
Archaeological Watching Brief

Emergency Repairs to Flood Defences

Iken Marshes

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HW Report No. 136

Project name	Iken Marshes
Client	East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board
SHER Event No	IKN 110
Grid reference	TM 4263 5630
Date of fieldwork	11th and 16th December 2013

Introduction

Following extreme high tides in December 2013 repairs were required to flood defences at Iken Marshes, south of the River Alde (Fig 1). These works consisted of excavating clay from the marshes to repair holes in the flood banks and were undertaken by East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board between 11th and 17th December 2013.

Location, Topography and Geology

The site lay to the south of the River Alde where flat marshes at or below 0mOD are protected from the estuarine waters by a substantial floodbank. To the south the gradually rising ground away from the estuary is dominated by Yarn Hill: a significant landmark of geological origin standing to a height of 14m OD.

The underlying solid geology of the area is recorded as Crag Formation Sand, laid down in the Quarternary Period in an environment dominated by shallow seas. The overlying superficial geology is of tidal flat deposits of clay and silt formed in shoreline environments.

(<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>)

Archaeological Background

Several sites have been recorded in the vicinity of the site. Located less than 1km to the south east is the site of a possible Bronze Age ring ditch, this along with linear cropmarks has been identified from aerial photographs.

A possible Roman or Iron Age salt production site (IKN049) has been recorded c.250m south of the site on the edge of the marsh at 0m OD. This again has been identified by aerial photography as a patch of red soil on the edge of an otherwise brown ploughed field.

An iron sword was found at the base of Yarn Hill in the late 19th or early 20th century. This is thought to be Saxon in date. At the same time a banked enclosure was also identified on Yarn Hill and recent studies of aerial photographs have identified other rectilinear enclosures both on Yarn Hill and around the foot of the hill.

The vast majority of known sites in this area date to the Post-medieval period, many of which lay close to the edge of the Alde estuary. These include a sea-wall, a post alignment within the estuary, possible oyster pits and quarry pits. The sea wall starts c.1.5km to the west of the present site and runs for c.6km along the southern edge of the estuary. This bank is visible on the early Ordnance Survey maps of 1837 and 1884 but is not shown on Hodkinson's Map of 1783.

Between Yarn Hill and the sea bank an area of regular linear features (IKN098) has been identified from aerial photographs. The low lying position of the site suggests that these are features related to drainage.

Other sites in the area are related to WWII when the area was used for training.

Methods

Several breaches in the sea wall required repair. For this material was excavated from the marshes which are currently under pasture. Top soil was stripped from an area of c.500m² and the underlying silty clays extracted to repair the bank. Archaeological monitoring was undertaken on the breaches in the sea bank and the extraction site. Additionally two pits which has been excavated by the landowner prior to the storm surge were also observed, and a single transect close to possible saltern site (IKN049) was fieldwalked.

All works were carried out in full accordance with national and regional guidelines for the treatment of archaeological remains, and in particular the guidance set out in *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003) and the *Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2001).

The site archive consists of site notes and digital photographs.

Results

The breaches in the sea bank were monitored (Fig 2, A, Plate 1). It was thought that the earlier post-medieval build of sea wall may have been revealed however, the material swept away during the flood event was from the top and back of the bank only, the front and core of the bank were not revealed. No distinct differences in build were noted. It is therefore thought that the elements of the bank revealed date from the 1950s onwards.

Material to repair the bank was taken from the marsh, from an area c.50m long and c.10m wide and 1.5m -2m deep (Fig 2, B, Plates 2 and 3). The topsoil across this area was relatively shallow (c.0.1m deep), below this lay a subsoil of mid orange brown slightly silty clay c.0.4m deep. This overlay the natural of a mid brownish orange slightly silty clay. Clay field drains on a north-south alignment were seen to run across this area.

Two pits, which lay closer to Yarn Hill, had been excavated by the landowner prior to the storm in order to fill sand bags. These were located just above the 0m contour where the ground begins to gently rise towards the base of Yarn Hill (Fig 2, C, Plate 4). The natural subsoil here was noticeably different from that on the marshes being orange silty sand. Within the natural sand distinctive laminations were visible including narrow bands of yellow sand and

grey silt/clays. Over the natural lay a thick topsoil (c.0,5m deep) of mid orange brown slightly silty loamy sand. The two pits were irregular rectangles measuring c.12mx5m and 6mx8m) and between 2 and 2.5m in depth.

As a possible undated saltern site is marked in the HER close by a single transect of fieldwalking (Fig 2, D) was undertaken to the south of and following the curving field boundary between the marshes and cultivated fields. Within the field walked was a crop of brassicas which partially masked the ground surface. A number of finds were recovered and a gradual reddening of the soil was noted. The finds consisted of 28 undiagnostic fragments of briquetage weighing 0.72kg.and a single flint flake. The briquetage fragments had no datable features or qualities and could be either Roman or medieval in date (Sarah Percival pers. comm.).

