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**DETAILED OUTCROP MEASURED SECTION
OF THE ST. MARY RIVER FORMATION,
OLDMAN RIVER, WEST OF MONARCH,
SOUTHERN ALBERTA**

A.P. Hamblin

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**GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF CANADA
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FORMATION, OLDMAN RIVER, WEST OF MONARCH, SOUTHERN ALBERTA
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INTRODUCTION

The enclosed measured outcrop description section represents a partially complete succession through the Maastrichtian-age St. Mary River Formation. The nearly continuous outcrop, located about 200 km south-southeast of Calgary (Fig. 1), is one of the most complete surface records of these strata in the Plains portion of the basin. It includes about 530 m of the St. Mary River Formation. Beds exposed at this location were briefly examined by Williams and Dyer (1930), Russell and Landes (1940) and Tozer (1952), concentrating particularly on the St. Mary River/Willow Creek contact. Nadon (1991) provided detailed descriptions and paleocurrent data for individual channel sandstones throughout this outcrop area, but no complete measured section or direct stratigraphic correlation to surrounding surface and subsurface occurrences.

Background geological information on the St. Mary River Formation, Edmonton Group and Bearpaw Formation, both in surface and subsurface, were summarized in Hamblin (1998a, 1998b, 1998c). In addition, information pertinent to the petroleum geology, discovered reserves and hydrocarbon potential of the strata of the Edmonton Group was detailed by Hamblin and Lee (1997). Further outcrop and subsurface studies of the Edmonton, and related St. Mary River Formation, are currently in progress.

The exposures are good to excellent, are scattered along 20 km of the Oldman River (Fig. 1) in a line oblique to the strike of the bedding and reveal portions of most of the ~530 m of stratigraphic thickness. The outcrops are located in Twp. 9-10, Rge 23-25W4. Together, the exposed sections cover about 410 m of the succession, with a large gap only in the lower 1/3 of the unit, here estimated at about 90 m (Fig. 2). Paleocurrent data, suggesting dominant direction of sediment dispersal, is summarized in Figure 3. A subsurface Gamma Ray-Sonic log from a nearby well to the west is also included for comparison to the outcrops (Fig. 4).

SUMMARY OF SEDIMENTOLOGY AND STRATIGRAPHY

The exposed section of Maastrichtian rocks detailed here covers about 410 metres of the succession, missing only a 90 m interval in the lower third, and several very minor intervals elsewhere (Fig. 2). The basal contact of the St. Mary River Formation is exposed at the Monarch Fault Zone, 3 km south of the village of Monarch, where it overlies marine shale of the Bearpaw Formation. The upper contact is exposed at the northward bend of the river, 6 km north of the village of Pearce, where the lowest beds of the overlying Willow Creek Formation appear.

Bearpaw Formation

The Bearpaw Formation, as exposed here, consists of grey to dark grey silty mudstone, slightly coarsening-upward, with abundant bioturbation. Only the uppermost few metres is present.

St. Mary River Formation

The St. Mary River Formation is generally characterized by thinly interbedded siltstone, very fine to medium sandstone and minor carbonaceous shale to coal. The lower 60 m exposed here (Fig. 2a) includes alternating very fine to fine sandstone, grey burrowed siltstone with gastropod shells, minor greenish grey pedogenic siltstone and numerous seams of coal and carbonaceous mudstone. These facies are similar to those commonly associated with the lower

Horseshoe Canyon Formation to the north (see Hamblin, 1998b) and the lower portion of the St. Mary River Formation as exposed near Little Bow Provincial Park (see Hamblin, 1998a). This is interpreted as a shoreline-related transitional succession, with significant marine influence at the 30 m and the 40 m levels. No significant shoreface deposits are preserved here, although this section is approximately correlative to the Blood Reserve Formation of the southernmost Foothills (see Hamblin, 1998b). This exposure is followed by a covered interval, estimated at about 90 m in thickness (Fig. 1, 2a,b).

The succeeding section, from about 150 m to about 455 m (fig. 2b-e), consists of a monotonous succession of thinly interbedded greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, sharp-based fining-upward fine to medium sandstone, with sideritic concretion horizons and minor thin bentonite beds. Roots and dinosaur footprints are common, but thin carbonaceous mudstones are rare. These facies are typical of the St. Mary River Formation throughout its area of distribution in the southern Plains and Foothills (see Hamblin, 1998b). These sediments are interpreted as the result of floodplain deposition in a non-marine setting. Some sandstone units are thick, multi storied, have erosional bases and are characterised by abundant trough and ripple cross bedding. These are interpreted as significant channel deposits. Abundant paleocurrent data suggests dominant sediment dispersal toward the northeast (Fig. 3), a conclusion similar to that of Nadon (1991). Indications of some possible marine (or open lacustrine?) influence are present in the 305-330 m level: presence of *Ophiomorpha* and other vertical burrows, hummocky cross stratification, and thin coarsening-upward sequences. These features, positioned at approximately 2/3 from the base of the formation, are in a similar position to that of the Drumheller Marine Tongue of the Horseshoe Canyon Formation to the north.

