

NATURE RESERVES & WORLD WAR TWO ARCHAEOLOGY

June 29, 2012 Robin Standring Buildings, Community Archaeology, Conservation, Day of Archaeology 2012, Environmental Archaeology, Historical Archaeology, Military, Post Medieval Aaron, Boyton, Britain, Dudley, east coast, Firing range, Hollesley, [http](http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/m/minsmere/archaeology.aspx), Military, Ministry of Defence, Minsmere RSPB reserve, nature conservation, Northern Ireland, pillbox, pulley systems, Reg, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, RSPB, Suffolk, United Kingdom, World War Two

My job involves visiting and advising on management of archaeological sites for the UK's largest wildlife charity, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). We manage land across Britain from Shetland to Cornwall, Suffolk to Ceredigion and also throughout Northern Ireland. I get to see an amazing variety of sites from shell middens to hillforts to 19th century timber storage ponds – thousands of sites including 200 which are Scheduled (legally protected). Many of the best preserved archaeological sites can be found in wild places because this land has not been subject to intensive agriculture or commercial development. In particular we have hundreds of World War Two sites and I'd stick my neck out and say we must have one of the largest and best preserved collections of any land owner (with exception of the Ministry of Defence!).

The military used many wild places for training, storage, firing/bombing ranges or fortified them against invasion. Heathland and coastal wetland were particularly heavily used because they were out of the way spots where they could conduct live firing. The military flooded areas as a form of invasion defence, leading wildlife to recolonise in the 1940s – so conservationists have a lot to thank the military for in Suffolk, see:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/m/minsmere/archaeology.aspx>

Today I visited two wetland sites in Suffolk which have well preserved buildings – RSPB Boyton Marsh and Hollesley Marsh in Suffolk. I was hosted by wardens Dudley, Reg and Aaron – a

happier crew you will not meet, and once you get to see where they work you can understand why. Nice sunny day in the countryside, quiet landscapes with grass bending in the wind and some beautiful concrete block houses and pillboxes! Boyton was an Armoured Fighting Vehicle (AFV) firing range where tanks trained in the run up to D-Day and a group of block houses survive which would have operated pulley systems to move targets for the tanks to fire at. It is hard to imagine the noise, and the tanks trundling past today. At Hollesely we have a beautiful pillbox, which was part of the coastal crust of defences that carpeted the east coast of England – and a nice place to stop on a walk, eat your sandwiches and look at the view. We discussed how we good interpret these sites for visitors and keep them in good order – luckily, by and large they were built to last! Returned home to see the kids for a Romans vs medieval knights battle.....historical accuracy is everything to us archaeologists.