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Defence Training Estate: Salisbury Plain Netheravon Airfield and Haxton Road Track and Crossing

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Ref: 88050.01
March 2013



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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Prepared for:
Landmarc Support Services Ltd
Westdown Camp
Tilshead
Wiltshire
SP3 4RS

Prepared by:
Wessex Archaeology
Portway House
Old Sarum Park
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP4 6EB

www.wessexarch.co.uk



March 2013

Report Ref: 88050.01



Quality Assurance

Project Code	88050	Accession Code		Client Ref.	
Planning Application Ref.		Ordnance Survey (OS) national grid reference (NGR)	416680, 149925		

Version	Status*	Prepared by	Checked and Approved By	Approver's Signature	Date
v01	E	GSC	SF		20/03/13
File:	\\projectserver\wessex\PROJECTS\88050\Report				
	F	SF	REG		
File:	\\projectserver\wessex\PROJECTS\88050\Report				
File:					
File:					
File:					

* I = Internal Draft; E = External Draft; F = Final

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Landmarc Support Services Ltd to carry out an archaeological watching brief during construction for a new track on land to the north of Netheravon Airfield, Defence Training Estates – Salisbury Plain (DTE SP) centred on National Grid Reference 416680, 149925.

The works were primarily associated with the relaying and improvement of an existing trackway located between Netheravon and Mile Ball copse. The trackway links the airfield to a marshalling/muster area at Mile Ball. The works also included the stripping of a marshalling/muster area and associated drainage improvements at Mile Ball.

The work comprised the removal of the existing trackway surface on both the southern and northern side of the Haxton to Everleigh road, totalling c. 900m in length. The strip was generally c. 6m in width, and included the removal of topsoil and subsoil deposits to the Upper Chalk (clay with flints) natural geology. The works were machine excavated using a tracked 360° excavator employing a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. The stripping of the marshalling/muster area was conducted in a similar way, and measured at least c. 40 x 26m. A c. 30m drainage trench was also excavated in relation to these works.

No archaeological deposits or features were noted during the course of the works. The watching brief did, however, identify the location of a soil-filled dry coombe on the southern side of the Haxton Road.

Limited quantities of residual finds of burnt and worked flint were noted within the topsoil deposits, predominantly on the northern side of the Haxton Road. No deposits deemed suitable for environmental sampling were identified.

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken between 4th December 2012 and January 9th 2013.



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Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Landmarc Support Services Ltd and Wessex Archaeology is grateful to Clive Paxman and Melanie Hill in this regard. Wessex Archaeology would also like to thank the groundwork team from Raymond Brown for their assistance during the course of the works, in particular Gary Wilkins.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Dave Murdie and this report was compiled by Gareth Chaffey. The report illustrations were prepared by Kenneth Lymer and the project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by Paul White and Sue Farr, who also edited the final report.



Defence Training Estate: Salisbury Plain Netheravon Airfield and Haxton Road Track and Crossing

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Landmarc Support Services Ltd, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the improvement and re-establishment of a trackway between Netheravon Airfield and Mile Ball, located at the Netheravon to Haxton Road track and crossing, Wiltshire, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 416680, 149925 (**Figure 1**) hereafter referred to as 'the Site'.
- 1.1.2 Given the archaeological potential of the Site, an archaeological watching brief was required during groundworks associated with the development to ensure anything of archaeological interest was recorded during the works.
- 1.1.3 The watching brief was undertaken between 4th December 2012 and January 9th 2013.

1.2 The Site, location and geology

- 1.2.1 The route of the track is positioned along the line of a former trackway located within DTE Salisbury Plain. It is positioned to the east of the village of Netheravon, and immediately north of Netheravon Airfield, Wiltshire. The trackway links the airfield to a marshalling/muster area at Mile Ball and crosses the Netheravon to Haxton Road at its northern end.
- 1.2.2 The Site lies at between 127m and 131m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) on undulating ground to the east of Netheravon village and runs primarily through farmland comprising arable, semi-improved and improved grassland. After crossing the Netheravon to Haxton Road the northern section of the track gradually slopes down toward Coombe Lane to the north.
- 1.2.3 The British Geological Survey map for the area shows that the trackway lies on Upper Chalk (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1:50,000 map sheet 282).

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 The Defence Training Estate of Salisbury Plain is well known for its prehistoric archaeology including round and long barrows, field systems and enclosures and contains over 2,300 archaeological sites and monuments from all ages. The area has been in military use for over 100 years and contains features associated with the development of warfare over this period.
- 2.1.2 Although no finds or features were recorded within the Site itself, to the north-west of the airfield, several undated ring ditches are recorded from aerial photography. Whilst they remain undated, they are indicative of Bronze Age funerary activity in the area. Indeed, two beaker burials were found during the airfield's construction in the 1920s and included



a crouched female inhumation. Aerial photography has also identified extensive field systems crossing to the north and south of the Site. Later activity is also attested by the discovery during the airfield's construction of a Saxon inhumation. A bronze pin, socketed spearhead and traces of a shield were recorded associated with the burial.

