



**Herefordshire Archaeology**  
Conservation and Environmental Planning  
Planning Services  
Environment Directorate  
Herefordshire Council

**Herefordshire Woodlands  
Pilot Study: Phase 2  
Stapleton Wood  
Stapleton  
(SO 32183 66962)**

**Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 74**

Report prepared by  
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**Contents**

**Summary  
Introduction  
Method  
Results  
Discussion  
Acknowledgements  
Archive  
Appendix**

**Herefordshire Archaeology** is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, maintains the county Sites and Monument Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects. The County Archaeologist is Dr. Keith Ray.

# Herefordshire Woodlands Pilot Scheme: Phase 2.

## Stapleton Wood

### Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 74

Herefordshire Archaeology, November 2003.

#### *Summary:*

*The survey described in this report (EHE33683) formed part of a pilot study undertaken in partnership with the Forestry Commission. A rapid walk over survey was carried out in the wood concerned. A hand held Global Positioning System was used to record the location of features encountered.*

*The earliest feature identified was located at the top of Hell Peak. This consisted of a drop down into the wood from the pasture fields to the south. This was interpreted as a possible stretch of Medieval Deer Park boundary associated with Stapleton Castle. Further features of medieval date were located in the southeast corner of the wood. These consisted of field boundaries, indicating that the wood has expanded since the medieval period.*

*The presence of a deer park may also explain the limited number of woodland management features identified during this survey. Those that were identified were primarily situated at the north western end of the survey area and comprised of charcoal burning platforms, saw pits and log stores.*

**Disclaimer:** It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGR's are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50, and 0.02m at 1:20.

Figures 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. This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

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## **Introduction**

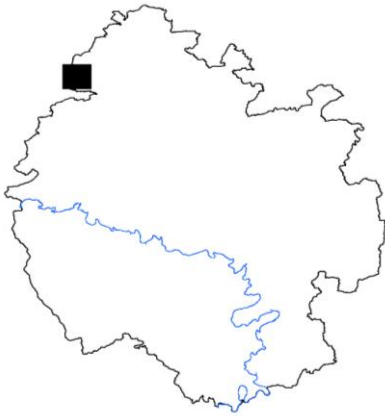
This report provides an account of a rapid survey of Stapleton Woods, (EHE33683). The survey was undertaken as part of a pilot study in partnership with the Forestry Commission in order to document the archaeology of woodlands in the county. Woodlands are areas of high archaeological potential in that they have seldom been subjected to the types of disturbance associated with intensive modern agriculture. Relatively little information concerning archaeological sites within woodland has been recorded in the past. Access is often difficult, aerial photographs are of little or no use and until recently recording an accurate location within woodland was often not practicable.

Since 1999 Herefordshire Archaeology has been involved in regular discussions with the Forestry Commission concerning the lack of archaeological data available when management plans are being prepared and applications for Woodland Grant Schemes are submitted. As a result of these discussions, the Forestry Commission has grant aided Herefordshire Archaeology to undertake a two phase pilot study. Phase One took place in 2001-2 and involved the rapid survey of eight areas of woodland in different areas of the county. These woodlands were split into those that are owned and managed by Forest Enterprises, those owned by large private estates, those that have recently been the subject of Woodland Grant Scheme applications and those for which Native Woodland Plans have been or are in preparation.

The survey for each woodland area in the pilot study identified the potential for the survival of archaeological features and sampled the types of features present. A Stage Two survey will re-visit woodlands identified in the Stage One study as being of high archaeological potential and a more detailed survey undertaken. This will illustrate the density of archaeological sites within the woodland and record the relationships between features to enable some degree of understanding concerning the evolution of the woodland. The Stage Two survey will also expand the Stage One survey and subject additional woodlands to rapid survey.

It is only when the changes throughout history within a wood have been documented and understood and put together with ecological information that a well informed management strategy can be implemented. Woodland boundaries have often moved over the centuries, sometimes expanding to encapsulate and preserve evidence of alternative land-use, e.g. field systems and on other occasions shrinking and being subject to differing forms of woodland management. These variations in land-use within a woodland influence the ecological data from that woodland. As such archaeological survey can contribute significant data concerning woodland history, management history and sequential development. This can provide independent verification of historical change from ecological study.

