

METRIC SURVEY OF HALSCOMBE, SIMONSBATH,
EXMOOR
Exmoor Mires Project EDPI3

PROJECT REPORT

By Hazel Riley



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OASIS PROJECT NO: 151542

EXMOOR MIRES PROJECT CODE: EDPI3

ABBREVIATIONS

EH English Heritage

EMP Exmoor Mires Project

ENPA Exmoor National Park Authority

ENPHER Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record

GPS Global Positioning System

NMP National Mapping Programme

NMR National Monuments Record

OSGB36 Ordnance Survey National Grid

OSTN02 Ordnance Survey transformation parameters for conversion of WGS84 coordinates to the Ordnance Survey National Grid coordinates

RCHME Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

RICS Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors

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ABSTRACT

A large scale metric survey of an area of earthworks on Halscombe near Simonsbath in Exmoor National Park was undertaken for the Exmoor Mires Project. The earthworks are interpreted as mid 19th-century iron ore prospecting trenches and two Bronze Age hut platforms with associated field banks.

INTRODUCTION

This survey of Halscombe was undertaken for the Exmoor Mires Project (EMP) on behalf of the Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA). The principal aim of the work was to carry out a walkover and metric survey of the area to identify, accurately locate, record and interpret extant archaeological features in the area which will be affected by mire restoration work, carried out by EMP, on Deer Park and its environs (ENPA 2013). The report consists of two sections: the archaeological features and their historic landscape context are outlined and interpreted in this section. The Appendix contains the evidence base for this in the form of a Site Gazetteer which presents the detailed results of the survey work.

Location, topography and geology

Halscombe is located in the heart of Exmoor Forest, 600m south of Simonsbath (Fig 1). Halscombe is a broad spur of land between the River Barle and Halscombe Water. The land rises steeply from the River Barle on the NE side of Halscombe and very sharply from Halscombe Water on the south side of Halscombe. The sites described here are located on more gently sloping land, where a tributary stream of Halscombe Water flows NE across Halscombe, at a height of c 360-380m OD (Fig 2). The survey area lies within an area of reclaimed moorland with poorly drained, peaty soils supporting rough grazing with interspersed with areas of reeds (Front cover). The underlying geology consists of Devonian rocks - slates of the Morte Slates Formation (bgs.ac.uk).

Site numbering

Each archaeological feature has been given a unique number with the prefix EDPI3, and these numbers are used throughout this report: EDPI3(401) to EDPI3(417). In the

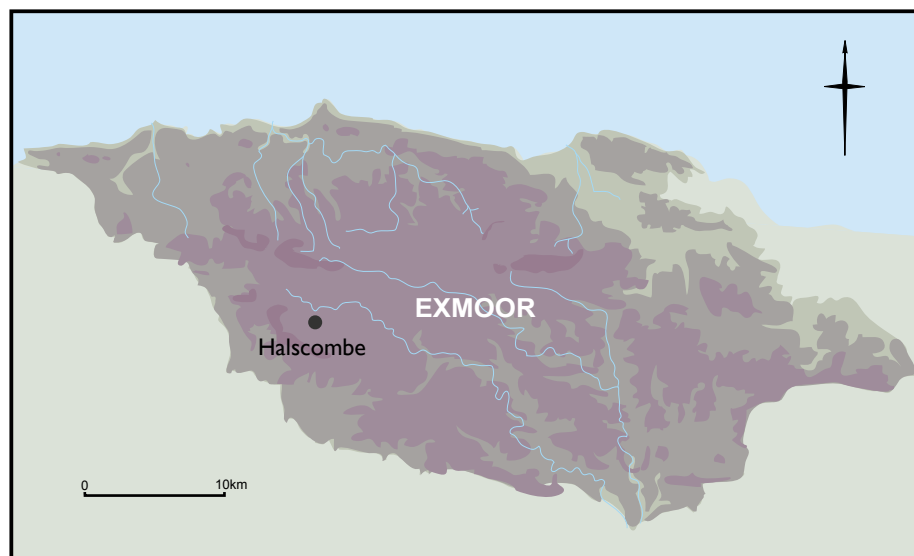


Fig 1 Location map

gazetteer entries, where appropriate, the sites are cross-referenced with the Exmoor HER numbers, the Mire walkover survey numbers and the EH NMR numbers.

PREVIOUS WORK

The RCHME carried out archaeological fieldwork across the area in the early 1990s (Riley and Wilson-North 2001; EH NMR records) and the EH NMP project for Exmoor mapped the archaeological and historic landscape features of the whole of the National Park from air photographs (Hegarty and Toms 2009). An archaeological survey of the Exmoor Forest Estate ENPA was undertaken by Richard McDonnell in 1993-4 (McDonnell 1994). The area was included in a walkover survey in advance of mire restoration work (ENPHER records).

