

The Archaeology of Fernworthy Forest, Dartmoor, Devon

A New Survey

July 2013



South-West Landscape Investigations



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Moor than meets the eye
Landscape Partnership



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Summary

An archaeological survey of Fernworthy Forest was requested by Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA), in partnership with the Forestry Commission (FC), as part of the development phase of the Authority's HLF Landscape partnership programme of work '*Moor than meets the Eye - the story of people and landscape over 4000 years on Dartmoor.*' The survey has been designed to inform the Authority within the preset objectives of:

- o improving the visibility and interpretation of the archaeological sites.
- o rediscover those sites which had been lost or obscured by tree planting.
- o restore the settings of individual sites.
- o produce new material for interpretation, education and public purpose.
- o assist the FC in the refinement of future forest plans and operational assessments to ensure that accidental damage to archaeological sites does not occur during forestry operations.

Following a desktop survey, fieldwork was undertaken to establish the character and extent of previously recorded archaeological sites and to assess the accuracy of data held by the DNPA HER. Also, to investigate any sites of potential interest revealed through the desktop survey but not previously recorded. This included features transcribed from a new LiDAR dataset commissioned by the partnership.

Sites were selected for large-scale survey at scales of between 1:200 and 1:000, depending on the individual merits of the site, recorded in plan and in some cases profile. Eight sites have been surveyed, including a stone circle, four double stone rows, eight cairns, five hut circle settlements with a total of 37 huts, and one late/post-medieval farmstead. Where remains are poorly preserved, photographs or descriptions have been used as the main sources of record. Other forms of evidence, including leats and farm enclosures have been analysed and are discussed within the relevant sections.

Primary documentary sources were not researched in depth, however, a number of antiquarian publications were utilised as well as late 19th-century photographic images and cartographic sources extending back to the late 18th century. This exercise has drawn together a good selection of material, which will be of use for future interpretation and public interest.

The reporting stage includes a detailed description with dimensions and condition for each site recorded within the plantation, for insertion in the DNPA HER and all recorded sites have been georeferenced to enable inclusion in the GIS. A statement of significance has been compiled for the individual categories of prehistoric sites, specifically their local, regional and national importance, and for the post-medieval remains, some general observations regarding the greater significance of the farming landscape in more holistic terms is included. Some conservation and research priorities are highlighted.

Acknowledgements

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This archaeological survey is of the area today known as Fernworthy Forest, Dartmoor National Park's largest conifer plantation. In the 21st century, and for much the 20th, the focus of Fernworthy has been its reservoir, the dam for which was completed in 1942 (Hemery 1983, 753), and its extensive plantation. Forestry commenced at Fernworthy shortly after the land was acquired by the Duchy of Cornwall estate in 1917 and by 1930 the conifers covered more than 800 acres (324ha)(Gill 1970, 269). The area has remained under densely-planted conifer ever since, replanted twice in some zones. The area included in this survey is that of the plantation (but excluding areas currently managed by SW Lakes), the boundary for which is the stone wall that encloses the former Fernworthy estate, a series of massive newtakes taken in during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Fernworthy is situated on the eastern edge of the upland plateau of Dartmoor, where the land starts to fall away rapidly towards the hinterland around Chagford and where the fall in height between the outer enclosures and the reservoir is up to 140m. The topography for this area, now mostly obscured to the modern observer by the plantation and the reservoir, is dominated by the river valley of the South Teign and its tributaries. The river has its source just west and outside the plantation and, along with its southern tributaries, runs through some dramatic steep-sided coombes containing fast-flowing streams before entering the gentler slopes around Fernworthy Farm. The area lies firmly within the granite zone: outcrops, although now disguised by the conifers, were once visible as notable landmarks at Hemstone Rocks and Lowton Tor. Moorstone (i.e. detached granite) has been the dominant building material for all forms of structure in this neighbourhood including houses, field boundaries and monuments, since the early second millennium BC.

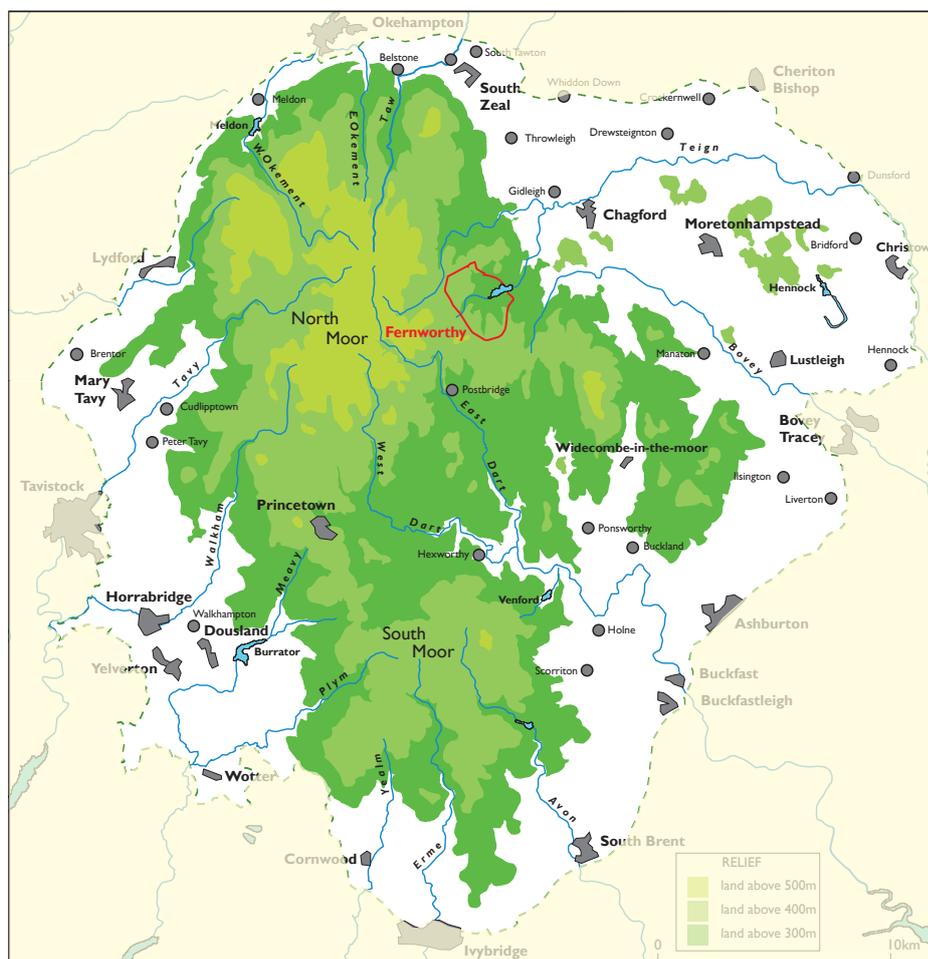


Fig 1 Location of Fernworthy Forest within Dartmoor National Park, Devon.

1.1 Historical Summary

The origins of human occupation in these valleys are obscure but it is known that a human presence on this part of Dartmoor was happening by the Mesolithic period, evident from a stone tool assemblage identified with that period recorded not far away at Batworthy. By the end of the 3rd millennium BC and the beginning of the 2nd, in the early stages of the Bronze Age, people were probably in permanent occupation of this part of the moors. Evidence of their presence comes in the form of ritual and funerary monuments including stone rows and round barrows. At Froggymead a combination of multiple barrows, stone rows and a stone circle, serves to emphasise the importance of this place as a ceremonial centre, perhaps over several generations. Excavation at one of these Froggymead barrows in the 19th century brought to light a fine 'Beaker' vessel and other artefacts indicative of an Early Bronze Age burial.

Settlement in the 2nd millennium BC was widespread in the valleys on the south side of the river, where people lived in round houses. These houses, built on substantial granite foundations with conical timber roofs, have left the characteristic upstanding evidence we know as hut circles. Within the project area the hut circles are arranged in groups of between three and ten. Some had associated enclosure walls, though much of the evidence for this has suffered severely from later human activities, including the robbing of stone from the medieval period onwards and disturbance by forestry vehicles.

Land divisions known as reaves, and their accompanying coaxial field systems, as described by Fleming (1989) and others, are another common component of 2nd millennium Dartmoor and are particularly prevalent on the eastern side of the moor with complex systems at Kestor, Thornworthy Tor and Shovel Down. The fragile remains, however, have not survived well in the plantation although pockets of evidence suggest their former presence.

For Dartmoor in general, the period following the Middle Bronze Age, is still an archaeological enigma. However, modern excavations are beginning to reveal that settlements and round houses may sometimes have been occupied into the Iron Age. Although likely to apply to some of the Fernworthy hut circles, it cannot currently be proven that any were occupied this late though further investigation may prove otherwise.

Following the Iron Age there is a dearth of evidence to suggest the level of occupation or other human activity on the uplands. Although modern scholarly opinion is starting to favour the idea that settlement may have returned to Dartmoor, if indeed it had ever ceased, before the Norman conquest, specific documentary or reliable archaeological evidence is still lacking. Fernworthy lies just within the eastern boundary of Dartmoor Forest, the ancient parish that covers central Dartmoor and much of the upland, and documented settlement for the Forest does not appear until after the disafforestation of 1239 with records of the ancient tenements on central Dartmoor. Unfortunately no settlement in the Fernworthy area was specifically documented in this early period, although some researchers have argued for Anglo Saxon occupation of the farm of that name (Worth 1953), while another believes the site may have been occupied in 1086 at the time of Domesday (Greeves 2004, 67). There is good reason to suspect that some at least of the small farms found along this section of the South Teign have origins at least in the 13th to 15th century, though possibly earlier, inferred from evidence of other valleys on the moor where we are able to be more certain about the date of similar farms.

Although the development of settlement in the area in the intervening period is yet to be illuminated by a documentary study, by the 18th century there were five small farms: Fernworthy, Assacombe, Silk House, Lowton and Higher Lowton. Fernworthy is likely to be the earliest, followed, at an as yet undefined interval, by Assacombe and Silk House. The Lowton's may be later but again the sequence is uncertain. The people who occupied these farms lived in small rectangular granite houses at the centre of their holdings, with few outbuildings. They created enclosed fields to grow fodder and to contain their livestock but they almost certainly utilised the higher uplands for summer pasture and as a source of turf, which they harvested as a fuel.

By the late 18th century, major change was affecting this part of the moor as certain estate holders began to expand the size of their holdings through land grants provided by the Duchy of Cornwall (Gill 1970). On Dartmoor this episode is usually referred to as the 'improver period'. Among these 'improvers' was Sir John Davie of Crediton, the holder of Fernworthy, who, by the 1780s began taking in large, additional areas of moorland outside the estate while also absorbing the lands of the smaller farms, all of which were part of Fernworthy by 1825 when most of the farmsteads were in ruins. Massive additional intakes of land were added to the estate during this period, though much of it was steep, rocky moorland that was never developed economically until the coming of the conifers in the first quarter of the 20th century. Fernworthy Farm survived into the 20th century but was abandoned and demolished shortly before the reservoir was flooded in the late 1930s. Thus ended a probable 4000-year span of human occupation in this area.

1.2 Methodology

This survey has combined traditional techniques of landscape investigation and terrestrial survey with the additional facility of a new LiDAR dataset covering the plantation.

A desktop survey was undertaken to collate existing data concerning the field remains, commencing with the Devon/Dartmoor HER. In the following report, all HER reference numbers where referred to in the text appear in square brackets. Secondary sources were also collated; these included the work of past topographic writers, such as William Crossing (1909) and Eric Hemery (1983), but also several 19th century archaeological reports and the work of the Dartmoor Exploration Committee, including surveys and excavations.

Reference to primary documentary sources has been limited to local record office collections but cartographic evidence has proved particularly helpful in the interpretation of the five medieval farms. These maps include one very fine estate survey of 1794-6 held by North Devon Record Office and three surveys (two of 1807 and one of c.1825) held by the Duchy of Cornwall in London.¹ Early (1886) edition 25-inch scale OS maps have also proved very useful.

On completion of the desktop survey the reconnaissance phase commenced, firstly by field checking existing HER entries but also a general walkover of areas currently accessible on foot. The scope of the latter exercise was limited by the density of the conifers; areas of mature conifer with clear ground beneath the trees allowed exploration on foot, whereas densely packed saplings or un-thinned larger conifers are mostly impenetrable. Investigation was also possible in some of the clear-felled areas, although brashings and debris inhibit the process somewhat.

The limitations of the above exercise were balanced to some extent by the availability of a new LiDAR dataset now in the possession of DNPA, from which it has been possible to examine the forest floor remotely within the less densely planted areas of conifer. However, the denser areas still remain unexplored.

A number of sites were selected for measured survey, data for which was captured using a Total Station Theodolite then annotated in the field. An appropriate scale for each survey was selected on its level of detail and the overall spread of the remains. Large scale (1:200) was selected for the stone circle, Assacombe House and a representative selection of hut circles. Hut settlements were surveyed at 1:1000 scale and the Assacombe settlement and the stone rows at 1:500. All features recorded have been geo-referenced using mapping grade GPS and supplied as 1:2500 geospatial data suitable for use with GIS.

2.0 THE PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

Within the estate of Fernworthy a good range of prehistoric archaeological sites has survived as earthworks or upstanding stone structures. These reflect aspects of domestic, funerary and ritual activity within several spatially separate areas of the upper South Teign valley in the early to mid second millennium BC and perhaps earlier.

The ritual and burial monuments are likely to be the oldest visible evidence in this area, including a stone circle, stone rows, and numerous round barrows. Hut settlements containing up to twelve hut circles, could have similar chronological origins, though they can rarely be proven to be contemporary. These settlements bare a resemblance to, and may be chronologically associated with, other prehistoric remains in the area outside the confines of the plantation, such as those on Thornworthy Down and Shovel Down. However, one aspect that is less obvious within the plantation is the reaves. These prehistoric linear land divisions and associated smaller field systems are a common feature of the wider second millennium BC landscape of Dartmoor, particularly on the eastern side of the moor and a general absence of them within the plantation may be partly due to their obliteration by forestry activity. Some do survive; two reaves previously recorded on the open moor of Stonetor Hill, NW of the plantation, could not previously be traced within it. However, both have been revealed on the LiDAR data as continuing for up to 400m into the plantation. A coaxial field system associated with one of the hut settlements, at West Lowton, has also been found to be more extensive than previously recorded.

2.2 Previous research

Past archaeological activity is described below under the headings of individual sites. However, it is worth emphasising that this area of Dartmoor was one of the earliest areas to come to the attention of 19th-century antiquaries, such as Rowe, Ormerod and Lukis in the 1830s-70s, and was also subject to much attention by the Dartmoor Exploration Committee (DEC) in the 1890s and 1930s. This branch of the Devonshire Association was formed in 1893 by a group of Devon's leading antiquaries of the time, including Robert Burnard, Sabine Baring Gould and R Hansford Worth, with the mission to investigate, through excavation and fieldwork, the antiquities of Dartmoor. All three undertook important excavations at hut settlements and barrows in this area, resulting in some extraordinary discoveries. Following this dash of excitement, the area received little further interest on such a scale, although gatherers of general field data such as Grinsell (1978) and Turner (1990) passed by in the later 20th century, and Jeremy Butler (1991) recorded the ritual monuments in the 1980s-90s. A high proportion of the previously recorded sites in the plantation are scheduled monuments (SM) and were visited and reported on by English Heritage (EH) field officers as part of the Monument Protection Programme (MPP). In 1976 a working party carried out a survey of the known monuments within the plantation, as an early effort to improve the conservation of the archaeology (Anon 1976).

2.3 Froggymead

For descriptive purposes Froggymead will include the stone circle plus the stone rows to both north and south of the circle and the five barrows in the vicinity. This combination of monuments in such close proximity we may term a ceremonial or ritual landscape, where ritual and funerary monuments evolved around one or more primary components.

Despite its current backwater status, hidden in a begrudgingly small clearing within the plantation and

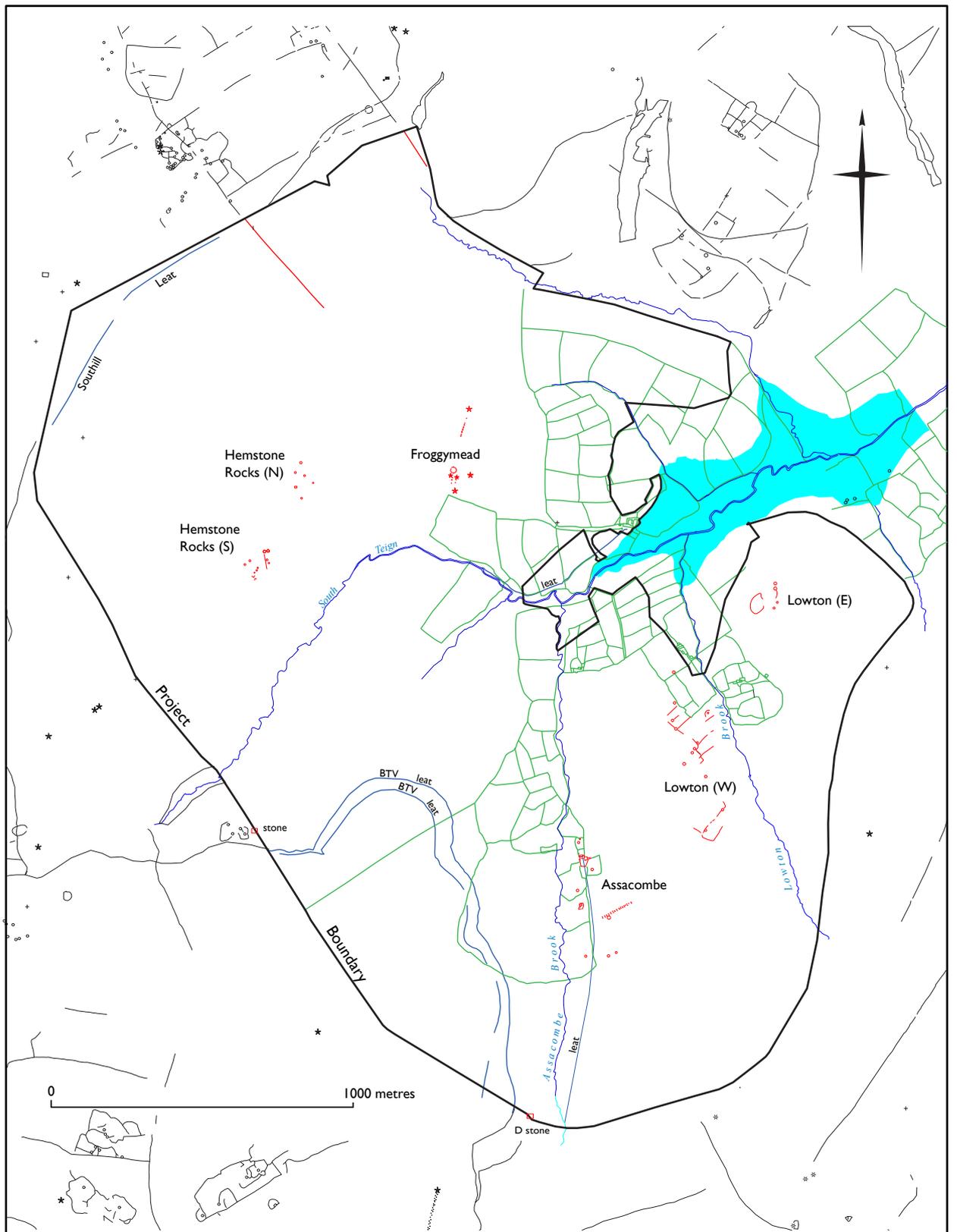


Fig 2 Prehistoric and other archaeology in Fernworthy Forest (include LiDAR). The map also shows recorded archaeology on the exterior of the project boundary based on NMR data.

divorced from its moorland context, the complex of monuments at Froggymead has attracted the attention of antiquaries and archaeologists from the early 19th century onwards and in the 1890s, excavations produced some of Dartmoor's most important prehistoric artefact finds.

Samuel Rowe was the first visitor to record his findings in detail, which he published in a seminal paper on Dartmoor's antiquities in 1830:

On Ruggamead Hill, in Vernworthy new-take, one mile and a half from Gidleigh pillar, is a circle of upright stones, twenty-seven in number; the highest standing three feet and a half from the surface. From some wide intervals in the circumference, the stones appear to have been removed. Diameter sixty-four feet.

S. of the circle, three hundred and sixty feet, commences an avenue, taking a direction N. And S. One hundred and twenty-four feet towards a brook. A large part of this avenue seems to have been removed, for the construction of a neighbouring wall (Rowe 1830, 179-212).

The first image of the circle comes courtesy of Spence Bate in 1871 in the form of an engraving providing an oblique view (Fig 3). He also provided a short commentary stating that ‘..the circle is in a good state of preservation, one stone only being absent from the perfect number of twenty-seven stones⁴ (Spence Bate 1871, 514). Spence Bate did not mention any of the associated cairns, and the stone rows he referred to only briefly.

The circle and two of the cairns, but not the stone rows, were subject to measured survey for the first time in 1879 when the Revd Lukis was commissioned by the Society of Antiquaries of London to explore many of the prehistoric stone monuments then known on Dartmoor. These surveys were never published but the completed drawings survive in the society's archives, among them Froggymead (Fig 4), and they represent the first competently executed surveys of this category of monument on Dartmoor.

Lukis's plan shows the 27 stones, all still visible today, with the notable gap of two missing stones on the south sector. The plan shows the circle to be somewhat irregular; all but one of the stones appear to be upright, but its circularity is far from perfect. Also of interest is the number of stones depicted making up a kerb around the western of the two barrows (Barrow A). Most of these are not visible today and have either become covered by the overgrowth of turf, or were removed during excavations at a later date (see below). Unfortunately, apart from a general summary of Lukis's Dartmoor findings (Lukis 1881), no description to accompany the drawing has survived.



Fig 3 An engraved image of the Froggymead/Fernworthy stone circle by C Spence Bate in 1871.

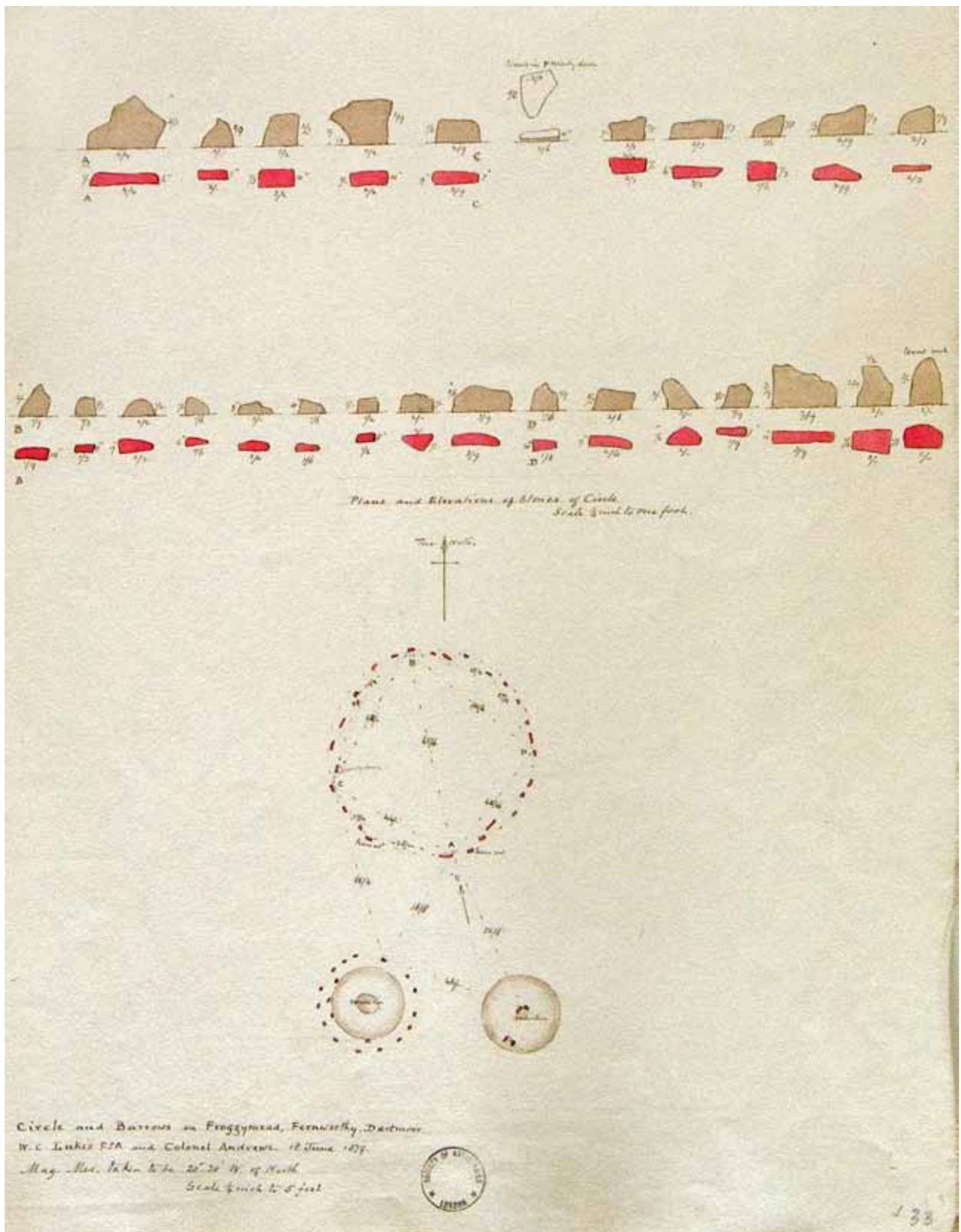


Fig 4 The first measured survey of Froggymead stone circle and two of the barrows by W C Lukis in 1879. (Soc Antiq London with permission)

Following this, the stone circle and the larger stone row (B) appeared on the first edition 25-inch OS map published in 1886.

