

Archaeological Sites within Merrivale Training
Area, Dartmoor National Park, Devon:
A condition survey on behalf of Defence
Infrastructure Organisation

March 2018



Southwest Landscape Investigations



Dr Phil Newman MCIfA, FSA

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Survey and report by

Dr Phil Newman MClfA, FSA
Southwest Landscape Investigations
6 Burnley Close
Newton Abbot, Devon TQ12 1YB

[www:philnew.co.uk](http://www.philnew.co.uk)
07730 978321



A tinnert's hut on Beardown Brook

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INTRODUCTION

A survey was requested by Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) as part of the on-going management and monitoring of heritage assets within the Merrivale Training Area. The purpose of the work is to provide an updated condition assessment for all known archaeological sites within Merrivale TA. This includes scheduled monuments (SMs) and non-scheduled sites recorded in the Dartmoor HER and the National Monument Record (NMR), but excludes listed buildings. Previous condition surveys were completed on Merrivale in 2010 and 2005. The revised survey was undertaken in January-March 2018.

The Survey Area (Fig. 1)

Merrivale Training Area is the second largest of the Dartmoor training areas (DTAs), and covers 3319ha within the central western sector of Dartmoor National Park. It is one of three Dartmoor Training Areas where live firing is practised. The boundary is mostly arbitrary, only adhering to a few natural landmarks, but the TA incorporates the source and upper valleys of the Rivers Walkham and Cowsic as well as the head regions of the West River Dart, South Tavy and Colly Brook. The terrain includes deep valleys and high tors with granite outcrops, but also several areas of bog, especially near the river sources. The majority of the land falls within the Forest of Dartmoor, though the western zone is within Peter Tavy parish, and a small portion to the south-west comes under Walkhampton parish.

The majority of the area is common land on open moorland, also designated as Access Land, though a small area on the western edge near Wapsworth is enclosed pasture. Vehicular access to the area is restricted to a single trackway to Whittor, and a second track to Great Mis Tor. Neither is available for use by the public, other than on foot, at any time.

Although in terms of area, Merrivale is the second largest of the Dartmoor TAs, it contains a relatively low number of heritage assets, compared with the smaller ranges, whilst, together with Okehampton, it has a concentration of approximately one scheduled monument (SMs) per square kilometer, although of the total archaeological sites recorded within Merrivale, 30% are SMs.



Fig 1. Dartmoor National Park showing DIO Dartmoor Training Area, with Merrivale TA highlighted.

Training Area Name	Size in Kms ²	Monuments recorded	SAMs	%SAM	SAMs per Km ²
Ringmoor	6.1	92	43	46.7	7
Cramber	8.4	146	28	19	3.3
Willsworthy	14.5	184	29	15.5	2
Merrivale	33.2	118	35	30	1.05
Okehampton	61.8	272	56	20	1.1

Table 1 Demonstrating low percentage of SMs per Km² compared with the smaller Dartmoor TAs.

Methodology

The current condition survey is the third of its kind on Merrivale and follows earlier surveys in 2010 by S Probert and in 2005 by English Heritage, the latter forming the original baseline survey. The essential methodology of the condition survey has not changed and requires a field inspection and report for all the heritage assets listed in previous surveys. Any deterioration or improvement in condition is noted, and recommendations are made as to future management. Photographic evidence for each heritage asset acts as a visual means of monitoring site condition over time and digital photographs from each survey are archived by DIO for back reference.

The current survey has made use of the 2005 EH baseline survey of Merrivale TA (on which the first condition appraisal was based) as a means of establishing location and extent of the archaeological sites recorded in that report (Fig. 2). Also, with the availability of LiDAR and satellite imagery, it has been possible to modify slightly the polygons surrounding some areas of tin streamworks on the high moor.

Since the 2005 survey, only one additional sites had been added to the baseline list. Of the 118 heritage assets for which records now exist, 35 form the whole or part of scheduled monuments (SMs), or they are within the protected zone of a SM. Two additional sites have been added in 2018, though neither are included in the statistics.

