Condolden Barrow, Tintagel, Cornwall

Erosion repair to Scheduled Monument





Historic Environment Projects

Cornwall Council

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The conservation work was undertaken by volunteers from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers; we would like to thank the volunteers for their hard work, as well as Tom David of BTCV Cornwall for arranging the volunteer teams and Mr P. Scott the landowner.

Within the Historic Environment Service, the archaeological work was carried out by Dick Cole, Ann Preston-Jones and James Gossip.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of the Historic Environment Service projects team and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

Freedom of Information Act

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Cover illustration

Volunteers at work on the barrow in April 2008.

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Abbreviations

CRO	Cornwall	County	Record	Office
	Comwan	COUNTY	recora	Office

EH English Heritage

HER Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Historic Environment Record

HE CC Historic Environment, Cornwall Council (formerly Historic Environment Service,

Cornwall County Council)

NGR National Grid Reference

OS Ordnance Survey

PRN Primary Record Number in Cornwall HER

RIC Royal Institution of Cornwall

1 Summary

This report describes work undertaken in 2008 to repair the extremely badly eroded barrow known as Condolden Barrow, which stands on a hill above Tintagel.

The barrow, which has a long history of erosion, was repaired by teams of volunteers from the British trust for Volunteers in April 2008, under the supervision of archaeologists from Historic Environment Projects. Preliminary recording indicated that erosion was affecting about one third of the barrow's surface. In the eroded areas, the ground had been lowered by as much as 0.4 metres; the erosion had cut through the turf and topsoil layers containing some large and small stones, and was eating into an underlying light yellow-brown clay layer. The barrow had originally been surrounded by a ditch – now covered by material eroded and spread from the mound; a wide depression still visible around the mound is probably not an original feature. Fist-sized quartz and stones discovered in the ditch silts when post-holes were dug for the new fence suggested that the barrow may originally have been covered by an outer stony layer.

Condolden Barrow is a Scheduled Monument (Cornwall number 299) and is recorded in Cornwall Council's Historic Environment Record (PRN 23077). It is at NGR SX 0905 8718.

2 Introduction

Condolden Barrow is an impressive Bronze Age round barrow, in an outstanding location on high ground overlooking Tintagel and the coast towards Boscastle (Fig. 1). Prior to the work described in this report, the monument had been eroded by stock for many years and as a result, much of the surface of the mound had extensive and deep erosion scars. The barrow had been assessed as at high risk of damage in English Heritage's recent *Scheduled Monuments at Risk* evaluations.

The purpose of the project was to restore the profile of the barrow and fence it off from the remainder of the field to prevent further erosion. Archaeological recording preceded the erosion repair. The work was carried out by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, under the overall archaeological supervision of the Historic Environment Service of Cornwall County Council (now Historic Environment, Cornwall Council).

Condolden Barrow is a Scheduled Monument (Cornwall number 299) and is recorded in Cornwall Council's Historic Environment Record (PRN 23077). It is at NGR SX 0905 8718.

3 Condolden Beacon

3.1 The monument

As Fig 1 shows, Condolden Barrow is in a spectacular location in Tintagel parish, on high ground overlooking the north Cornish coast. When surveyed by the Ordnance Survey in 1976, the barrow was described as 26 metres in diameter and 2.8 metres high. The vestigial remains of a wide shallow ditch, approximately 0.5 metres deep and 12 metres wide, were also noted.

3.2 History of the monument

No history of the monument is known before the 19th century. However, the surrounding area is recorded from as early as 1298 as *mora de Gondolvaen*, the 'moor of the holed stone': the name containing the Cornish place-name elements *goon* 'downland, unenclosed pasture' and *tol-ven, 'holed stone' or 'dolmen, cromlech, quoit' (Gover 1948, 74; Padel 1985, 108, 220). The only other place in Cornwall with a name including the element *tol-ven is Tolvan in Constantine parish in west Cornwall, where a large triangular stone with a hole through it, now in the back garden of Tolvan Cottage (Fig 6), is believed to have been originally associated with a nearby barrow, and may originally have formed part of a cist or potentially a chambered tomb associated with the barrow (HER 24548, 24549). For such a feature to have given its name to this area of former downland in Tintagel, it must have been substantial and notable. No remains are known now of any holed stone or tomb here but there must be a strong possibility that it was associated with the barrow – itself a dominating presence – as was the Tolvan in Constantine.