Conclusions

Although the work undertaken to repair the floodbank revealed no archaeological deposits, the single transect of fieldwalking nearby has confirmed that site IKN 049 is a saltern, although no closely dateable finds were recovered.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are expressed to the East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board for sponsoring these works, and particularly to Jude Plouviez (Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service) for supplying archaeological information at short notice prior to the works commencing. Finds were identified by Sarah Percival (briquetage) and Sarah bates (flint).

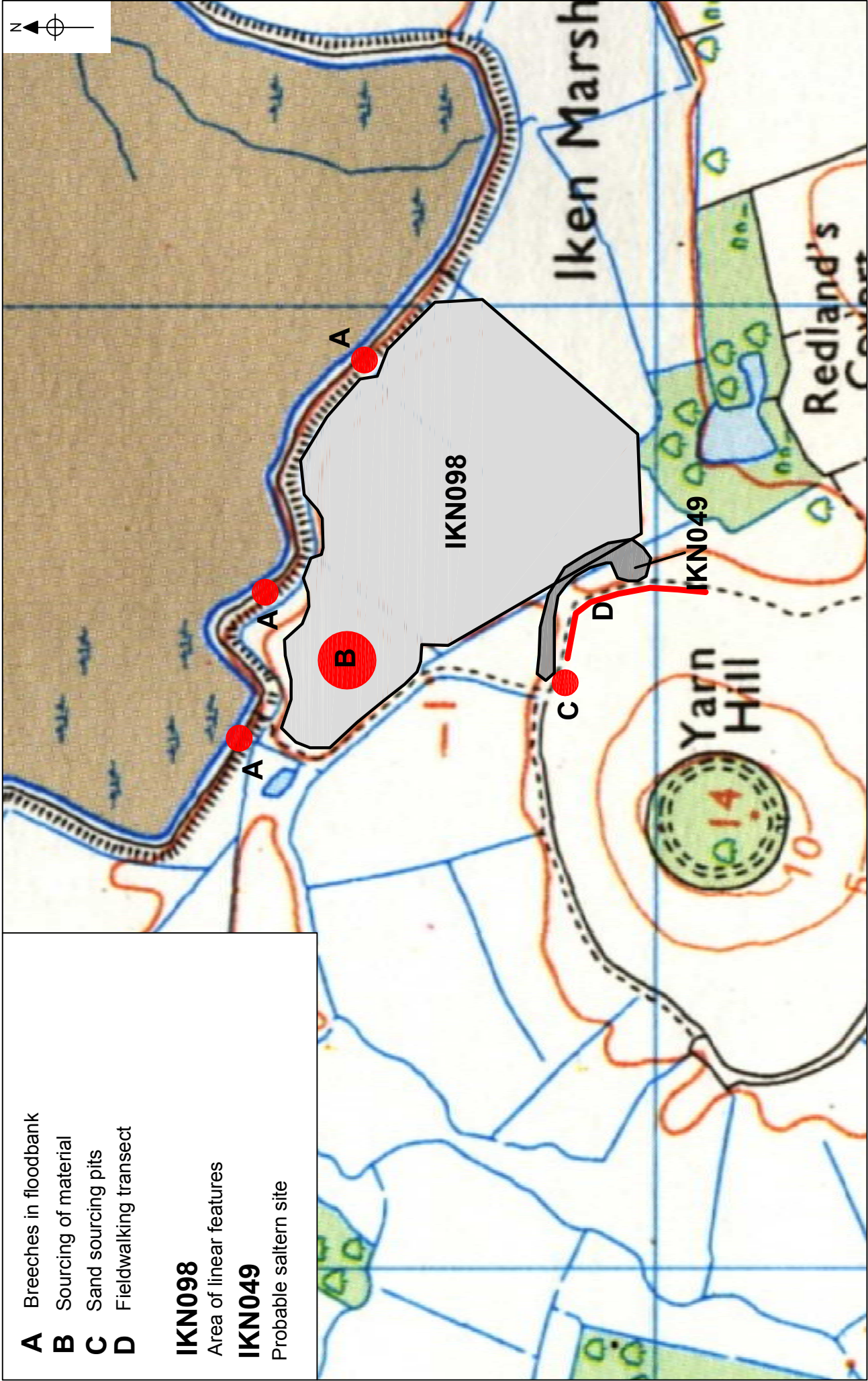


Figure 2. Showing areas of archaeological monitoring.



Plate 1. Showing breach in sea wall, looking north-west.



Plate 2. Sourcing of material, looking south, Yarn Hill is wooded are in background.



Plate 3. Sourcing of material, typical section with field drain, looking south-east.



Plate 4. Pit located towards base of Yarn Hill, looking north.