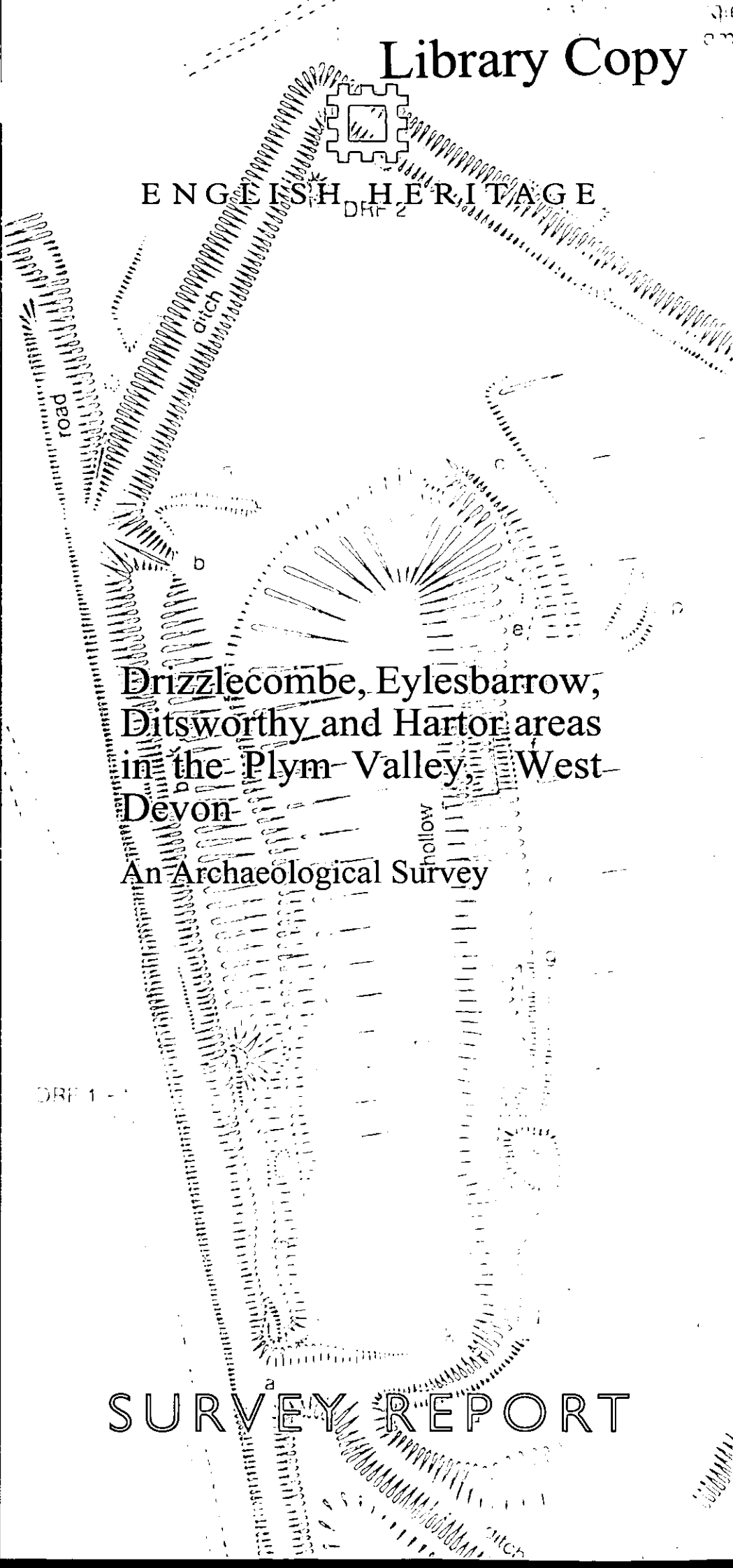


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DRE 2



road

ditch

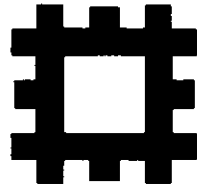
hollow

Drizzlecombe, Eylesbarrow,  
Ditsworthy and Hartor areas  
in the Plym Valley, West  
Devon