Less than 20 years after Lukis' visit the site was subject to a major programme of investigation by the Dartmoor Exploration Committee, including survey and excavation (DEC 1898). For the first time all the elements that make up this ceremonial complex were surveyed, including the stone circle, all three stone rows and the four barrows. An excavation trench was cut through the stone circle, revealing that its floor when in use had been scattered with charcoal from fires, from which the excavators concluded that it was used as a crematorium or as the site of funeral feasts. The four barrows were also excavated of which

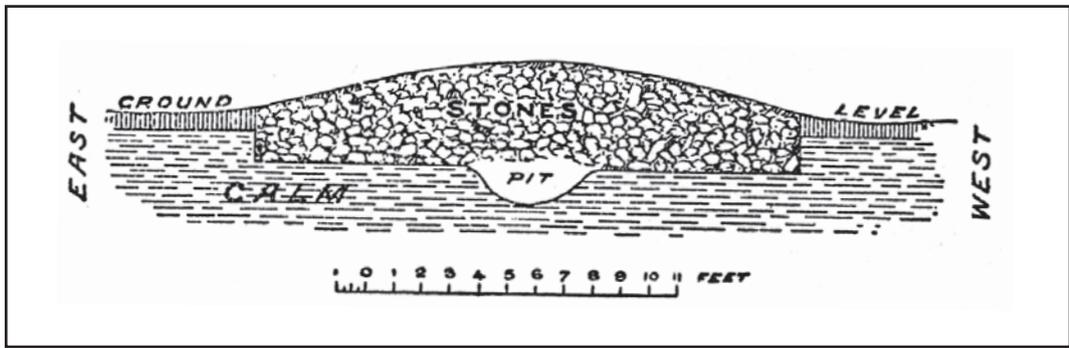


Fig 5 Section drawing of the barrow (D) excavated by the Dartmoor Exploration Committee.



Fig 6
Small finds excavated by the DEC from Barrow D in 1898 – button (front and reverse) and flint knife (EH and Plymouth Museum).

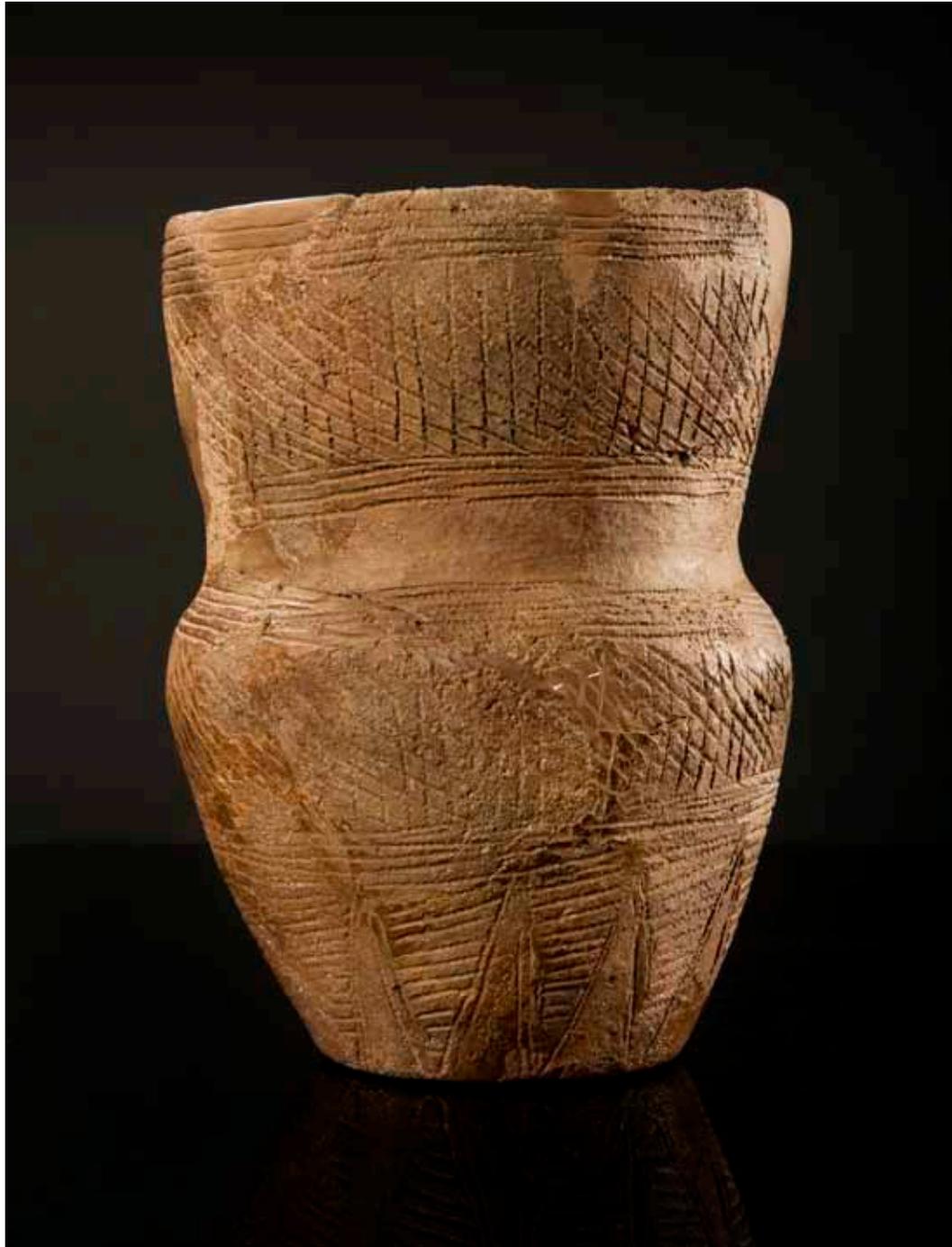


Fig 7 The Fernworthy beaker retrieved from Barrow D (EH and Plymouth Museum).

barrows B and C revealed 'no results' to speak of, and barrow A contained a disturbed cist 'previously rifled' and masses of burnt bone.

More spectacular was the results from barrow D, an undisturbed example. This was the main feature that attracted the DEC to this group of monuments in the hope that material could be retrieved which could provide a date for the whole complex.

This barrow comprised a mound of small stones (Fig 5) covering a central pit, which contained a fragment of bronze - possibly a knife or spearhead, - a dress button made from either Kimmeridge shale or jet² and a flint knife (Fig 6). But most spectacular was the find of a crushed ceramic vessel, a beaker (Fig 7), which when reconstructed became one of Dartmoor's most important Bronze Age finds and is now on display in Plymouth City Museum along with the other artefacts retrieved.

This assemblage of finds gave the DEC the material they needed to establish an approximate date for the barrow, but within the constraints of dating knowledge available at the time, they could say only that it



Fig 8 Chapman & Son photograph of the Froggymead/Fernworthy stone circle looking north in about 1900, showing the moorland context before the plantation (DA 013007).



Fig 9 The Froggymead stone circle looking NW, May 2013 (Phil Newman).

was late Neolithic or early Bronze Age (DEC 1898, 110), although they were unable to prove that any of the monuments were contemporary as they had hoped to. More recently, archaeologists have come to realise that not all the monuments within a complex such as Froggymead necessarily originate from the same epoch; barrows, stone rows or even the stone circle may represent later additions to whichever of the features were established at the site originally and perhaps by later generations.

Several useful early photographs of the stone circle survive. Some demonstrate the moorland setting of the monument, since lost by the tree planting, while others document the attrition of the forests as the trees encroach. The earliest of these, by Chapman, is of about 1900 (Fig 8) and shows a view of the circle looking NE with a backdrop of Thornworthy Tor and Kestor Rock on a distant horizon. Captured maybe less than a decade after the DEC investigations, all the stones stand erect but evidence of the trench has faded. Photos from the Taylor collection in the 1930s (DA 000572) show the circle still in an open moorland setting but with young conifers now growing nearby as the first phase of planting had begun. By the 1940s and 50s photographic views show the circle completely surrounded by conifers (DA 001013).

In the later 20th century small-scale measured plans of the monuments have been published by Butler (1991, 163) and RCHME (Newman 2011, Fig 2.42), however, the current survey represents the most detailed and accurate plan of the monument since the DEC investigations in the 1890s.

2.3.1 Evidence

The Stone circle [6534] (Figs 8-11)

The circle comprises 27 upright granite stones *in situ* with an internal diameter of 19.2 -19.6m. This is the same number of stones recorded by Rowe in 1830 and by most later recorders. Two additional stones (a and b) now exist in what was reported by Rowe to be a gap with hollows where stones had been removed. These two are flush with the ground and have probably been added more recently.

Froggymead is among the more regular of Dartmoor's stone circles with only minor irregularities in the positions of the stones around the circumference. One stone (c) appears to have become displaced and on the NW sector the curvature of the circumference appears slightly flattened in plan. All but three of the stones are set vertically, while those three (c, d and e) lean slightly. There is no known record of the stones being re-erected and both Bate and Lukis depict upright stones. It is known, however, that the DEC when excavating sites of this type would adjust the appearance to what they considered more correct and it is possible this practice occurred here though not recorded. This would explain why several of the stones in Lukis's plan of 1879 (Fig 4) are slightly displaced compared to the modern survey and why a stone drawn as fallen on Lukis's depiction, has been upright at least since the Chapman photo of c.1900 (Fig 8).

The stones vary in shape but fall roughly within two distinct categories. These may have had no significance to the builders but may simply represent materials available to them:

1. slabs set edgewise with their long axis following the line of the circumference
2. posts narrower than they are broad, with squared or pointed tops

The tallest stone is 0.95m high and the shortest is 0.3m.

A low, spread linear earthwork within the circle may be a result of erosion or is, just possibly, the last vestiges of the disturbance produced by the archaeological excavation of 1889. Erosion hollows have now formed around some of the stones, often retaining water and the NW side of the circle is today extremely wet.

Froggymead (Fernworthy) Stone Circle

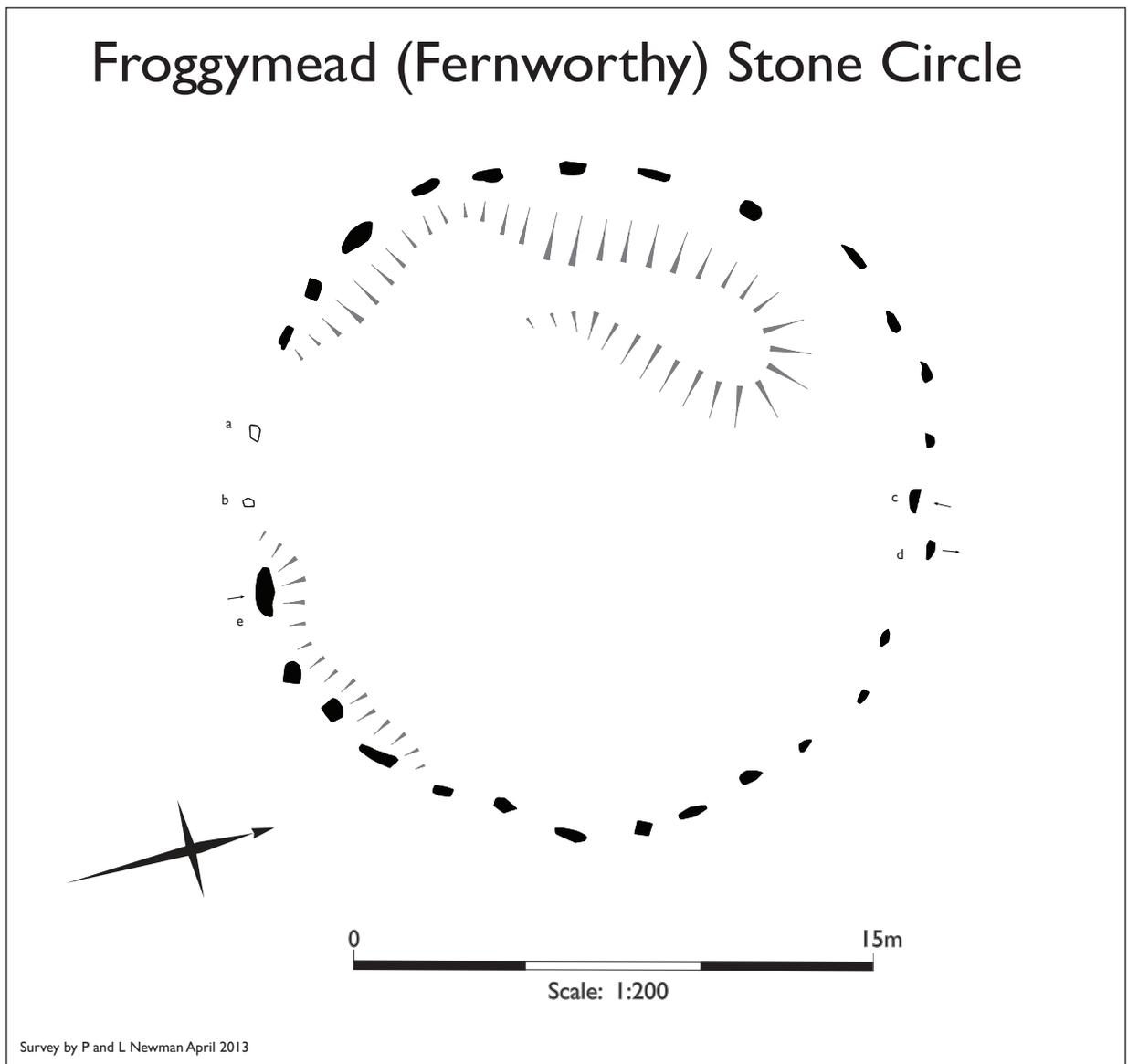


Fig 10 Plan of Froggymead stone circle surveyed at 1:200 scale with elevations.

Stone Row a [14886](Fig 11)

This stone row to the south of the stone circle appears to be aligned coaxially with a diametric centre line of the circle, approximately SSE. Although many of the stones are missing and those that survive are very small, some barely breaking the surface of the turf, enough remains to establish that this was a double alignment of paired stones. Seventeen stones survive, all are small with a maximum footprint of 0.45m by 0.38m and the tallest stands to only 15cm. The overall distance between the current end stones is 34m and the rows are a little over 1m apart. It has been claimed (Worth 1953) that an upright stone in the modern wall to the south beyond the forest track was a part of this alignment and may have formed its southern terminal but this is unproven and the wall has since been effaced.

Near the northern end of the surviving alignment an earthen barrow (Barrow A) sits uncomfortably, slightly offset to the west. One stone survives to the north of the barrow suggesting that it overlies a preexisting stone row, breaking its continuity and is therefore later than the row, which in this case was probably erected to complement the circle not the barrow as is more usual.

The row has clearly been robbed of most of its stone and the ground in the vicinity is much disturbed and eroded. What appears to be a hollow trackway or ditch crosses the row and various diggings have resulted in hollows in the vicinity. This row, row C and the area surrounding them was not spared when the conifers were planted and although now cleared, tree stumps and machine furrows (not illustrated) bear witness

Fernworthy (Froggymead) Ceremonial Complex Stone Circle and Barrows

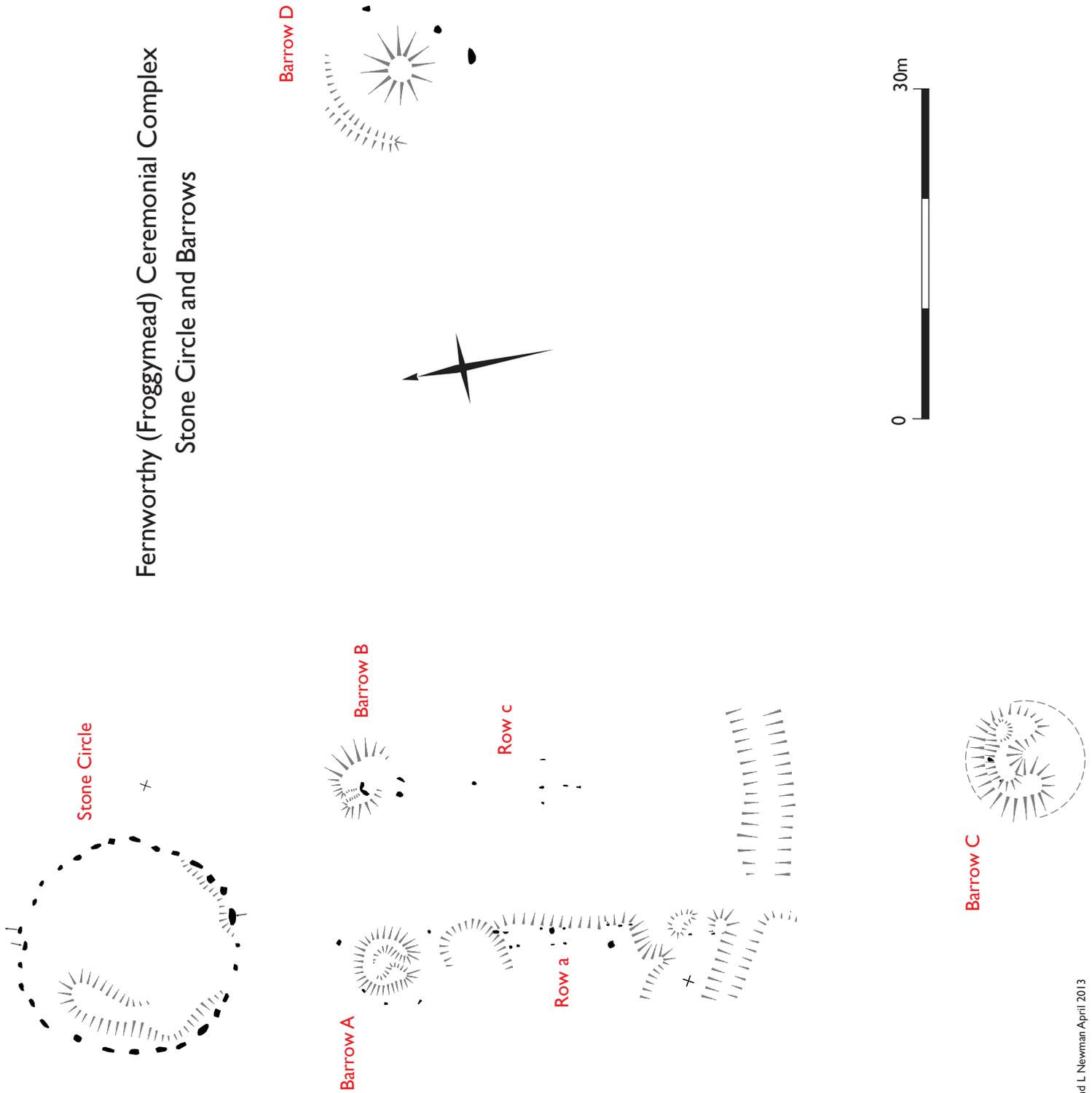
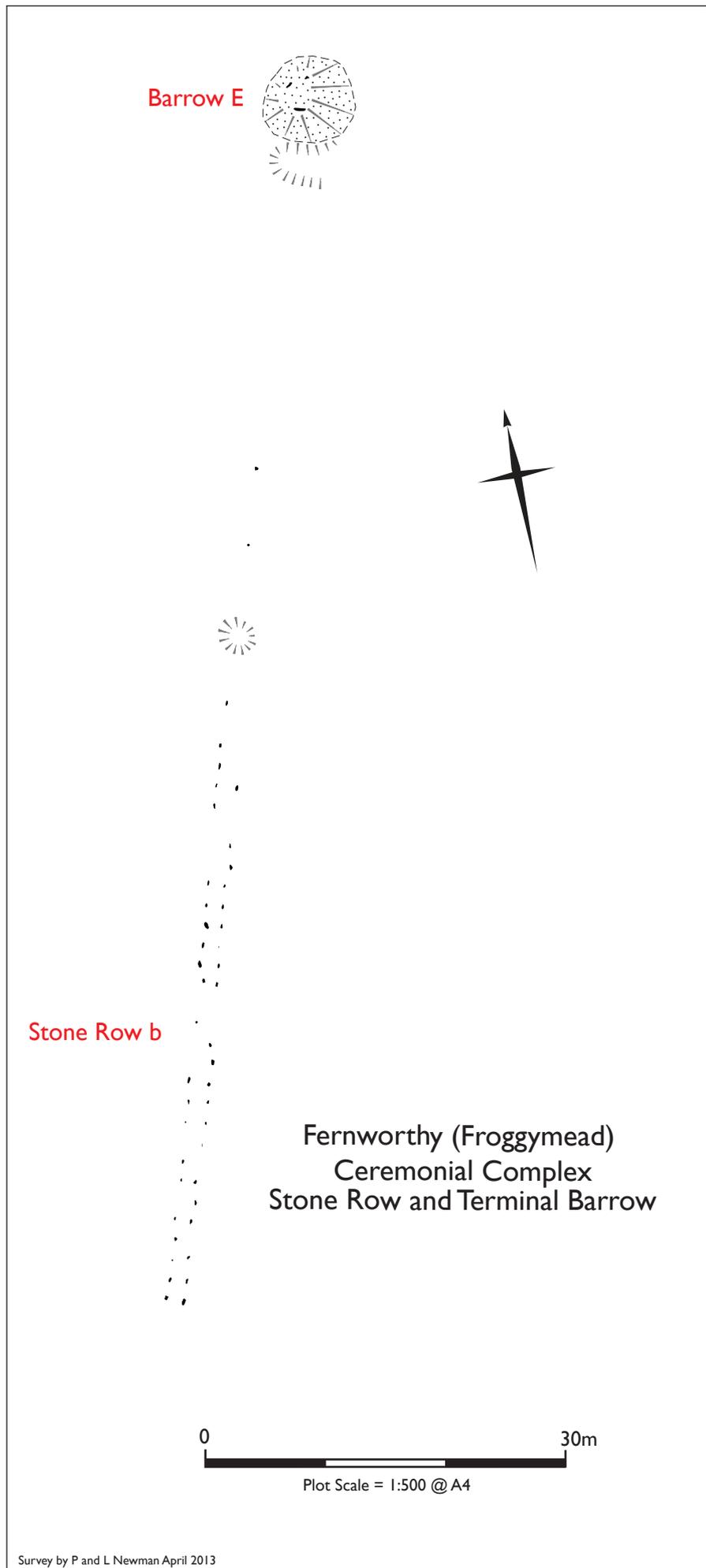


Fig 11
Plan of the southern end
of the Froggymead
Ceremonial Complex,
surveyed at 1:500 scale.

Fig 12
Plan of Froggymead
Stone Row b
surveyed at 1:500
scale.



Survey by P and L Newman April 2013

to a period of rough treatment of these fragile features. However, Worth's plan of 1898 shows a similarly depleted number of stones long before the forestry activity and it is likely the builders of the Fernworthy enclosure walls were responsible for the missing stones. It is also possible, given the small dimensions of the visible stones, that others remain *in situ* but have become overwhelmed by turf and topsoil.

Stone Row b [6562](Fig 12)

The longest of the three rows, and possibly once much longer, commences 105m NNE of the circle at which point the first pair of visible stones is located. From there this double row undoubtedly extended a further 100m, terminating at Barrow 5, although for the c.45m leading up to the barrow most of the stones are missing. It is not known if or how far the southern end of the row once extended or whether it terminated near the circle. However, had it continued south in a straight line the row would have tangentially clipped the western edge of the circle, so it seems unlikely, unless the missing section deviated slightly to compensate and hit the row more centrally.

The rows are 1.2 – 1.5m apart. The western row has 22 stones *in situ* and the eastern row has 21, arranged as 15 pairs, with each row having a number of singles where a corresponding stone is absent. The largest stone has a footprint of 0.58m by 0.25m but many are much smaller, some barely visible. The average height is 7-10cm though some are almost level with the ground. Two isolated stones to the north of the main group cannot be identified as being aligned with either row and may be displaced.

Other than these two, all the stones between the main group and the barrow are missing.

Stone Row c [6556] (Fig 11)

This row, probably originally a double, runs approximately parallel with Row A and is of similar character, i.e. most stones are missing and the few that survive are small. Again it is likely that some stones are buried and currently obscured. The northern terminal of the row appears to be a very despoiled barrow (Barrow B) and to the south, if the row continued it would clip the edge of Barrow C. The eastern row has five stones currently visible covering a distance of 17.8m but with many gaps. The western row is represented by only two stones, each paired with a counterpart in the other row 1.3m to the west. A single stone 2.4m to the east suggests there was a third row but this may just be a misplaced stone, which has become earthfast, not part of a row.

