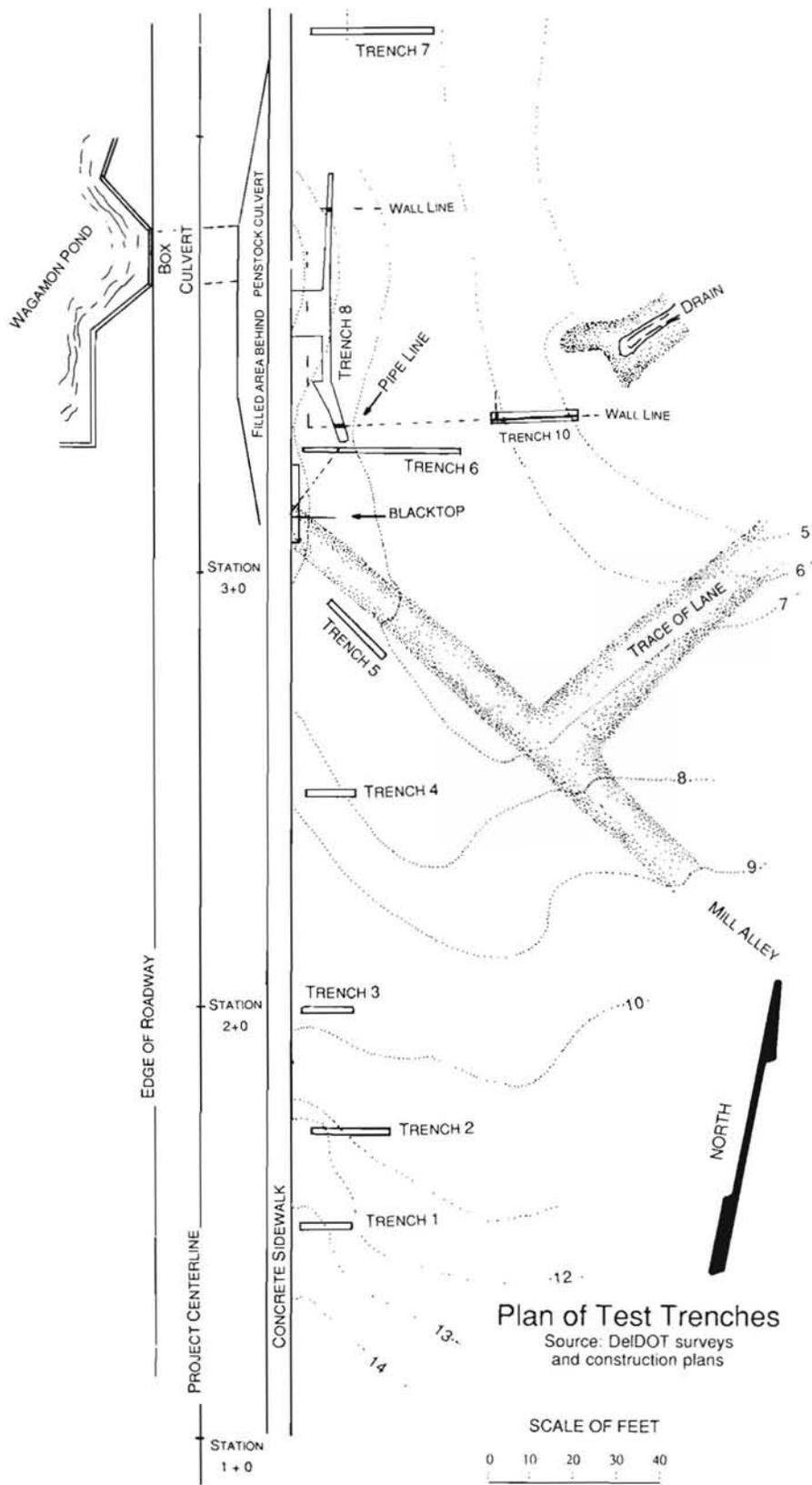


Figure 8: Plan of test trenches

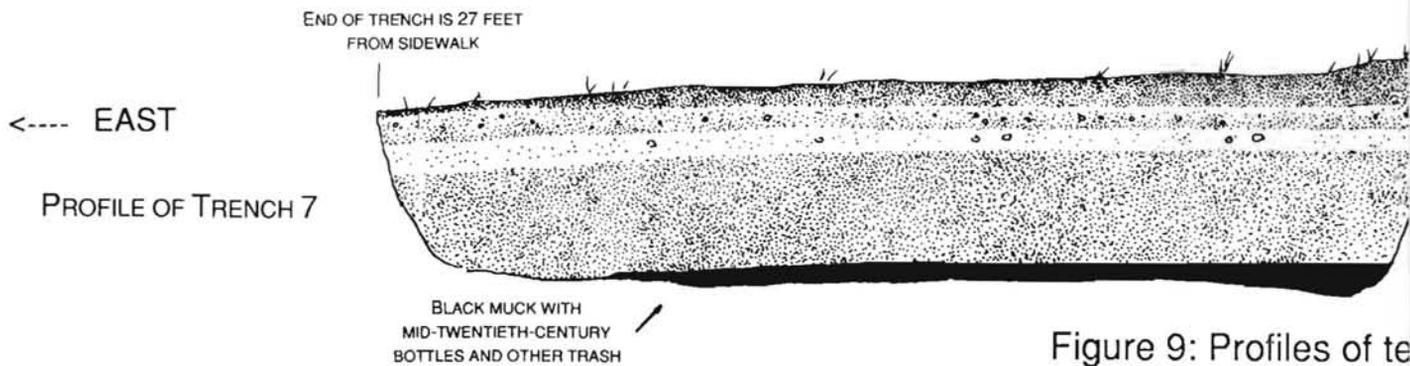
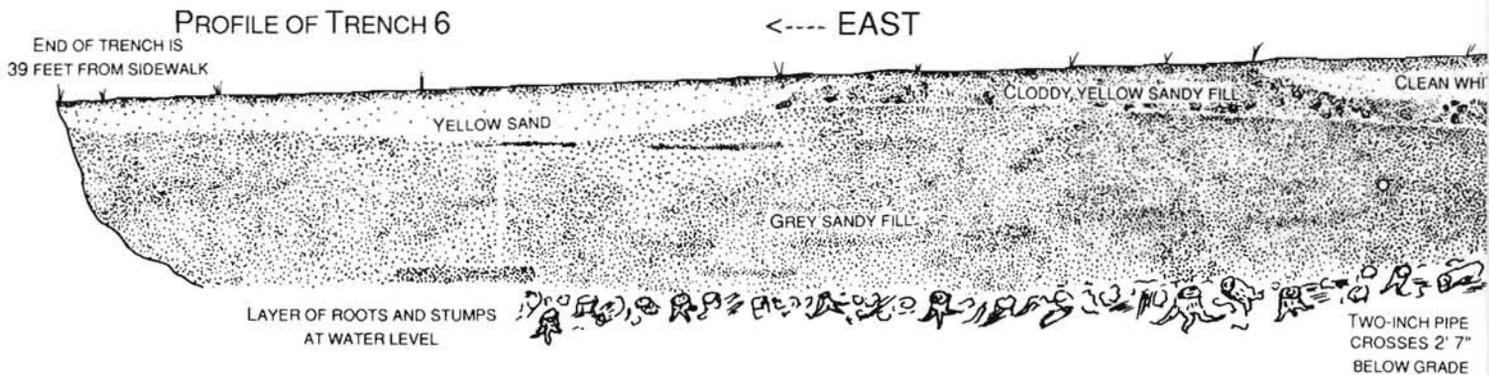