An Archaeological Survey

DRE 1

SURVEY REPORT



# ENGLISH HERITAGE

## Drizzlecombe, Eylesbarrow, Ditsworthy and Hartor areas in the Plym Valley, West Devon

### An Archaeological Survey

County: Devon  
District: West Devon  
Parish: Sheepstor/ Forest of Dartmoor  
OS Map No: SX 56 NE/SX 66 NW  
Surveyed: June - Nov. 1999  
Report by: Simon Probert  
Investigation: S. Probert, M. Fletcher, P. Newman,

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## INTRODUCTION

This area is defined by the boundary wall of Ditsworthy Warren from Meavy Pool to the Sheepstor Brook, the Eylesbarrow Reave to Eylesbarrow then to Crane Lake and Plym Head. From there the Plym is used as the boundary for some 5.5km returning to Meavy Pool.

The area of this survey, some 5.2 square km, has formed part of two much wider landscape surveys conducted by the Central Excavation Unit (Smith 1981) and Edinburgh University (Robertson 1991). The area has also been transcribed from aerial photographs by the RCHME APU in 1985 and by Butler (1993, map 49).

The survey was undertaken at a scale of 1:2500 (see appendix 1, plots 1-5).

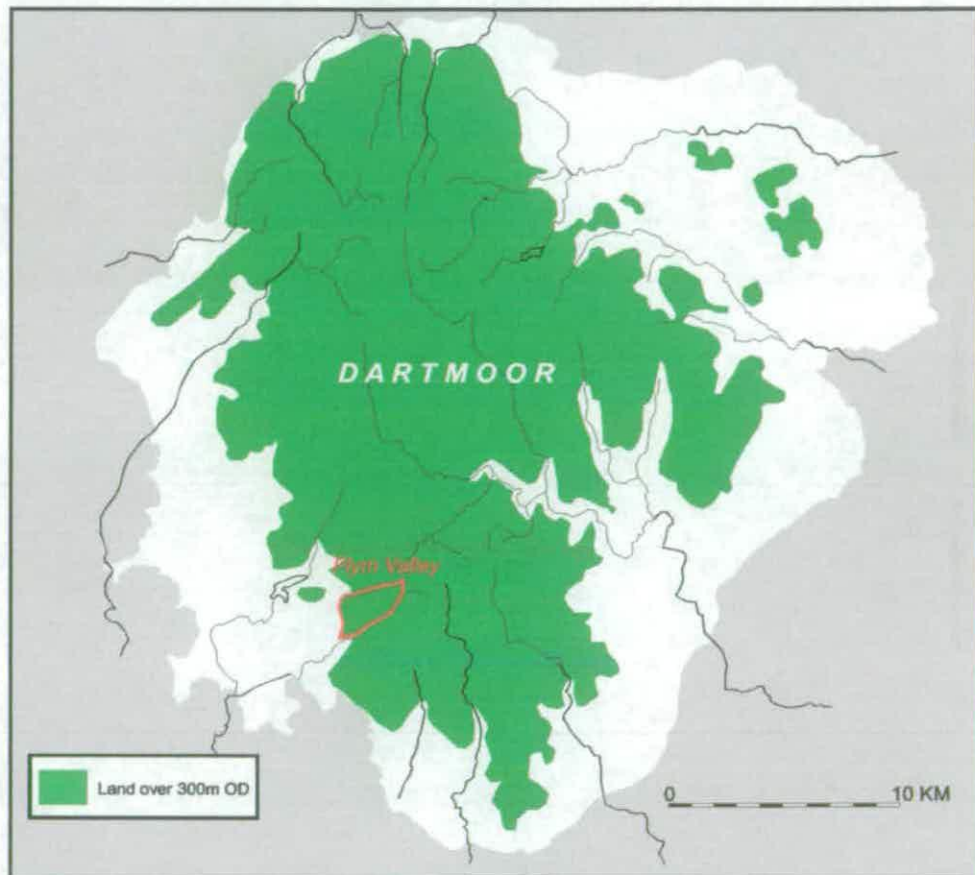


Fig. 1. Location map.

