

# EXMOOR MIRES PROJECT: BURCOMBE, SOMERSET

(NGR SS 5773 3699)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

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On behalf of:  
Exmoor National Park Authority

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AC archaeology

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## Results of an archaeological watching brief

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## Summary

*An archaeological watching brief carried out during groundworks associated with the restoration of blanket bog mire at Burcombe, Exmoor National Park, Somerset (centred on SS 7553 3699) was carried out by AC archaeology during March 2013.*

*The works undertaken involved the removal of turf and peat blocks using a mechanical excavator. The material was then used to create dams and block gullies in order to hold water on their uphill side. No newly-identified archaeological features, deposits exposed and no finds were recovered.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out during groundworks associated with the restoration of blanket bog mire on Burcombe, Exmoor (centred on SS 7553 3799; Fig. 1). The work was carried out by AC archaeology during March 2012 and was undertaken in accordance with a brief prepared by the Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA; Bray 2012). The work was commissioned by the Exmoor National Park Authority.
- 1.2 Burcombe is situated 2km to the southwest of Simonsbath, on north facing-slopes above the River Barle (Fig. 1). The land drops gently and then steeply down from a height of 450m aOD to 270m aOD.
- 1.3 The underlying solid geology comprises Devonian slates of the Morte slate formation partially overlain by peat.
- 1.4 The works were carried out as part of the Exmoor Mires Project whose aim is restore to healthy condition many of the mires of Exmoor's peatlands by blocking drainage ditches that have been dug as part of past agricultural improvement. The work at Burcombe involved the removal of turf and peat blocks using mechanical excavators as quarry material for reuse within peat and wood dams to block the gullies in order to hold water on the uphill side.

### 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The recorded archaeological monuments within the site are all of post-medieval date. These include large stretches of drainage ditches (MMO2715 and MMO2881), and two smaller areas of peat cutting (MMO2768 and MMO2931), probably of mid-19th-century date. There are also three groups of mine working – an openwork and four shafts of 19th-century date (MMO2949 and MSO6936), and a more complex group of earthworks that may represent exploitation in a variety of different ways during different periods (MSO6804). In addition, on topographical grounds, the area has potential for the presence of prehistoric features and associated cultural material.

### 3. AIMS

- 3.1 The construction of the dams involves ground disturbance and therefore had the potential to damage or destroy archaeological features. The main aim of the watching brief was to observe, investigate, excavate and record any surviving below-ground archaeological features, deposits or artefacts exposed during groundworks associated with the restoration works. In addition, movement of plant across the site also had the potential to damage or destroy known earthwork archaeological features. Therefore, a second aim was to advise on areas of archaeological interest to be avoided.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY (Plate 1)**

- 4.1 All excavations associated with the restoration works were carried out using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket and working under a constant archaeological presence (Plate 1). Excavations ceased at the level required by the Exmoor Mires Project.
- 4.2 The monitoring and recording was carried out in line with section 3 of the brief (Bray 2012), and recorded was undertaken in accordance with the AC archaeology *pro forma* recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and with reference to AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*.

#### **5. RESULTS AND COMMENT (Fig. 2; Plates 2-4)**

- 5.1 The creation of all dams within Burcombe was monitored; their locations are shown on Fig. 2. The following observations were made:
- During baling of an area south of ditch 26 (at approx. SS 75198 37870) a silted-up ditch was recorded (Plate 2). It was observed to have been dug through an earlier openwork (MMO2949), and may have formed part of the 19th-century drainage of the area (cf ENPA MMO2881).
  - Banks (presumably formed from excavated upcast) were present adjacent to ditches 6 and 7a. Along their course large stones, measuring up to 1.2m long, were present (Plate 3). They did not form structural elements to the banks, and may simply represent excavated material from the adjacent ditches, although given their discrete nature it is possible that they represent limited clearance from adjacent moorland during agricultural improvement.
  - A representative section of eroded ground at the end of ditch 19a was recorded (Plate 4). Here the deposit sequence comprised 0.17m thick topsoil (100) of black/dark brown soft peat-loam with very occasional stones and a dense root mat overlying 0.20m of black/very dark brown soft peat with very occasional small stones and frequent small root fragments (101). This sealed a 0.10m thick subsoil (102) of mid grey-brown soft peaty clay with frequent coarse gravel and stones that overlaid natural bedrock (103) comprising mid yellow-grey medium soft slate and silty clay. Where deposits 102 and 103 were exposed elsewhere on site they were sometimes darker and lighter respectively.
- 5.2 No unknown archaeological features or deposits or finds were exposed, and no finds were recovered, during the excavations associated with the restoration works.