THE SURVEY

The fieldwork was carried out during April 2013. All of the features recorded in the Exmoor HER and in the EMP walkover survey were located, photographed and recorded. A LiDAR image of the area (Fig 3) was used to help prospect for new sites and these were recorded in the same way. These detailed descriptions and photographs make up the Site Gazetteer. All of the extant archaeological features were surveyed at a scale of 1:500 using survey grade differential GPS. Spot heights were taken across the survey area to obtain contours at 1m intervals. The GPS-derived geodetic WGS84 coordinates were transformed to the Ordnance Survey National Grid (OSGB36) using the Ordnance Survey's grid transformation (OSTN02) in Leica's GPS post-processing software. Observation times were based on those recommended by the OS and the RICS in order to obtain accurate heighting information (OS 2010; RICS 2010). Figure 4 reproduces the survey plan at 1:1000 scale and shows the surveyed features with their EDPI3 numbers.

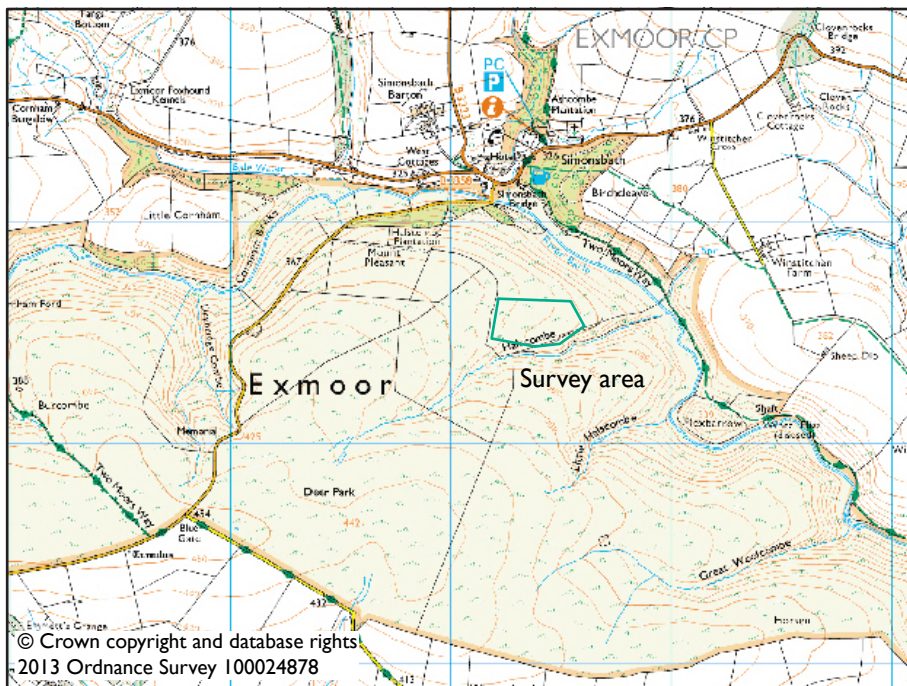


Fig 2 Survey location and topography

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE EARTHWORK FEATURES

Prehistoric settlement and boundary features

The earliest extant archaeological features recorded are two circular platforms at the SE corner of the survey area (Figs 5 and 6). The platform to the west, EDPI3(414), is 10m in diameter, that to the east, EDPI3(416), is 12m in diameter and both are terraced into the hillside to a depth of 1m. The east platform is cut by a post-medieval contour leat, EDPI3(412), (Fig 5). A curving ditch runs along the edge of the west platform, a curving stony scarp runs around the east platform, EDPI3(413) (417). Both of these features are cut by the same post medieval contour leat. A narrow bank lies to the south of the west platform. These are two hut platforms, each lying within a defined area marked by a ditch or a stony scarp. The complex probably dates from the Middle Bronze Age.

The site occupies a sheltered, south facing site, above Halscombe Water, at an altitude of 366m OD. There are no known prehistoric settlement sites in the immediate area, but later Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age activity is attested by the standing stone and cairns on Deer Park, 1 km to the SW above Halscombe Water (NMR SS 73 NE 13, 53, 54). Recent fieldwork by the EMP has identified possible earlier prehistoric activity at Wintershead on the southern edge of Deer Park (Carey and Ventre 2012; Riley 2012), including an early Neolithic leaf arrowhead (L Bray pers comm). During the course of this survey a retouched flint tool on a long flake was found in a recently weathered molehill between the trenches EDPI3(401) and (404) (Fig 7).