According to the Megalithic Portal website, legend claims this to be the final resting place of several people, amongst them Cador, a 6th century King of Cornwall and one of Arthur's knights, "Arthur's sword bearer at his coronation and a caretaker of Guinevere"; as well as Queen Isolde. This legend, however, is unsubstantiated by any other source known to the authors, so must be treated with caution, even though it seems likely that a monument as notable as Condolen Barrow would have attracted such stories. Further interesting stories relate to the fact that Condolden Barrow was used as an open-air meeting place by early Bible Christians in the area: a notable figure at the meetings being Abraham Bastard, a famed Cornish wrestler converted at Trebarwith by preacher Betsy Read in 1818 (Dyer 2005, 94).

Although they do not depict that barrow, early maps such as Gascoyne (1699) and Martyn (1748) show an old road to Tintagel coming over the down to Trenale and past Condolden

Barrow, a road that survives now only as a farm lane and footpath, but whose importance is emphasised by Dyer (2005, 15, 19, 45, 81). The barrow first appears on the first edition Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1809 (Fig 2), where it is named 'Cadon Barrow', its prominent appearance here perhaps linked to the fact that it was an Ordnance Survey triangulation point from an early date. The Tithe map of 1842 shows the area as enclosed (Fig 3), and the field containing the barrow as 'Condolden Down: partially arable' suggesting that enclosure of the downland was taking place at the time. Both the 1880 and 1907 maps (Figs 4 and 5) show the barrow with a triangle on top, indicating its use as a triangulation point, while the field about is rough pasture. According to the owner, Peter Scott, the field was finally improved and cultivated during World War II.

3.3 Condition of the monument

Condolden Barrow has a long history of damage and erosion. In 1879, Maclean (*History of Trigg Minor*) noted that attempts had been made to 'examine' it. In 1976, surveyors from the Ordnance Survey noted that the mound was badly damaged on the northern side and that the 'ditch' (but not the mound as a whole) was under plough. Stock erosion to the mound was first noted by the Field Monument Warden (FMW) in 1980, when management of the surrounding area changed from cultivation to intensive grazing, and the FMW's reports describe a rapid deterioration:

"A pathway up the south face has been trampled bare by cattle ...probably due to the proximity of a fence which has caused a bottleneck."

Only two years later, the situation had declined further:

"The condition is much worse. The side of the mound is denuded and there is bad erosion of a strip 13 metres long and up to within 4 ft of the top. The cattle have cut deep into the surface and the face is breaking away ...piled against the corner of the fence to about 2 ft depth ...I do not know how the damage can now easily be covered. Part of the exposed area is large and steep ...I am quite shocked by the rapid deterioration."

By 1983, one side had become:

"Quite bare and the denuded part is spreading around the other slopes ...although the rate of erosion has ... slowed down."

Despite this more optimistic view, things had worsened again by 1989:

"On the south, where the fence abuts the barrow, the barrow is bare and trampled. Bare tracks run west and east from this, around the barrow and considerable scarps have eroded here. A broad bare track runs up to the top of the barrow from the south and much of the top is bare also, with 0.2 metres of the foundation of the trig pillar exposed. Where there is grass, this is poached."

In 1992, the problematic fence was removed, leaving a line of nettles and a small lynchet to mark its former existence. However, the much hoped-for improvement to the condition of the barrow did not occur and by 1998, it was recorded that:

"The removal of the adjacent fence does not appear to have alleviated the problem at all. In addition the surface of the barrow is generally disturbed by poaching."

However, subsequent to this, a greater emphasis on sheep grazing does at least seem to have allowed the situation to stabilise, and in 2005, although the barrow was found to be severely eroded, with water puddled around the trig point, this was thought to be no worse than before.

"The problem is essentially that the sheep are attracted to the top of the mound. Despite recent wet weather, the grass over the rest of the field is not excessively damp or poached."

In 2007, the erosion suddenly increased again, precipitated by a change in farm regime from sheep back to cattle.

"...trig pillar now 18" [0.45 metres] above level of barrow with concrete foundation fully exposed ...fresh erosion on face on west ...yellow clay capping exposed over a large percentage of the mound ..."

