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An Archaeological Survey of Chailey Common, East Sussex

Phase 1

by
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Summary

Three areas in the Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve are being scraped to remove the bracken and encourage the re-establishment of heather. An archaeological survey was undertaken on the first of these areas at Pound Common (Phase 1) during 2007 to monitor the groundworks and record any archaeological features revealed.

The survey found a number of earthwork features, predominantly of Post-Medieval date, which comprised hollow ways, quarries, possible ridge & furrow, and some military earthworks.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1** Chris Butler Archaeological Services was commissioned by East Sussex County Council to carry out an archaeological survey and to monitor the scraping of parts of the Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve.
- 1.2** Chailey Common is one of the largest heathland commons in the South of England, covering some 450 acres. It was designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 1966, and is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Chailey Common is located to the west and north-west of North Chailey, some 10km north of Lewes in East Sussex.
- 1.3** The geology, according to the British Geological Survey (Sheet 318/333), is Upper Tunbridge Wells Sand.
- 1.4** As part of the management plan for Chailey Common¹ three areas within the Local Nature Reserve were identified for scraping. The objective being to remove the bracken, which had infested these areas, and to allow the heather to re-establish itself as part of the regeneration of the heathland.
- 1.5** The East Sussex County Archaeologist recommended a programme of works comprising a walkover survey to identify the above ground archaeological features, and the monitoring of ground disturbance to record archaeological features and recover artefacts.
- 1.6** As the project progressed, there was some modification to the programme of works by the County Archaeologist as the extent of the surviving archaeological remains became apparent.
- 1.7** This report covers Phase 1 of the project, which involved the recording of the archaeology at Pound Common, where the first scrape was undertaken.

2. Archaeological Background

- 2.1** Pound Common is situated on the south side of the A272 road between North Common Road and Beggar's Wood Road, on the west side of North Chailey, centred on TQ382207 (Fig. 1). The 1.7ha scrape was originally located in the centre of Pound Common, although subsequently a number of smaller areas were scraped at different locations.

¹ Gittins, S. 2006 Draft Management Plan for Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve, ESCC.

2.2 The HER records for Chailey Common were provided by ESCC, and are listed below:

MES1251	TQ39492155	Prehistoric	Flint scraper
MES1252	TQ37422116	Iron Age	Pottery sherd, possibly from a ditch
MES1273	TQ394209	Roman	Bloomery site
MES7237	TQ39352101	Roman	Settlement
MES1248	TQ403199	Post Medieval	Place name evidence for iron working site
MES1261	TQ387214	Post Medieval	Chailey Windmill (Listed Building)
MES1263	TQ402209	Post Medieval	Newick & Chailey Station
MES1274	TQ376214	Post Medieval	C19th Smock mill on site of earlier mill
MES1275	TQ384211	Post Medieval	C18th Hospital (Listed Building)
MES1276	TQ385211	Modern	C20th Chapel (Listed Building)
MES1277	TQ386214	Modern	C20th Hospital

2.3 Aerial photographs dating from 1947, 1999 and 2006, provided by ESCC, were inspected. Unfortunately the 1947 photograph was not very helpful due to its poor quality, however the more recent photographs showed many of the archaeological features that could also be seen on the ground.

2.4 Very little archaeological work has been undertaken on Chailey Common in the past and little is currently known about its complex history. Its position on the east-west ridge, which is likely to have been an important communication route in prehistory, hints at potential for prehistoric activity. In the Roman period a small roadside settlement associated with the iron industry grew up alongside the road at Downsview, North Chailey (TQ39352101)².

2.5 Industrial activity may have continued to be a feature of this area, although the Post Medieval pottery and brick industries were located on South Common at South Chailey³. During the First and Second World War's Chailey Common was used for training, the physical evidence for which survives in places across the Common⁴.

² Butler, C. 2004 'A Roman Site at North Chailey' *MSFAT Newsletter* 53.

³ Baines, J.W. 1980 *Sussex Pottery*, Fisher Publications, Brighton.

⁴ Longstaff-Tyrrell, P. 2000 *Front-Line Sussex*, Sutton Publishing Ltd, Stroud.

3. Archaeological Methodology

3.1 An initial walkover survey of the site was carried out prior to any scraping being undertaken. At this stage it was realised that there were substantial earthwork remains surviving across Pound Common, the nature and date of which were unknown. It was decided that an attempt would be made to plot all of the earthworks that could be seen, and not just those affected by the scraping. It was hoped that by undertaking this exercise, a better understanding of the nature of the complex remains would be possible.

