



ENGLISH HERITAGE
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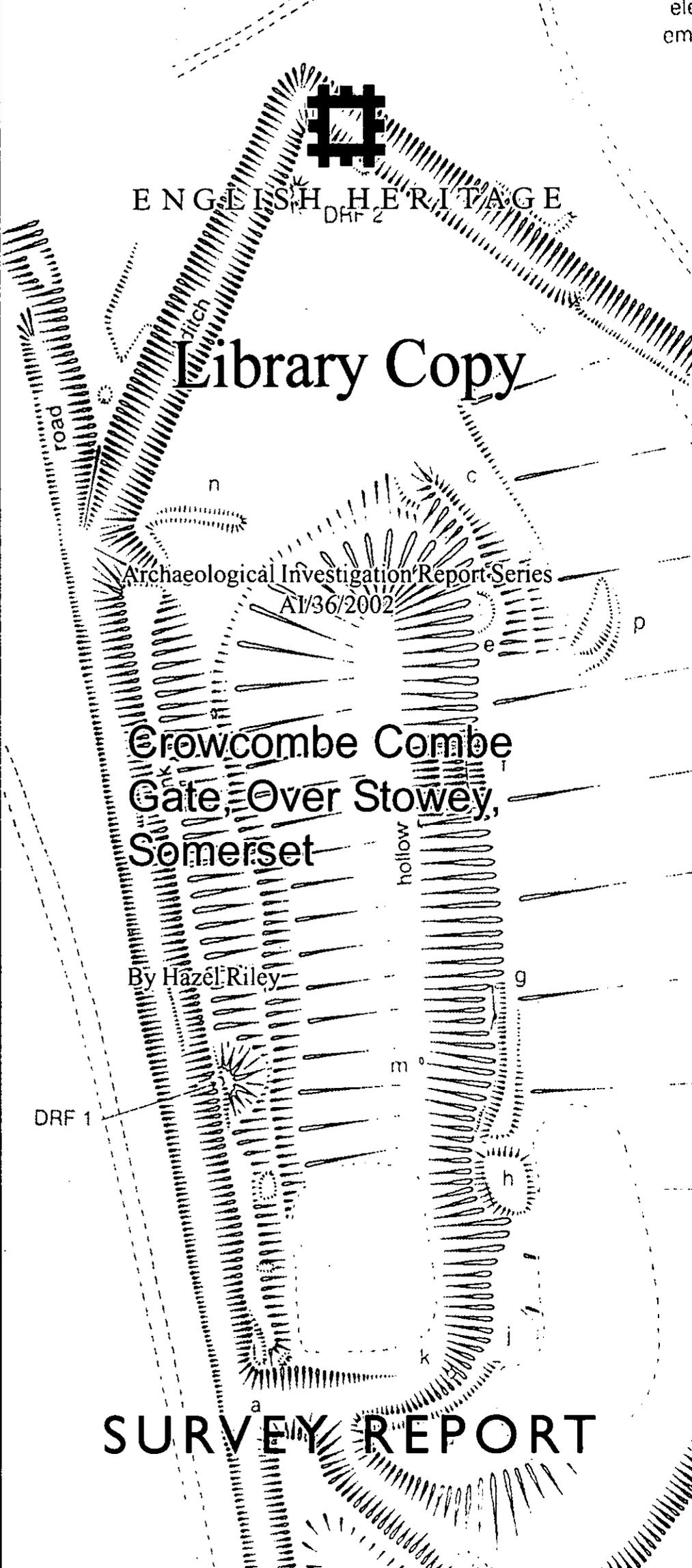
Archaeological Investigation Report Series
AI/36/2002

Crowcombe Combe
Gate, Over Stowey,
Somerset

By Hazel Riley

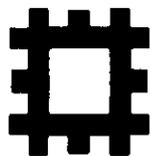
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SURVEY REPORT



Archaeological Investigation Report Series

AI/36/2002



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Crowcombe Combe Gate, Over Stowey,
Somerset

An archaeological survey by English Heritage

County: Somerset
District: Sedgemoor
Parish: Over Stowey
OS map no: ST 13 NE
NGR: ST 1502 3725
NMR no: ST 13 NE 61,62,63,64,65
SMR no: 11356,11360,11391-11396
Surveyed: May 2002
Report by: Hazel Riley
Surveyors: Hazel Riley, Elaine Jamieson
Illustrations: Hazel Riley

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English Heritage 1:200 plan of the cairn at Crowcombe Combe Gate

Figure 3

English Heritage plan at 1: 1000 scale

Figure 4

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Summary

The earthworks at Crowcombe Combe Gate, previously interpreted as a prehistoric settlement, have been identified as the site of a searchlight position, dating from the Second World War. Two small prehistoric cairns have been identified, and a large Bronze Age burial cairn has been located close to the searchlight position.