The 2018 condition survey was conducted using pro-forma sheets (in digital format) to record field observations, with the results collated into an Excel spreadsheet. Condition photographs are filed using the monument numbers, enabling cross-referencing with the spread sheet. Location and approximate extent of each monuments is presented in GIS polygon format (.shp). Each entity in the GIS file also has a short descriptive field. The results are summarized in this report, which also highlights any issues that may require conservation action.

LEGACY CONDITION AND MONUMENT TYPE

Condition of field monuments is to some extent dependent on their age. A prehistoric site, which may be up to 5000 years old at Merrivale, may have less visible fabric but has had much longer to decline and stabilise than a ruined 20th-century military earthwork or structure, whereas the condition of modern sites can decline rapidly if unprotected and subject to neglect and abuse. Clearly, a consistent approach when applying a condition category is difficult for an assemblage of monuments with such a diversity of ages. Allowances therefore have to be made for the legacy condition, which is described below for each category. For the purposes of this survey the *Condition* terms (good, fair, poor) have to take this into account but are still somewhat arbitrary depending on the observer. However, the *Stability and Change* record for each monument is more accurately gauged and is related solely to damage, threats or other management issues visible at the time of inspection. These observations can be cross-referenced to past inspections to establish whether the site's status has declined, improved or remains static since previous inspections.

The archaeology of Merrivale Training Area can be broken down into nine distinct categories, based on chronological period and site types:

Prehistoric burial – cairns

Prehistoric ritual – stone circles, stone rows, tor enclosure

Prehistoric settlement – hut circles, enclosed settlements and reaves

Medieval agriculture – field system, cultivation ridges

Medieval/post-medieval settlements

Medieval/ post medieval industrial – tinworking, charcoal making

Nineteenth-century tin mining

Miscellaneous (mostly post-medieval) – boundary stones and large stone artefacts

This is a fairly typical assemblage of archaeological site types found on Dartmoor's moorlands, although the area is well endowed with prehistoric hut settlements and two particularly fine isolated medieval farmsteads. The unusual feature of Whittor enclosure is a particularly significant heritage asset. Although, prehistoric reaves are present in this area they are not as numerous as some other parts of Dartmoor. The early tin industry is well represented with many hectares of tin streamworks following river valleys, and several pit-type workings. Small rectangular structures known as tinnerns' lodges, but usually recorded as tinnerns' huts, may be found nestling amongst the remains of the streamworks. The area contains one tin blowing, or smelting house and the remains of a 19th-century tin mine lie beside the River Walkham.

Ritual

Langstone stone circle (439606) is one of only 14 certain stone circles to survive on Dartmoor. The site was restored in 1894 (Newman 2003), though some stones have become damaged since that time, but it is an impressive and significant monument, dating probably from the early 2nd millennium BC. A total of three stone rows are known in Merrivale TA: one at Langstone Moor (439578) not far north of the circle has a large standing stone at its southern terminal known as the Longstone. Others rows are found on Conies Down Tor (439578) and Cut Hill (1405946). A single standing stone named Beardown Man (439571), is more remotely sited near Devil's Tor. The stone rows are likely to be among the earliest extant Bronze Age monuments within the TA, dating possibly from as early as the third millennium BC. As with all orthostatic monuments there is a risk of individual stones being toppled, usually through a combination of erosion around the base and use by animals as rubbing posts. Although the stone circle was restored, it is unlikely these particular stone rows were ever subject to antiquarian interference.

A large, stony tor enclosure on Whittor (439744) at the far west of the TA is believed to have Neolithic origins and is one of only two such examples known on Dartmoor. Its age and rarity make it a particularly sensitive site, but its robust fabric and tor location have served to protect it over the millennia.

