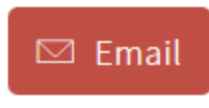


Brendon Hills National Mapping Programme project



The Brendon Hills form an elongated ridge located mainly within West Somerset, to the east of Exmoor. The terrain is deeply incised by streams and rivers running roughly southwards to the Haddeo River, a tributary of the River Exe. Parts of the region have a long history of ironstone mining and remains of this industry and its effects on the landscape are still evident. The area has also been subjected to intense agricultural improvement over the last century resulting in very few upstanding archaeological sites surviving and a perception of an area with a generally low monument density.



Landscape view of the Brendon Hills taken on 14-JAN-1997 (NMR 15583/32) © Crown copyright. HE

The Brendon Hills project was an aerial survey using National Mapping Programme (NMP) standards, supporting an extensive programme of field survey across Exmoor. The results were incorporated in the publication *The Field Archaeology of Exmoor* and have been included in the Exmoor Historic Environment Record. [↗](#)

Archaeology of the Brendon Hills

There are substantial numbers of prehistoric remains scattered across the Brendon Hills, many surviving as well-preserved earthworks.



The Iron Age hillfort at Bury Castle photographed on 10-FEB-1999. Within the ramparts of the hillfort are the remains of a presumed 12th century motte (NMR 18276/05) © Historic England

Industry and agriculture on the Brendon Hills

Lying at the heart of the Brendon Hills is an area where ironstone mining has historically been an important regional industry. The remains of this and associated industrial activities are still to be found, in some cases as the relatively well-preserved stone remains of the main structures.



The remains of Langham Hill Pit ironstone mine photographed on 12-FEB-2008 (NMR 24297/28) © Historic England

Elsewhere decades of agriculture have left traces requiring considerably more effort to understand their original nature.



Heavily degraded and overgrown remains of some shafts belonging to Ison Mine photographed on 09-AUG-2005 (NMR 24028/22) © Historic England

As well as the vestiges of the area's industrial past the remains of post-medieval catch meadow irrigation systems were recorded extensively across this area of Exmoor. The catch meadows are particular to this part of the country, commonly found on the sides of stream and river valleys. These are systems of parallel linear field gutters aligned with the contours (akin to leats). Each system is fed by a pond in which a mixture of water and slurry is collected. This mixture then seeps down-slope out of the gutters, fertilising the pasture. At the request of the Exeter Field Office, all gutters not already recorded on the current Ordnance Survey base map were mapped.



An example of the classic "catch meadow" irrigation common in the Brendon Hills photographed on 27-JUN-1995 (NMR 15306/54) © Crown copyright. HE

New discoveries

One site initially thought to be the remains of a former garden earthwork were subsequently identified by the field survey as a potential Roman military site, much of which is still visible as earthworks and only partially obscured by the buildings of a post-medieval farm.



Earthworks surrounding a farm photographed under snow on 10-FEB-1999. The main, defining a rectangular area to the right of the farm buildings, are of a Roman military site, since confirmed by geophysical survey as a Roman fort (NMR 18259/28) © Crown copyright. HE