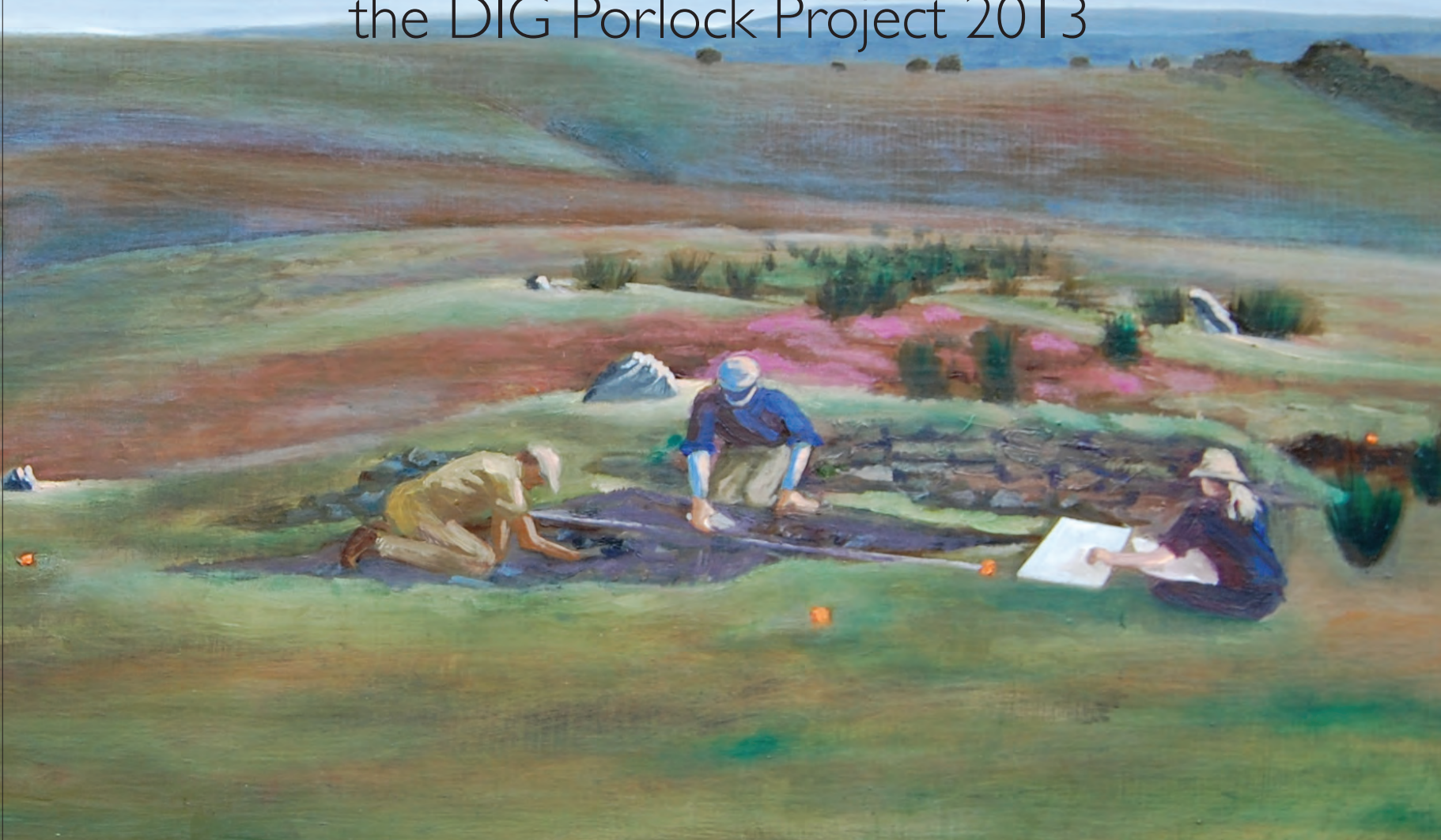


Porlock's Moorland Archaeology

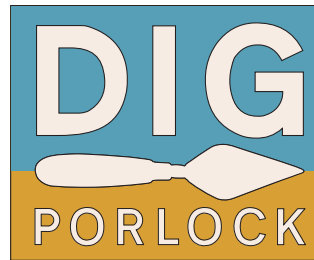
the DIG Porlock Project 2013





Porlock's Moorland Archaeology

the DIG Porlock Project 2013



'this book brings together the fieldwork of local volunteers and archaeologists carried out in 2013 on Porlock Allotment, an area of remote moorland at the southern end of Porlock parish in West Somerset. It has played a major part in making an exemplary archaeological record of this landscape, and in so doing has told the story of people in this place over the last 10,000 years.'

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This archaeology project is part of the Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership Scheme, which celebrates moorland as the 'heart of Exmoor'. The Partnership is extremely grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and our local partners and funders.



'Helping people to enjoy and appreciate Exmoor's moorlands, and supporting those who take care of them.'



Contents

Why DIG Porlock?	4-7
Locating Porlock's moorland heritage	8-10
Sites investigated by DIG Porlock 2013	
1. Hawkcombe Head	11-13
2. Porlock Stone Circle	14-15
3. Porlock Stone Row	16-17
4. House Platforms - North	18
5. House Platforms - South	19
6. House Platforms - Weir Water	20
7. The Doughnut	21
8. Enclosure - west of Lucott Cross cattle grid	22-23
9. 'V' shaped feature	24-25
10. Cairn - west of Porlock Stone Circle	26
11. Peat cutting	27-28
Answering the questions posed by DIG Porlock	29-31
Porlock Allotment: The last 10,000 years	32-38
Postscript	39
Finds Days	40-41
A Bronze Age Day	42-45
Fieldwalking Day	46-47
Thanks and acknowledgments	48



Porlock Allotment from the air

© English Heritage 27681_038

Why DIG Porlock?

The moorlands around Porlock contain a wealth of archaeological evidence showing how people have used and changed this landscape over the last 10,000 years. Archaeologists have previously identified a number of sites from hunter gatherer camps to Bronze Age settlements and traces of structures built during World War Two. But many of the big questions remain unanswered: Who were the first people in Porlock parish? Where did they live? What were their lives like? How did they contribute to the Porlock we see today?

In 2013 members of the local community along with archaeologists from Exmoor National Park embarked on DIG Porlock: The aim was to investigate the origins of Porlock parish, and the tools to be used were:

- archaeological fieldwork
- excavation
- research



Looking down Hawkcombe from Hawkcombe Head

The project was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund through the Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership Scheme. A major part of the project was to provide opportunities to gain skills in a wide range of archaeological techniques including the use of air photographs, field survey, geophysical survey, archaeological excavation, identification of finds and artefacts, as well as documentary research.

Throughout 2013 over 50 volunteers from Porlock and the surrounding area, along with children from St Dubricius and Exford Schools, were involved in DIG Porlock in all weathers, from snow, gales, mist and rain to heat waves, carrying out extensive surveys, excavation and field walking of archaeological sites. The end result of all this hard work is a solid archive and a much more coherent story about how our ancestors lived and died. This area of moorland is now one of the best recorded on Exmoor, providing a resource for generations to come.

During 2013 fieldwork focused on an area called Porlock Allotment. Initially this caused some confusion in the project, as it was assumed we were going to be exploring vegetable gardens on the fringes of Porlock itself! But Porlock Allotment is an area of moorland to the south-west of Porlock lying at 400m above sea level. It is called Porlock Allotment because it abuts the former

Royal Forest of Exmoor. When the Forest was sold in 1818, those major landowners who had rights to the Forest were allotted land in lieu of those rights - hence the term 'Allotment'.