Cairns

There are records for a total of 23 prehistoric (Bronze Age) round cairns or barrows in the training area, of which 15 are scheduled, or form part of a scheduled monument. The most significant of the cairns as landscape features are the larger hilltop examples including White Barrow (439600) and Limsboro' Cairn (440633) and one large stony example on Whittor.(439735). In general, however, cairns in this TA are small and discreet. Some survive as bare heaps of stone, while others have a certain amount of turf covering. Three of the smaller cairns contain stone cists (439738; 442724; 442789), though all have been disturbed. A number of small, low, stony or earthen mounds may also be included with the cairns, though in some cases the remains are barely perceivable and their authenticity is not always proven.

Cairns were frequent targets for interventions by antiquaries and looters in the past, often leaving the remains heavily disturbed with results unrecorded. Most of the above examples show signs of interference, especially the cists, which have all been opened.

Hut circles and settlements

Records exist for 26 sites where prehistoric round houses survive, together in many cases with elements of enclosure walls, often in small to large groups, forming settlements. Most of the hut circles and their associated settlements probably had origins in the early to mid 2nd millennium BC.

The largest and most impressive of these is at Langstone Moor (439615) where at least 35 stone hut circles are associated with various enclosures, though some of the huts are free standing. There is also an impressive array of 24 huts within sub-divided enclosures to the north of Whittor (439615). Many smaller settlement and groups of individual dwellings are spread along the valleys of the Walkham and Cowsic Rivers and Foxholes Streams. These tend to be smaller huts with minimal or no associated enclosures. The extent of the remains varies between subtle circular earthworks with minimal stone showing through the turf, and more robust examples with massive walls constructed from edge-set stone. Many of Dartmoor's hut circles have been subject to archaeological investigation in the past, principally in the late 19th century, though, unlike cairns, these have usually been recorded to some extent. Notable within Merrivale TA the settlement at Langstone Moor was investigated in 1894 when eleven of the huts were excavated (Newman 2003). Stone robbing has not been too big a problem in Merrivale TA where 19th-century land improvement was less of an issue.

Reaves

Reaves (prehistoric linear boundary banks) are common over much of western Dartmoor, where fine examples have been recorded within Merrivale TA at Roos Tor (439812), Whittor (439762) and on Cudlipptown Down (439967). These linear banks of earth and stone are normally very stable and insusceptible to casual damage, although many have been fossilized into later walling schemes and some have become disguised by a natural overgrowth of turf. One of the main modern threats to reaves on Dartmoor generally, has been traversing by heavy wheeled vehicles, though this has been very limited among the Merrivale examples.

Medieval/post medieval agriculture and settlement

The majority of the Merrivale TA comprises high moorland, where medieval and later attempts to settle and farm are very few. However, on the slightly lower lands around Cudlipptown Down, contained within modern enclosures, are the remains of two deserted settlements (439897; 439894). Both comprise turf-covered outline foundation ruins, representing the remains of rectangular structures, including longhouses as well as additional smaller buildings. There is also much evidence of strip cultivation in the form of subtle earthworks, including strip fields, lynchets and ridge and furrow as well as turf hedge banks used to divide up plots of land (919078). Although undated archaeologically, their appearance and similarity to other dated Dartmoor sites, suggests that occupation would have been loosely within the medieval or post-medieval period. Once collapsed these ruins achieved stability fairly quickly and appear to have remained undisturbed while a lack of intensive farming activity in the surrounding fields has conserved the cultivation earthworks.

Medieval/post-medieval industrial

Tin streamworking remains are to be observed along many of the river valleys and tributaries within Merrivale TA including sizable stretches of the Walkham (1064674), and a large area of the Colly Brook (1400165), while isolated patches survive along the Cowsic (1184973), Blackabrook (1065681), Beardown Brook (619345), Foxhole Stream (966140) and the West Dart (1050209). A particularly extensive streamwork, called Dead Lake (*part of* 1064674), extends north of the River Walkham on Cocks Hill. Although several tinworks have been scheduled elsewhere on Dartmoor, none within this training area have been so designated.