## THE PREHISTORIC LANDSCAPE

In broad terms this phase in the development of the landscape consists of four main categories:

**The lithic monuments**

**The sepulchral monuments**

**Settlement**

**The boundary work**

### **The Lithic Monuments**

The features in this category are concentrated on a gentle southwest-facing flank on the south side of Drizzlecombe. Three single stone rows run in an approximate northeast to southwest

line down the hillside from modestly sized but ornate cairns and terminate at massive blocking slabs. The shortest row, 76m long, contains 15 stones while the longest, at 146m, contains 80. The third row, immediately to the north of the others is 140m long and possesses 90 stones. The latter displays an interesting variation of form in that midway down its length it changes from a single row to a double line of stones and reverting to a single row before the blocking stone.

It is possible that these three elements may only constitute the remains of two stone rows. The longest and shortest follow the same alignment and their current forms owe much to restoration works in the first decade of the 20th century. It is not unknown for stone rows to incorporate other monuments; at Shovel Down, the Longstone, a large standing stone lies almost centrally in the remains of a stone row while at Merrivale a small, elaborate cairn again lies in the middle of another row. Further examples of what are essentially head-to-tail rows sharing the same alignment are not found elsewhere on Dartmoor.

An additional stone row has been alleged some 100m northeast of the Scout Hut and though some low stones do protrude through the cropped turf in this area there is nothing to indicate the presence of such a feature.

#### **The Sepulchral Monuments**

Within the Eylesbarrow hinterland this constitutes a large and varied group of monuments, several of which are intimately associated with the ritual monuments.

Three broad categories can be distinguished:

*Small elaborate cairns*

*Medium and large cairns*

*Small unadorned cairns*

*Small elaborate cairns*

This is a wide category containing ring cairns, kerbed cairns and the cists that are found with little or no cairn material remaining. The diameters of these features lies in the range 5m to 10m and they remain a maximum of 1.0m high.

Three elaborate cairns lie at the upper ends of the Drizzlecombe stone rows. These terminal cairns measure between 8m and 10m in diameter and all possess traces of a kerb. The southern cairn has evidence of a double ring of stones while a further cairn, to the north of the rows, displays a well-preserved double ring. This latter cairn shares an alignment with two of the terminal cairns though there is no evidence to suggest the former presence of an associated stone row.

Three other elaborate cairns and several of indeterminate type lie in the immediate area of the stone rows. In addition a heavily robbed cairn containing a possible cist lies on the south-facing slope 600m northeast of the stone rows and a solitary cist some 400m to the north.

A small ring cairn and a cist-containing cairn lie on the ridge crest immediately north of the Eylesbarrow Mine track. The further remains of a possible cist are situated amidst the later

mining remains on the western flank of Eylesbarrow.

#### *Medium and large cairns*

Four examples of this cairn type are apparent. They are all of the same form, circular turf and stone bowl-shaped mounds between 17m and 27m in diameter standing between 1.2m and 2.8m high. All the mounds display evidence of unrecorded antiquarian excavations while those on the summit of Eylesbarrow are being constantly disturbed by walkers. Only the smallest mound, north of the stone rows, possesses any form of vegetation cover, the remainder consisting of bare stone. There is no evidence to suggest that these features possessed any of the adornments of the previous cairn type.

The largest cairn, presumably the Eylesbarrow, lies alongside a slightly smaller example on the crest of a flat-topped hill of the same name. A reave, termed the 'Eylesbarrow Reave' (Fleming 1988, Fig 22) commences on the southwestern margin of the smaller cairn and follows a rough southwesterly course for some 8km. Such direct relationships between sepulchral and boundary monuments are rare on Dartmoor.

The Giant's Basin is positioned 30m southeast of the Drizzlecombe stone rows. It measures 24m in diameter and 2.8 high with a 1.65m deep excavation hollow in its centre. The fourth example is situated 150m northeast of the stone rows and even though only 17m in diameter its positioning on the south facing slope makes it a significant landscape feature. Worth (1953, 210) remarks that this cairn appears to be aligned with the longest of the stone rows.