- 2.1.3 The land was purchased for military training in 1897, and Netheravon Airfield was established in 1913 as the first operational military flying base in Britain. In 1914 the Royal Flying Corps held a concentration of aircraft and crews at the airfield to carry out practical training and became an important strategic base for Squadrons destined for the front line and as a training base for aircrew, groundcrew and specialist signallers and fitters.
- 2.1.4 Modern military trenches have been recorded from aerial photography to the north of the airfield in close proximity to the Site and three small square enclosures of probable military origin are recorded to the east.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1.1 The objective of the watching brief was to record, as far as is reasonably possible, the location, extent, date, nature, character and relationships of any surviving archaeological remains observed during the groundwork programme.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Fieldwork methodology

- 4.1.1 All fieldwork was conducted in accordance with the guidance and standards outlined in the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (IfA 2008).
- 4.1.2 A strip, map and sample investigative watching brief was undertaken when groundworks commenced along the proposed track using a 21 tonne 360° tracked excavator fitted with a 1.8m ditching bucket (**Plate 1**). Works were monitored by a suitably qualified and experienced archaeologist and focussed on the excavation of topsoil/made ground deposits during groundworks.
- 4.1.3 The watching brief was maintained throughout initial stripping until it was clear that the potential for archaeological remains to be exposed had been exhausted. Where practicable and without causing unreasonable delay to the works programme, excavations were halted whilst investigations were carried out by Wessex Archaeology staff.
- 4.1.4 The development comprised the monitoring of the machine excavation associated with the re-establishment and improvement of the existing trackway which crosses the Netheravon-Haxton Road, totalling c. 900m in length (**Plate 1**). A large area associated with the proposed marshalling/muster area (**Plate 2**) and an associated drainage trench (**Plate 3**) c. 30m in length was also stripped.
- 4.1.5 All archaeological deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* record sheets with a unique numbering system for individual contexts. Archaeological features and deposits were hand-drawn at either 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate. Monitored works were located using data provided by the client and a Leica Viva series GNSS unit using the OS National GPS Network through an RTK network and referenced to OS mapping.
- 4.1.6 A full photographic record was compiled using digital images. The record illustrates both the detail and the general context of the principal features, finds excavated, and the Site



as a whole. Digital images have been subject to a managed quality control and curation process which has embedded appropriate metadata within the image and ensures the long term accessibility of the image set.

- 4.1.7 A unique site code **88050** was allocated to the Site, and was used on all records and finds.

5 RESULTS

- 5.1.1 The general stratigraphic sequence observed during the excavations was generally consistent and comprised a mid brown silty clay topsoil measuring between 0.20m and 0.30m in depth overlying (where visible) a shallow mid red brown subsoil which in turn overlay the natural chalk geology. Regular periglacial striping was observed in the natural chalk (**Plate 4**).
- 5.1.2 Although no archaeological features or deposits were observed during the course of the watching brief, the fieldwork did identify the location of a mid reddish brown silty clay-filled dry coombe (**Plate 5**) on the southern side of the Haxton Road.
- 5.1.3 Limited quantities of residual finds of worked and burnt flint were noted within the topsoil deposits, notably on the northern side of the Haxton Road.
- 5.1.4 No deposits deemed suitable for environmental sampling were identified.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1.1 The watching brief did not identify any archaeological features or deposits.

7 ARCHIVE

7.1 Preparation and Deposition

- 7.1.1 The complete project archive has been prepared in accordance with Wessex Archaeology's *Guidelines for Archive Preparation* and in accordance with *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage* (UKIC 1990). Details of the watching brief have also been entered into the online Oasis1 database maintained by the Archaeological Data Service (ADS). A copy of the OASIS entry is included below.

7.2 Archive

- 7.2.1 The watching brief project archive consists of:

- One A4 file containing the paper records
- Digital data (site photographs, Word and pdf files).

- 7.2.2 The archive is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Salisbury under the WA project code 88050. On completion of the project, the archive will be deposited with the Wiltshire Heritage Museum, in Devizes.

7.3 Copyright

- 7.3.1 This report may contain material that is non-Wessex Archaeology copyright (e.g. Ordnance Survey, British Geological Survey, Crown Copyright), or the intellectual property of third parties, which we are able to provide for limited reproduction under the terms of our own copyright licences, but for which copyright itself is non-transferrable by Wessex



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7.4 Security Copy

- 7.4.1 In line with current best practice, on completion of the project a security copy of the paper records will be prepared, in the form of microfilm. The master jackets and one diazo copy of the microfilm will be submitted to the National Monuments Record Centre (Swindon); a second diazo copy will be deposited with the paper records at Devizes Museum, and a third diazo copy will be retained by Wessex Archaeology.

