

# Nance Round, Illogan, Cornwall

## Scrub Clearance



**Historic Environment Service (Projects)**

Cornwall County Council



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## **Scrub clearance**

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Within the Historic Environment Service, the report was commented on by Ann Preston Jones and Peter Rose.

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.

## **Cover illustration**

Scrub clearance in 2006.

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## Abbreviations

EH	English Heritage
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
HER	Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Historic Environment Record
HES	Historic Environment Service, Cornwall County Council
NGR	National Grid Reference
PRN	Primary Record Number in Cornwall HER
OS	Ordnance Survey

# 1 Introduction

Nance Round (NGR SW 664 450) is an Iron Age or Romano-British enclosure located on a prominent north-facing spur, overlooking the steep-sided valley leading down to the harbour at Portreath (Fig. 1).

The interior of the Round has been regularly ploughed, as has the land immediately around the ramparts and ditches of the monument. The edges of the ramparts and ditches have been damaged, and for the most part had been cloaked in scrub vegetation for a considerable time. Considerable damage has also been done by the burrowing of badgers and other animals.

Following the introduction of a Management Agreement with English Heritage, work to improve the condition of the monument commenced in 2003, with the Historic Environment Service assisting the new owners with the implementation of a programme of scrub clearance.

This report documents the scrub clearance works carried out in November 2003, November 2004, February-April 2005, March 2006 and November 2006.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 The monument

Nance Round is a multi-vallate Iron Age or Romano-British enclosure, over two acres in extent. It is protected as a Scheduled Monument (Cornwall 1036) and is recorded within the Historic Environment Record (PRN 18022). Like the local settlement Nance Farm, first recorded in 1324, and Nance Wood to the north, the Round incorporates the Cornish place-name element **nans** 'valley' (Padel 1985, 170-1).

To the south, east and west, it is surrounded by arable land. To the north, it is flanked by Nance Wood, a Site of Special Scientific Interest described by English Nature as a "narrow strip of semi-natural woodland on steep, north facing slopes ... largely composed of almost pure sessile oak which is thought to have been last actively coppiced some 40-60 years ago (English Nature 2003, 1).

Writing in 1970, Michael Tangye described Nance Round as the 'best example' of a round in the parish of Illogan (Fig. 4). He added;

"Various MMS sources of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries show that the field in which it lies was called Goon-an-Geare 'downland of the fort,' later spellings are Gullen Gear, followed by Golden Gear, and the present name is merely, 'The Rounds.' Local tradition claims this earthwork as 'Roman,' and tells of a great battle having been fought there.

"The earthwork is circular, and bivallate, having two clear ditches. It shows traces of having formerly possessed a feature rare in west Cornwall, a dependent enclosure. This can be discerned at the south-east side as a slight change in ground level, most pronounced after the cutting of corn. When under plough, the orange clay soil of the presumed foundations of the enclosure bank contrasts sharply with the soil all around it. A cattle track through the defences, where this dependent feature adjoins the earthwork proper, might indicate the original entrance" (Tangye 1980, 47).

The monument is indeed impressive, with banks up to 1.2 m high, and ditches up to 0.6m deep. Although parts of two ramparts are visible (to the south-west and north-west), air

photos (see Figs. 6, 7 and 8) indicate a far more complex monument, with up to three ramparts. Examination of air photographs suggest a possible annexe to the south-east (as noted above), which may consist of two smaller enclosures, as well as a third enclosure bank to the south-west (Fig. 5).

## **2.2 History of management**

Located within Anciently Enclosed Land (ie. land farmed from medieval times or before) (Cornwall County Council 1996), there is a history of intensive cultivation in and around Nance Round. It was assessed as arable for the purpose of the 1840 Tithe Map. When Scheduled in 1976, the ground both inside and outside the Round was cultivated, with only the banks and part of the ditches left unploughed, and covered in trees and scrub. This was still the case until recently and Figs 6 and 7 show the extent of cultivated ground in 1989 and 1992.

