TEST-PITTING ON BRADWELL MOOR, 1991

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During 1992, Severn Trent Water constructed a pipeline from Bamford to Buxton, crossing the Peak District, and affording an opportunity for archaeological fieldwork to be conducted at various locations along the route. The results achieved on some of these sites have been described in previous volumes of this *Journal*, and others will follow in due course. In some cases, the fieldwork involved full-scale excavation of the threatened portion of a known monument, undertaken in advance of the construction-works (e.g. Guilbert and Challis 1993). In others, prior investigation was limited to evaluations by various forms of survey and excavation, with a view to larger-scale excavation should the results prove auspicious, or alternatively to be followed by a watching-brief during stripping of the easement preparatory to pipeline-construction (e.g. Guilbert *et al.* 1995). In yet others, a watching-brief alone produced valuable results regarding artefact-distributions (e.g. Guilbert and Garton 1995). The present note deals with another example of the second of these approaches, undertaken in spring 1991, and forming part of the same overall project. This comprised an evaluation of the highest point along the course of the pipeline, where a break-pressure reservoir was to be constructed on the summit of a nameless eminence rising to over 450m O.D., and situated at SK 140796, on the southern edge of Bradwell Moor, a relatively high tract of undulating limestone plateau, overlooking Tideswell Moor to the south (though the site of this evaluation actually falls within the civil parish of Tideswell). Intuitively, such a hilltop in the White Peak seemed a likely candidate for evidence of prehistoric activity, and test-pitting was considered to be the most appropriate and economical method of examining this potential.

At the time of the fieldwork, the exact position of the reservoir and the extent of related ground-disturbance (arising both from the installation of pipelines to carry water to and from the reservoir and from temporary use of an adjacent storage-compound) remained to be determined; but the reasonable coincidence between the areas that were eventually so disturbed and the distribution of the test-pits will be evident from Fig. 1. Thirty test-pits (in the archive, numbered BMR/01–30, in order of opening), each 1m square, were set out as close as possible to the intersections of a 20m grid, with due allowance for superficially obvious, localized disturbances. Each test-pit was excavated in thin spits, entirely by hand, though with a less-rigorous methodology than some opened since (Guilbert *et al.* 1997, 49). All lumps of soil were broken in the search for artefacts, but, in the interests of economy, sieving was not undertaken systematically. However, immediately any suspected artefact of stone was recovered from a given test-pit, the remainder of the soil excavated from that pit was passed through a 6mm mesh; this applied in thirteen cases, though in nine of these the supposed artefacts were subsequently adjudged to be natural fragments of chert. In all test-pits, a humic topsoil, varying from 0.10m to 0.26m in thickness and presumed partly created by ploughing (though perhaps not ploughed for some time), overlay a silt/clay subsoil, variably laden