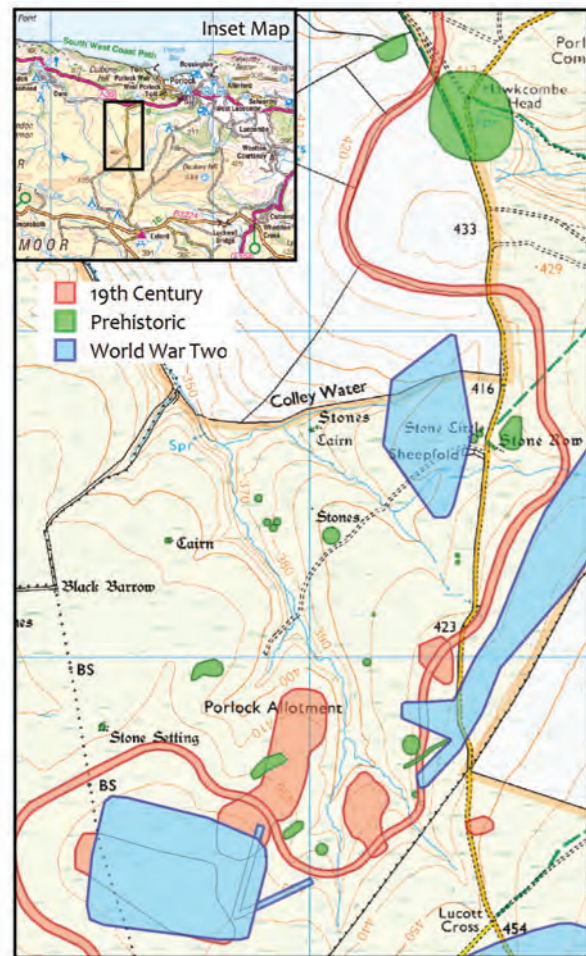
Porlock Allotment is a beautiful part of Exmoor. It is dominated by Weir Water, a deep valley, which runs south to north through it, before turning west to become the East Lyn river which flows on to Lynmouth. A series of minor combes or valleys run into the head of Weir Water and between these are a series of spurs or necks of land. The moorland here comprises deep heather, whortleberry, molinia (or purple moor grass) and bracken. The area is grazed by sheep and some cattle in summer. Porlock Allotment and Porlock Common have never been intensively farmed, and this has resulted in the survival of extensive archaeological remains from thousands of years ago. This is typical of Exmoor's moorlands, but Porlock Allotment is especially rich in these sites.

The challenge for the DIG Porlock project was to examine these archaeological sites and see how the evidence they contain about how people have lived and died on Porlock Allotment in the past can illuminate an otherwise silent story, a story which began around 8,000 years ago and ends in 1945.



Porlock stone circle photographed 1946-48 by the RAF. The white areas show military activity on the moorlands which were used for training during World War Two.

Locating Porlock's moorland heritage



Archaeological sites on Porlock Allotment already identified before DIG Porlock began

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One of the biggest challenges of DIG Porlock was the subtle nature of the archaeology. Locating the archaeological sites was often frustrating, so the phrase 'Is this it?' is probably the best project strap line! And although the archaeology of Porlock Allotment is elusive and difficult to find, at the beginning of the project we already had quite a lot to go on: it was known that people had long occupied the moorlands above Porlock: sites dating from the Mesolithic (8,000-4,000BC) to World War Two had already been identified and recorded in this area. The Exmoor Historic Environment Record (HER), maintained by Exmoor National Park, records the details of a number of sites. Using this 'known' archaeology it became clear that the archaeology of Porlock's moorlands has a strong focus on the prehistoric periods, the nineteenth century and World War Two.

Through the use of aerial photographs, LiDAR data and

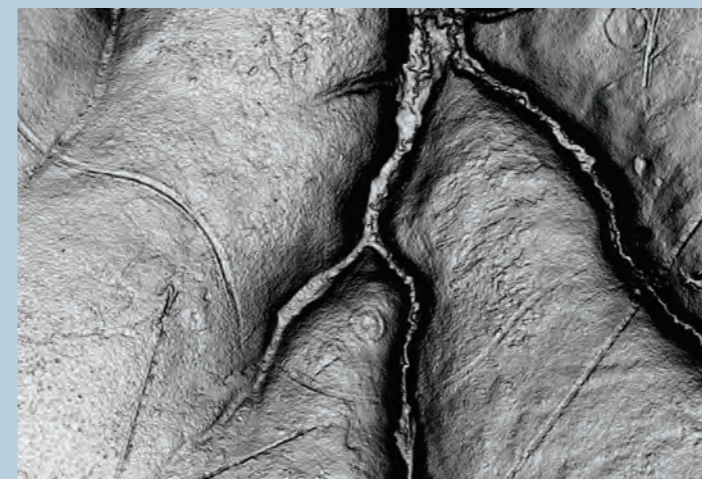
Ordnance Survey maps, volunteers and archaeologists from Exmoor National Park identified the known archaeology on the ground, and began the process of finding out more about the earliest residents of Porlock parish.

What is LiDAR?

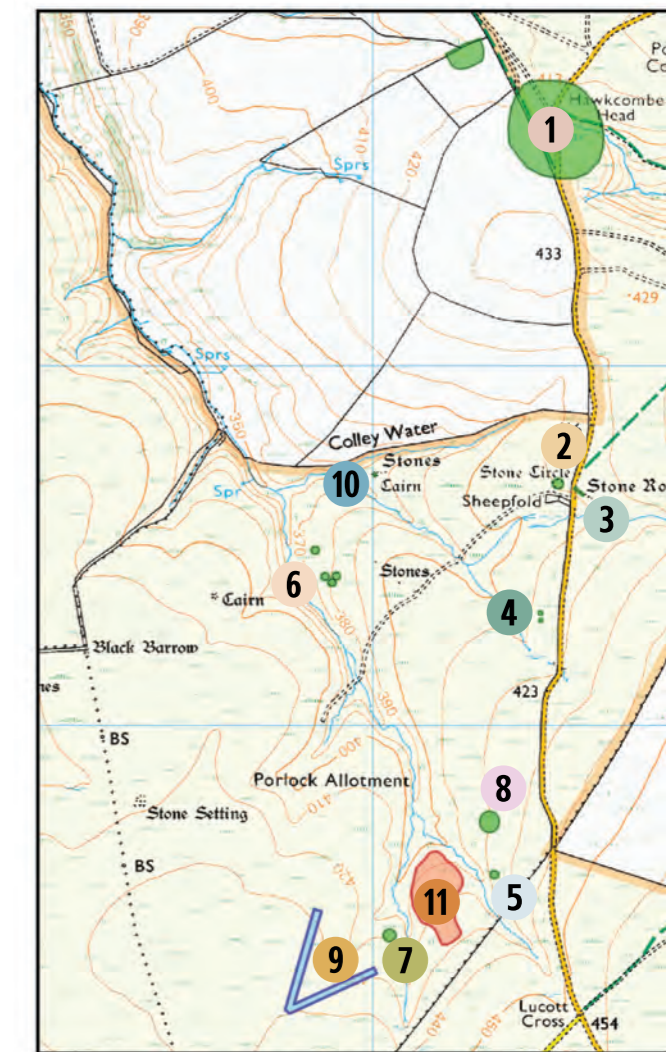
LiDAR (Light Detection And Ranging) is a type of remote sensing. It is a very detailed laser scan of the surface of the earth. A laser is fired at the surface of the earth from an aeroplane and the time taken for the laser to bounce back from the earth's surface is measured. This provides a very accurate distance. From this data a highly detailed map of the earth's surface can be made. The technique also allows vegetation such as scrub or trees to be 'removed' from the data, thereby 'revealing' the contours of the surface which are hidden. The data can also be manipulated by introducing an 'artificial shadow' which accentuates the surface topography thereby revealing slight surface undulations, which are often of archaeological interest.

Eleven sites across Porlock Allotment and Porlock Common were investigated as part of DIG Porlock. Their dates ranged from Mesolithic to World War Two. Together they show how rich Exmoor's archaeology is, but more importantly for this project, they provide a narrative - a story - of this landscape.

This story is not an unbroken one, for long periods of time remain stubbornly silent. Rather it is like a series of windows on the past where archaeology can provide tantalising glimpses into the details of past lives, back to a time where we know nothing of language and little of beliefs. Whilst surveying the humps and bumps of a burial cairn in the bitter winds of April 2013 it was hard to appreciate such things, but all these individual activities - surveying, geophysical survey and excavation - help to provide an exemplary record of this remarkable landscape and allow archaeologists to weave a story of past lives. Lives that, without archaeology, would remain silent.



LiDAR image of Porlock Allotment, processed to show archaeological features on the surface



Sites investigated during DIG Porlock 2013

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What is geophysical survey?

Geophysical survey is a term used to describe techniques which can help to show archaeology below the ground, without disturbing the surface. This means it is a 'non-invasive' technique, unlike archaeological excavation. The benefit of using non-invasive techniques is that they can be repeated again, if for example the equipment malfunctions or the results are unexpected.