From about 455 m to 533 m represents the upper 78 m of the St. Mary River Formation. It includes interbedded thick fine to medium sandstones, lesser greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, and abundant thin carbonaceous mudstones. Roots are ubiquitous. Sideritic concretion horizons are absent. These facies are more reminiscent of the Horseshoe Canyon Formation to the north. Paleocurrent data indicate sediment dispersal was much more variable than in the previous unit including transport to the northeast, southeast, northwest and southwest. These deposits are interpreted to represent floodplain deposition, with re-establishment of conditions favourable to preservation of peat accumulation. Ten metres below the upper contact a white, trough cross bedded sandstone with large vertical tree roots is present, approximately correlative to the well-known Whitemud Formation of southeastern and central Alberta. In the upper 10 m are two distinct dark grey to brownish, laminated, bentonitic mudstone units which are very similar to the well-known Battle Formation of southeastern and central Alberta.

Willow Creek Formation

Only about 10 m of the overlying Willow Creek Formation is poorly exposed at this location. Bright green shale alternates with whitish very fine to fine sandstone.

INTERPRETATION

Comparison of the surface and subsurface sections (Fig. 4), and with the section near Carmangay (Hamblin 1998a), suggests that the intertonguing of St. Mary River-type facies of the south with Horseshoe Canyon-type facies of the north occurs in a definable and stratigraphically organized fashion at this latitude. Horseshoe Canyon-type facies (pale grey thick channel

sandstones interbedded with burrowed marine-brackish mudstone, abundant coals and carbonaceous shales, and lesser pedogenic siltstone) are prevalent in the lower ~70 m and the upper ~80 m. However, strata of the intervening ~350 m are dominated by St. Mary River-type facies (greenish grey pedogenic siltstone with abundant caliche/paleosol horizons and roots, interbedded with thin grey to buff sandstones and rare thin carbonaceous shales). Here, at the latitude of Twp 10, the Horseshoe Canyon-like units are thinner and less organic-rich than those at the latitude of Twp 14 near Carmangay (see Hamblin 1998a). Conversely, the St. Mary River-like facies are more dominant.

This stratigraphic arrangement may be interpreted as representing a N-S climatic trend (more humid to the north, more arid to the south; first expounded by Jerzykiewicz and Sweet, 1988) which shifted first northward, then southward through the time of Maastrichtian deposition. Conversely, it may be the result of the large-scale intertonguing of two different clastic wedges in this area which had different depositional styles, sediment sources and patterns of sediment dispersal. A third possibility is a relation to transgressive-regressive patterns. A combination of all three is possible.

HYDROCARBON POTENTIAL

Further work is required to resolve the regional-scale stratigraphic architecture of the Maastrichtian deposits of southern Alberta. This may be important because a limited number of gas pools are known in the Horseshoe Canyon to the north, although relatively little exploration has ever been targeted directly toward these units. However, vast areas of Alberta shallowly underlain by these units are essentially unexplored at this stratigraphic level, and may offer undiscovered pools of modest size, low pressure, but inexpensive exploration costs.

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1. Location map for measured outcrop sections along Oldman River near Monarch. Thicknesses refer to those of measured section in Figure 2.
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3. Summary of paleocurrent data from outcrops. A. Summary of measurements of trough cross bedding, ripple cross lamination and linear scours, with vector means of dispersal directions. B. Total of all paleocurrent measurements from these outcrops, with vector mean of dispersal direction.
4. Comparison of Gamma Ray - Sonic log from well 12-4-10-27W4 with measured outcrop sections from Oldman River.

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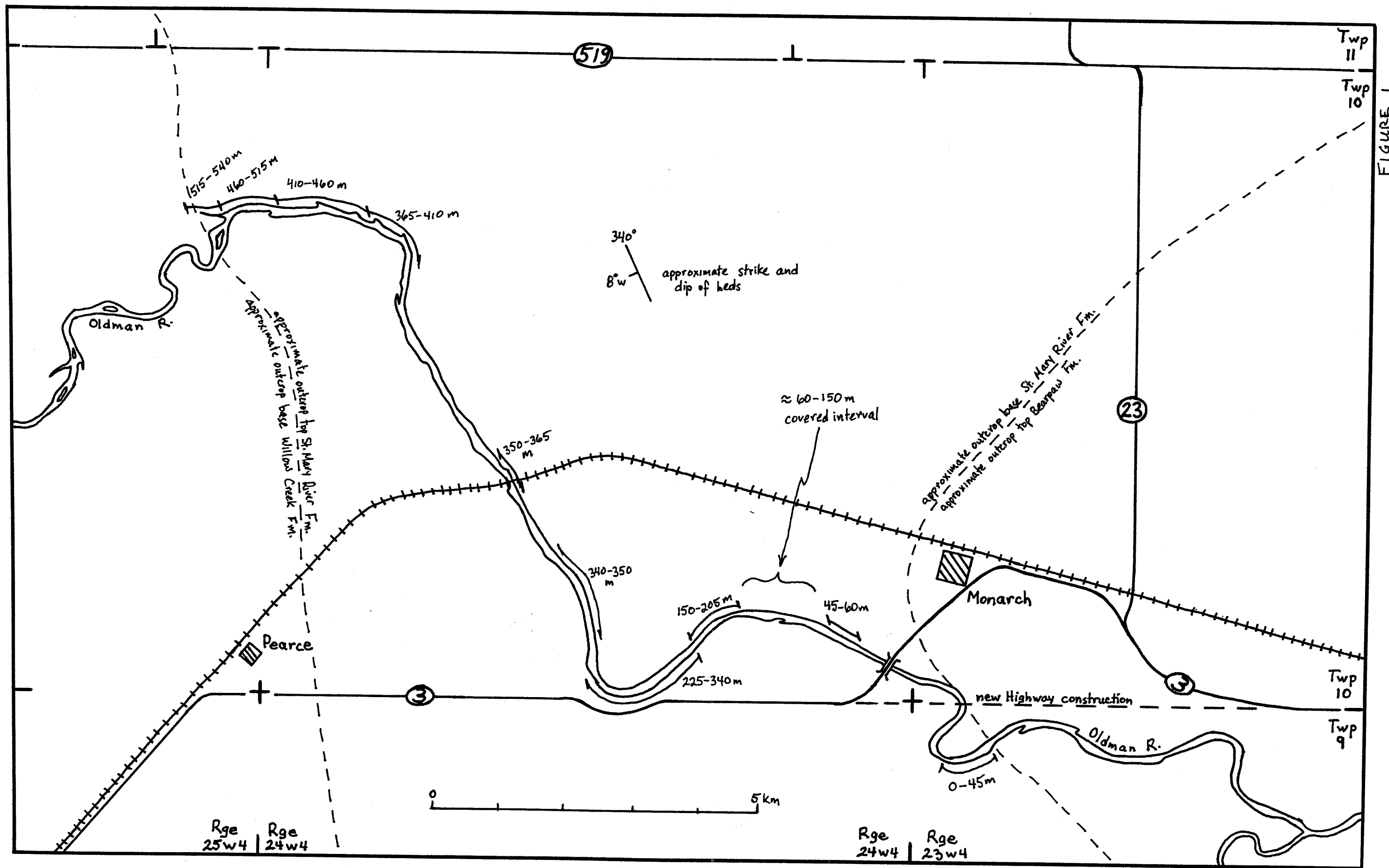