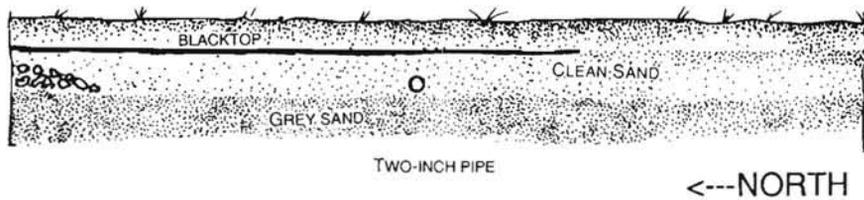
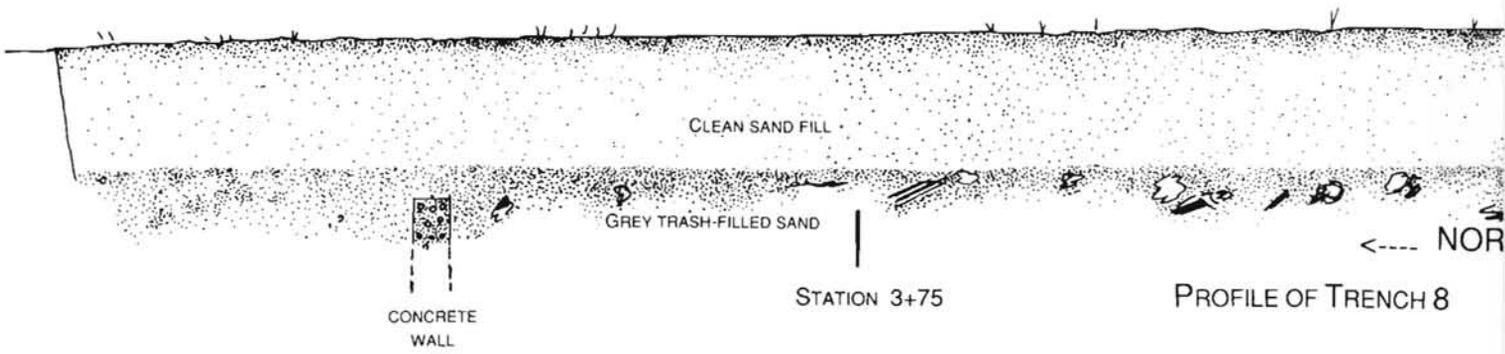
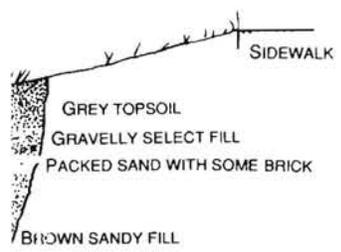