#### **6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The fieldwork was commissioned by the ENPA and managed for them by Lee Bray and for AC archaeology by John Valentin. The watching brief was undertaken Paul Cooke, Francis Ward and Naomi Hughes. The report was prepared by Andrew Passmore, with the illustrations drawn by Sarnia Blackmore.

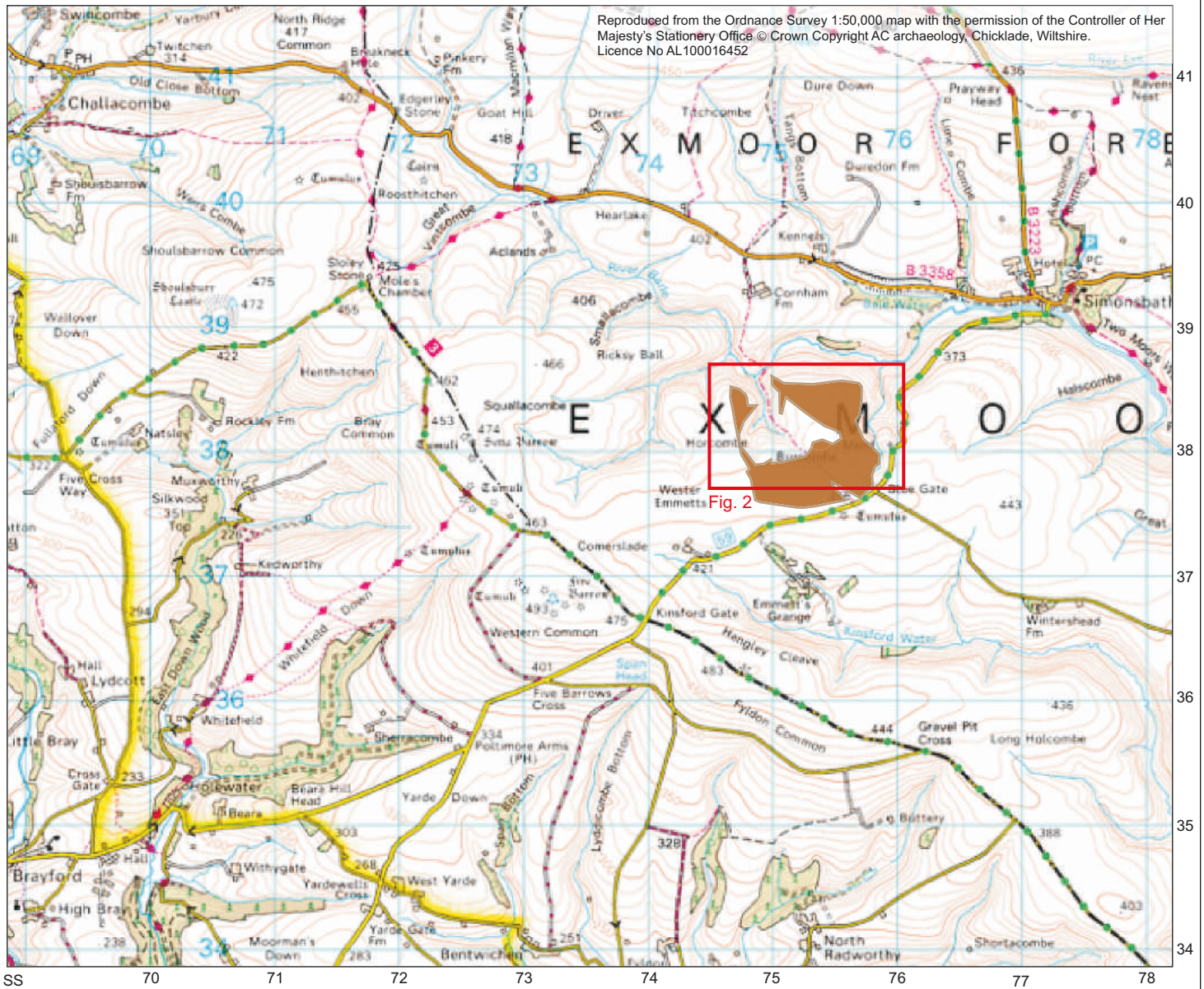
#### **7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS**