INTRODUCTION

Location and Geology

The site lies at Crowcombe Combe Gate, to the south of the Crowcombe to Over Stowey road, centred at ST 1502 3725 (Fig 1). It occupies an area of gently sloping ground at the head of

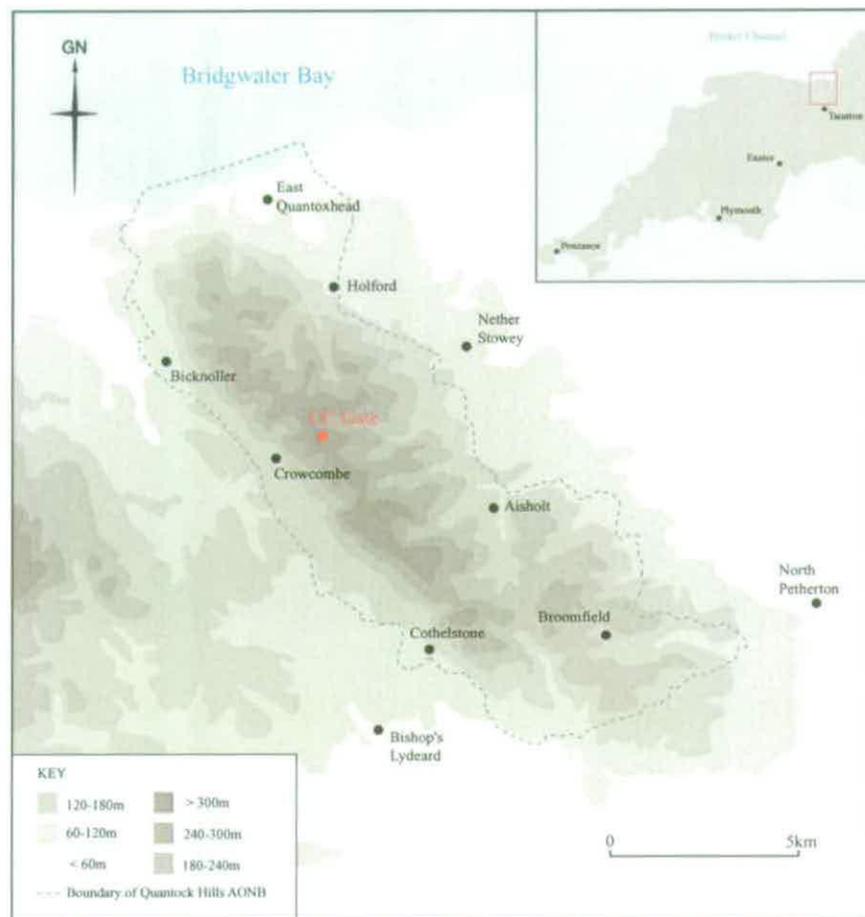


Fig. 1
Location map

Rams Combe, and lies at an altitude of 300m OD. Most of the site is on open moorland, but the building remains lie in the corner of a large field, currently under pasture. The underlying geology comprises the sandstones of the Devonian Hangman Grits (Geological map, sheet 295).

The survey

The survey was carried out as part of the English Heritage archaeological survey of the Quantock Hills AONB. The work was undertaken using differential GPS and an EDM theodolite to record the archaeological detail and locate the site to the National Grid (OSTN97). The survey work was done in May 2002, before bracken cover became a problem. The numbers (*n*) refer to the 1:1000 scale plan (Fig 3).