## ***Location***



Stapleton Wood is located at NGR: SO 32183, 66962 approximately 2km. north of Prestigne. The woodland comprises the top of an Old Red Sandstone outcrop.

The Historic Landscape Characterisation Study for Herefordshire states that the area of Stapleton Wood is located within an area of landscape that is defined by the continued reconfiguration of enclosures that relate to the expansion and retraction of woodland cover. This accounts for the sinuous boundaries observed in the area. The area around Stapleton Wood to the south is defined by the enclosure of former common arable fields into a patchwork pattern of enclosures.

Figure 1: Site Location

## ***Previous fieldwork / records***

Prior to the survey taking place the county Sites and Monuments Record was consulted and a single entry was recorded;

### **Stapleton deer park, HSM 31925, NGR SO 3300 6640**

A possible deer park in the hilly area abutting Stapleton Castle on its east side.

## ***Method***

Stapleton Wood was surveyed on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2003. The survey comprised a rapid assessment of the potential of the woodland to contain well preserved archaeological features. Features were mapped using a hand-held Garmin 12 XL Global Positioning System, enabling a ten-figure grid reference to be recorded for each feature. This system is accurate to within approximately 10m under tree canopy.

The wood was walked in transects aligned roughly north/south and approximately 50m to 100m apart. If a large feature was encountered and no other features of archaeological significance can be seen, then this feature was followed and features 50m either side of it recorded. Field observations and grid references were recorded on a dictaphone and transcribed at a later date.

The following survey is only a sample of the woodland and should not be taken as exhaustive or its results as definitive. It is intended to record the type of features present, their state of preservation and their relationships to other features within the woodland.

### ***Field conditions***

Stapleton Wood covers the slopes of a sandstone outcrop. Approximately 80% of its area comprises of two steep slopes, one, northwest facing and the other southeast, the area in between consists of large areas of marshy ground.

The majority of Stapleton Wood is planted with dense conifer. This is principally on its steep valley sides, while deciduous trees are located primarily in the base of the valley and around the periphery. Large tracts of the more mature conifer are present, which have an under storey of 1m high bramble, making survey impracticable within these areas.

### ***Survey Conditions***

The rapid walkover survey was conducted on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2003. The weather was overcast but dry and visibility remained good throughout the day.

### **Results (Figure 2)**

The recorded data from the survey is described in detail within the results section. This latter section is concluded by a brief discussion highlighting the historical development of the woodland as understood using the 2003 survey results. The significance of recorded features and management implications are then commented upon within the discussion section. Appendix 1 contains a simple data base which cross references each site to the Ordnance Survey National Grid, (NGR), and the series of unique Sites and Monuments Record “Primary Record Numbers” (PRN), allocated following the transcription. These numbers are referred to within both the text and illustrations. They are prefixed by HSM, these initials relating to Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record.

#### **Woodland management features**

Two charcoal burning platforms (HSM 33685 and 33700) were recorded. The first was 7-8m in diameter, and both its up cut and down slope lip were c.1m high. The second measured 13m, its up slope cut was 1.50m high and the down slope lip was 2m high, charcoal was visible at both sites. Both were located in the northwest corner of the survey area, close to the woodland boundary.

Four saw pits were recorded (HSM 33689, 33690, 33691 and 33699). Their earthwork remains comprise an oval depression between 4 and 6m in length, 1.5m wide and 0.3-0.5m deep with spoil on their down-slope sides. These were predominately located on the northern slope, in an area close to the charcoal burning platforms, log stores and a man-made pond.

Six log stores were recorded (HSM 33692, 33695, 33696, 33715, 33716, 33717). These comprised level platforms which ranged in size from 3m to 6m in diameter and were located primarily next to holloways. These were identified in two areas of the wood. Those in the northwest corner of the survey area (i.e. HSM 33695) were related to

charcoal burning platforms and saw pits, and were dated to the post medieval period. A second grouping was identified in the south east corner of the survey area (i.e. HSM 33717). These were larger in size and were associated with a modern forest trackway.