For the condition of the barrow in 2007 and 2008, see Figs. 7 - 10.

3.4 Background to the present project

At this point in the story of Condolden Barrow's decline the on-going development of English Heritage's Scheduled Monuments at Risk initiative, in which the barrow was assessed as being at high risk of damage, highlighted the need for action, and the monument was placed on the Scheduled Monument Management programme's list of projects. This had been discussed in the past but always postponed as other priorities emerged. However this time, the farmer's agreement was sought and obtained, the needs of the site discussed with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and dates set for the work.

4 Conservation work

4.1 Erosion repair

The repair work was carried out by volunteers from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) in the first two weeks of April, with two 'Natural Break' sets of volunteers on site between the 4th to 10th April and 11th to 18th April 2008.

The eroded parts of the beacon were reconstructed with sandbags, which were filled with soil and packed closely together to provide a firm surface. Soil was then spread over the top of the bags in order to match the contours of the surrounding, un-eroded parts of the barrow. Grass seed was then scattered over this surface. See Figs 11 and 12.

4.2 Fence

A fence was erected at the foot of the barrow's mound, in order to prevent future erosion. It comprised sheep netting and two strands of barbed wire. The fence, which measured approximately 20 metres on each side, was positioned to have least visual impact and included a 5ft wide gate on the south side, to allow for continued visitor access to the barrow and occasional grazing. The six strainer post-holes were all hand-dug under archaeological supervision, the rest hammered in. See Fig. 13.

4.3 Aftercare

Following completion of the work, it was suggested to the farmer that stock should be kept off the mound for at least a year, in order to allow sufficient opportunity for the repair work to consolidate and the grass to become adequately established. See Fig. 14.

5 Archaeological recording

Archaeological recording was undertaken in order to provide a record of the barrow before the conservation work commenced, to record the conservation work and ensure that the barrow was not damaged in the process of carrying out the work

In addition, close liaison was maintained with the BTCV volunteers while work took place. This included visits at the outset to explain the significance of the monument and the need for

the management work; as well as visits while work was taking place to both record the work and to discuss progress with the volunteers.

5.1 Preliminary survey

A three-dimensional measured survey of the beacon was produced using a total station (EDM), which covered the full extent of the barrow, all eroded areas, hollows or scarps and the trig pillar (see Fig. 15). A description was also made of any layers and features visible in the eroded areas.

5.2 Photographic record

A series of photographs were taken of the barrow and all eroded areas before the work commenced, of the management work, and of the barrow once work had been completed. These included black and white archive photographs using a 35mm camera on fine grain archive quality film and supporting colour photographs taken with a digital camera.

5.3 Monitoring the management work

An archaeologist visited the site regularly during works while work to ensure that management work was proceeding according to agreed methods, to discuss and agree any necessary departures from the guidelines and specifications and record any significant stages in the work with notes and photographs

Six strainer post-holes were excavated for a fence around the base of the barrow mound. This work was carried out under archaeological supervision and the holes were monitored for stratigraphy or finds.

6 The findings

6.1 Condolden Barrow survey

The survey of the barrow demonstrated that the barrow is a circular feature roughly 27m in diameter (Fig 15). The main area of maximum erosion was on the southern side of the monument and stretched from one side of the barrow, almost to the opposing side - a distance of over 22m.

The main eroded area sloped down gently from the top of the mound, but included a number of surviving scarps of soil, the eroded downslopes of which were more severe. There were also three islands of material, within the eroded area, which were still vegetated.

At the very top of the mound (A), the dip down from the uneroded turf to the north varied between 0.1m and 0.5m. It comprised 0.1m of a dried topsoil layer over a mid brown soil containing a very large quantity of killas pieces.

There were three surviving scarps/grassed hummocks within the eroded area (B-D). The westernmost (B) of these was to the immediate south of the trig point and formed the edge of the platform around it. It was five metres long and the near-vertical downslope edge varied between 0.4m and 0.5m in dip. The top of this section showed a slight dried muddy crust of a top soil, 0.05m thick, which overlay a light yellowish brown soil containing almost 50% small killas pieces. This section also showed a number of larger stone pieces including quartz and killas in this deposit.