3.2 The earthworks could also be clearly seen on the aerial photographs, especially the 2006 example. These were plotted at 1:2,000 onto a map of Pound Common (Fig. 2).

3.3 A more detailed walkover survey of the earthworks on Pound Common was then undertaken in October 2007, using a methodology agreed with the County Archaeologist, and which has also been used for a similar archaeological survey in Ashdown Forest.

3.4 The survey comprised a systematic walkover of the area to be surveyed. Written notes were recorded for each earthwork encountered, including information on its dimensions, shape and extent, together with any relationships with other earthworks. Where necessary this information was backed up with sketches and digital photographs. All measurements were estimated by pacing, and a hand-held GPS was used to provide an exact location.

3.5 The information collected from the systematic walkover survey was then related to the mapped data plotted from the aerial photographs (Fig. 3), and was also entered onto an Excel database.

3.6 During the survey, the ground surface was also inspected for archaeological artefacts, which were bagged and located using the hand-held GPS.

4. Results

4.1 The aerial photographs showed a series of linear features running across Pound Common, which were plotted onto a map (Fig. 2). These linear features were concentrated in three main areas. Firstly, on the west side of the Common, where they were in a south-west to north-east alignment parallel to North Common Road. The second group of linear features were on the east side of the Common, where they were aligned north-west to south-east parallel to Beggar's Wood Road, and the final group were on an east-west alignment on the southern edge of the Common. A number of current tracks were also plotted onto the map at the same time.

- 4.2** There were very few obvious features on the aerial photographs in the central part of the Common, and only two linear features could be seen cutting across the area that was due to be scraped. Most of the Common is shown covered with vegetation in the 1999 and 2006 aerial photographs, whilst the 1947 aerial photograph, although of poor quality, shows numerous tracks across the Common, together with a number of fresh diggings, all probably the result of military activity during the Second World War.
- 4.3** The detailed walkover survey confirmed the presence of the earthworks plotted from the aerial photographs, whilst also adding a number of features that could not be seen on the aerial photographs. The sites located on the walkover survey are marked on Fig. 3, and listed below:
- CC01** Two parallel hollow ways, 10m apart, aligned north-east to south-west, the western one being larger at 3m wide and 0.5m deep. They are exposed for some 50m at TQ37912078, before disappearing into scrub to the north-east and they peter-out to the south-west. They emerge from undergrowth at TQ37842083 where they are 6m wide & 2m deep and 3m wide & 0.5m deep respectively and 6m apart.
- CC02** Traces of further slight hollow ways at 10m intervals further east of above, also on north-east to south-west alignment, then a further two only 5m apart at TQ37962077, which are 3m wide and 0.3m deep, with the easternmost one being 4m wide & 1m deep. These continue to TQ37922071 where they are 3m wide & 0.6m deep, but stop before reaching the road.
- CC03** A series of discrete low linear banks aligned north-south, starting at TQ38002075 to TQ38042073. They resemble ridge and furrow, and are divided by furrows 2m wide and 0.25m deep. Some stretch at least 60m south of the track, but disappear into the gorse to the north of the track. The east side of this area is marked by a large bank on the west side of a hollow way 4m wide and 1m deep at TQ38052073 (See CC04), which extends further north to TQ38052092 where it is 3m wide & 0.6m deep. These were not identified from the aerial photographs, but have been partly exposed by the scraping.
- CC04** A pair of parallel hollow ways (3.5m wide and 0.75m deep) 10m apart, aligned north-east to south-west at TQ38092073, which can be traced north as they bend slightly to TQ38102080. Continue on to TQ38122092 where they are 3.5m wide & 0.75m deep, and 4m wide & 1.2m deep respectively. These match two linear features noted from aerial photograph.
- CC05** A small crescent shaped earthwork forming a bank 0.4m high & 1.2m wide covering an area 7 x 5m. TQ38142075.
- CC06** Possible quarry 10m x 20m and 1.2m deep at TQ38112074. U-shaped orientated east-west with a broad entrance at east end. The 1m high bank forming the west side of the quarry appears to continue from TQ38112073 to TQ38162070, and may suggest more of this area has been dug away in the past.
- CC07** North-south hollow way, 4m wide and 1m deep located at TQ38212080. It continues north into bracken & gorse, and to the south where it has a distinct bank on the west side. It emerges at its north end to meet the north-west to south-east banks at TQ38172090