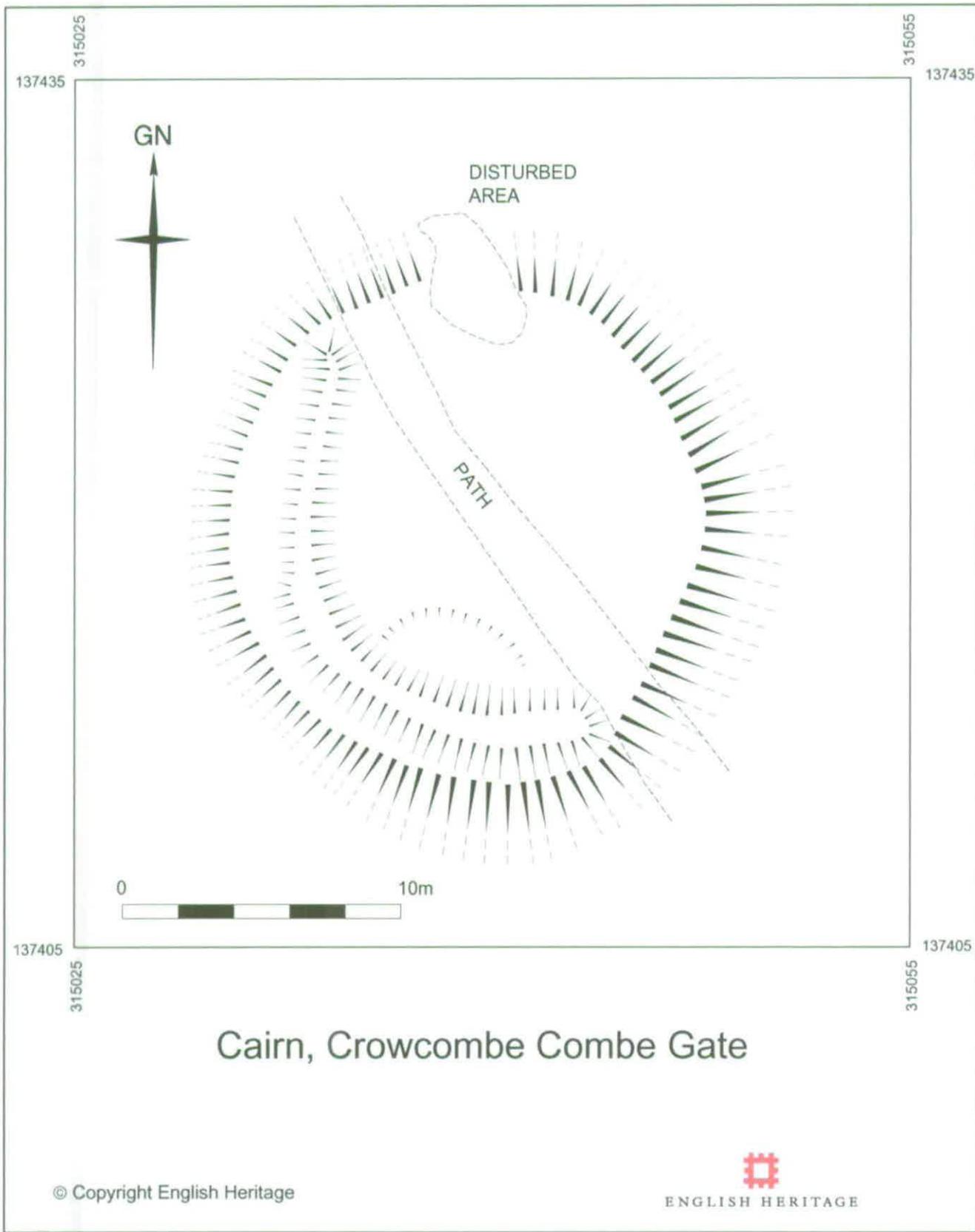


Fig. 2 English Heritage 1: 200 scale plan of the cairn at Crowcombe Combe Gate

HISTORY AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

A possible prehistoric enclosure was noted from air photographs by R McDonnell as part of an air photographic transcription of the Quantock Hills AONB. The feature was not located during a subsequent field visit. During this visit, however, several other features were discovered. These included three depressions, which were interpreted as possible prehistoric hut circles, and three platforms, interpreted as possible prehistoric hut platforms. The features were described and a sketch plan made (SMR 11360,11391,11392,11393,11394,11395).

The site was visited by staff from the Exeter Office of English Heritage in April 2002 with a view to recording the site as part of the EH Archaeological Survey of the Quantock Hills AONB. During this visit it became clear that the features were not prehistoric in origin, but represented something of a much more recent date. Conversations with the National Trust Wardens about features in the adjoining field known as West Hill, and with colleagues in the EH Swindon Office, confirmed that the putative prehistoric features were, in fact, part of a searchlight position dating from the early years of the Second World War. Several prehistoric features were, however, re-interpreted or discovered during the course of the EH survey work.