This section of the monument is particularly affected by the overgrowth of turf where some of the stones are barely visible, however, more stones are now visible than on Worth's plan of 1898.

The barrows/cairns (Fig 11)

The five barrows are all in poor condition. Barrows A-D were all excavated by the DEC in 1898 and still bear the scars, although in the case of A, B & C they had been opened previously and their current disturbed and spread appearance may owe more to earlier barrow diggers than to the efforts of the DEC. Barrow D, which the DEC claimed was undisturbed before they began work, appears to have been reconstructed by them following the excavation. Although now turf covered, the excavations revealed that these features were constructed from stone and are more properly referred to as cairns.

Barrow A [14885] is a turf-covered circular mound with a spread of up to 6.5m and 0.3m high. The central area is slightly hollowed and there is evidence of a trench having been cut through the southern quadrant, both evidence of excavation. The DEC reported this barrow to be much 'pillaged' suggesting that stone had been taken for the newtake wall. However, less than 20 years earlier Lukis showed an almost complete retaining circle *in situ* (Fig 4) although only three stones are visible today.

Barrow B [6719] is almost completely flat and survives only as an amorphous low, flat-topped earthwork cut through by a modern machine furrow. It may once have had an overall diameter of 7m but is today much spread. Two earthfast stones survive *in situ* at the centre of the mound forming an approximate right angle, which the excavators in 1898 concluded was a cist, of which all other traces are gone. The two stones are depicted on Lukis's plan of 1879 (Fig 4) and must therefore have already been exposed. The plan surveyed by R H Worth and published alongside the excavation report in 1898 (DEC 1898) contains an error, showing this barrow and stone row C too far to the south by several metres.

Barrow C [14887] The southernmost of the barrows is currently spread to about 11m diameter. Although originally circular, most of the southern half has been effaced and the centre section dug into, leaving a crescent shaped earthwork of 0.45m high. There is no evidence of there ever having been a kerb, nor has any past writer mentioned the presence of one.

Barrow D [6560] which produced most of the finds in 1898, is located in its own clearing, 75m SE of the circle. Although undoubtedly part of this complex, it is isolated and is the only barrow not apparently associated with or in the vicinity of a stone row. The diameter of the reconstructed, approximately circular earthen mound is around 7.8m and it stands to a height of 0.4m. Three earthfast stones on the eastern circumference appear to represent remains of a retaining circle, recorded during the excavations in 1898 as 'standing stones' though these are not depicted on the section drawing (Fig 5). Similarly, a curving earthen bank following the circumference on the NW side was not recorded by the DEC and may have resulted from their diggings.

Barrow E (Fig 12) At the northern terminal of Stone Row B on the edge of the clearing, much flattened and spread. Its overall form is now barely traceable but the spread of stone has a diameter of approximately 8m. Several stones are exposed but unlikely to be *in situ*.

2.4 Assacombe

One of the major concentrations of prehistoric evidence within the Fernworthy newtake is spread along the moderately sloping eastern hillslope of Assacombe (Assycombe) Brook, where a double stone row with a terminal cairn and a total of eight hut circles survive. A later settlement, probably with medieval beginnings, was imposed over these remains and it is likely that some prehistoric enclosure walls were incorporated into this farm, which itself was abandoned before the 1830s and is dealt with in a separate section (see below).

The Assacombe stone row came to the attention of the Dartmoor antiquaries somewhat later than other monuments in this class, at least by those who recorded their findings. Samuel Rowe wrote that Assacombe Hill:

... has various relics, though chiefly in a more dilapidated state than usual. The adjacent fences too evidently account for the more than ordinarily ruinous state of the hut circles, and quadrangular inclosures on this spot (Rowe 1830, 209).

It is curious that such a visually striking and relatively intact monument as this stone row escaped individual attention from Rowe in this and his subsequent publication (Rowe 1848), which implies that he was unaware of it.

The site also escaped the notice of Lukis when undertaking his programme of survey in the late 1870s, despite this being one of the parts of Dartmoor in which he was most active (see Froggymead above) when commissioned by the Society of Antiquaries.

The Assacombe row also eluded, or was ignored by, the 19th-century Ordnance Survey investigators as



Fig 13 Photograph of the Assacombe Stone Row by Robert Burnard, May 29th 1894 showing the 'five re-erected stones at the east end' viewed from the SW. (DA 003490).



Fig 14 Chapman & Son postcard view of the upper eastern end of the stone row c.1900, looking SE showing the stones re-erected by Burnard and Baring Gould (DA 013008).



Fig 15 Chapman and Son postcard view looking SW, c. 1900, of the Assacombe hut circle excavated by Burnard and Baring Gould. (DA 013009).



Fig 16 Photo view of the stone row looking SW, July 2013 (Phil Newman).



Fig 17 The stones at the head of the row re-erected by Burnard and Baring Gould, only two survive untoppled. July 2013 (Phil Newman).

the site is absent from the 1st edition 25-inch map of 1886, despite the inclusion of the adjacent hut circle. However, by 1905 the row was included on the 2nd edition, although only four of the eight hut circles were depicted.

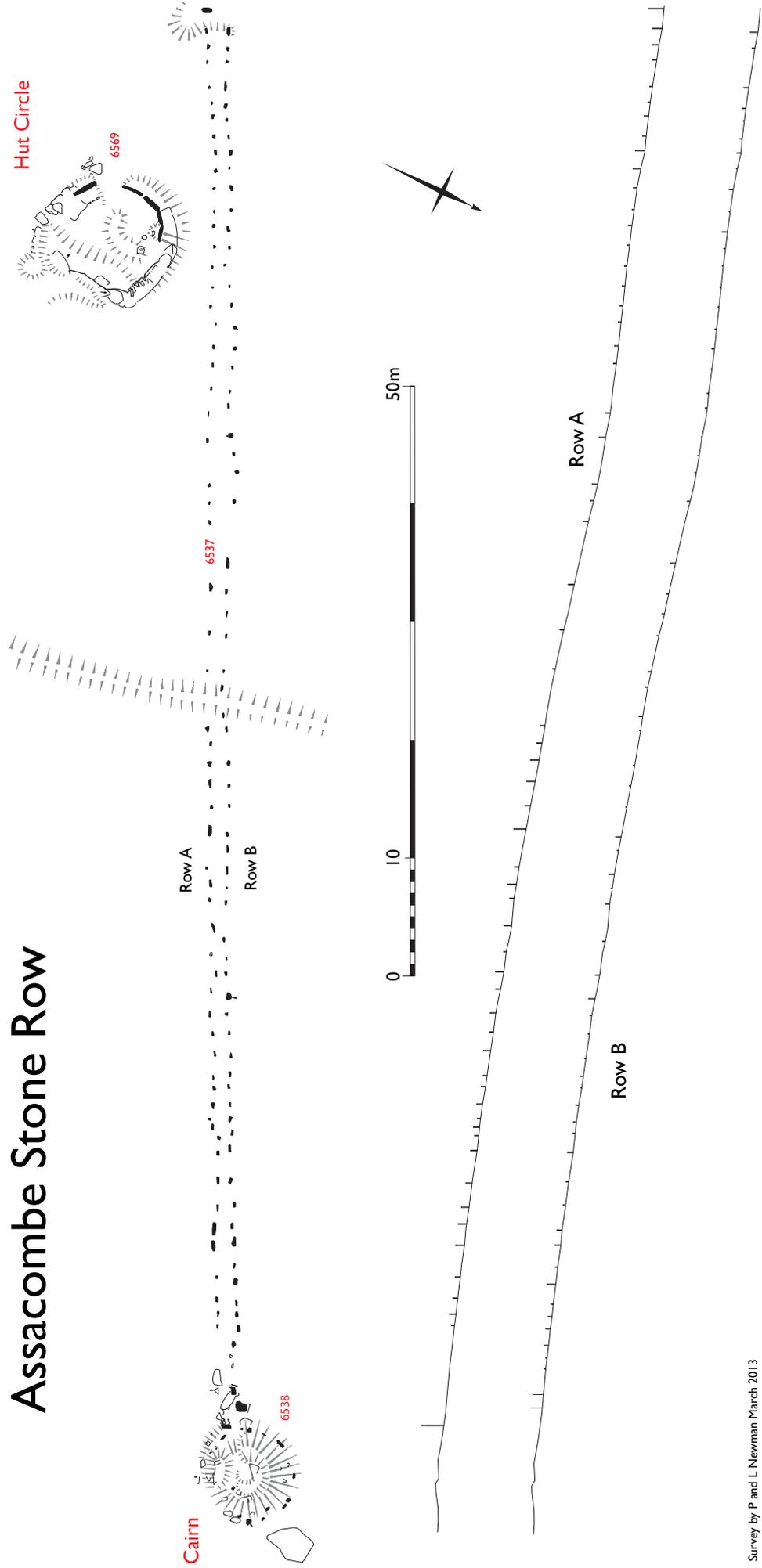
Writing in 1889, Lloyd Warden Page provided a brief description of the stone row and mentioned the hut circles thereabouts. More important perhaps, is the writer's statement that there were many tracklines (reaves) in the vicinity (Page 1889, 204), a form of evidence that is very much absent within the areas planted with conifers several decades later.

The first and only detailed archaeological examination of the site was by Burnard and Baring Gould of the DEC in May 1894. Their investigation focussed around the top, eastern end of the row where they re-erected several of the taller stones, following which Burnard captured the restored section with the five re-erected stones in a photograph (Fig 13). Rather than excavate the row itself, they concentrated on the nearby hut circle, sited only 3m to the south of the row, in an attempt to prove that the two monuments were 'coeval'. They concluded, unfortunately, that the structure had been so severely robbed of its stone by the inhabitants of the medieval Assacombe farmstead, that all evidence for a date had been destroyed.

In his notes for May 1894 (DA 104763) Burnard mentioned that he and Baring Gould had also excavated two other hut circles. One was below the stone row and 'has a track line (reave) leading to it east and west'. This is likely to have been circle 6567, which still has vestiges of a wall extending from its eastern quadrant, although anything that survived on the western side has now become obscured or destroyed. The other circle he noted was 'in the enclosure, marked on map'. This was probably circle [6565] within an enclosure to the north of Assacombe Farm which has a lowered floor typical of huts excavated by the DEC when not backfilled.⁵ They found charcoal deposited in a 'cooking hole' in the floor of the circle.

The photographers of Chapman and Son provided a very fine postcard view of the top end of the row looking along it to the west (Fig 14). It shows the monument long before the encroachment of plantation with vistas across to the open moorland areas that are today covered by trees. A second view is of the hut circle with a section of the row behind (Fig 15), again showing the original open moorland setting.

Assacombe Stone Row



Survey by P and L Newman March 2013

Fig 18
1:500 Plan of the Assacombe stone row, cairn and hut circle. Sectional view shows the slope gradient and relative height of individual stones.

2.4.1 Evidence

The Stone Row [6537] (Figs 13, 14, 16-18)

The stone row comprises two parallel alignments of 117m long, ascending the eastern slope of Assacombe from WSW to ENE, with a difference in height between the western and eastern ends of 18.67m. A blocking stone makes up the western terminal of the southern row (A) and a cairn forms the eastern terminal of both rows.

The stones vary in shape and height but most are small, some barely protruding above the turf. The smallest examples are as little as 19cm by 5cm. They are arranged in pairs, whereby for each stone in row A there is or was a counterpart in row B. The distance between the pairs is between 1-1.5m and the distance between the rows is 1.25m. Although some of the stones are edge-set slabs, deliberately set with their long axis following that of the row, many of the other stones are of random outline and clearly not chosen to conform to a particular shape.

Row A has a total of 59 *in situ* stones plus the western blocking stone, which is 1.26m high. At least 12 stones in this row are missing or buried and two tall stones at the eastern end, previously re-erected by Burnard and Baring Gould (Fig 13), have fallen (Fig 17). The tallest stone in the whole monument, also re-erected, is that at the eastern terminal of Row A on the periphery of the cairn. This stands to 1.85m high and its horizontal axis is set at right angles to other stones in the row. Of the other stones within row A the tallest is 0.74m.

Row B has 64 stones *in situ* with four missing. The tallest stone at the eastern terminal, one of the re-erected examples, currently leans to the north and is in imminent danger of completely toppling. Of the remaining stones the tallest is 1m.

Apart from the re-erection of the tall stones near the cairn, there is no record of the remainder having been restored. This is reflected in the slightly wavy arrangement of the rows in places. For both rows the majority of the taller stones appear to be towards the higher, eastern end of the monument, although others are found in places along the line.

Slightly to the west of halfway along the rows, a low, stony bank traverses them at an approximate right angle. This probable reave [6540] can be traced across the clearing and for several metres into the conifers on the south side, but has become invisible beyond the northern edge of the clearing.

Cairn [6538]

The eastern terminal of the stone row comprises a low stony round cairn or barrow. Its position is slightly offset from the rows, inasmuch as the central axis of the rows, if continued, does not cut the circle of the cairn diametrically but as a chord across its southern sector. This odd positioning suggests a far from straightforward building sequence.

Although turf covered, the cairn is made predominantly from stone. It is roughly circular with a spread diameter of 8.4-8.7m forming a 0.65m high dome. There is one large displaced slab forming the north side of a central hollow which probably represents a rifled cist. A series of apparently *in-situ* slabs with spaces between them provide an approximate arc around the circumference of the cairn on the north side to form a retaining circle. However, the stones on its southern sector have become displaced. The existence of an inner circle described by Grinsell is difficult to agree with (Grinsell 1978, 146).

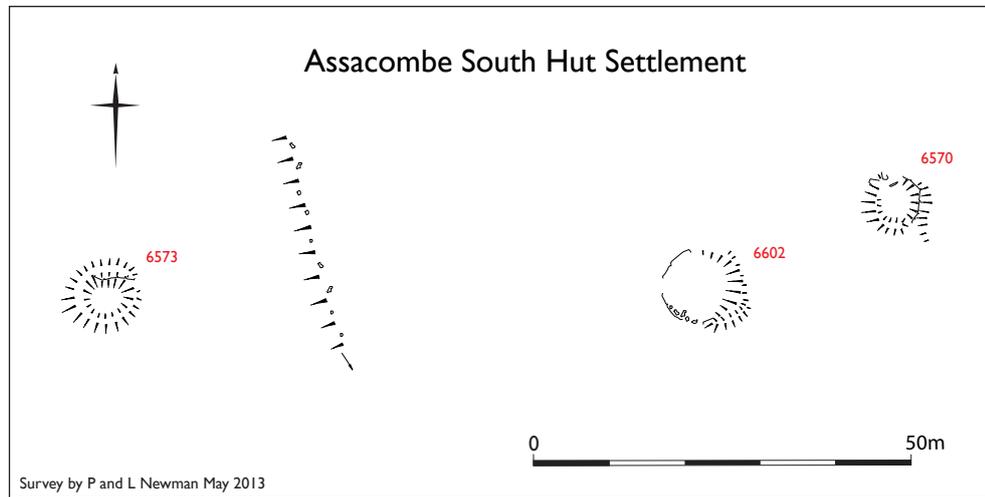


Fig 19 1:000 survey of the southern three hut circles at Assacombe

Hut Circles

Hut [6569] (Fig 15, 29)

Approximately 6m to the south of the rows sits a large hut circle with an internal diameter of 9.2m. The floor of the hut has been cut level into sloping ground and the walls are constructed from a series of flat slabs, set end to end, longwise and upright to form a circle that makes up the inner shell of the wall. The NW sector is the most intact section with four contiguous slabs *in situ* standing to 0.7m high. On the eastern side several of the slabs have fallen inwards and now lean at an angle. Other slabs on the southern sector appear to be missing and to the NE a rough rubble wall has been substituted in a gap which has to be assumed once also contained slabs. The position of the entrance is visible in the SE sector, with fallen door linings, but a larger opening on the west side was claimed, by Burnard and Baring Gould following excavation, to be an access route for carts when the majority of the stone from this hut was robbed. For this robbing they accused the builders of the medieval Assacombe walls.

Hut [6567]

This hut is likely to have been another that was investigated by Burnard and Baring Gould and which in his notes Burnard describe as having a trackline to west and east, by which he was certainly referring to the vestiges of enclosure walls attached to the hut. The hut now has very little stone visible and survives essentially as a circular earthwork bank. The interior diameter is approximately 6.8m and the bank is spread up to 2.8m and 0.4m high. A breach in the bank on the SE side is likely to be the position of the entrance. Rotten stumps and roots from two conifers felled sometime ago, but originally planted in the hut circle's walls, provide testimony to the lack of concern for these monuments at the time the plantation was created.

Hut [6565] (Fig 29)

Probably the third hut mentioned by Burnard in his notes of 1894. Although the hut is made up of thick rubble and earth banks, the interior has an approximately level floor which has been cleaned down by the excavators to leave the stones of the inner wall in sharp profile. The hut probably had built rather than slab walls, parts of which are exposed on the interior. A breach in the bank on the southern end is likely to have been the entrance. The internal diameter is up to 5.8m and the walls are up to 3.6m thick and 1m high. Rotten stumps and roots from five conifers have disturbed both the walls and interior of the hut.

Hut [6564]

A small and ill-defined hut circle attached to the inside of the enclosure wall, only 10m north of hut [6565]. The stony circular bank has a level interior with a diameter of 3.4m. The bank on the west side blends into the slope and has spread to 3m thick. Several stones of a built interior shell wall are visible and a breach on the southern end is the probable location of the entrance.

Hut [6566]

Located within a rectangular enclosure 60m SE of Assacombe farmstead, an earthwork hut circle with only fragments of stone surviving to represent the inner wall. The walls are very disturbed but the interior diameter is between 5.7 and 6.3m and the spread remains of the walls are up to 3m thick and 0.45m high. A 1.6m diameter cairn recorded 4.5m SE of the hut by the RCHME surveyor in the 1990s is an unlikely candidate and appears more likely to be an earthfast boulder, which has accumulated some additional stone.

An additional group of three huts (Fig 19) is located 130m south of the Assacombe stone row on a moderate western slope. All three appear to have been robbed of stone.

Hut [6573]

Just west of the modern track, this hut sits in a natural hollow that cuts into the slope, providing level ground for its floor. The walls have been much robbed leaving an earth and stone ring of 5.7-6.4m diameter. Some stone is visible on the northern arc of the wall but is mostly covered by turf.

Hut [6602]

Stepped in to the moderate slope to provide a level floor. Some stone of the walls remains in place on the western side, but on the eastern arc the walls are represented only by an earthwork crescent. The interior diameter of the hut is 8.7m.

Hut [6570]

Although some stone on the eastern side may represent the interior of the wall, any other stone surviving at this site has been displaced and the hut has clearly been extensively robbed. It survives as a 6.4m diameter circular earthwork, stepped into the terrace with a substantive crescent embankment on the western side. A breach in the bank on the SE probably represents the position of the entrance.

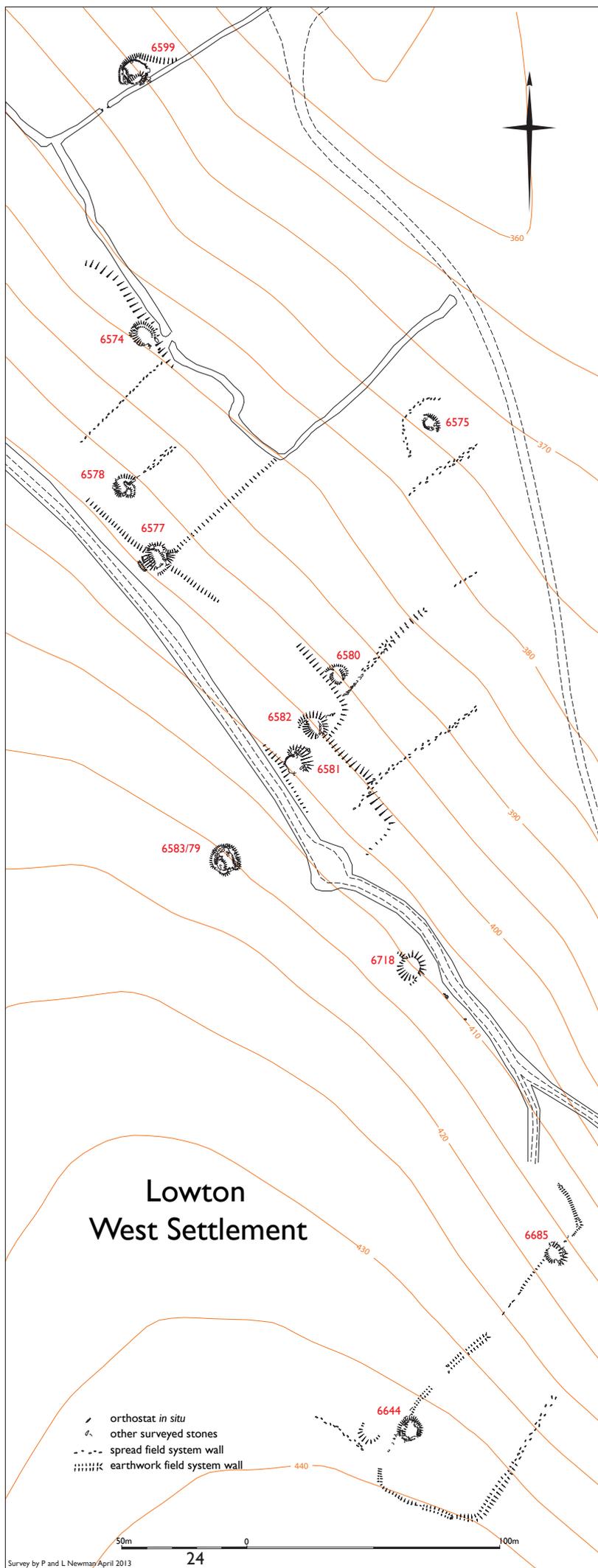
2.5 Lowton Brook

The largest concentration of prehistoric settlement evidence lies within the Lowton Brook valley (Fig 20) where, on the western slopes twelve hut circles, enclosure walls and a partial field system survive. To the east, remains of a small elliptical enclosure are associated with four hut circles (Fig 24).

2.5.1 Lowton West Settlement

Twelve hut circles lie spread over a distance of 550m N to S along the western valley side between the 370m and 440m contour. Fragmentary evidence of a reave system and other enclosure walls, previously un-surveyed, were certainly associated with these huts.

Fig 20
 1:1000 survey (reduced) of huts
 and field system on the western slopes
 of Lowton Brook.
 See also Fig 29 for large-scale plans of
 huts 6599 and 6583



Surprisingly, one of these hut circles [6599], a particularly robust and well-preserved example, was recorded on a map surveyed in 1794, along with other features likely to be prehistoric in origin. This includes a linear feature running in a more or less straight line north to south along the crest of Assacombe Hill annotated with the words:

A Row of Stones, Yulgo a Reve of Stones, in some Instances a very Low Mound or Bank which divides Assacombe Common from Lowton (?)Estate (NDRO B170/102)

Unfortunately this clearly rather fragile feature has not survived the years of forestry activity and can no longer be traced, but judging by the description, it is likely that this and other features annotated on the map as 'Reve' had their origins as prehistoric boundaries.

Samuel Rowe observed that:

In the neighbourhood of Venworthy, tracklines will be found, forming irregular features (and containing hut circles) of a similar description to those on Lakehead Hill (Rowe 1830).

He was almost certainly describing the area on the west side of Lowton Brook, tracklines being the term used by antiquaries in the mid-19th century for what we now refer to as reaves.

Ormerod, one of the first antiquaries to focus specifically on the eastern side of Dartmoor also observed huts and an enclosure at this location:

By the sides of a small feeder stream of the South Teign, near Fernworthy, there are ten huts measuring from 15 to 32 feet. The only peculiarity to be specially noticed is the situation of a hut, 15ft in diameter, placed nearly in the centre of a quadrangular enclosure measuring about 48 by 93 feet (Ormerod 1864, 303).

The precise location of this enclosure is no longer apparent, but this description certainly conforms with other surviving sections of what remains in this location today.

No archaeological interventions are known to have occurred within any of the huts on the west side of the Lowton valley, possibly because most have been despoiled for their stone long before the 19th century. Although surveyed at mapping scale (1:10,000) by the RCHME in the 1990's and depicted at small scale by Butler (1991), the settlement has not previously been surveyed at large scale.

2.5.2 Evidence (Fig 20)

Hut Circles

The hut group is spread over an approximately 0.5km flank of the hillside, arranged into two localised groups plus several discrete outliers, which altogether might be described as a neighbourhood. With the exception of hut [6599] all have been robbed of stones to some extent, in some cases leaving only the smaller stones surviving in the fabric of the walls, most of which are displaced. Only four of the huts still have what may be referred to as *in situ* orthostats making up part of their walls or entrances. The steepness of the hillside has necessitated most of the huts to be terraced to provide level floors.

Hut [6574]

This hut has been comprehensively robbed of its larger stones leaving little more than an 7.3m diameter earthwork ring surrounding a terraced floor with a few small stone surviving on the southern sector. Two fallen stones, one either side of a breach in the bank on the SE side probably represent the remains of the entrance. 3.3m south of the entrance on the exterior of the hut is an upright granite stone over 1m in height. It is not part of the hut or of any surviving enclosure wall and its presence cannot be accounted for.