The central one of these three areas (C) included a patch of grass 5.25m by a maximum of 2.0m, which appeared to respect the former shape of the barrow. A scarp on the western side of this area was just over 5.0m long. It was 0.55m in height. The top 0.2m of this was a topsoil

deposit which appeared whitish brown due to being very dry. Below this, there was a light yellowish brown clayey deposit which contained a considerable amount of small killas pieces.

Immediately below area (C), on its eastern side, there was another scarp with a patch of vegetated material to its south. The vegetated mound was 1.65m by 1.5m, while the scarp was 0.6m high. The top 0.15m was a quite clayey light brown soil containing about 10% killas pieces, which overlay a similar deposit that was a little less clayey.

At the western end of this main eroded area, there was a quite deeply eroded pocket (E). On the interior, there was a pronounced dip of about 0.5m down to a gentler slope. The top layer was a quite soft, mid brown loamy soil containing a considerable amount of killas pieces which varied in depth between 0.25-0.4m. Beneath this there was a light yellowish brown clayey deposit which also contained a considerable amount of small killas pieces.

On the north west flank of the monument, there was a further eroded area (F), which measured just under 5.0m by 2.5m. On the interior, there was a pronounced dip of about 0.5m down to a more gentle slope. The top layer was 0.25m deep and comprised a quite soft, mid brown loamy soil containing a considerable amount of killas pieces. Beneath this there was a light yellowish brown clayey deposit which also contained small killas pieces.

It is clear that the erosion caused by the cattle has caused substantial damage to the core of the monument and the loss of the soily killas spreads of prehistoric date that were thrown up to create the monument.

6.2 The post-holes

In advance of this project, it was widely considered that a very slight depression around the actual barrow was evidence of a wide ditch. It was noted that the excavation of corner posts for the fencing would be in the area of this ditch and below-ground archaeological remains could be encountered.

In the excavation for the south western of these four post-holes, there was 0.24m of a medium brown topsoil containing numerous small killas pieces overlying undisturbed killas bedrock. In the other three holes, 0.28m of a similar mid brown topsoil, overlay undisturbed natural rock.

By contrast, the holes for the two gateposts, positioned right at the foot of the mound on the south side were excavated down 1.0m through soil and did not hit natural rock. In the western of the two holes, there was 0.1m of a mid brown topsoil which overlay 0.6m of a mottled mid brown deposit containing a very large amount of killas and quartz. Below this, there was a whitish-gray silty clay containing a number of fist-sized quartz pieces and a considerable amount of killas. Only the top 0.3m of this deposit was excavated. It was clear that the holes were excavated through ditch fill, with the lower whitish clay representing the silting up of the open ditch with the mottled deposit above representing the erosion of the actual barrow into the ditch. The presence of quartz pieces in the pits could imply that these stones once decorated the exterior of the barrow.

Similar material was found in the hole for the other gatepost, though there was a less obvious distinction between the topsoil and the main mottled deposit which was beneath it.

The findings from these six individual pits clearly demonstrate that the slight depression around the barrow was not evidence of an extremely wide ditch. It may alternatively represent the effects of past ploughing or stock erosion around the bottom of the mound. The actual ditch has been shown to have been less wide and positioned at the base of the barrow as evidenced by the excavation for the two holes for the gateposts on the south, erosion of the barrow having spread the mound out over the original site of the ditch.

7 The future

A management agreement for the future maintenance of the beacon was discussed with the landowner. The following conditions were suggested:

Year 1:

Keep the gate closed and do not graze the barrow at all.

Years 2 - 5:

Maintain a healthy grass cover on the monument.

- allow stock onto the barrow for short periods only when it requires grazing
- remove stock from the barrow as soon as there is any sign of poaching or erosion
- do not allow stock onto the barrow in the winter at all (from October to March)

Control weeds and burrowing animals.

Control scrub and sapling growth by cutting down to ground level leaving the roots in situ to avoid disturbing archaeological layers.

Obtain the prior consent of the Secretary of State for National Heritage for all works involving the breaking of the ground surface of the monument or the tipping on or flooding of it.

Monitor the fence throughout the period of this agreement to ensure that it is stock proof and report any problems to the Historic Environment Service.

