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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions, Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

DIVISION OF NATIONAL REGISTER PROGRAMS NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1. Name of Property

historic name Aho, Elias and Lisi, Historic Farmstead other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Off Township Road 358 not for publication N/A city, town Tower (Waasa Township) vicinity x state Minnesota code MN county St. Louis code 137 zip code 55732

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: x private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal. Category of Property: building(s), x district, site, structure, object. Number of Resources within Property: Contributing (5, 1, 6), Noncontributing (3, 0, 3) buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing: Rural Finnish Log Buildings of St. Louis Co., MN Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this x nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property x meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: Ian R. Stewart, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Minnesota Historical Society. Date: 1/25/90

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official: Date: State or Federal agency and bureau:

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: x entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet. determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet. determined not eligible for the National Register. removed from the National Register. other, (explain): Entered in the National Register: 4/9/90 Signature of the Keeper: Date of Action:

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE:

animal facility

agricultural outbuilding

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE:

animal facility

agricultural outbuilding

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Other: Log

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Log

Weatherboard

roof Asphalt

other

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

Built during the period of Finnish settlement into rural areas, the Elias and Lisi Aho Farm is located in southwest Waasa Township on a relatively level, open parcel of land. Part of an original 160-acre homestead, the property is one of the county's few relatively intact Finnish farms that retains a majority of its farmstead buildings and cultivated land. The property has five original log buildings that date from between 1902-1907, and three other later buildings of new, incompatible materials. Accompanying the dwelling and outbuildings are some of the fields that originally complemented the farm. The following summary description of the Aho Farm corresponds to a map included with the registration form.

1) House (tupa), 1902, contributing.

Constructed on a rubble stone foundation reinforced with concrete, the Aho House is a 1 1/2 story, rectangular-shaped building that may have been built in two stages. In its present appearance, the upper half of the house is covered with drop siding; the current owners have been exposing the square hewn, chinkless log walls that are joined at the corners by very slightly splayed, full dovetail corner notches. Measuring 17'3" in width and 38'4" in length, the north section of the house consists of a bay 18'8" long abutting a bay that extends to the south for 19'8". The north half has paired 1/1 double hung sash windows on the north gable end and single 1/1 windows on the east and west walls. The south half features similar windows on the west and south elevations. A wood frame, hipped roof porch encloses two-thirds of the facade, and a small, wood frame gable addition that provides access to the cellar is attached to the northeast corner. Two wall dormers, each with 1/1 double hung sash, project from the west side of the house. A cinder block chimney pierces the east pitch of the gable roof, which is covered with asphalt shingles.

2) Cattle Barn, 1902-1907, contributing.

This is a small, one-story building with a foundation made of rubble stone covered with concrete (a small area in one corner has cinder block). Measuring 16'3" x 18'3", it has square hewn log walls and finely-crafted full dovetail corner notches. The logs extend up to the eaves, and vertical boards and battens cover the upper gables. Small,  See continuation sheet

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Agriculture  
Architecture  
Ethnic Heritage: European

Period of Significance

1902-1939

Significant Dates

1902

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Aho, Elias, architect and builder

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Elias and Lisi Aho Farm is historically significant under National Register Criterion A because it is associated with the efforts by Finns to transform the marginal cutover area of northeastern Minnesota into productive agricultural land during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is also architecturally significant under Criterion C as an excellent example of a large and intact complex of buildings that embody the distinctive, traditional log construction techniques utilized by Finnish immigrants in the area. The dwelling, outbuildings, and cultivated land represent the first associated property type (Finnish Log Farms) and exemplify the kind of subsistence level farming initiated by these immigrants. The Aho Farm is representative of the agrarian life style that so many Finns strove for in rural St. Louis County during and after their employment in the iron mining and lumber industries (see associated historic contexts, The Iron Range, 1880s-1930s and Northern Minnesota Lumbering, 1870s-1930s). Each log building on the property also represents the third historic context, Finnish Log Architecture, 1880s-1930s. The Aho Farm illustrates the common practice by Finns of erecting numerous log buildings each for a specialized function. Taken as a whole, however, the farm buildings do not conform to any distinct arrangement; rather, they are randomly placed throughout the farm yard with the house forming a focal point for the site. The cleared land surrounding the the farm to the east and the various domestic and agricultural buildings -- the sauna, cattle barn, and riihi -- demonstrate the successful introduction of farming and animal husbandry by the Aho family. Finally, the use of a traditional house plan and familiar construction techniques such as chinkless log walls, dovetailed, and double notched corners indicates the continuation of folk building practices from Finland. These log buildings are in excellent condition and relatively unchanged, and thus maintain their integrity of materials, design, workmanship, and association. The property continues to be actively maintained for farming, it has minimal intrusions, and none of the buildings have been moved, providing for good integrity of setting, location, and feeling.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See the Historic Contexts Bibliography

