

CLEARBROOK RAMP, CLEARBROOK, BUCKLAND MONACHORUM, DEVON

(Centred on NGR SX 52439 65511)

Results of a topographical survey and archaeological
watching brief

Dartmoor National Park Authority planning reference 0368/13,
condition 4

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On behalf of:
Devon County Council

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AC archaeology

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Summary

A topographic survey and archaeological watching brief was carried out by AC archaeology in January 2014 at the Clearbrook Ramp, Buckland Monachorum, Devon (NGR SX 52439 64411). A topographic survey of a small group of tinner's pits was prepared, and a watching brief carried out during the construction of a cycle trail that crossed some of the pits. The spoil heap of one pit was partially removed and recorded, and a buried pit associated with a recorded spoil heap was excavated. It had been backfilled during the 20th century.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig.1)

- 1.1 This report presents the results of a topographic survey and watching brief carried out at the Clearbrook Ramp, Clearbrook, Buckland Monachorum, Devon (SX 52439 65511; Fig. 1) by AC archaeology between February and September 2014. The recording was commissioned by Devon County Council, and was required under condition 4 of the grant of Planning Permission (Dartmoor National Park Authority reference 0368/13) for the "Construction of a trail including associated earthworks and resurface existing car park area". The ramp is located at the northern end of the trail south of the road between Clearbrook and Hoo Meavy. Guidance on the scope of the investigations was provided by the Dartmoor National Park Authority Senior Archaeologist.

2. THE SITE

- 2.1 The site is located on the eastern side of Roborough Down on unenclosed land situated above the River Meavy. It is located on a northeast-facing slope to the west of the former Princetown Railway that was opened in 1883 and was partially converted from parts of the earlier Plymouth and Dartmoor Tramway (MDV19112).
- 2.2 The trail is located in an area containing remains associated with former tin working, including leats (MDVs 28253, 42835 and 42836) and a possible platform for a tin mill platform (MDV42838), all located to the south of the scheme.
- 2.3 Towards the north of the scheme, the route of the trail crosses through a linear group of recently-identified pits that are thought to represent the remains of tin prospecting (MDV105701).

3. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The aim of the field survey and watching brief was to preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits exposed during groundworks associated with the project. This principally focussed on the surveying and recording of the group of probable tin prospecting pits located at the northern end of the scheme.
- 3.2 The investigations were carried out in accordance with a Project Design prepared by AC archaeology (Hughes 2013), and comprised two elements. Firstly, a topographic survey of the earthworks at the northern end of the scheme, which was prepared on behalf of AC archaeology by Dr Phil Newman, and secondly, a watching brief during

groundworks associated with the construction of the trail in the vicinity of the identified earthworks.

4. THE TOPOGRAPHIC SURVEY, by Dr Phil Newman (Fig. 2)

4.1 Introduction

The remains comprise a roughly west to east aligned cluster of pits, associated with tin prospecting and extraction, extending for 86m between SX 5236 6550 and SX 5245 6552. They lie on a moderate gradient, with a difference in height from top (west) to bottom (east) of approximately 6m; most of the pits are situated between 150-155m aOD. To the south of the pits there is evidence of other surface disturbance caused by probable mineral working and at the eastern extremity of the pit cluster vestiges of an old hedge line traverse the site from north to south.

4.2 The pits

All the pits are approximately circular or elliptical in plan with sloping sides and flat bottom surfaces. Each has an associated heap of spoil, either as an annular mound on the downslope side or to one side of the pit.

Of the eleven pits in the alignment, at least four (a-d) are likely to be prospecting/trial or 'shoad' pits based on their smaller diameter (between 3.2 and 4.7m) and diminutive spoil heaps, indicating only a shallow penetration of the ground. The majority of these pits lie within the higher, western section of the cluster but at the eastern end a small spoil mound (d) indicates the probable location of a similar sized pit, though the pit itself has become backfilled.

