

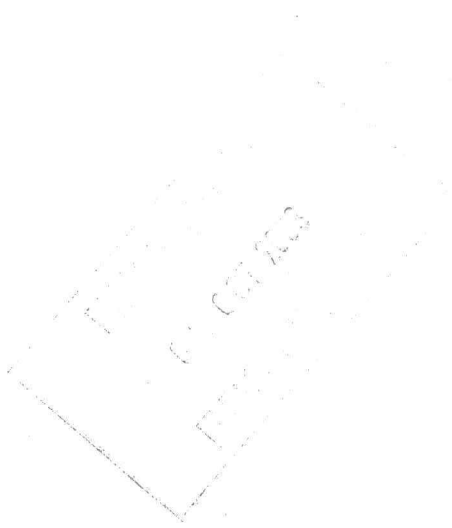
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**Escrick Park Estate
 Skipwith Back Common
 Skipwith
 North Yorkshire**

SE 668 395

Archaeological Field Survey



MAP

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Non Technical Summary

A survey of Back Common was undertaken by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd in April, 2003. A total of 30 archaeological sites were recorded varying in date from the Prehistoric period through to modern day. Prehistoric funerary monuments, medieval ridge and furrow, post medieval sand workings, windmill mounds; and remains of RAF Riccall all illustrate the important contribution this area of lowland heath makes to our understanding of the history of the village of Skipwith and its immediate environs. The diversity of the character of these sites is what makes Skipwith Back and also Front Common unique in North Yorkshire. A factor which needs to be taken seriously in any redevelopment proposals for this tract of land.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd has been commissioned by T.L.C. on behalf of Escrick Park Estate in accordance with a Specification for Archaeological Evaluation produced by the Heritage Unit of North Yorkshire County Council.
- 1.2 All work has been funded by the Escrick Park Estate
- 1.3 All maps within this report have been produced from Ordnance Survey with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown Copyright. License No. AL 50453A.

2. Site Description

- 2.1 The Escrick Park Estate presently covers an area of 8005 acres (3240 hectares, although the Estate once possessed over 24000 acres or 9700 hectares) of land composed of pasture, arable and tracts of woodland (Fig. 1). The villages of Escrick and Skipwith with their associated farm land forms the bulk of the Estate, with further parcels of land in the neighbouring parishes of Deighton,

Riccall and Stillingfleet. The Estate is situated approximately 11km to the south of York and 8km to the north of Selby.

2.2 Skipwith Common situated to the south of the village of Skipwith (SE 6550 3745: Fig. 1) comprises the Front, Back and Little Commons, giving a total area of 324 hectares. This report considers the archaeology of Back Common, an area which covers approximately 68 hectares.

2.3 The Common is covered with bracken and birch scrub which varies in density from sparse to extremely dense. The land is low lying and the level of water in the dykes and ponds varies depending on seasonal fluctuations in rainfall. Close to the edges of the Common mature oaks can be seen, these probably represent the deliberate demarcation of grazing land from arable land.

3. Topography and Geology

3.1 The village of Skipwith and the Common stand on flat lying land between 9-10m A.O.D. The surface geology of the area around Skipwith is characterised by soil type 821 (Everingham Series). This is an Aeolian Sand, which forms a deep stoneless permeable sandy soil. The ground water in the locality is controlled by drainage ditches. This type of soil is at risk from wind erosion; the results of which are clearly visible today on land to the north of the village of Skipwith. The marked difference in soil types is central to the development of land use in the Skipwith and Escrick parishes from the earliest times to the present day.

3.2 A consideration of the drainage within the Estate shows its importance. The Estate is criss crossed with dykes and the marked fluctuation of the water table was very evident during the course of the survey.

3.3 Drainage of the Commons is by way of a number of drains and ditches. The majority of the drainage ditches are peripheral to the Back Common and are associated with improving the drainage of the adjacent arable land.

3.4 Recourse to old maps of the Estate and early Ordnance Survey maps provides evidence from around the mid 18th century. It is suggested that the dykes which have names such as Bridge Dike, Pallion Dike, and Homes Dike are of some considerable age. The dykes meander through the landscape and may represent the widening and deepening of small becks. The northern boundary of Back Common is the Common Drain.

- 3.5 In addition to the 'ancient' dikes, cartographic evidence shows a large number of straight ditches running through the Back Common dug in recent times to aid drainage.