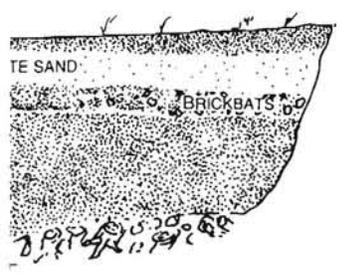
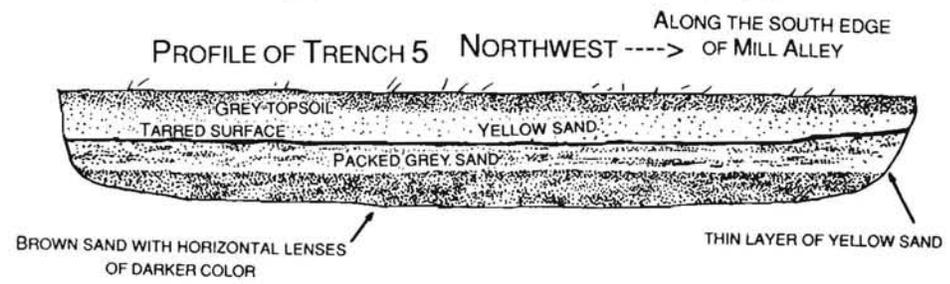
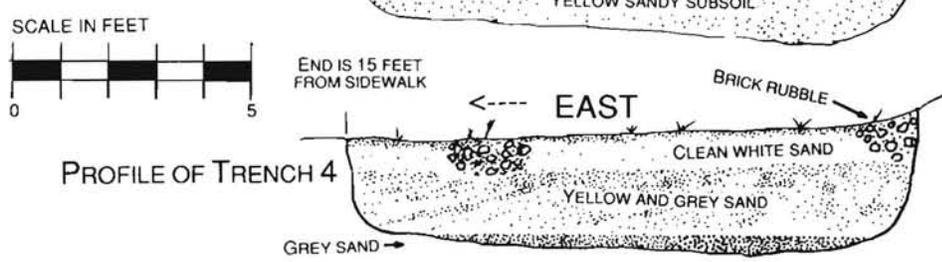
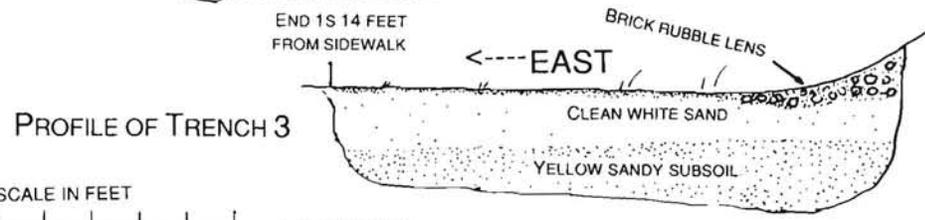