Larger pits (e-h) are within the centre of the cluster and probably represent an attempt to work the back of the tin outcrop, beyond the prospecting stage, although not to any great depth. Pits (e), (f) and (g) represent the most intense activity, resulting in three conjoined hollows surviving to up 1.4m deep, though they are now silted and were once deeper. Substantial spoil mounds on the north, south and eastern sides of the cluster indicate that these pits were significantly deeper than the shoad pits. Pit (h) is detached from the central cluster, being 13m to the west, but its larger dimensions (7m dia x 1.4m deep) and more substantial annular spoil heap (1.1m high) indicate this too represents an attempt at extraction, albeit undeveloped, rather than prospecting.

4.3 Other surface disturbance

South of the main cluster, a large amorphous hollow of up to 3.1m deep and covering an area of approximately 320 square metres may also be associated with a minor attempt at mineral extraction, though it is not clear if tin was the objective. A similar though smaller and shallower surface disturbance is located just a few metres to the east.

4.4 Hedge line

The linear earthwork remains of a former north to south aligned hedge are located at the eastern end of the pit cluster. The southern section is a subtle earthwork bank of 2.7m wide by up to 0.6m high on the east side and 0.2m on the western side. Near the northern end, the spoil heap from one of the smaller pits (d) appears to overlie the hedge bank, suggesting the latter is earlier. However, the growth of a tree in this location, now felled, has caused disturbance to the earthworks so this sequence would need to be confirmed by excavation. The hedge may be traced north of the

spoil mound surviving as a slight scarp of up to 0.2m high traversing the modern footpath.

5. THE WATCHING BRIEF (Fig. 2; Plates 1-5)

- 5.1** The groundworks for in the area of the tinner's pits comprised of a 3m wide excavation into the side of the slope, down to maximum depth of 4m, along with a drainage trench on its west side. Excavations involving the removal of topsoil down to the underlying natural were monitored (Plate 1).
- 5.2** The following soil sequence was recorded: topsoil (001), which measured up to 0.40m thick, and comprised moderate dark brown clayish silt with occasional small to medium angular stones, which overlaid the natural (002) – moderate dark brownish-yellow clayish silt and solid Upper Devonian slates (Plate 2).
- 5.3** The groundworks had an impact on two of the tinner's pits identified during the earthwork survey – (g) and (d). Following removal of topsoil, a pit (F005) associated with the spoil mound (d) was exposed (Plate 3). It measured 1.20m wide by 0.60m deep, and had been backfilled with a deposit (004) of dark brown moderate clayish silt that contained abundant glass bottles, china and coke/coal inclusions. A sample of these finds was collected. They comprise a sherd of yellow industrial ware, three sherds of white industrial wares, and a small glass meat or fish paste jar marked with H&C; all date to the twentieth century.
- 5.4** The northwest quadrant of the spoil heap associated with pit (g) was removed (Plates 4 and 5), and measured 3.2m long (north – south) by 1.3m wide (east – west). The spoil heap comprised a single deposit (003), measuring 0.90m deep, of light brownish-grey, moderate silty clay with rare, small to medium sub-angular stone. No finds were recovered. The spoil had been dumped directly onto the topsoil 001.
- 5.5** The 'line of old hedge' recorded to the southeast of spoil heap (d) was not identified as such a monument. Instead, at this location an earthing cable, associated with a nearby overhead electricity cable pole, which had been laid within a narrow trench excavated down to the top of the solid bedrock was encountered.

6. COMMENTS

- 6.1** A survey of a group of recently-identified tinner's pits was prepared. Their discovery adds to the corpus of documented and visible tinworking remains located on various parts of Roborough Down and the west side of the River Meavy valley. The survey has identified a linear group of small prospecting or 'shoad' pits, and a group of slightly larger pits that probably represent an attempt to work the tin outcrop.
- 6.2** Two of these pits were investigated during the watching brief. Part of the soil heap of pit (g) was excavated. It comprised a single deposit, from which no finds were recovered. A pit associated with soil mound (d) was exposed. As expected, and consistent with the other prospecting pits, it was small. It has been filled in during the early 20th century, perhaps when the nearby house to the northeast was constructed.
- 6.3** The old hedge bank recorded during the earthwork survey was identified as the line of a poorly backfilled service trench associated with an overhead electricity cable.

