

# WOODBURY COMMON, DEVON

(Centred on NGR SY 03592 87830)

Archaeological survey of fire-damaged heathland

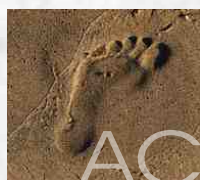
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On behalf of:  
Devon County Council

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Date: March 2018



AC archaeology

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The survey was commissioned by the Devon County Council Historic Environment Team, and managed for them by Bill Horner, and for AC archaeology by John Valentin. Historic Environment Record data was provided by Marrina Neophytou. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Stella De-Villiers and Sarnia Blackmore.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of AC archaeology and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological survey carried out by AC archaeology on 7 May 2017 and 23 June 2017 of part of Woodbury Common, Devon (centred on SY 03592 87830). The survey covered approximately 31ha of heathland that had been damaged by fire on 23 April 2017. The survey was commissioned by the Devon County Council Historic Environment Team with the aim of providing updated information on heritage assets within the area of the fire.
- 1.2 The survey area was located to the east of Woodbury Castle – an Iron Age hillfort (MDV10500) – and extended east for a distance of 700m. The northern extent of the fire was defined by the B3180, with the other limits largely defined by paths and tracks crossing the heathland.
- 1.3 Topographically the northwest limit (followed by the B3180) is a fairly flat ridgeline (at around 175m aOD) dropping slightly to the southwest. The southeast part of the survey area is a gently-sloping plateau dropping down to the southeast. The west side of this plateau has a steep slope that drops down to a valley containing the head of a stream; the north and west sides of this valley have gentler slopes. The underlying geology is Triassic conglomerate of the Chester Formation, and Triassic mudstone of the Littleham Mudstone Formation overlain by Quaternary head deposits of sand with clay and gravel (British geological survey online viewer 2018).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The survey was undertaken using a Leica Netrover GPS, with 1-2cm accuracy. This was linked to Ordnance Survey base stations and provided real-time corrections into the National Grid. Data collected during the survey was stored within the GPS's on-board memory. During the post-fieldwork analysis the data was processed using AutoCAD and imported into graphics software to produce Fig. 1. The survey was carried out in accordance with the guidance set out in the then applicable *Understanding the Archaeology of Landscapes* (English Heritage 2007).
- 2.2 The survey was accompanied by a written description of the earthworks that forms the basis of section 3 of this report, along with a digital photographic record. For the latter the general character of individual or groups of earthworks were recorded; an individual record of all landscape features was not prepared.

## 3. THE SURVEY (Fig. 1; Plates 1-25)

### **Existing heritage assets within the survey area**

- 3.1 The Devon Historic Environment Record contains a number of records for heritage assets within the survey area. A total of nine of these assets – all earthworks – were investigated as part of the survey and are discussed below.

### ***MDV10483 – mound***

- 3.2 This asset was unaffected by the fire, and no new information about the asset was revealed. MDV70406 abuts the bank surrounding the mound on its south side (see section 3.7 below).

- MDV55204 – platform**
- 3.3 This asset was not identified during the survey. Its recorded position is within an area of dense fire-damaged gorse.
- MDV70403 – ditch** (Plate 1)
- 3.4 This ditch is located within dense fire-damaged gorse, and this vegetation obscured much of the ditch within the survey area. It was visible for a distance of 210m from SY 03788 87891 eastwards to SY 03788 87891. At the latter point there is a very slight bank on its south side. This appears to simply represent upcast from digging of the ditch rather than representing a formal landscape (boundary) feature.
- MDV70404 – demolished building**
- 3.5 The surviving concrete base measures 5m long by 1.30m wide, and probably represents a pathway to the former building (Plate 2). There is some concrete debris located to the northeast and southwest of the *in situ* concrete. To the southeast, at SY 03842 87882, is an irregularly-shaped mound, aligned north-south, and measuring 15m long by 8m wide (Plate 3). To the east of the building, at SY 03876 87897, is a northeast-southwest aligned mound measuring 12m long by 7m wide and 0.80m high (Plate 4). To the northeast of this mound at SY 03882 87906, adjacent to the track, is a third mound, aligned east-west, measuring 6m long by 4m wide by 0.80m high (Plate 5). The mounds are probably associated with the building. A single pigs tail barbed wire support post is also located in this area, to the south of the *in situ* concrete (Plate 6).
- MDV70405 – linear earthwork**
- 3.6 Within the survey area the feature was largely obscured by fire-affected gorse, although some sections were exposed. It was most clearly visible at SY 03843 88002 where the bank measured 2.50 wide by 0.30m high, and the flanking ditch on the north side measured 1m wide by 0.20-0.30m deep (Plate 7). At a distance of 3m to the south was a second ditch, parallel to the bank, which measured 2m wide by 0.50m deep. A third ditch, 3m to the south, was also aligned parallel to these features, and measured 2.5m wide by 0.50m deep (Plate 8). To the east of, and immediately west of, SY 03843 88002 these ditches were obscured by vegetation, but they were visible further west where they are crossed by a track (Plate 9). Further west features become less distinct, but the main boundary can be traced to SY 03364 70405 adjacent to the B3180 where it has been disturbed by vehicle tracks. MDV70405 forms part of this group of ditches.
- MDV70406 – earthwork boundary bank** (Plate 10 and 11)
- 3.7 The earthwork is as the existing description, and extends from SY 03761 87966 south from the southeast side of the encircling bank within asset MDV10483, and turns southwest and continues for a short distance before petering out at SY 03742 87935. The ditch on the southeast side of the bank measures 0.50m wide.
- MDV70407 – mound** (Plate 12)
- 3.8 The feature was located at SY 03664 87796. Other than this revised location, no new information about the asset was gleaned during the survey.
- MDV112541 – trench** (Plates 13-14)
- 3.9 The mapped extent of these slit trenches partially falls within the survey area, and a concentration of trenches was recorded towards the northeast end of this area. Topographically, this represents the ridgeline either side of the B3180, and top of the slope to the east. A smaller number of trenches are located to the northeast of the current mapped area, although not all of this ground was fire damaged and vegetation