#### *Small unadorned cairns*

There are perhaps six examples of this type within the Eylesbarrow catchment. The diameters lie in the range 5.4m to 10m and they remain between 0.25m and 1.1m high. By definition there are no traces of cists or kerbs. They display a particularly narrow distribution in this landscape in that with one exception, which may actually be a post-medieval clearance cairn, they appear to be more closely associated with prehistoric settlement than the ritual or other sepulchral monuments. They lie in close proximity to the hut clusters and enclosed settlements that are dispersed over the southern half of the hinterland. This trend is apparent on other areas of Dartmoor such as Holne Moor (RCHME 1997), Willsworthy (RCHME 1998) and Merrivale (English Heritage 2000). These surveys have shown that the positioning of small cairns also tends to avoid close association with lithic and other sepulchral monuments.

#### **Settlement**

Within the survey area the prehistoric settlement remains are dominated by the large enclosure and dense concentration of hut circles at Whittenknowles Rocks. While the size of this monument is not typical of this activity in the area it does exemplify the vast majority of the settlement remains; enclosed hut groups. A total of 87 huts were surveyed and only seven do not lie within or are not intimately associated with enclosures. Of these six are within 40m of enclosures, the remaining hut being very disturbed and lying in an area of stone clearance which may have removed traces of other contemporary features.

With very few exceptions the surveyed hut circles have all been terraced into the moderately sloping hillsides to provide level interiors with diameters between 2.7m and 12m. Their walls

vary in construction according to the nature of the granite in the immediate area. Some huts display double rings of upright orthostats with rubble infilling while others, often of a similar size, possess little more than low stoney rims. Entrances, where apparent, are in the southern quadrant and the majority of settlements lie on south or southwest facing slopes. Several huts possess small, attached annexes of between 2.0 and 3.5m in internal diameter.

The Whittenknowles Rocks settlement contains a maximum of 36 hut circles within a well-defined sub rectangular enclosure of 4.0ha. All of the hut circles have suffered some form of disturbance from a medieval phase of occupation. Low walls formerly linked several of the huts and served to subdivide the main enclosure. There are no similar settlements in the Plym Valley though comparable sites exist on other parts of Dartmoor.

The majority of the enclosures consist of a single sub-circular plot of between 0.1ha and 0.6ha containing between one and seven identifiable hut circles. The enclosure walls, where disturbed, display a stone core and turf cap and occasional traces of internal facing stones. They average 1.5m wide and 0.7m high and none of the extant entrances can be deemed original. Subsidiary enclosures, also containing hut circles, are attached to two enclosures at Eastern Tor and Drizzlecombe.

In addition to these is the possible existence of a further enclosure type marked by the fragmentary remains of several insubstantial enclosures only rarely containing hut circles. While most of the remains lie in relatively dense grassland where identification is problematic their form suggests that they were originally less substantial than the other enclosed settlement types. It is possible that the fragmentary walls are field rather than settlement boundaries and the hut circles are generally smaller than the average at around 3.0m in internal diameter. The best preserved remains of this type lie at Gutter tor where the largest outcrops have been joined by a series of stoney banks to create an enclosure roughly 40m north to south by 25m. In form this feature resembles a Neolithic defended enclosure though it's small size probably precludes such interpretation. Attached to this enclosure are fragmentary banks creating several incomplete enclosures, one of which contains a hut circle.

There is little in the way of chronology visible within the settlements of all types though one poorly-preserved site on the right bank of the Narrator Brook appears to have been added to the Eylesbarrow reave. The field evidence from other areas of Dartmoor suggests these settlement types have a long history. Their origins may lie in the later Neolithic period and they were certainly in existence by the Early Bronze Age as several have been incorporated into Middle Bronze Age reave systems at Riddon Ridge, Shaugh Moor (RCHME 1998) and Holne Moor (RCHME 1997). Survey evidence would also suggest that their occupation continued into the Middle Bronze Age while excavation at Shaugh Moor (Smith et al 1981) confirms this and extends the occupation into the Late Bronze Age. The excavation at Shaugh Moor also brought to light evidence of seasonal occupation. Such an explanation is not readily available from the above ground evidence. However, the form of the enclosed settlements would tend to support a transhumance interpretation given the impracticalities of permanent arable cultivation centered on such small, often crowded and stoney enclosures. Such conclusions have already been drawn by both Fox (1957) and Fleming (1988) who describe similar sites as 'pastoral enclosures' and 'sheilings' respectively.