Hut [6575]

This hut stands alone near the bottom of the slope, in an area apparently cleared of stone to accommodate it. It is the smallest hut in the group at just under 4m internal diameter, with a floor stepped into the hill slope. The usual degree of robbing appears to have occurred, though several smaller slabs, now displaced, survive around the circumference. The entrance opening is on the SE side and one recumbent larger slab may be one of the disturbed door linings.

Hut [6577]

Two orthostats from the wall remain *in situ* and several tumbled stones litter the ground but larger slabs have been removed leaving a disturbed earthwork circle of 7.5m, with a level floor terraced into the hillside. A breach in the earthwork on the SE quadrant represents all that remains of the entrance opening. This hut is situated at a junction between two reaves.

Hut [6578]

Although some disturbed stones on the western side of this hut still form an arc, the majority of its fabric has been interfered with when most of its stone was robbed, leaving a feint earthwork outline of a circle and some amorphous heaps of earth on the SE side. The likely internal diameter was between 6m and 7.5m.

Hut [6580]

The hut sits at the foot of a lynchet which formed a boundary wall or reave. Although the levelled interior and an outline portion of the hut's wall on the SW side is visible, robbing has left only a circular earthwork. The interior diameter is 5.4m.

Hut [6581]

Three large orthostats remain in place on the NW side, while several other large slabs are now leaning inwards. On the eastern side however most of the large slabs have been removed and only tumbled stone remains. The hut is notable for its level floor terraced into the slope with consequent high revetment on the west side and high earth embankment on the east side. A breach in the SE arc of the walls is the site of the entrance.

Hut [6582]

At the junction of two lynchets from the associated field system, this hut has a notably terraced appearance forming a circular earthwork but only a few displaced stones survive on the eastern side. Fallen stones lining an opening on the SE side represent the remains of the entrance.

Hut [6583; 6579] (Fig 21 & 22)

The construction method for this hut is at variance with others in the group, where large slabs have been laid horizontally in two visible courses. Some of these remain in place to give a hut with an internal diameter of 7.4m. Much of the stone has been removed, however, leaving behind a circular earth and stone bank and what little stone does remain is disturbed and scattered. On the SE corner the door opening has one lining remaining upright, while its counterpart has fallen and is now leaning against it.



Fig 21 Photo of hut 6583 looking NE. May 2013 (Phil Newman).



Fig 22 Photo of door lining Hut 6583, looking NW. May 2013 (Phil Newman).



Fig 23 Photo of hut 6599 looking NE, July 2013 (Phil Newman).

Hut [6599] (Fig 23, Fig 29)

The northernmost of the huts in this group, this isolated example is also the most intact within the Fernworthy project area. It is likely to have avoided robbing through re-use down the centuries, probably in the medieval and post-medieval periods and possibly as late as the 18th century. It was a significant enough feature to be the only hut circle marked on the estate map of 1794-6, suggesting it may have been in use, either as a roofed outbuilding for one of the Lowton settlements, or perhaps as a small stock pound.

The hut comprises a single circle of large, edge-set granite slabs with an internal diameter of between 8.9 and 9.1m. The highest of the stones stands 0.7-0.8m above the floor level. The approximately level floor has been terraced into the slope whereby the stones on the back, western sector form a revetment against the slope. On the southern sector a later, probably post-medieval wall bank from a large enclosure, has been built against the hut, incorporating an arc of the hut's walls. It is likely that this section once included the original entrance, which is now obscured. Later users of the building probably entered it via one of the large slabs, which has been laid level to form an opening and providing a step on the eastern side.

On the floor of the structure there is a partially buried a slotted gatepost with five rectangular slots of 13cm by 5cm. How or why it ended up in this location is difficult to explain.

In the junction of the later field wall and the hut on the east side, a small storage cavity has been formed under a sub-triangular slab of granite. The cavity is 0.8m wide by 0.6m deep and approximately 0.5m high. It is certainly a later addition to the structure, probably associated with medieval or post-medieval re-use of the hut circle.

Hut [6644]

The highest and southernmost hut in the group sits in an almost level position on the summit of the ridge and built into the north side of a rectangular enclosure. Some of the slabs that line the interior of the wall are still *in situ* but several others on the NE arc have collapsed outwards. Disturbed areas, where stone has been robbed, survive as a circular earthwork surrounding the level floor. The interior diameter of the hut was approximately 6.5m. The clear door opening on the SE side has one *in situ* and one leaning door lining.

Hut [6685]

A circular earthwork stepped into the hillside with displaced stones lying randomly around the circumference, none of which are *in situ*. The internal diameter is approximately 6.5m. The hut is associated with a vestigial wall running SW to NE which is part of the contemporary field system.

Hut [6718]

This hut survives only as a circular scoop in the hillside. A few stones are just visible at ground level forming an inner curb on the NE side but no others survive. The internal diameter is 7.6m and a breach in the earthwork on the SE side marks the position of the entrance.

The field system [58436]

A combination of LiDAR transcription and field reconnaissance has revealed that more of the field system associated with these huts has survived than previously mapped, which concords with 19th century reports of 'tracklines' 'reves' and 'enclosures', long before the encroachment of the conifers. What remains is, however, fragmentary and mostly disturbed but probably represents a developed system of rectangular enclosures, or parallel reaves, similar to other systems nearby on the east side of Dartmoor at Thornworthy

Tor and Shoveldown, though perhaps on a smaller scale. Further components may remain to be discovered under the closely planted young conifers that cover much of this slope.

The field boundaries (reaves) survive as turf-covered stony banks, which, where badly disturbed, appear as random linear assemblages of displaced stones. Where running across the contour some boundaries take the form of lynchets. No part of the system is complete, with large gaps between the visible evidence.

The main axis of the parallel boundaries runs approximately SW to NE, at right angles to the contour. Additional boundaries running along the contour divided the ground into rectangular enclosures. In several places hut circles are incorporated into the reaves, including one [6577] set into a 'T' junction. The two southernmost huts [6644; 6685] are 90m apart and built into a slightly sinuous reave, which forms the northern boundary of a rectangular enclosure. It seems likely that the huts preceded the construction of the reave, which has been added specifically to include these two.

2.5.3 Lowton East Settlement (Figs 24-9)

On the eastern slope of the Lowton valley, on variably sloping ground, is the surviving portion of a vaguely horse-shoe shaped enclosure with four associated hut circles, one of which is attached to the enclosure while the others sit outside.

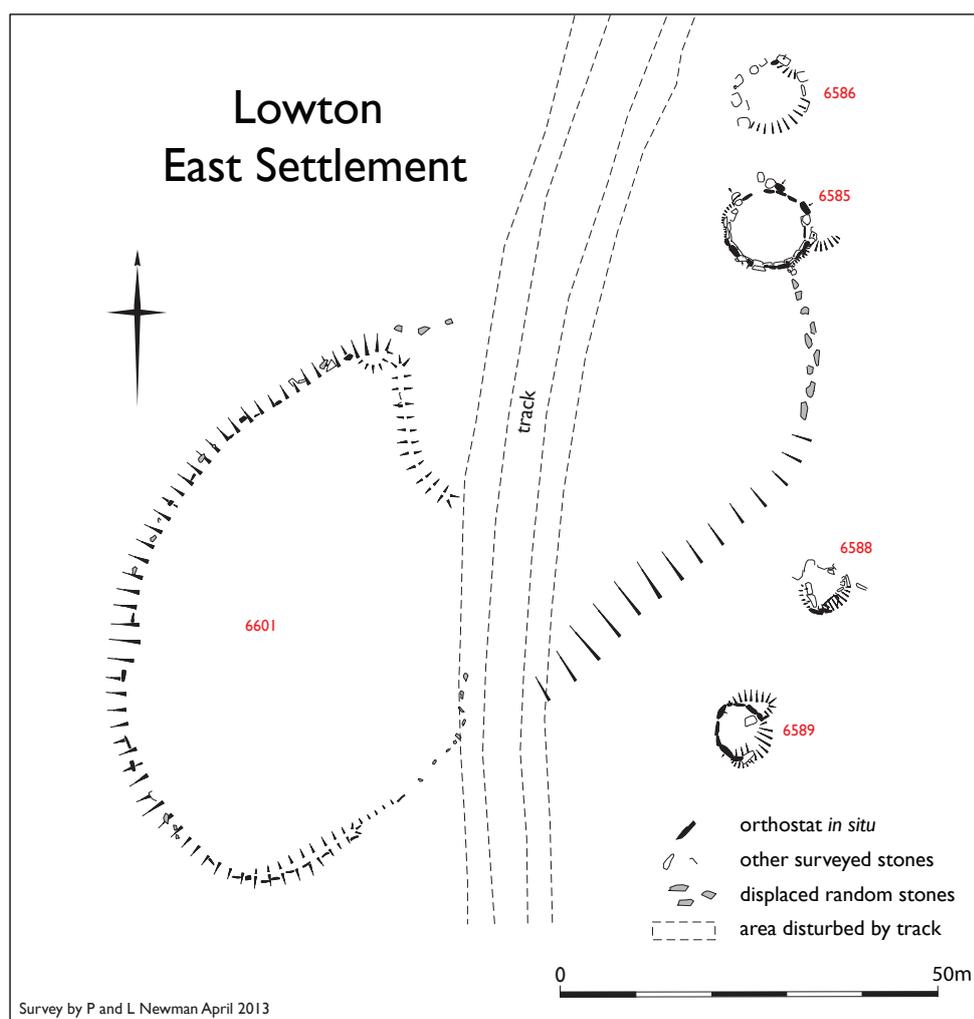


Fig 24 1:1000 survey of huts and enclosure on the eastern slope of Lowton Brook. See also Fig 29 for large-scale plan of hut 6585.



Fig 25 Photo of the Lowton East settlement enclosure wall looking north-east, May 2013 (Phil Newman).

A forest trackway has bisected the settlement and destroyed some of the evidence, including any association between the huts, which are all situated on the eastern side of the track, and the enclosure, which survives as an upstanding monument mostly on the western side.

The visible portion of the enclosure [6601] on the west side is an approximate horse-shoe shape in plan view, with an in-turned curving bank on the northern end. It measures 55m by up to 65m long and has an area of about 0.25ha. On the southern side, a 20m section remains as an upstanding bank of 0.5m high, but the majority of the walls survives as a spread lynchet of 3.4m wide by 0.7m high. Within the fabric many orthostats remain *in situ* (Fig 25), though others have fallen to give the bank and lynchet a stony appearance. Although the enclosure was planted over with conifers in the early days of plantation, these have now been removed. Nevertheless, the interior still contains much debris.

It is not known for certain how this portion of enclosure related to the remains on the eastern side of the track, but it is likely to have followed the lip of an escarpment which runs NE. This area was covered by forest debris at the time of survey, but the escarpment appears to align with a broken down stony bank that terminates at a large hut circle.

Hut [6585] (Fig 26, 27, 29)

This is a fine, well-preserved hut circle. Although some robbing of stone has occurred on the northern side, the hut seems mostly to have avoided the usual forces of attrition suffered by others in the plantation. The striking appearance of this hut caught the attention of William Crossing in his Guide to Dartmoor (1909, 246) and was later examined by R H Worth whilst excavating the Metheral Huts in 1934-6 in advance of the reservoir flooding the area. Because of the unusual construction method (see below) Worth concluded that a very similar circle at Metheral was in fact not a hut circle but a cairn circle or kerbed cairn. It followed that this hut at Lowton, of comparable appearance, and having a stony interior was also a cairn rather than a hut and Worth recommended excavation to prove it (Worth 1937). Although there is no record of this having been carried out, the interior of the hut today, cannot be described as



Fig 26 Photo of 1894 by Robert Burnard, showing hut 6585 in its moorland setting looking east, before the onset of the plantation (DA 003519).

stony and a photograph by Burnard, taken in 1894 (Fig 26) suggests the floor was as clear then as it is today. Turner was also convinced of the authenticity of this site as a cairn, surveying it at large scale as his 'double kerbed cairn' type site (Turner 1990, 41-4).

The circle is constructed with a double thickness wall of slabs, the unusual point being that the outer facing is made up of taller orthostatic slabs, whilst the inner face, also made from slabs, forms a lower kerb against the outer face. The space between the two, according to Turner's drawing (1990, Fig 13) is packed with smaller stones. These are less visible today than when Turner undertook his survey, due to the overgrowth of turf.

Although the ground surrounding the hut is fairly level, the interior floor appears artificially so, strongly suggesting this was originally a dwelling rather than a cairn, with an average internal diameter of 9.5m across the inner circle. Both the inner and outer circle are constructed from carefully selected granite slabs. The longest is 1.8m but most are about 1.4m and the thickness varies between 20 and 60cm. The tallest stone of the outer ring is 1.5m, though most are about 1m high, whereas the stones of the inner kerb are more uniform at around 0.5m.

The survival of the stones is better on the south side where many of the outer orthostats are *in situ* and much of the inner kerb remains in place. On the north side, where robbing has occurred, remaining stones are of the inner kerb, whereas the outer stones have been removed. There are displaced stones around much of the circumference, though the interior is mostly free of stone.

The position of the entrance is controversial because, as Turner observed, an apparent opening on the east side where a possible door lining remains upright, has been blocked on the interior by a stone of the inner kerb. However, the stone extends only to just above ground level and could be part of a step. Nevertheless, the positioning of the opening on the eastern rather than south-eastern quadrant is atypical of huts included in this survey and indeed of Dartmoor generally, so a question mark has to remain over both the original purpose and any later reuse of this circle.



Fig 27 Photo of hut [6585], May 2013. See also Fig 29 for large-scale plan. (Phil Newman).



Fig 28 Photo of hut [6589] looking west , May 2013, showing the exceptionally large in situ slabs. (Phil Newman).

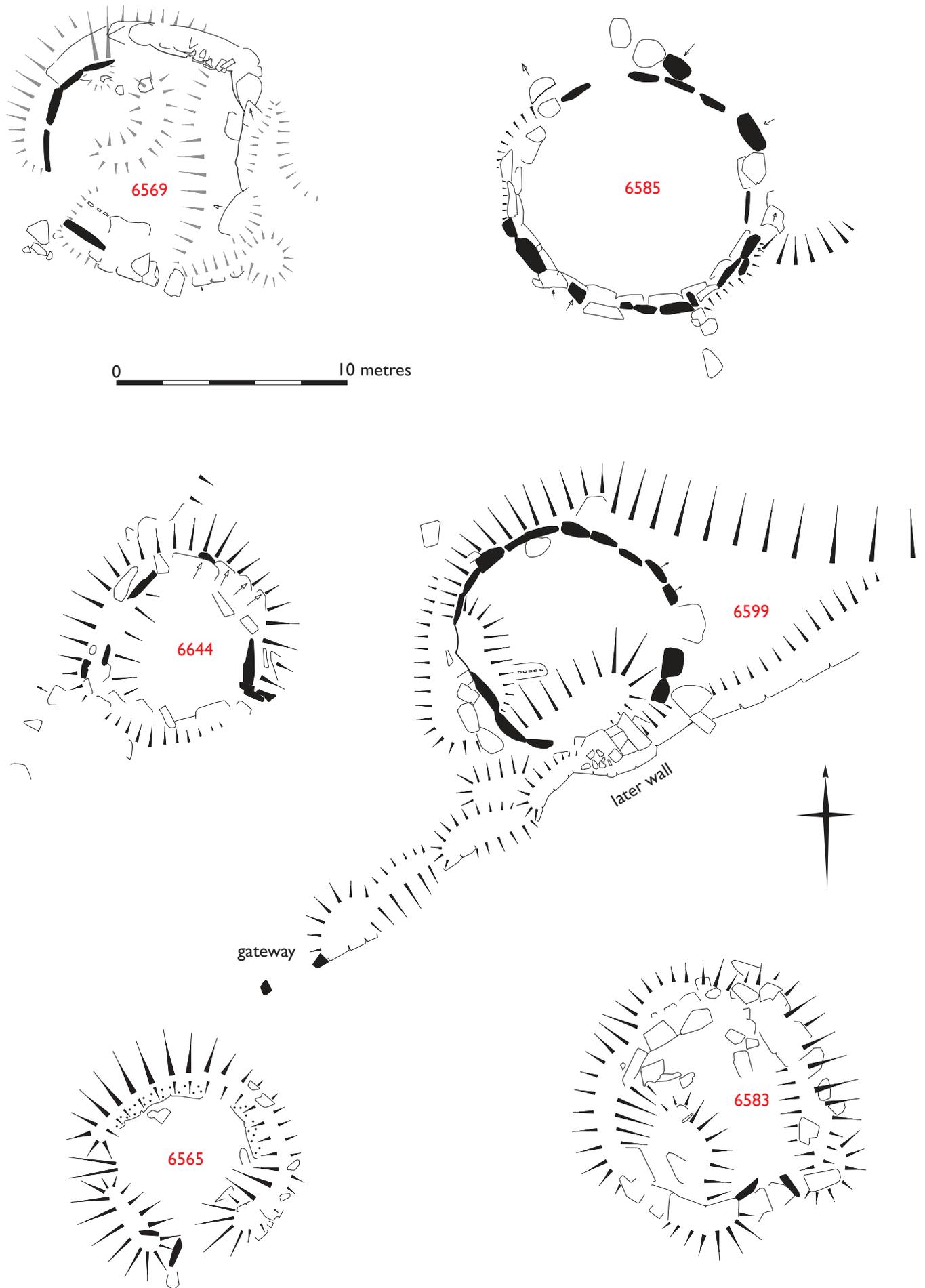


Fig 29 Large scale (1:200) plans of selected hut circles.

Hut [6586]

Located 6m north of [6585], this hut has been severely depleted of stone through robbing. The level floor is defined on the south side by a shallow scarp and displaced, recumbent or leaning boulders and slabs mark the remainder of the circumference, leaving no clues as to construction method. The interior diameter is approximately 7.5m.

Hut [6588]

A smaller hut which probably had an internal diameter of no more than 5m. A shallow scarp defines the southern arc of the hut where two large and one other slab remain *in situ*, though severely leaning. Of the remaining slabs not removed when the hut was robbed, all have toppled and are recumbent or severely leaning. Several smaller stones, clearly displaced and lying in random positions, mark the remainder of the circumference.

Hut [6589] (Fig 28)

An irregular circle of orthostatic slabs with an internal diameter of up to 7m. Nine of the slabs remain *in situ* making an unbroken arc on the west, northern and NE sides; only the SE quadrant is missing, where a shallow scarp marks the former position of the wall. A further two large slabs are lying flat. It seems likely that only two, or at most three slabs have been removed from the site. The standing slabs which have a rounded, triangular horizontal profile are particularly massive, the largest being 2.4m long by 1.32m high.

2.6 Hemstone hut settlement (south) (Fig 30)

On a SE-facing slope in the upper reaches of the South Teign valley is a clearing containing seven hut circles and two cairns. All are in very poor condition having been exposed to up to three episodes of conifer planting. It is also likely that the huts were of a less robust type than others within the project area and that the two cairns were thoroughly disturbed, even before the DEC explored the site in July 1900 (Baring Gould 1901, 135; 137). They reported excavating one hut circle from which they retrieved a flint scraper and a cooking stone but also remains of a cist and three ruined cairns. Unfortunately, their site description leaves much doubt as to the locations of these features, which cannot be identified with certainty.

Hut [6732]

One of two hut circles on the western central sector of the group, the remains of which are in slightly clearer condition. The 5.5m diameter earthwork ring stepped into the hillslope has no notably *in situ* stones in the fabric of the walls, though many displaced examples are partially buried by the overgrowth of turf.

Hut [6733]

The second of two slightly clearer hut circles. The hut remains only as an earthwork ring of approximately 5.5m diameter, with parts of displaced stones protruding through the turf cover.

Hut [6734]

A slight crescentic earthwork terrace with a diameter of approximately 4m and a ring of small displaced stones representing the disturbed walls.

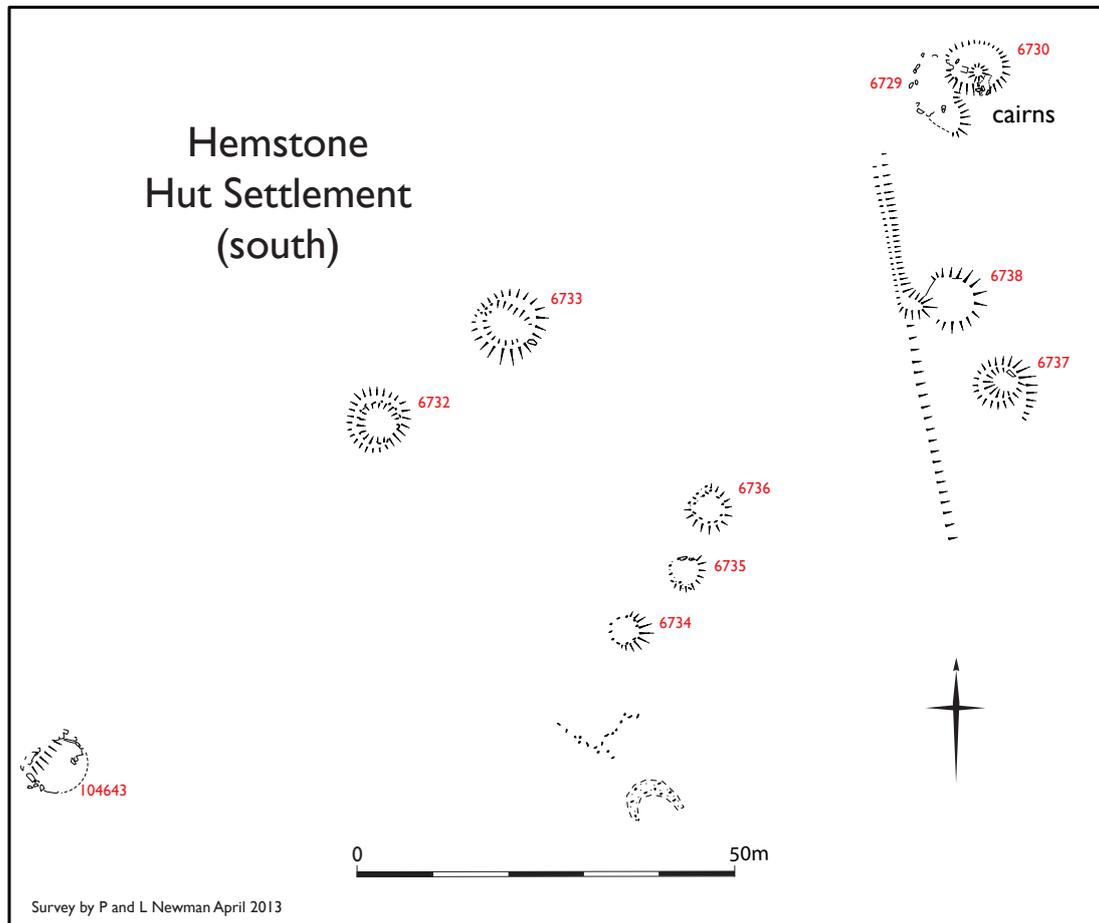


Fig 30 1:1000 scale earthwork survey of the Hemstone hut settlement (south).

Hut [6735]

A 3.5m diameter circle of disturbed stones sitting on a slight platform.

Hut [6736]

An earthwork circle, terraced into the slope with an approximately 4m ring of displaced stones representing the disturbed walls.

Hut [6737]

An earthwork ring with a levelled interior and internal diameter of approximately 4.5m. Only one large stone survives in place on the NE arc of the building.

Hut [6738]

A slight circular earthwork with level interior and internal diameter of approximately 6.2m. Two low, earthfast slabs on the NW arc of the wall may still be *in situ*. The hut is attached on the west side to the remnant of a field wall running NNW to SSE.

Hut [104643]

A previously unrecorded hut circle located in an area as yet not cleared of conifers to the west of the main group 15m below the track. The hut has an approximately level floor with stones, including some large

boulders and slabs, surviving mainly on the northern arc of the wall forming a circle of approximately 6.6m diameter. Although the southern arc has some displaced stone, most appears to have been robbed.

Cairns [6729; 6730]

An elliptical low mound 8m by 7m and between 10 and 20cm high at the northern end of the hut settlement may be identified as one of the probable cairns described by Baring Gould (1901, 135; 137). The mound has a flattish upper surface and a smaller mound just south of centre. There is a rectangular pit, 0.8m by 0.7m offset to the east. A trench, possibly from the 1900 excavation, has gashed into the SE sector and there is a second, smaller cutting on the western end. Adjoining the western side is an approximate 6m semicircle of granite stones randomly set in the ground. These may represent the retaining circle of the second cairn described and disturbance in the form of two shallow pits with the circle may be evidence of the DEC's intervention of July 1900.