When assessed in 2000, it was clear that the interior of Nance Round had not been grazed for a number of years, with the result that the grass was becoming tussocky and rough. However, the ground immediately around the monument was still being ploughed. It was noted that the ramparts and associated ditches were covered by varied mix of vegetation, though broadly there were three forms of vegetation cover:

- Bracken and bramble, containing the occasional small thorn or section of gorse. This was mainly to be found to the east, north-east and west.
- Scrub, comprising mainly blackthorn and gorse. This was particularly dense to the south-east, while there were further areas of scrub to the north (which contains a greater amount of bracken and bramble) and the north-east.
- Areas of small, wind-sculpted oaks with occasionally other trees such as holly. This is to be found between the northern edge of the monument and Nance Wood; and along the south-west part of the Round, where it grew over the best-preserved section of banks and associated ditches. The small trees form a canopy and the ground beneath them was quite open, with limited cover of bramble. The external edge of this woodland included some scrub which was particularly dense, while on the interior of the oaks there was a thin coverage of bracken and brambles.

It is also clear that, due to the lack of management or grazing, the interior was gradually being invaded by bramble, bracken and scrub. There was clear evidence of badger activity around the monument which had caused considerable below-ground damage from burrowing, although none of the holes appeared to be active.

Inspection of the edges of the ramparts also demonstrated that past farmers had ploughed right up to the edge of the earthworks, both on the inside and the outside. The area containing the cropmarks representing part of the ramparts, the outwork and associated field system had also been ploughed on a regular basis.

## **2.3 Background to the present project**

In 2000, Mr and Mrs Alway took over Nance Farm. Interested in conservation and history, while being keen to farm less intensively, they approached the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) for advice and help in preparing an application for Countryside Stewardship. The application, submitted in 2002, included provision for taking the round and a surrounding area out of cultivation. In the event, the Always declined the offer of an agreement and it was at this point that the English Heritage (EH) Field Monument Warden visited Nance Farm to explore whether proposals for the better



management of the Round could be taken forward by means of an English Heritage Management Agreement (MA).

The Always proved sympathetic to the idea of such an agreement, which was quickly negotiated and concluded. The present Management Agreement will run until 2008 and included provision for:

- Fencing off the Round and associated cropmark features from the surrounding arable field.
- An end to ploughing of the monument and newly fenced area
- Controlled grazing of this newly-created enclosure.

When the agreement was signed, it was agreed that there was a need for some clearance of scrub which had gradually encroached on the ramparts, through a prolonged lack of grazing.

### **3 Management works**

The scrub clearance was carried out by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, under the supervision of archaeologists from HES. A large number of BTCV teams undertook separate visits to the site to carry out the works.

The overall objectives of the project were identified as follows:

- To open up the area between the Round and the nearby boundary with Nance Wood, so that it would be possible to walk around the entire circumference of the monument and so that the northern edge of the field could be securely fenced.
- To expose the profile of banks and ditches.

#### **3.1 November 2003**

The first phase of scrub clearance was carried out over two days by a mid-week volunteer group of BTCV. On this occasion, vegetation was cleared along the existing boundary to the north of Nance Round. The worst of the vegetation was cleared with a chainsaw and this included scrub as well as overhanging branches from Nance Wood. The cleared area was about 2.0m wide and many of the loppings were thrown into Nance Wood to rot down, while a considerable amount of wood was left dumped to the north-east and north-west of the Round.

Following this work, Mr Alway fenced the Round and its immediate area from the remainder of the field so that controlled grazing could be re-introduced on the monument (Figs. 8 and 9). The fence along the inner side of the boundary with Nance Wood was erected during the winter months of 2004-2005.

#### **3.2 November 2004**

The second phase of vegetation clearance was undertaken by a nine-strong, all-female, team of volunteers though BTCV's 'natural break' holiday scheme. The work concentrated on the south-west corner of the monument, where an area of bracken and extremely dense thorn and gorse were removed (Figs. 10 and 13). The work was carried out by hand, using bow saws, hooks and loppers.

The scrub was cut as close to ground level as possible, with clearance limited to blackthorn and gorse. All the cuttings from this period of work were burnt on a site, a short distance away from the monument.

### **3.3 February-April 2005**

The mid-week volunteer group of BTCV revisited the site during two days in February 2005. By this time, a large flock of sheep had been introduced into the fenced area to graze the monument, which had had a positive effect in reducing the extent of the less dense vegetation.