DIG Porlock used two different geophysical survey techniques: gradiometry and resistivity. Gradiometry detects variations in the earth's magnetic field and is useful for detecting heating events such as hearths, as these create changes in the magnetic signature of the ground. Resistivity records the resistance of the soil below the ground. It can show areas of higher and lower resistance to the normal ground resistance for that area. This may indicate areas where the ground has been disturbed in the past. For example ditches should show a lower resistance because material has been removed and looser packed material and water will have taken its place, providing less resistance to an electrical current. A brick wall should give a higher resistance reading as the current finds it harder to travel through the brick.



Carrying out a gradiometer survey at Hawkcombe Head



Different equipment is required to carry out resistivity survey

Archaeology in action: Sites investigated by DIG Porlock 2013

I. Hawkcombe Head

Type of Site:

Hunter gatherer flint knapping site

Date: Mesolithic (8,000-4,000BC approx)

Work carried out: geophysical survey, excavation, fieldwalking

ENP HER Number: MSO 7889

This site was discovered in the 1940s when Mesolithic flints were found there. Since 2001 it has been the subject of archaeological investigations by the University of Bristol during which post holes and hearths have been revealed, dating to the Mesolithic, along with thousands of flint flakes and microlithic tools.

? Questions posed by DIG Porlock 2013:

- How far does this site extend around Hawkcombe Head?

In March 2013 DIG Porlock volunteers carried out geophysical survey with Dr Chris Carey on areas to the South and West of the known site. The aim of this was to determine whether there was likely to be any archaeology surviving below the ground in these areas, such as post holes from Mesolithic structures, or hearths.



Gradiometry and resistivity surveys were carried out on two areas at Hawkcombe Head



Several small trenches were excavated, based on the results of the geophysical survey



Flint tools from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age found during fieldwalking at Ven Combe

Gradiometry and resistivity surveys were carried out by volunteers over 2 days. The results showed several potential Mesolithic features. A few of these were investigated further with small excavations during July 2013. Over 6 days volunteers, joined by students, excavated 4 small

trenches and 1 larger trench hoping to find the extent of the Hawkcombe Head site in these directions.

Fieldwalking of nearby Ven Combe was also carried out by volunteers, with help from children at St Dubricius School and



Fieldwalking to recover prehistoric flint tools and waste flakes



Children from St Dubricius School joined volunteers to systematically fieldwalk an area of Ven Combe

Bristol Young Archaeologists Club. This yielded almost 700 pieces of flint from the plough soil of which 240 were identified as tools. Most of these were microliths of Mesolithic date, but one Bronze Age tanged and barbed arrowhead was also found.

2. Porlock Stone Circle

Type of site: stone circle

Date: Prehistoric - Thought to date from the late Neolithic into the Bronze Age period (approx 2,000-1,500BC)

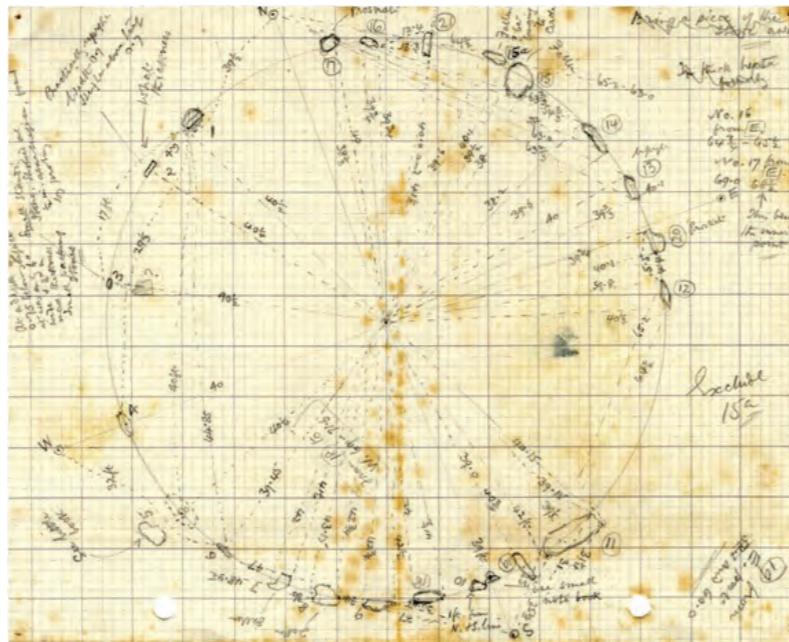
Work carried out: excavation

ENP HER Number: MSO 7898

An incomplete circle of 12 to 14 stones 24.5m in diameter, Porlock stone circle became more widely known when it was excavated by Harold St George Gray in 1928. Little is understood about how this monument was constructed, by whom and even why. During World War Two military training took place in this area and a metal antiquity star was placed at the circle to warn troops that they were not to damage the ancient monument. Unfortunately this metal star is no longer there.

Questions posed by DIG Porlock 2013:

- How was this monument constructed?
- How much of the monument was disturbed by St George Gray's excavations in the 1920s?



A plan of Porlock stone circle by Harold St George Gray, made during his excavations in the 1920s

© Courtesy of Somerset Historic Environment Record



A minilith of Porlock stone circle by Clare Maryan Green

© Clare Maryan Green

In August 2013, volunteers joined a team from the University of Leicester, led by Mark Gillings, to try to answer these questions through carefully targeted excavations. Trenches were dug around two upright stones and the remaining stones of the circle were meticulously planned and photographed.



Each stone of Porlock stone circle was meticulously recorded

© Barry Hitchcox

3. Porlock Stone Row

Type of site: stone row

Date: Prehistoric - Thought to date from the Neolithic into the Bronze Age period (2,000-1,500BC)

Work carried out: geophysical survey, excavation

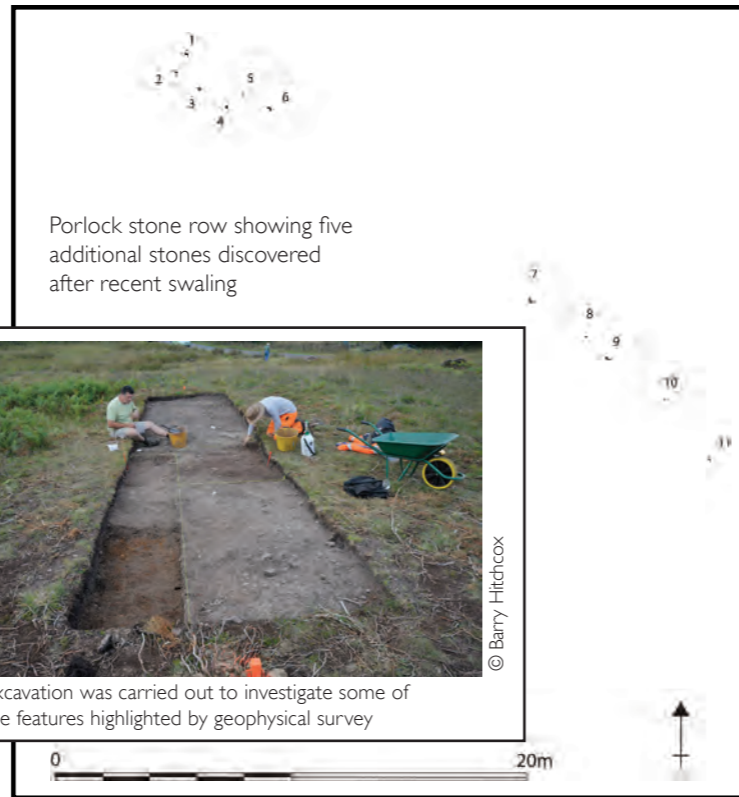
ENP HER Number: MSO 7924

Porlock stone row is a double stone row, which lies close to the stone circle but is now separated from it by the Porlock-Exford road. As with most of the standing stone monuments on Exmoor, the stones that make up the row are 'miniliths', much smaller than in other stone rows around Britain. This is one of the reasons that Exmoor's prehistoric archaeology is unique.

? Questions posed by DIG Porlock 2013:

- Does the stone row connect with the stone circle?
- Why is the stone row located where it is?