2.7 Hemstone hut settlement (north - Tom's Hill) (Fig 31)

Five ruined hut circles and the foundations of a rectangular structure [6739], probably a later building, sit

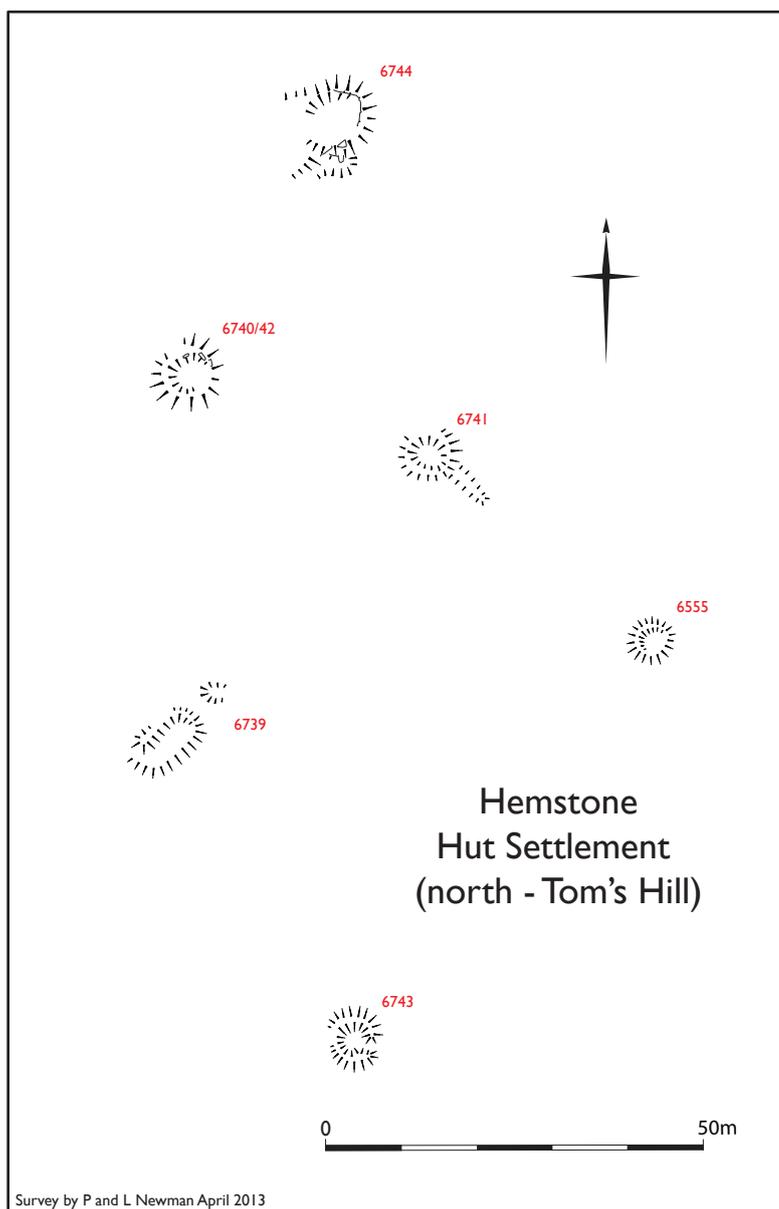


Fig 31 1:1000 scale earthwork survey of the Hemstone hut settlement (north - Tom's Hill).

in a large clearing just above and to the north of the forestry track.

Very little stone is visible in any of the huts, which survive as circular earthworks. The stones that do survive with few exceptions are small and there is no evidence of any large slabs. The overall size and robustness of the remains is less than most other hut circles in the area.

Hut [6740]

An earthwork circle of 6.3m diameter. Only displaced stones are visible.

Hut [6741]

An earthwork circle of 5.3m diameter with no visible stone surviving. A linear earthwork bank 6m long by 2.4m extends from the SE quadrant of the hut and may represent remains of an enclosure wall, though it is the only remnant associated with this settlement.

Hut [6743]

This hut has the appearance of a circular earthwork or earth and stone mound, with a hollowed centre and an alternative interpretation might be a round cairn. The overall diameter is 8.8m though the internal diameter is only 4m. An opening in the earthwork on the eastern side could be an entrance or possibly an unrecorded excavation trench dug in

Hut [6744]

An earthwork circle of 7.3m diameter. Vestiges of stone kerb survive on the NE interior but other stones are displaced.

Hut [6555]

An earthwork ring cut into the slope with a total spread of 6.3m. The level interior is a little over 4m diameter and any surviving stone is now turf covered.

3.0 THE SECOND MILLENNIUM AD: MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL FERNWORTHY

3.1 Introduction

The presence of medieval and later farmers within the boundaries of Fernworthy plantation, has left a much stronger and more coherent footprint on the landscape than prehistoric predecessors, but it is often less obvious or accessible to the modern visitor where, until recently, few of the remains have in any way been conserved, maintained or interpreted and some have been irretrievably destroyed. This includes Fernworthy Farm itself, which was demolished prior to filling the reservoir in the 1940s. However, sufficient evidence of medieval and later farmsteads and enclosures survives to tell an interesting story of the development and decline of this more recent period of human settlement on eastern Dartmoor.

By the time the plantation, then the reservoir were conceived in the early 20th century, only Fernworthy survived as an occupied working farm in this higher part of South Teign country. However, south of Fernworthy, nestling in the sheltered valleys of the two small tributaries, Assacombe Brook and Lowton Brook, a further four farmsteads were once occupied. These are: Lowton and Higher Lowton (Loughton), Assacombe and Silk House (Fig 32). Although still occupied in 1794, (NDRO B170/102) by 1825 the Lowtons were deserted and their lands, along with those of Silk House, had been incorporated into Fernworthy (DuCo 1825). By 1839 all four of the farms were included in the Fernworthy estate under one occupier (DRO Tithe Map and App. for Dartmoor Forest).

3.2 Previous research

The medieval and later farmsteads of Dartmoor and their associated landscape of enclosures stimulated little activity among 19th and early 20th-century antiquaries, understandably perhaps as many such farms had been abandoned just beyond living memory or, in the case of Fernworthy, were still occupied. However, both Burnard and Baring Gould (1900, 163) saw fit to comment on the ruins of Assacombe. The former, who also provided a rare photographic view of the farmhouse (Fig 37), described it as 'the ruins of an ancient farmhouse, which was occupied by one John Hamlyn some forty or fifty years ago' (Burnard 1894, 58).

A greater enthusiasm for medieval and later settlement on Dartmoor among archaeologists developed from the 1960s when Linehan's seminal papers on the topic of Dartmoor's deserted sites were published (Linehan 1965; 1966), approximately contemporary with excavations at Hound Tor deserted medieval village, by Minter (Beresford 1979). Of the above farmsteads, only 'Assycombe' is listed by Linehan, who mentioned only that there were 'Three or four buildings in extensive enclosures with hut circles' (Linehan 1965, 173).

Dartmoor writer Eric Hemery (1983) described selectively the ruins at Assacombe and mentioned the ruins of Silk House, about which he confessed he had unearthed very little useful information; he also assumed that the Lowtons had been consumed by conifers and he provided some un-sourced 16th and 17th century references to Fernworthy.

Although both the Dartmoor HER and English Heritage NMR have records for Assacombe, which is a scheduled monument (SM No. 1017981), the other three are mentioned only as sites that appear as ruins on early OS maps, where no recent field investigation has been attempted.

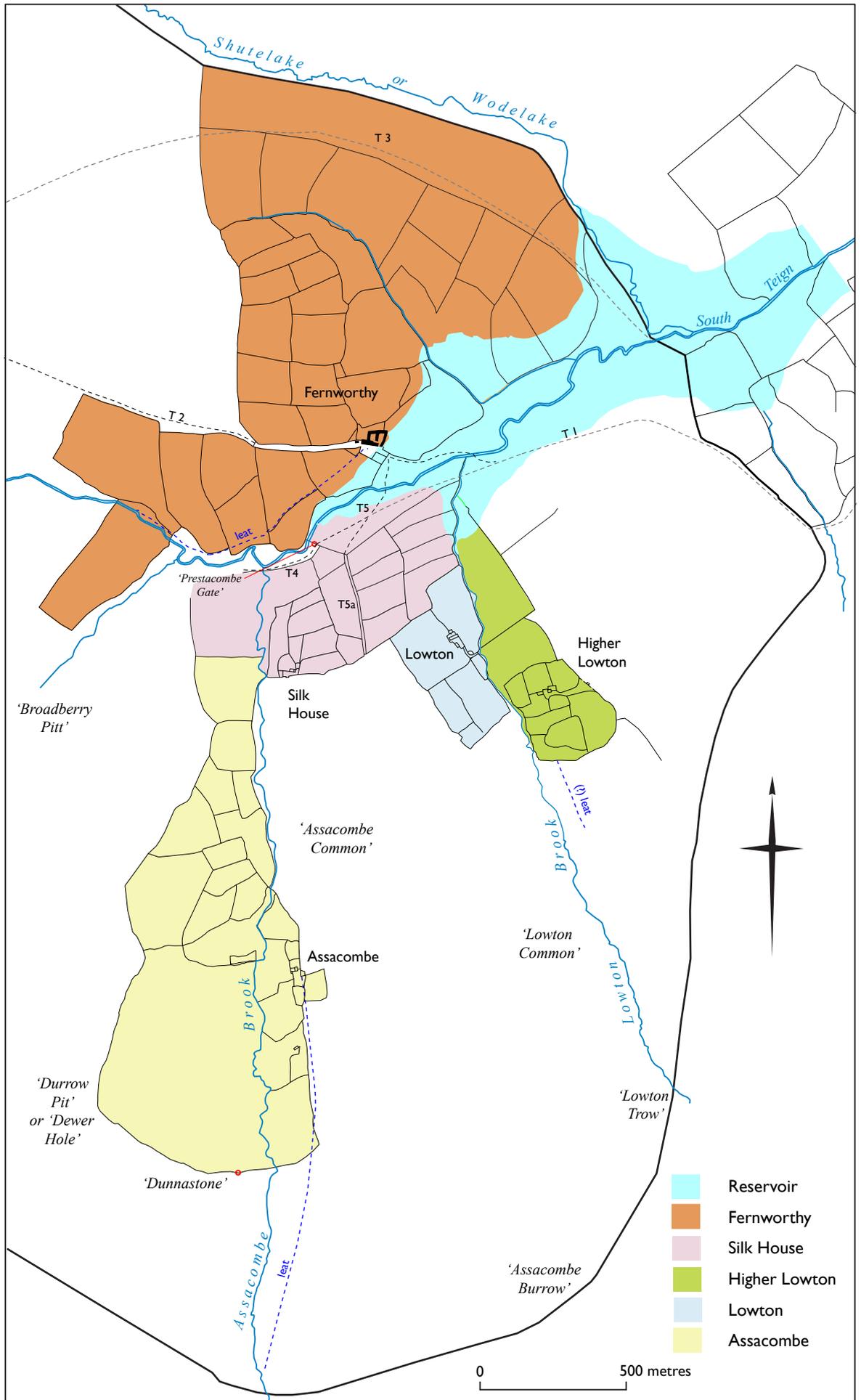


Fig 32 Map showing farming and enclosure in the 2nd millennium AD, medieval to 20th century, based on 1886 OS with additions from maps of 1796, 1807 and c.1825. Showing individual holdings as in 1825.

3.3 Cartographic Sources

Cartographic sources for this area have proved particularly useful, as the Davie family, owners of the Fernworthy estate, commissioned several detailed surveys between 1794 and c.1825.

The first of these maps was surveyed to a high standard in 1794 by Robert Ballment and drawn up in colour in 1796 (NDRO B170/102). All five of the farmsteads are drawn in a similar style that suggests all were still occupied at this date and, although all the assets are numbered on the map, the whereabouts of the accompanying catalogue are not known, so the names of occupiers or the fields themselves are not included. Intriguingly, the fields surrounding the Lowtons and Silk House (Figs 42) are delineated in the same green pen as Fernworthy and the field numbers prefixed with the letter 'a', whereas those associated with Assacombe (Fig 33) are in yellow and prefixed with 'b', suggesting that while Assacombe survived as an independent farm, the other three, or at least their lands, had been absorbed into Fernworthy before 1800.

Two maps of the Fernworthy estate were drawn up for Sir John Davie in 1807, by P Warren of Holne Chase (DuCo 1807a & b). The maps are very similar, one may be a draft or tracing of the other, but each contains slightly different information. The primary purpose of the maps is to show the recently completed

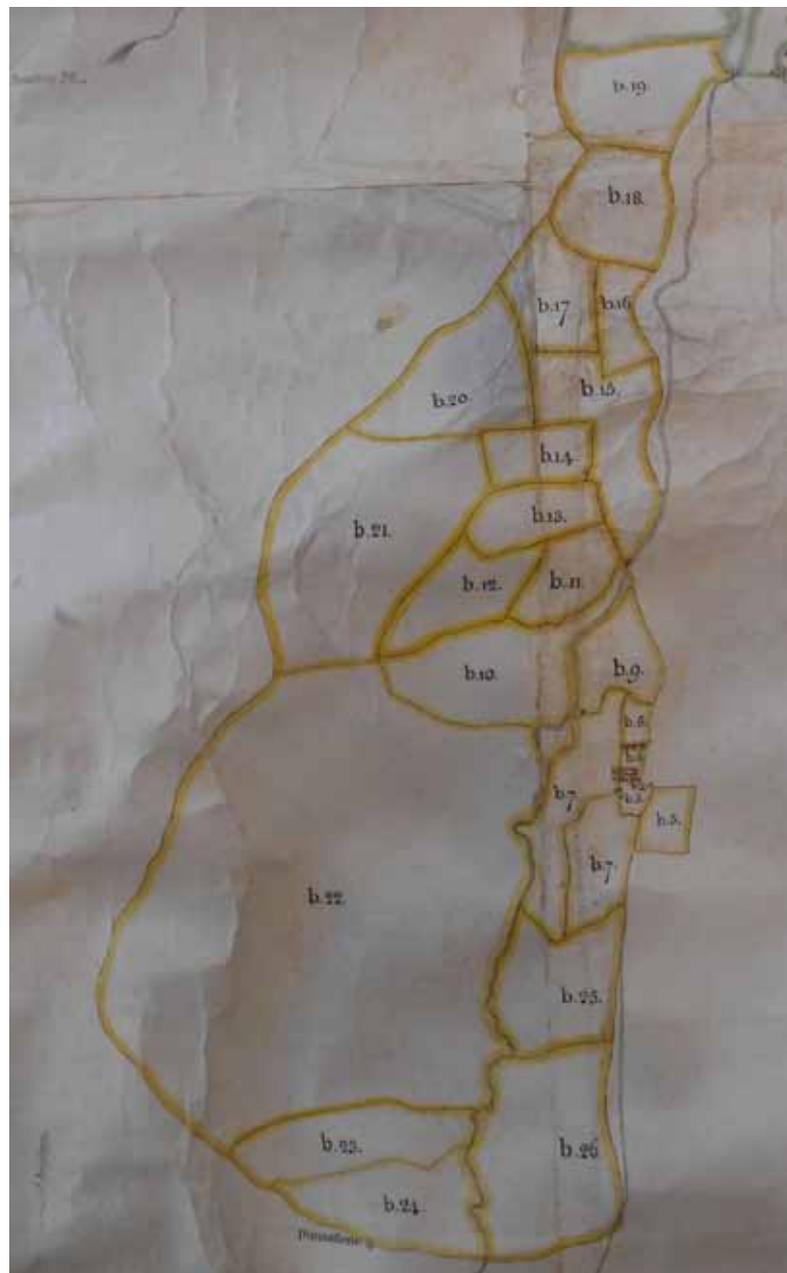


Fig 33 Assacombe enclosures from map of 1796 (NDRO B170/102).

outer walls of Sir John's massive 'new enclosure' as an addition to the existing enclosures. Fernworthy, Assacombe and Silk House are depicted, apparently still occupied, but not Lowton or Higher Lowton. Although probably abandoned, their absence from the map may be more to do with their relevance to the map's purpose (see Newman 2011 Fig 9.9).

An undated map in the Duchy of Cornwall archive, but probably of about 1825 or later,³ is a tracing of the 1794 map but with the addition of a catalogue attached. This confirms what can only be inferred from the earlier map, that the Lowtons and Silk House had been firmly absorbed into Fernworthy, while Assacombe remained as a separate holding. The Lowtons were described as ruins at this time. This situation had changed very little by the time of the Tithe Survey in 1839 (DRO Tithe Map and App. for Dartmoor Forest 1839) and, although by that time Assacombe's lands had also become part of Fernworthy, the house was not recorded as a ruin. An important footnote on the c.1825 map informs us that stones from many of the southern fields of Assacombe and Higher Lowton were robbed when the 'outbound' wall of the large Fernworthy enclosure was built (c.1800) and the fields affected had been absorbed in common with the new enclosure (see Fig 47).

Collectively these maps tell us much about the human landscape and traditions surviving in the 18th and early 19th centuries, knowledge of which has been mostly lost to us. The 1796 map depicts a number of features that are almost certainly prehistoric. The large hut circle at Lowton (6599) is shown, possibly reflecting the fact that it still served some purpose. Rows or 'Reves' of stone are depicted as straight pecked lines. The 'reve' described above on Assacombe Hill was clearly serving a purpose dividing the commons of Assacombe and Lowton, but other Reves depicted seem to be just incidental landscape features recorded by the surveyor. Trackways used by the occupants of the farms and others and, remarkably, the locations of many field gateways are noted, providing clues about the movement of people and livestock. A number of place names appear on the maps describing natural features and landmarks, which are not known from any published source and have fallen into disuse: Dunnastone, Broadberry Pitt, Prestacombe Gate, Will Torr, Crown Hole, Dewer Hole, Hempstone or Empson Pit, Empson Burrow, Lowton Trow, Assacombe Burrow and Durrow Pit. These names serve particularly to remind us that this was once a living, human landscape within which the permanent occupants and itinerant workers who travelled through it had an intimate knowledge and enduring traditions.

This survey has included only a limited study of primary sources and archive material but it is certain that a more detailed search would further enhance and provide context for the survey below. In particular, the Duchy of Cornwall archives are likely to contain a good deal of relevant information.

3.4 The Farms

[nb The farmstead of Lowton lies outside the boundary of the current project and has not been surveyed. The remains of Higher Lowton were identified following fieldwork, sited amid dense conifers. These were cleared by the Forestry Commission and at the time of writing the site was awaiting further clearance before a large scale measured survey could take place. Silk House, sadly, has had a forest trackway driven right across the buildings leaving insufficient evidence for a meaningful survey. Fernworthy suffered almost total demolition when the valley was flooded to create the reservoir, remaining features are here surveyed photographically.]

Early documentary evidence for these farmsteads has not been researched as part of the current project brief. However, various sources have been published, which infer a medieval origin for some of these farms and the character of the remains shows similarities with other areas of Dartmoor where documentary evidence confirms occupation from at least the 13th century (e.g. Meavy Valley). Beyond these similarities it is not yet possible to provide definitive dates for the origins of the settlement, the construction dates

of the ruined buildings, or whether there was continuity of occupation before final abandonment. But it is possible, by combining the available late 18th and early 19th century maps with the field evidence, to offer a reconstruction of this landscape for that period and the decades leading up to it. There is good reason to suppose that this snapshot might also be appropriate for preceding centuries in terms of the landscape's overall appearance and mode of agricultural activity but this remains to be confirmed.

Assacombe farmstead (alternative spellings Asacombe, Assycombe, Assecombe) sits on the gentle sloping eastern bank of Assacombe Brook, or Water, which, but for the odd meander, flows south to north in a more or less straight line. At an altitude of 395m OD, Assacombe is among the highest deserted farmsteads on Dartmoor. Silk House, also on the east bank, is a little lower at 365m and both must have benefitted from the shelter afforded by the very steep slopes of White Ridge's northern reaches on the west side of the valley. Lowton and Higher Lowton sit on the western and eastern slopes respectively of Lowton Water; Higher Lowton is at 367m OD while Lowton is 355m OD.

Long before the arrival of the plantation tracks, this group of farmsteads existed in one of the most isolated places anywhere in Devon. The only route into the area was the track (T1 on Fig 32) from Thornworthy to Fernworthy, which runs around the southern outskirts of the Thornworthy enclosures across open moorland. This track is still in use today serving as the asphalt road into the estate, though its final section into Fernworthy farmyard and the bridge across the South Teign is submerged beneath the reservoir. West of Fernworthy, a 300m walled lane provided access to the commons of Dartmoor; not just to the occupiers of this farm but others droving livestock from farms to the east in Chagford and further afield. The map of 1794 shows a moorland trackway (T2) following an approximately straight course from the end of the Fernworthy lane to 'Mangers Steps', across the Teign. The western section of this track is not shown on the 1807 map but a 'New Turf Path' which followed a similar course out of the Fernworthy moor



Fig 34 The 'Dunnastone' at Assacombe, June 2013 (Phil Newman).

lane, after a few hundred metres joins a second track (T3), which led across the northern Fernworthy enclosures from Fernworthy Corner. The track is annotated thus:

The Old Turf Path as Formerly used by the Chagford People

The likely reason for the diversion onto the new turf path was that the outer newtake walls of Fernworthy had only been 'erected about 25 years since' and Davie, the land holder clearly wished to curtail the use of his new enclosures as an access route for turf cutters and others returning from the moor.

A route to the commons south of the South Teign was via a branch of the Fernworthy to Thornworthy track through Prestacombe Gate (T4), which also provided access to the settlements in the tributary valleys of Assacombe and Lowton Brooks (Fig 42).

The main access for the four settlements was via a second track (T5) from Fernworthy itself which crossed the South Teign over a ford. A section of the track (T5a) was contained within a walled lane, or driveway, through the Silk House enclosures, opening out onto the Assacombe and Lowton Commons and providing access for cattle movement to and from the Dartmoor Commons to the south of these settlements. All four of the holdings lack a dedicated lane through the fields though the farmsteads all back onto common or open moorland. Movement of people and livestock in the vicinity of the farms would therefore have been via small paths, the courses of which are no longer known to us.

3.5 Assacombe [6703] (Figs 32-40)

The place name of Assacombe, Assecombe or Assycombe appears in documents from 1488 (Gover 1931, 198) and it is possible that a small farmstead was established here by that time. Apart from Fernworthy, this is the largest of the former holdings within the plantation, its enclosures spread as a linear block along the slopes of Assacombe Brook to form a ringfence farm with open moorland on three sides. (Fig 32, 33). The northern section is on the west side of the brook and the southern section is on the east, where the brook acts as a boundary for some of the fields. A large outer enclosure (see below) on the southern end consolidates the lands on both sides of the brook. The farmstead and courtyard sit adjacent to the eastern boundary of the holding, approximately in the centre of this linear arrangement. Today the farm buildings and courtyard, together with a short strip of land, which includes some ruined enclosure walls, four hut circles and a small rectangular building to the south, is set within a clearing. Originally the whole site was planted with conifers and the stumps and roots of the felled trees are still all too visible amongst the remains. The majority of Assacombe's outlying fields were planted over and survive in various conditions, some currently obscured by dense areas of conifer.

There is good reason to believe that parts of the Assacombe field layout had their origins in a prehistoric settlement and field system, which although long abandoned when the medieval settlers arrived, was adapted and re-furbished to suit their needs. Remains of four hut circles exist close by the farmstead all of which have probable associations with enclosures forming part of the medieval farm. One of these huts [6567] has slight evidence of a prehistoric boundary connecting to its eastern side. It was mentioned by Burnard as a 'trackline' and was probably much clearer at the time of his visit in 1894 (DA 104763). This in turn links the hut circle to the long north-south wall that once formed the eastern boundary of the farm, meeting it at a right angle. The north south wall runs for 475m with little deviation, a characteristic redolent of a prehistoric reave. Unfortunately much of the southern section of this feature has been disturbed but, despite this, it is notable that the further south this wall extends, the more it has the appearance of a prehistoric boundary rather than a medieval one, i.e. alignments of edge-set boulders set into a low embankment and of generally slight proportions. Nearer the farm ruins the small enclosures close by were maintained until the 19th century and comprise wall banks of up to 1.2m high, with stone faces on one or both sides. In places these have been disturbed by forestry activity and may also have been victims of the recorded robbing in the early 19th century.

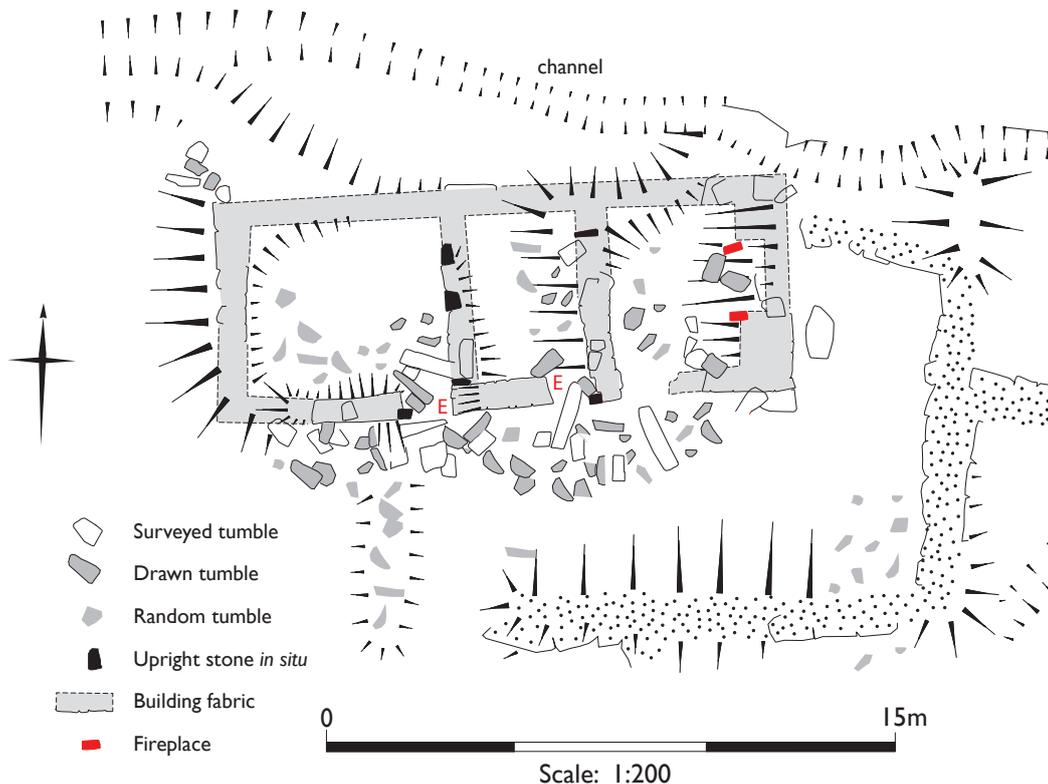


Fig 36 Assacombe 1:200 earthwork survey of ruined farmhouse.

