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Council**

HEREFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY

A watching brief during the excavation of an Electricity Cable trench at Eastnor Park, Herefordshire.

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Herefordshire Archaeology
Environment, Planning and Waste
Economy, Communities & Corporate Directorate
Herefordshire Council



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Herefordshire Archaeology is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic sites and landscapes, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects.

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Summary:

Western Power Distribution identified an overhead electricity cable that was deemed necessary / desirable to re-route below ground. The proposed route of the cable was through an area of Eastnor Estate which is part of a Registered Park, is currently managed under a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and is recorded within the Historic Environment Record as being close to an area where flint artefacts have been recovered.

In mitigation of these works Herefordshire Archaeology were contracted by Christopher Lyons Rural Asset Management, on behalf of Eastnor Estate to undertake a watching brief on the trenching as it ran through the parkland.

No recognisable, archaeological, features were encountered and no artefacts were recovered during the works. The lines of three water pipes were recorded as they crossed the line of the trench. The profile of the top-soil, subsoil and bedrock suggests that this area has been ploughed for a considerable period of time, possibly beginning during the prehistoric period and continuing into the medieval period. This has caused considerable erosion from the ridge top to be transported down slope, smoothing the topography.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. National Grid References are accurate to approximately 5m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50 and 0.02m at 1:20m

Figures contained within this report contain material from the Ordnance Survey. The grid in this material is the National Grid taken from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (OS Licence 100024168). This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

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1. Introduction

This report (Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 355) provides an account of archaeological watching brief associated with the excavation of trenching for a mains electricity cable through Eastnor Park. Herefordshire Archaeology was contracted by Cristopher Lyons Rural Asset Management, on behalf of Eastnor Estate, to undertake a watching brief in mitigation of the excavation of a trench cut for the purpose of burying electricity cables by Western Power Distribution.



Figure 1: Location of Eastnor in relation to the main towns and city in Herefordshire. © Herefordshire Council

2. Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the watching brief were to record any archaeological features disturbed by the works and recover any artefactual evidence which may provide information concerning the landscape history and development of the area affected by the works.

3. Location, Topography, Geology and Land-use

Eastnor Park is located approximately 4km east of Ledbury within the parish of Eastnor, Herefordshire. It is a registered Park and Garden comprising the lower slopes western side of the part of the Malvern Hills together with the immediate environs of Eastnor Castle.

The area affected by the works is currently included within a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and is managed within an archaeological option (HD5). The site is also included within the SSSI and the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The geology is carboniferous limestone and the overlying soil is of the Crwbin series. This soil type consists of very shallow well drained loamy soils over limestone, often found on steep slopes; limestone pavements and other rock exposures are common in the area.