At the time of the production of this report, no management plan has been agreed between English Heritage and the landowner.

8 Conclusion

The combined information from the survey and excavation of post holes has demonstrated that although very superficial in relation to the overall size of the barrow, erosion was affecting about one third of the barrow's surface. In the eroded areas, the ground had been lowered by as much as 0.4 metres, had cut through the turf and topsoil layers containing some large and small stones, and was eating into an underlying light yellow-brown clay layer. The barrow had originally been surrounded by a ditch – now covered by material eroded and spread from the mound; a wide depression still visible around the mound is probably not an original feature. Fist-sized quartz and stones discovered in the ditch silts suggested that the barrow may originally have been covered by an outer stony layer.

Unfortunately there have been problems with the fence and the gate has subsequently been left open, allowing stock onto the mound. Nonetheless, it is reassuring to know that the fresh erosion will be of the modern sacrificial layer and not of the original barrow material, first laid down perhaps 4000 years ago.

9 References

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9.3 Websites

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 $\underline{\text{http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/HAR-2010-regional-registers/sw-HAR-register-2010.pdf/}$

Megalithic Portal:

http://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=22301

10Project archive

The HES project number is 2008204

The project's documentary, photographic and drawn archive is housed at the offices of the Historic Environment Service, Cornwall County Council, Kennall Building, Old County Hall, Station Road, Truro, TR1 3AY. The contents of this archive are as listed below:

- 1. A project file containing site records and notes, project correspondence and administration.
- 2. Electronic drawings stored in the directory: R:\Historic Environment (CAD)\CAD Archive\Sites C\Condolden Barrow
- 3. Black and white photographs archived under the following index numbers: GBP2068
- 4. Digital photographs stored in the directory ..\HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT IMAGES\SITES.A-D\CONDOLDEN BEACON
- 5. This report held in digital form as: G:\Historic Environment (Documents)\HE Projects\Sites\Sites C\Condolden Beacon\Condolden Beacon report