- CC08** Circular cut into the above hollow way (CC07) 6m diameter & 0.5m deep at TQ38212081. It has a bank around the cut 0.6m high and 0.75m wide, with the north side open using the hollow way as an entrance.
- CC09** Quarry; linear 8m wide and 2.5m deep & some 30m long between TQ38162070 & TQ38192068.
- CC10** A second rectangular quarry starts 4m south of CC09 and continues to TQ38202067. It is 6m wide, 15m long and 2m deep.
- CC11** Two shallow oval cuts 1m apart; 3 x 2.5m & 0.4m deep. TQ38172072
- CC12** Two probable slit trenches, each 3 x 1m and 0.5m deep TQ38182081
- CC13** Shallow rectangular cut 2.5 x 3.5m & 0.3m deep TQ38162081
- CC14** Two slit trenches, 3 x 0.5m & 0.75m deep TQ38222087
- CC15** A north-west to south-east orientated bank, now largely removed at its north end, but at TQ38242082 it is about 2m wide and 0.3m high, although it varies in size along its length. This matches a feature at least 120m long plotted from aerial photograph.
- CC16** The bank (CC15) merges with other north-west to south-east banks up to 0.5m high on the same alignment at TQ38172085. Other banks exist at TQ38182090 and are 3-4m wide and between 0.25 and 0.8m high. These may be survivors of hollow ways seen on aerial photographs.
- CC17** A ditch aligned north-west to south-east 0.25m deep and 0.6m wide curves to follow the alignment of the road. TQ38272088. This is possible the bottom of a bulldozed hollow way. The ground rises on its south-west side, and the aerial photographs suggest there were other linear features here on a similar alignment (see CC18).
- CC18** Three to four possible hollow ways on north-west to south-east alignment on higher ground at TQ38302083. They vary in size from 2-3m wide and from 0.2 to 0.5 in depth. A deep hollow way 2.5 – 3m wide and 1.3m deep on similar alignment at TQ28282082.
- CC19** Crescent shaped quarry 10m long and 1.5m deep, with globular shaped south-east end 4m wide. TQ38212065. There are other small quarry pits, each approx 5m diameter, to the east of this quarry. None of these can be seen on the aerial photographs.
- CC20** Five or six east-west aligned eroded hollow ways or ridge and furrow 0.5m deep at 5m to 7m intervals centred on TQ38212063. They extend some way west and east, and there is a track running parallel to them along the north edge.
- CC21** Small square enclosure on the southern edge of the Common with bank 0.3m high and 1m wide with ditch on its outside. Tree covered. North-east corner at TQ38112062, and north-west corner at TQ38042061. Shown on OS map and aerial photographs.

- CC22** North-south aligned bank crossed by current path at TQ38052060. Bank is over 2m wide and 0.5m high. There are more east-west aligned banks from possible ridge and furrow on the west side of this bank.
- CC23** Possible slit trench 2.5m x 0.5m & 0.3m deep TQ37952087.
- CC24** Four north-south orientated ridges at TQ37852070. The deepest is on the west side and is 1m deep & 5m wide extending for 50m. The others are 2m wide & 0.5m deep and not as extensive.
- CC25** Some six parallel hollow ways aligned north-east to south-west 3m wide & 0.3m deep at TQ37732050. Most peter-out further north, but the largest is 4m wide & 0.7m deep and continues to near the car park.

5. Finds

5.1 Only 13 artefacts were recovered during the walkover survey, and are summarised below.

5.1.1 TQ38262079: 1 soft hammer-struck flake or blade proximal end fragment (4g)

5.1.2 TQ38212062: 1 hard hammer-struck flake and;
1 fire-fractured flake distal fragment (10g)

5.1.3 TQ38252089: 1 soft hammer-struck flint flake (16g)

5.1.4 TQ38022093: 1 fire-fractured flint (13g)
1 C19/20th pottery sherd (6g)

5.15 TQ38212081: 7 C19/20th pottery sherds (19g)

5.2 The four pieces of flintwork are largely undiagnostic, although the proximal end fragment from a flake or blade and the soft hammer-struck flake (which has evidence of platform preparation) are likely to be Mesolithic in date.

5.3 The eight sherds of 19/20th century pottery are all plain white china. The seven sherds from TQ38212081 were recovered from the bottom of the circular cut at this location, and are all probably from the same vessel.