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 160 acres

UTM References

A | 1, 5 | 5 | 6, 3 | 4, 6, 0 | 5, 2 | 7, 8 | 4, 3, 0 |  
 Zone Easting Northing

C | 1, 5 | 5 | 6, 3 | 8, 8, 0 | 5, 2 | 7, 8 | 0, 2, 0 |

B | 1, 5 | 5 | 6, 3 | 8, 6, 0 | 5, 2 | 7, 8 | 4, 3, 0 |  
 Zone Easting Northing

D | 1, 5 | 5 | 6, 4 | 2, 7, 0 | 5, 2 | 7, 8 | 0, 4, 0 |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter, the south half of the northwest quarter, and the northeast quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 29, Waasa Township, St. Louis County.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the farmhouse, outbuildings, and cultivated fields that have historically been part of the Aho Farm and that maintain historic integrity.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

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organization N/A date January 1989

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square sashless window openings pierce the south, east, and west walls, and a 4'-wide gap serves as a door along the west wall. The gable roof is covered with corrugated metal.

3) Barn, 1902-1907, contributing.

This is the largest log building on the property, measuring 22'9" x 41'7". Its length is divided in half by a log wall that protrudes through both exterior sidewalls. It has a small door cut in the south wall. The barn features logs that are hewn flat on the outside surface and left in the round on the interior side; they are very solidly constructed, have moss insulation, and are joined at the corners by vertical double notches. Logs fill both gables and the upper walls and roof are stabilized by two purlins and a ridgepole, as well as two tie beams in the east half and one in the west half. These tie beams are embedded into the wall just above and below the plate, and prevent the sidewalls from bowing out under the weight of the roof. The interior of the east side of the building is open to the roof, while the west side has six log joists with round sapling poles laid on top to form the loft floor. Two wide openings pierce the south wall and a small window is located in the northwest corner.

4) Riihi, 1902-1907, contributing.

The original function of this building was probably to dry grain with an interior stove, although it appears to have later served as a stable. Like the barn, the riihi has hewn log walls and double notch corner joints. Its rectangular shape consists of a 17' x 19' solid log block linked in a linear fashion to a 12'5" x 19' section made of a pair of cantilevered plates, sills, and corner posts covered with vertical boards. A 6'-wide double door opening in the southeast wall leads into the stable area which has a dirt floor toward the front, and a log floor at the rear where the horse stalls were formerly located. Two tie beams are dovetailed into the walls, while each of the purlins and ridge pole are supported by short vertical posts notched into the top of the center wall. A sliding track door provides access into the west half of the building. The gable roof is covered with corrugated metal.

5) Sauna, 1902-1907, contributing.

The sauna is a one-story, log and frame building measuring 13'3" x 21'5". Access inside is through a door in the south wall of the frame section. This anteroom has a concrete floor and a flue opening from the

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off-center brick chimney. A log partition separates the front room from the rear, which contains a changing and bathing room. The narrow changing room has a wood floor and is divided from the sauna by a narrow frame wall. The sauna room features a concrete floor under wooden planks, four raised wooden benches, and a stove attached to the chimney.

The log section of the sauna is made of hewn timbers joined at the corners by a double notch joint. Both gable walls consist entirely of logs. The plate logs extend from the building core and are supported by a pair of upright poles. This projecting frame is sheathed with drop siding. A small, square fixed sash window pierces the south log wall, and a double hung window lights the frame section. The building is constructed into a small hillside and has a rubble stone foundation. The gable roof is covered with corrugated metal.

6) Chicken Coop, ca.1950, noncontributing.

This is a small, wood frame building with a concrete foundation, asphalt siding, and a gable roof.

7) Pond House, ca.1940, noncontributing.

This square, hipped roof structure has a concrete foundation and is made of cinder block.

8) Garage, ca.1960, noncontributing.

The garage is a cinder block building with a barrel roof and two section track doors.

9) Agricultural Land, contributing.

