

**A Condition Survey of the Archaeological Sites of the Ringmoor Training  
Area, Dartmoor**

County:	Devon
District:	West Devon
Parish:	Sheepstor
NGR (Centre):	SX 571663
Surveyed:	Nov-Dec 2010
Contractor:	S Probert
Client:	Landmarc/Defence Estates

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## **A CONDITION SURVEY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF THE RINGMOOR TRAINING AREA, DARTMOOR, DEVON**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The MoD lease at Ringmoor covers approximately 610ha of which the vast majority is moorland, both unenclosed and enclosed with a small area of enclosed pasture adjacent to Dittsworthy Warren House. Previous surveys of this area have recorded 95 sites of which 89 were visited during this assessment, the remainder being findspots and duplicate or destroyed sites. One new site, a possible cross (1528877), was added to the database during the course of this investigation.

Thirty nine sites, mostly attributable to the Bronze Age though some dating to the medieval period, are Scheduled as Ancient Monuments and protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979.

#### **1.1 Previous Work**

Earlier archaeological work in this area consists of the systematic, though somewhat limited in scope, survey by the Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division between the 1950's and late 1970's and a partial area investigation by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England in 1999 (RCHME 1999). All the prehistoric sepulchral monuments display evidence of both recorded and unrecorded excavations, as do most of the hut circles in the Legis Tor area. Brisworthy Stone Circle and the stone row to the north were partially restored in 1909 (Worth 1941).

The area has also been transcribed from aerial photographs (Butler 1993) and several monument classes were visited by the English Heritage Monument Protection Programme.

An Archaeological Baseline Condition Survey was commissioned from English Heritage in 2004, reporting in 2005 (English Heritage 2005). This was undertaken in adherence to work already completed under the aegis of the **Revised Action Plan** (RAP) (2001) that resulted from the **Willsworthy Integrated Land Management Plan** of 1998. The RAP has articulated a number of actions aimed at defining the nature of the archaeological resource and promoting its conservation. Namely to:

- 51     Review the current maintenance condition survey programme for scheduled sites and revise if desirable.
- 52     Produce and revise a threat assessment for all Scheduled Ancient Monuments and ensure that measures are in place to prevent damage.
- 56     Extend threat assessment to cover non-scheduled sites.
- 57     Develop a system for regular condition surveys of non scheduled sites.
- 60     Gather detailed information on potential vehicle damage to archaeological sites.

## **1.2 Archaeological Summary**

Ringmoor's archaeological resource is an exemplar of the Dartmoor landscape. It contains the highest density of monuments of any of the training areas leased or owned by the MoD on Dartmoor.

The prehistoric period is represented by a number of small settlements consisting of small, irregular, enclosures and hut circles with a somewhat unusual example at Whittenknowles Rocks containing the remains of 36 huts. The Eylesbarrow Reave, a prehistoric boundarywork bisects the area. To the southeast of this reave and north of Brisworthy are the partially restored remains of a stone circle and stone row. A wide variety of sepulchral monuments occupy positions mostly along the ridge crests and higher slopes.

There are abundant remains of medieval settlement and field systems across the training area. The sites of five farmsteads are visible, as are a complex layout of fields covering some 400ha. Tin streamworking remains, dating broadly from the same period, are extensive and form broad bands along the water courses.

Later tinworking is marked by shallow shafts and trenches mostly situated on Lynch Common. A small, probably 19<sup>th</sup> century, mine formerly lay at the junction of the Sheepstor and Eylesbarrow roads. The extreme northeastern corner of the area contains two tin processing sites formerly part of Eylesbarrow Mine.

During the post-medieval period much of the then enclosed land flanking the Plym was converted to rabbit warrens, and witnessed the construction of a large concentration of pillow mounds and vermin traps.

Two bomb craters lie in the saddle between Gutter Tor and Legis Tor.

## **2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONDITION SURVEY AUGUST-OCTOBER 2010**

### **2.1 Background and Methodology**

Baseline Condition Surveys have been completed for each of the five Dartmoor Training Areas. This report fulfils action 57 of the RAP and constitutes the second stage in the process of monitoring and threat mitigation at Ringmoor by providing updated condition assessments and, therefore, depth to the baseline survey. As with the other training areas it is intended to be repeated at five-yearly intervals.

During the course of the 2010 survey, conducted between November and December each site was visited and photographed. The location and direction of each photograph was recorded and is available in a GIS format on the accompanying CD. The site and its immediate surroundings were assessed for damage, military use and potential threats. Details were recorded on a standard DE condition form. These forms are synthesised in the appendix to this report and are also available as .doc and .pdf files on the accompanying CD.