FIGURE 1

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2 (a)

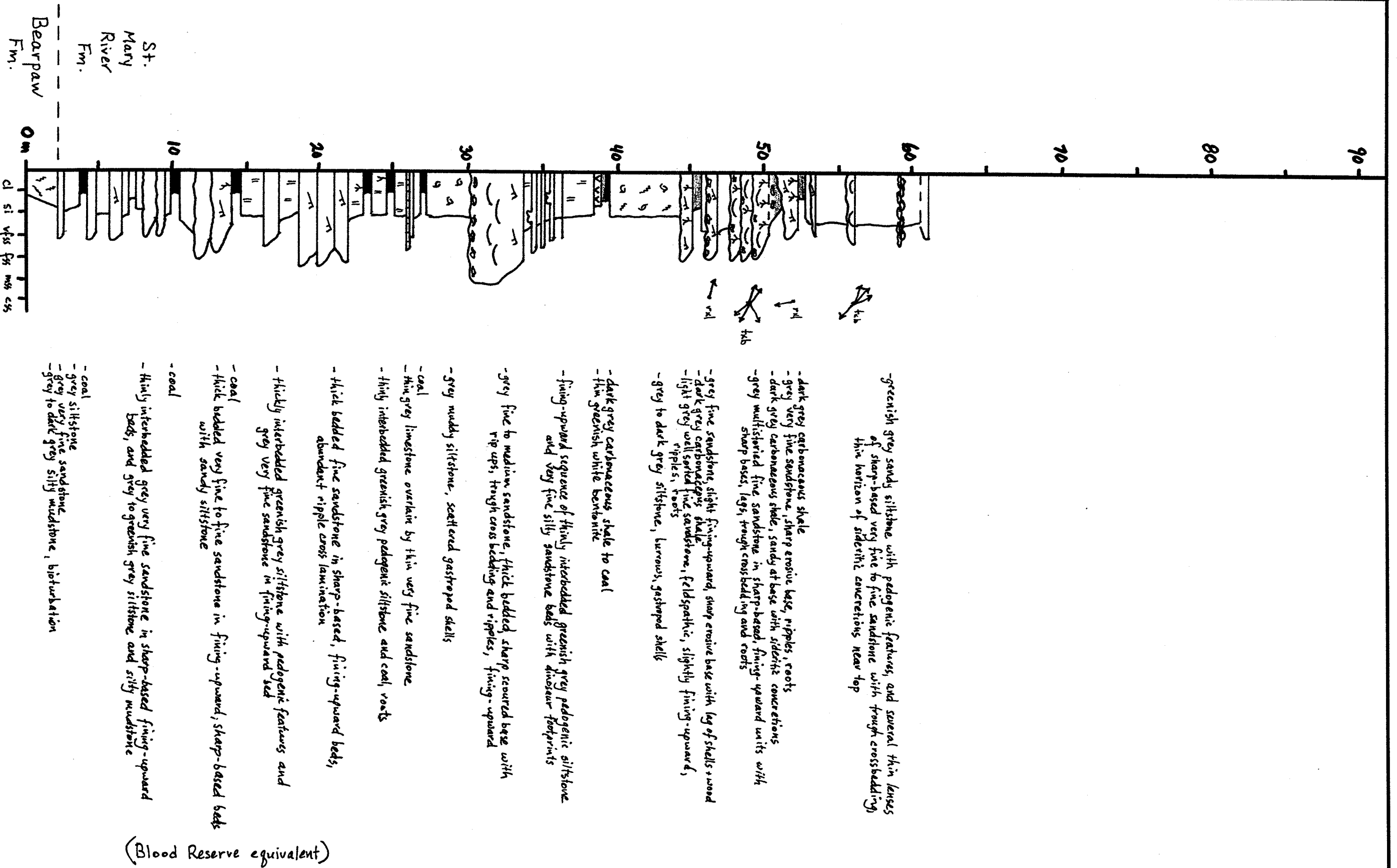
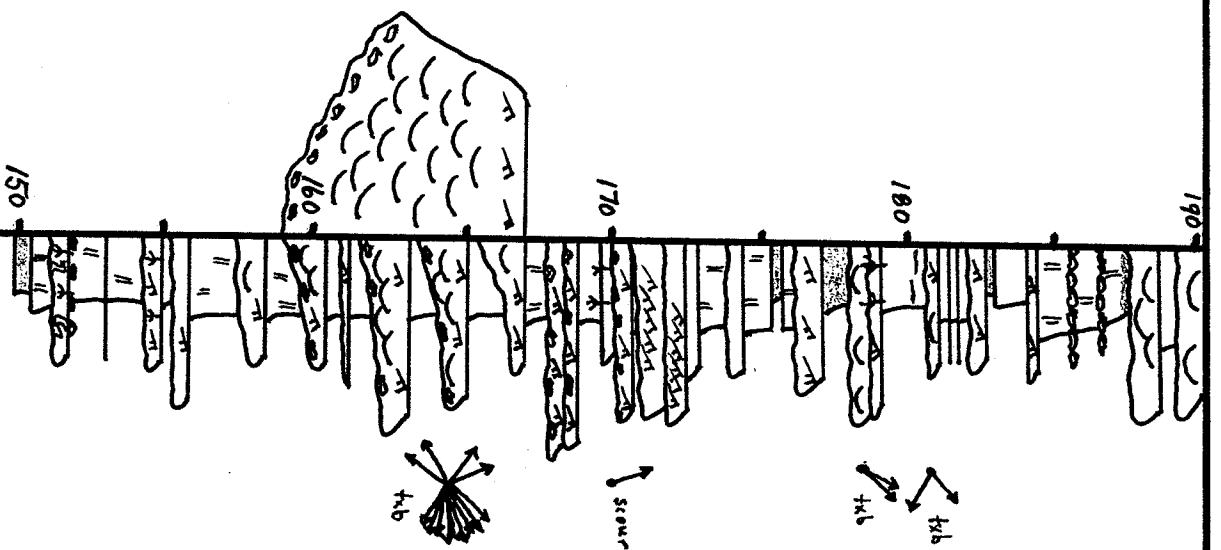