6. Discussion

- 6.1** There are no identifiable surviving earthworks from the Prehistoric or Roman periods on the Common. However, the presence of four pieces of flint debitage and the piece of fire-fractured flint indicates that there has been prehistoric activity here, and the nearby Roman settlement at North Chailey would suggest that activity in the Roman period should be expected.
- 6.2** This survey has shown that Pound Common has had a significant amount of later activity that has left numerous earthworks across the Common. These earthworks, predominantly hollow ways, probably all date from the Post Medieval period, although some may have their origins in the later Medieval period.
- 6.3** In the later 16th and early 17th centuries much common land in the Weald was enclosed⁵, including parts of Chailey Common. In 1624 Sir Henry Compton enclosed land at Chailey Common, and was in dispute with the local inhabitants who threw down the fences, although another common in the parish was enclosed by Lord Abergavenny with agreement of his tenants⁶.
- 6.4** There is some evidence to suggest that part of Pound Common may have been enclosed, and subjected to ploughing in the early Post Medieval period, as two areas of possible ridge and furrow ploughing were identified in the survey.
- 6.5** The numerous hollow ways follow the alignments of the modern roads on the east and west sides of Pound Common, and are almost certainly Post Medieval pack animal trackways that were used until they became impassable and then migrated to one side, before finally following the current route used by the modern road. These demonstrate the longevity of these tracks/roads, and confirm that in these areas, at least, no enclosure has taken place, as this would have eliminated the earthworks. Similar hollow ways survive on Ashdown Forest, where again there has been no subsequent agricultural activity to destroy them.
- 6.6** A number of quarries were located during the survey, and are likely to be Post Medieval in date, and were probably for the extraction of sand or sandstone for building purposes.
- 6.7** No surviving First World War activity was identified on Pound Common, although a small number of partly in-filled Second World War slit trenches were located. It is possible that some of the features identified as quarries may have in fact been for military use.

⁵ Brent, C.E 1976 'Rural employment and Population in Sussex Between 1550 and 1640', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* **114**, 27-48.

⁶ Cornwall, J. 1960 'Agricultural Improvement 1560-1640', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* **98** 118-132

6.8 The remaining phases of the survey will be undertaken as the scrapings take place, and reports will be produced on these in due course.

7. Acknowledgements

7.1 The initial arrangements for the survey were made by Heli Gittins, the Chailey Common Ranger, and then subsequently by her successor Dave Durroch, and Sandy Williamson, Western Area Manager.

7.2 Casper Johnson, the East Sussex County Archaeologist provided guidance and an initial brief for the project, and Greg Chuter provided the HER records, maps and aerial photographs.