A chainsaw was used to clear vegetation along the north-east corner of the main rampart, with the vegetation varying from areas of bracken to thicker concentrations of thorn and gorse. Thorn and gorse to the south of the area of small oaks, positioned between the Round and Nance Wood, were also removed. The oaks were retained, though some thinning of the vegetation in this area was undertaken (Fig. 13). A large amount of loppings were initially left in place which, added to the existing heaps left from the first intervention in November 2003, meant there was a considerable amount of material to dispose of.

A team from BTCV subsequently went to the site in the following month to burn up as much of the existing piles as possible. Interested children from Pool School also visited the site on two separate occasions in March and April, in order to assist with the burning of the loppings.

### **3.4 March 2006**

Through the 2005-2007 Scheduled Monument Management Programme, a second 'natural break' holiday scheme was advertised. However, the take-up was very limited and this had to be shelved.

As an alternative to this, two further visits from BTCV's mid-week team were arranged in March 2006. This concentrated on the north-western part of the monument (Fig. 13). Once again, the larger trees were cut down with a chainsaw while the areas of less substantial thorn were removed with hand tools. At this point, various stumps of thorn trees cut down during the most recent works, but also in previous years, were treated with herbicide to prevent re-growth. All loppings were burnt, with assistance from the farmer who rounded up the bonfires in the evening after the volunteers had left.

### **3.5 November 2006**

To complete the scrub clearance, there were two final visits from BTCV's mid-week team, which took place in the first week of November 2006. The works concentrated on the south-western part of the monument, around the elongated stretch of small oaks and holly which were left in place. Both chainsaws and hand tools were used to remove the thorn and gorse, with fresh stumps treated with herbicide. The loppings were again successfully burnt with help from the farmer (Figs. 11-13).

## **4 Recommendations for future work**

The clearance of scrub from around Nance Wood took a considerable amount of work, through four separate years. Inspection of the areas cleared in 2004 demonstrate that, unsurprisingly, much of the thorn is starting to grow back and it is vital that a proactive management regime is established to stop such species re-establishing themselves in the coming months and years.

#### **4.1 Maintenance of cleared areas**

Controlled grazing of the monument, as identified in the existing management plan, should be continued. It is also recommended that fresh growth in the cleared areas is reduced in height annually with a flail mower or equivalent method. Spraying to control the bracken may also prove advisable.

#### **4.2 Animal burrowing**

Areas of burrowing may be noted, particularly on the south-western corner of the monument. It is recommended that a natural environment professional should assess the nature of animal activity in and around the Round. Areas of burrowing, if no longer active, could perhaps be remodelled.

#### **4.3 Removal of dumped stone**

There are also some small dumps of stone on the edge of the monument, which could be removed to enhance the setting of Nance Round.

#### **4.4 English Heritage Management Agreement**

It is also important that a new Management Agreement is arranged through English Heritage in 2008, in order to take forward the sensitive management of the monument into the future.

## **5 References**

### **5.1 Primary sources**

Ordnance Survey, c1813. *1 Inch Map*

Ordnance Survey, c1880. *25 Inch Map* First Edition

Ordnance Survey, c1907. *25 Inch Map* Second Edition

Ordnance Survey, 2003. *LandLine Digital Mapping*

Tithe Map and Apportionment, 1840. *Parish of Illogan* (microfiche copy at HES)

### **5.2 Publications**

Cornwall County Council, 1996. *Cornwall Landscape Assessment 1994*. HES / Landscape Design Associates, Cornwall County Council.

English Nature, 2003. *Site Management Statement – Nance Wood*

Padel, O. J., 1985. *Cornish Place-name Elements*, E.P.N.S., Nottingham

Tangye, M., 1980. Earthworks in the Parish of Illogan, *Cornish Archaeology*, **10**

## 6 Project archive

HES project numbers are **2004006; 2005048**.

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. Black and white photographs archived under the following index numbers: **GBP 1725**.
3. Colour slides archived under the following index numbers: **GCS 34560-34595**
4. Digital photographs stored in the directory `..\Images\Sites M-P/Nance Wood`
5. This report held in digital form as: `G:\CAU\DOCUMENT\THE PROJECTS\SITES\SITES N\NANCE, ILLOGAN\SCRUB CLEARANCE REPORT.DOC`