may obscure further examples. Here the trenches were generally isolated. On average these measure 1.30m long by 0.70m wide by 0.20m deep. Within this group is a single 6m long Z-shaped trench. Two pits had well-defined sharp edges, and are probably of later 20th-century date; one pit was square with spoil around all four sides, whilst the other was T-shaped with spoil on several sides. Several of the pits were cut into the upper side of boundary AC5.

#### ***MDV112543 – trench***

- 3.10** The currently mapped area of trenches (as recorded from the post-war RAF aerial photographs) is located on the very upper side of a steep west-facing eastern slope of a valley; they do not extend southwest onto the lower part of this slope. The fire has exposed an extensive continuation of these pits extending northeast onto the flatter plateau; the pits continue to the northeast beyond the limit of the fire (formed by existing paths and firebreaks). Within this newly-exposed area the foxholes are mainly the standard rectangular slit trenches (Plate 15), with some being T-shaped and V-shaped, as well as a few longer Z-shaped trenches (Plate 16). All are relatively shallow and may have silted up. The greatest concentration is to the southwest with fewer towards the hilltop to the northeast, where there are occasional outliers (e.g. AC1 and AC2).
- 3.11** Within this area, at SY 03861 87967, is a large pit – the largest single rectangular pit recorded during the survey – measuring 3.5m long (east-west) by 2.5m wide (north-south) with 2m wide, 0.50m high banks on all sides (Plate 17). It is located near the highest point of the ground occupied by MDV112543, and may have had a specific function, such as a mortar pit to fire over troops dug in to the south and southwest.

#### **Newly-identified heritage assets within the survey area**

##### ***AC1 – slit trench*** (Plate 18)

- 3.12** A single 20th-century slit trench located at SY 03859 87997. It is aligned northeast-southwest and measures 2m long, 1.50m wide by 0.30m deep, with steep northwest and northeast sides and shallower southeast and southwest sides, and a flat base. This is probably an outlier to the main concentration of MDV112543.

##### ***AC2 – slit trenches*** (Plates 19 and 20)

- 3.13** A group of nine 20th-century slit trenches located east of MDV10483, centred on SY 03779 87989 within an area previously cleared of vegetation. They measure between 2.20m long by 0.90m wide by 0.30m deep down to 1.30m long by 0.70m wide by 0.20m deep. They have partially silted up, and therefore may be of Second World War date. The southwestern pit has a low 1.70m wide bank of spoil on its south side. These are discretely located away from the other slit trenches in the area, perhaps taking shelter from the adjacent trees on mound MDV10483.

##### ***AC3 – slit trenches*** (Plate 21)

- 3.14** A group of seven slit trenches located southwest of asset MDV10483, centred on SY 03739 87911. They measure up to 2.50m long by 1.30 wide by 0.30m deep. Some have spoil heaps on their south side measuring up to 0.70m wide by 0.20m high. At SY 03739 87911 one of the pits is dug into ditch MDV70405. This is different in character from the others and measures 1.50m<sup>2</sup> by 0.50m deep with spoil on all four sides measuring up to 1m wide by 0.30m high. This pit is probably of later 20th-century date, and later than the other pits. The group probably forms part of MDV112543, extending slightly further north than the main concentration of the currently recorded pits.