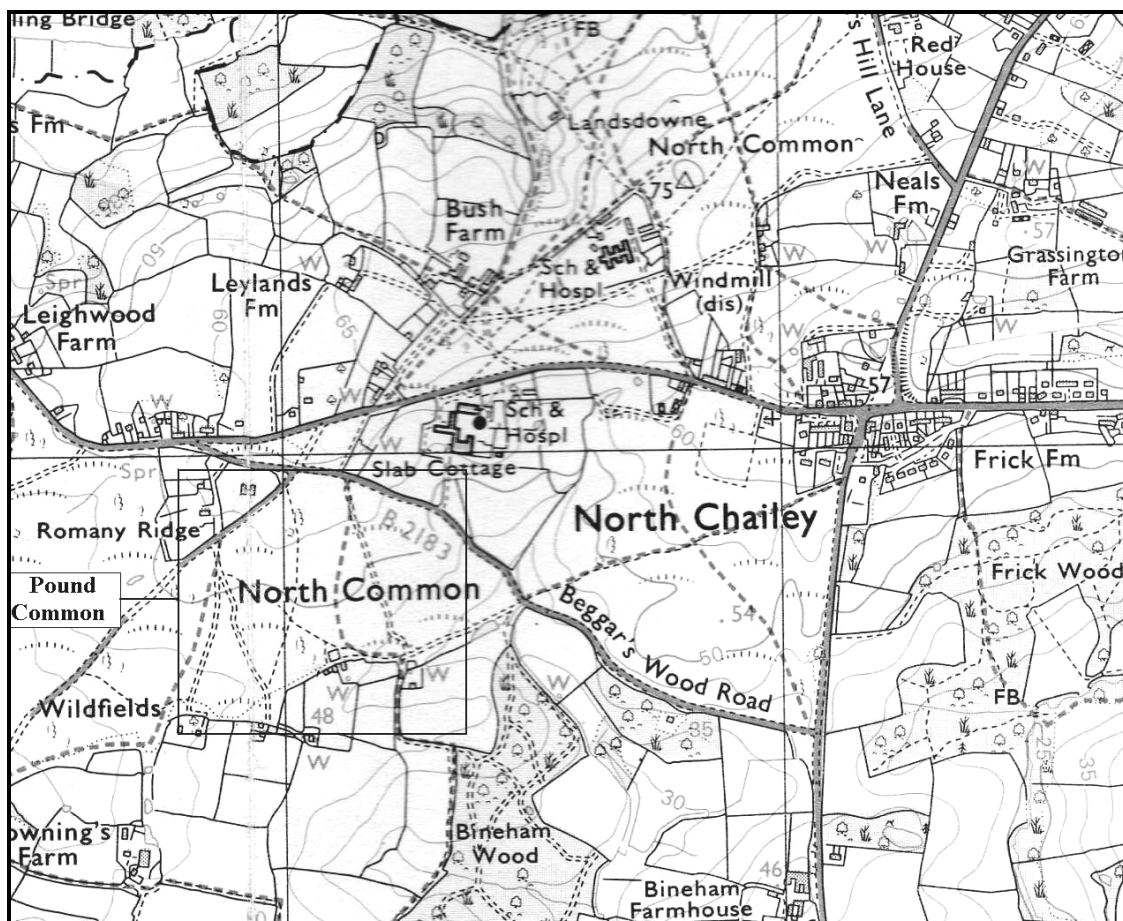


Fig. 1: Chailey Common; Location of Pound Common.

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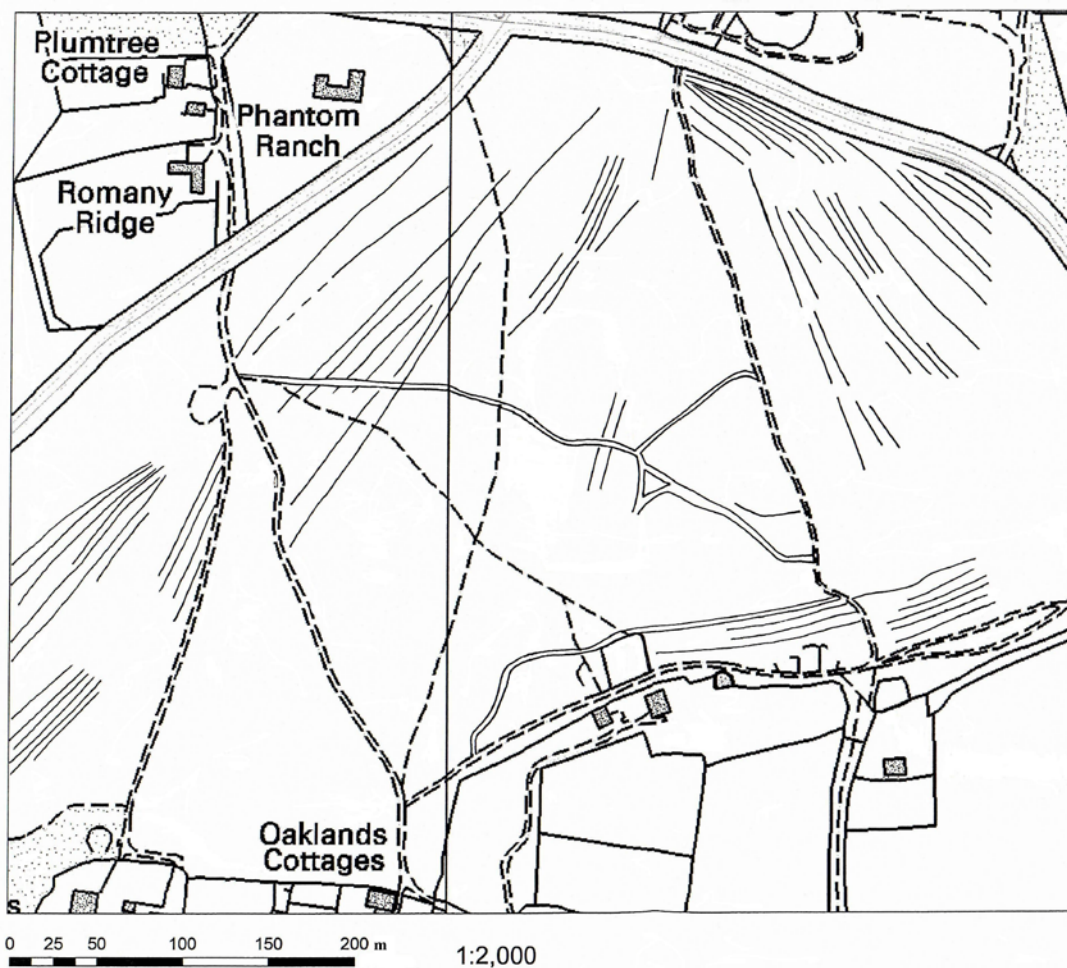


Fig. 2: Pound Common showing the features plotted from aerial photographs.