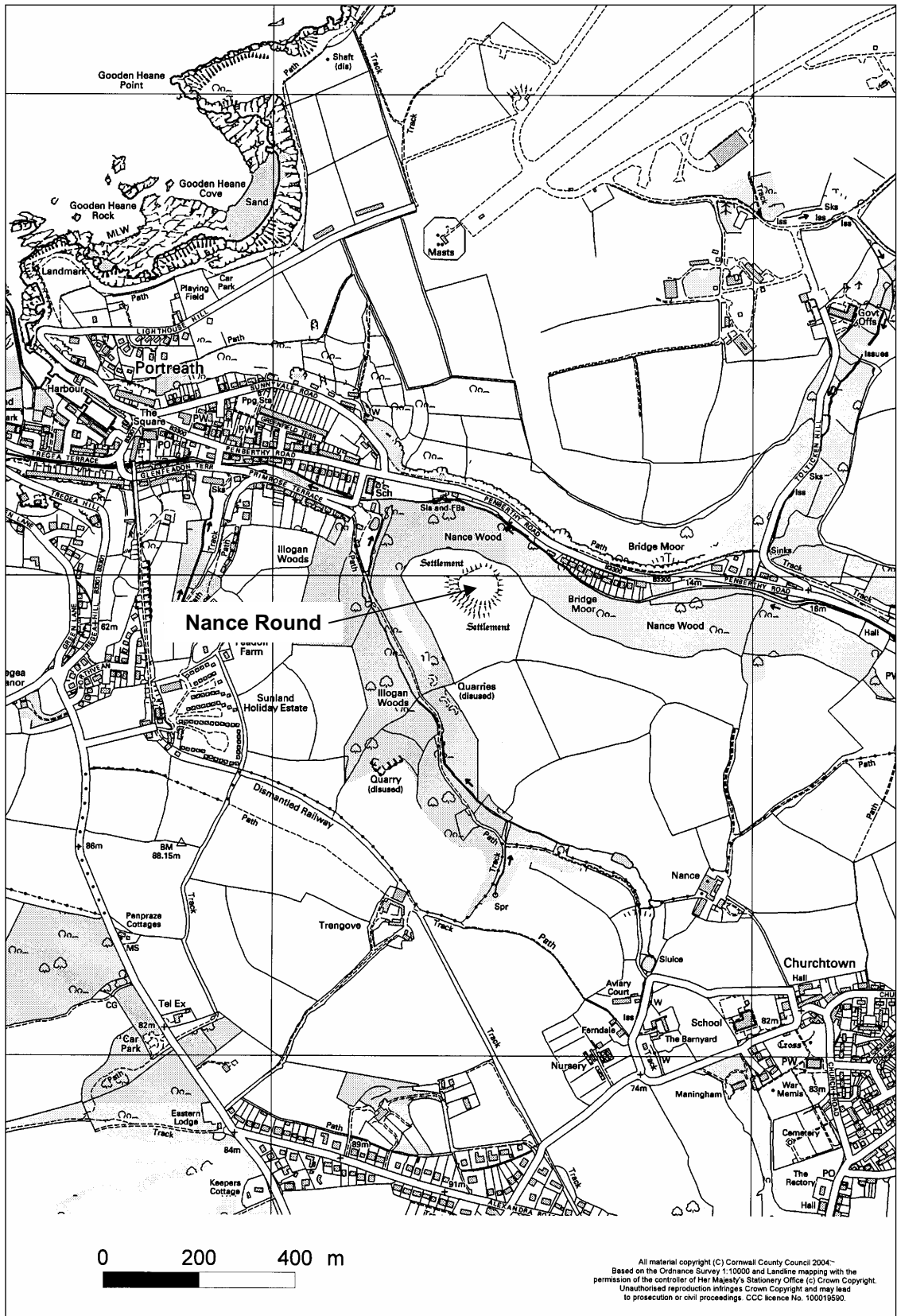


Fig. 1 Nance Round in relation to Portreath.



Fig. 2 Nance Round recorded on 1880 OS Map.