Perhaps the most intriguing component of the Assacombe fieldscape is the boundary of the southern outer Newtake. Referred to simply as 'Durehole' on the 1825 map (b22 on Fig 33), it is a 16ha enclosure with very little sub-division and may have been the last intake of land to be appended to this farm. It is interesting because almost the entire enclosure relied on pre-existing features for its boundaries. The SE corner is formed by a continuation of the north-south boundary described above, which is very likely to have had prehistoric origins. From that point the section between the forest track and the brook has been effaced but west of the brook the boundary can be re-traced following a linear gully up the steeper hillside. This gully then curves slightly for a further 460m NW to the next corner then begins a descent to the NE for a further 375m. From this point it continued down the slope back towards the brook but its course has now been adopted as a forestry track. The gully is up to 10m wide by 1.7m deep and there is no trace of any wall either on the lip of this feature or as a revetment, so the barrier to the open moor relied solely on the depth of this earthwork. Its dimensions seem exceptionally deep to have been dug as a boundary or to have served as a cornditch, for which purpose it could not have functioned without a revetment and top bank. Later robbing would not explain the total lack of a stone structure along the boundary. It seems most likely that this feature may have had its origins associated with tinworking, either as a prospecting gully, a shallow tinwork or a water channel. This is one of the few particularly notable examples of tinworking in this valley.

Along the southern boundary of this enclosure, a feature is marked on the 1796 map as 'Dunnastone'. No record of this name can be traced in any published literature and the name has fallen into disuse. Field investigation has revealed that the Dunnastone is a large rounded granite boulder set in the gully, which, unusually, has been split, probably naturally, into three separate pieces (Fig 34). It is a large object and would certainly have been a visible feature of the landscape on this steep valley side, though now forgotten about due to it being shrouded by conifers. The fact that it had a name implies greater significance than we are currently aware. No inscription is visible although the stone is completely covered by moss.



Fig 37 Photograph of June 1894 by Robert Burnard, showing Assacombe Farmhouse ruin looking north (DA 003489).

3.5.1 Farm buildings

There are two foci for domestic activity at Assacombe. (Fig 35)

The main farmstead (Fig 36-40) comprises a ruined, stone-built, rectangular structure with a small courtyard, a single identifiable outbuilding and a garden plot. There is also evidence of a water supply in the form of a leat, and access to Assacombe Common for people and livestock was via an entrance to the north of the garden plot.

The house is oriented east to west and was built entirely from moorstone, with three separate rooms, each having a doorway on the south side. The structure is now a total ruin but a photograph by Robert Burnard, captured in 1894, provides an excellent guide to its former appearance, though it was a standing ruin even by that time (Fig 37). The photo shows the view from the south: the building is roofless but parts of the wall are still erect to approximately their original height at the western end and the entrance to the western room has its door linings and lintel intact and *in situ*. At the eastern end the gable end with a chimney breast are still standing with the granite fireplace lintel *in situ*. On the western end a small rectangular pen is attached to the south side.

Although the house has suffered massive collapse in the time that has passed since Burnard's photograph, many of the features contained within it can still be traced among the ruins (Fig 38-40).

The walls now survive as outlines, just above foundation level in places, though standing a little higher on some parts. The wall separating the western room, the probable byre, also incorporates upright granite post within its fabric, two of which remain *in situ*. The overall internal dimensions of the building are 12.3m by 4.4m and the walls are on average 0.75m thick, with the exception of the eastern, fireplace wall which is approximately 1.5m. Of the three rooms the western is largest at 5.2m long, while the central and eastern are both approximately 3m. The latter two may have been interconnected, with the most likely position for a door at the northern end of the partition. Two entrances are visible on Burnard's photograph and these correspond with openings that survive amid the rubble (marked E on Fig 36). The large granite posts up to 1.8m long, which formed the door linings and lintels are identifiable; two are still erect in their original



Fig 38 Assacombe farmhouse in June 2013 showing a similar view to the Burnard image (Fig 37) looking north (Phil Newman).

Fig 39 In situ fireplace stones at Assacombe Farmhouse, June 2013 (Phil Newman).



Fig 40 Assacombe farmhouse in April 2013 view from the east (Phil Newman).

position and others lie amid the tumbled stone. An apparent opening into the eastern room may have accommodated a window.

The position of the fireplace against the interior of the eastern wall is still evident where the void for the fire measures 1.6m by 1m. The two granite upright posts that formed the lining of the hearth and supported the lintel have survived *in situ* (Fig 39), protruding about 0.5m above the tumble of the collapsed chimney breast and gable wall. The fate of the lintel is not known.

On the exterior of the building the pen shown on Burnard's photograph and on early maps has been completely obliterated, only rubble survives at this end of the exterior and the faint alignment of loose stone may delineate the base of its east wall. A few metres to the south a small rectangular moorstone structure, much ruined, is built against the wall of the outer yard. Its interior dimensions may have been approximately 3.1m by 1.7m.

A small, L-shaped inner yard is built against the SE corner of the house. This was cut into the slope and its walls are consequently in the form of moorstone revetments built against the drop and badly collapsed in places. Attached to the eastern end of the yard at a slightly higher level is a roughly rectangular enclosure 11m by 9m, delineated by a stone-faced bank, which is likely to have been a garden plot.

Water was supplied to the house via a shallow leat, which diverted water from Assacombe Brook approximately 880m up the valley [104641]. The leat is marked on the map of 1796 and the Tithe Map of

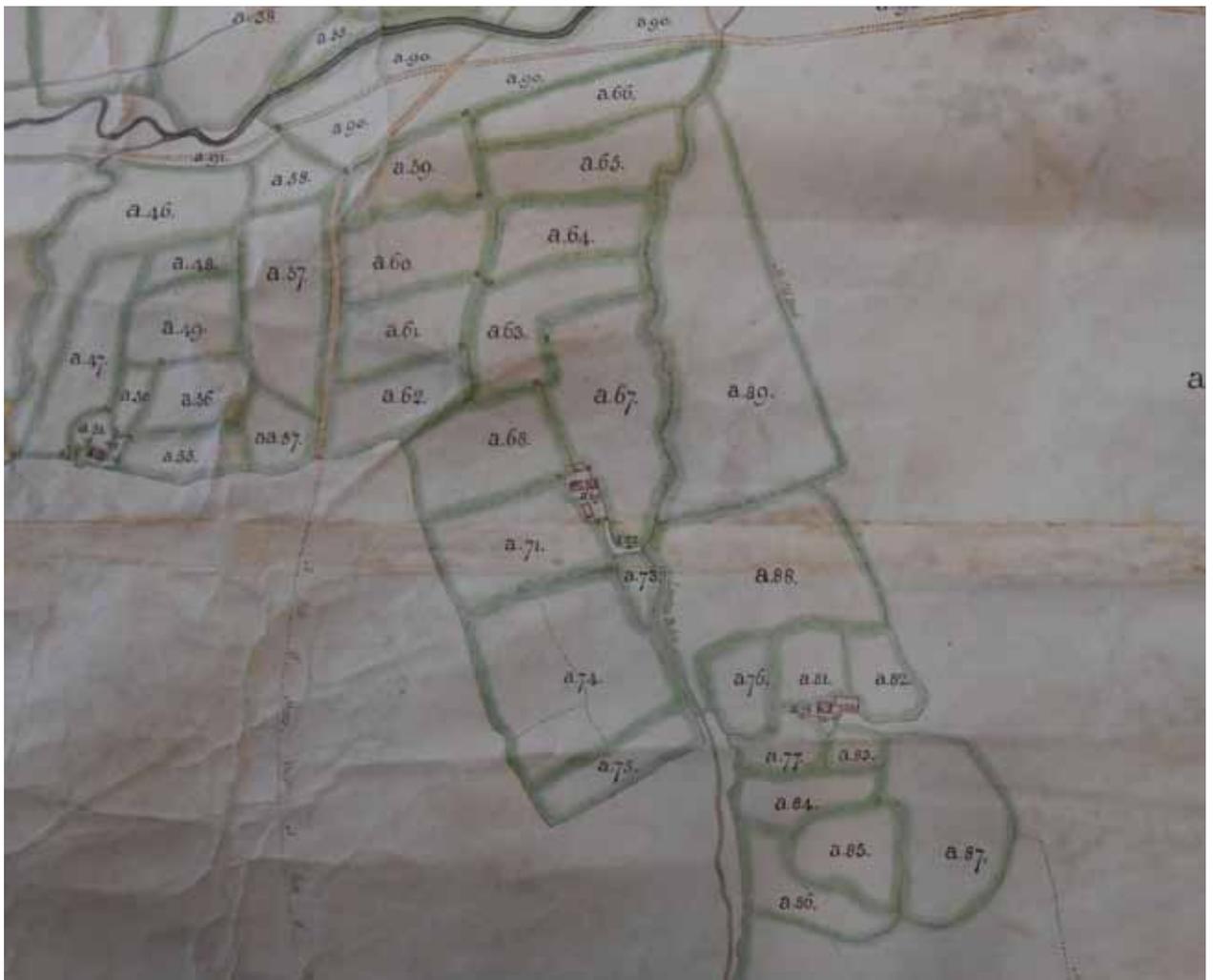


Fig 41 Higher Lowton (right), Lowton (centre) and Silk House (far right) enclosures and farmsteads from map of 1796 (NDRO B1701102).

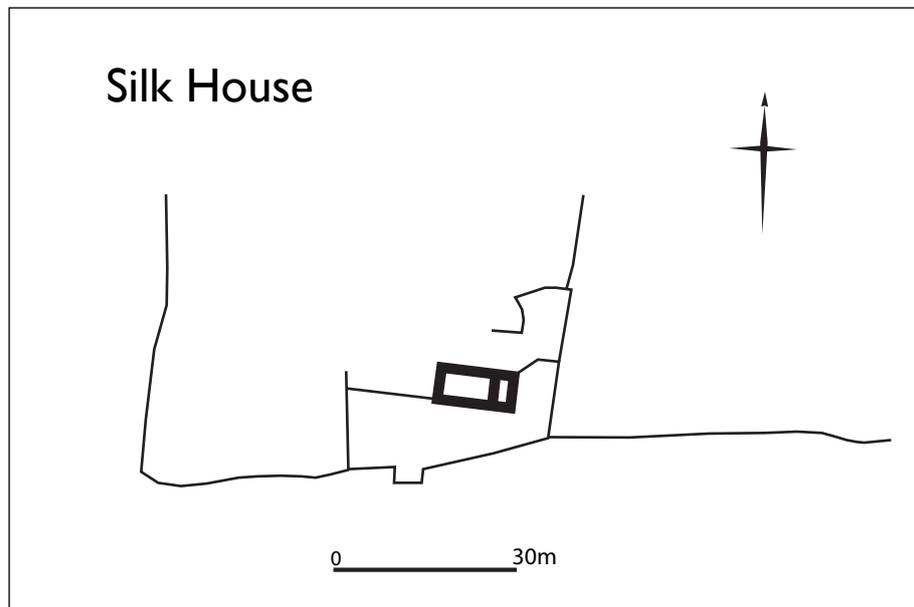


Fig 42 Plan of the ruins at Silk House before destruction, derived from OS 1st edition 25-inch map, 1886.

1839 but much of its course runs through areas now covered by conifers making it very difficult to trace outside the clearing. However, its slight earthwork is visible approaching the corner of the garden plot and extending back to the edge of the plantation. The earthwork has become spread and is very shallow through silting. On the northern side of the house a channel runs down the slope in the direction of the brook and probably provided a route for the leat water after passing the house. Unfortunately, the precise course of the leat around the house and yards is unclear. The leat may be traced further south of the farm across a clearing containing two hut circles then back into the conifers. At this point the leat crosses the outer enclosure wall of Durehole where the earthwork is slightly clearer, before continuing south into an impenetrable area of fallen conifers.

One hundred and seventy metres south of the main farmstead are the earthwork remains of a probably earlier building [6568/6703]. There are no known documentary or cartographic sources that mention or depict this structure, which we have to assume was abandoned long before 1796, though the field within which it stood was named 'House Plot' in c. 1825.

The house is built into an artificial terrace with a scarp on the east side. An embanked stone wall defines the edge of the scarp on the south and parts of the east side but on the north side the terrace is defined only by a broad earthwork bank. The wall is in a fragmented state on the east side. The overall size of the terrace is 17.6m by 16.2m and at its highest point the drop is 1m.

The house is set into the northern half of the enclosure and comprises a rectangular stony earthwork, slightly sunken into the slope and therefore defined only by a 'U'-shape scarp at the eastern end. The position of the northern wall is marked by a spread (3m wide) bank. The south wall and western corner appear very disturbed. Though difficult to establish precise dimensions the interior may have been 9.4m by 4.5m.

The major diagnostic feature in this building is the fireplace at the eastern end comprising the two upright granite post set 1.25m apart, which formed the front of the chimney breast, and a large stone that makes up the rear of the hearth. Only the very tops of the posts are currently visible.

All other structural evidence has been disguised by the covering of turf, or, given the fate of all the prehistoric huts in this district and the recorded robbing of medieval and later field walls to construct the



Fig 43 View of Higher Lowton Farmhouse in July 2013 following clearance (Phil Newman).

Fig 44 Dry-stone walling of the Higher Lowton outer enclosure, July 2013 (Phil Newman)



Fig 45 Small stone structure at Higher Lowton, July 2013 (Phil Newman)

newtake wall, it is likely that this building was also robbed of stone, perhaps in the 18th century. Although described in the Scheduled Monument description (SM No. 1017981) as a longhouse, this is unlikely to be correct.

3.6 Silk House [20916] (Figs 41-2)

Current knowledge of Silk House derived from documentation is almost non-existent and the site would certainly benefit from thorough research. However, the farm is well represented on the 18th-19th century maps and it is likely to have similar late-medieval origins as Assacombe and Fernworthy and indeed similar farmsteads elsewhere on Dartmoor.

The lands of Silk House, as defined on the c.1825 map, form a compact unit, delimited on the south side by the River Teign and on the east by the Lowton Brook. It is likely that Assacombe Brook formed the original western boundary, but an additional field called Tom's Hill, on the west side of the brook, may also have formed part of this holding, though possibly a later attachment. A track from Metheral passes through Prestacombe Gate and along a narrow corridor beside the Teign then onto open moorland. The holding is cut roughly in two by a walled lane that provided access to Assacombe and Lowton Commons to the south, mainly it seems for the occupiers of Fernworthy.

The house and farm courtyard were on the SE corner of the holding, adjacent to the commons. A single rectangular building is depicted on the 1796 map within an L-shaped yard. The layout is replicated on the 25-inch OS map of 1886 (Fig 42). Unfortunately the building was mostly destroyed when a forestry track was driven through it. A portion of the yard walls remain, including a notable rectangular feature in the wall protruding southwards, which is shown on the early maps, but it appears that the house has had the track built directly over it.

3.7 Lowton [6651] (Figs 41, 43-5)

Lowton, including Higher Lowton (Loughton), represents a southern extension of enclosure in the valley of Lowton Brook, apparently bolted on to the fields of Silk House and therefore later, though as yet the chronological details of these developments elude us. Both of these holdings were very small, even by Dartmoor standards; as delineated in 1825, Lowton was a little under 10 acres (4ha) and Higher Lowton was 19 acres (7.7ha), though this included much scrubby ground.

The field remains of neither settlement have previously been discussed by archaeologists, indeed until now it has been widely believed that conifer planting and road building had led to their destruction. The buildings of Higher Lowton, on the eastern side of the brook, continued to be depicted on OS maps until fairly recently but Lowton on the western side was no longer included following the building of the perimeter road very close by.

Both settlements were still standing and probably inhabited in 1796 (NDRO B170/102) although the fields had been absorbed into Fernworthy and the houses were in ruins by 1825 (DuCo 1825). Until further documentary research is undertaken the earliest known reference to these farms is of 1733 when 'John Horsham was at Higher Loughton' (Hemery 1983, 749), although it is certain that their occupancy extends further back.

The field walls surrounding Lowton are mostly substantial wall banks, with in some cases high granite faces on the exterior. For Higher Lowton the dominant boundary tradition is dry stone walling. Indeed the farm is surrounded by a single ringfence enclosing 8 acres (3.4ha), the perimeter defined by a continuous, finely constructed drystone wall (Fig 41), interrupted only by the modern track, which has cut a wide transect through the enclosure. The maps of 1796 and c.1825 show additional sub-division within both holdings,

which do not survive in any form today. A side note on the 1825 map mentions that 'the fences of these fields are quite down', inferring their boundaries were demarcated by a none-enduring material, either timber or withy fences. All of the interior fences of Higher Lowton must have been constructed in this way as no trace of them survives. The condition of the dry stone wall, considering its location in dense plantation, is good and minor alterations to its form after 1825 (e.g. the blocking off the opening preventing access to the house from the east), suggest that it was maintained long after the farm was abandoned, forming a useful stock enclosure that backed onto the commons.

Other boundaries marked on the 1786 map as 'An Old Bank', extending along the valley from this enclosure on its south and northern ends have survived less well. On the northern end dense saplings cover this area though a low stony bank may be seen beside the road. On the south, what appears to be a shallow lynchet or a silted leat channel can be traced until it reaches an area of dense saplings; its surviving portion corresponds approximately with that on the map.

The main buildings at Higher Lowton survive miraculously just beside a major plantation route and were planted over many years ago, their re-discovery as a result of this research has led to the felling of some trees to expose the remains. Although in progress at the time of writing, smaller trees and brashings still covering the site prevented a full survey.

Two ruined rectangular structures can be identified (Fig 43) as depicted on the 1796 map, though a third attached to the surviving pair appears to have been destroyed by the growth of a very large conifer still *in situ*. Although constructed from granite, disturbance and the build up of forest debris has left only a slight footprint for these buildings. The western structure has approximate interior dimensions of 9.5m by 3.7m, while that attached to its eastern end is 4m by 3.5m. No evidence of a fireplace or entrance was visible at the time of investigation.

A third rectangular building [104638] attached to the outer eastern boundary of the enclosure is almost certainly later than the farmstead, probably associated with the alteration to the wall described above (Fig 45). The building is a three-sided structure attached the exterior of the enclosure wall, which acts as the forth wall. Internal dimensions are 3.7m by 2.8m and the walls are up to 1.4m high and 0.8m thick.

Lower Lowton, just outside the boundary of the current survey, is under dense vegetation, but it is known that some remains survive and the site is certainly worthy of further investigation (see 6.1 below).



Fig 46 A slotted gatepost still standing in the yard at Fernworthy Farm, April 2013 (Phil Newman).

3.8 Fernworthy (Figs 46-51)

3.8.1 Pre-19th century

Much has been made of the fact that 'Fernworthie Hedges' is mentioned on a Dartmoor Perambulation of 1609 (Rowe 1896, 143) confirming the existence of enclosures and consequently a settlement here at least by that date. Earlier references to Vernaworthy (1355), Ferneworthy (1377), Vernworthie (1524) and Fernworthy Yeat (1579) (Gover *et al* 1969) might suggest that this farm had much earlier origins. Greeves claims 'it is likely that people had been living at Fernworthy since at least 1086 as extra-mural burgesses of the town of Lydford' (Greeves 2004, 67), and R H Worth considered that 'Worthy' as a suffix to a place name indicates a possible Saxon date for the establishment of a settlement such as this (Worth 1953). Realistically, establishing the origins of this farm, like all the others in this valley awaits more detailed documentary research, and/or archaeological intervention to provide more certainty.

In Eric Hemery's account of Fernworthy, with which he supplied no sources, the farm was owned by Edward Widdon in 1558 and 'at the time of the Spanish Armada' (also 1588) Mr Lightfoot was the occupant. In 1690 the house was demolished and rebuilt (Hemery 1983, 755).

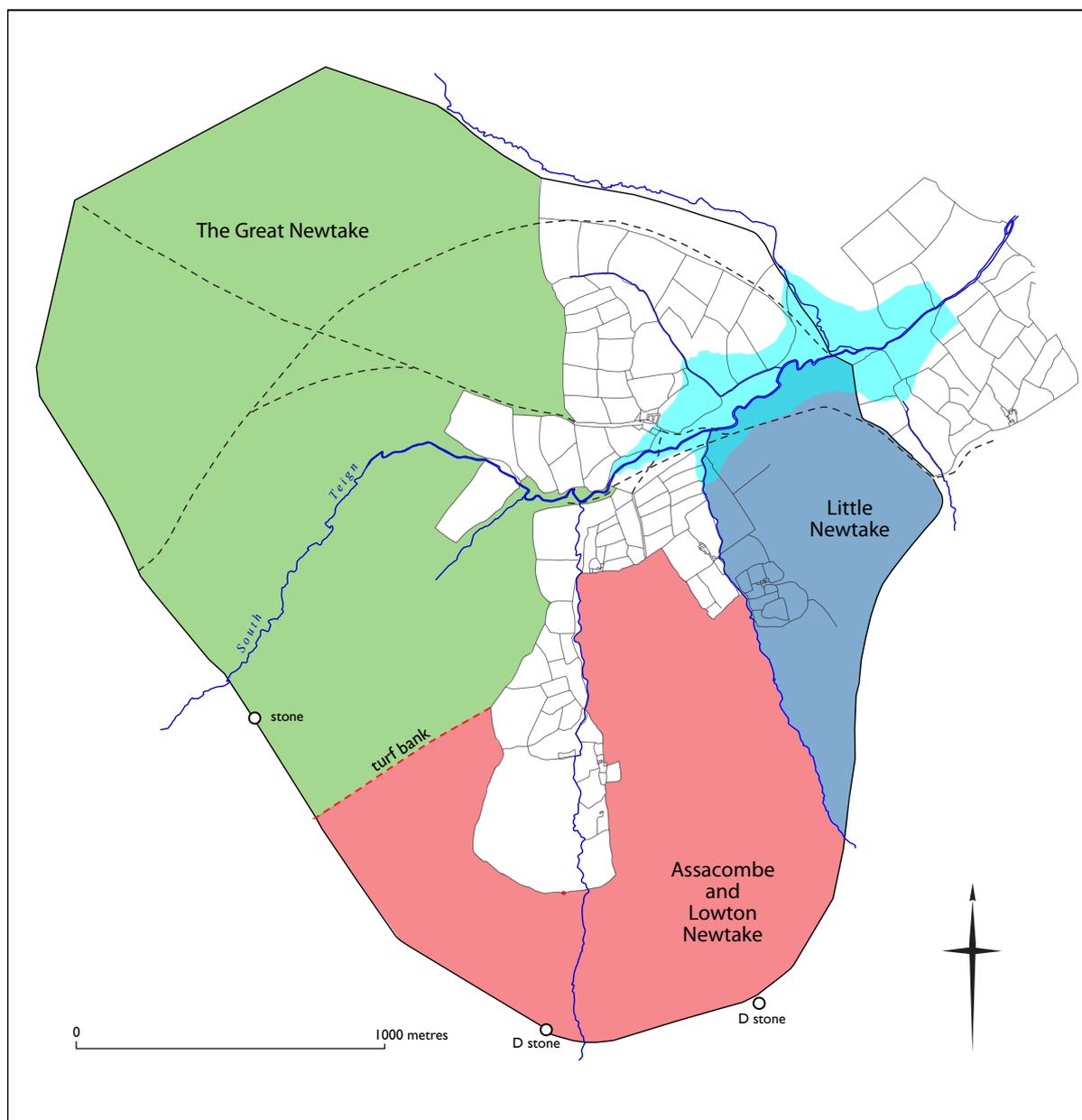


Fig 47 Map showing the Fernworthy Estate including improver newtakes. Based on a variety of sources.