As the 2007 EH survey was conducted to OSTN02 using Trimble GPS recording to an accuracy of 0.01m a resurvey of the archaeological landscape was deemed unnecessary.

All monument reference numbers referred to in this report are those assigned by the National Monuments Record.

## 2.2 Land Use Change at Ringmoor 2005-2010

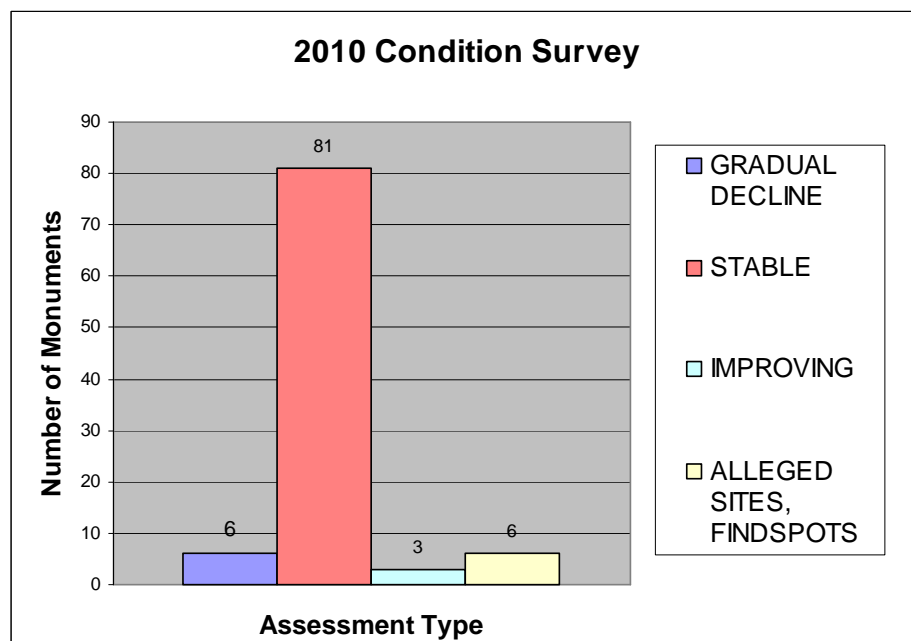
The area is not used exclusively for military training; it is primarily a pastoral area. As such it, in common with most of Dartmoor, has witnessed dramatic reduction in livestock levels in recent years. This has led to a regeneration of vegetation and a diminution in the number worn tracks across the area. Poaching scars are absent from all monuments with the exception of erosion hollows around some of the upright stones used as rubbing posts. In most cases the vegetation in these has either regrown or is in the process of regeneration.

Ringmoor is well-served with both public and restricted access thoroughfares; as such the need for off-road vehicular traffic is very limited.

## 3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

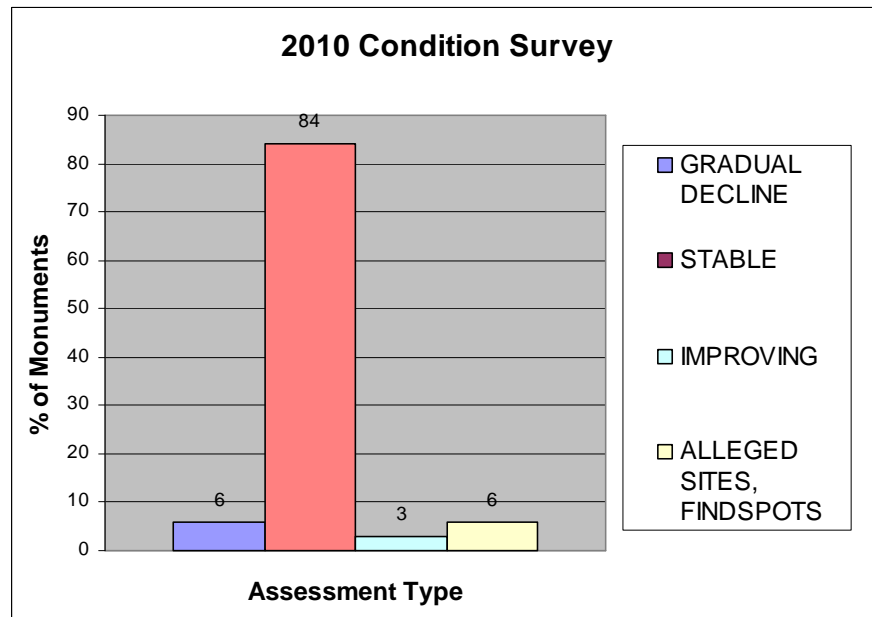
### 3.1 Introduction

The findings of the 2010 survey are summarised in Fig. 1 (actual numbers of monuments) and Fig. 2 (percentages). The number of stable monuments forms



**Fig. 1** Actual findings of the 2010 condition survey

the bulk (81 monuments 84%) of the sample while those in gradual decline constitute only 6 or 6%. Monuments whose condition is considered to be improving form 3% of the dataset.