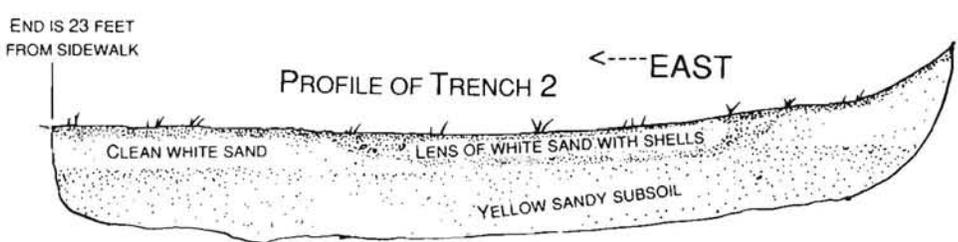
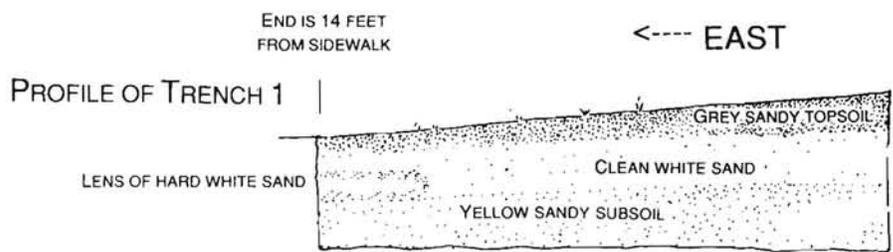
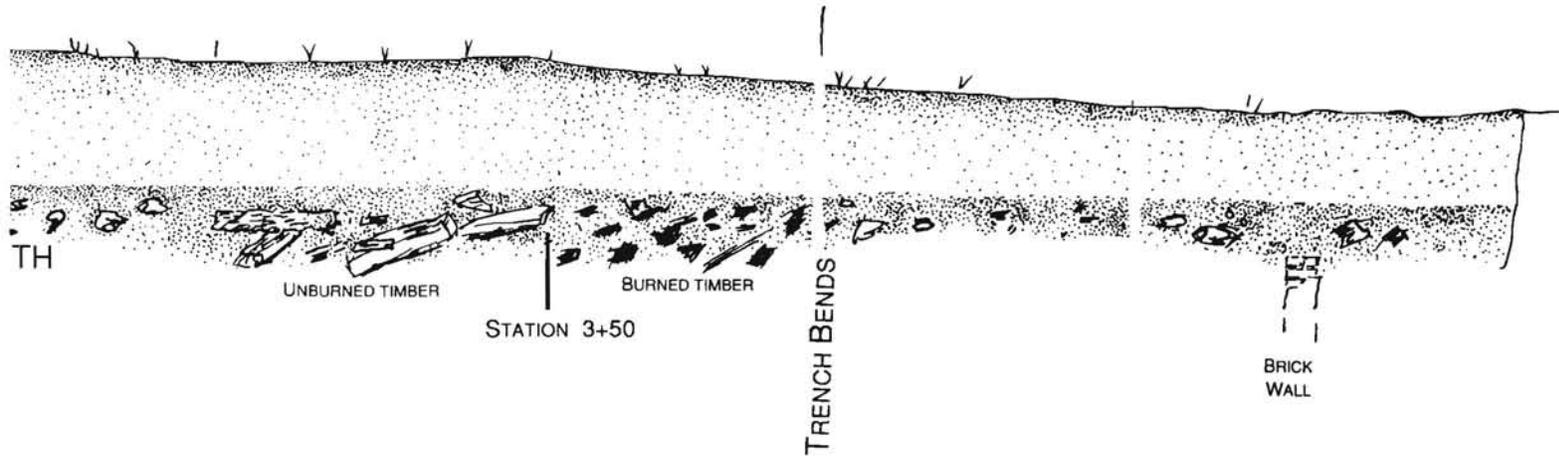