In April 2013, volunteers assisted a team from the University of Leicester in carrying out a geophysical survey of Porlock stone row. The results of this survey helped them to decide whether archaeological excavation would be appropriate to answer some of the questions about this monument, and where this excavation should focus.



In August 2013 Mark Gillings and the team from Leicester returned and were joined again by volunteers to carry out an excavation at the stone row. This involved a long trench across a gap in the row, to determine whether there was evidence for 'missing' stones. Fourteen volunteers were able to participate in this excavation and many more visited the dig for a site tour.

Carrying out a geophysical survey of Porlock stone row



4. House Platforms - North

Type of site: House platforms

Date: Thought to be Bronze Age period (2,000-700BC)

Work carried out: geophysical survey, large scale survey

ENP HER Number: MSO 7945, MSO 7946

Two slight platforms were found by archaeologists in the 1990s on the slopes above Weir Water just west of the Porlock-Exford road. They are thought to have been built to stand roundhouses on, and sites like this are characteristic of the Bronze Age.

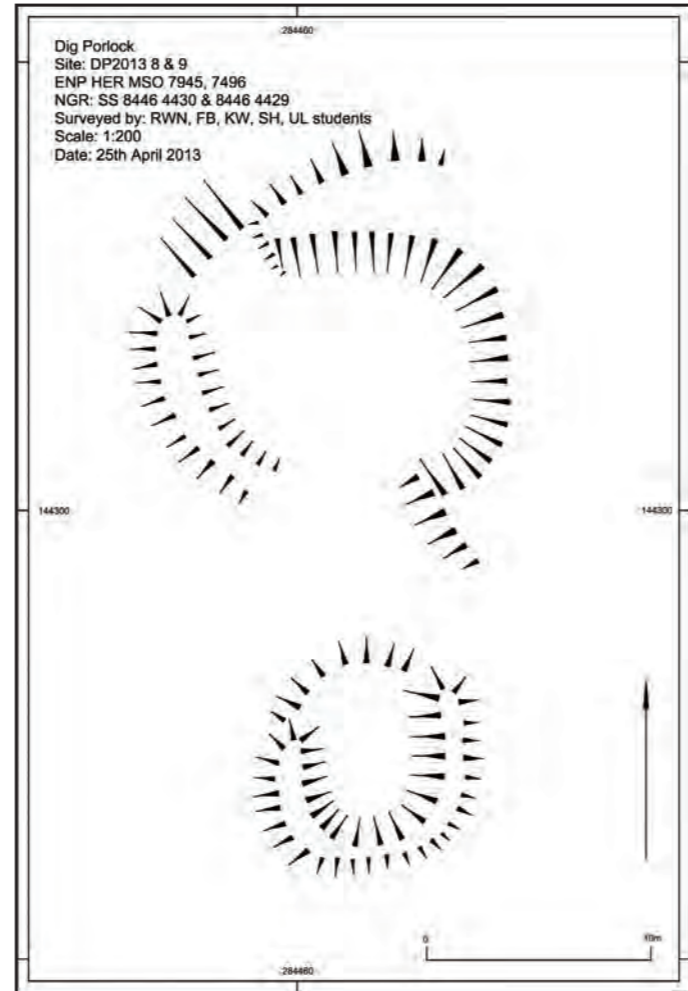


GPS equipment was used to ensure the surveys were accurately located

? Questions posed by DIG Porlock 2013:

- Were these really house platforms?
- Was there any evidence for the buildings themselves?

In April, geophysical survey was carried out by the University of Leicester aided by volunteers. A large scale survey of the platforms was also undertaken at this time by Rob Wilson-North and Faye Balmond, with assistance from DIG Porlock volunteers.



A survey of the house platforms was carried out, assisted by volunteers

5. House Platforms - South

Type of site: House platforms

Date: Thought to be Bronze Age period (2,000-700BC)

Work carried out: geophysical survey

ENP HER Number: MSO 7909

Two platforms were recorded by archaeologists in the 1990s on the edge of steep slopes west of Lucott Cross cattle grid on the Porlock-Exford road. One platform is massive and the other forms a very slight ring. They are thought to have been the bases for roundhouses, and sites like this are characteristic of the Bronze Age.

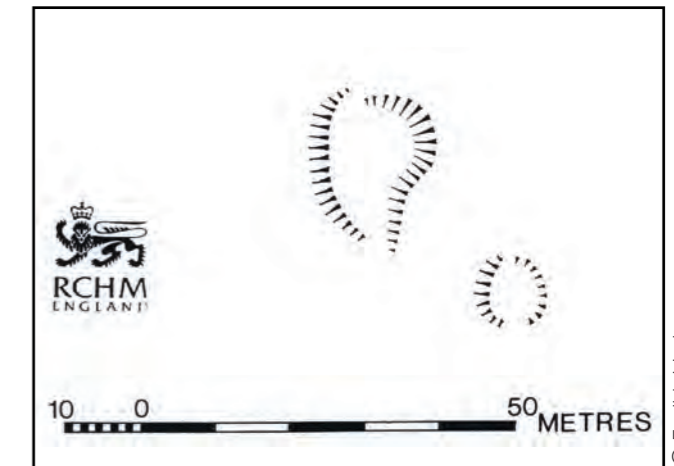
? Questions posed by DIG Porlock 2013:

- Are they really house platforms?
- Is there any evidence for the buildings themselves?
- Why is one platform so much bigger than the other?

Geophysical survey was carried out on these hut platforms by Chris Carey assisted by volunteers.



One aim of carrying out geophysics on these house platforms was to identify any hearths or fireplaces below the ground surface



A survey of these house platforms had already been completed

6. House Platforms - Weir Water

Type of site: House platforms

Date: Thought to be Bronze Age period (2,000-700BC)

Work carried out: GPS survey; large scale survey

ENP HER Number: MSO 7907

This group of house platforms lies on a sheltered natural terrace just above Weir Water. They are unusual because the banks around the platforms contain large quantities of stone, unlike other house platforms on Exmoor. They are thought to have been the bases for roundhouses, and sites like this are characteristic of the Bronze Age.



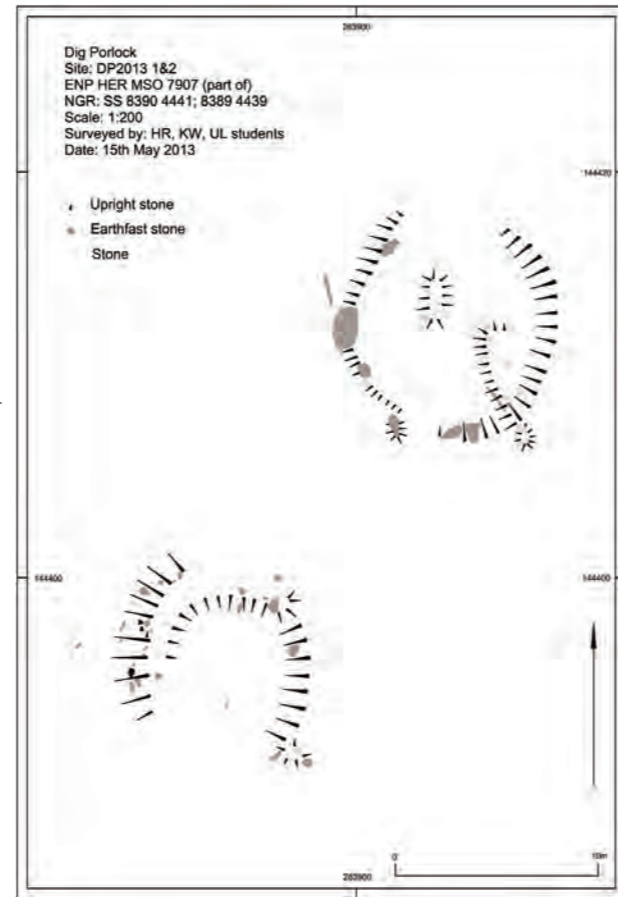
© Hazel Riley

The valley house platforms are distinctive because of the large pieces of stone used in their construction

Questions posed by DIG Porlock 2013:

- How many platforms are there?
- Is there any evidence for the buildings themselves?
- Is there any evidence for why/how this settlement was abandoned?

GPS survey was carried out by Hazel Riley and volunteers to accurately record the location of all archaeological features. Two of the platforms were then surveyed in detail to provide accurate records of these structures.