**Fig. 2** Percentage findings of the 2010 condition survey

### 3.2 Gradual Decline

This classification is populated by six monuments. The majority, four, are subject to footpath erosion, one has been put under threat by livestock whilst the last is overlain by a car park.

#### 3.2.1 Footpath erosion

A vermin trap, 1409610, (Fig. 3), lies on a small ledge above the right bank of the River Plym that is also occupied by a relatively well-used footpath. The continued use of this path, which has already scarred the site of the former trap and its approaches, may lead, in the medium or longer term, to further disruption to this feature.



**Fig. 3**  
Vermin trap 1409610. Footpath erosion. The path runs through the former trap, the funnel walls are visible either side of the scale bar.



During the course of this assessment and the baseline survey in 2005 it was noticed that the track was used almost exclusively by the military as a route between Legis Tor and a crossing point on the river. Were the descent to the river to be made downstream, west, of this feature the erosion would be considerably lessened if not terminated.



**Fig. 4**  
Medieval enclosure 1313030. Footpath erosion through outer bank.

The other three instances of footpath disruption affect medieval field boundaries. The small sub-circular enclosure 1313030 adjacent to the car park at the end of the public road to the Scout Hut is traversed by a number of footpaths. Several erosion scars have been created on this feature by foot traffic from the car park to the open moor (Fig. 4). Other than the closure of the car park, which is both useful to the military and popular with the public, there is no viable remedy to this erosion. Consequently, as long as the footpaths retain their current routes the relatively mild and slow deterioration of this monument should be tolerated.



**Fig. 5**  
Field system 1409366. The medieval enclosure bank running left to right in the foreground is pierced by a footpath following the stone row.



In the same vein the now redundant boundaries of the extensive medieval field systems 438858 and 1409366 covering the Ringmoor plateau and Lynch Common are pierced by a number of footpaths (Fig. 5). While the diversion of the paths is a possible action, their courses are relatively fixed and restricting the damage to the present alignments would be the preferred option.

### *3.2.2. Livestock damage*

The reduction in stock numbers has reversed much of the damage noticed in the 2005 survey. However, a collection of upright stones, 1260494, on the open moor north of Dittsworthy House continue to serve as rubbing posts for ponies and cattle in particular. This activity has created bare erosion hollows around the bases of these stones (Fig. 6). All stones remain stable in their sockets but comparison with the 2005 survey shows a slight deterioration in the surrounding hollows. Given that these features are relatively recent erections monitoring at the next condition assessment in five years should suffice and remedial action can be taken then, if necessary.



**Fig. 6** One of the stones of monument 1260494. Despite the erosion hollow the stone remains stable in its socket.

### *3.2.3. Vehicular Damage*

The small car park at the junction of the Sheepstor and Eylesbarrow roads occupies the site of the former processing area of a small tin mine, 1408397. The approach to the car park is already heavily rutted (Fig. 7) which may be affecting any sub-surface remains. Its continued use threatens the medium to long-term integrity of this site.



**Fig. 7** Entrance to car park containing mine 1408397. Vehicle damage spreading to avoid deep rut in approach track.

#### *3.2.4 Summary*

The element of gradual decline in the Ringmoor archaeological landscape is small with the problems at two of the six sites relatively easily remedied. The remaining four sites possess no practical solutions in terms of arresting further damage.

### **3.3 Stable**

The majority of the archaeological resource, 82 sites, 85% of the total, consists of monuments in a stable condition. These sites are generally in a good or fair state of preservation. The southern half of the training area benefits from the fact that there are no easy crossing points on the River Plym, forcing most foot traffic to use the Eylesbarrow road or the Ringmoor Cottage to Gutter Tor footpath in order to access the high moor. The courses of these routes are well-established and tend to avoid most of the more vulnerable features.

The stable category contains several monuments that were classified as in gradual decline in the 2005 Baseline Survey. The erosion scars and vegetation on the possible cairn at Legis Tor, 1408396, previously at risk from military activity, have regenerated while the erosion hollows around the boundary stones in the enclosed land on the Ringmoor plateau have stabilised due to the reduction in the amount of livestock, Fig. 8.