The settlement on Halscombe has similarities with other extant Bronze Age settlement sites on Exmoor, such as the hut circle and field boundaries on West Pinford, set in a landscape of stone settings and cairns, and the hut platforms and short lengths of field banks on Porlock Allotment (Riley and Wilson-North 2001, figs 2.19; 2.43; Riley 2013).



Fig 3 LiDAR image of the survey area



Fig 5 Bronze Age hut platform EDPI3(414)



*Fig 6 (left) Bronze Age hut platform cut by post medieval leat
Fig 7 (below) End scraper found on Halscombe*



Fig 8 Detail of iron ore prospecting trench EDPI3(401)

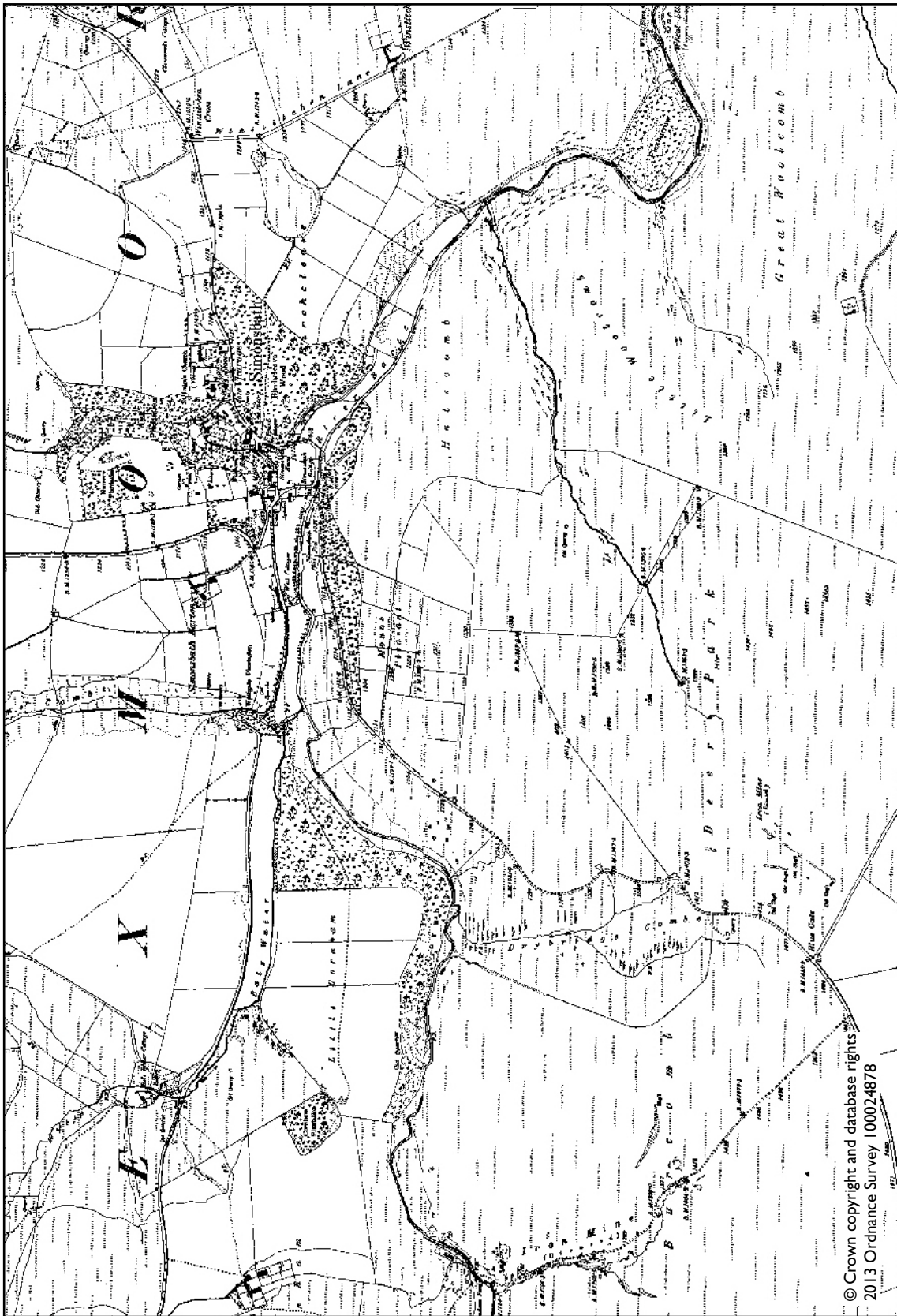
Post medieval drainage and iron ore prospecting features