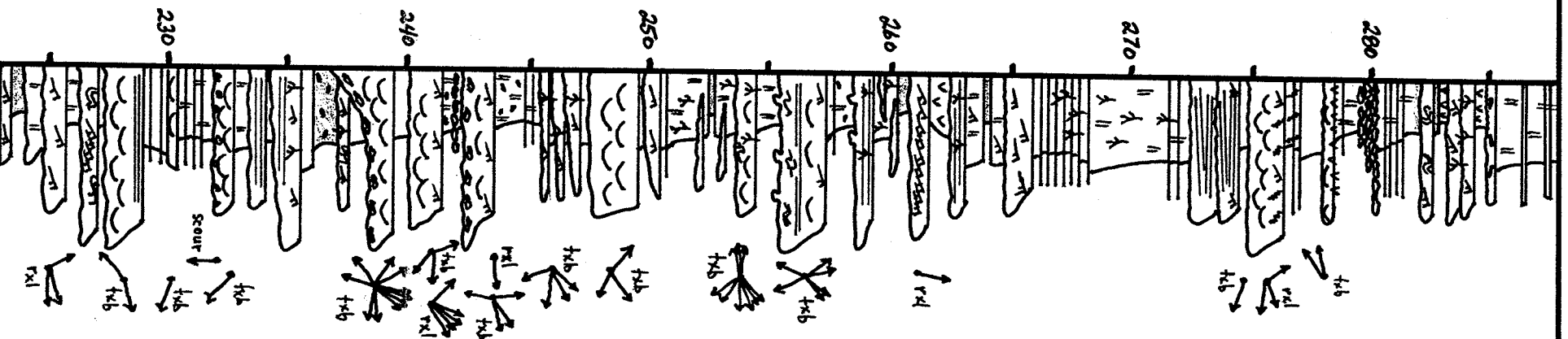
FIGURE 2(a)



- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, several horizons of siltstone concretions, carbonaceous shale at top
- grey very fine sandstone, ripples
- greenish grey pedogenic muddy siltstone, thin carbonaceous shale at base
- thinly interbedded grey very fine sandstone and siltstone, sharp erosive bases, trough cross bedded and ripples
- grey silty mudstone, carbonaceous streaks at top
- grey multistoried fine sandstone, sharp erosive base, fining-upward, trough cross bedding, ripples, roots
- carbonaceous shale
- grey fine sandstone, sharp base, fining-upward, rippled
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, thin carbonaceous shale near top
- grey fine sandstone, sharp base
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone
- light grey multistoried fine sandstone with sharp erosional bases, separated by thin discontinuous siltstone lenses, coaly nip-ups, ripples and climbing ripples
- greenish grey siltstone and silty very fine sandstone, roots
- grey fine to medium sandstone, several stacked beds with erosional bases, ripples, fining-upward, rippled
- greenish grey sandy siltstone, pedogenic
- light grey very fine to medium sandstone, in several thick beds with sharp erosional bases and ripples separated by lenses of greenish grey siltstone - to west these all merge to form one thick 8m sandstone bed - trough cross bedded and rippled throughout
- greenish grey siltstone
- light grey very fine sandstone, sharp scoured base, rippled
- greenish grey muddy siltstone, pedogenic
- several thin light grey very fine to fine sandstone beds, sharp erosive bases, fining-upward, roots, low angle lamination and ripples
- greenish grey silty mudstone, pedogenic
- greenish grey very fine sandstone, erosive base, roots, contorted lamination
- greenish grey silty mudstone, pedogenic
- dark grey carbonaceous shale