Tinworking remains of this type represent episodes of major upheaval within the landscape, sometimes for considerable periods of time, followed by abrupt abandonment. The activity leaves deep scars rather than the more subtle evidence of some other past activities, though parts of the workings have become smoothed by time. The interiors of the tinworks comprise much discarded material left behind by the extraction process, now often overgrown by turf. Despite the inherent robustness of tinwork remains they have, over time, become subject to encroachment by mires, which, in some

cases, such as at the head of the River Walkham and Colly Brook, have completely obscured parts of the evidence and rendered large areas inaccessible. Beyond this, they have not been subject to robbing or re-use of stone and survive, as far as can be known from observation, largely undisturbed. Pit works and prospecting pits of various size and extent are found in several places across Merrivale TA but have not been subject to any interference since they were abandoned, though the soft earth of the spoil mounds has in some cases made a home for burrowing animals.

Small rectangular buildings or shelters are commonly associated with the tinworks, often built within the worked area, and usually referred to as tinnerns' huts or lodges. Seventeen of these stone built shelters have been recorded as foundation ruins, including four on the Tavy (1064657; 440643; 440640; 440658), three on the West Dart (443977; 443962;) and two each on the Foxtor Stream (442771; 442522) and Beardown Brook (619357; 619379). None of these remains are scheduled. These huts were not built to endure and their ad-hoc construction from whatever stone was available, often means their walls have become tumbled. A more enduring building was built by the tinnerns beside the River Walkham to smelt tin at Upper Merrivale (439629). This building was archaeologically excavated in the 1990's and has since been allowed to stabilise naturally. Many large stone artefacts retrieved from the building have been left at the site.

Wheal Prosper (439709) is a small, late 18th- early 19th century tin mine beside the River Walkham. The surface remains comprise an open cutting, surface evidence of shallow shafts with spoil heaps, a leat, a stamping mill with dressing floor, and a large, ruined, stone building. All these remains survive as stable earthworks or ruined structures, though evidence of a buried stone wheelpit is also visible.

THE CONDITION SURVEY: RESULTS

Condition

Of the 141 sites listed within previous reports, 23 were recorded as either not found, natural features, non-antiquities or duplicates (*see* Table 3). These have not been included in the 2018 survey or statistics. A total of 118 sites have therefore been revisited for the 2018 survey, presented on the Excel spread sheet. Two sites not previously included (SWL1034; SWL1035) have now been added to the data base but not incorporated in the statistics this time as this would skew the results.

Of the 118 sites included in the 2018 statistics, 65 (55%) may be stated to be in good condition, 40 (34%) in fair condition and 12 (10%) in poor condition. In the 2010 survey the figures differed slightly with 76 (64.5%) in good condition, 31 (26.5%) in fair condition and 9 (7.5%) in poor condition.

However, of the 35 SMs, 14 (40%) can be stated to be in good condition in 2018, while 17 (48.5%) are fair condition and 5 (14.5%) are in a poor condition. This compares with the 2010 statistics of 12 good (34.5%), 9 fair (25.5%), 6 poor (17%). The variation in these statistics is due, in the most part, to the subjectivity of this form of assessment (which has to include varying degrees of legacy damage) than any actual change in condition since 2010. Also, only 28 sites were recorded as scheduled in the 2010 survey compared with 35 in 2018.

Stability and Change

This more objective category measures the extent to which a heritage asset may be said to be in a stable condition, or otherwise, and notes any changes following previous surveys, which may be the result of damage through various causes, or erosion. This measure also acts as an indicator as to whether intervention may be beneficial in halting the decline, especially where caused by human agency.

From the total of 118 assets, 105 (89% - up 4.5% on 2010) of the total sample remain in a stable condition, while 12 (10.2% - down 2% on 2010) are reported as in gradual decline (Table 2; Fig 2), in most cases this is due to very insignificant patches of erosion or minor threats.

The figures are summarized in Table 2, which includes the statistics from previous surveys for comparison:

2018 survey of 118 heritage assets assessed (excludes new 2018 sites)	No.	%of total
Stable	105	89
Gradual Decline	12	10.2
Rapid Decline	0	0
Improving	1	<1
2010 survey of 118 heritage assets assessed		
Stable	100	84.5
Gradual Decline	15	12.5
Rapid Decline	1	<1
Improving	2	1.5
2005 baseline survey of 116 heritage assets		
Stable	92	79
Gradual Decline	24	21
Rapid Decline	0	0
Improving	0	0

Table 2 Showing actual numbers and percentages of the total in terms of stability and change.