A narrow channel with a bank on its downslope side, EDPI3 412, runs from the tributary stream of Halscombe Water along the contours of the hillside towards the NE. This is a leat carrying water from the stream across Halscombe (Fig 6). It could be part of a water management scheme to improve the spring grass on the steep slopes below. It may also be associated with the small enclosures above Halscombe Plantation which are named 'Mount Pleasant' on the 1st edition OS map (Fig 9). These enclosures are not shown on the 1804 OS map of the area (www.bl.uk/onlinegallery North Molton). The leat may therefore date from the earliest phase of John Knight's reclamation work on Exmoor in the 1820s; it certainly pre-dates the mid-19th century iron ore prospecting features.

A system of linear trenches with spoil banks and associated drainage channels lies on both sides of a tributary stream of Halscombe Water: EDPI3(401), (404), (405), (406), (411). Seven lie on the NW side of the stream. The trenches with spoil banks are between 10-45m long. Five of them are oriented NW/SE and lie across the hillslope between 383m-374m. One trench links the two western trenches; a further trench runs from the western trench to the stream. Long, narrow channels run from the five NW/SE trenches to the stream, these are 30-70m long, reed filled and wet in places. At the east side of the complex a curvilinear channel with spoil banks runs for 150m NW/SE downslope to the stream, EDPI3(407). On the south side of the stream two linear channels with intermittent spoil banks, EDPI3(411), run for a total of 95m downslope between 382-370m. The stream bed has been artificially deepened along most of its course below the linear earthworks.

These earthworks are the remains of trenches dug to prospect for iron ore deposits by Frederic Knight in the early 1850s. The evidence for this comes from three sources: the morphology and location of the earthworks; contemporary and historical accounts of prospecting for iron ore on the southern part of Exmoor Forest in the 19th century, and other comparable archaeological remains in the environs.

The linear trenches on the NW side of the stream are regularly spaced, indicating a systematic search for mineral deposits. The spoil dumps on the sides of the trenches are a characteristic feature of prospecting trenches (Fig 8). This part of Halscombe is on the projected line of the 'Little Woolcombe Vein', a lode identified in some of the earliest searches for iron ore in the 1850s. A plan showing the Dowlais Iron Company's mining operations on Burcombe and Hangle Cleve, 1855-1858, shows the location of eight E/W lodes, centred on the large ironstone workings at Burcombe (Orwin 1929, plan facing p132). On this plan the 'Little Woolcombe Vein' is shown with an adit below Burcombe. Its projected line to the east runs across Halscombe where these earthworks occur. The spur of land between Halscombe and Great Woolcombe is now called Little Halscombe, but on the OS 1st edition map (Fig 9) the spur is named 'Little Woolcombe', suggesting that the mineral vein was sought if not found in this area. Following the discovery of high grade iron ore at Goosemoor on the Brendon Hills in the 1840s, Frederick Knight began to explore the potential of the Exmoor Forest estate for similar ironstone deposits. His father, John Knight, had already acquired the mineral rights to the property and 1846 a copper mine at Wheal Eliza, just across the



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Fig 9 Extract from OS 1st edition map

River Barle from Halscombe, was leased. In 1853 Samuel Blackwell from Dudley and Ebenezer Rogers from South Wales, who were working at the Brendon Hills iron mines, were engaged by Frederick Knight to look at the iron deposits which he had identified on Exmoor Forest. They explored 'Rogers Vein' on Deer Park at Blue Gate and sunk a deep shaft there. Frederick Knight and his agent Robert Smith continued their search for minerals on the forest and Orwin writes that:

'By 1854, Frederick Knight had satisfied himself of the potential value of the minerals underlying his property. By means of trenches and holes and by making a few cuts into the side of the hill, the existence of deposits of ore was proved – for the most part on either side of the South Molton road, in the Deer Park and Hangle Cleeve to the south, and on Burcombe to the north. Other deposits were identified in the regions of Picked Stones and Hoar Oak Hill'
(Orwin 1929, 121).

Burton writes of the extensive nature of Frederick Knight's search for ironstone on Exmoor Forest in the early 1850s. In 1909 Alex Tucker was employed by Viscount Ebrington to report on the mineral deposits on his part of the Exmoor Forest estate. Tucker recorded that Frederick Knight cut a '12-15 feet deep trench two miles long across the South Forest from Hangle Cleeve to Simonsbath, to intersect the outcrop of the east-west lodes. In 1909, much of this trench and the outcrop of the lodes were still to be seen, although badly overgrown' (Burton 1989, 201).