**Fig. 8** Boundary stone 1409370. The vegetation in the erosion hollow at the base of this stone has regenerated sufficiently for this monument to be considered stable. Active footpath erosion is visible in the background.

Several other sites previously thought to be in gradual decline show no discernible change from the 2005 survey and so have been reassessed as stable. The only potential threats to the sites in this area are the extensive swathes of bracken which can be highly disruptive to sub-surface remains.

### 3.4 Improving

As detailed above since the 2005 Baseline Survey several sites have passed through the improving category and are now classified as stable. Three sites, previously in gradual decline, are visibly improving.



**Fig. 9** Ringmoor Down Stone Row, 438671. Regeneration of erosion hollow.

The erosion hollows and vegetation around the stone row and cairn circle, 438671, are regenerating as is the footpath running up the row. The former, once bare hollows, are largely grassed over, only those around the larger stones exhibiting exposed peat (Fig. 9). This improvement is probably due to the livestock reduction as these stones formerly served as rubbing posts. The footpath remains as a slight hollow though now it is also largely grassed over suggesting a diminution in the number of visitors.



**Fig. 10** Vermin trap 1311114.

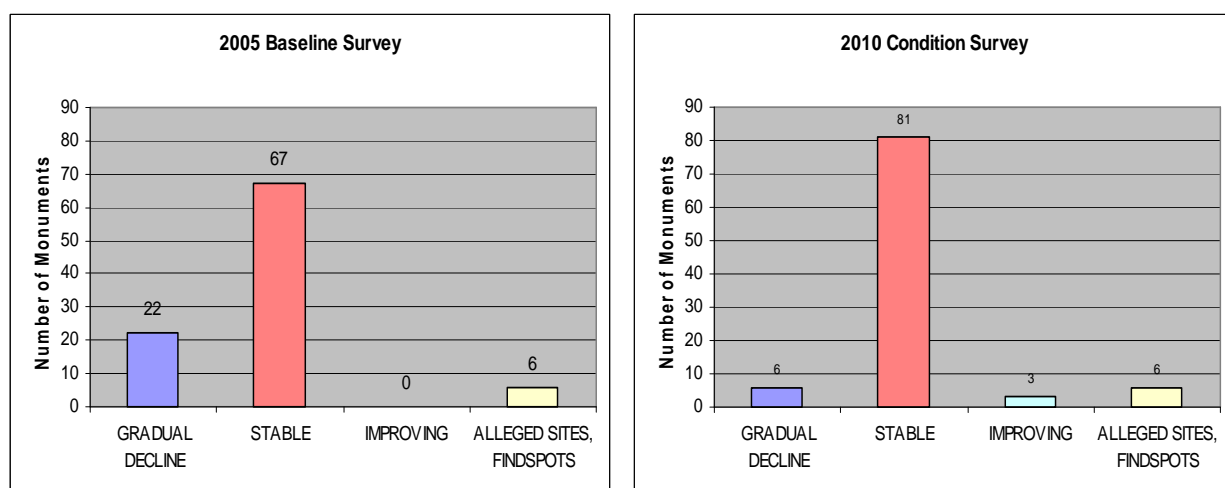
A footpath runs left to right across the monument above the scale bar. In 2005 the path was marked by a band of bare ground.

The footpath between Gutter Tor and Dittsworth House continues to bisect the vermin trap 1311114, though the condition of the monument has improved since the 2005 survey. The paths that approach the site remain deeply eroded but the monument itself is now largely vegetation covered with little bare ground visible, Fig. 10, in contrast with 2005. It remains desirable that the footpath be diverted to maintain this improvement.

Site 1409367, perhaps the most disturbed of the boundary stones on Ringmoor Down, still possesses a deep, water-filled erosion hollow though the surrounding vegetation is regenerating.