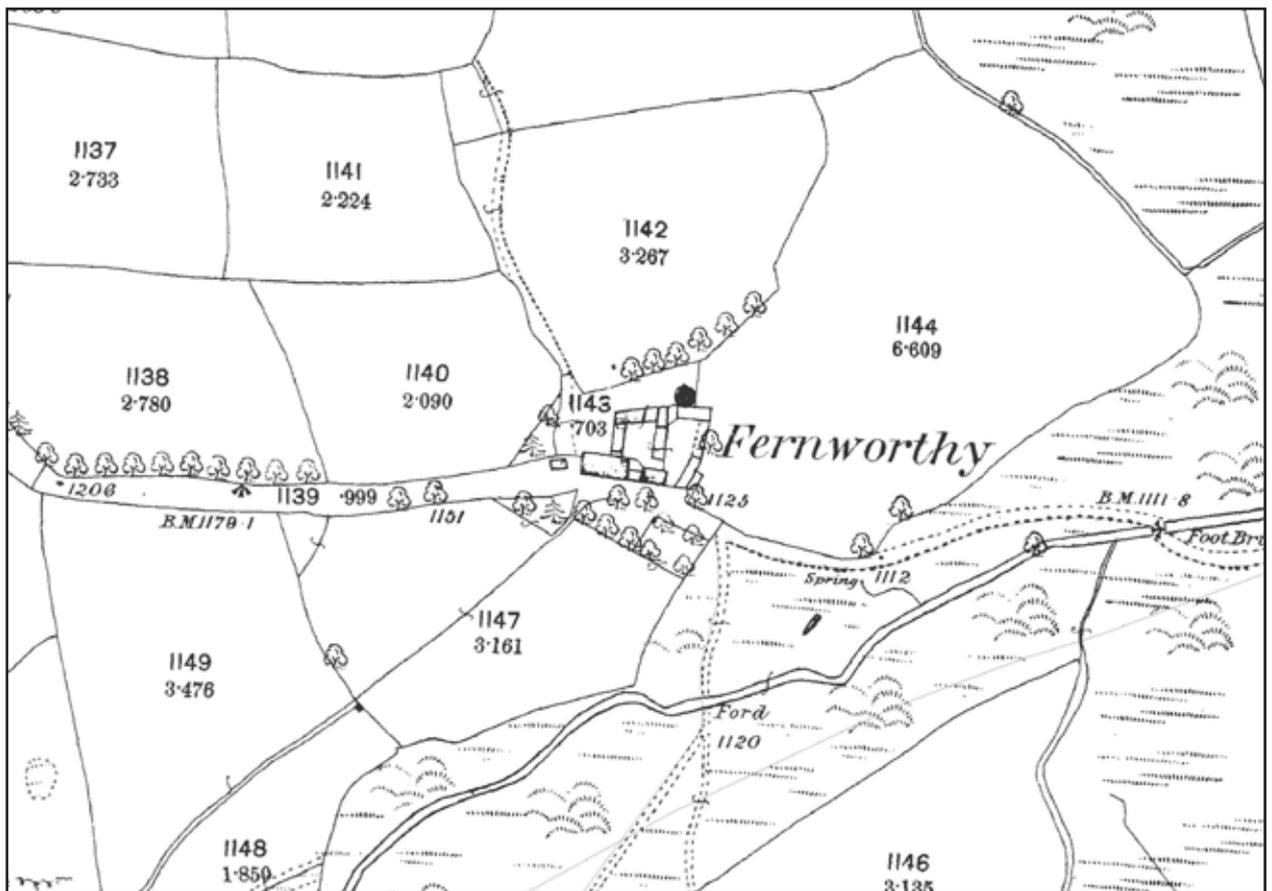


Fig 49 Fernworthy from the OS 1st edition 25-inch map, 1886.

the NW side are delineated on the Tithe Map of 1839, while the apportionment puts the total lands held under Fernworthy, which by that time included Assacombe, as only 282 acres (114ha).

When the later eastern portion of the newtake was added, it was defined on the SE side by a straight turf hedge, which is marked on the map of 1807. This was later abandoned when the two halves were amalgamated, but survives as a 4m-wide earthwork, which can be traced running through the plantation [104640].

Near the southernmost proximity of the outer Fernworthy enclosure (SX 6573 8191), just inside the stone wall, stands a 0.9m-high boundary stone [104748] (Fig 50) inscribed with the letter 'D', almost certainly Davie's initial.⁶ It was probably a marking out stone, to delineate the boundary of the newtake before construction of the walls and is likely therefore to be one of a set. The stone, and any others that may once have existed, dates to the 1790s when Davie was 'taking in' this land. The 1796 map indeed does not depict the newtake as constructed but as a series of points joined by straight lines, which suggest that it shows the intended layout. Each deviation in the line is marked accompanied by an annotation including the word 'bound'. It is possible therefore that the course of the wall was marked out by several of these stones. One other stone is known to exist on Assacombe Hill, just outside the enclosure at SX 6645 8119 but a search at some of the likely positions, albeit not exhaustive, has so far failed to produce any more 'D' stones. However, an upright stone, without an inscription (Fig 51), was found built into the wall just south of the South Teign. Although resembling a gatepost it is not part of a gate and it is a noticeably vertical post in a wall made entirely of horizontally laid stones. It is sited approximately (allowing for minor discrepancies between a 210 year-old map and the modern OS grid) at the point of one of the above mentioned markers described as 'The Seventh Side Bound South'. It is likely therefore that additional stones representing a marking out phase at Fernworthy, which may or may not be inscribed with a letter 'D', are yet to be re-discovered.



Fig 50 A boundary stone on Assacombe Hill inscribed with the letter D.



Fig 51 A possible boundary marker near South Teign Head.

3.8.4 Fernworthy House [6630] (Figs 48-51)

Our knowledge of the farmhouse and outbuildings at Fernworthy is limited to map evidence and early 20th century photographs, as all buildings except one have been thoroughly demolished. However, the field and lanes above the waterline survive, including the walled lane leading away from the yard to the west, which, as described above, provided access to the commons.

The map of 1796 (Fig 48) shows the house to be of greater proportions than others in the estate, with a range of buildings forming two rectangular yards on the north side. This had altered little by 1886 on the OS 25-inch map of that date (Fig 49), with the addition of only one small building.

The house is featured in at least two known photographic images: a Frith photograph of the early 1900s (Greeves 2004, 67) shows the south aspect of the house looking east. It was a two storey building with closely spaced windows and a rendered exterior finished in limewash, though the whiteness is possibly enhanced in the photograph to make it more attractive for the postcard. It has a slate roof and partial slate cladding on the western gable end. A full height chimney at each end of the house suggests hearths on both storeys. A range of outbuildings are shown attached to the eastern end of the house and small building in the foreground is the only structure from the entire range to survive today, though roofless.

A scene viewed from the other direction in 1934, not long before demolition (Fig 52) shows the main house had an outshot on the eastern end onto which the outbuildings were attached, one of which has its own chimney stack.

Little in these images is recognisable on the ground today, though fragmentary stone outlines have survived of the house and some of the outbuildings. The upper sections of the latter were probably built from timber. A gatepost (Fig 46) with four vertical slots stands erect near the house location and is likely to have served as part of an entrance to the yard from the small enclosure on the north side.

Water to Fernworthy Farm was diverted from the South Teign via a leat which extracted water off the north side and ran for 590m dropping 15m in height to enter the farm court on the south side. The dry earthwork channel can be traced from there through the enclosures to the SW of the farm, then in parts through the planted area of the forest back to the river.



Fig 52 View of Fernworthy farmhouse in 1934 (DA 000571).

3.9 Chronology

Without any definitive dating evidence, assigning origins to these farms and attempting a narrative for the period prior to 1794 is a very uncertain process. Although it is likely that some have founding dates in the medieval period, as is more easily established at similar farms elsewhere on Dartmoor, they were not abandoned until the late 18th or early 19th centuries, so the remains are very different to those of settlements deserted much earlier, including the many early longhouses that have been archaeologically excavated, such as those at Hound Tor. Many centuries of occupation resulted in refurbishments and rebuilds culminating at Fernworthy, for example, with a very fine house and outbuildings surviving into the 20th century (Fig 52), which belied its probable medieval founding date. At Assacombe we know from Burnard's photograph (Fig 37) that this building was built to its full height in stone, a tradition not found in vernacular buildings on Dartmoor in the earlier medieval period. The internal fireplace and chimney breast found in this house and in the smaller example nearby we would also not expect to find in earlier medieval houses. However, chance finds of c. 13th-14th century pot sherds amongst the ruins do point to some level of occupation in the late medieval period (HER MDV30788).

Archaeological excavations have in the past focussed on settlements deserted much earlier and no investigation as yet has examined a site of later desertion but it seems possible that investigations of ruined buildings at places such as Assacombe, Fernworthy and Silk House would reveal origins within a period earlier than the extant field remains would suggest. Sadly, the houses at Lowton and Higher Lowton are currently too heavily covered by vegetation to suggest details or period of construction.

All that can be stated with certainty is that all five farmsteads were inhabited in 1794, although the smaller farms of Lowton, Higher Lowton and Silk House had already had their lands engrossed with that of Fernworthy and their houses were in ruins by 1825.

A study of field boundary morphology and typology combined with historical research could throw further light on the development of this landscape from the medieval period to the 19th century.



Fig 53 View showing the one remaining building at Fernworthy Farm, April 2013 (Phil Newman).

4.0 Other Evidence

4.1 Tinworking

Tin streamworking in the medieval and post-medieval periods is known to have been occurring within and around the Fernworthy plantation, though uncharacteristically, has not left the substantial visible footprint found elsewhere on Dartmoor and whatever may remain is heavily disguised by the conifers and marshes. LiDAR imagery has also failed to highlight any streamworks within any of the valleys. However, evidence of a very shallow streamwork is spread along the course of a tributary known as ‘Shutlake’ in 1796, ‘Wodelake or Wattsbrook’ in 1807 or Shute Lake in 1825, and which Eric Hemery (1983) chose to call ‘Crown Hall Stream’. Much of the brook lies outside the Fernworthy enclosures but the upper section, NW of the Thornworthy gate, is inside and has subtle evidence of tinworking, comprising small mounds and shallow depressions, within which closely spaced mature conifers have further added to the undulations on the ground.

The South Teign rises from a shallow basin just outside the SW boundary wall of Fernworthy, where the ground along the stream has the evidence for streamworks. However, beyond the boundary within the enclosure the remains are harder to find as the river runs through boggy ground, and conifers of various ages and densities cover the ground. As the valley steepens further to the west, no evidence of streamworks remain suggesting the activity was sporadic along this stretch of the river, although some likely streamworking remains survive near the waters edge of the reservoir and Hemery reported ‘medieval tinner burrows’ being exposed during the drought in the summer of 1976 (Hemery 1983, 756).

The most notable evidence of tinworking is the long gully that was later followed to delineate the outer

boundary of Assacombe Farm described above. The gully extends west following a curving route from the Assacombe Brook up the slope, rising 70m. From there it turns north, descending back down towards the brook. The final section has been adopted by the modern track and the easternmost corner is currently under impenetrable conifer saplings. The whole gully is visible on the LiDAR images showing it to be a single entity. Any associated earthworks are no longer visible and no water supply to it is immediately obvious. It is also not clear if this feature started life as two separate gullies, added to and joined when adopted as a boundary. The gully is on average 5-6m wide and up to 2m deep, widening near its southern end to approximately 8m. Of interest is the presence just below the SW corner of the gully of a landscape feature known as 'Dewerhole' (DuCo 1807a & b) or 'Durow Pit' (DuCo 1825). This is a very steep-sided

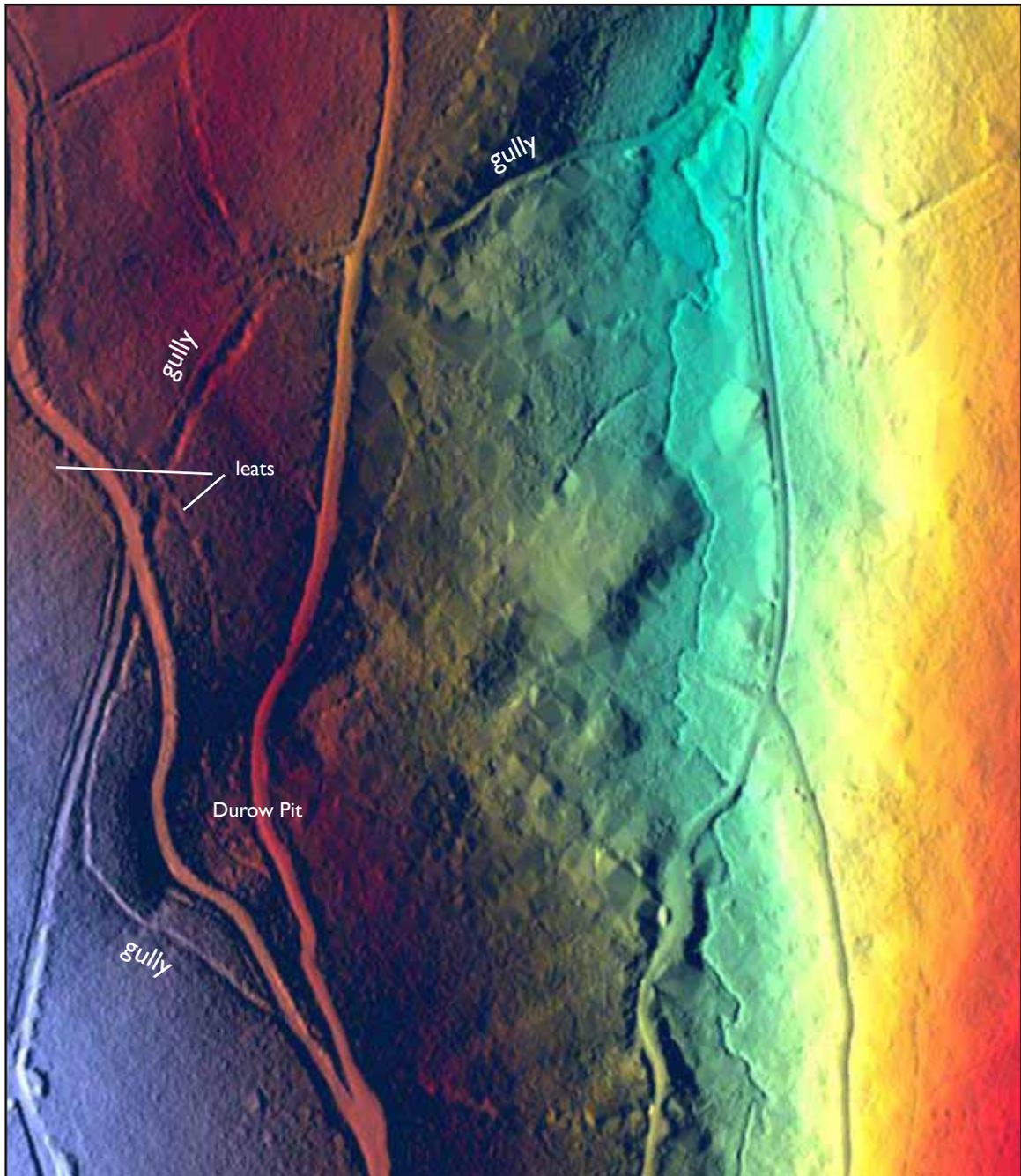


Fig 54 LiDAR image showing the long curving gully, a probable former tinwork, that makes up the outer southern boundary of Assacombe. Also visible is the deep hollow known as Durow Pit and the courses of the two Birchtor and Vitifer leats.

hollow in the hillside, which is currently inaccessible due to tree coverage but it shows on the LiDAR as a linear gully, approximately 100m wide by 180m long. This is most likely to be a natural feature but further investigation may reveal more attempts at tinworking within the hollow.

4.2 Leats

Three separate leats pass through the Fernworthy enclosures but their sources and destinations lie well outside the plantation.

The Southill leat [27723] is the oldest, probably 15th century, and it flows from the North Teign to Southill where it powered a mill. The leat ran through the NW corner of the plantation for 900m, though clearly was abandoned long before the land was enclosed. The leat is difficult to trace within the conifers but is visible as a faint line on the LiDAR images, which has enabled pinpointing the earthworks on the ground with accuracy. The earthwork is extremely weak and effaced in places but does survive sufficiently to track it through the trees, following the course depicted on the LiDAR image (see Fig 2).

The Birch Tor and Vitifer leat diverted water from the East Dart and North Teign, on moorland west of Fernworthy, to the Birch Tor and Vitifer mines over 4km to the SE. Probably originally dug in 1793 it was extended on two occasions (Dickinson 1975). Two sections of the leat run in parallel through the SW sector of the plantation, covering an approximate total distance of 1.8km. The lower leat (6576) is the larger with an internal width of up to 2m. It is visible along most of its course through the forest in open ground though obscured by conifers near the southern end, but still traceable.

The majority of the higher leat (104637) is currently in open ground, clear felled recently but with replanted saplings. However, its course is not so clear near the south end where it has been disturbed by forestry tracks. Both leats comprise a flat-bottomed channel, with very little silting, and a mound of upcast material running along the downslope side.

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Condition

Miraculously, despite the combined forces of attrition that have eroded the evidence since the creation of the plantation in the first quarter of the 20th century, all the sites recorded by reliable sources prior to that date have survived although their condition has deteriorated as a result of forestry activity. All the hut settlements were planted over in the original programme of planting and only relatively recently were these sites left open after felling. Although now open, the root damage from large conifers planted amidst the remains is considerable and incidental damage from heavy vehicles and the construction of tracks has taken a toll, especially on field boundaries. Indeed, reaves and field boundaries have suffered the most; in areas that have never been avoided by the tree planters, such features are no longer traceable.

Not all damage can be blamed on the forestry operations, and the robbing of stone to construct field walls from the medieval period onwards, has accounted for much disturbance of both the prehistoric huts and their associated boundary walls as well as medieval later houses and fields. This spoliation of prehistoric items was noted by several of the 19th-century observers recorded above. The destruction of medieval and post-medieval boundaries is also apparent, robbed as a source of stone for the 18th-19th century newtake wall builders.

5.2 Context

Perhaps the biggest change affecting the archaeological sites of Fernworthy Forest and the way the modern visitors may experience them, is their landscape context. The appearance of this once open and undulating stretch of moorland, where small streams descend through steep coombes, is difficult to visualise today amidst the tall conifers, where it is rarely possible to see more than a few 100m from any one spot. A small sample of how this landscape appeared in the late 19th century survives in a photograph of September 1891, published in 1983 in the DPA's *A Dartmoor Century* (Greeves & Somers Cocks 1983, Plate 51), which provides a view from below Lowton Tor looking across to Fernworthy farm with the pasture fields of Fernworthy and Silk House in the foreground and the open moorland beyond (see also Figs 13 and 14 above). In his description of the Lowton hut circles, William Crossing (1909) mentions the close proximity of 'Lowton Borough', a rock pile after which the locale takes its name, but it is possible to be completely unaware of its presence when visiting the huts today.

Natural features, such as outcrops and steep hollows once possessed names of their own such as Dunnastone, Broadberry Pitt, Will Torr, Crown Hole, Dewer Hole, Hempstone or Empson Pit, Empson Burrow, Lowton Trow, Assacombe Burrow and Durrow Pit. These places became less visible and the names fell into disuse long ago. The places themselves are rarely visited, few even knowing of their existence or location, yet they indicate intimate knowledge of place and strong traditions, now lost, by the people who once lived, worked in, or passed through this area whilst going about their business.

One antiquary, Robert Burnard, actually described the Fernworthy estate as 'picturesque' (Burnard 1894). The only glimpses we have into how any of these archaeological sites appeared in their landscape to the antiquaries in the 19th and early 20th is from surviving contemporary photographs of the area by Burnard and others.

The Froggymead stone circle and rows and the Assacombe stone row are perhaps the worst affected in this way with trees crowding them, both having lost the outward vistas they once possessed. They appear like museum exhibits plucked from their original surroundings with much of their meaning lost. However, it may not be that simple. There is some evidence to suggest that in the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC, monuments of this type were often placed within woodland clearings prepared especially for the purpose. The pollen evidence from Dartmoor's only excavated stone row suggest this precise scenario (Eogan 1965). Ironically, the original context for these ceremonial monuments may not have been the fully open moorland landscape which we may envisage or wish for today. Nevertheless, the surrounding of dense, very tall conifers provides an equally false context.

For those who visit Fernworthy today, either walking through it on their way to the open moor or to enjoy the peace of the lake, the story of the medieval and later landscape is almost a closed book. Although important archaeological sites can be sought out by those with a determination to do so, they are often completely out of context, in clearings surrounded by conifers, while much of the agricultural infrastructure of fields, trackways and water supplies is concealed. Tantalising glimpses of field walls exposed in places but disappearing into dense conifer patches prevent an overview of what actually exists here while modern maps show very few of the relict features and aerial photographs early enough to be useful don't exist. Any grasp of how these components fit with others in the area, how they related to the local topography and the greater landscape is impossible without the level of investigation that has gone into this report. The significance of this phase of Fernworthy's past as a heritage asset has not previously been considered.

A comparative landscape can be found in the Meavy Valley on SW Dartmoor, where a reservoir and plantation have had a similar impact on the lower lying farms, but the open moorland locations have a similar level of remains and, probably, an analogous back story (see below).

5.3 The LiDAR

While it is to some extent disappointing that the LiDAR has not produced any spectacular new archaeological discovery, its usefulness has been to confirm that we do already have knowledge of as much of the archaeology that exists with the plantation that is detectable, even using this the most up to date technology, suggesting that management of the archaeology and the plantation can now proceed based on what we do know rather than what we might not know. It has also confirmed that some fragile features, which we know from cartographic sources once existed and have been effaced by forestry activity, are not visible using this very sensitive technology either, throwing some doubt on the usefulness of any future searches for above ground evidence in areas of the plantation particularly densely populated with conifers.

5.4 Significance

5.4.1 Prehistoric

Fernworthy Forest contains a representative sample of prehistoric evidence, fairly typical of such assemblages elsewhere on Dartmoor, containing the full suite of site types with one stone circle, three stone rows, a number of round cairns, hut circles, settlements and field systems. All of the prehistoric sites described above are scheduled monuments (SMs) and therefore, considered by DCMS to be of national importance.

Froggymead

Froggymead is one of only 14 stone circles surviving on Dartmoor in an upstanding state. Whereas at least four stone circles have suffered the misguided interference of the late 19th-century antiquaries, with their attempts at restoration, there is good reason to believe that such interventions were minimal at this site, as most of the stones were upright when Bate and Lukis separately depicted the circle in the 1870s. In terms of size, Froggymead falls approximately at the lower end of the scale for Dartmoor examples at 19.6m diameter, with Mardon Down being the largest at a little under 38.2m (Butler 1997, 152).

Open stone circles, though common in the British Isles, are more so in western, south-western, and northern England, Wales and Scotland. They are rare elsewhere in Europe. In south-west England the counties of Cornwall, Devon Somerset and Dorset all have examples and in Devon all but two of its 16 examples are located on Dartmoor, where their moorland location has often allowed them to survive relatively undisturbed. These examples represent the fag end of what was probably once a very common feature of the lowlands and hinterland of Devon as well as the upland. As part of this group of survivors therefore, each circle is an important representative of a once much greater resource.

The circle is one of only two on Dartmoor that can be described as a central component of a ceremonial complex (the other being Merrivale), whereby a wider range of ritual and funerary monuments coexist at the same location. Although it is not unusual for barrows to be located near to a stone circle or stone row, the combination of barrows, stone circle and stone rows is less common. The three rows in this case have not survived well, and, judging by the size of the remaining stones, were never robust monuments. Many of the stones are missing but enough remain to inform us of the former significance of this site as part of a deliberate grouping of monuments. The barrows, sadly, are in a poor state but their significance lies in the findings from the 1897 excavations from which a crucially important assemblage of artefacts was recovered.

It is rare then to have this combination of ceremonial and funerary monuments surviving extant at one location. But at this site we have the additional data from artefacts, reliably retrieved from one of the barrows, the Beaker style pottery giving a cultural marker for at least one of the barrows.

Assacombe Stone Row

In the British Isles, the distribution of stone rows is similar to that of circles, mainly in the west and north of the country. They are also common across the channel in Brittany. However, Dartmoor has the largest assemblage of these monuments in Britain with between 75 and 80 examples, over 40% of which are double rows as at Assacombe.

Assacombe is a fairly typical example of a double row terminating with a cairn on the eastern end and a blocking stone on the west. All the stones appear to be *in situ* and although Burnard and Baring Gould re-erected a group of larger stones near the eastern terminal, as far as we can tell, the site has not suffered any recent interference.

Within any regional group of similar monuments, each will contribute a unique set of data to our understanding of the site type. At Assacombe the steep gradient of the hillslope is one such unique feature, where it is unusual for a stone row of only 117m long to have one end not visible from the other, due to the steepness of the terrain. The fact that the terminal barrow is offset from the axis of the row, must also have a story behind it, as yet untold. Thirdly, the row has a hut circle close by, only 2.8m to the SE and it is very unusual for ceremonial and domestic features of the early Bronze Age to be so closely associated.

Our dating framework for Dartmoor's ceremonial monuments is weak, due to a lack of radiocarbon dates from modern excavations. As a class of monument, stone rows are likely to have beginnings at the earlier end of the Bronze Age, some possibly having origins in the Neolithic. Stone circles, when dated elsewhere in the UK, are similarly of the early Bronze Age, though possibly continuing in importance into the Middle Bronze Age. Regardless of origins, both such monuments may have had enduring resonance across generations for the communities that built them or resided near them later. Round barrows, or cairns, often prove to have been more durable as a monument form, introduced in the late Neolithic but still current in the Middle Bronze Age, including alterations to earlier examples. The ceremonial and funerary monuments at Fernworthy may therefore mark places of continuing sacred relevance for several generations of the community or communities that built them.