These figures represent an increase of 4.5% in the total number of heritage assets reported to be in a stable condition, while those considered to be in gradual decline has decreased by 2%, which indicates a generally positive direction of travel for the aggregate statistics within this TA.

MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

Management measures

No management measures are currently in use for any of the sites, scheduled or unscheduled, within Merrivale TA, where threat levels are minimal. The use of off-road vehicles was a problem in 2005, especially on Langstone Moor and on the east slope of Roos Tor, where in both cases, assets have been reported damaged by vehicles in the past. In 2018, evidence of vehicle activity appears to have reduced , and both reported cases have begun to stabilise. Vehicles are not permitted on the commons, and use of ordnance in the TA is restricted to small arms. Stocking levels of sheep, cattle and ponies are currently low (also observed in the 2010 report), reducing the problem of poaching, and the pressure from civilian visitors for much of the TA is minimal due to its remoteness.

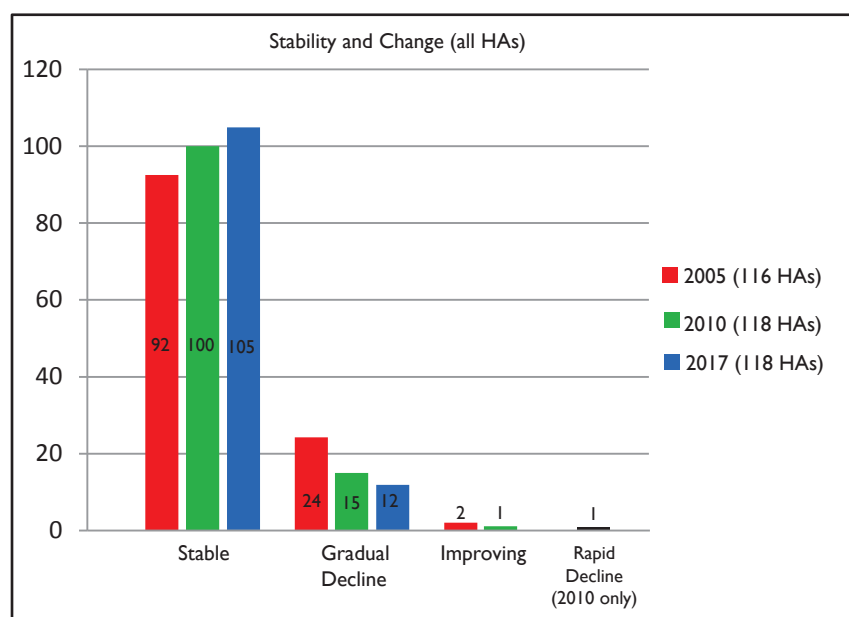


Fig. 2 Graph presenting the statistics for stability and change for all heritage assets (HA) recorded in Merrivale TA.