### **The Boundary Work**

The Eylesbarrow Reave, the longest and perhaps the most influential prehistoric boundary work on the southwest quarter of Dartmoor, commences from the northernmost cairn at Eylesbarrow. This substantial feature measures between 2.5m and 4.0m wide and remains up to 1.2m high. Where damaged it displays a stoney core and turf cap. It follows an almost undeviating southwesterly course for some 2.3km through the survey area and continues its course for a further 5.5km across Ringmoor and Wigford Downs before turning south at the crest of the Plym Gorge northeast of Dewerstone. For most of its length this feature appears to function solely as a boundary marker though at its southwestern extremity where it crosses Wigford Down it serves as the terminal reave of a well-developed parallel reave system.

Fleming (1988, 105) puts the origin of these conspicuous boundary works at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age around 1700/1600 BC. In most cases their presence seems to define the boundary of what is essentially claimed land, sometimes developed for permanent settlement, and common land used as a seasonal resource. This definition appears to accommodate most such reaves on Dartmoor with the exception of those within the Plym Valley. While the southwestern end of the Eylesbarrow Reave marks the edge of the Wigford Down parallel reave system the remainder of the reave when coupled to the Willings Walls Reave (Fleming 1988, Fig 22) seems to define a corridor roughly centered on the Plym Valley. Perhaps an additional function of the reaves in this area was to mark access routes from the lower slopes of Dartmoor to the high moorland pastures.

### **THE MEDIEVAL AND LATER AGRARIAN LANDSCAPE**

Two small settlements each containing a long sub-divided building accompanied what appear to be ancillary structures lie within the survey area: at Whittenknowles Rocks and southeast of Gutter Tor. The long buildings 22m and 28m in length resemble longhouses apart from the fact that there appears to be only a single entrance, in the centre of the side facing the southern aspect. Both buildings are also aligned across the contours with their upper ends slightly below the current ground level. The building at Whittenknowles has been extended by the addition of two rooms onto what would have been the higher, dwelling, end. The ancillary structures are all rectangular with lengths of between 6.7m and 12m. Two of the buildings at Gutter Tor display cross-passages while one of the Whittenknowles structures has staggered entrances in its long sides. The extensive field system immediately south of Gutter Tor probably has origins that are contemporary with this settlement though the original remains are largely overlain by a later reuse of this area (see below). Traces of what may be contemporary banks lie west of the farmstead and on the lower slopes of the tor. Several small enclosures adjoin parts of the settlement. The Whittenknowles settlement lies within and partially reuses a large prehistoric enclosure that contains several small fields. The latter were cleared during the medieval reoccupation, the resulting debris being deposited in the nearby hut circles. In addition to these, several enclosures dating from this later period were added to the outside of the main enclosing wall. Traces of what appear to be a more organised contemporary field system lie some 300m to the north, divorced from the settlement.

The results of the exhaustive documentary research conducted by Robertson (1991, 232) suggest that similar settlement remains exist beneath the buildings of Ditsworthy Warren. The whole of the right bank of the River Plym was owned by the Cistercians of Buckland

Abbey, whose records mention a settlement at Gutter Tor, Gotetorre, in 1281. By 1404 it, 'Guttur', had been 'recently abandoned'. Ditsworthy does not appear in the record until 1473 though Robertson (1991, 212) argues persuasively that it possessed an earlier origin, similar to that of Gutter Tor whose fields it appears to have used following the abandonment of the latter. A lease for what was probably a property rather than an area called 'Derksworthy' was granted by Thomas Olyver, Abbot of Buckland, to William Pomeray in 1493. Interestingly, Pomeray had held the property before that date. The Reformation saw the right bank of the Plym sold to the Slanning family. The farm at Ditsworthy was leased to Elie Shullibeare in 1552.

