

METRIC SURVEY OF BURNT MOUNDS ON
SPOONER'S ALLOTMENT, EXMOOR FOREST
Exmoor Mires Project ESPI4

PROJECT REPORT

By Hazel Riley



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OASIS PROJECT NO 191267

ABBREVIATIONS

EH English Heritage

EMP Exmoor Mires Project

ENPA Exmoor National Park Authority

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 metric survey of two mounds and their immediate environs on Spooner's Allotment was carried out to record and accurately locate the earthworks. The survey has confirmed the interpretation of one of the mounds as a burnt mound, dating from c 2000-1500 BC, and suggested that the other mound may also be a burnt mound.

INTRODUCTION

This survey of two mounds on Spooner's Allotment was undertaken for the Exmoor Mire Project (EMP) on behalf of the Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA). The principal aim of the work was to record the two mounds and accurately locate them to aid their interpretation and to provide context for a small evaluation excavation scheduled to take place on the SW side of the western mound. The survey area lies within the area on Spooner's Allotment which has been affected by mire restoration work and the installation of a monitoring station carried out by EMP.

The report consists of two sections: the archaeological features and their historic landscape context are outlined and interpreted in the first section.

The second section 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

The survey area lies on Spooner's Allotment, at the confluence of two streams, the headwaters of a stream which flows into the River Barle between Flexbarrow and Cow Castle (Figs 1 and 2). The mounds lie on the northern edge of the southern stream, at 385m OD, at NGR SS 7791 3739 (Fig 3).

The underlying geology is rocks of the Devonian period: sandstones of the Hangman formation; there are deposits of blanket peat on the level plateaux and alluvium deposits on the valley floors (bgs.ac.uk).

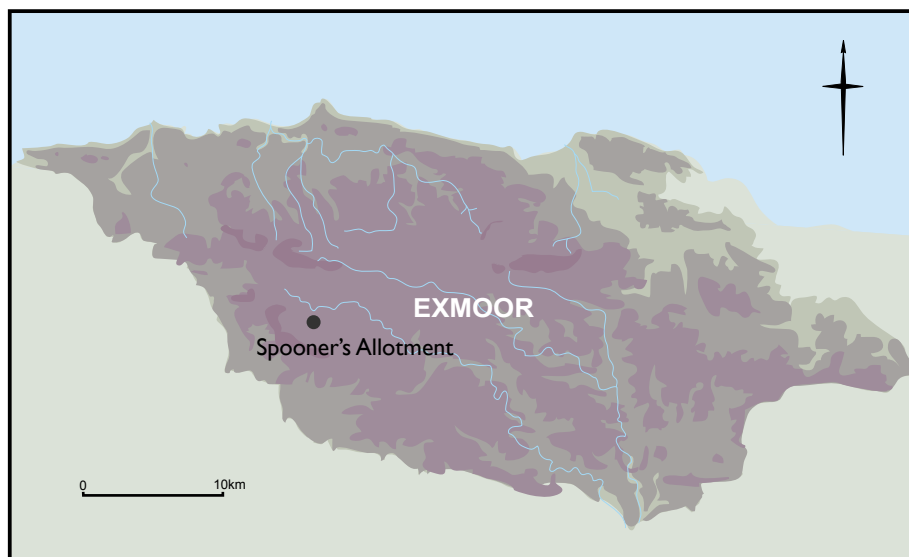


Fig 1 Location map

Site numbering

For this survey, each archaeological feature has been given a unique number with the prefix ESPI4, and these numbers are used throughout this report: ESPI4(101) to ESPI4(103). Previous numbering schemes are set out in Bray 2013, 15-19.

PREVIOUS WORK

The small cairn to the SW of the mounds was located by ENPA staff prior to the EMP work, and a recent walkover survey for the EMP identified the two mounds as probable burnt mounds (Bray 2013). A geophysical survey of the area was carried out in 2013 (Carey *fc*).

THE SURVEY

The fieldwork was carried out during August 2014, when the ground conditions were not ideal for analytical earthwork survey (Fig 8). The mounds were recorded at a scale of 1:250 and a topographic survey of the whole area recorded the small cairn and contours at 2m intervals (Figs 3 and 4). Profiles were surveyed across the mounds (Fig 5).