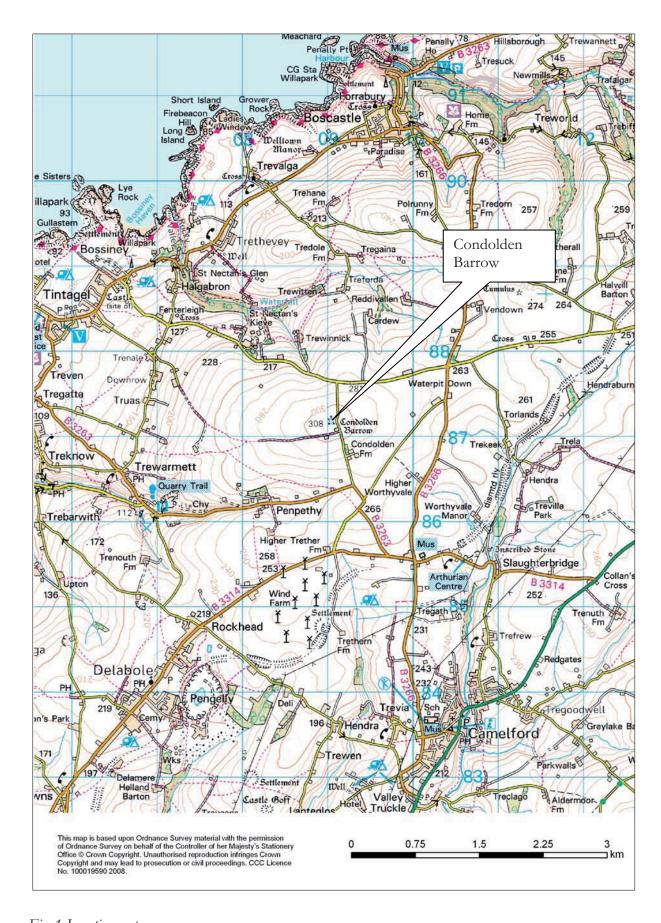


Fig. 1 Location map

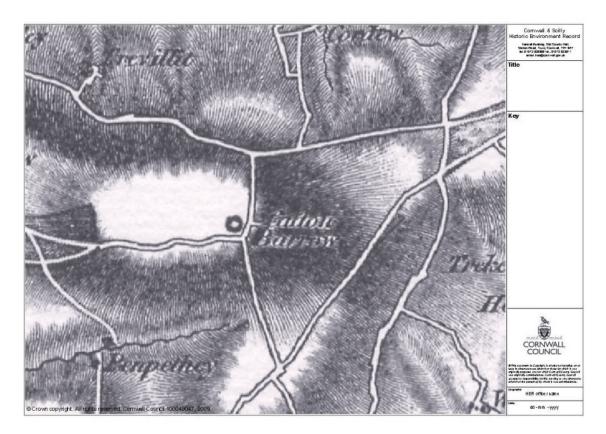


Fig. 2 Condolden Barrow on the 1809 Ordnance Survey Map

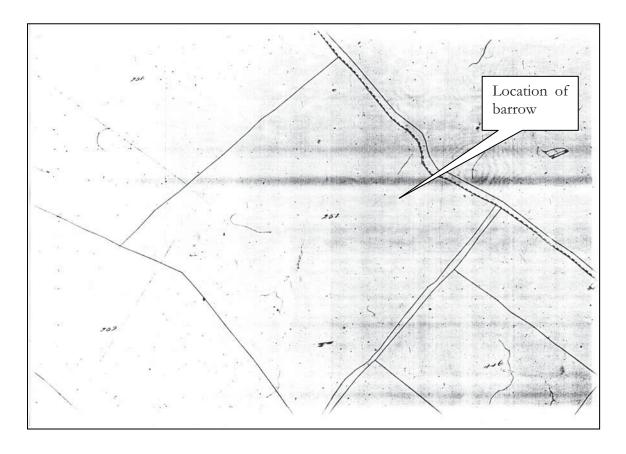


Fig. 3 The setting of Condolden Barrow in 1842, as shown on the Tithe Map

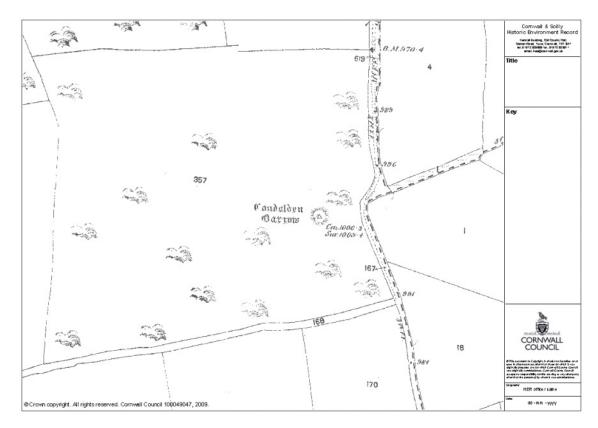


Fig 4. Condolden Barrow, 1880 OS

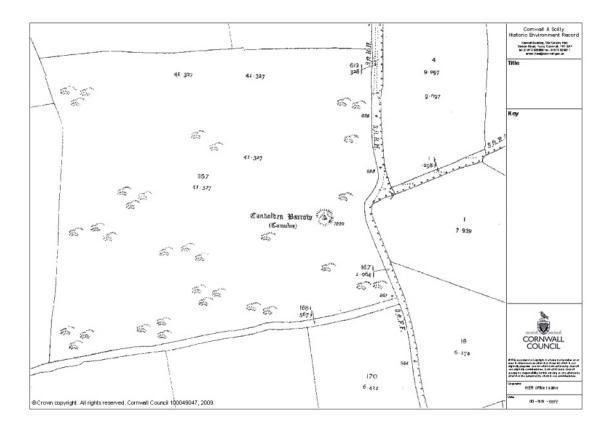


Fig. 5 Condolden Barrow, 1907 OS

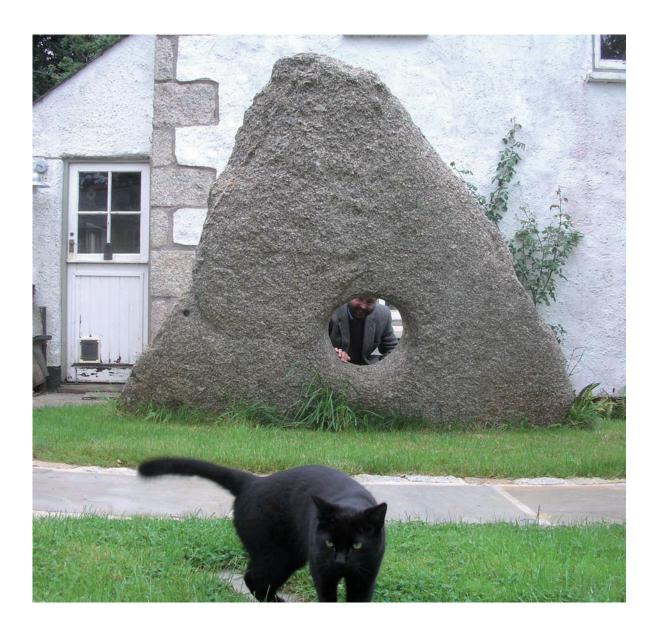


Fig. 6 The Tolvan in Constantine

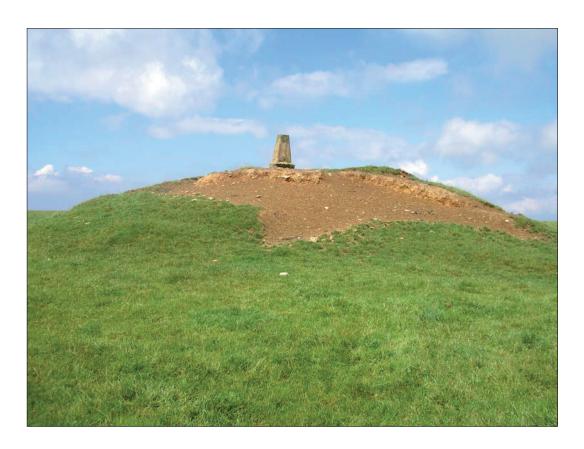


Fig. 7 Condolden Barrow photographed from the south in 2007