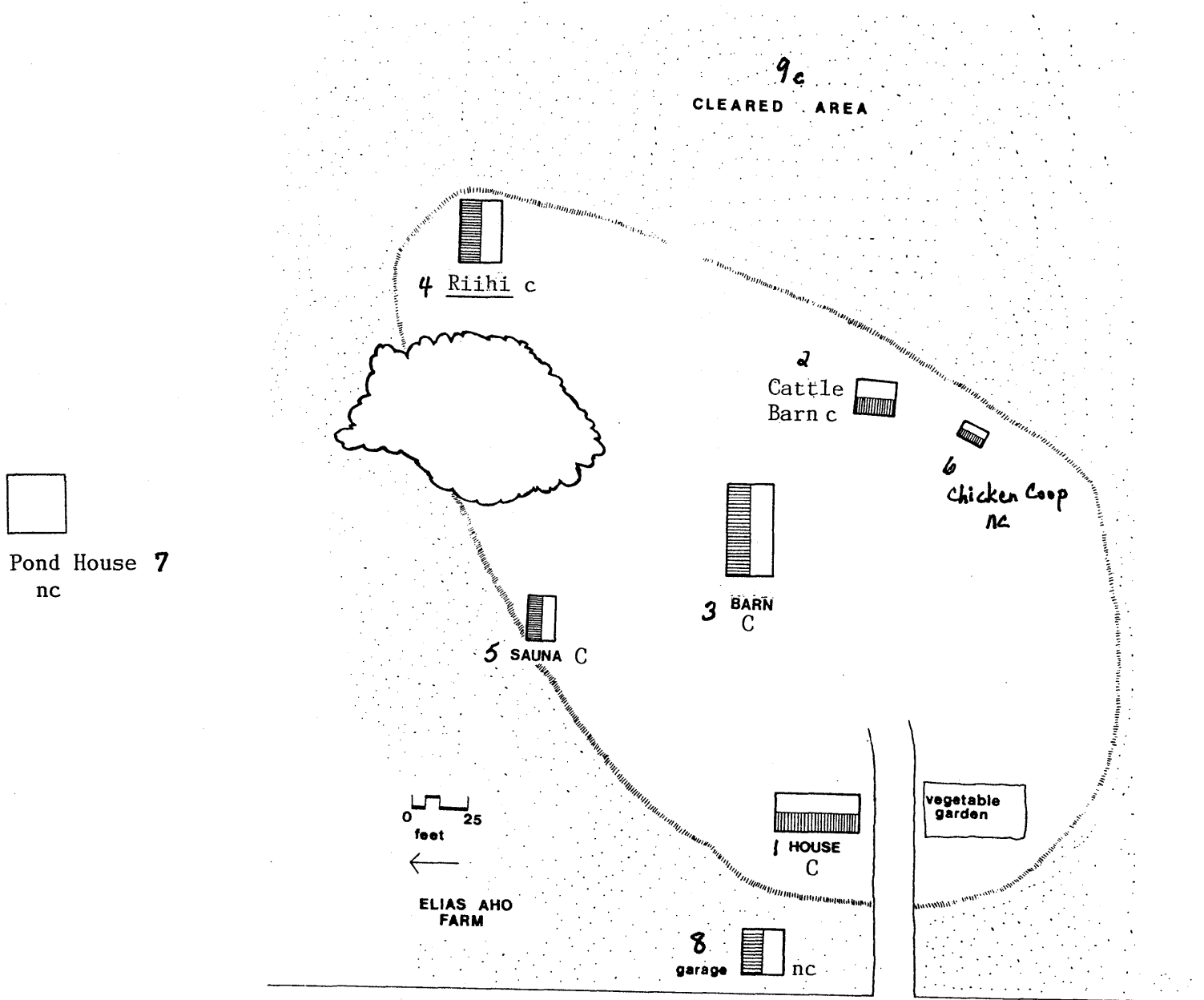
The cultivated fields east of the farmstead occupy the original land cleared by the Aho family. These fields continue to be used today for similar purposes.