Linear prospecting trenches can be seen elsewhere in the area. At Blue Gate, where mining occurred in the 1850s and the early 20th century, a linear trench connecting two shafts is 4.3m wide, 1m deep and 420m long. This feature is described on an undated plan by Captain Phillips as having been dug by Frederick Knight. Several other linear trenches at Blue Gate mine are attributed to Frederick Knight's explorations in the 1850s (EH NMR SS 73 NE 23). Just over 1km to the SE of Blue Gate iron mine are the earthwork remains of two linear trenches, 180m and 70m long (NMR SS 73 NE 128, 129). These are very similar in form to those on Halscombe; Burton has suggested they were dug to establish the extent of the lodes at Blue Gate iron mine (Burton 1989, 143).

There are several phases of drainage features on Halscombe. The channels which run from the ends of the linear trenches down to the edge of the stream on the N side are a maximum of 0.5m deep, reed filled, with no evident spoil banks associated with them. They seem to have been dug as drainage channels and are probably contemporary with the iron ore prospecting in the 1850s. Several small drainage ditches cut through the prospecting trenches. These probably date from the latter part of the 19th century or the early 20th century, when the grazing potential of the area was being improved. A small area of peat cutting lies in the SW part of the study area. The large areas of peat cutting identified from air photographs on Burcombe and Deer Park to the west and south of Halscombe could well be associated with the later 19th and early 20th century mining operations and subsequent need for accommodation and fuel for workers and their families in this remote, upland area.

EDP13 SITE GAZETTEER

EDP13(401)

Location: NGR 277270, 138588

Type: PROSPECTING PIT Period:Victorian (1837-1901)

Description and interpretation:Two long, narrow trenches with banks of spoil on each side, oriented NW-SE and 20m apart.The trench to the west is 83m long, 3m wide and 1m deep.The banks on each side are 3m wide and 0.5m high.The trench to the east is 20m long, 3m wide and 1m deep, with banks 2-3m wide and 0.3-0.5m high on both sides.

At the southeast end of both trenches long, silted up, reed filled ditches run from the trenches to the edge of a tributary stream to Halscombe Water.The west ditch is 45m long, 3m wide and 0.5m deep; the east ditch is 60m long, 3m wide and 0.5m deep.They were dug to drain water from the trenches into the stream below.

The two trenches are linked by a short trench, 18m long, 3m wide and 1m deep. Banks of spoil on both sides are 3m wide and 0.5m high.This trench has been modified by a later drainage ditch, EDP13(402).A further long, narrow trench runs off the west side of the west trench.This is 36m long, 3m wide and m deep, with banks of spoil 3m wide, 0.5m high on the sides.A drainage ditch cuts the trench and banks.

These earthworks are most likely to be part of Frederick Knight's prospecting for ironstone in the southern part of Exmoor Forest and so date from the early 1850s.

References: Part of ENPHER MMO2882. Part of NMR SS 73 SE 85

EDP13(401)a_NW_11APR13_HRILEY; EDP13(401)b_NW_19APR13_HRILEY

EDP13(402)

Location: NGR 277255, 138587

Type: DRAINAGE DITCH

Period:Victorian (1837-1901); Early 20th Century (1901-1932)

Description and interpretation:Three drainage ditches on the north side of a tributary stream of Halscombe Water.The ditches are 1m wide, 0.25m deep and cut through the prospecting trenches, EDP13(401).They date from the latter part of the 19th century or the early 20th century, when the grazing potential of the area was being improved.

References: Part of ENPHER MMO2882. Part of NMR SS 73 SE 85

EDP13(402)_SE_19APR13_HRILEY

EDP13(403)

Location: NGR 277267, 138549

Type: STREAM

Period:Victorian (1837-1901); Early 20th Century (1901-1932)

Description and interpretation:Tributary to Halscombe Water.The sides of the channel have been deepened by a series of scarps along its course, below the prospecting trenches and drains, EDP13(401) and (402).A bank of spoil, 25m long, 4m wide and 0.4m high lies on the northwest side.This is associated with the ironstone prospecting and drainage in the area.

References: Part of ENPHER MMO2882. Part of NMR SS 73 SE 85

EDP13(403)_W_11APR13_HRILEY

EDP13(404)

Location: NGR 277326, 138557

Type: PROSPECTING PIT

Period:Victorian (1837-1901)

Description and interpretation:A linear trench, oriented NW-SE, with banks of spoil on each side.The trench is 17m long, 3m wide and 1m deep.The banks are 3m wide and 0.4m high.A shallow, reed-filled linear hollow, 75m long, 3m wide and 0.25m deep runs from the south end of the trench to the stream below and was dug to drain the trench.