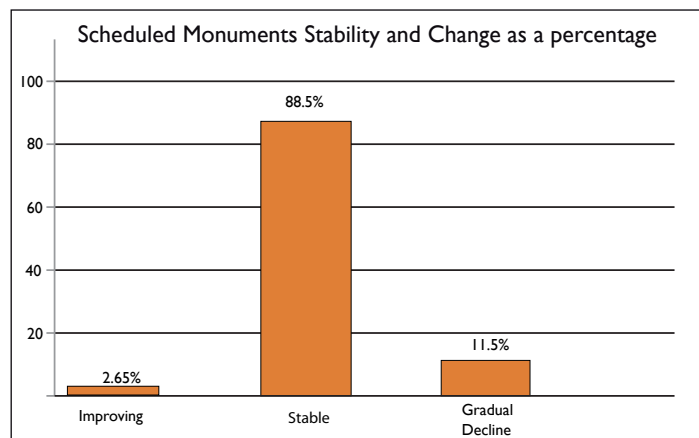
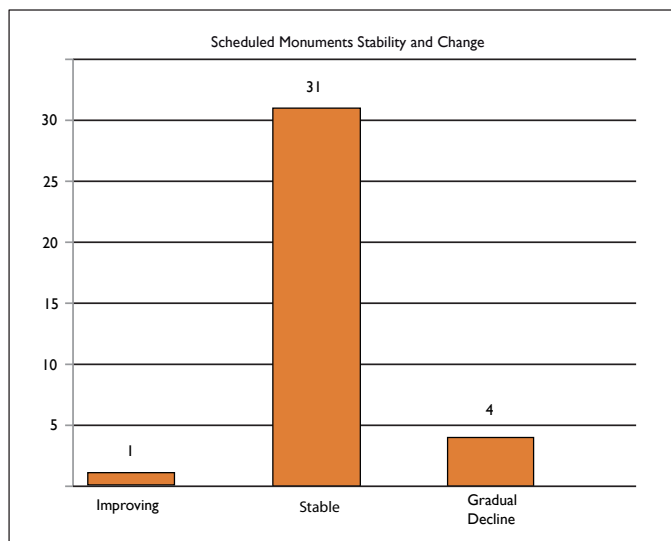


Fig. 3 (left) Graph showing the number of scheduled monuments in defined categories, March 2018.

Fig. 4 (right) The same information expressed as a percentage.

SCHEDULED MONUMENTS (SMs)

Of the 35 SMs, 31 (88.5%) are in a stable state and only 4 (11.5%) are in gradual decline. In all cases through forces of attrition and in no case through accidental or wanton damage by humans. In all but three of these cases, no immediate action, other than continued monitoring, is necessary.

Gradual decline requiring attention

439600 (SM No: 1007896) White Barrow. The center of this important monument continues to be affected by livestock erosion and waterlogging, causing a hollow on the top of the mound. Repair with compacted stone and a turf covering could remedy this problem without affecting the integrity of the monument.

439606 (SM No: 1007550) Langstone Moor stone circle. Conservation work carried out in 2003, to fill erosion hollows around the bases of the upright stones, is beginning to fail, and watery hollows are again present around several of the stones. Remedial action may not be necessary just yet, but continued monitoring will be necessary to assess further decline in this situation.

439621 (SM No: 1007897) Langstone Moor stone row continues to be bisected by former vehicle tracks, now used by walkers and livestock (as reported in 2005 and 2010). The terminal standing stone is within a water-worn erosion hollow, where supporting stones around the base have become further exposed since the 2010 assessment and the hollow appears much deeper. The risk of the stone toppling needs to be properly assessed and remedial action taken if felt necessary. One useful action may be to divert the water away from the hollow in which the stone stands, with the option of filling the channel with stone and turf.

Gradual decline requiring monitoring only

439578 (SM No: 1008073; 1008012) The Conies Down stone row still has minor traces of animal erosion around the base of some stones, though it appears to be fewer than observed in 2010. Although insignificant, monitoring is advisable.

NON-SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

There is little to report in the way of specific damage or erosion at individual non-scheduled sites in Merrivale TA. However, it is worth noting that two sites highlighted in the 2010 condition survey are still in gradual decline.

440633 Limsboro' Cairn. Loose stone continues to be moved about as reported in 2010, probably by the public.

1388126 A cluster of four military mortar pits are permanently filled with boggy material, and losing their definition, although these very recent features are of no great significance archaeologically.

1406369 Cut Hill stone row. The western most recumbent stone is supported by a plinth of peat. It appears that the height of this plinth is greater than in 2010, suggesting that the ground level is eroding quite rapidly. The monument remains stable at present.

1065830 The Prison Leat was reported to be in rapid decline in 2010, although in 2018, this appears to have slowed as the channel has become filled with vegetation and animal stocking levels have declined. Although not yet considered stable, this asset does show some improvement compared with 2010.

