

Pen Hill, Mendip
Archaeological Watching Brief
NGR ST 56342 48661



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Abstract

Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned to monitor groundworks associated with the replacement of security fencing at Pen Hill telecommunications station near Wells in Somerset. The transmitter mast is held in place by cables linked to six anchor points set into the hillside. One of the anchor points is located within metres of Pen Hill Long Barrow and Round Barrow, both are listed as a Scheduled Monument, Number 1020018. A cairn is also listed within this schedule, though situated approximately 140m north-east of the long and round barrows, and away from the location of any of the mast anchor points.

As the project is classed as essential infrastructure, it was not carried out in accordance with a planning condition, and scheduled monument consent was not required, but it was considered appropriate to have the work to replace the fence monitored, under the supervision of an archaeologist, as a precaution.

Limited groundworks were necessary, to excavate 15 post holes for the construction of the new fence around the rectangular concrete base of the anchor point.

A single deposit consisting, of a sterile orange brown silt containing frequent pieces of angular, stone was recorded, in each of the post holes. No deposits of archaeological interest were recorded and no artefacts were retrieved during the works.

The archaeological monitoring took place on the 13th and 14th of June 2017 by the author of this report, Rachel Heaton, of Avon Archaeology Limited.



Acknowledgements

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Notes

Whereas Avon Archaeology Limited has taken all care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

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Abbreviations

AAL	Avon Archaeology Limited
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum
HER	Historic Environment Record
NGR	National Grid Reference
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation



1 Introduction

Avon Archaeology Limited were commissioned by Emily Bowcroft of Chalcraft Construction Ltd on behalf of Arqiva (Telecommunications Company) to carry out an archaeological watching brief at Pen Hill, where fencing around the anchor points of the telecommunications mast needed replacing.

An archaeologist was required to monitor the ground works at one of the anchor points, due to its location next to Pen Hill Long Barrow and Round Barrow.

The work was classed as 'essential infrastructure' and the request for archaeological monitoring did not arise as a result of a planning condition, and did not require scheduled monument consent as would be usual at such a site. However, it was considered expedient to monitor the groundworks for archaeological features and artefacts as a matter of precaution due to the sensitivity of the location.

2 Site Location, Topography and Geology

Pen Hill forms part of the Mendip Hills Plateau in Somerset, and it is located approximately 2 miles from the city of Wells. The name 'Pen' is said to be Celtic in origin, meaning Hill or Tor.

The hill is home to the Aqiva Transmitter Station which was built in 1967. The mast is located at the crest of the hill and currently measures 281m in height. Originally the mast was over 300m tall, but was reduced in height when the analogue signal was replaced with digital technology after 2010. The mast remains visible on the horizon, from many miles away.

The top of the hill measures 305m above sea level and is marked by an Ordnance Survey Trig Point.



Geologically, bedrock consists of sandstone of the Portishead Formation, a sedimentary rock formed approximately 359 to 375 million years ago in the Devonian Period, when the local environment was dominated by rivers (BGS).

3 Archaeological Background

Pen Hill is important archaeologically as it is the location of three funerary monuments: a long barrow dating from the early Neolithic period; a round barrow of late Neolithic – Bronze age date and a cairn of Bronze Age date. All three are located below the south west facing slopes of the hill (**Figure 2**).

The long barrow is located 200m downslope of the crest of the hill, and it is aligned east-west. The barrow takes the form of a linear earthen mound, 44m in length with an average width of 13m and a height of 2m. The barrow was originally flanked by side ditches: that on the northern side is just about visible, but on the south side the ditch has disappeared through a combination of erosion, and because the platform anchoring the telecommunications mast sits directly over it. The smaller round barrow is located at the east end of the long barrow. It is roughly circular, as the name would suggest, with a diameter of 14m, and height of 1.5m. The cairn is separate from the two barrows, located approximately 140m to the north-east.

The barrows and cairn were first scheduled in 1929 and are currently listed under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, entry number 1020018.

4 Aims and Methodology

The watching brief at Pen Hill was required to monitor the excavation of post holes around the mast anchor-point that is situated next to the long barrow and round barrow, so that any archaeological deposits or finds that may be disturbed could be recorded and preserved accordingly.

The work was carried out by a team employed by the principle contractor, Chalcroft Construction Ltd; minimal grading was carried out using a mini digger fitted with a



toothless bucket, while post holes were excavated by the use of a mini digger fitted with a corkscrew auger, as well as hand tools to complete the process.

All the information regarding the ground works was recorded in field documents, produced and compiled by Avon Archaeology Limited, in addition to a detailed photographic survey and technical drawings, where necessary.

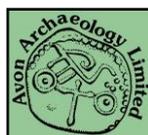
5 The Monitoring

As mentioned above, archaeological monitoring was required as a precautionary measure to observe and record the ground works associated with the replacement of a fence, around one of the mast anchor points at Pen Hill. The location was archaeologically sensitive; next to the Neolithic long barrow, and partially overlaying the southern ditch of the mound.

The anchor point consists of a solid concrete block measuring approximately 12m by 8m set onto a flattish platform, on the side of the hill (**Plates 5, 6 & 7**). The existing wooden fence was removed, simply by pushing it over with a mini digger. The fence surrounded the concrete base, leaving a gap of 0.5m. Vegetation, and a minimal 0.05m - 0.07m thick scrape of topsoil was removed using a grading bucket, to a width of 1m around the concrete base.