Three large roughly rectangular platforms (HSM 33686, 33687, and 33701) were recorded primarily on the northern slope of the survey area. These range in size from 8m in diameter to linear platforms 8m x 2m. A function for these platforms could not be identified during the course of the survey, but all of these platforms were located in close association with both saw pits and charcoal burning platforms suggesting that they were either used as storage or as building platforms for seasonal accommodation.

A single man made dam and pond (HSM 33697) was identified during the survey. This consisted on the north side of the natural down slope contour, but on the south side featured a substantial curved bank. This bank was c.3.50m wide and stood to a height of 1.50m. In effect it enclosed an area c.12m in diameter. A natural stream fed into this enclosure from the east.

Twelve sections of holloway were recorded during the survey but several of these may relate to the same holloway. The first (HSM 33694) was situated in the northwest corner of the survey area. It was 2.50m wide and 0.50m deep and proceeded downslope parallel with the woodbank (HSM 33693). The second (HSM 33711) was located to the east of the first. This was aligned roughly northeast-southwest and extended from the woodbank (HSM 33707) into the centre of the wood. The holloway was 3.50m wide, the up slope scarp was 1.50m deep and the down slope lip was 0.90m deep. Both these latter measurements are maximums.

In the southwest corner of the survey area was a junction of several holloways. The first (HSM 33704) was the southern end of a holloway that extended from HSM 33694. The second holloway (HSM 3375) again extended down from the northwest corner of the wood. Two holloways recorded as HSM 33708 and HSM 33710 appear to be the same feature. They are aligned east-west, from the woodbank (HSM 33707) to this junction. All these holloways date from the post medieval period as relationships with other sites of this period can be made.

In the southeast corner of the wood is a substantial holloway (HSM 33714). This is 6-7m wide and it extends towards the most easterly part of the wood, then turns back on itself, and heads back into the wood. The north bank of the north section of this holloway appears very dominant, being 1.50m high. This in conjunction with the fact that it runs a great distance in a straight line may suggest that this holloway follows an earlier field boundary.