CONCLUSION

The great majority of heritage assets within Merrivale Training Area survive in a good to fair condition, those that are classified as poor (12 out of 118) are mainly so by way of legacy. Under the heading of stability and change, the percentage of sites reckoned to be in gradual decline has decreased from 12.5% to 10.2% since the last survey of 2010. No sites may be stated to be in rapid decline and only one is in an improving state. Of the 35 scheduled monuments, four are reported to be in a decline. Only three sites (all SMs) are recommended to receive consideration regarding conservation, though all appear to be suffering as a result of natural forces, not through any human intervention.

Overall the survey has demonstrated that, since the previous survey of 2010, the heritage assets in Merrivale TA have not suffered any serious damage through human intervention, either wanton or accidental, and that current activity and management of the TA provides favorable conditions for the assets to continue to survive in a stable state. The statistics confirm (Fig. 2; Table 2) that since the first assessment in 2005, the number of sites in a stable condition has steadily increased, while those considered to be in decline have steadily decreased. In the handful of cases where concerns are raised, this is due to natural causes, such as waterlogging or livestock poaching, and could be ameliorated by some light-touch remedial action and/or continued monitoring.

REFERENCES

English Heritage 2005 *Merrivale Training Area Monument Baseline Condition Survey*. Unpub report prepared for MOD DIO.

Newman, P 2003 *The Langstone Moor Stone Circle and its Prehistoric Environs*. EH Report AI/25/2003

Probert, S 2010 *A Condition Survey of the Archaeological Sites of the Merrivale Training Area, Dartmoor*. Unpub report prepared for MOD DIO.

Appendix 1: Duplicate records; not found; natural features; non-antiquities; no ground evidence

MOD DIO ID no.	DESCRIPTION	MOD Property	COUNTY
439574	Alleged cairn. Not found	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439624	Rock Basin on Mis Tor. Not an antiquity.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439658	Peaty mounds - not antiquities.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439661	A probable shell crater, now water filled, formerly believed to be a hut circle.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439664	A natural hollow previously believed to be a hut circle.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439670	Peat stacks west of Spriddle Lake previously believed to be hut circles.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439697	The site of an alleged barrow. No ground evidence. Duplicate record.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439706	A cropmark enclosure visible on Aps. Not found on the ground.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439759	Group of 4 disturbed cairns. Duplicate record.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439797	A mound was recorded built into the reave at Langstone Moor. Doubtful.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439878	Hut circle and enclosure. Duplicate record.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439940	An alleged cist. Not found. Duplicate record.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
439943	Stone free areas within Whittor enclosure. Not archaeological.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
440630	The site of two alleged hut circles. No ground evidence.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
442819	The site of two alleged hut circles. No ground evidence.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
873417	A drainage ditch of no archaeological significance.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
1064570	Alleged cairn south of Beardown man. Unlikely	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
1064779	Tinners hut at Spriddle Lake. No ground evidence.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
1065232	The site of an alleged cist. No ground evidence.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
1065277	The site of an alleged hut circle - natural feature.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
1065605	The site of an alleged tinner's cache. No ground evidence.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON
1065817	The site of two alleged hut circles. Duplicate record.	DTA MERRIVALE	DEVON