The archaeological features were surveyed using survey grade differential GPS. 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).

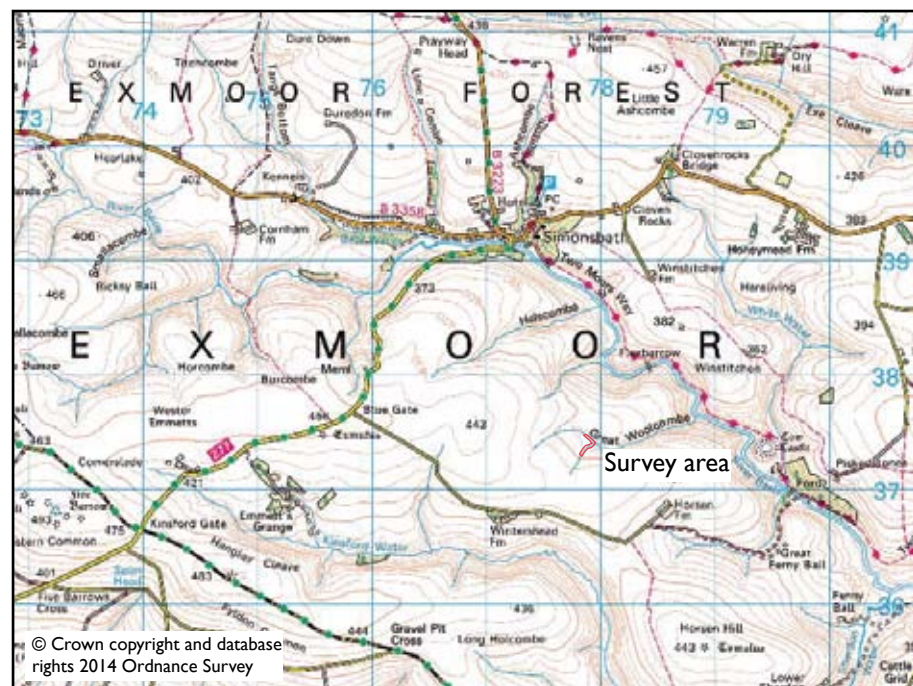


Fig 2 Survey location and topography

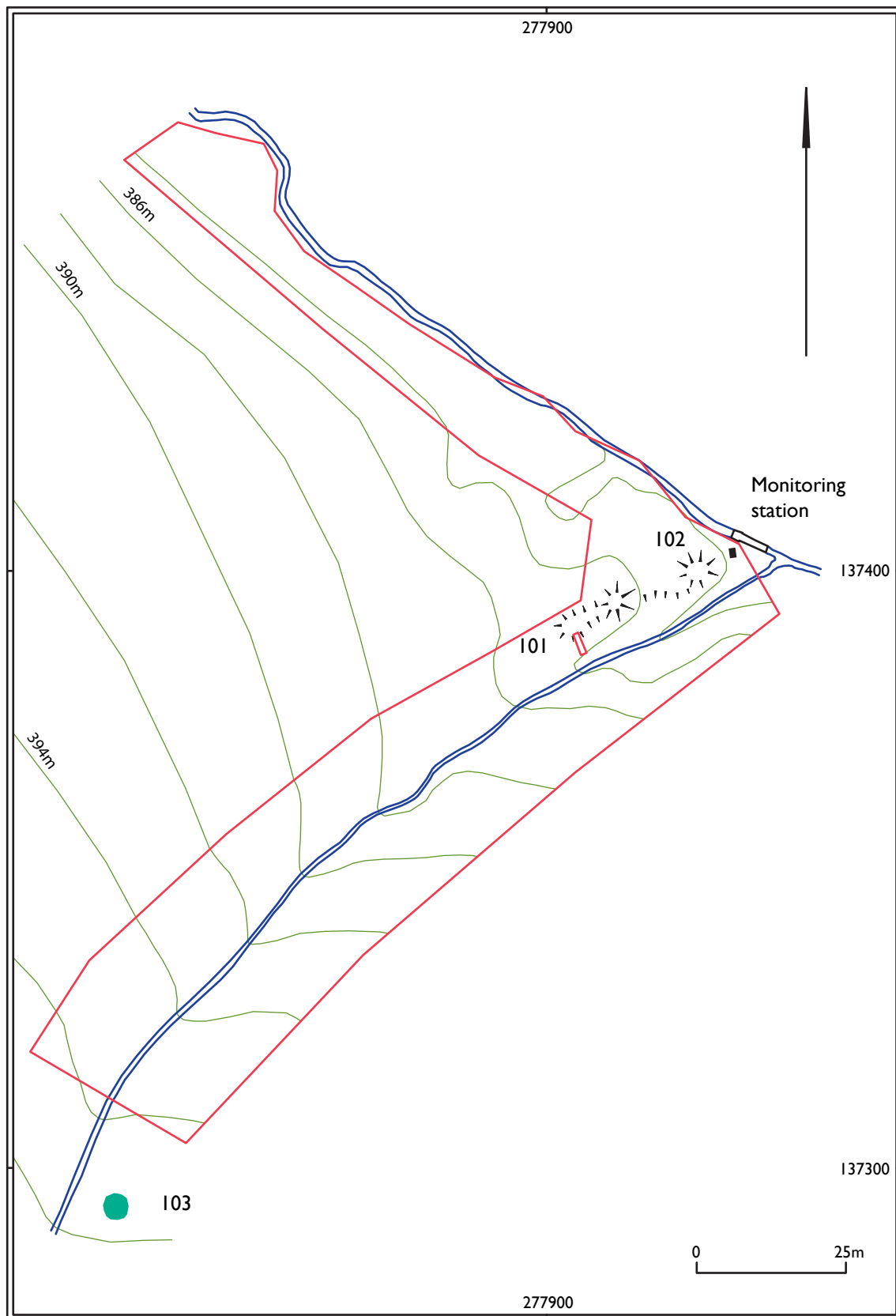


Fig 3 Topographic and location survey with the site reference numbers (1:1000 scale)