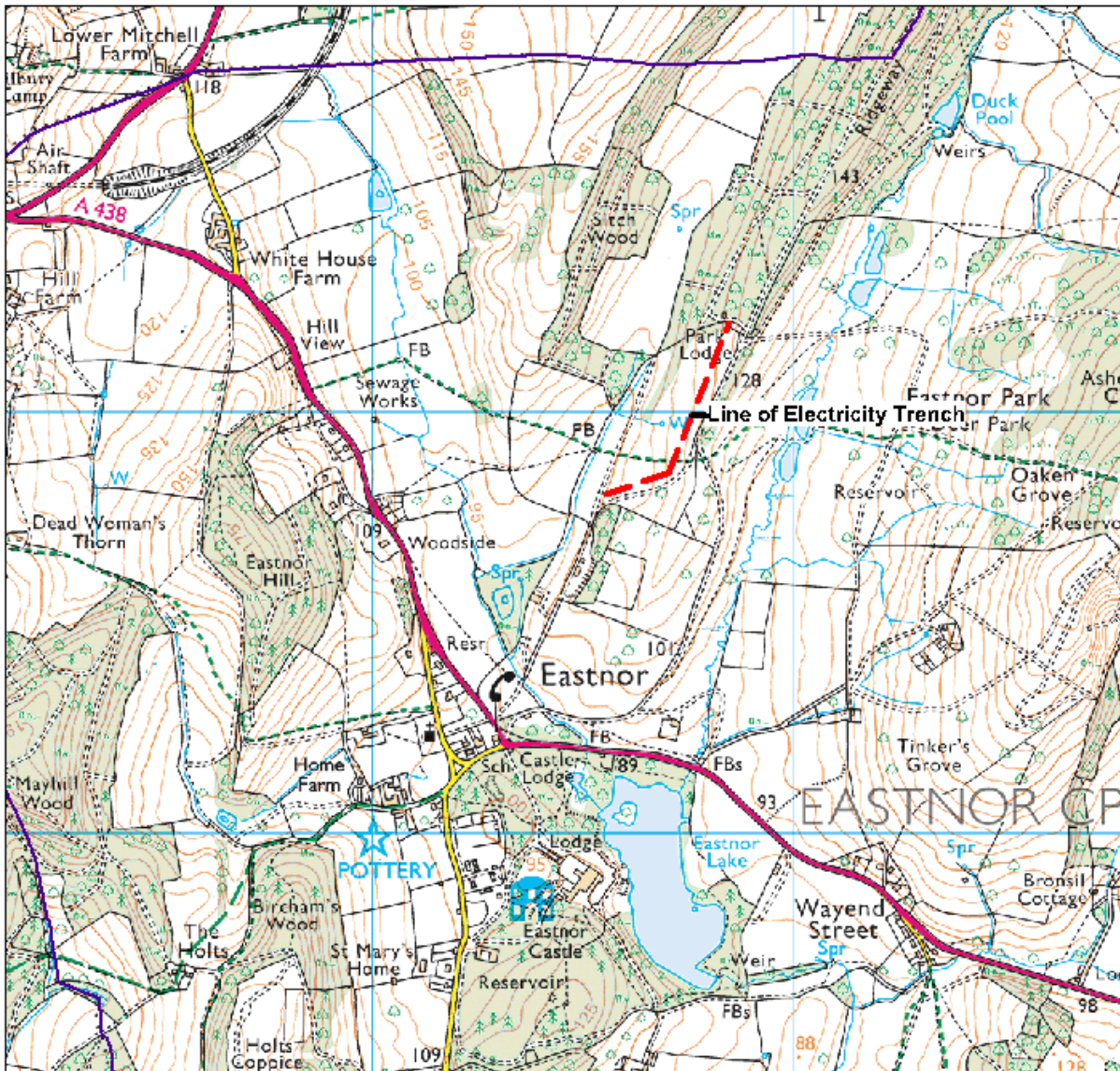


Figure 2: Location of proposed trench within Eastnor Park, Herefordshire, © Crown copyright. All rights reserved Licence No.100024168.

4. Historical and archaeological background

Eastnor Deer Park is thought to have been created c. 1785 as a landscape park. It incorporated elements of Bronsil Park which originated in the 15th century and comprised a 1300 acre park emparked by Richard Beauchamp in c. 1460. Individual and groups of trees were planted across the new parkland during the 18th and 19th centuries, in order to create a romanticised “natural” parkland.

In laying out the parkland and effectively removing it from 19th and early 20th century agricultural processes, earthworks relating to the medieval landscape were preserved. Many of these are still visible and relate to the extensive arable field systems dating from the 13th and 14th centuries taking the form of lynchets, headlands and areas of ridge and furrow.

During the latter half of the 20th century areas within the Park were agriculturally improved, leading to a degree of loss of definition in some areas.

5. Current Knowledge

The area affected by the works comprises a pasture field between “Golden Gates Lodge” to the north and “Morley’s Orls” to the south. The field slopes gently to the north-west and has a find-spot recorded on it (HER 8332), for the discovery of flint artefacts of prehistoric date thought to have been recorded during the 1970’s.

6. The Watching Brief.

The watching brief comprised a series of five site visits between 28th September and 1st October. The trench was machine cut, measuring 0.35m wide, 1.3m deep and 570m in length. The line of the trench left the track at the base of slope (NGR SO 73537 37783) and ran in a north easterly direction across the slope to NGR SO 73683 37876 at which point it turned to the north-north-east, just below the ridge top to terminate immediately to the west of Park Lodge at NGR SO 73861 38198.

During the process of excavation, it rapidly became apparent that the topsoil comprised a thin, well drained, mid-brown, loam which continued to a maximum depth of 0.25m. This lay directly over a stony and slightly clayey subsoil, the depth of which varied between 0.4m and 1.1m below the present ground surface. This directly overlay a nodular limestone bedrock.

No archaeological features were cut / exposed by the trenching and no artefacts were recovered from the works. Three plastic water pipes were encountered crossing the course of the trench line. These were located at NGR SO: 73710 37912, NGR SO: 73711 37917 and NGR SO: 73857 38189 (see figure 3).



Plate 1. Cable trench looking from the track, upslope to the north-east..