FIGURE 2 (b)

FIGURE 2 (b)



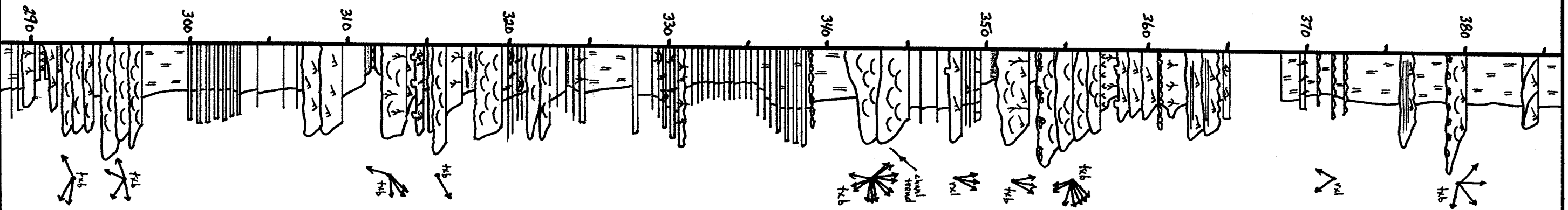
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, few thin very fine sandstone beds
- grey silty fine sandstone, large wood fragments
- light grey sandstone benthic
- grey fine sandstone, rippled, rooted
- light grey claystone benthic
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, contorted lamination
- grey fine sandstone, rippled, divergent footprints, contorted lamination
- thin interbedded greenish grey pedogenic siltstone and very fine sandstone, carbonaceous at top
- lens of sideritic concretions, sharp irregular top, roots, fractures, siltstone - calcareous
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone
- grey fine sandstone, trough crossbedded, several thin benthic beds
- greenish grey siltstone
- light grey fine to medium sandstone, sharp base, fining-upward to siltstone, trough cross bedding, ripples, abundant vertical + horizontal burrows in upper 1m including *Obolus*
- light grey fine sandstone in 2 sharp based beds, low angle lamination and ripples
- greenish grey very sandy siltstone, pedogenic, brecciated, calcareous, sideritic sandstone beds near top, roots
- thinly interbedded very fine sandstone and greenish grey siltstone, long roots
- light grey very fine to fine sandstone, sharp base, fining-upward, rippled
- greenish grey sandy siltstone, pedogenic, rippled, carbonaceous shale lens
- grey fine sandstone, horizontal and low angle lamination, roots at top
- light grey silty bentonite, coarsening-upward
- light grey fine to medium sandstone, fining-upward, climbing ripples
- dark grey carbonaceous shale
- greenish grey siltstone, roots, thin very fine sandstone lenses
- light grey fine to medium sandstone, sharp base with ball + pillow, roots, horizontal lamination
- greenish grey pedogenic silty mudstone, fining-upward, carbonaceous fragments
- light grey fine to medium sandstone, erosive base with ball + pillow, fining-upward, horizontal lamination, trough crossbedding, minor ripples
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone
- rusty weathering fine sandstone, calcareous, roots, contorted lamination
- greenish grey pedogenic silty mudstone, roots throughout, thin carbonaceous shale near top, minor very fine sandstone lenses
- grey very fine sandstone, lens shape
- light grey fine sandstone, sharp erosive base, trough crossbedded, carbonaceous flats
- interbedded very fine to fine sandstone and sandy siltstone, sharp erosional bases, sandstone beds merge to west, trough crossbeds, ripples, roots
- greenish grey silty mudstone, pedogenic, carbonaceous fragments, several siltstone lenses with sharp irregular tops
- grey fine sandstone, fining-upward, erosive base with coarse lag and rip-ups, trough crossbedded ripples
- greenish grey silty mudstone, pedogenic, carbonaceous, sideritic concretion bed
- light grey fine sandstone, erosive base with lag, fining-upward, trough crossbedded
- grey carbonaceous shale, silty streaks
- buff fine to medium sandstone, deeply incised to west, fining-upward trough crossbedded
- dark grey carbonaceous sandy siltstone with thin fine sandstone and greenish sandy siltstone, roots, wood fragments, contorted lamination
- grey fine to medium sandstone lenses encased in greenish grey pedogenic sandy siltstone, erosive bases, horizontal lamination, roots
- buff fine sandstone, erosive base with caliche rip-ups and linear scores
- thinly interbedded pedogenic siltstone and very fine sandstone
- slightly coarsening-upward sequence of greenish sandy siltstone and silty very fine sandstone
- light grey fine to medium sandstone, calcareous, erosive base, trough crossbedded
- light grey feldspathic fine to medium sandstone encased in greenish pedogenic clayey siltstone, climbing ripples, contorted lamination
- light grey very fine to fine sandstone, fining-upward, sharp base, rippled
- greenish grey silty very fine sandstone, pedogenic, rippled, with carbonaceous shale