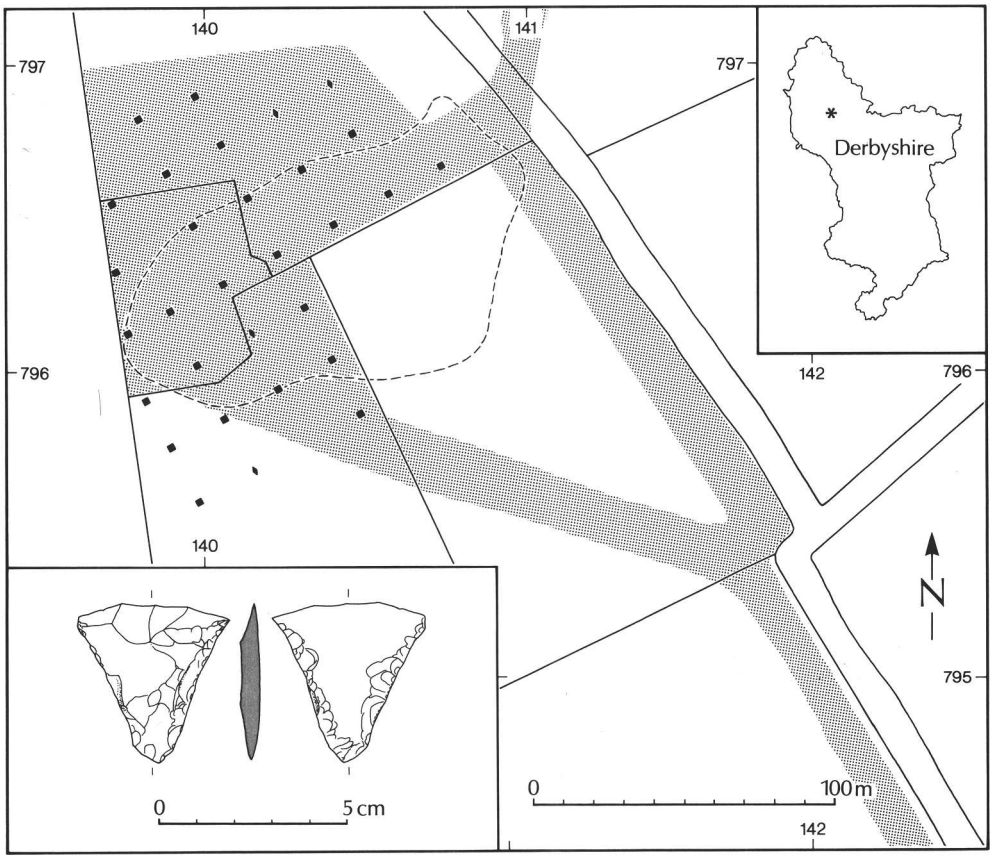

Fig. 1: Bradwell Moor: location of 30 test-pits excavated in 1991, represented by squares (not to scale), except that a lozenge marks each of the four that yielded a lithic artefact; stone walls are unbroken lines (showing their pattern as rebuilt and repaired following construction of the reservoir in 1992); the shaded area suffered disturbance during the construction-works; the 450m O.D. contour-line is broken; the National Grid is numbered around the border; scale 1:2500. The flint arrowhead, inset at bottom left (scale 1:2), came from the north-easternmost test-pit. An asterisk marks the site on the map inset at top right.

with fragments of chert; and this formed a layer of variable thickness over the limestone/chert bedrock. Each test-pit was excavated down to the surface of bedrock or to at least 0.05m depth (some up to 0.20m) into subsoil. No archaeological features or deposits were recorded below the topsoil in any test-pit, and only four pieces of stone were confirmed as having been worked (we are grateful to D. Garton for examining these as well as the putative artefacts of stone, and for providing the identifications included in the following paragraph).

The most notable lithic artefact is a fine, chisel arrowhead made from brown/grey, translucent flint (Fig. 1, inset), typologically attributable to the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age (Green 1980, 100, 111–14); this could as easily have been an incidental loss during hunting over the moor some 4000 years ago as evidence of contemporary

settlement on this site. The others are a core-rejuvenation flake and a fragment of a small blade, both of flint like that of the arrowhead, plus a spall of dark-grey chert; none of these is intrinsically datable. These four items were scattered among the test-pits (Fig. 1), and all came from topsoil; as did the only other artefacts recovered, these being odd pieces of clinker, presumed to be a residue of material used in dressing the fields since Post-Medieval enclosure of the moor (cf. Farey 1813, 408–45).

Subsequent test-pitting in the White Peak, at Slipper Low Farm towards the southern margin of the limestone (Garton and Kennett 1996) and Bradwellmoor Barn towards its northern margin (Guilbert *et al.* 1997), have shown that this approach can be instructive when applied to sites of prehistoric activity in this landscape, either as a method of preliminary investigation or as a means of gathering information which, in its own right, can contribute to an appreciation of wider settlement-patterns. Although intended primarily for the former purpose, the test-pits opened speculatively on Bradwell Moor in 1991 can claim only to have made a negative contribution to the latter objective, for their meagre haul of artefacts cannot be regarded as adequate evidence of more than a casual prehistoric presence on this hilltop, though obviously not entirely ruling out the possibility of some more settled usage. The windswept situation of this set of test-pits, when compared with that of the more-productive set excavated in 1995 'in the lee of a localized declivity', at around 350m O.D., near Bradwellmoor Barn (some 2.4km to the north-east of the site described in this report), may imply that it is moderately sheltered spots within the plateau that offer the best chance of locating evidence for prehistoric activity. This conclusion may seem obvious enough, but it will remain conjectural until confirmed by the excavation of many more sets of test-pits in a variety of topographical locations across the White Peak; and it is to be hoped that all opportunities to put it to the test by this technique will be grasped. In the present case, it would have been unreasonable to propose that further archaeological investigation should be conducted, and further costs thus incurred, in anticipation of the construction-works; and it need only be added that a watching-brief, maintained during the ensuing earth-moving stages of those works, produced no more artefacts.

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