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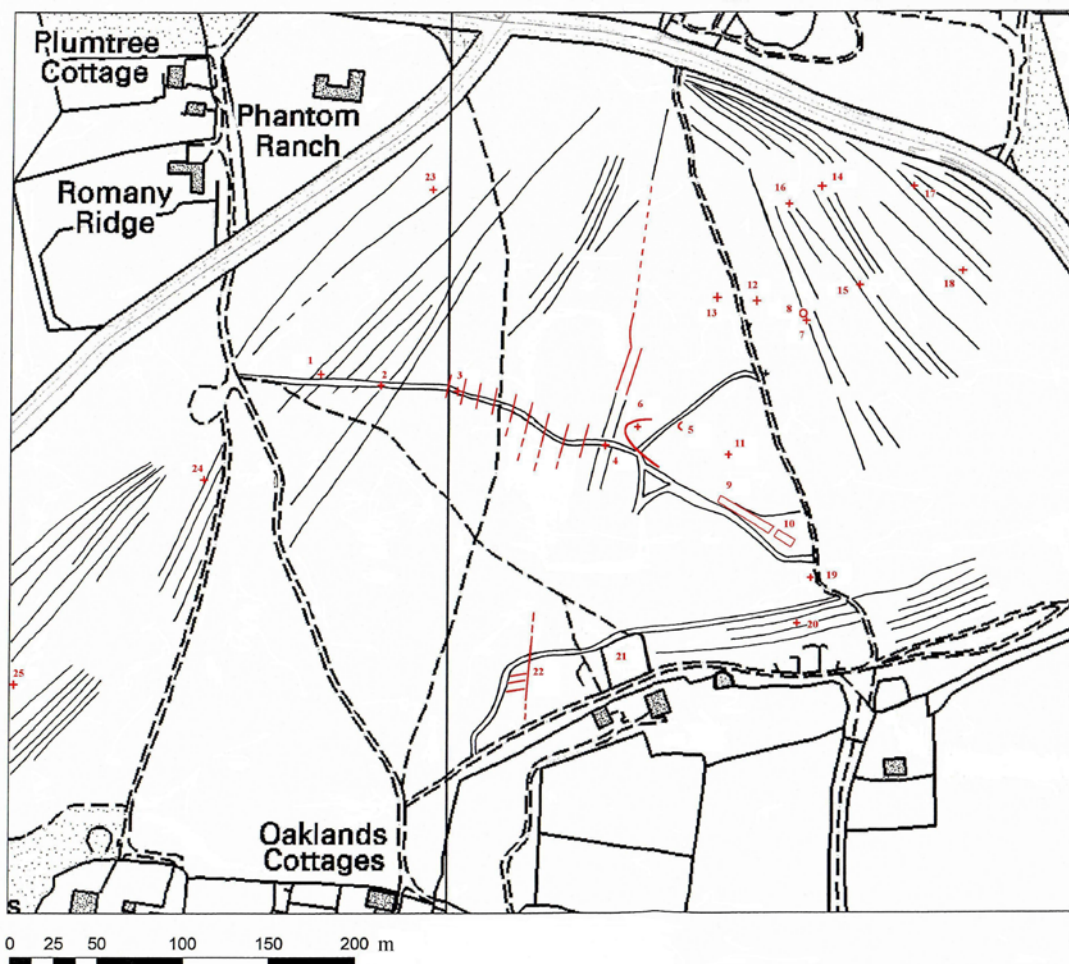


Fig. 3: Pound Common showing the features located in the walkover survey.

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Chris Butler Archaeological Services

Chris Butler has been an archaeologist since 1985, and formed the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team in 1987, since when it has carried out numerous fieldwork projects, and was runner up in the Pitt-Rivers Award at the British Archaeological Awards in 1996. Having previously worked as a Pensions Technical Manager and Administration Director in the financial services industry, Chris formed **Chris Butler Archaeological Services** at the beginning of 2002.

Chris is a Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, a committee member of the Lithic Studies Society, and is a part time lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Sussex. He continues to run the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team in his spare time.

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