- grey multistoried fine sandstone, thick bedded, brownish weathering, sharp bases and fining-upward, trough cross bedded

- grey multistoried fine to very fine sandstone, brownish weathering, in thick sharp based beds each fining-upward and separated by thin carbonaceous sandy siltstone to silty very fine sandstone, trough cross bedded

FIGURE 2 (c)

FIGURE 2 (c)



- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, poorly exposed
- grey very fine sandstone, sharp base, lateral accretion surface, rippled top
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone,
- white weathering very fine to medium sandstone, fining-upward, sharp base with ripple marks, large trough cross beds, rippled top, forms prominent ledge
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, fractures, rubbly weathering
- white weathering fine sandstone, fining-upward, sharp base, horizontal lamination
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, poorly exposed
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone with thin very fine sandstone lenses, rippled
- rusty weathering calcareate horizon, vertical roots or burrows
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone
- calcareous very fine sandstone and greenish grey pedogenic siltstone
- multistoried very fine to fine sandstone, erosional bases, sharp rippled top with fossil dinosaur droppings, horizontal lamination + ripples
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, thin rooted sandy zone in middle
- rusty weathering calcareate bed, fractured
- multistoried very fine sandstone in sharp based fining-upward beds, dinosaur footprints on base
- greenish grey siltstone, roots, coaly streaks, thin bentonite bed
- multistoried fine to medium sandstone, feldspathic, thick bedded, erosional base with localized lens of calcareate nodules, trough crossbedded, separated into multiple sandstone beds to N
- greenish grey muddy siltstone grading up into dark grey carbonaceous shale
- rusty weathering calcareate bed, fractured, sharp top.
- grey fine sandstone fining-upward to siltstone, erosive base with dinosaur footprint, ripples and climbing ripples
- greenish grey sandy siltstone, few thin very fine sandstone beds
- multistoried fine sandstone, erosive incised base, slightly fining-upward, lens shaped units, trough crossbedded
- grey pedogenic siltstone, massive
- coarsening-upward sequence of grey fine sandstone and greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, irregular siltstone calcareate horizon at top
- thinly interbedded green muddy siltstone and greenish grey siltstone, few thin carbonaceous beds
- concaving-upward sequence of grey fine to medium sandstone and sandy siltstone, low angle and hummocky cross stratification, ripples, roots, vertical burrows throughout
- grey fine sandstone, rusty weathering, sharp base + top
- bright green muddy siltstone, pedogenic, poorly exposed
- interbedded greenish grey very fine sandstone and pedogenic siltstone, roots, one thin carbonaceous shale, one thin calcareate bed
- buff fine sandstone, multistoried, erosional base, lens shapes, trough cross bedded
- thinly interbedded sandy siltstone and fine to medium sandstone, low angle and hummocky cross stratification, abundant *Ophiomorpha* burrows
- grey fine sandstone, fining-upward, erosive base, trough cross bedded
- dark grey muddy siltstone, carbonaceous streaks.
- grey silty very fine sandstone, roots
- grey multistoried fine sandstone, erosive base, trough crossbedded, convolute lamination
- grey fine sandstone, ball + pillow, vertical burrows including *Ophiomorpha*
- buff fine sandstone, fining-upward to silty very fine sandstone, broad shallow troughs and ripples at top, roots
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone, fining upward, thin carbonaceous shale beds and several thin greenish bentonites near top
- greenish grey fine sandstone, multistoried, fining-upward, erosive bases, rippled
- grey siltstone, few thin very fine sandstone beds
- thinly interbedded very fine sandstone and siltstone
- greenish grey pedogenic siltstone
- buff fine to medium sandstone, multistoried, erosive bases, lenses of medium sand, fining-upward, trough cross bedded
- dark greenish grey pedogenic sandy siltstone
- grey fine sandstone, multistoried, erosive bases, large troughs, rippled top
- interbedded silty mudstone and carbonaceous shale and pale greenish bentonite and very fine sandstone with erosive base and ripples
- grey very fine sandstone, fining-upward, roots

(? Drumheller Marine Tongue)
equivalent?

FIGURE 2(d)

FIGURE 2(d)