© Hazel Riley

Two of the platforms were surveyed in detail, recording the location of each piece of stone

7. The Doughnut

Type of site: Unknown: House platform? Henge?

Date: Thought to be Bronze Age period (2,000-700BC)

Work carried out: geophysical survey

ENP HER Number: MSO 7905

This enigmatic oval enclosure lies on the end of a dramatic spur overlooking the headwaters of Weir Water. It is thought to be prehistoric, but its date and function are unknown. It was given the name 'the doughnut' because of its shape, to help differentiate it from the other enclosure on Porlock Allotment.

Questions posed by DIG Porlock 2013:

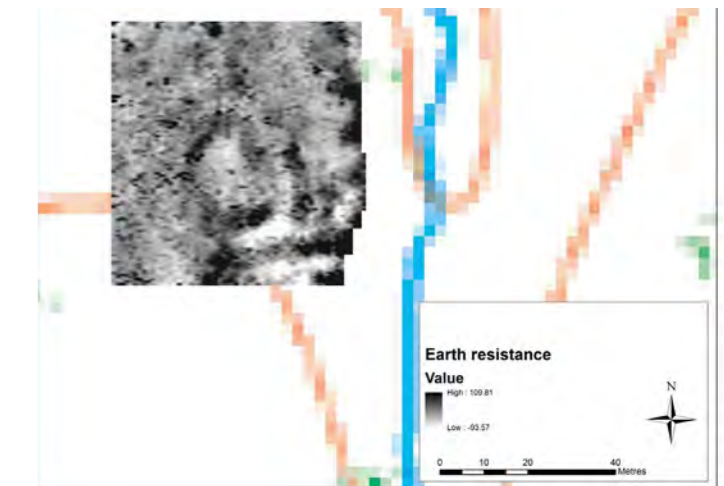
- What is this site?
- What was it used for?
- How old is it?

A geophysical survey of this structure was carried out by Chris Carey. It was hoped that this could provide us with more information about this unusual site and help to answer some of the questions about it, however the dense heather growing all over the site made it difficult to access and hampered the survey work.



© English Heritage 27681_033

The doughnut was so named because of its distinctive shape, and to differentiate it from the other prehistoric enclosure on Porlock Allotment



© Chris Carey

The geophysical survey of the doughnut clearly show its shape, with the banks and ditches giving respective high and low resistance readings

8. Enclosure - west of Lucott Cross cattle grid

Type of site: Enclosure with house platforms

Date: Thought to be Bronze Age period (2,000-700BC)

Work carried out: geophysical survey, large scale survey

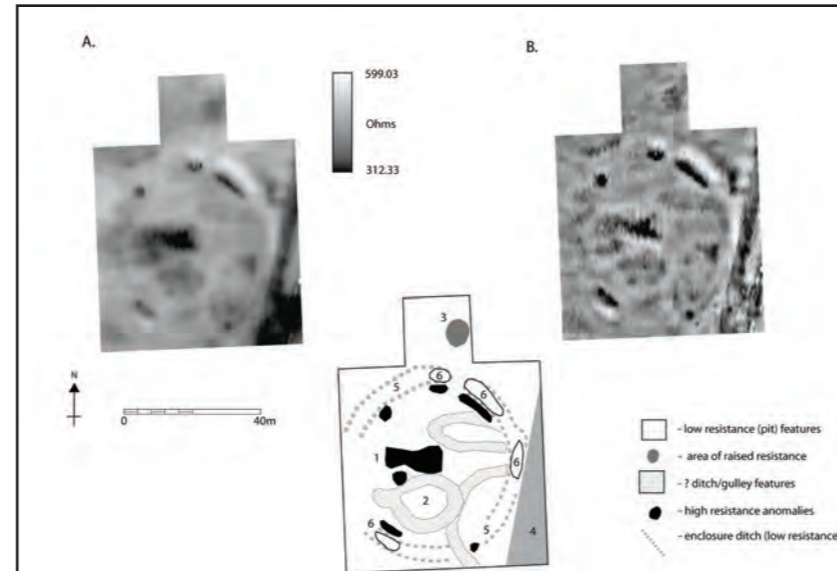
ENP HER Number: MSO 7904

An oval enclosure about 100 metres west of the Lucott Cross cattle grid. It comprises an earthen bank with external ditch. Inside the enclosure are two platforms which appear to be the bases for roundhouses. Sites like this are thought to date from the Middle Bronze Age and are best described as a small farmstead. The enclosure has been clipped by the course of the incomplete Porlock to Simonsbath railway which was built in the 1850s.

Questions posed by DIG Porlock 2013:

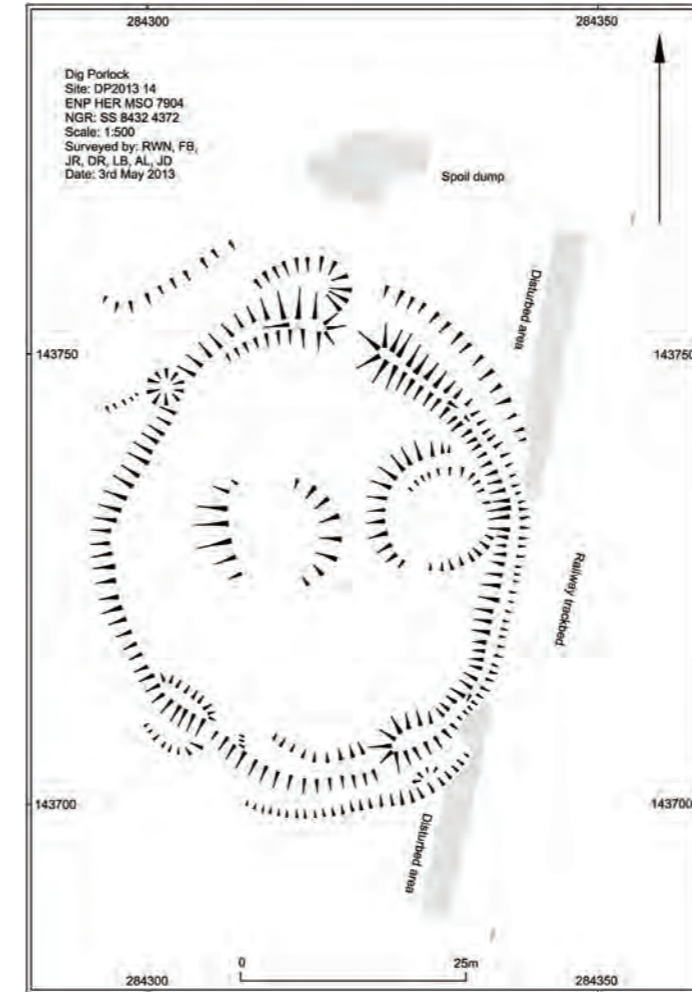
- Was this enclosure completed?
- How many buildings stood within it?
- How much has it been damaged by the building of the railway and by military training during World War Two?

Geophysical survey was completed by Mark Gillings and Jeremy Taylor with students from the University of Leicester aided by DIG Porlock volunteers. A detailed survey of the earthworks was also carried out at this time by Rob Wilson-North, Faye Balmont and volunteers.