Fig. 8 Erosion around the trig pillar on the top of Condolden Barrow in 2007.



Fig. 9 Condolden Barrow photographed from the south east in April 2008



Fig. 10 Condolden Barrow photographed from the east in April 2008



Fig. 11 Volunteers at work on Condolden Barrow in April 2008



Fig. 12 Volunteers at work on Condolden Barrow in April 2008



Fig. 13 Condolden Barrow immediately following conservation works in April 2008.



Fig. 14 Condolden Barrow photographed from the south west in October 2008.

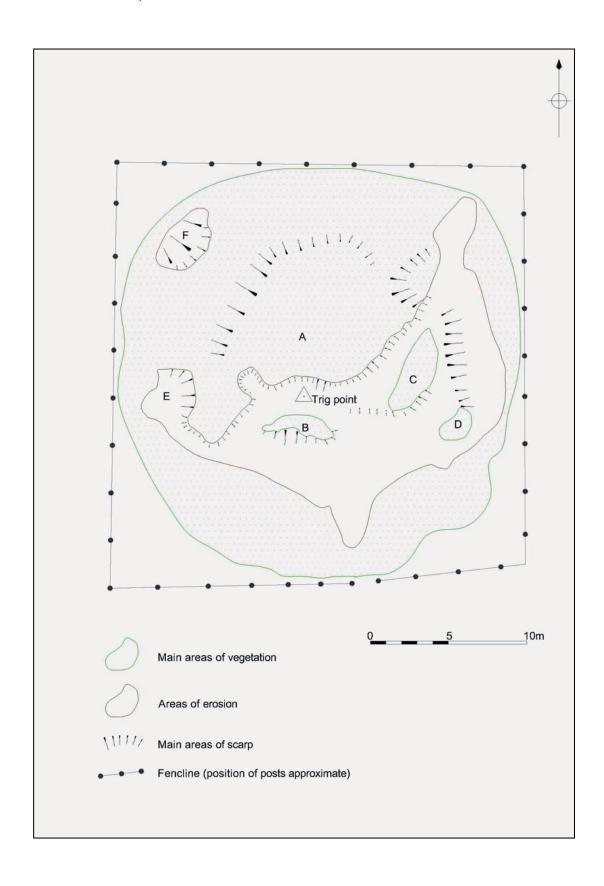


Fig 15CC HE survey of Condolden Barrow