4. Historical and Archaeological Background

- 4.1 The parish of Skipwith possesses a rich archaeological and historical landscape. This is illustrated by, not only the surviving architectural elements within the body of the parish church of St Helen's, Skipwith Hall and a number of 18th century houses, but also by the well preserved earthwork of a medieval moated site and associated features. In addition to the above, the aerial photographic record for the parish of Skipwith is extensive and surviving earthworks away from the village consist of round and square barrow cemeteries, mill mounds, line ponds, evidence of sand, marl and peat extraction and structures relating to RAF Riccall – a World War II training base for the crews of Halifax bombers.

5. Aims and Objectives

- 5.1 The common is the subject of a proposal by the Escrick Park Estate to regenerate about 39 hectares of lowland heath, which is a UK BAP priority habitat, using the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Such a scheme is likely to involve the felling of birch and pine scrub to let in more light, spraying then mechanically removing the bracken and litter layer down to the top of mineral soil, cleaning out ditches and possibly spreading heather seeds.
- 5.2 To permit the above programme to be implemented a management scheme is required that protects important archaeological remains which are known to survive with the Back Common. In addition this area has not been the subject of a detailed archaeological survey in the past and the potential is high for additional archaeological features to be discovered.
- 5.3 The aim of the survey of the Back Common is to identify those archaeological features which could be under threat from regeneration, and to provide locational information so that these features can be accurately mapped and protected by a management scheme. Information is to be displayed in cartographic and tabular form.

6. Methodology

- 6.1 To provide a comprehensive guide to the archaeology of Back Common all previous information on field monuments was consulted and in addition to this an extensive search of cartographic evidence was also undertaken. Lists were drawn up of the sites located and cross referenced with their source data. Each site was given a unique number and plotted onto 1:2500 map bases. Each site was visited and a proforma record site completed. During the course of the survey new sites were discovered and their information added to the database. Where appropriate a digital photographic record was also made.
- 6.2 Survey was undertaken in early April, 2003 during a spell of good fine weather with clear skies and even light.
- 6.3 The Back Common does not attract the number of visitors seen on Front Common; as a result a very high proportion of the land area is overgrown with bracken, brambles, long grass and dead vegetation including wind blown trees.
- 6.4 Certain parts of the Back Common are inaccessible at most times of the year due to marshy/swampy conditions as well as large tracts of dead trees and standing water.

7. Results

- 7.1 A possible total of 29 sites were identified, of which 24 were recorded from documentary sources, 2 sites had been destroyed and 6 were new previously unrecorded sites. The report catalogue can be broken down in to a series of sub groups, which are listed below:

7.2 Funerary

- 7.2.1 Two types of funerary monument survive on the Back Common, these consist of round and square barrows, the latter forming a distinct grouping at Danes Hill.
- 7.2.2 Three sites were located which were suggestive of being round barrows (sites 10, 12 & 22).
- 7.2.3 Five square barrows were identified in varying states of preservation (Sites 5-9), and an area of earthworks which may well relate to the funerary activity to the south-west (Site 15). Sites 5-9 represent the Scheduled Ancient Monuments grouping.

7.3 Landscape

7.3.1 This category of sites comprises of drainage features such as dykes.

7.3.2 The importance of drainage on the Estate has already been considered elsewhere in the report, but it is again emphasised by the number of dikes which exist on Back Common. The obvious modern features have not been included in this survey. Common Drain (Site 1) which forms the northern boundary to Back Common meanders through the landscape before joining Pallion Dyke to the north-west. During the course of the survey a relict meander of Common Drain was recorded (Site 25). A further section of dyke was recorded at the north-western corner of Back Common (Site 1).

7.4 Economic

7.4.1 Evidence of small scale industrial use is illustrated by the presence of mill mounds and mineral extraction pits. Although not a major source of mineral resources, the geology of the Estate did provide for small scale extraction of sand and clay/marl. Of course the major resource of peat was to be found on Skipwith Common. Redundant sand pits were recorded as Sites 17 – 20, 24 and 29).

7.4.2 The ponds located during the survey are likely to be the result of previous extraction of sand but are not recorded as this on early Ordnance Survey maps. Site 16 is one such example whereas Site 4 is also recorded as a pond but due to its location on the southern edge of Little Common may actually be a line pond. Further examples of this category of site exist on Front Common to the south.

7.4.3 Three redundant mill sites were recorded. These consisted of Sites 2, 11 and 13. All that remained of the windmill was the mound and all were believed to be of a Post-medieval date.