Robertson speculates that the abandoned fields south of Gutter Tor were refurbished during this period and brought into the Ditsworthy holding. The field evidence would tend to support this as the structure of the banks of this field system is markedly more substantial than those directly associated with the earlier field boundaries around the settlement and in the relict field system around Whittenknowles. The same change is apparent on the opposite side of the Plym, outside the survey area, where earlier medieval field systems are redeveloped at the same time and in which traces of ridge and furrow remain. This phase illustrates a period of growth in agriculture in the immediate post-medieval period also reflected in the reconstruction of farm buildings, particularly farmhouses; that at Ditsworthy probably dates from this period. This phase seems to have been relatively short as by 1676 Ditsworthy had become a warren (Robertson 1991, 260).

Robertson was unable to identify documentary references to the Whittenknowles settlement.

#### **DITSWORTHY WARREN**

Ditsworthy had acquired the suffix 'warren' by the 1676 when Sir Nicholas Slanning leased the holding to Edward Meade described as a Warrener. Meade had previously held a joint tenancy with Martha Shepherd for the same area. The warren was in the hands of Edward Meade in 1718 but in 1719 it was transferred to William Nicholls who also held Legis Tor warren. With one short break between 1782 and 1800 the Nicholls family remained the tenants of Ditsworthy until 1830 when Nicholas Ware took over. The Wares leased Ditsworthy until the end of warrening in 1947.

The bounds of Ditsworthy Warren are described by Linehan (1966) as following the long wall north from Legis Tor Warren to Burcombe Gate, the current edge of survey, then south east along the Sheepstor Brook to the saddle between Whittenknowles Rocks and Eastern Tor. Two possible courses between this ridge and the Drizzlecombe Brook are represented by a number of unmarked upright granite posts. The first, most northerly line, consists of three stones, the first immediately southeast of the Whittenknowles settlement the second within the streamworks flanking the Drizzlecombe Brook and the last in open ground to the west of the Drizzlecombe stone rows. The second, alignment lies some 200m to the south and possesses two stones, three if a drill-split gatepost is included, set into an abandoned corn-ditch-type boundary seemingly belonging to the earliest medieval phase. Whichever of these two routes were followed the boundary eventually reached the River Plym which it then followed downstream to Legis tor.

Of the two possible routes between the Sheepstor Brook and River Plym the most southerly



would seem the most likely. Fragments of the cornditch boundary can be traced northwestwards from the extant remains to the streamworks on the Sheepstor Brook. At several points along its length this feature is disrupted by opencast tinworkings probably dating to the post-medieval period. It would seem appropriate that it marks the northern boundary of Robertson's proposed early settlement in the Ditsworthy area, and retained this function, if only in a legal sense through into the seventeenth century. It does not appear to have been affected by the later medieval redevelopment so apparent in this area and may not have been maintained in this later period. The rather stoney area between it and the nearest redeveloped fields whilst technically part of the Ditsworthy holding may not have been cultivated; their underuse being compensated for by the acquisition of the better land formerly attached to the Gutter Tor settlement.

At least part of this cornditch was in use sometime during the 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as a gateway near its eastern end possesses a drill-split gatepost. The presence of drill holes has been dated to the period after 1820 by Worth (1953, 400).

Within the warren are a total of 54 pillow mounds the vast majority oriented with their long axes cutting the contours and with well-defined drainage ditches around their upper ends and flanking the long sides. A number of mounds, presumably later in origin, have been constructed upon the banks associated with the later medieval redevelopment.

The mounds vary in length from 6.5m to 35m but possess a fairly uniform width of 7.5m to 8.0m. They average around 1.3m in height. With one exception the mounds appear to be constructed of soil upon a base of large stones. The ends of the mounds are usually rounded and the tops flat. Northwest of Ditsworthy farmhouse are two mounds only 3m apart. Unusually, the eastern of these mounds has stone revetted sides and a turf cap and in addition to this peculiarity it does not possess a drainage ditch.