Hut circles and settlements

Although common in several upland areas, Dartmoor has the largest assemblage of stone hut circles anywhere in the British Isles, with over 4000 recorded examples (Butler 1997, 141). Fernworthy contains 37 hut circles arranged into five separate identifiable settlements, comprising between four and twelve huts. In terms of collective significance, other hut circles slightly lower down the South Teign valley at Metheral, now submerged beneath the reservoir, should also be considered part of this group, within which there is great variety of construction technique and size but also condition. Some of the larger examples of up to 9m were constructed using large slabs set on edge to form shell walls onto which a timber and thatch conical roof rested. These huts, particularly where close to later wall building, activity were extensively robbed of their stone and most survive only as disturbed earth and stone rings from which the usable stone has been stripped. Several, however, survive in excellent condition, suffering less robbing than others. Hut [6599] appears almost intact but for being built into a later wall, and hut [6585] has an unusual constructional style with a second inner lining of slabs of a type recorded at very few other sites on Dartmoor. This has raised the suspicion in some that it is in fact a cairn rather than a hut.

Near Hemstone Rocks two settlements contain smaller huts which have very little stone showing at all and those that do are mostly small boulders. The circles are predominantly earthworks in character and it is difficult, based on visible remains, to establish how much stone was used in their construction and how much has been robbed.

Enclosures, reaves and evidence of field systems are less common within Fernworthy than might be expected, but it is likely that much that once existed has been lost through robbing by later wall builders and through the inevitable disturbance caused by the forestry activity. However, some have survived around Lowton as an indicator as to what once might have existed and there is the possibility that outlines of some prehistoric boundaries were fossilized into later fields at Lowton and Assacombe and perhaps elsewhere.

Nineteenth century and earlier sources strongly suggest that reaves were present in these valleys and the map of 1796 has several such features marked, though most cannot be traced within the forest today. Remarkably, however, on the undisturbed open moor to the west of Fernworthy near South Teign Head, another, distinctly serpentine, section of reave is shown on the map described as a 'A Reve of Stones' and this feature survives very clearly today confirming the map to be a reliable source and that those reaves marked on it within the plantation certainly were visible in 1796 if not surviving now.

The earliest archaeologically dated stone hut circle on Dartmoor so far is c.1800BC at Shaugh Moor (Wainwright & Smith 1980, 119), but this should not preclude the existence of even earlier examples elsewhere on the moor. It is clear from other excavations, however, that the round house format was still in use in this region about 1600 years later at Shapley Common during the Iron Age (Gibson 1992). At Shaugh Moor it was also evident that some houses underwent several episodes of occupation over more than a millennia. Precise dating for the origins and occupation of any of the settlement and hut circles at Fernworthy is not possible, given the lack of data we have and the ambiguity in what little we do know. But it seems most likely that the hut circles came into existence in the second-millennium BC and were occupied by pastoralist farmers who created small coaxial field systems associated with some of their settlements. Continued occupation of the houses as late as the Iron Age, as at nearby Teigncombe and Kestor, is a possibility that must also be considered.

Dartmoor National Park contains the most significant assemblage of Early to Middle Bronze Age, upstanding stone monuments anywhere in the British Isles, perhaps in Europe. A statement as to the significance of any one part or section of that assemblage must acknowledge its contribution to that greater part. Apart, therefore, from any individual merits of the monuments in Fernworthy, each is also a component of what is arguably the most significant second millennium (Bronze Age) landscape in Britain.

5.4.2 The second millennium AD: Medieval and later Evidence

Unlike that of the second millennium BC, the significance of evidence for human activity in Fernworthy from the second millennium AD is difficult to gauge on the basis of precedent. A fieldscape of the type that survives within the plantation has not previously been considered worthy of either highly detailed research or protection within Dartmoor National Park, possibly because they resemble too closely the material evidence of farms and houses that are still occupied and thriving. However, there are areas of similar characteristics in the Meavy Valley (Newman 1995) and at Hawns and Dendles (Fletcher *et al* 1998) on southern Dartmoor, which have been subject to some examination. What the three areas have in common is the late abandonment (19th to 20th century) of settlements that had likely early origins, resulting in a desertion of the working landscape, combined with a sudden change in land usage in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, either reservoir catchment or plantation. All three areas also lie within the transition zone between enclosed farmland and moorland or common land.

One problem with Fernworthy lies in the dating, which as yet is un-researched for all five farms. Although glimpses into the history of this place are available, until a thorough historical or archaeological investigation is directed at these farms, their origins, period of occupancy and development can only be surmised from comparison with what is known from similar sites elsewhere.

addition clearance needed (minimum)

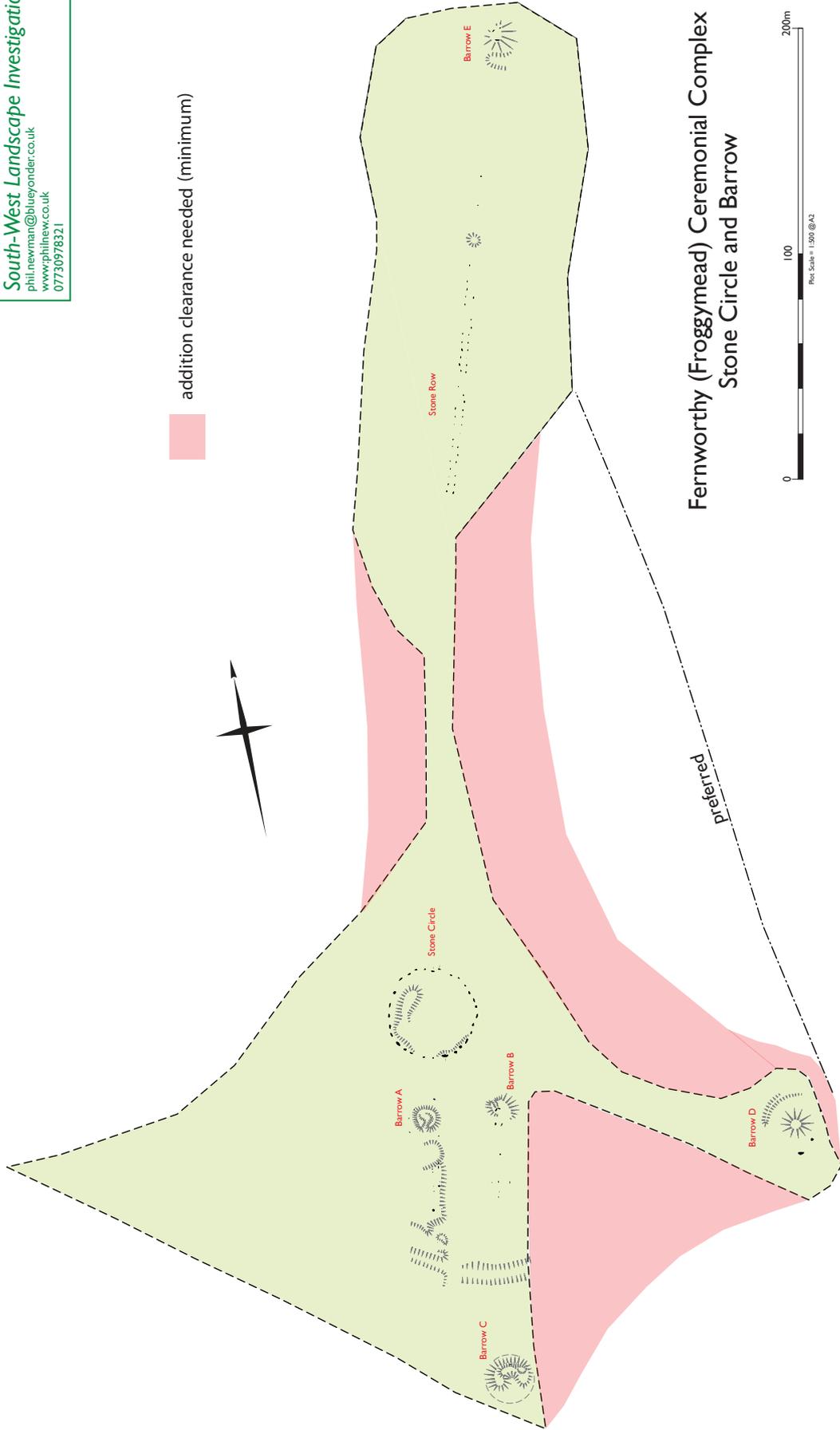


Fig 55 1:1000 scale plan of Froggymead showing suggested additional cleared areas.

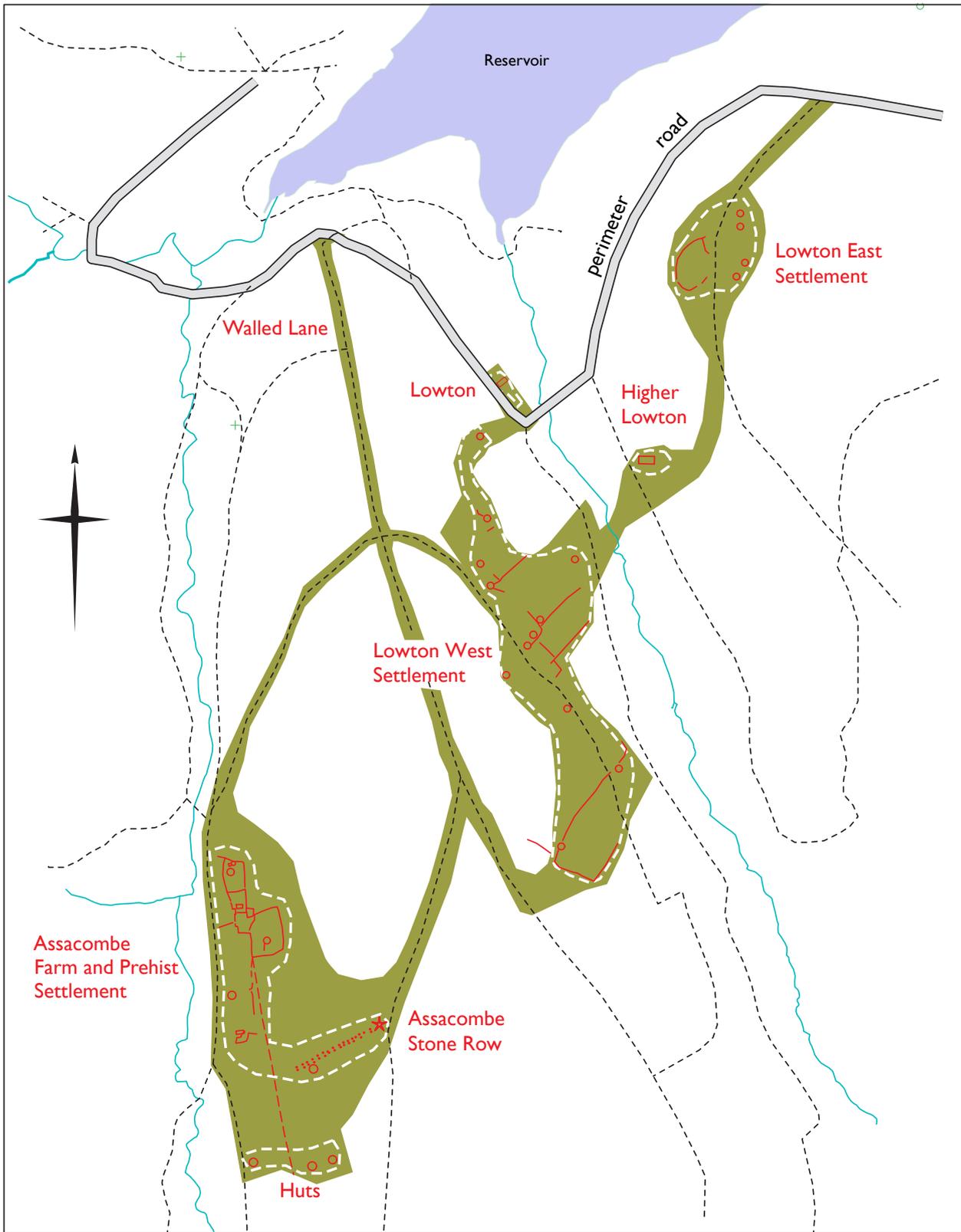
In the Meavy Valley and its upper tributaries of Newleycombe Lake and Narrator Brook, a reservoir was imposed in the late 1890s, followed by partial plantation. Although the occupants of several of the settlements within these valleys were forced to leave in a way similar to Fernworthy, the buildings were not demolished. Other farms had already been abandoned during the 19th century and their fields had been absorbed into the surviving holdings, providing further parallels with Fernworthy. However, most of the farms in Meavy Valley have occupation documented from the 14th century and in some cases the 13th (Newman 1994). But it does not follow that all moorland farms that existed by the 18th century, had medieval origins; historical research by Greeves at Yellowmead, a deserted farmstead at Peter Tavy, was unable to push the date back further than 1672 (Greeves 2008, 10), highlighting the uncertainties that surround these old farms.

The character of the field evidence of some abandoned buildings and the range of field wall types in the Meavy valley are similar to those at Fernworthy, as elsewhere on Dartmoor, including Hawns and Dendles. The problem with all these areas is that since their founding periods, farms and their fields were continuously re-furbished, modernised and expanded, so the evidence that is extant today is impossible to date based on appearance.

Origins will always fascinate and ideally we would wish to establish them when possible. However, the Fernworthy landscape has other eras of fascination. Thanks to several maps available to us, we have a snapshot of life and landscape in the upper South Teign Valley in the late Georgian period of the 1780s to 1830, which coupled with the landscape evidence throws much light on the improver period.

It is known that the farms were still occupied in 1796 and that the process of engrossing the smaller holdings by the owners of Fernworthy was occurring as part of the improver episode which would culminate with the additions of new massive intakes of moorland. This process was completed by 1807 and by 1825 all but Assacombe and Fernworthy were deserted, although by 1839 only Fernworthy survived. Farming continued, based at the one surviving settlement, but major changes to the landscape had halted by the early 1800s.

With the tools available it is possible to reconstruct the agricultural landscape at Fernworthy now hidden by the plantation, as it was worked at around c. AD1800. The houses people lived in; the natural features they gave names to; the fields where they grazed their animals and grew fodder; the lanes they walked along and the gateways into their fields; the routes onto the commons for grazing and turf cutting; the water supplies to their farms and finally the changes wrought by the improver episode. All are evident among the plantation today and worthy of further research, interpretation, conservation and protection.



0 500m



approx spread of archaeological sites including SAMs



Suggested corridor



Existing tracks and paths

Fig 56 Map showing locations of monuments on the SE side of the forest around Assacombe and Lowton Brooks and suggested layout of archaeological corridor.

6.0 FUTURE PRIORITIES

6.1 RESEARCH

- Expand the archaeological survey to include areas currently managed by SW Lakes and also parts of Metheral. This would necessarily exclude submerged areas but future droughts may give rise to opportunities to further explore that area, including hut circles, field walls, reaves and a cist/barrow.
- Undertake detailed documentary research to establish history and origins of the five farmsteads. To include Duchy of Cornwall Archive (Princetown and London), British Library, The National Archive (London) and any other relevant archive.
- Clear vegetation from Higher and Lower Lowton and carry out detailed survey of the farmsteads.
- Commission excavations at one of the above farmsteads and/or Assacombe/ Silk House to better understand the buildings and to retrieve dateable material that might help establish origins and development of the settlements.

6.2 MANAGEMENT

Specific works

- **Assacombe settlement:** Remove self-seeded conifer saplings from the cleared area and maintain the open aspect through annual cutting and grazing. Following clear felling to the east of this site, whenever this occurs, it would be desirable for re-planting to allow a clear buffer zone around the site of at least 50m.
- **Froggymead:** Extend the cleared areas around the site to enable greater appreciation of all features together (Fig 55). In particular widen the clearing leading up to Barrow D and the corridor between the stone circle and the northern stone row.
- **Lowton, East:** Clear debris from interior of enclosure. Prevent self-seeded saplings taking a hold.
- **Lowton, West:** Improve the cleared status of the southern two huts by preventing sapling growth and improve the small branch trackway up to them, which is currently becoming obscured by debris and saplings. Expand the annually cleared area to include the space below the track between huts [6577] and [6580] and the area SE of the latter hut.
- **Hemstone, South:** remove debris from the clear area, which is currently hampering walker access, and may be concealing further remains and maintain the open aspect.
- Place visual markers around hut circle [104643] and protect the site from damage associated with future felling in this area.

General works

- Prevent future forestry activities disturbing any of the archaeological remains described above, including field boundaries associated with 2nd millennium AD farms. Contractors should receive archaeological supervision before undertaking clear-felling and timber removal in sensitive areas. Driving vehicles through field walls should be stopped and the planting of saplings should in future not take place within agreed zones adjacent to all archaeological remains, including those currently without statutory protection (SMs).

Interpretation and Access

Many guided walk descriptions recommend parking at Fernworthy as a means to gain access to the open moors, but very few actually recommend exploring its archaeology. Yet there is much of interest in a relatively safe environment.

- Improve access to the archaeology by the creation of archaeologically themed corridors through the conifers. This could be achieved by expanding and adding to the current cleared areas around some monuments and incorporating existing forest tracks, to create permanent open archaeological zones, connected by open corridors. This would be particularly appropriate for the Lowton and Assacombe areas, where a single corridor could include all the monuments in these groups but a circular route could also be established taking in the majority of Fernworthy's monuments.
- upgrade the level of interpretation and signage. Signposted routes could be created to allow walkers to explore the archaeology of Fernworthy, either as a themed circular walk or *en route* to the open moors.
- Upgrade and update interpretation leaflets and explore the possibilities of using digital media to disseminate the information.

7.0 SOURCES

Notes

1. Photographic copies in possession of the author.
2. Recent analysis has confirmed that this item is of jet. Thanks to Fiona Pitt of Plymouth Museum for this information.
3. Although the map is undated it was commissioned by Sir Humphry Davie who did not succeed to the estate until the death of his father, Sir John Davie, in 1825.
4. This is a confusing statement. Twenty-seven is not a perfect number but 28 is.
5. Hut [6566], also within an enclosure, had not appeared on the OS map by the time of Burnard's activities.
6. I am grateful to Tom Greeves for drawing my attention to this stone. See *Dartmoor Magazine* 41, Winter 1995, p3.

Cartographic Sources

- NDRO B170/102 – A Map or Plan of the Estates called Fernworthy, Higher and Lower Lowton, Silkhouse and Ascombe. Situate in the Parish of Lydford and County of Devon the Lands of Sir John Davie Bart. Plann'd in the Year 1794 and Mapp'd in the Year 1796. ___by Robert Ballment. [Original held by North Devon Record Office, Barnstaple]
- DuCo 1807a – Map of Sir John Davie's New Enclosure on the NE Quarter of the Forest of Dartmoor adjoining to Fernworthy. Survey by PWarren of Holne Chase. [Original held by Duchy of Cornwall Archive, Buckingham Gate, London] (Reproduced in Newman 2011, Fig 9.9).
- DuCo 1807b – Draft version of DuCo 1807a. [Original held by Duchy of Cornwall Archive, Buckingham Gate, London]
- DuCo 1825 – Map of the Estate called Fernworthy Higher and Lower Lowton Silkhouse and Assacombe in the Parish of Lidford Devon The Property of Sir Humphry P Davie Bart. Measured and Mapped by Robert and Hugh Ballment. [Original held by Duchy of Cornwall Archive, Buckingham Gate, London.]
- Tithe map and Apportionment of Lydford (Dartmoor Forest) 1839. [Held by Devon Record Office, Great Moor House, Exeter]
- OS 1886 – Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25-inch to one mile scale.

Abbreviations

DA – Dartmoor Archive

DPA – Dartmoor Preservation Association

DRO – Devon Record Office Exeter

DuCo – Duchy of Cornwall Record Office, London

NDRO – North Devon Record Office, Barnstaple

RCHME - Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

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APPENDIX

SITE GAZETTEER

HER No.	NGR (SX)	Item	SM No.
MDV6537	6604 8261	Assacombe Stone Row	1017981
MDV6534	6548 8411	Froggymead Stone Circle	1017984
MDV6737	6485 8379	Hut circle, Hemstone south settlement	1017986
MDV27723	6431 8461	Southill Leat, visible on LiDAR	
MDV6580	6631 8318	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6566	6595 8275	Hut circle, part of Assacombe Farm settlement	1017981
MDV6583	6626 8310	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6602	6601 8245	Hut circle, part of Assacombe Farm settlement	1017981
MDV6744	6496 8414	Hut circle, Hemstone north settlement (Tom's Hill)	1017985
MDV6538	6609 8264	Assacombe terminal cairn	1017981
MDV6540	6604 8261	Reave crossing a stone row	1017981
MDV6564	6591 8285	Hut circle, part of Assacombe Farm settlement	1017981
MDV6567	6590 8268	Hut circle, part of Assacombe Farm settlement	1017981
MDV6569	6601 8258	Hut Circle adjacent to Assacombe Stone Row	1017981
MDV6573	6593 8245	Hut circle, part of Assacombe Farm settlement	1017981
MDV6574	6623 8331	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6577	6624 8322	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6581	6629 8314	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6601	6651 8365	Lowton eastern settlement enclosure	1017990
MDV6644	6634 8288	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6698	6594 8392	Gatepost near lane down to Fernworthy	
MDV6718	6634 8306	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6731	6481 8379	Hemstone southern settlement	1017986
MDV6732	6477 8379	Hut circle, Hemstone south settlement	1017986
MDV6736	6481 8378	Hut circle, Hemstone south settlement	1017986
MDV6739	6494 8406	Rectangular structure, Hemstone south settlement	1017986
MDV6742	6494 8411	Hut circle, Hemstone north settlement (Tom's Hill)	1017985
MDV20916	6591 8343	Silk House farmstead	
MDV6555	6500 8407	Hut circle, Hemstone north settlement (Tom's Hill)	1017985
MDV6570	6603 8246	Hut circle, part of Assacombe Farm settlement	1017981
MDV6575	6634 8328	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6588	6658 8366	Hut circle, Lowton eastern settlement	1017990
MDV6735	6481 8377	Hut circle, Hemstone south settlement	1017986
MDV58436	6631 8314	Lowton Western settlement field system	1017983
MDV6589	6657 8364	Hut circle, Lowton eastern settlement	1017990
MDV6703	6591 8279	Assacombe Farmstead	1017981
MDV6730	6485 8384	Cairn, Hemstone south settlement	1017986
MDV6733	6478 8380	Hut circle, Hemstone south settlement	1017986
MDV6563	6553 8432	Froggymead Barrow E	1017984
MDV6565	6590 8284	Hut circle, part of Assacombe Farm settlement	1017981

MDV6578	6623 8325	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6582	6630 8316	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6585	6657 8371	Hut circle, Lowton eastern settlement	1017990
MDV6586	6657 8372	Hut circle, Lowton eastern settlement	1017990
MDV6599	6623 8342	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6729	6483 8383	Cairn, Hemstone south settlement	1017986
MDV6734	6480 8376	Hut circle, Hemstone south settlement	1017986
MDV6738	6484 8381	Hut circle, Hemstone south settlement	1017986
MDV6743	6496 8402	Hut circle, Hemstone north settlement (Tom's Hill)	1017985
MDV6568	6591 8263	Rectangular building (dwelling?) at Assacombe	
MDV6651	6645 8339	Higher Lowton Farm	
MDV6740	6494 8410	Hemstone north hut settlement.	1017985
MDV6741	6497 8409	Hut circle, Hemstone north settlement (Tom's Hill)	1017985
MDV14885	6548 8409	Froggymead Barrow A	1017984
MDV6560	6663 8407	Froggymead Barrow D	1017984
MDV14886	6547 8407	Froggymead Row a	
MDV6556	6549 8408	Froggymead Row c	1017984
MDV6562	6553 8427	Froggymead Row b	1017984
MDV14887	6548 8404	Froggymead Barrow C	1017984
MDV6719	6549 8409	Froggymead Barrow B	1017984
MDV6630	6607 8393	Fernworthy Farm (demolished ruin)	
MDV6685	6639 8295	Hut circle, Lowton western settlement	1017983
MDV6576	6549 8277	Lower Birch Tor and Vitifer Mine leat	
MDV104637	6545 8273	Higher Birch Tor and Vitifer Mine leat	
MDV104638	6654 8341	Rectangular structure at Higher Lowton	
MDV104639	6608 8393	Slotted gatepost amid ruins of Fernworthy Farm	
MDV104640	6526 8280	An earthwork bank constructed around 1800 which extends for 680m between SX 6497 8260 and 6555 8297	
MDV104641	6594 8231	A dry leat which once diverted water to Assacombe Farm	
MDV104642	6600 8386	A dry leat which once diverted water to Fernworthy Farm	
MDV29138	6490 8482	An approximately 400m-long section of reave	
MDV68287	6534 8523	An approximately 145m-long section of reave	
MDV104643	6474 8370	Hut circle, Hemstone south settlement.	
MDV104748	6573 8191	Boundary stone with letter D inscribed	