The geophysical survey shows the enclosure clearly but appears to show features within that are not visible on the ground surface

© University of Leicester



The survey confirms there are two building platforms within the enclosure

© Hazel Riley



Volunteers assisted in carrying out a detailed survey of this site

9. 'V' shaped feature

Type of site: World War Two training feature

Date: World War Two period

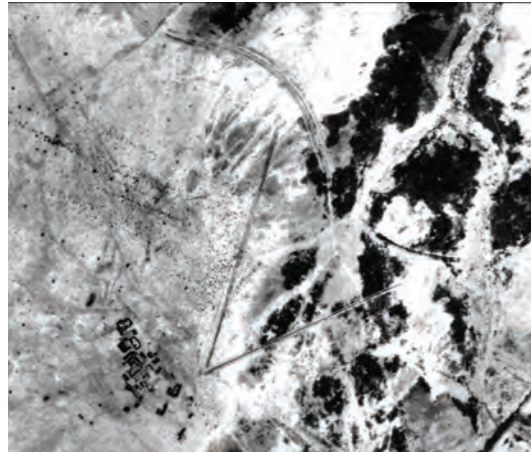
Work carried out: large scale survey and recording of profiles across the earthwork

ENP HER Number: MMO 2526

Questions posed by DIG Porlock 2013:

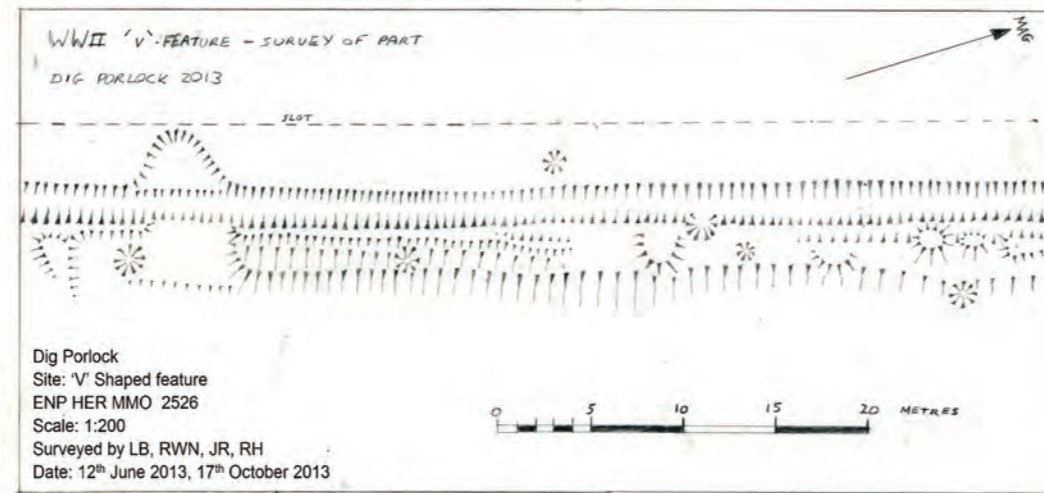
- What was this feature actually for?
- What is it made from?

A detailed survey of part of this feature was carried out by Lee Bray assisted by local volunteers.



© RAF Photography

This 1946 air photograph of the 'V' shows shell holes in straight lines from one side of the feature, giving some suggestions as to its function. An area of earlier peat cutting is also visible as dark shapes near to the point of the 'V'



Pencil field drawing surveyed at 1:200 scale of part of the 'V' shaped feature

The 'V' shaped feature was surveyed with the assistance of volunteers



10. Cairn - west of Porlock Stone Circle

Type of site: Cairn

Date: Thought to be Bronze Age period (2,000-700BC)

Work carried out: large scale survey

ENP HER Number: MSO 7902

A small circular mound on the end of a spur above a tributary of Weir Water. The mound is interpreted as a Bronze Age burial cairn due to its location, high stone content and its shape.

Questions posed by DIG Porlock 2013:

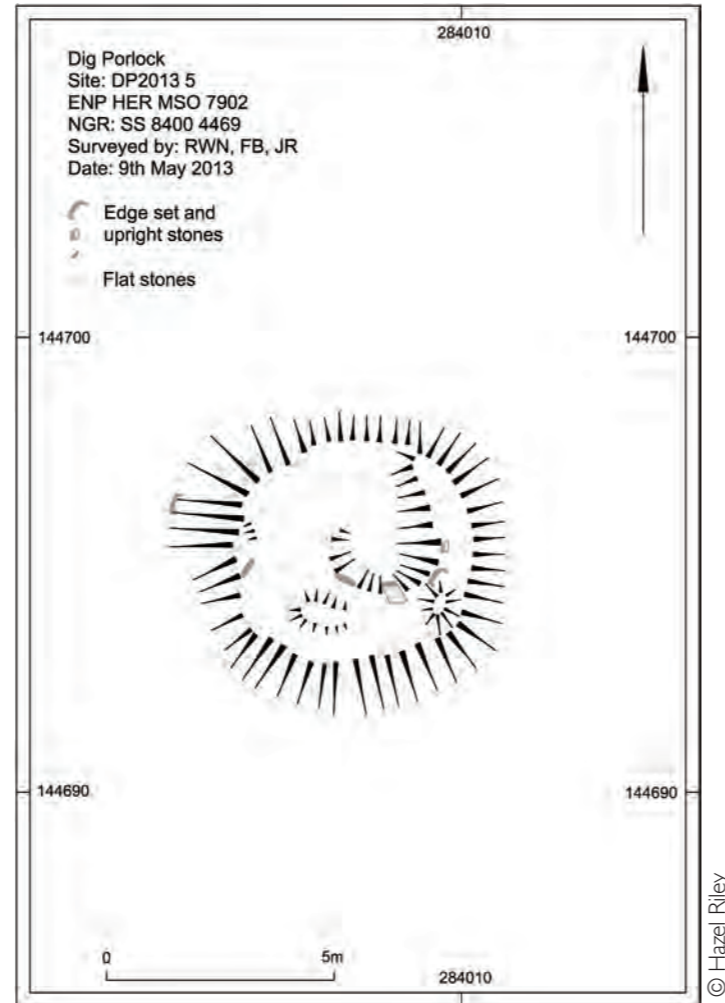
- Is there any structure to the stonework of the cairn?
- How much has it been disturbed by stone robbing?

A large scale survey was carried out by Rob Wilson-North and Faye Balmond, assisted by volunteers.



© English Heritage 26880-003

Oblique air photograph of cairn. Near the cairn is a rock outcrop



The cairn, surveyed with assistance from volunteers is situated at the head of a combe with a view down Weir Water

11. Peat cutting

Type of site: Peat cutting

Date: Likely to date to 19th/20th Centuries

Work carried out: GPS survey

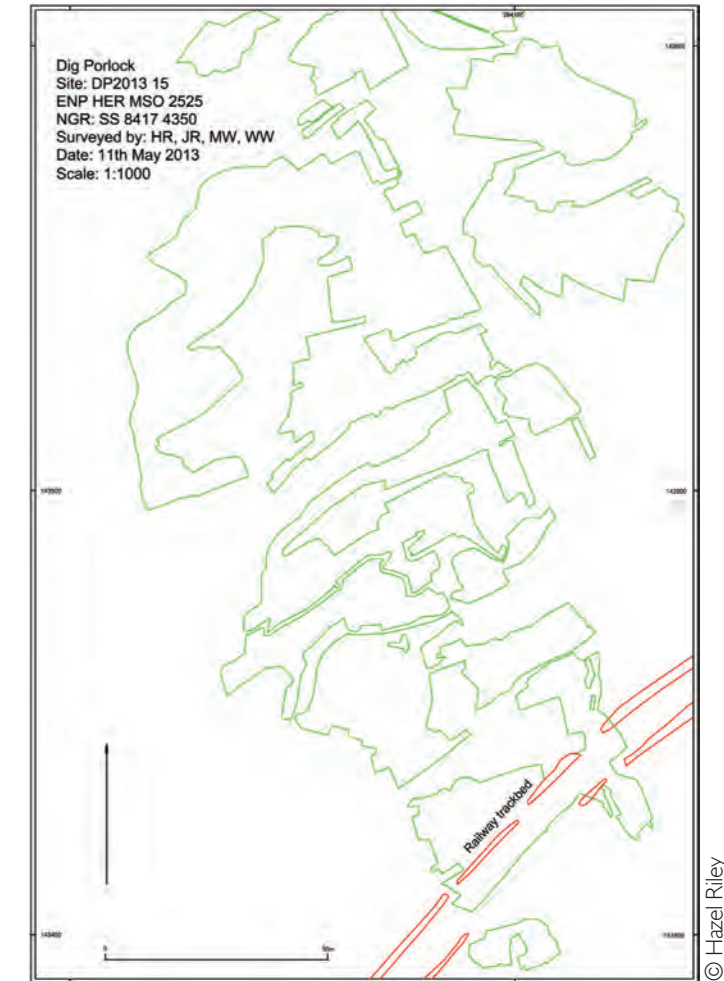
ENP HER Number: MMO 2525

An area of peat cutting on a spur south-west of the Lucott Cross cattle grid. The site comprises a network of shallow pits where peat has been dug away in the past to provide domestic fuel. The area of peat cuttings is crossed by the trackbed of the Porlock to Simonsbath railway, which was built in the 1850s but never completed.

Questions posed by DIG Porlock 2013:

- How old are these peat cuttings?
- Are they earlier or later than the Porlock to Simonsbath railway trackbed?