7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

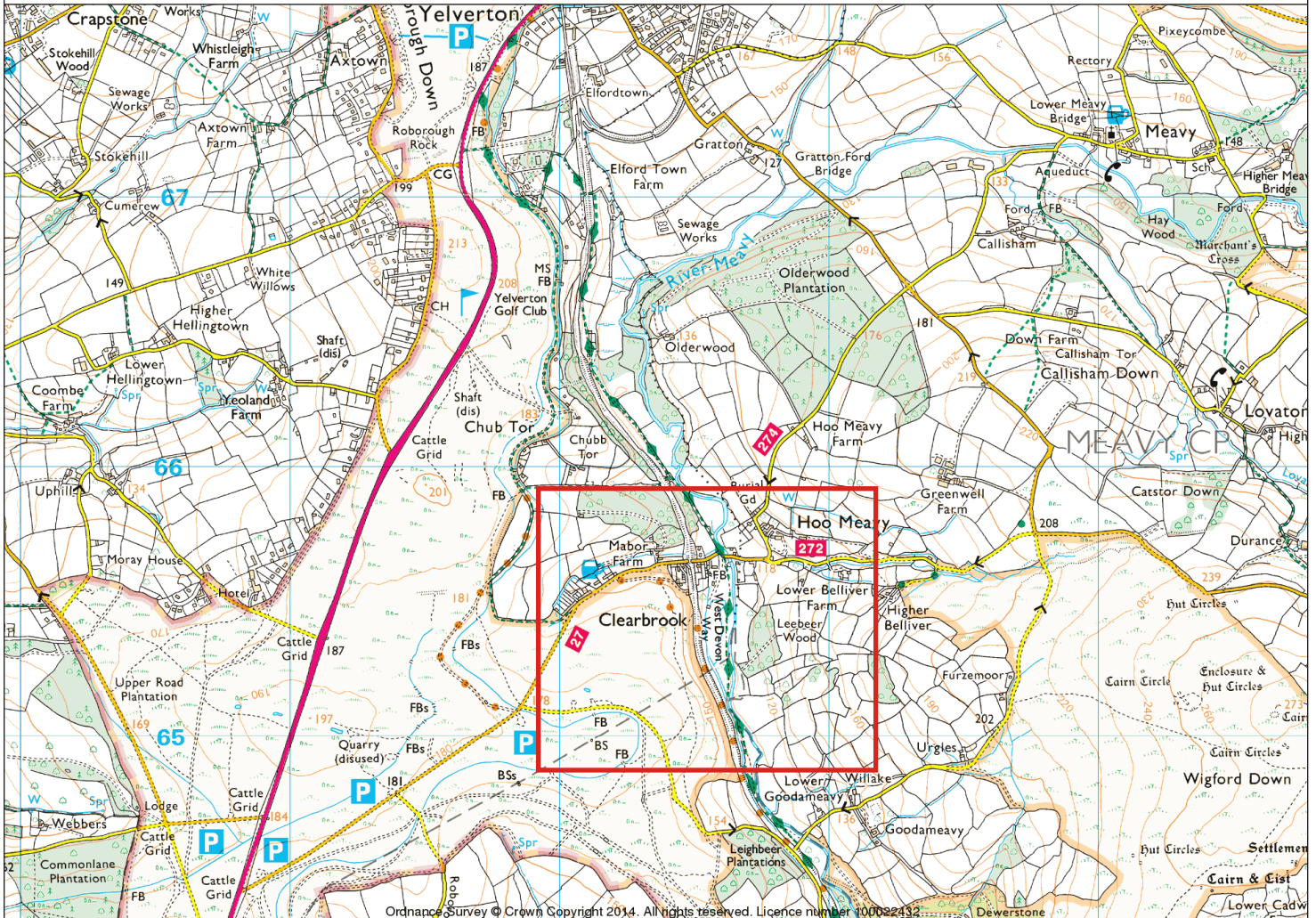
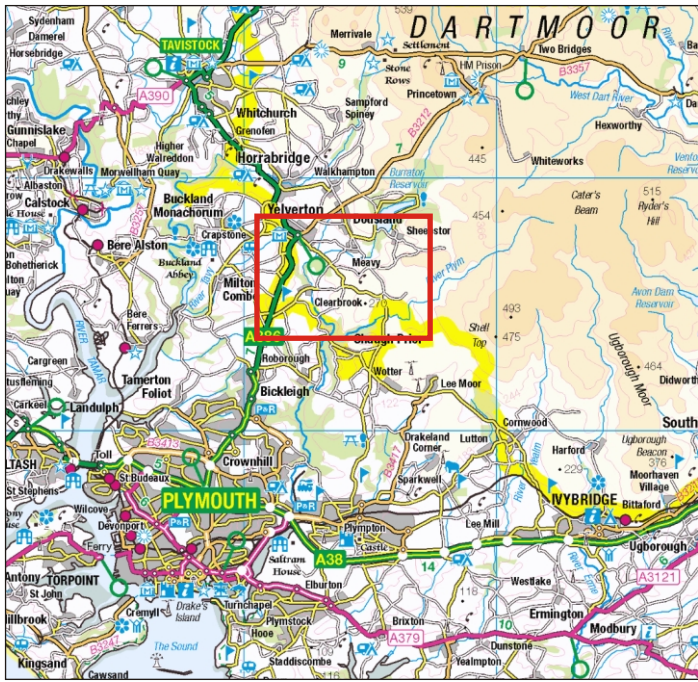
- 7.1** The archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology in Bradninch. The paper and digital archive will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service, and the finds will be discarded.
- 7.2** An entry to the OASIS database, including a digital copy of this report, has been created using the unique identifier 192522.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1** This project was commissioned by Devon County Council, and managed for them by Graham Cornish and for AC archaeology by Simon Hughes. The earthwork survey was prepared by Dr Phil Newman and the watching brief carried out by Abigail Brown. The report was edited by Andrew Passmore, with the illustrations prepared by Elisabeth Patkai.