- 7.1 The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ.
- 7.2 The OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS) number for this project is 152598.

## 8. REFERENCE

Bray, L., 2012, *Generic brief for Archaeological Monitoring of Mire Restoration on Burcombe and Prayway Meads, Exmoor.*





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Fig. 2

0 2.5km  
Scale 1:50,000@A4

 Site

PROJECT

Burcombe, Exmoor

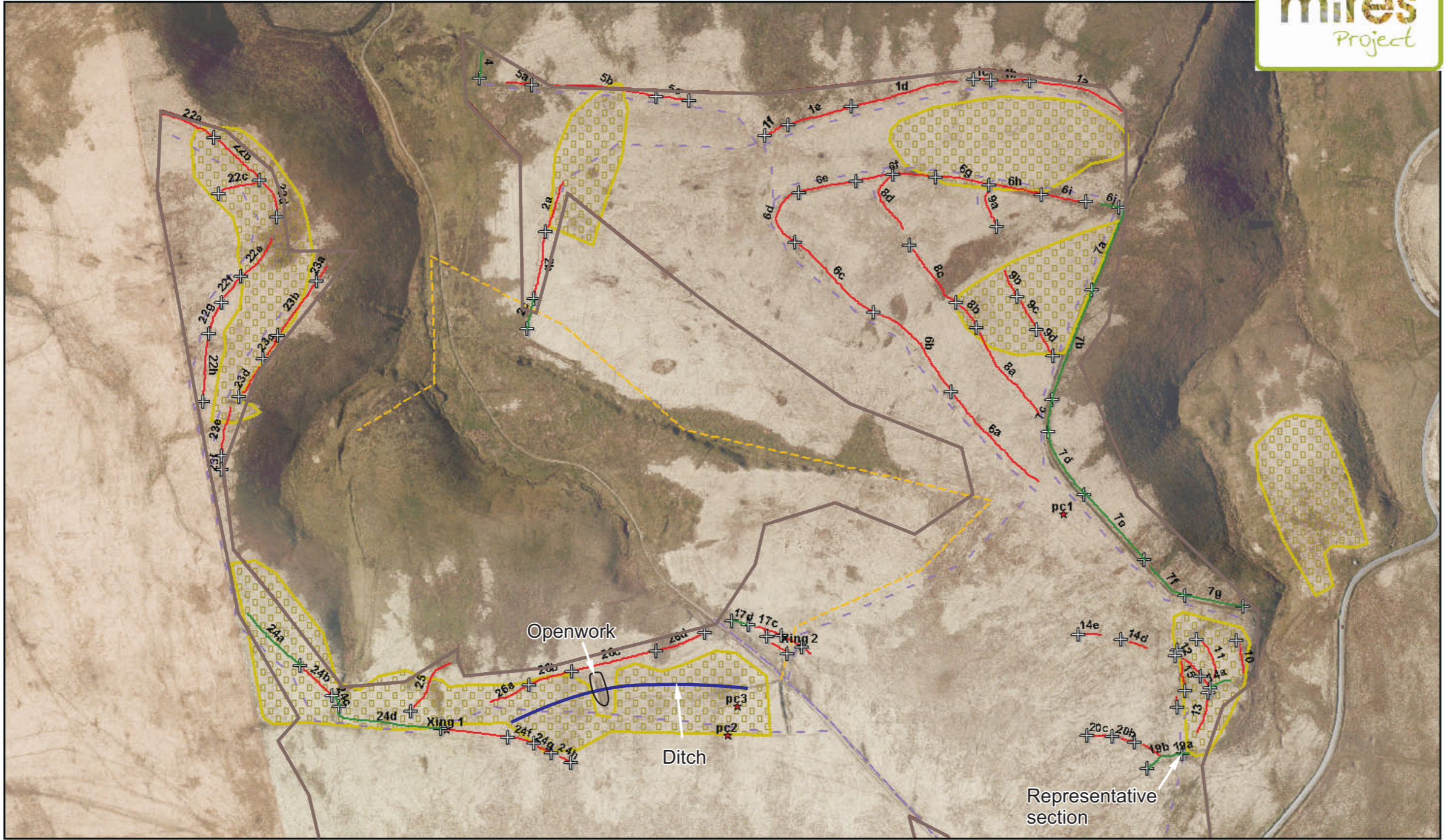
TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site