A GPS survey of this area was carried out by Hazel Riley and volunteers.



Although peat cutting was not a large scale industry on Exmoor, it leaves visible traces on the ground. The green outlines individual areas of peat cutting.

The extensive peat cuttings on Porlock Allotment were surveyed with GPS equipment



© Hazel Riley

Answering the questions posed by DIG Porlock

1. Hawkcombe Head

Q: How far does the hunter gatherer site extend around Hawkcombe Head?

A: As a result of DIG Porlock, we now have a better idea of the extent of the flint knapping site, which areas hunter gatherers used, and which they didn't. As a result of fieldwalking in Ven Combe, we also have a much better idea of the scale of flint knapping activity in this area.

2. Porlock Stone Circle

Q: How was Porlock Stone Circle constructed?

A: Work at Porlock Stone Circle has shown us the continued importance of these monuments in the landscape, proving that stones have been moved and even added by people in more recent history. It has given insights into the addition of these recent stones, but doesn't tell us how the prehistoric stone circle may have been constructed.

Q: How much of Porlock Stone Circle was disturbed by St George Gray's excavations in the 1920s?

A: Interestingly it seems that St George Gray didn't disturb as much of the monument as was previously thought. In fact the team were able to determine that the cairn next to the stone circle is in fact much larger than it appears on the surface, adding further questions about this complex monument.

3. Porlock Stone Row

Q: Does Porlock Stone Row connect with the stone circle?

A: The current work has not confirmed whether the stone circle and row are physically connected.

Q: Why is Porlock Stone Row located where it is?

A: The geophysical survey showed that Porlock Stone Row was located on a low resistance band, along its entire length. By excavating an area of the stone row, the team were hoping to find out what this could be. The excavation was inconclusive and a much larger area would need to be excavated to resolve this question. At this stage it seems likely that either the geophysical anomaly is geomorphological or represents an earlier feature than the stone row.

4. House Platforms - North

Q: Are the 'house platforms - North' really house platforms?

A: The geophysical survey showed these features to appear differently to the earthwork survey, without carrying out an excavation it is difficult to say whether these were platforms for buildings.

Q: Is there any evidence for the buildings themselves?

A: The absence of stone on these platforms shows that if there were buildings here they were not stone built. This suggests that any buildings may have been made of wattle and daub.

5. House Platforms - South

Q: Are the 'house platforms - south' really house platforms?

A: The geophysical survey suggests that the large platform was a stance for a house, and a possible hearth (or fireplace) has been identified within it. Without carrying out an excavation it is difficult to say whether these were platforms for buildings.

Q: Is there any evidence for the buildings themselves?

A: The absence of stone on these platforms shows that if there were buildings here they were not stone built. This suggests that any buildings may have been made of wattle and daub.

Q: Why is one platform so much bigger than the other?

A: The geophysical survey was not able to suggest why one is bigger than the other; it may be related to the status, function or chronology of the platforms.

6. House platforms - Weir Water

Q: How many platforms are there?

A: Three platforms have been identified and two were surveyed as part of DIG Porlock.

Q: Is there any evidence for the buildings themselves?

A: The absence of stone on these platforms shows that if there were buildings here they were not stone built. However some

large stone blocks were used in the construction of the platforms themselves and these are still visible on the ground today.

Q: Is there any evidence for why/how this settlement was abandoned?

A: It was noted that stone had been dumped in the centre of the hut circles. It may be that this is evidence for the destruction and 'closing' of the houses when they were abandoned.

7. The Doughnut

Q: What is this site?

A: DIG Porlock 2013 has been unable to answer this question, in part because of the difficulty in accessing the site in order to carry out survey work, as a result of the dense vegetation.

Q: What was it used for?

A: It was hoped that the geophysical survey might be able to tell us whether activities involving heating or burning had been carried out on this site. Unfortunately due to the use of this area of moorland for military training in World War Two, the geophysical survey showed a patchwork of shell craters and fragments littering this site, masking any signs of heating or burning in prehistory.

Q: How old is it?

A: To answer this question would require a greater amount of survey and excavation work to be carried out at this site than was possible as part of DIG Porlock 2013.

8. Enclosure - west of Lucott Cross cattle grid

Q: Was this enclosure completed?

A: The geophysical survey carried out by University of Leicester suggests that this enclosure may not have been completed as the banks on one side appear to have been much larger than those on the opposite side.

Q: How many buildings stood within it?

A: The large scale earthwork survey of this site suggested two building platforms inside the enclosure. The geophysical survey suggests that a third platform, not visible on the surface is also present.

Q: How much has it been damaged by the building of the railway and by military training during World War Two?

A: The earthwork survey shows that the line of the railway just clips the side of the enclosure bank, and that it was subjected to some shelling during World War Two military training by the presence of shell holes near the banks. The geophysical survey is able to detect the presence of metal and also shows that the enclosure was subject to shelling, yet the damage caused to the structure is minimal.

9. 'V' shaped feature

Q: What was this feature actually for?

A: It is likely to have been a target railway of sorts, but further documentary research may be able to shed greater light on this in the future.

Q: What is it made from?

A: The survey of this structure shows a bank with ditches on either side. It is presumed that the material from the ditches was heaped up to make the bank.

10. Cairn - west of Porlock Stone Circle

Q: Is there any structure to the stonework of the cairn?

A: Yes, a number of stones within the cairn have been deliberately set on edge. This may indicate the presence of a grave or cist or even kerbing, which has been observed at other cairns on Exmoor.

Q: How much has it been disturbed by stone robbing?

A: A small pit has been dug into the top of the cairn but this hasn't caused much disturbance.

11. Peat cutting

Q: How old are these peat cuttings?

A: The peat cutting is at least as early as the 18th century and may date back as far as the medieval period.

Q: Are they earlier or later than the Porlock to Simonsbath railway track bed?

A: The track bed of the Porlock to Simonsbath railway has been built over some of the peat cuttings, showing that they must be earlier than around 1850.

Porlock Allotment: The last 10,000 years

'Archaeology can be dry dust'. Television archaeology glamorises how archaeology is done and perhaps doesn't worry enough about the fact that archaeology is about people like us...who lived in the past. Finding out about the past can be fun in itself, but the story it tells is often a very human one full of hardships, successes and disappointment: a matter of life and death.

Porlock Allotment in spring 2013 was cold, wet, horrible, windy and, later on in the year, far too hot! Whilst working on the moor, it was difficult to think about anything except 'lunch' and 'when can we go home?' Yet we have a fascination with the past and an incessant curiosity about these strange neighbours of ours, separated from us only by time. If we could allow ourselves to think for a moment about what this landscape has seen - which archaeology gives us the clues to - we could envisage a remarkable story:

10,000 years ago

Around 10,000 years ago hunter gatherers returned to Exmoor coming north through Europe as the last vestiges of the Ice Age gave way to a warmer period. They crossed the low lying area which was to become the English Channel, but which then was still dry land, and moved into southern England.

They were small groups, staying close to the coastline and exploiting its natural resources. Occasionally they would venture into the uplands in search of wild animals to hunt: red deer and wild pig especially. One of these remote ancestors discarded or

dropped a meche de foret - a flint 'drill bit' - used for boring holes in animal skin (to allow them to be sewn into clothing).

We can imagine these hunter gatherers wearing clothes of red deer skin as they squatted around hearths in the woodlands that then covered Exmoor's hilltops. No moorland existed then, and the Bristol Channel was dry land. Instead, the Atlantic broke on long sandy beaches away westwards towards a high hill which was later to become an island called Lundy. It was still possible to walk from Porlock to Lundy without getting wet.

In July 2013 a DIG Porlock volunteer picked up that meche de foret whilst fieldwalking near Ven Combe, the first person to touch it in 10,000 years.



A Mesolithic drill, found during fieldwalking in summer 2013



It is thought that when Mesolithic hunter gatherers visited Hawkcombe Head that it may have been much more densely wooded. This image gives an idea of how it may have looked.