7.5 Agricultural

7.5.1 Two new sites (Sites 27 & 28) were located in the north-western corner of Back Common, both features appeared to represent hedge banks and their location south of Common Drain and the fact that cartographic evidence shows planting along this feature in the 19th century may explain their presence.

- 7.5.2 Traces of earthworks, which may represent ridge and furrow can be seen in various locations on the Common but care should be taken in interpreting these features as such. Sections of the Common have been planted in the past and the soil in these areas would have been prepared prior to planting. Traces of possible ridge and furrow were observed on land to the north of Site 13 orientated south-south-west to north-north-east extending for a maximum of 20m from the boundary with the open land to the south of Little Common.
- 7.5.3 Aerial photographic reconnaissance of land surrounding Back Common has recorded a number of features, which relate to earlier farming regimes. At SE 6740 4050 a series of linear ditches which may form a field system in the north-west corner of Crook Moor and to the south of Manor Wood and Thornhill Farm. In addition there is, in the south, a large rectangular enclosure with an entrance in the south-west corner and internal features. At SE 6650 4040 (centre) linear ditches aligned north-east to south-west with a rectangular enclosure and internal features attached to the south of a trackway are recorded to the south-west of Wake House. This activity may relate to further ditches seen to the east at SE 6710 4030, where linear ditches aligned north to south to the west of Manor Farm survive as crop marks. At SE 6780 3980 linears form a possible field system to the east of Danes Hills (Back Common), a trackway, ring ditches and a square barrow with a central pit are visible. At SE 6750 3910 and 6740 3950 a large area of cropmark sites include in the north a field system, trackway, hut circle and enclosures to the east of West End Farm and in the south there is a trackway, enclosures, field system and hut circles with a rectangular enclosure.
- 7.5.4 The periphery of the Common was checked to see if any of the linears recorded on aerial reconnaissance continued into the Back Common. No features were observed, but this does not necessarily mean that earlier activity is not masked by the ground conditions current at the time of the survey.
- 7.5.5 Site 14 was a specific cropmark relating to an enclosure system. No visible above ground remains were visible at the time of the survey.

7.6 Brick Built Structures

- 7.6.1 Cartographic evidence suggested the presence of two features of recent brick construction (Sites 3 and 21). No traces were found of Site 3, a 19th century cottage but Site 21 was recorded as a rectangular platform of brick capped with a 9m x 8m x 0.12m slab of concrete.

7.6.2 It is believed that Site 21 represents part of the Lorenz system which operated from RAF Riccall during World War II. To aid aircraft flying in fog the blind approach or Lorenz system was devised. This consisted of three beacons aligned with the main runway; an outer beacon located two miles or 3.2 km upwind (often north-east) from the threshold, an inner beacon on the perimeter of the airfield and the main beacon at the far end of the runway. In March 1995 felling along the north-western edge of the Front Common located an hitherto unrecorded brick built structure (Site B88), measuring 5m by 3m. None of the walls stood to their original height and there was no indication of any roofing materials. A doorway was noted in the south-eastern corner of the building and the building appeared to have been partitioned into two units. Evidence for an internal drain or sump near the door was recorded and on the exterior of the building a shallow ditch was recorded running along the north and west walls before running away to the south-west. Both sites B88 and 21 were in the exact locations for the Lorenz system beacons for the outer and main beacons. The method used to identify these sites is taken on distance measurements as described above and the presence of square concrete plinths approximately 9.14m square, enclosed by bricks 5ft high. The main beacon was located in a slightly larger rectangular enclosure. It seems more than likely that site 403 represents the location of the outer beacon. Site B88 is more problematic as it does not fit the general description for the main beacon site, as it is smaller, but it is in the right location.

8. Site Assessment

8.1 The format used to assess each individual site (Table 1) is based on the scheduling criteria given in Annex 4 of Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning (PPG16) issued by the Department of the Environment. Each category (rarity, documentation, group value, survival/condition, fragility/vulnerability, diversity and potential) has been scored subjectively between 1 and 10, 10 being a maximum score, or high to low, and also nil to average. Totals are also given on Table 1, the maximum score being 70.

Monument Period	Highest Score	Lowest Score
Prehistoric	55	31
Post-Medieval	55	39
Modern	57	17

Summary of Site Assessment Totals

8.2 Monuments are in danger from forestry work. The risks have been assessed as high, moderate or low:-

- Felling : moderate to high danger when the trees are planted on or very near to the monuments
- Machinery : high danger of destroying monuments
- Ploughing/scarification : high (some monuments already badly damaged)

8.3 *Prehistoric Monuments*

8.3.1 This class includes round, square barrows and enclosures. Nine sites were recorded as funerary monuments, and one represented an unlocated enclosure system.