Figure 9: Profiles of te



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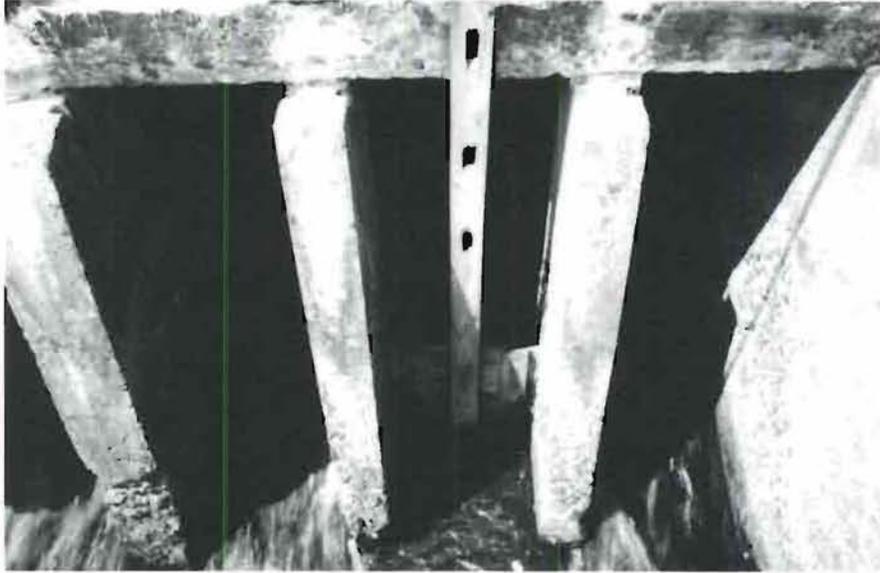


Plate 11: Detail of the wooden gate structure
on the downstream side of Bridge 808

The Mill Site

Trench 6 was the deepest, crossing the site just south of the mill location. The trench extended back 39 feet from the sidewalk and more than four feet below grade before rising water intervened. Clean white sand capped the unit under the thin topsoil. Under the sand, toward the front, was a layer of brick rubble, which may be the same one that was encountered in Trench 9.

Under these top layers was a thick layer of lensed grey sandy fill, most of which was clean. The pipe observed in Trench 9 was here as well, with no discernible pipe trench. Lenses of black sand appeared at several places in the fill. Only one possible feature intruded; about 30 feet from the sidewalk, a concentration of pulverized brick rubble was observed at a depth of two feet nine inches below grade. This could have been the badly weathered remains of a robbed wall.