© Peter Lorimer

A stone setting on Lanacombe, envisaged as it may have been shortly after its construction. It is possible that the Porlock settings had similar surroundings at this time

8,000 years ago

Around 8,000 years ago hunter gatherers still hunted on Exmoor, but now they were here more frequently, a change driven by the submergence of the land north of Exmoor as the Severn Estuary formed. Sea levels rose by 40 metres and the lands of the ancestors were lost forever. Imagine the stories and fables which were recounted around those hearths on cold, starry, Exmoor nights, embellished over decades, centuries and long millenia. Stories of hunting successes and hunting grounds lost to the sea. How did these people explain such dramatic changes in their lives? What traditions and legends arose to explain all of this?

At Hawkcombe Head we have found the traces of their hearths lying close beneath the moorland vegetation and in Ven Combe nearly 700 pieces of flint were found during 2013 on the surface of the field showing how hunter gatherers returned year after year to this place and made little camps in the woods, knapped flint, ate deer meat and told stories.

This wealth of evidence from such a long time ago suddenly comes to an end and, for nearly 3000 years, archaeology tells us nearly nothing about Porlock Allotment.

4,000 years ago

We move eventually to a time around 4,000 years ago when the landscape had changed beyond recognition from its ice age origins. The

woodlands had retreated and were now sporadic on the high ground interspersed with open heath and scrub. On the very tops of Exmoor, peat had already formed. In this more open landscape, people had settled, though hunting and gathering still formed a key part of their subsistence. They put up small groups of standing stones and they lived in little communities of around 20 people; perhaps an extended family group.

Hamlets were formed, perhaps, by two or three round houses built of wattle and daub with conical thatched roofs. They looked out on a settled and farmed landscape of small clearings and little fields surrounded with hedges of dead branches and other gathered material. In these areas they grew their crops of primitive corn and kept some livestock, such as goats. During the day, their flocks ranged over the uncultivated hills, tended by a member of the family. Plans were made to extend these fields and to farm larger areas, and long field boundaries began to be laid out, but they were destined never to be finished.

On the hilltops round mounds contained the remains of their ancestors, buried or cremated, and these places took on a significance which meant that they were used over and over again and were places of ritual and markers of time and space. Yet on Porlock Allotment, very few burial mounds have been found. These people were farmers, but still hunted and gathered as their ancestors had done. A broken arrowhead, diagnostically Bronze Age (a barbed and tanged arrowhead) picked up in Ven Combe by a volunteer helping with the fieldwalking, may well have been lost on one of these hunting forays.



© Barry Hitchcox

A Bronze Age arrowhead found at Hawkcombe Head during fieldwalking in summer 2013

This peaceful and settled way of life came to a gradual end as the vagaries of the climate combined with the over-cultivation of the thin high soils: crops failed, and winters became colder and the weather wetter. The planned expansion of the fields was a painful irony, for the over farming of this high land had speeded its decline. People abandoned the higher moors, never to return.

On Porlock Allotment these Bronze Age hamlets can still be found amongst the heather. Groups of two or three round houses: little rings of earth and stone. Some have had heaps of stones thrown into them, perhaps the final deliberate abandonment of homes that could no longer support their inhabitants. The last

goodbye before these Exmoor people turned away to find new lives off the moor which itself was gradually claiming their homes and fields.

2,000 years ago

Another long period of silence falls on Porlock Allotment. Archaeology is utterly silent, but in 2013 a small lead ring was found within Porlock Stone Circle. It is yet to be properly identified, and so far all the archaeologists' suggestions are just surmise, but it just could be a votive offering, left by people passing nearly 1,000 years after the end of the Bronze Age, in the Roman period. Again archaeology leaves us with the most human of questions which it can never answer, but which we love it to have posed: Is this really a Roman votive offering? And if so who were these people? Where were they going? Why did they leave this offering at the circle? What did the stone circle mean to them as it was already over 1,500 years old when they were there?

700 years ago

The archaeological record is absent for another long period, and history provides us with the background and historical context, but nothing from this time can be identified with confidence on Porlock Allotment. Traces of peat cuttings have been found and some of these may date back to the medieval period. Turves gathered by commoners to burn on the hearths in their scattered longhouses around the moor.

160 years ago

It is not until the Victorian period that Porlock Allotment again springs to life with the building of a railway across its slopes. This failed enterprise, which was to link Porlock Weir with Simonsbath, was never completed, but the trackbed can be followed amongst the heather and beside the traces of the Bronze Age settlements. Iron was sought in the deep combs and the hollows of these old mine workings can still be traced.

75 years ago

During World War Two much of Exmoor's central moorland was taken over by the army for training. Porlock Allotment lay at the extreme eastern end of the area, but numbers of chemical weapons projectiles have been found along with 5" rockets. It is now difficult to imagine the peaceful moorland shattered by the explosion of shells, the roar of military vehicles and aircraft as well as the shouts of soldiers. In the long nights the valley of Weir Water would have echoed to the sudden detonation of mortars and been lit up by the bright flashes of exploding ordnance. And at the end, peace returned to the moorlands as the soldiers who had trained here crossed the English Channel, to face the horror of the Normandy landings and the long fight to Berlin which eventually ended World War Two.



The trackbed of the Porlock to Simonsbath railway can be seen winding its way into the distance in the centre of this air photograph

© English Heritage 15608_16



© Peter Lorimer

World War Two military training took place on much of Exmoor's moorlands. This image imagines what target practice at Larkbarrow was like and it is likely that similar training was taking place on Porlock Allotment

Postscript

Porlock Allotment is remarkable for the time depth it represents and for the excellent preservation of its archaeological sites. The story that this archaeology tells is a series of pictures - like a photograph album - of the last 10,000 years. It gives us detailed insights into episodes that have taken place in the past, but does not provide a continuous narrative.

DIG Porlock is the most detailed archaeological study of a moorland landscape within Exmoor National Park. It has demonstrated the potential of the archaeology and has provided high quality records of individual sites that will be used for years to come, informing how the historic landscape is managed into the future. Examples are the excavations on Porlock Stone Circle, which have shown that the buried prehistoric archaeology survives far better than expected;

whereas on some prehistoric sites, the effects of military activity during World War Two have been much more dramatic than was imagined. DIG Porlock will guide future archaeological research work on Exmoor. For example, it has raised a series of interesting questions about the nature and chronology of prehistoric settlement, as well as the circumstances and attitudes that prehistoric communities had to settlement abandonment, burial and commemoration practices.

Archaeology rarely provides more answers than questions, and despite the skills learned by volunteers and the knowledge of specialists, this is certainly true of DIG Porlock. The achievements of this project are entirely thanks to the combined efforts of those specialists and the local community, who have shared their fascination and enthusiasm for Exmoor's moorland past.

Finds Days

Finds days, examining pottery, metals and flint were held at Dover Manor Museum.



A Bronze Age day

A 'Bronze Age' day was held for children of St Dubricius, Exford, Timberscombe and Cutcombe schools as part of DIG Porlock, giving them a taste of daily life in the Bronze Age



Carding and Spinning

Processing sheep's wool - the first stage in making clothes



Flint Knapping

Learning about the skilled techniques of a flintknapper





Grinding Corn

Grinding corn into flour on a quern stone



Making Coil Pots

Pottery before the potter's wheel

Fieldwalking Day

Children from St Dubricius School took part in fieldwalking at Ven Combe with DIG Porlock volunteers, students and National Park archaeologists.



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Further Reading

The following reports have been produced through DIG Porlock 2013

Hawkcombe combined geoprospection survey

Lucott Gate combined geoprospection survey

DIG Porlock: Earthwork surveys on Porlock Allotment

Excavation and Survey at Porlock Circle and Stone Row, Exmoor

Geophysical Survey at Porlock Allotment

Vencombe field walking 2013 flint report

Airborne laser scanning analysis and field observations,

Exmoor National Park

Dr Chris Carey

Dr Chris Carey

Hazel Riley

Dr Mark Gillings

Dr Mark Gillings & Dr Jeremy Taylor

Dr Paula Gardiner

Rebecca Bennett

Detailed information on all the sites investigated as part of DIG Porlock as well as information on other archaeological features in the area can be found by visiting the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record online at

www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/history

Or you can email HER@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk or telephone 01398 322273 to make an appointment to visit.



DIG Porlock was an archaeology project carried out by local volunteers and archaeologists in 2013 on Porlock Allotment, an area of remote moorland at the southern end of Porlock parish in West Somerset. It has played a major part in making an exemplary archaeological record of this landscape. This booklet brings together the results of the project and tells the story of people in this place over the last 10,000 years.



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