#### **4 COMPARISON OF FINDINGS 2005 AND 2010 SURVEYS**

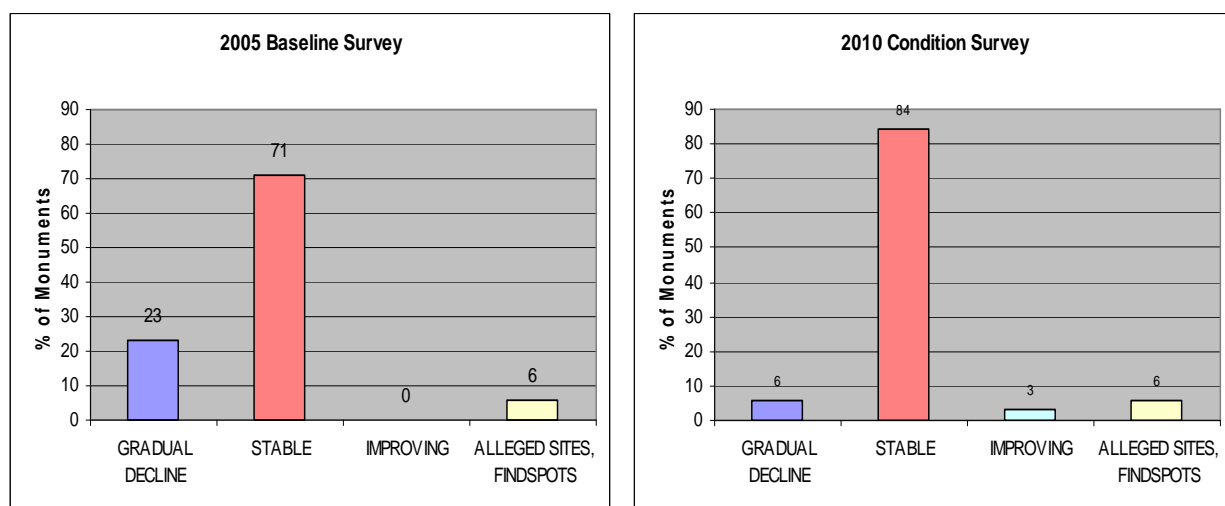
The numbers and relative quantities of each condition type in the 2005 and 2010 surveys can be seen in Figs. 11 and 12 respectively.



**Fig. 11** Actual results of the 2005 Baseline survey and 2010 resurvey.

The monuments represent a relatively fluid dataset with a number of condition assessments changing between the 2005 and 2010 surveys.

There is a degree of what is best described as ‘bedding in’ of the data, the 2010 survey confirming or negating assessments that could only be speculation in the 2005 reference set. The 2010 assessment suggests that the number of sites suspected of being in Gradual Decline in 2005 was overstated, the size of this category being reduced from 23 to 6. Most of these reclassifications have occurred because there has been no discernible change in the appearance of these monuments. Other sites, as described above, have benefitted from changes in livestock levels and visitor numbers and progressed through Improving to become Stable. Of particular note, an apparent change in military activity has reversed the decline of the possible cairn at Legis Tor, 1408396, which now presents as a stable feature.



**Fig. 12** Relative results of the 2005 Baseline survey and 2010 resurvey.

The ability to compare the site photography has facilitated the creation of a more objective dataset which itself has enabled the population of the Improving category containing three monuments previously deemed in gradual decline.

In broad terms both surveys present a solid core of Stable sites. The major difference being a movement of monuments across the x-axis from Gradual Decline in 2005 to Stable and Improving in 2010.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

The extensive archaeological landscape at Ringmoor is remarkably well-preserved with relatively few instances of active damage. The observed problems are incidental rather than intentional and mostly related to erosion caused by footpaths running through monuments.

The condition of two of the smaller monuments, the vermin traps 1311114 and 1409610, would be enhanced if the paths that bisect them were to be diverted.

On a much larger scale, the remains of the medieval field systems, 438858 and 1409366, which occupy 230ha of Lynch Common and the Ringmoor plateau are traversed by a number of footpaths. Erosion of these remains is an issue at several of the bottlenecks where paths cross banks. This damage is best tolerated providing that future monitoring does not show the problem to be escalating or the paths wandering to create further breaches.

Poaching by livestock has reduced markedly with the decrease in stocking levels. The vegetation on most previously affected sites has either regenerated or is in the process of regeneration. An exception lies on the unenclosed part of the training area around Eastern Tor where the relatively good grazing is supplemented by a supply of rubbing posts, site 1260494.

Vehicular damage is limited to the car park on the site of the former mine, 1408397, at the junction of the Sheepstor and Eylesbarrow roads. The approach track is already severely rutted and the erosion of any sub surface remains is likely. It is recommended that this car park is closed.

Bracken, which has the potential to disturb any sub-surface remains, is found extensively over the training area though its eradication is not a practical option.

There is no evidence of intentional damage to any of the monuments at Ringmoor.

While there is an element of decline in some of the archaeological features of the Ringmoor Training Area it is, as a whole, in a stable condition. Land use changes and action by the military training authorities have removed the active threats from many monuments and returned them to stability. Further, modest actions, detailed above, would reinforce this assessment.

Simon Probert  
30 December 2010

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