- AC4 – boundary** (Plates 22 and 23)
- 3.15** A boundary bank and ditch aligned broadly northeast-southwest and curving around the head of a valley from SY 03385 87793 to SY 03296 87627. It is constructed of local sand and pebbles, and measures up to 2.80m wide by 0.50m high. There is a small possible break or gateway towards the east end, but this is probably just erosion. It is less distinct (measuring up to 2.1m wide by 0.30m high), and there is more erosion, towards the southwest end of the feature.
- AC5 – boundary** (Plate 24)
- 3.16** A boundary recorded on historic and some more recent Ordnance Survey maps (as plot 1033) to the east of Woodbury Castle around the springhead and marshy flat ground in the valley bottom. As it is recorded on historic Ordnance Survey maps it was not surveyed during the current project. The bank measures up to 2.8m wide by 0.6m high and is well defined, but heavily disturbed in places. It probably represents a later post-medieval 'stock' enclosure to keep grazing animals out of the marshy ground.
- AC6 – mound** (Plate 25)
- 3.17** A northwest-southeast aligned mound, truncated on its north side by a track. It is located at SY 03587 87821, and measures c. 20m long by 5m wide by on average 1m high. It is largely obscured by vegetation.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

- 4.1** The survey has provided additional information on currently recorded heritage assets within the area of the April 2017 fire on Woodbury Common, and identified a small number of new assets.
- 4.2** Several of the assets relate to historic agriculture and are field boundaries in the form of banks and ditches. Other than AC5 (plot 1033) none are recorded on historic Ordnance Survey maps. They are generally located on the higher, flatter plateau within the northern part of the survey area; some continue beyond the survey area to the northeast. One of the banks is attached to the outer bank of MDV10483, which is considered to represent a landscaping feature dating to the late 18th or 19th century. These field boundaries may therefore represent a short-lived phase of enclosure of this broad period.
- 4.3** The majority of the earthworks in the survey area are slit trenches or foxholes dug during military training. These date to the Second World War and to the second half of 20th century. There are two main concentrations – to the northeast of Woodbury Castle (MDV112541), and on the plateau on the east side of the valley within the survey area (MDV112543). The extents of these monuments have been extended during this survey. Both groups are topographically located on the higher ground of the ridge along the north side of the common, and they avoid the steeper slopes and the (wet) valley bottom to the south. A variety of shapes and sizes were recorded; although most are rectangular, a few are T-shaped and Z-shaped. Within MDV112543 is a single large pit that could have housed a mortar, and close by is the remains of a Second World War building base, along with a group of probably associated mounds and a fence post.

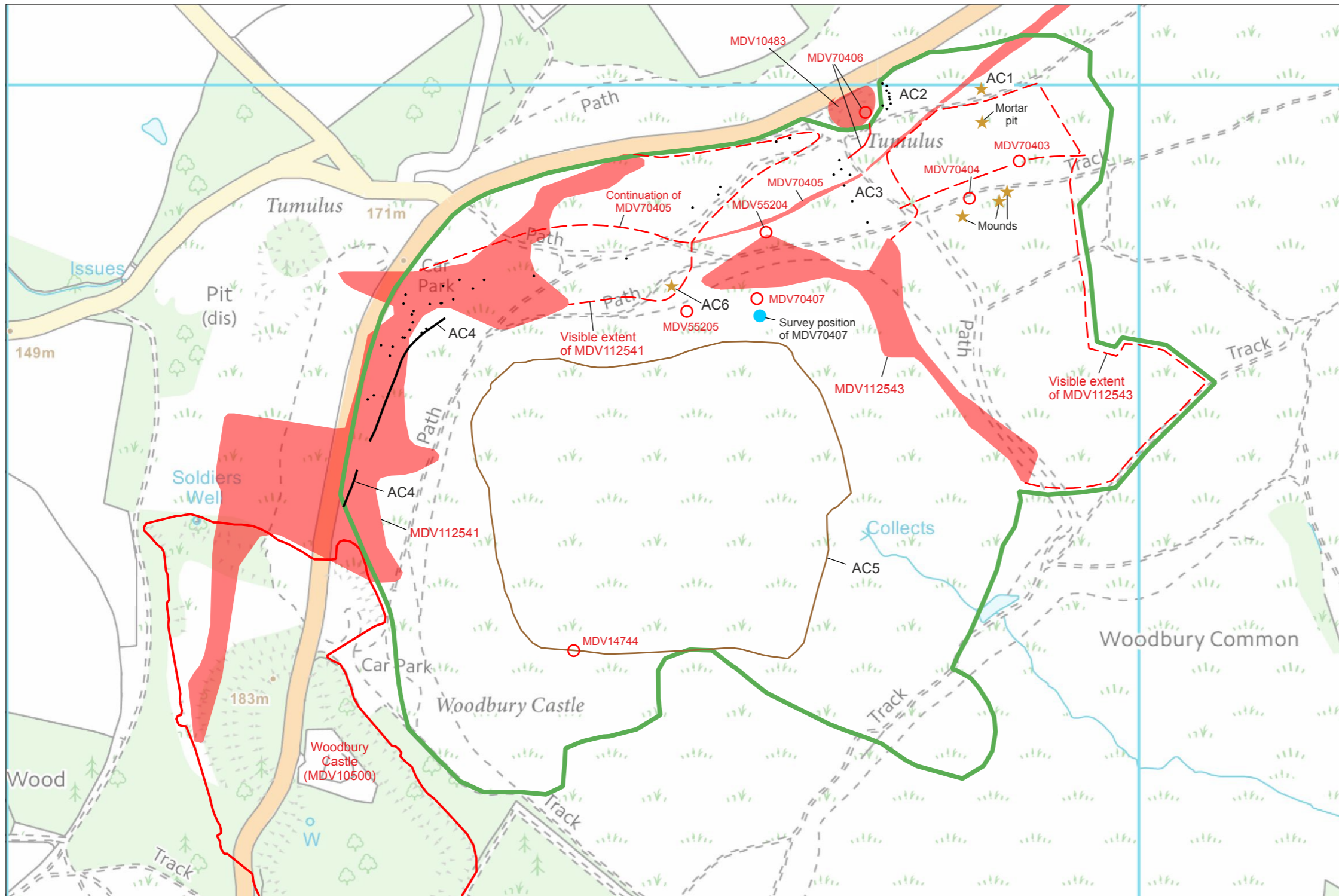
## **5. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY**