8 REFERENCES

8.1 Bibliography

British Geological Survey (BGS), 1959, *Devizes: Sheet 282*, 1:63, 360

McOmish, D. Field, D. and Brown, G. 2002. *The Field Archaeology of Salisbury Plain*, English Heritage



APPENDIX 1: OASIS RECORD FORM

Netheravon Airfield and Haxton Road - Wessex Archaeology

OASIS ID - wessexar1-146336

Versions

View	Version	Completed by	Email	Date
View 1	1	S Farr	s.farr@wessexarch.co.uk	26 March 2013

Completed sections in current version

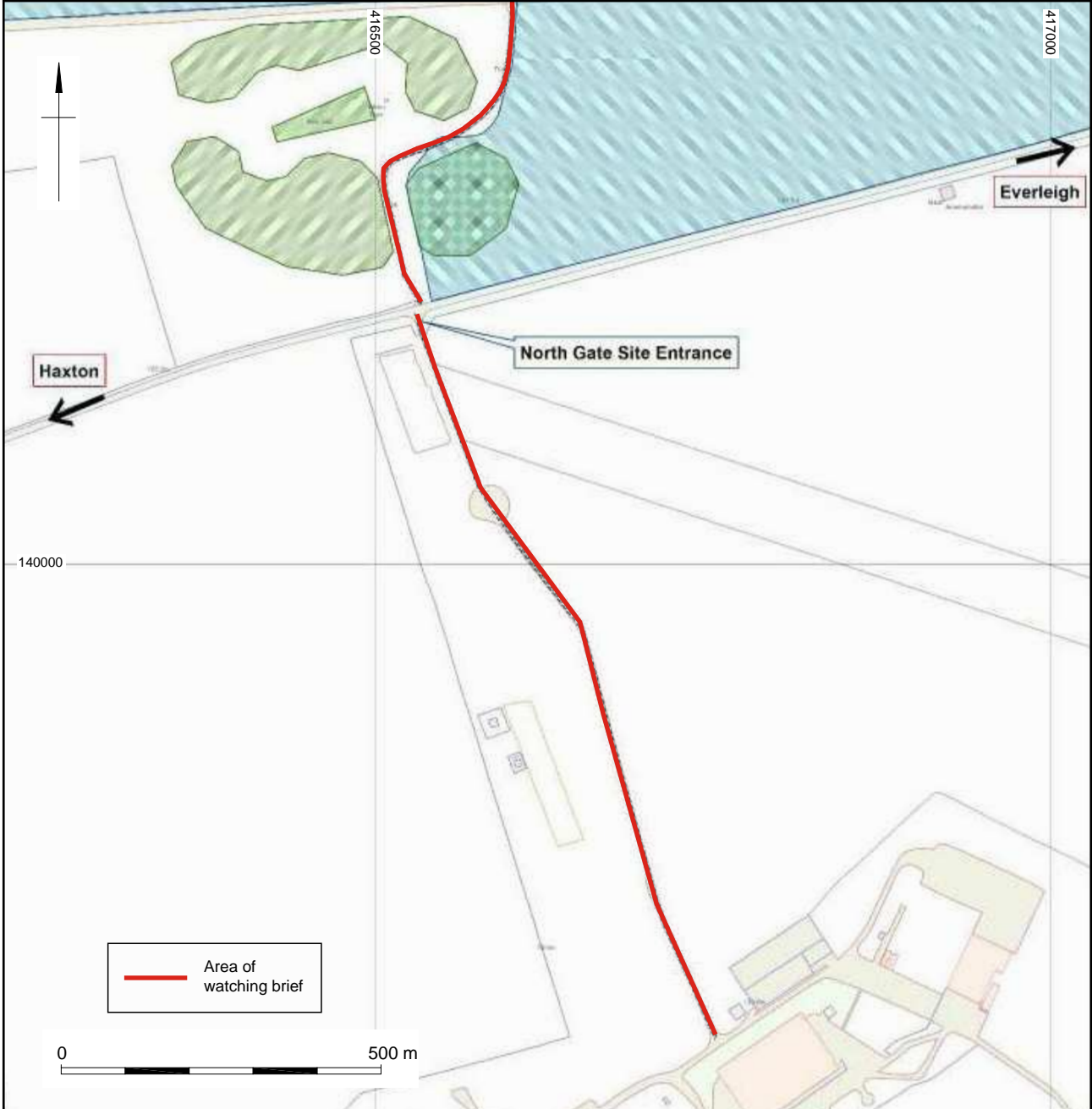
Details	Location	Creators	Archive	Publications
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1/1


Validated sections in current version

Details	Location	Creators	Archive	Publications
No	No	No	No	0/1

File submission and form progress

Grey literature report submitted?	No	Grey literature report filename/s	
Report release delay specified?	Yes	Release delay	Release into ADS library once signed off
Images submitted?	No	Image filename/s	
Boundary file submitted?	No	Boundary filename	



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Location plan

Figure 1



Plate 1: Route of trackway following partial topsoil stripping, looking north towards Mile Ball



Plate 2: Stripping of marshalling/muster area, Mile Ball



Plate 3: Drainage trench at Mile Ball



Plate 4: Formation level of trackway following machine excavation



Plate 5: Dry coombe south of Haxton Road



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Wessex Archaeology Ltd registered office Portway House, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 6EB
Tel: 01722 326867 Fax: 01722 337562 info@wessexarch.co.uk www.wessexarch.co.uk



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