8.3.2 These monuments have all been assessed on Table 1 and score a maximum of 55 out of a maximum of 70.

8.3.3 There is a great danger that the surviving Prehistoric monuments may be damaged further before their importance can be investigated fully.

8.4 *Medieval*

8.4.1 No medieval features were observed other than ridge and furrow.

8.5 *Post-medieval*

8.5.1 Post medieval features consisted of windmill mounds and sand pits. A total of three post mill sites were located and six redundant sand pits were recorded.

8.6 *Modern Features*

8.6.1 The 19th cottage (Site 3) had been removed leaving no trace. However this was not true of the World War II site (Site 21) which is believed to be of great importance not due to its physical appearance but because of what it represents.

9. **Discussion**

9.1 Back Common is presently a mix of silver birch and pine scrubland, bracken covered areas, and tracts of land submerged in water. No matter what time of the year a field survey is undertaken there will still be areas of the site where it will not be possible to gain access. This is the nature of Back Common, a piece of land which remains untamed and probably still with hidden secrets.

- 9.2 The field survey undertaken in 2003 showed the diversity of features surviving within the confines of Back Common and how this piece of land has been utilised and exploited over the past 2000 years.
- 9.3 The current proposals see another chapter in the story of Little Common, Crook Moor and Danes Hills. The return of the land to lowland heath cannot but accentuate the importance of the surviving archaeological features. However, these features are a fragile resource and extreme care will be required during the implementation of the proposed scheme.

**SKIPWITH BACK COMMON
TABLE 2**

Site No	NGR	Classification	Description	Sensitivity	Assessment
1	SE 6678 4056	Dyke	Dyke. Aligned N-S. Shallow U shaped profile. 45o sides. 1m-2.5m in width and 1m deep. Dry at time of survey. Trees respect edges. Cuts through Site 28 before butting into Site 26. Length 138m	Low	35
2	SE 6688 3816	Mill Mound	Mill mound. undermined size, central hollow area bramble & bracken, fallen silver birch. Horseriders damage. No structure surviving. Diameter 12m, height 0.8m .	Medium	43
3	SE 6670 3828	Structure	19 th century cottage. No traces of structure remains.	Low	17
4	SE 6684 3853	Pond	Pond. To north of Mill Hill. 65m by 10m max. Trees on edge. Silver birch, reeds. ? Line pond.	Low	54
5	SE 6662 3992	Square Barrow	Square barrow. Location Danes Hills. Flat topped, sub square shape with rounded corners, surrounding ditch. Presently supporting Birch trees, sapling and small shrubs. No signs of excavation. Evidence of animal burrowing. N-S 9m by E-W 10m, 0.6m high. Clear the trees	High	54
6	SE 6674 3988	Round Barrow	Barrow. Location Danes Hills. Sub Circular in shape, not possible to determine if it is a square or a round barrow. No clear indication of surrounding ditch. Covered in bracken with some birch trees. No signs of excavation. Evidence of animal disturbance. N-S 13m by E-W 13m, 0.06m high. Do not disturb clear the trees from the mound.	High	55
7	SE 6665 3992	Barrow	Unknown. Location Danes Hills. Possible linear group of barrows. Top is flat, with steep sides. Covered with Birch	High	50

			trees conifers and heather. No signs of excavation. N-S 29m by E-W 12m, 0.55m high. Contour survey may help elucidate?		
8	SE 6659 3992	Square Barrow	Small square Barrow. Location Danes Hills. Sub square in shape, no clear indications of surrounding ditch. Covered with bracken and birch trees. No evidence of excavation. Evidence of rabbit burrowing. N-s 7m by E-W 7m, 0.3m high. Clear the trees, do not let them re-establish. Fill in crater left by fallen tree	High	53
9	SE 6658 3996	Square Barrow	Square Barrow. Location Danes Hills. Covered with young birch and conifers, surrounding scrub dense difficult to ascertain shape. No indication of excavation. Evidence of animal disturbance. NW -SE 24m by SW -NE 13m, 0.05m high. To clearly identify the nature of this feature, the trees/scrub needs clearing, followed by a contour survey.	High	53
10	SE 6661 3872	Ring Ditch	Unknown. Location Little Common. Apparent Ring Ditch, not possible to discern this from the ground. No evidence of excavation. Some evidence of animal burrowing. Contour survey of this area	Medium	31
11	SE 6698 3819	Mill Mound	Windmill? Ploughed out mound of ? post mill. Diameter 20m, height 0.6m. Do not deep/sub-soil plough.	High	50
12	SE 6690 3960	Barrow	Barrow? Location Crook Moor. Low mound with gentle profile, no evidence of surrounding ditch. Covered with conifers and birch trees, plus bracken. No evidence of excavation. Evidence of animal burrowing. Survey to determine nature and extent.	High	50
13	SE 6684 3850	Mill Mound	Old Mill Hill - windmill mound. 10m in diameter surviving to over 1m in height, grass covered and animal burrowed. Surrounded by trees.	High	55
14	SE 6630 4040	Enclosure System	Enclosure System. SMR relates to cropmark. No visible remains on ground. Do not deep plough.	Medium	45