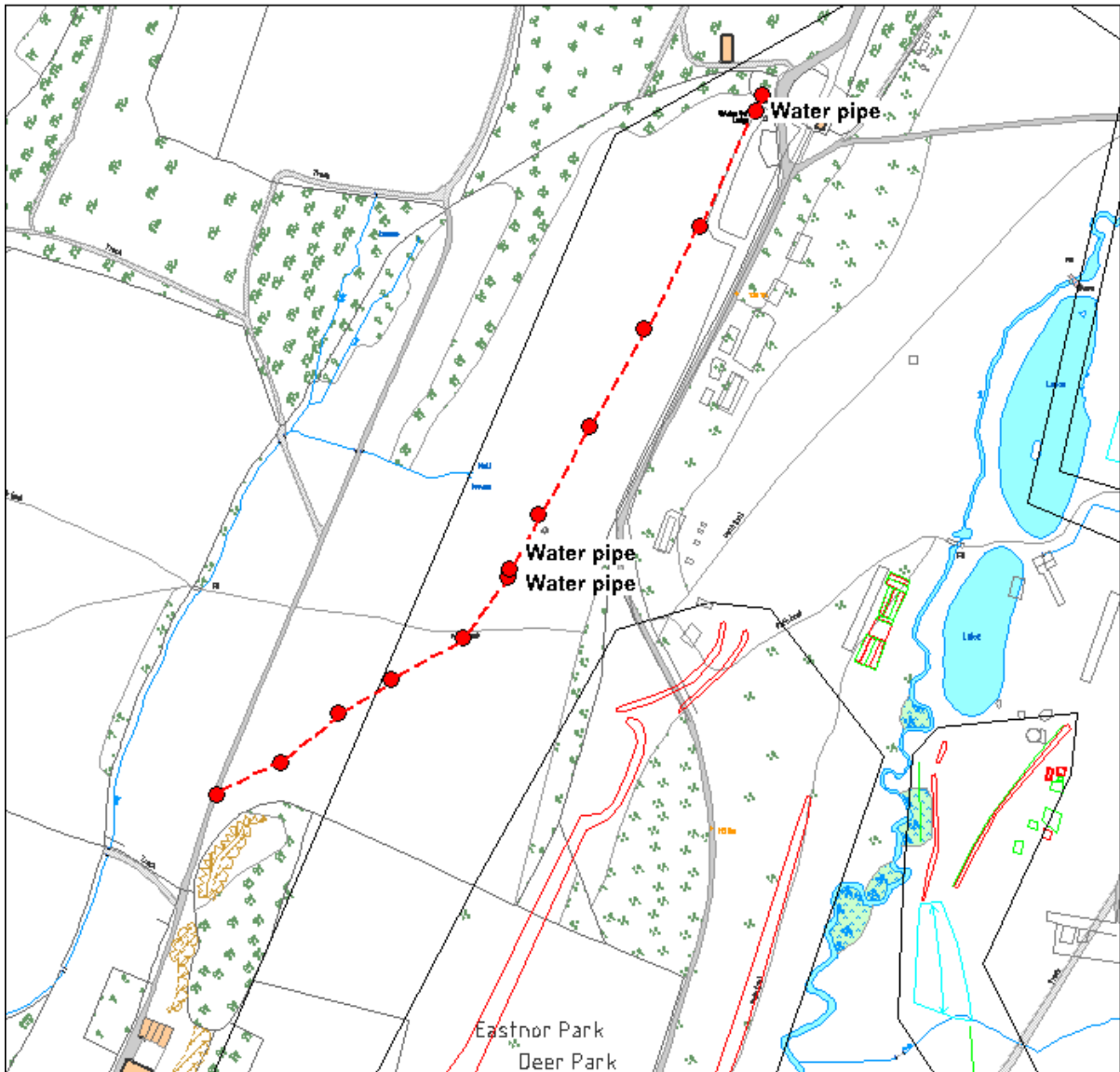


Figure 3: Mapped route of the cable trench and locations of water pipes, © Crown copyright. All rights reserved Licence No.100024168.

7. Discussion

Whilst the trenching observed during the watching brief did not intercept any cut archaeological features, such as ditches, pits or boundary features, it has provided some information concerning the profile of the underlying geology. The fluctuation of the depth of bedrock together with the variation in thickness of the subsoil (between 0.4m and 1.1m) would imply that a substantial degree of “smoothing” of the topography has occurred and that the hill slope was at one time more “stepped” than its current appearance may suggest. This would have made it ideal for its use as arable and/or pasture for the earliest farming communities in Herefordshire during the Neolithic and early Bronze Age. The build-up of subsoil, particularly over the steeper slopes may, in part, be due to this and later (medieval) ploughing which has caused eroded material ploughed from the ridge top to be transported downslope.

The find-spot recorded on the Historic Environment Record (HER 8332), for the discovery of flint artefacts of prehistoric date is located close to the ridge top at NGR SO: 73710 37800 is still of relevance in that the finds may relate to the existence of a farmstead or other type of settlement within a prehistoric field system.



Plate 2: Trench section showing depth of bedrock.