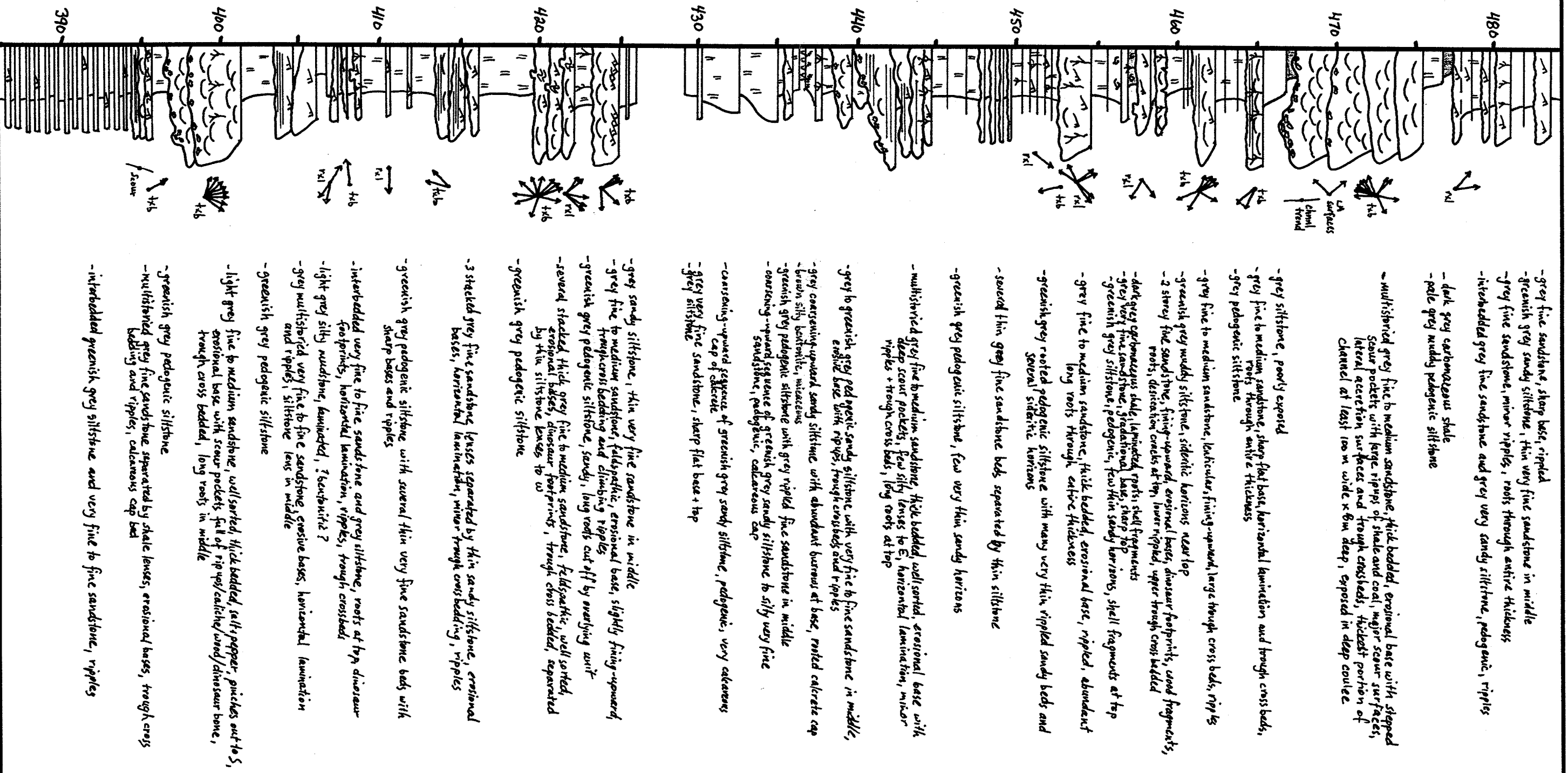


FIGURE 2 (c)