Four pillow mounds were also constructed within the workings of the former Eylesbarrow Mine in the period following 1859 when Ditsworthy land was increased to take over the holding of the mine company. These mounds display stoney bases with soil or turf caps and square ends. They range in length from 12.5 to 19m and 4.8 to 5.7m in width. Heights vary very little from 1.2m. A stipulation of the lease granted to the warrener, William Ware, was that the area was to be populated by 500 pairs of breeding rabbits. Such a figure would appear excessive for only four pillow mounds and it must be assumed that the rabbits were encouraged to inhabit some of the old tinworkings that litter the area. A similar arrangement must have been in place at the neighbouring Crane Lake Warren to the east which operated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Stanbrook, 1994) and in which there are no pillow mounds.

A solitary pillow mound lies immediately north of the Eylesbarrow Mine track. It is not clear whether this was formerly part of the later expansion of Ditsworthy or an opportunistic enterprise by one of the commoners.

The Ditsworthy area possesses traces of some eight vermin traps. These mostly consist of in-situ trap boxes and/or funnel walls. Several displaced trap stones recorded by Linehan are no longer apparent. Traps and their history are discussed at length by Haynes (1970 and

Robertson 1991). The best-preserved examples of the Ditsworthy traps preserve the stone-lined channel that formerly contained the operating catch. This would have triggered a mechanism resulting in the tunnel being sealed by shutters sliding in grooves at the trap ends. The trap was baited and prey was often encouraged into it by a stone funnel with its narrow end at the trap entrance. Traps were often constructed in field banks or at other obstacles where it was deemed possible to attract vermin, mostly stoats, weasels and polecats. Robertson (1991, 306) provides convincing evidence that these traps were used principally in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century after which vermin was shot and more use was made of spring traps. Support for this evidence is provided by the lack of stone vermin traps at the Eylesbarrow section of the warren.

Dogs, used by the warreners to force the rabbits into nets, were housed in elaborately constructed kennels within the enclosures adjacent to the house.

### **TINWORKING**

See *Eylesbarrow(Ailsborough) Tin Mine* separate report.

### **MILITARY ACTIVITY**

The area is used by the military, mostly Royal Marines and Royal Navy, as a dry training area though in the past it has been used for live firing exercises. Few remains of military activity exist; perhaps the most substantial are eight rectangular hollows filled with medium sized boulders that form a broad chevron flanking the stone rows and extending into the Plym streamworks. These appear as fresh features on aerial photographs taken in 1942 though by the 1950's they had become indistinct. Their use is unclear but it seems likely that they served as target bases for light or medium weapons based in positions on the other side of the Plym, outside the survey area. Traces of several dozen slit trenches were observed, mostly in the Ditsworthy and Hartor areas.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The positioning of and relationships between the monuments of the prehistoric period in this area broadly conform to those on other parts of Dartmoor though several inconsistencies in terms of monument type and location also arise.

In the upper Plym Valley the Eylesbarrow Reave does not appear to mark a territorial boundary as on other parts of the moor but defines access. The settlement remains are of a single type namely enclosed hut clusters. These contain a large number of hut circles with diameters in the range 7m to 12m which on other parts of the moor are very rare when coupled to this type of settlement. The occurrence of the Giant's Basin in a valley bottom when other cairns of this size are in prominent skyline positions is also unusual.

The medieval and later agrarian remains are also worthy of note. While dispersed settlement is characteristic of this period it is rare to see a complete abandoned landscape dating to the later medieval period. The positioning of these remains, at roughly 1km intervals, in the Plym Valley is suggestive of a deliberate 'planting' though both sides of the valley have been under different ownership. There is nowhere else on Dartmoor where similar remains are so completely preserved.

The high density warrening in this area is a local trend, perhaps even to be regarded as a

tradition, not generally repeated on other parts of the moor.

It is clear that the monuments within the surveyed area constitute a puzzling microcosm of 6000 years of human activity in the Plym Valley as the area appears to possess several unique characteristics when compared to Dartmoor as a whole. While the Upper Plym Valley has been the subject of several appraisals and surveys none have attempted to put it into this wider context. The extent of this divergence from the apparent norm, if one exists, will only be qualified by further quantitative survey work.

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