15 post holes located 1m from the concrete base at approximately 3m intervals. Each hole measured 0.3m diameter and were all excavated using a mechanical auger and finished with hand tools, to a depth of between 0.5m-0.7m (**Plates 1, 2 & 4**)

A single context was recorded during the monitoring, and was exposed as the topsoil was stripped back and was consistent as up-cast from each excavated post hole. It consisted of an amorphous, sterile deposit consisting of small pieces of angular stone (sandstone) within an orange brown silt matrix (**Plates 2 & 3**). No inclusions were noted, and no artefacts of any description were recovered.



6 Conclusions

Limited groundworks were necessary, to excavate the 15 post holes required for the construction of the new security fence around the rectangular, concrete base of the anchor point, located next to the Pen Hill Long Barrow.

A single deposit was recorded during the field work. It was a consistent, sterile deposit, containing frequent angular pieces of stone, within an orange brown silt matrix. No variations were seen from the surface to the base of each post hole. The possibility of noticing and identifying a change, especially if slight, was restricted by the conditions of excavation; each post hole had a diameter of only 0.3m, where viewing was limited to the top 0.2m-0.3m; in addition the auger churned the earth.

The mast anchor point is positioned just over 3m (at its closest point) from the downward slope of the southern side of the long barrow, directly over the location of the southern ditch. Both flanking ditches have become infilled as the barrow has gradually succumbed to the process of erosion, the southern ditch more so than the northern ditch which is just visible.

The concrete block, however, is set onto a platform of almost level ground, ground which would otherwise be sloping more steeply, suggesting that it is man-made, specifically for the purpose of building the anchor point.

It is therefore likely that all the post holes were dug through modern redeposited material, laid out in the late 1960s when the mast was built. It is quite possible that some material which has eroded from the top and sides was included, but such deposits were indistinct.



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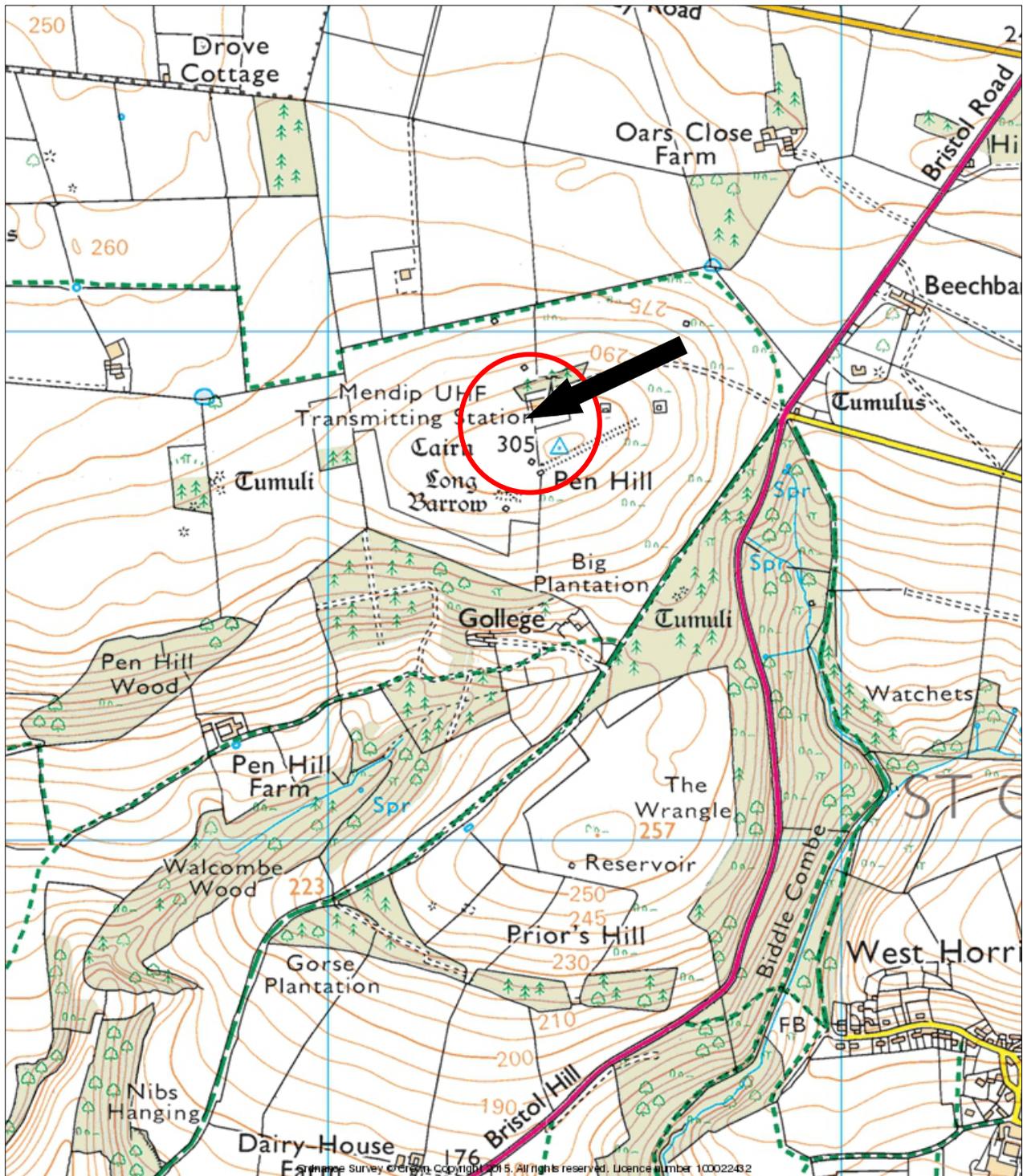
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Figure 1

Location of the Study Area



No set scale



Figure 2

Site Location Plan with Boundary of the Study Area