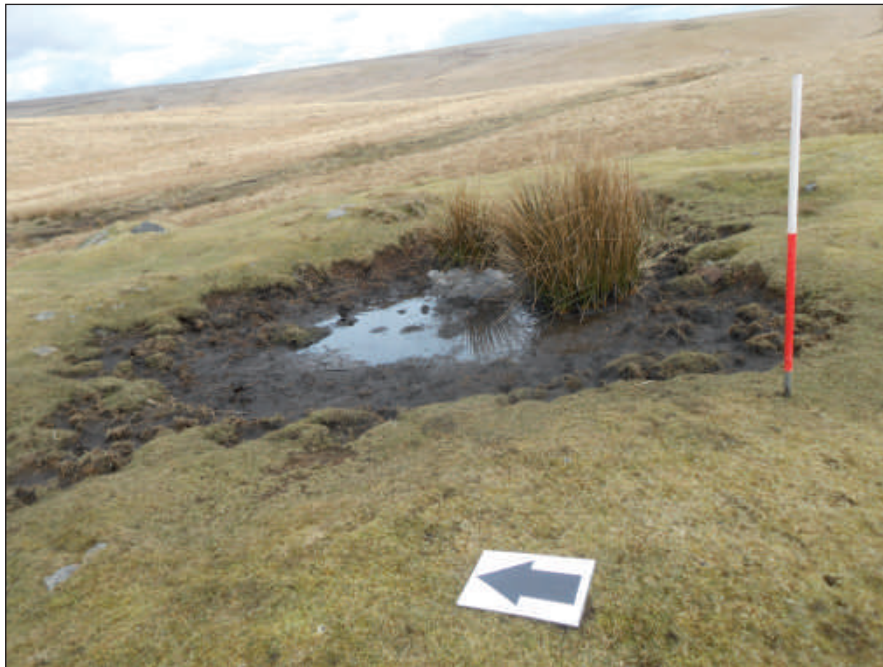


Fig 5. 439600 White Barrow. The center of this important monument continues to be affected by livestock erosion and waterlogging, causing a hollow on the top of the mound.



Fig 6. 439606 Langstone Moor stone circle. Conservation work carried out in 2003, to fill erosion hollows around the bases of the upright stones and some recumbent, is beginning to fail,



Fig 7. 439606 Langstone Moor stone circle.



Fig 8. 439621 Langstone Moor stone row. The terminal standing stone (Longstone) is within a water-worn erosion hollow, where supporting stones around the base have become further exposed since the 2010 assessment.



Fig 9. 1406369 Cut Hill stone row. The western most recumbent stone is supported by a plinth of peat. It appears that the height of this plinth is greater than in 2010, suggesting that the ground level is eroding quite rapidly. The monument remains stable at present.

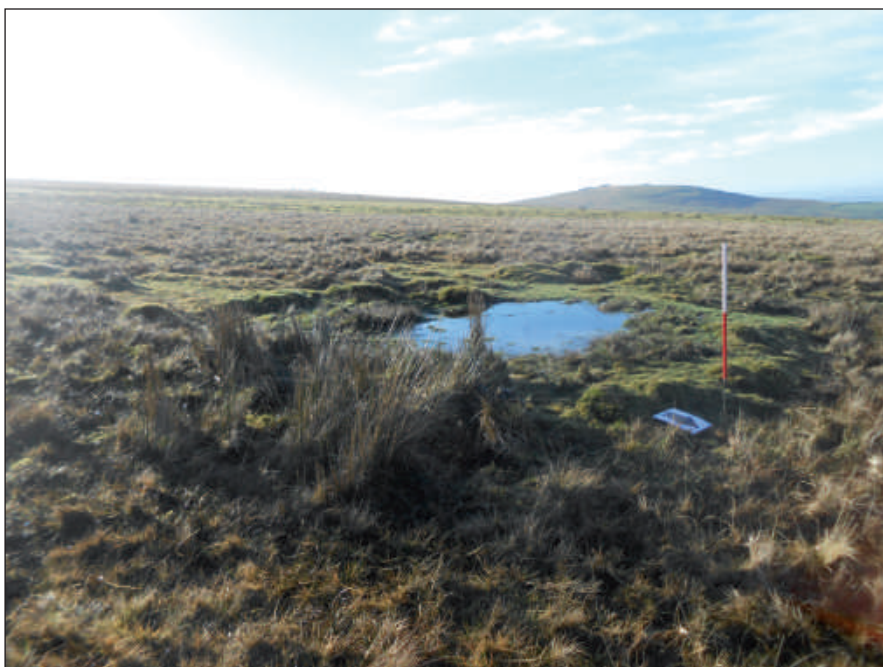


Fig 10. 1388126 A cluster of four military mortar pits are permanently filled with boggy material, and losing their definition, although these very recent features are of no great significance archaeologically.