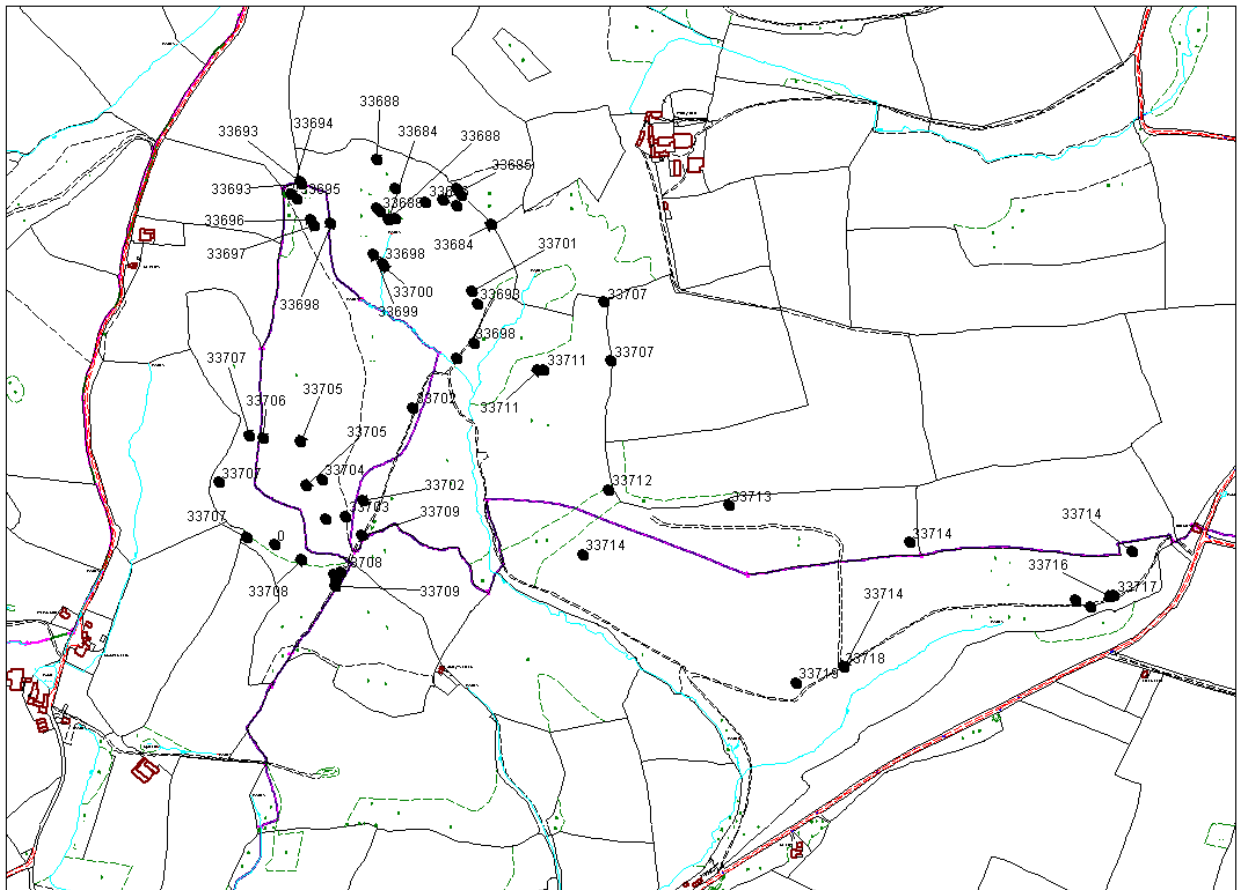
### **Woodland boundaries**

A single section of the present woodland boundary bank has been interpreted as possibly relating to part of a Medieval Deer Park boundary (HSM 33707). This consisted of a steeply cut lynchet immediately under the scarp edge at the top of Hell Peak. This feature

is different in character to the other sections of woodland boundary recorded and would certainly be one of the most efficient methods of enclosing a Deer Park with regard to the topography at this location.

Two sections of wood bank were recorded during the survey (HSM 33693 and 33707). The first of these consisted of a bank that was 1m wide x 0.50m high with an external ditch that was 2.50m wide. The second, HSM 33707 was located along the western boundary of the wood and consisted of a 1.50m drop onto the surrounding pasture. A further drop into the wood was located on the east side of the wood.

Two compartment boundaries were recorded (HSM 33706 and 33709) in the southwest corner of the wood. Both consist of banks 1.50m wide with an associated ditch on the west side. These have been attributed to the post medieval period primarily due to the lack of evidence linking them to earlier features and the fact that they are aligned with a post medieval holloway. These features are linear, and it should be noted that they may represent ownership boundaries rather than purely woodland divisions.



**Figure 2: Location of earthworks recorded during the survey.**

### ***Indications of former land use***

It appears plausible to suggest that in the medieval period Stapleton Wood formed part of a deer park associated with Stapleton castle, which is situated next to the existing wood in the southwest corner. It is also likely given the lack of woodland management features identified during the survey, and the paucity of internal boundaries that the site has been used primarily as a park since that period.

Those woodland management features that were identified relate to the post medieval period and the distribution of these features, suggests that limited processing has taken place on the site. The large number of substantial holloways within the confines of the wood however, suggest that the wood resource was harvested and timber removed from it.

The field boundary noted in the southeast end of the site (northern edge of modern holloway) suggests that the wood in this area is relatively recent.

### ***Site and feature condition***

The majority of features recorded were well preserved especially in the northwest corner of the wood where the woodland consisted of sparse deciduous trees. The only exception to this was in the north eastern area, (figure 2) that had been damaged by the planting of dense conifer. The area to the northeast of the survey was too overgrown to survey. This consisted of newly planted dense conifer that had an under storey of bramble approximately 1m high.

### **Discussion and Implications**

#### **Implications regarding the archaeological resource**

The topography and geology of Stapleton Wood dictates that it is particularly susceptible to erosion. The steep slopes in conjunction with shallow, sandy soils means that there is the potential for large scale erosion if large areas are clear felled during or prior to periods of heavy or prolonged rainfall. This makes the earthworks present within Stapleton Wood particularly vulnerable. Those woodland management features identified in the northwest corner of the wood would clearly be under threat if further planting was to take place

#### **Implications for future management**

A single large area of modern planting in the northeast corner of the existing woodland now appears totally devoid of any archaeological features above ground. Future management of this type will further degrade the archaeological resource.