# Exmoor Mires Restoration Plan

Burcombe : Ditch Works - Overview Site Plan



Date: 18/02/2013  
 Compiled by: MA

★ Peat cutting to block	⊕ Start/End point of ditch section	← Site Entrance	▨ Baling area	▭ Site boundary
— Drainage ditch to block		- - - Access route - vehicles	0	250m
— Ditch to block - wooden blocks		- - - Access route - vehicles		
		- - - Footpath to be aware of		

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PROJECT  
 Burcombe, Exmoor

TITLE  
 Fig. 2: Observations







Plate 1: General view of works showing construction of wooden dams, viewed from the east



Plate 2: Silted-up ditch showing openwork in the background, viewed from the east (1m scale)



Plate 3: Intersection of ditches 6j and 7a showing large stones, viewed from the east (1m scale)

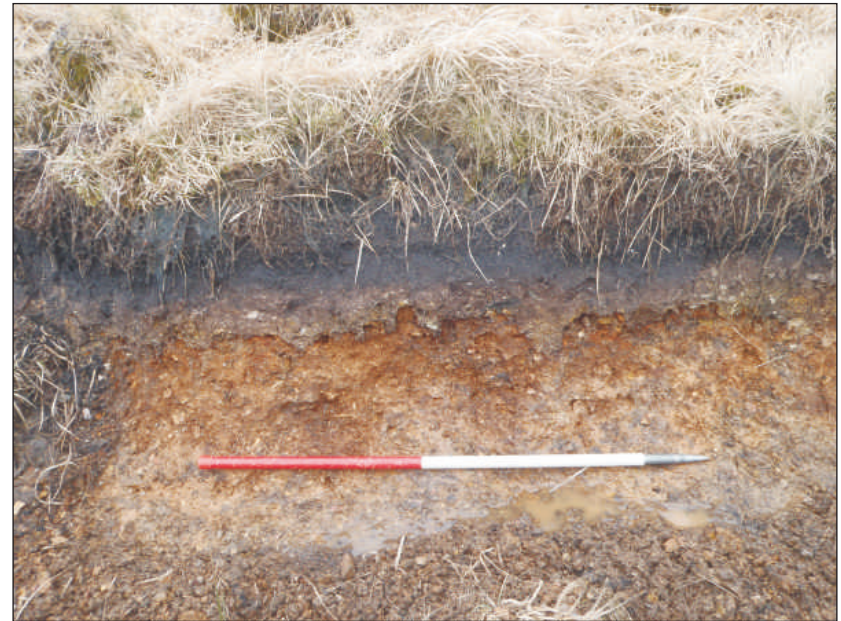


Plate 4: Representative section at ditch 19a, viewed from the north (1m scale)