These earthworks are most likely to be part of Frederick Knight's prospecting for ironstone in the southern part of Exmoor Forest and so date from the early 1850s.

References: Part of ENPHER MMO2882. Part of NMR SS 73 SE 85

EDP13(404)_SE_19APR13_HRILEY

EDP13(405)

Location: NGR 277353, 138547

Type: PROSPECTING PIT

Period:Victorian (1837-1901)

Description and interpretation:A linear trench, oriented NW-SE, with a banks of spoil at north end.The trench is 14m long, 3m wide and 0.9m deep.The banks are 1-2m wide and 0.4m high.A shallow, reed-filled linear hollow, 80m long, 3m wide and 0.25m deep runs from the south end of the trench to the stream below and was dug to drain the trench.These earthworks are most likely to be part of Frederick Knight's prospecting for ironstone in the southern part of Exmoor Forest and so date from the early 1850s.

References: Part of ENPHER MMO2882. Part of NMR SS 73 SE 85

EDP13(405)_SE_19APR13_HRILEY

EDP13(406)

Location: NGR 277388, 138537

Type: PROSPECTING PIT

Period:Victorian (1837-1901)

Description and interpretation:A linear trench, oriented NW-SE, with a bank of spoil on the east side.The trench is 15m long, 3m wide and 0.5m deep, the bank is 3m wide and 0.3m high. A shallow, reed-filled linear hollow, 98m long, 4m wide and 0.25m deep runs from the south end of the trench to the stream below and was dug to drain the trench. Banks of spoil lie on the east side of the ditch the lower, south end.The ditch has cut through a contour leat (EDP13 412).These earthworks are most likely to be part of Frederick Knight's prospecting for ironstone in the southern part of Exmoor Forest and so date from the early 1850s.

References: Part of ENPHER MMO2882. Part of NMR SS 73 SE 85

EDP13(406)_NW_19APR13_HRILEY

EDP13(407)

Location: NGR 277440, 1385528

Type: PROSPECTING PIT

Period:Victorian (1837-1901)

Description and interpretation:A curvilinear trench with banks of spoil on each side. The trench is 150m long, 3m wide and 1m deep, the bank is 2-3m wide and 0.5m high.

The NW end of the trench cuts into the prospecting trench EDPI3 406. It overlies the gully, EDPI3(413) and has cut through the contour leat, EDPI3(412). These earthworks are most likely to be part of Frederick Knight's prospecting for ironstone in the southern part of Exmoor Forest and so date from the early 1850s.

References: Part of ENPHER MMO2882. Part of NMR SS 73 SE 85
EDPI3(407)_NE_19APR13_HRILEY

EDPI3(408)

Location: NGR: 277241, 138536

Period: Post Medieval (1540-1901)

Type: DRAINAGE DITCH

Description and interpretation: A shallow, linear hollow, oriented NW-SE. It is 42m long, 3m wide and 0.75m deep. This is a drainage ditch and its orientation and location suggest that it may be associated with the nearby peat cutting EDPI3 409.

References: Part of ENPHER MMO2882. Part of NMR SS 73 SE 85
EDPI3(408)_W_11APR13_HRILEY

EDPI3(409)

Location: NGR 277222, 138523

Type: PEAT CUTTING

Period: Post Medieval (1540-1901)

Description and interpretation: A series of rectangular hollows, 0.5m deep, covering an area 65m x 25m, is an area of peat cutting and dates from the post medieval period

References: EDPI3(409)_W_11APR13_HRILEY

EDPI3(410)

Location: NGR 277249, 138482

Type: DRAINAGE DITCH

Period: Victorian (1837-1901); Early 20th Century (1901-1932)

Description and interpretation: Three narrow drainage ditches, 1m wide and 0.4-0.7m deep on the south side of a tributary of Halscombe Water. One ditch drains an area of peat cutting, EDPI3(409); one cuts a probable prospecting trench, EDPI3(411). They date from the latter part of the 19th century or the early 20th century, when the grazing potential of the area was being improved.