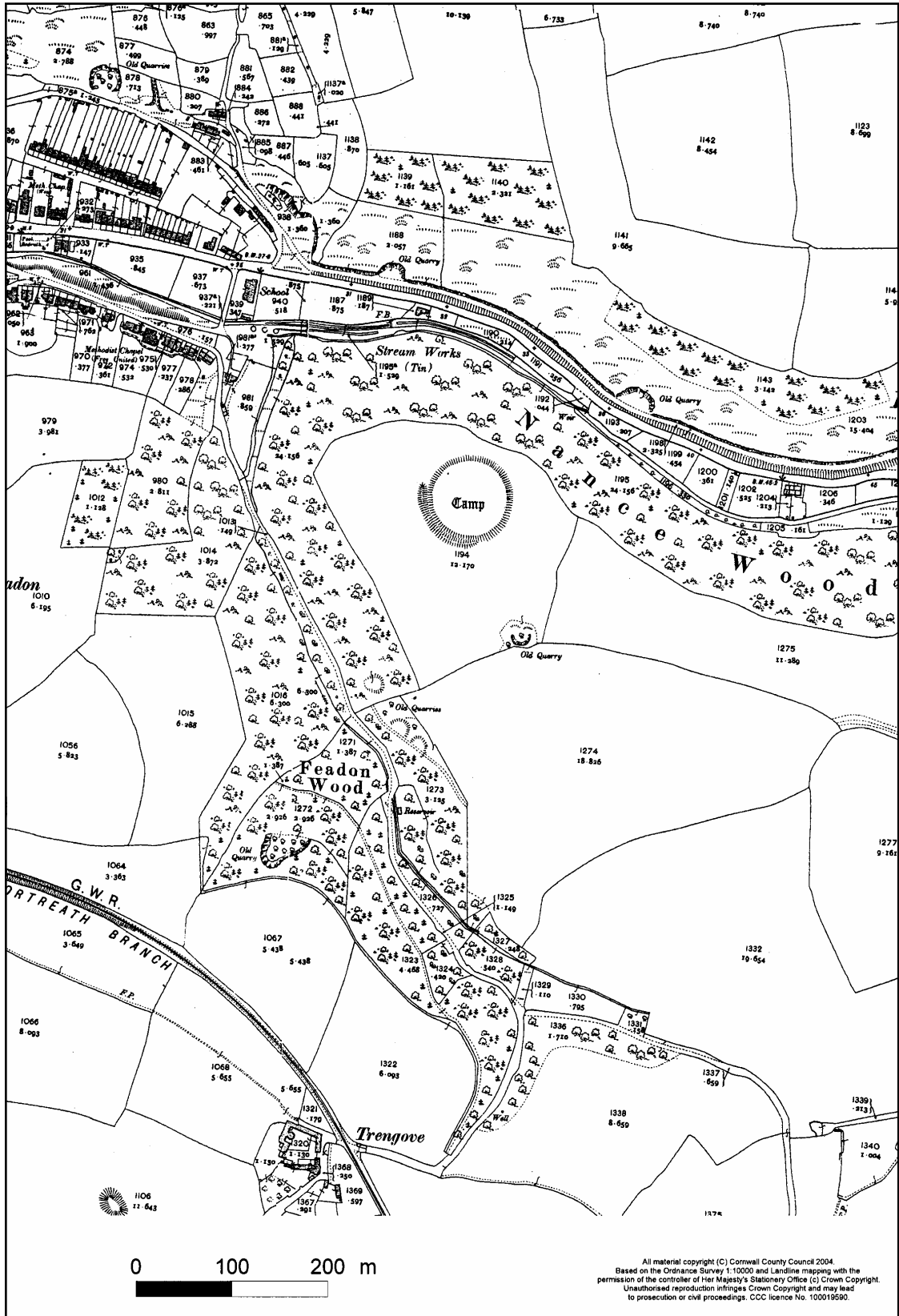
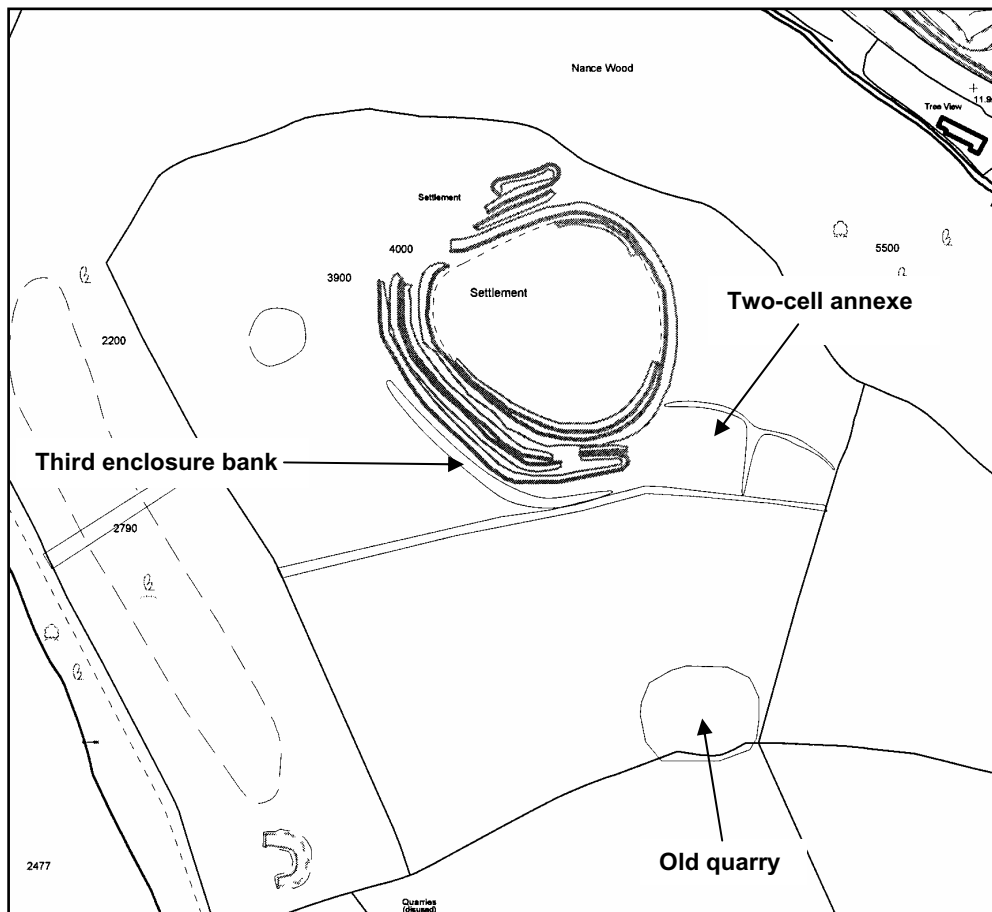
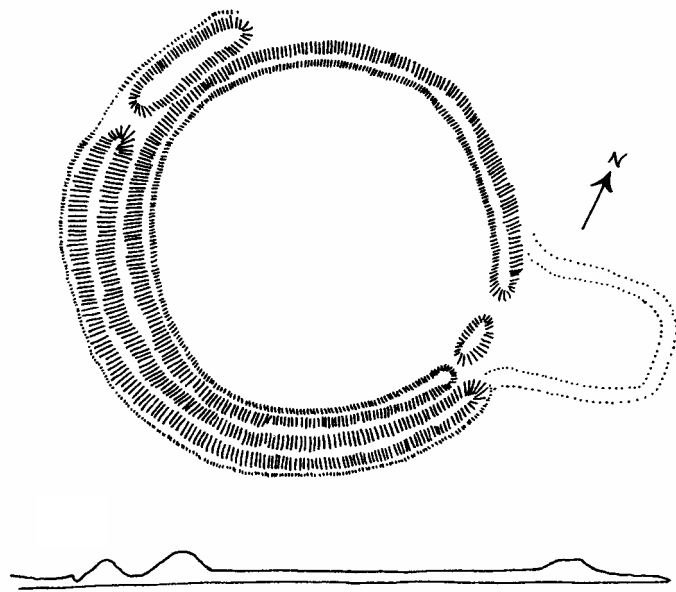


Fig. 3 Nance Round recorded on 1907 OS Map.



*Figs. 4 and 5* Nance Round as recorded by Tangye (1980, 45) and below-ground features recorded from aerial photographs.





*Figs. 6 and 7 Nance Round in 1989 (photographed from north) and 1992 (photographed from south).*



*Fig. 8 Nance Wood photographed on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2004 which shows the position of the recently erected fence.*



*Fig. 9 Fence erected to protect the archaeological remains in 2003.*



*Fig. 10 Clearance along eastern bank of Round in November 2004.*





*Fig. 11 Southern rampart of Round during scrub clearance in November 2006.*



*Fig. 12 Burning the loppings in November 2006.*





Fig. 13 Sketch survey showing areas of vegetation clearance at Nance Round (November 2004-November 2006).