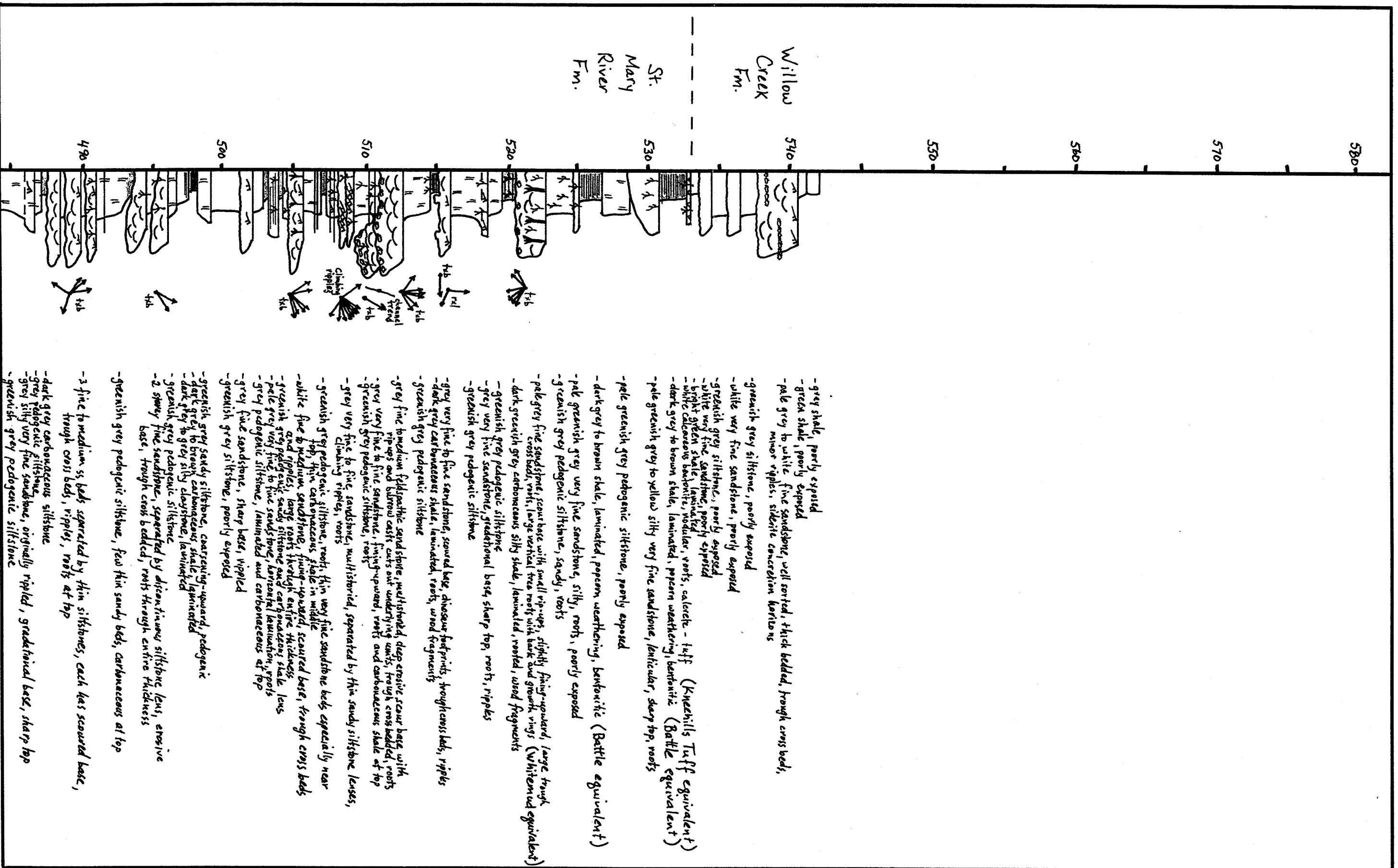


FIGURE 2 (f)

FIGURE 2 (f)

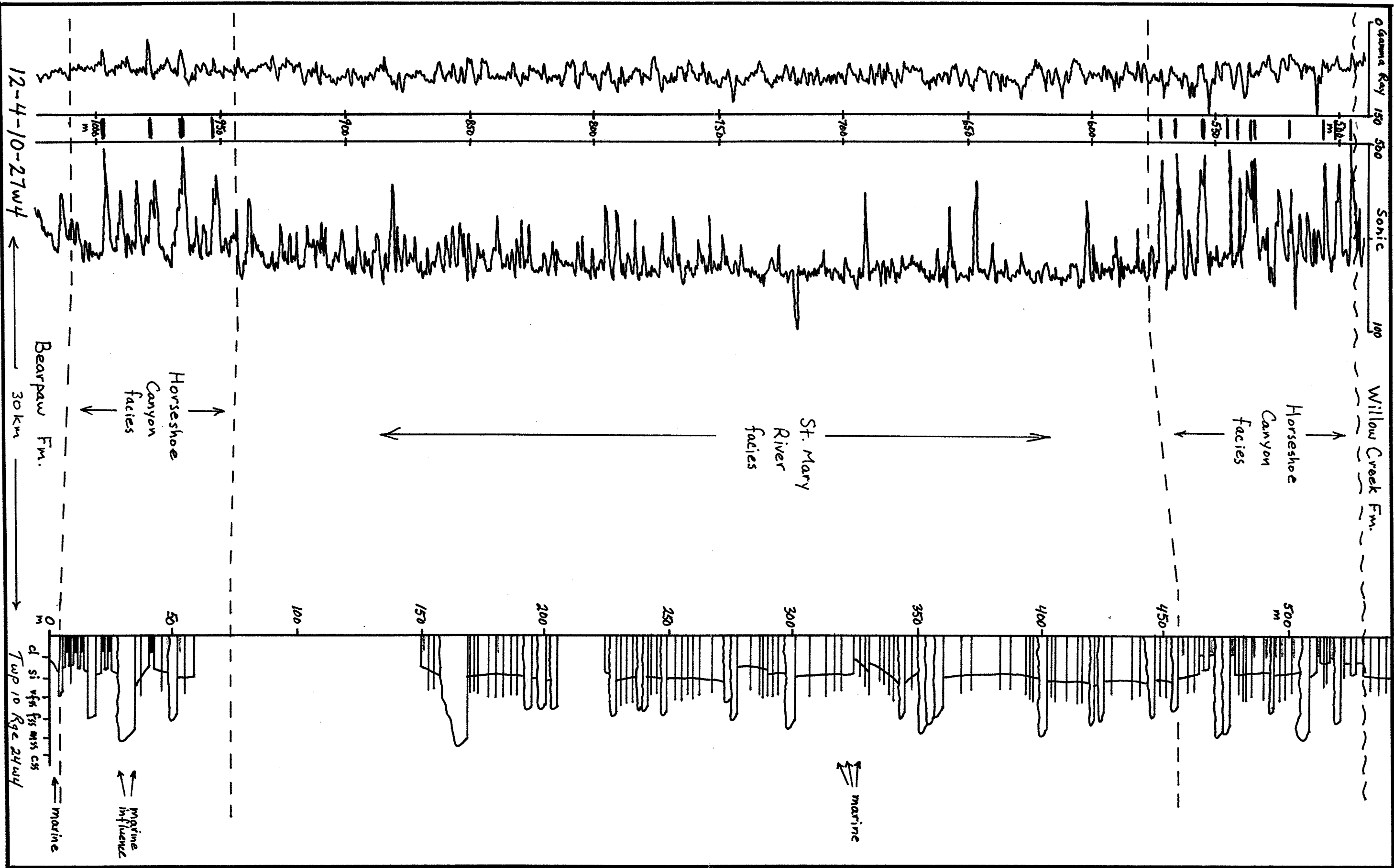


FIGURE 4

FIGURE 4