References: Part of ENPHER MMO2882. Part of NMR SS 73 SE 85
EDPI3(410)_NE_11APR13_HRILEY

EDPI3(411)

Location: NGR 277283, 138503

Type: PROSPECTING PIT

Period: Victorian (1837-1901)

Description and interpretation: A linear hollow, oriented N-S, 69m long, 3m wide and 1.25m deep. Banks of spoil, 3m wide and 0.6m high lies on the south side. A second linear hollow, oriented NW-SE, 62m long, 3m wide and 0.8m deep, with intermittent banks of spoil, lies at the east end. This could also be a shallow prospecting trench or it may have been dug to drain the area. These earthworks are most likely to be part of Frederick Knight's prospecting for ironstone in the southern part of Exmoor Forest

and so date from the early 1850s.

References: Part of ENPHER MMO2882. Part of NMR SS 73 SE 85
EDP13(411)_W_11APR13_HRILEY

EDP13(412)

Location: NGR 277488, 138517

Type: LEAT

Period: Post Medieval (1540-1901)

Description and interpretation: A narrow channel with a bank on its lower edge runs from a tributary stream of Halscombe Water east and northeast along the NE side of Halscombe for 300m. The channel is 1.5m wide and 0.4m deep; the bank is 1-2m wide and 0.25m high. This is a water channel or contour leat constructed to take water from a tributary stream of Halscombe Water across the NE side of Halscombe. It may be associated with the small enclosures to the north, above Halscombe Plantation, called Mount Pleasant in the late 19th century and perhaps dating from the early 19th century and John Knight. The channel is cut by features which date from the early 1850s and overlies prehistoric settlement features, EDP13(413), (416), (417).

References: Part of ENPHER MMO2882. Part of NMR SS 73 SE 85
EDP13(412)_NE_11APR13_HRILEY

EDP13(413)

Location: NGR 277454, 138513

Type: DITCH

Period: Bronze Age (2600-700BC)

Description and interpretation: A curvilinear hollow or ditch runs for 100m NW/SE from the edge of the steep slope down to Halscombe Water around the east side of the hut platform, EDP13(414). The hollow is 4m wide, 0.20-0.40m deep and has a bank, 3m wide and 0.25m high on the south side at its west end. The hollow is cut by the prospecting trench EDP13(407) and the leat EDP(412). Its spatial association with the hut platform EDP13(414) and the way it mirrors the course of the prehistoric field bank or boundary EDP13(417) suggest that this feature is associated with the Bronze Age settlement features and could be a field boundary which also provided access from Halscombe Water.

References: EDP13(413)_NW_19APR13_HRILEY

EDP13(414)

Location: NGR 277467, 138494

Type: HUT PLATFORM

Period: Bronze Age (2600-700BC)

Description and interpretation: A circular platform, 10m in diameter, formed by a well defined scarp cut into the hillside on the north side up to 1m high and a slighter scarp on the south side 0.6m high. A second flat area to the east, on the edge of the hollow EDP13(413) could also be a settlement feature although it is not as clear as the circular platform. This is most likely to be a prehistoric hut platform dating from the Middle Bronze Age.

References: EDP12(189)
EDP13(414)_N_11APR13_HRILEY

EDPI3(415)

Location: NGR 277473, 138478

Type: BANK (EARTHWORK)

Period: Bronze Age (2600-700BC)

Description and interpretation: A linear bank, 15m long, 2.5m wide and 0.5m high runs N/S just below the hut platform EDPI3 414. There is a significant amount of damage to the bank by burrowing animals on its east side. This is most likely to be a field bank associated with the Bronze Age settlement features.

References: EDPI3(415)_N_19APR13_HRILEY

EDPI3(416)

Location: NGR 277507, 138531

Type: HUT PLATFORM

Period: Bronze Age (2600-700BC)

Description and interpretation: A circular platform, 12m in diameter, is formed by a well defined scarp, 1m high, on the north side and a slighter scarp, 0.5m high, on the south side. The platform is cut by a leat EDPI3(412). This is most likely to be a prehistoric hut platform dating from the Middle Bronze Age.

References: EDPI2(198)

EDPI3(416)a_NW_11APR13_HRILEY, EDPI3(416)b_NW_19APR13_HRILEY

EDPI3(417)

Location: NGR 277483, 138530

Type: BANK (EARTHWORK)

Period: Bronze Age (2600-700BC)

Description and interpretation: A well defined, stony scarp 146m long and 0.5m high runs NW/SE and SW/NE around the hut platform EDPI3(416). A short bank, 10m long, 1.5m wide and 0.3m high overlies the scarp at its south corner. The scarp is cut by the leat EDPI3(412). This slight, stony scarp is very likely to be a prehistoric field boundary, associated with the prehistoric settlement features, and dating from the Middle Bronze Age.