# Appendix 1

The photographic index





2013

Archive No	Site Photo No	Description	Scale	View from	Photo by	Date
001	1	Representative section at east end of ditch 19a	1m	N	PC	06-03-2013
002	4	Representative section at east end of ditch 19a	1m	N	PC	06-03-2013
003	5	General view of ditch 19a showing exposed deposits		NW	PC	06-03-2013
004	6	General view of ditch 19a showing turf dam		N	PC	06-03-2013
005	7	General view of area		S	PC	06-03-2013
006	8	Construction of wood dam in ditch 14a		N	PC	06-03-2013
007	9	Construction of wood dam in ditch 14a		N	PC	06-03-2013
008	10	Construction of wood dam in ditch 14a		N	PC	06-03-2013
009	11	Construction of wood dam in ditch 14a		N	PC	06-03-2013
010	12	Construction of wood dam in ditch 14a		N	PC	06-03-2013
011	13	Construction of wood dam in ditch 14a		N	PC	06-03-2013
012	14	Construction of wood dam in ditch 14a		N	PC	06-03-2013
013	15	Construction of wood dam in ditch 14a		N	PC	06-03-2013
014	17	Turf and wood dam in ditch 14a	1m	NW	PC	06-03-2013
015	18	Turf and wood dam in ditch 14a	1m	NW	PC	06-03-2013
016	19	View north from dam in ditch 14a		S	PC	06-03-2013
017	20	View down field boundary towards road		W	PC	06-03-2013
018	21	View down field boundary towards road		E	PC	06-03-2013
019	23	View of baled area		E	PC	06-03-2013
020	24	Linear ditch exposed during baling – west end	1m	W	PC	06-03-2013
021	25	Linear ditch exposed during baling – west end	1m	E	PC	06-03-2013
022	26	Linear ditch exposed during baling – east end	1m	SW	PC	06-03-2013
023	27	Linear ditch exposed during baling – east end	1m	NE	PC	06-03-2013
024	28	View north from exposed ditch		S	PC	06-03-2013
025	29	Representative section at east end of ditch 19a	1m	N	PC	06-03-2013
026	31	View along field boundary (ditch 7)		NW	PC	06-03-2013
027	32	View along field boundary (ditch 7)		SE	PC	06-03-2013
028	33	View along field boundary (ditch 7)		SW	PC	06-03-2013
029	34	Blocked ditch 7		SE	PC	06-03-2013
030	35	Construction of peat dam in ditch 5a		NE	PC	06-03-2013
031	36	Construction of peat dam in ditch 5a		NE	PC	06-03-2013
032	37	Construction of peat dam in ditch 5a		NE	PC	06-03-2013
033	38	Construction of peat dam in ditch 5a		NE	PC	06-03-2013
034	39	Construction of peat dam in ditch 5a		NE	PC	06-03-2013
035	40	Construction of peat dam in ditch 5a		NE	PC	06-03-2013
036	41	Construction of peat dam in ditch 5a		NE	PC	06-03-2013
037	42	Peat dam in ditch 5a	1m	E	PC	06-03-2013
038	43	General view from ditch 5a		SE	PC	06-03-2013
039	44	Working shot from ditch 7d		NE	NH	06-03-2013
040	45	Working shot from ditch 7d		NE	NH	06-03-2013
041	46	Intersection of ditches 6j and 7a showing large stones	1m	E	PC	07-03-2013
042	47	Working shot of ditch 6		SW	NH	08-03-2013
043	50	Working shot of ditch 7		E	NH	08-03-2013
044	51	General shot of ditch 7 showing bale spreading		SW	PC	08-03-2013
045	52	Dam with bale spread	1m	SE	PC	08-03-2013
046	53	Levelled bank for access near north end of ditch 7a	1m	SE	PC	08-03-2013
047	54	Levelled bank for access near north end of ditch 7a	1m	E	PC	08-03-2013

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