9. SOURCE CONSULTED

Hughes, A., 2013, *Clearbrook Ramp, Yelverton, Devon, (Centred on NGR SX 52439 65511), Dartmoor National Park Authority planning ref. 0368/13, Project Design for a field survey and archaeological watching brief, AC archaeology Document No. ACD828/1/0*



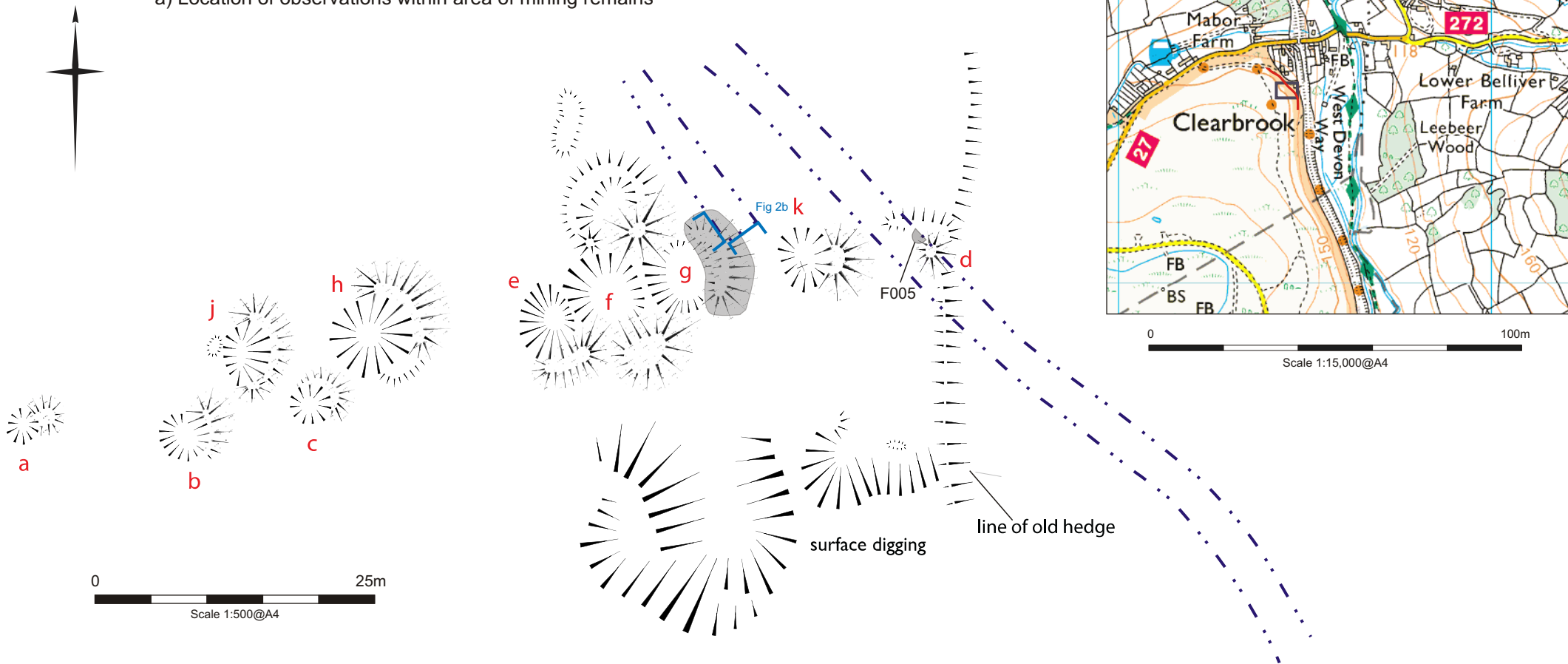
PROJECT
**Clearbrook Ramp, Buckland Monachorum,
 Devon**

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site

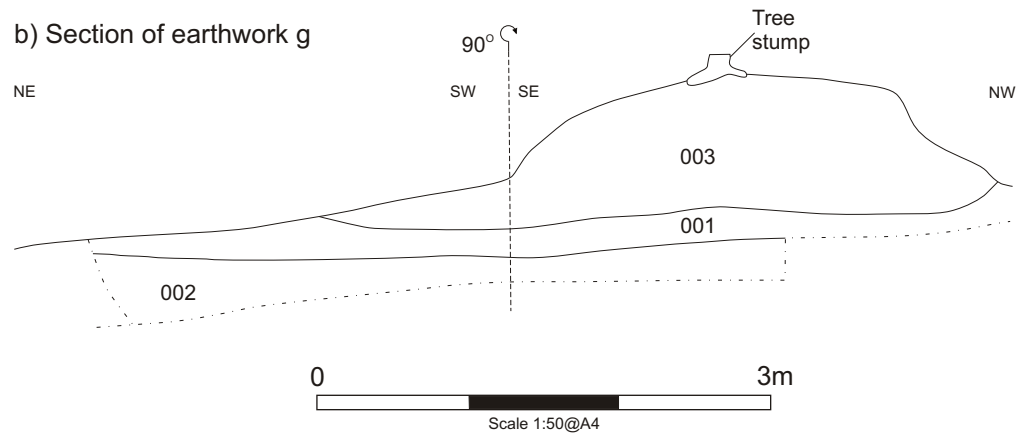


a) Location of observations within area of mining remains



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b) Section of earthwork g



PROJECT
 Clearbrook Ramp,
 Buckland Monachorum,
 Devon

TITLE
 Fig. 2: Topographic survey
 overlain with location of
 watching brief observations





Plate 1: General view of excavations south of the earthworks, view to northwest. 1m scale



Plate 3: Pit F005 following initial exposure, view to northeast. 1m scale



Plate 2: Typical deposit section, view to southwest. 1m scale



Plate 4: Drainage trench west of main trail, view to southeast. 1m scale



Plate 5: Spoil heap (g) showing main deposit 003, view to southwest. 1m scale

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