#### **Implications for future field work.**

Stapleton Wood contains a relatively low density of archaeological features relating to woodland management, although the abundance and size of the holloways suggests intensive removal of un-processed timber.



This area along the western edge of the wood, especially in the north, has a high potential for the presence of well preserved archaeological features. It should be possible to recognise relationships between many features and hence produce at least a rudimentary series of phases illustrating the changing management of the woodland.

A further area of importance concerns the woodland boundary bank. Further study should be able to elucidate the nature the existing woodland boundary bank and be able to establish whether the existing wood is within the confines of an earlier deer park.

As a consequence, prior to further planting, clear felling or other significant extraction of areas within the survey area, these areas should be subject to a more detailed walk over survey in order to record and assess the location, archaeological potential and significance of any features present.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the help and co-operation of Forest Enterprise for assistance with access for this survey, and to the Forestry Commission for their commitment to this pilot scheme.

Dr. Keith Ray, County Archaeologist, for his editorial input into this report.

### **Archive**

1 Dictaphone tape  
1 Transcription Record  
1 Excel Database  
1 Mapinfo data file  
This document

### **Validation**

Herefordshire Archaeology operates a validation system for its reports, to provide quality assurance and to comply with Best Value procedures.

This report has been checked for accuracy and clarity of statements of procedure and results.

Dr. K. Ray, County Archaeologist.

**Appendix: Database of features and grid references.**

HSM	Easting	Northin	Site type	Period	Description
33684	332183	266962	Holloway	Post-medieval	3-4m wide, aligned east/west
33684	332018	266970	Holloway	Post-medieval	Continuation of Holloway 33684. Second reading.
33685	332105	267001	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	7-8m in diameter, up slope drop 1m, down slope lip 1m.
33686	332078	266998	Platform	Post-medieval	4m in diameter, 0.40m bank on west side.
33687	332029	266972	Platform	Post-medieval	8m in diameter, up slope lip 1m, down slope lip 1.5m.
33688	332018	266970	Holloway	Post-medieval	Spur off previous Holloway.
33688	332005	266983	Holloway	Post-medieval	Second reading on spur.
33688	331999	266988	Holloway	Post-medieval	Holloway continues to the northeast.
33688	332000	267066	Holloway	Post-medieval	Ends at this point. Area is very boggy.
33689	332127	267020	Saw pit	Post-medieval	2.5-3m long, 1m wide, 1m high spoil on the down slope.
33690	332134	267008	Saw pit	Post medieval	2.5-3m long, 1m wide, 1m high spoil on the down slope.
33691	332127	266992	Saw pit	Post-medieval	2.5-3m long, 1m wide, 1m high spoil on the down slope.
33692	332029	267019	Log store	Post-medieval	3-4m in diameter, depth 0.30m.
33693	331878	267030	Woodbank	Post-medieval	Bank, 0.50m high, 1m wide. Ditch 2.5m wide, up slope lip 1m. Follows existing boundary.
33693	331880	267027	Woodbank	Post medieval	Second reading. Bank now 2m wide, 0.80m high.
33693	332160	266835	Woodbank	Post-medieval	1.5m wide, aligned northeast/southwest. Visible 30m east, 20m west
33694	331862	267011	Holloway	Post-medieval	2.5m wide, 0.50m deep
33695	331872	267003	Log store	Post-medieval	3-4m in diameter, up slope drop 1m, 0.30m high bank on the down slope.
33696	331894	266969	Log store	Post-medieval	4/5m in diameter, down slope drop 1.5m, damaged by stream.
33697	331900	266960	Bank/ dam	Post-medieval	Continuation of previous down slope. Area at base of both banks 12m diameter.
33698	331926	266964	Holloway	Post-medieval	Northeast 30m, southwest 40m, 4m wide, depth 1m.