References: EDPI2(190)

EDPI3(417)a_NE_11APR13_HRILEY, EDPI3(417)b_S_11APR13_HRILEY,

EDPI3(417)c_E_19APR13_HRILEY

EDPI3(418)

Location: NGR 277297, 138606

Type: END SCRAPER

Period: Later Prehistoric (4000BC-43AD)

Description and interpretation: A small scraper formed by retouch on the end of a long flint blade. The tool is 40mm long and 10mm wide. The scraper was found on a recently weathered molehill during the course of survey work.

References: EDPI3(418)_21MAY13_HRILEY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lee Bray organised access and provided background material; the LiDAR image was provided from data made available by South West Water.

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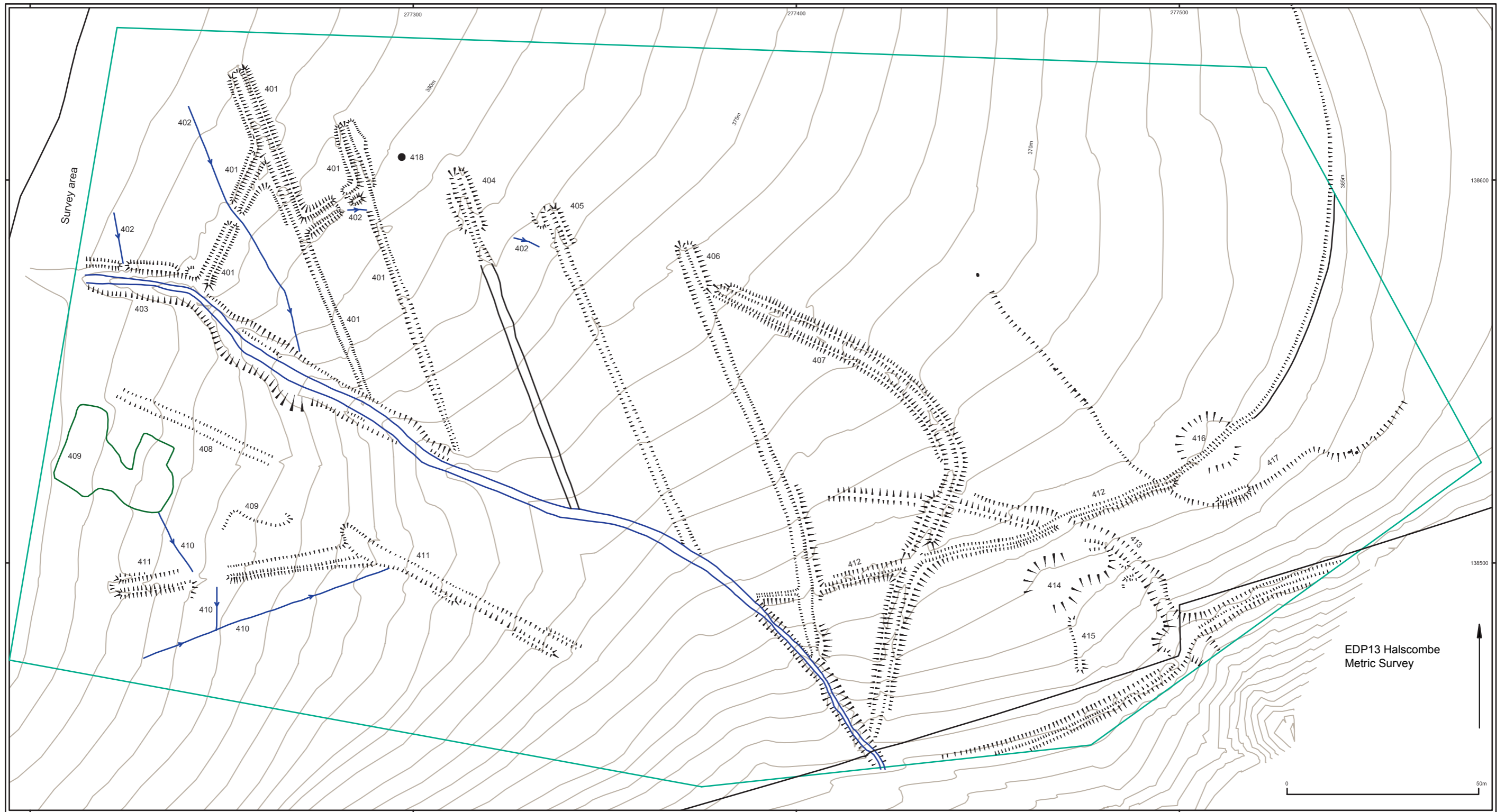


Figure 4 Survey plan with EDP13 site reference numbers (reduced 1:500 plan)