15	SE 6680 4000	Barrows	Barrows. Area of raised ground between arable field and road is clear that raised ground does undulate and a number of small depressions 1-2m square are present. The raised area is covered in bracken, but virtually no trees. Sign of animal tracks over the area. NE-SW 30m by NW-SE 17m, 0.5-1m high. Site in very definite need of a contour survey. Other wise do not disturb.	High	51
16	SE 6704 4035	Pond	Pond. A hollow area presently filled with water. Irregular "U" shaped feature. Slight encroachment by birch trees and scrub. N-S 22m by E-W 20m. Leave asis	Low	39
17	SE 6686 3855	Sand Pit	Old Sand Pit. Location Little Common. Ovate in shape. Heavily overgrown with trees and encroachment by weeds. N-S 15m by E-W 25m, 1.2m depth. Maintain as it is.	Low	39
18	SE 6662 3845	Sand Pit	Sand Pit. Location Little Common 256 and 266 are indistinguishable, they both merge into one feature. Heavily overgrown with trees and bracken and presently flooded. 107m by 17m as it is.	Low	39
19	SE 6664 3844	Sand Pit	Sand Pit. Indistinguishable from site 265, (see 265) Maintain as it is	Low	39
20	SE 6665 3973	Sand Pit	Sand Pit. Location Birchwood Farm. Extremely irregular shape. Holding water in a number of pools. Densely overgrown with small trees, bracken and bramble. 40m by 17m.	Low	39
21	SE 6673 4004	Structure – WWII	Military. A rectangular platform built of brick, capped with a 12cm thick concrete slab. Top appears perfectly flat/level. In the process of being overgrown by grass. Brick is clearly 20 th century date. Prt of Lorenz system	High	57
22	SE 6662 3976	Barrow	Barrow? A low mound located in an area of dense bracken and a few birch. Quite large though precise shape is difficult to determine. No ditch visible, no distinction between top/sides, a smooth mound. Clear	High	48

			animal disturbance, though no tree roots. No evidence of excavation. Diameter 24m, 0.6m high. Needs contour survey to determine its reality.		
23	SE 6649 3843	Enclosure	Enclosure. Not located.	Medium	38
24	SE 6659 3983	Sand Pit	Sand Pit. Located in area of scrubland. An amorphous linear depression. A number of small island, reeds and a few trees encroaching. E-W 45m by N-S 19m	Low	39
25	SE 6694 4049	Dyke	Dyke. Common Drain. 2.5m wide at top, 0.5m at base, 1.5m deep. Steep sided with brackish water in base. Northern boundary to Back Common.	Low	35
26	SE 6700 4040	Dyke	Redundant dyke. Dried up meander associated with site 26. 2m wide at top 0.3-0.4m at base. Little water in base. Points of access to Common Drain higher than level of drain. Original course of Common Drain rationalised in modern period.	Low	38
27	SE 6682 4061	Hedge Bank	Bank. Section of bank to south of Common Drain. 0.3m rising to 0.45m in height. Aligned E-W, flat topped and associated with ditch/furrow to south. Ditch U shaped in profile c. 1.5m at top to 0.5m at base. Tree growing on top. Plants indicative of old woodland. Extends for 60m to east. Merges into bank of Common Drain as it emerges from woodland in west.	Medium	43
28	SE 6683 4058	Hedge Bank	Bank. Prominent north facing side, southern edge lost in bracken. More pronounced at eastern end. Aligned E-W runs parallel to Bank 28. 1.25m in width standing up to 0.6m in height. Cut through in west by site 1. May represent terrace. 52m in length	Medium	43
29	SE 6659 3983	Sand Pit	Located in scrubland. An amorphous linear depression. A number of small islands, reeds and a few trees encroaching.	Low	39