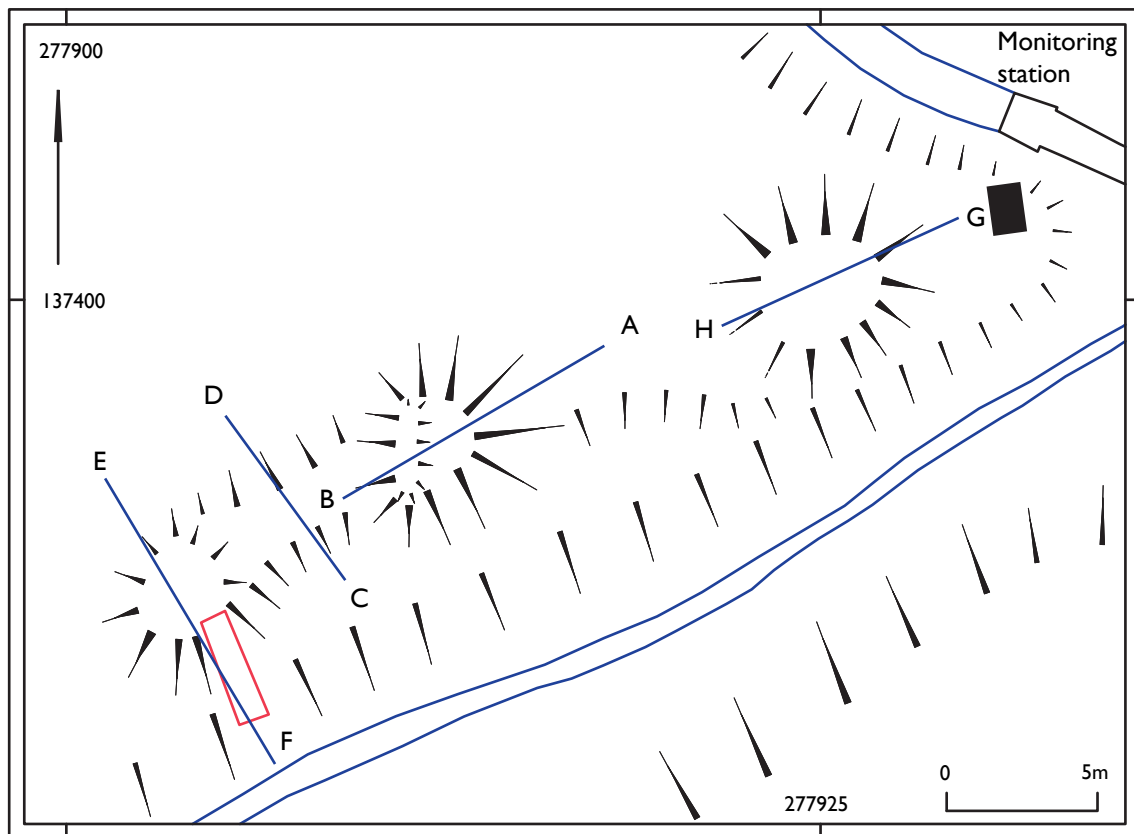


Fig 4 (top)
Earthwork survey
of the mounds
(1:250 scale)

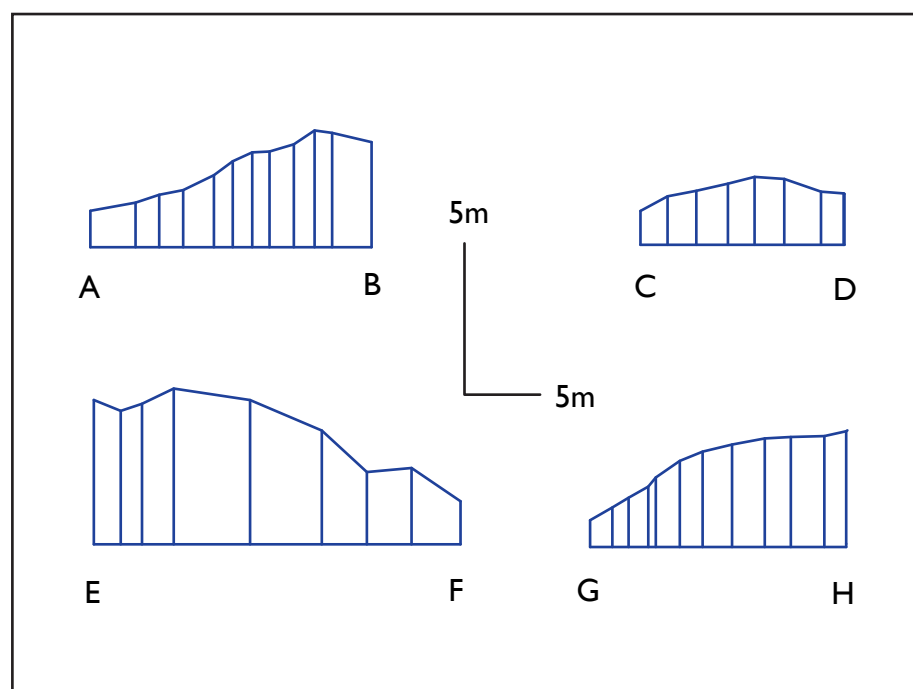


Fig 5 (right)
Profiles across the
mounds (vertical
scale x 2)

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Some 25m to the SW of the monitoring station at the confluence of the two streams, on the northern edge of the stream, are two mounds joined by a bank, ESPI4 (101) (Fig 6). The mound at the NE end is the best defined and is mostly turf covered and very stony. It is 6.5m NW/SE, 7m NE/SW and a maximum of 1m high and has a pronounced ridge of stone on its west side (Fig 7). The mound at the SW end is also stony and fragments of burnt quartz were seen on the north edge. It measures 5m NE/SW, 6m NW/SE and is a maximum of 1.4m high. The bank which links the two mounds is 5m long and 0.5m high, with a curve on its south side, forming a small level area between the mound and the edge of the stream. The feature has overall measurements of 17m NE/SW by 6.5m NW/SE. The location close to a stream, the morphology of the feature and the evidence of burning from both geophysics and ground evidence all suggest a burnt mound of prehistoric date.

A sub-circular stony mound, ESPI4 (102), lies 5m to the SW of the monitoring station at the confluence of the two streams. It measures 8m NE/SW, 7m NW/SE and is a maximum of 0.5m high (Figs 5 and 8). It is linked to the east side of the burnt mound ESPI4 (101) by a scarp which forms a level area between the mounds and the edge of the stream. The installation of the monitoring equipment may have disturbed part of this feature but given the proximity of the burnt mound to the SW this feature should be considered as a possible burnt mound, particularly as observations made during the installation of the flume recorded a possible buried soil at this location (Bray 2013, 8).