At the bottom of the sand fill was a layer of tree stumps, roots, and mud. State Forester Walter Gabel identified a sample as sycamore wood. Even at a depth of four feet, this deposit is higher than the original toe of the dam, and higher than the basement floor level of the last mill. Later trenches showed that this trench lay south of the mill, outside its walls.

Trench 7 also was perpendicular to the sidewalk, north of the mill site. This area was not part of the mill lot, but was occupied early in this century by two icehouses. At the bottom of the fill layers, four feet below the sidewalk, was a layer of black malodorous muck with bottles from the middle of the present century, which were not retained.

Trench 8 was cut across the mill site itself. It was positioned to cross the raceway and identify the extreme ends of the mill. Two walls, 50 feet apart, were identified, together with considerable construction debris. As in the other cases, a layer of clean sandy fill sealed the mill site, with a mound marking the location of the penstock. As the machine dug from north to south, the layer below the sand changed.



Plate 12: Machine cutting trench, looking north across the dam.

At the north end, the clean sandy fill was deeper than four feet. A reinforced concrete wall marked the beginning of a distinctly trashy dark grey sandy fill, which continued. Farther south, the trench contained more timber until whole large timbers were found. These were unburned and still had boards attached to them. Burned timbers were found farther south. Because the loose sand fill kept falling into the trench, it was not possible to examine the timbers closely, but the deposit appears to extend deeper than the three feet of the cut. The fill inside the mill has not been consolidated in the vicinity of the penstock bridge, and remains too unstable to permit further excavation.

It appears that the timber waste continues under the road, in the fill behind the penstock bridge. Near the south end of the trench, exactly fifty feet from the first wall, a brick wall was encountered, apparently the south wall of the most recent mill, if not the two earlier mills.

Trench 10 (not profiled) was an attempt to determine how far the mill ruins survived on the east. The machine was aligned with the south wall, 46 feet east (downstream) from the sidewalk, and extending twenty feet eastward. At the beginning of the trench was a bonded cross wall that went northward an unknown distance. Trenching stopped at 66 feet from the sidewalk, not because the end had been reached, but because there was insufficient footing for the machinery.

At least four distinct zones were identified in the trenching. First, the south end of the site was a former service area built on a borrow pit. The service buildings had light foundations that left little if any mark in the ground.



Plate 13: Machine-cut trench across the mill site, showing the effects of digging in timber-filled sand, which collapsed frequently.

The second zone between the former high ground and the original mill, identified in Trench 6, affords a clue to the original topography. The roots and stumps probably accumulated while the first mill was standing, only to be covered by fill when the second mill was built with its more ambitious loading area.

In the third area, north of the mill, the old marsh or cripple apparently stood open until fairly recently, accumulating the local trash. Bottle collectors report that the bottom around the mill is quite a rich prospecting area. In fact, a bottle hunter's hole caused some concern about washouts a few years ago.



Plate 14: Penstock bridge, looking west toward the pond
1990 Photo by Tim O'Brien of DeIDOT for HAER survey

Inside the mill, the fourth area, cannot be safely investigated without massive removal of overburden of timber and trash from the most recent fire. Few remains of the 1815 mill can be expected to have survived two fires and three rebuildings on the site.

Fieldwork succeeded in its first objective, to identify the mill site and any ancillary structures that might have left archaeological remains. In general, it confirmed that the burned sites exist under a layer of very recent clean fill.

Because the adjacent ground was owned by the state, it was possible to extend some of the trenches beyond the actual project area, delineated on Figure 2, page 5.

The highway construction project area contains part of the mill building site and the penstock structure, both of which had previously been well documented. No other structural remains were found inside the new road's impact area.

Ice houses, an expected part of any urban mill site, provided the only source of food cooling before the present century. Eyewitnesses report that the ice houses were flimsy affairs that should not be expected to have left remains. By the time the mill was burned, there were no evidences of the icehouses still visible in the muck next to the mill. When trench 7 was sunk into the ice house vicinity, recent trash was found in the muck immediately under the recent fill, indicating that ice house remains, if any, would be buried in the muck beyond any impact of the present project.