33698	332008	266899	Holloway	Post-medieval	Second reading.
33698	332155	266771	Holloway	Post-medieval	End of Holloway
33699	331995	266914	Saw pit	Post-medieval	2m long, spoil on the down slope. Condition, very poor.
33700	332010	266895	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	13m in diameter, up slope drop 1.5m, down slope lip 2m. Charcoal evident.
33701	332151	266854	Platform	Post-medieval	10m east/west, 2m north/south, up slope lip 1.20m, down slope lip 0.40m.
33702	332128	266747	Forest track / Holloway	Post-medieval/modern	Up slope drop, 3-4m, down slope drop 2.5m, width 5-6m.
33702	332057	266668	Forest track	Post-medieval/modern	Second reading.
33702	331978	266519	Forest track	Post-medieval/modern	Third reading
33703	331950	266493	Holloway	Post-medieval	1m wide at base, 5m wide at top, up slope drop 2m, down slope lip 1.5m. visible 30m northwest, 40m southeast.
33704	331918	266490	Holloway	Post-medieval	Very deep, 2.5m, 2m wide at base, 6m at top, aligned east/west.
33704	331913	266553	Holloway	Post-medieval	Second reading.
33705	331886	266543	Holloway	Post-medieval	3-4m wide at base, 7m across top, depth 2-3m, aligned north-south. Condition, good. Visible 60m east.
33705	331837	266448	Holloway	Post-Medieval	Second reading
33705	331877	266613	Holloway	Post-medieval	Ends at this point
33706	331819	266619	Compartment boundary	Post-medieval	1m wide ditch, bank 2m wide, 0.30m high. Visible for 20m in each direction.
33707	331796	266623	Woodbank	Post-medieval	1.5m drop to pasture fields. Condition, very good.
33707	331747	266549	Woodbank	Post-medieval	Second reading
33707	331793	266459	Woodbank	Post-medieval	Third reading
33707	332363	266837	Woodbank / deer leap	Post-medieval	1-1.5m drop into wood from pasture fields.
33707	332374	266743	Woodbank / deer leap	Post-medieval	Continues
33708	331879	266425	Holloway	Post-medieval	Parallel to previous Holloway.
33708	331942	266404	Holloway	Post-medieval	Second reading.
33708	331934	266391	Holloway	Post-medieval	End of Holloway
33709	331933	266383	Compartment boundary	Post-medieval	Bank 1.5m wide, 0.40m high, aligned north/south. Ditch 0.40m wide, 0.20m deep.

33709	331932	266401	Compartment boundary	Post-medieval	Second reading.
33709	331976	266463	Compartment boundary	Post-medieval	Third reading
33710	331932	266401	Holloway	Post-medieval	Aligned east/west. Most likely continuation of one previously mentioned.
33710	331932	266401	Holloway	Post-medieval	Possible continuation. 3m wide, 1m deep.
33711	332258	266729	Holloway	Post-medieval	3.5m wide, up slope bank 1-1.5m, down slope lip 0.90m. aligned northeast/southwest.
33711	332267	266729	Holloway	Post-medieval	Second reading.
33712	332371	266536	Trackway	Post-medieval	Cuts into up slope 0.20m, 1.20m wide, bank on down slope, 0.40m wide, 0.30m high. Aligned north/south.
33713	332563	266512	Trackway	Post-medieval	5m wide, up slope drop 1m, downslope lip 1.5m. Condition, good. Aligned north/south
33714	332851	266453	Holloway / follows extinct field boundary	Post-medieval	6-7m wide, up slope drop 1.5m, down slope drop 1-1.5m. Aligned north/south. Modern.
33714	332330	266432	Holloway / Field boundary	Post-medieval	Holloway continues
33714	333208	266437	Holloway / Field boundary	Post-medieval	Holloway continues
33714	333140	266348	Holloway / Field boundary	Post-medieval	Holloway continues. 6m wide, down slope drop 1-1.5m.
33714	332746	266253	Holloway / Field boundary	Post medieval	Holloway continues
33715	332851	266453	Log store	Modern	5-6m in diameter, cut into up slope 1m, down slope lip 0.50m. Modern.
33716	333173	266365	Log store	Modern	5-6m in diameter, down slope drop 2m. Modern.
33717	333177	266367	Log store	Modern	5-6m in diameter, down slope drop 2m. Modern.
33717	333116	266360	Log store	Modern	10-12m in diameter, down slope drop 1m. Modern.
33718	332746	266253	Holloway	Modern	Second Holloway extends to the northwest.
33719	332670	266227	Holloway	Modern	Further Holloway extends to the northwest, 5m wide, up slope lip 0.80m, down slope lip 1.20m.