- 5.1** The archive for this project comprises this report, along with a digital file of survey data, that is held by the Devon County Historic Environment Record.
- 5.2** An OASIS record has been created using the unique identifier 310464 and includes a digital version of this report.

## **6. SOURCES CONSULTED**

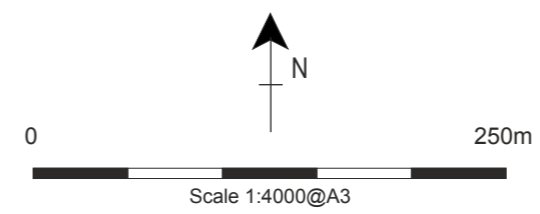
Ordnance Survey 25-inch Devonshire map sheet CXIII.3  
First edition, surveyed 1888, published 1889  
Second edition, revised 1904, published 1905





**Legend**

- Study area
- Heritage assets (poly)
- Heritage assets (points)
- Visible extent of features
- ★ Recorded features
- Recorded slit trenches
- Depicted on OS mapping



PROJECT  
Woodbury Common, Devon

TITLE  
Fig. 1: Location of recorded heritage assets





Plate 1: MDV70403 looking southwest with the scale on the slight bank to the south of the ditch (1m scale)



Plate 2: MDV70404, concrete base, looking southeast (1m scale)



Plate 3: MDV70404, southern mound, looking northeast (1m scale)





Plate 4: MDV70404, eastern mound, looking southeast (1m scale)



Plate 5: MDV70404, central mound, looking north (1m scale)



Plate 6: MDV70404, barbed wire support post, looking east (1m scale)





Plate 7: MDV70405, ditch and bank, looking northeast (1m scale)



Plate 8: MDV70405, ditch, looking northwest (1 scale)



Plate 9: MDV70405, ditches crossed by a track, looking west (1m scale)



Plate 10: MDV70406, east end of the boundary crossed by a track, looking southwest (1m scale)



Plate 11: MDV70406, west end of the boundary, looking east (1m scale)



Plate 12: MDV70407, mound, looking south (1m scale)





Plate 13: MDV112541, slit trench cut into boundary AC5, looking southwest (1m scale)



Plate 14: MDV112541, T-shaped slit trench, looking south (1m scale)



Plate 15: MDV112543, a typical large slit trench, looking south (1m scale)





Plate 16: MDV112543, a Z-shaped slit trench extending beyond the survey area, looking east (1m scale)



Plate 17: MDV112543, the large, possible mortar, pit, looking south (1m scale)



Plate 18: AC1, slit trench looking northwest (1m scale)





Plate 19: AC2, a typical slit trench, looking northeast (1m scale)



Plate 20: AC2, the southern slit trench with adjacent spoil, looking south (1m scale)



Plate 21: AC3, slit trench cut into boundary MDV70405, looking south (1m scale)





Plate 22: AC4, east end of boundary, looking southwest (1m scale)



Plate 23: AC4, damage to boundary showing its profile, looking southwest (1m scale)



Plate 24: AC5, boundary of plot 1033, looking west (1m scale)



Plate 25: AC6, mound, looking south (1m scale)

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