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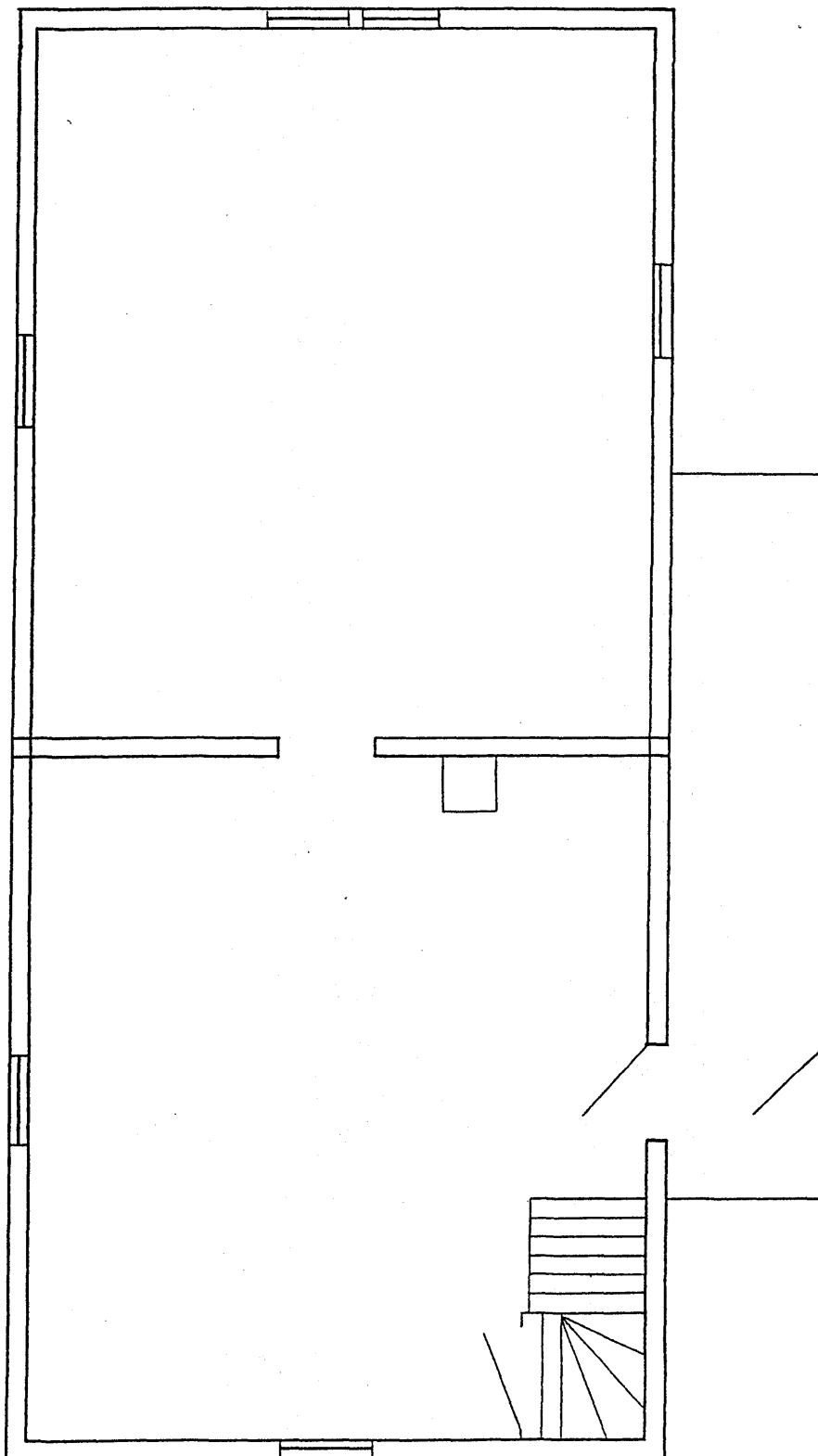
THIS IS NOT A BOUNDARY MAP

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ELIAS and LISI AHO HOUSE



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Like many Finnish immigrants, Elias Aho worked in the Iron Range town of Sparta (probably at the Sparta mine) for about ten years prior to becoming a farmer. During the summer of 1901, he moved from Sparta and filed for a 160-acre homestead in Section 29 of Waasa Township. In the fall of the same year he began to construct what one witness described as a "big house," which he completed and began to inhabit by May, 1902. It is likely that Aho had assistance from his Finnish neighbor August Sarvisto, who also completed his house in May, 1902. Aho and Sarvisto each served as a witness for the other when the final homestead proof was filed, a common practice in homogeneous ethnic settlements.

The difficulties encountered by homesteaders in the remote, undeveloped cutover region is revealed in the Homestead proof filed by Elias Aho. In this document he states that because of a lack of roads, his wife Lisi (who suffered from poor health) could not join him on their property until 1905, five years after she had come to St. Louis County. By the time Aho "proved up" on 6 June 1907, Lisi and five children were living on the farm. During their initial settlement period, the family made a significant number of improvements. Sixteen acres of land had been cleared with eight plowed and eight planted in hay. A stable, bath house, hay barn, cellar, root house, and the dwelling had been built, and a well and some fences had been installed. The farm included one team of horses, five cattle, and poultry. Moreover, the value of the holdings were estimated to be \$1,000, well above the average of \$700 for farms in the area.

The Aho Farm buildings affirm the desire by Finns to perpetuate their centuries-old construction techniques, building skills, and architectural forms in a New World setting. Each log building reveals the use of the two major tools -- a broadaxe and vara -- used by Finnish builders to hew and shape the walls of the house, sauna, riihi, barn, and cattle barn. The logs and corner joints have a tight, precise fit which has contributed to the overall condition and high degree of integrity of the site.

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UTM References (cont.)

	<u>Zone</u>	<u>Easting</u>	<u>Northing</u>
E	15	564280	5277680
F	15	563100	5277630
G	15	563100	5278000
H	15	563470	5278000