A small cairn, ESPI4 (103), lies at the southern end of the survey area. It is a low, stony mound, c 6m in diameter and 0.5m high.



Fig 6 The burnt mound (Hazel Riley)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The burnt mound on Spooner's Allotment is a regionally important discovery. Until very recently, it was thought that burnt mounds were absent from the South West, but excavations in 2005 at Town Farm Quarry, Burlescombe, on the NE edge of the Blackdown Hills in Devon uncovered two Bronze Age burnt mounds (Gent 2007) and a well-preserved, horseshoe shaped burnt mound was discovered on Exmoor in Hocombe Combe, Brendon Common in 2009 (Wilson-North 2011).

Given these recent discoveries, the potential for the discovery of further burnt mounds along the headwaters of river systems on Exmoor is high, unlike the moorland river systems of Dartmoor and Cornwall, where extensive extraction and processing of minerals has taken place throughout the historic period.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lee Bray organised access and provided background material.



*Fig 7 (above left)
Detail of the
stony ridge on
the NE side of
the burnt mound
(Hazel Riley)*



*Fig 8 (right)
The mound by
the monitoring
station (Hazel
Riley)*

REFERENCES

- Bray, L S 2013 *Results of Archaeological Walkover Surveys and Post Mire Restoration Monitoring on Spooners, Exmoor May 2012-June 2013*
Carey, C *fc Spooners Geoprospection Report*
Gent, T 2007 'Bronze Age burnt mounds and early medieval wells at Town Farm Quarry, Burlescombe' *Proc Devon Arch Soc* **65**, 35-46
Wilson-North, R 2011 *A burnt mound on Brendon Common, Exmoor*

ESPI4 SITE GAZETTEER

ESPI4(101)

Location: 277907, 137392

Type: BURNT MOUND

Period: Bronze Age (2000 BC to 700 BC)

Description and interpretation: Two stony, sub-circular mounds, linked by a low bank lie close to the monitoring station on Spooner's Allotment at the confluence of two streams which form part of a tributary stream of the River Barle. The mound at the NE end is the best defined and is mostly turf covered and very stony. It is 6.5m NW/SE, 7m NE/SW and a maximum of 1m high and has a pronounced ridge of stone on its west side. The mound at the SW end is also stony and fragments of burnt quartz were seen on the north edge. It measures 5m NE/SW, 6m NW/SE and is a maximum of 1.4m high. The bank which links the two mounds is 5m long and 0.5m high, with a curve on its south side, forming a small level area between the mound and the edge of the stream. The feature has overall measurements of 17m NE/SW by 6.5m NW/SE. The location close to a stream, the morphology of the feature and the evidence of burning from both geophysics and ground evidence all suggest a burnt mound of prehistoric date.

References: ESPI4 (101)_SW_13AUG14_HRILEY

ESPI4(102)

Location: 277925, 137400

Type: BURNT MOUND

Period: Bronze Age (2000 BC to 700 BC)

Description and interpretation: A sub-circular stony mound lies 5m to the SW of the monitoring station on Spooner's Allotment at the confluence of two streams which form part of a tributary stream of the River Barle. It measures 8m NE/SW, 7m NW/SE and is a maximum of 0.5m high. It is linked to the east side of the burnt mound ESPI4 (101) by a scarp which forms a level area between the mounds and the edge of the stream. The installation of the monitoring equipment may have disturbed part of this feature but given the proximity of the burnt mound to the SW this feature should be considered as a possible burnt mound, particularly as observations made during the installation of the flume recorded a possible buried soil at this location (Bray 2013, 8).

References: ESPI4 (102)_NE_13AUG14_HRILEY

ESPI4(103)

Location: 277827, 137293

Type: CAIRN

Period: Bronze Age (2000 BC to 700 BC)

Description and interpretation: A low, stony mound, c 6m in diameter and 0.5m high,

lies on the south side of the headwaters of a tributary stream of the River Barle, on Spooner's Allotment It is best interpreted as a prehistoric funerary monument.
References: ESPI4 (103)_N_22AUG14_HRILEY