PREHISTORIC FEATURES

The area contains one large and two small prehistoric burial cairns. The large cairn (1) is an impressive platform cairn (Fig 2). It lies close to the un-metalled road which runs from the Triscombe stone to Crowcombe Combe Gate, only 50m from the Crowcombe to Over Stowey road. The site was originally recorded from air photographs and was interpreted as a probable prehistoric enclosure or platform which had been re-used as a tree ring enclosure (SMR 11356). The cairn lies just to the west of the track which is heavily used by off-road vehicles. It is a large, flat-topped stony mound, some 20m in diameter, with a small bank on its western side. The bank is very stony, and is probably formed partly from cairn material. A shallow depression in the SW sector of the cairn is probably the result of this robbing. The bank represents the remains of a tree ring enclosure, dating from the 18th or early 19th century: Crowcombe Combe Gate is at the NE corner of Crowcombe Park. Rowan, beech, and oak grow on the mound, with invasive birch scrub. A track across the cairn follows the direction of the un-metalled road. The cairn lies in a commanding position at the head of Crowcombe Combe and Rams Combe. It forms part of a line of very large cairns on this part of the western edge of the Quantock ridge, such as those on Wills Neck and West Hill to the south, and Hurley Beacon to the north.

Two further cairns were identified during the survey. One, a substantial, flat-topped circular mound, 8m in diameter, lies close a boggy area (2). It has been ploughed over, this is particularly evident on its northern edge. The second is a smaller mound, some 5m in diameter (3). This mound also appears to have been ploughed over, particularly on its eastern edge.

The enclosure noted on air photographs but not located in the field could be a vehicle track associated with the searchlight position.

THE SEARCHLIGHT POSITION (FIGS 3 AND 4)

The remains dating from the Second World War fall into three groups. The remains of two Nissen huts and two small building platforms lie in the corner of the large pasture field known as West Hill. Three circular features lie just to the east of the Crowcombe to Over Stowey road, and three pits lie to the north. The building remains represent the accommodation and service buildings (8,9,10,11). The largest of the circular features is the position for the projector, probably a 90cm light (14) (Dobinson 2001, fig 15). The smaller circular mound to the south-west (12) is the sound locator emplacement, and the sub-rectangular mound with hollowed centre (13) could

be an emplacement for the Lewis gun. The three embanked oval hollows (5,6,7) could be further emplacements for Lewis guns or similar LAA (light anti-aircraft) guns.

The layout of the site appears to be typical of the single searchlight positions which covered the

*Fig. 4
The projector
emplacement*



country in the first few years of the Second World War, before the re-structuring which took place in the winter of 1940-41 (Dobinson 2001, 183-4; 280-5).

The remains of ploughing can be seen across the site. This probably dates from the late medieval or early post-medieval period. It can be observed running over the cairn near the boggy area, whilst the gun pits and searchlight emplacement clearly overlie it.

DISCUSSION

The identification of a Bronze Age burial cairn in this part of the Quantock Hills is a significant addition to the distribution of these monuments, both locally and regionally. The survival of Bronze Age settlement sites on the Quantock Hills appears to be limited by episodes of ploughing on the Commons. The ploughing was widespread and probably dated from the late medieval to early post-medieval periods. Thus the survival of a Bronze Age settlement site here, in an area where the remains of such ploughing can be seen, would be unusual. The survival of the searchlight position as extant earthworks is also unusual, with many such sites only surviving as crop marks in arable fields (Lowry 1995, 63). A cluster of three searchlight emplacements do, however, survive as earthworks at Buildwas Abbey in Shropshire (Brown 2002).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Staff from the National Trust and the Quantock Hills AONB facilitated the survey work. Somerset SMR provided information and maps.

REFERENCES

Brown, G 2002 *Earthworks at Buildwas Abbey, Shropshire*

Dobinson, C 2001 *AA Command: Britain's Anti-aircraft Defences of the Second World War*

Lowry, B (ed) 1995 *20th Century Defences in Britain: an Introductory Guide*

APPENDIX: TABLE OF FEATURES RECORDED

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
1 Cairn	ST 13 NE 61
SMR NUMBER	NGR
11356	ST 315040 137420

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
2 Cairn	ST 13 NE 62
SMR NUMBER	NGR
NEW SITE	ST 315081 137691

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
3 ? cairn	ST 13 NE 63
SMR NUMBER	NGR
NEW SITE	ST 315141 137745

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
4 Clearance cairn	ST 13 NE 64
SMR NUMBER	NGR
11396	ST 315077 137739

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
5 LAA pit	ST 13 NE 64
SMR NUMBER	NGR
11391	ST 315067 137721

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
6 LAA pit	ST 13 NE 64
SMR NUMBER	NGR
11392	ST 315120 137729

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
7 LAA pit	ST 13 NE 64
SMR NUMBER	NGR
11393	ST 315111 137656

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
8 Nissen hut base	ST 13 NE 64
SMR NUMBER	NGR
NEW SITE	ST 315024 137493

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
9 Nissen hut base	ST 13 NE 64
SMR NUMBER	NGR
NEW SITE	ST 315033 137479

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
10 WWII building	ST 13 NE 64
SMR NUMBER	NGR
NEW SITE	ST 315022 137514

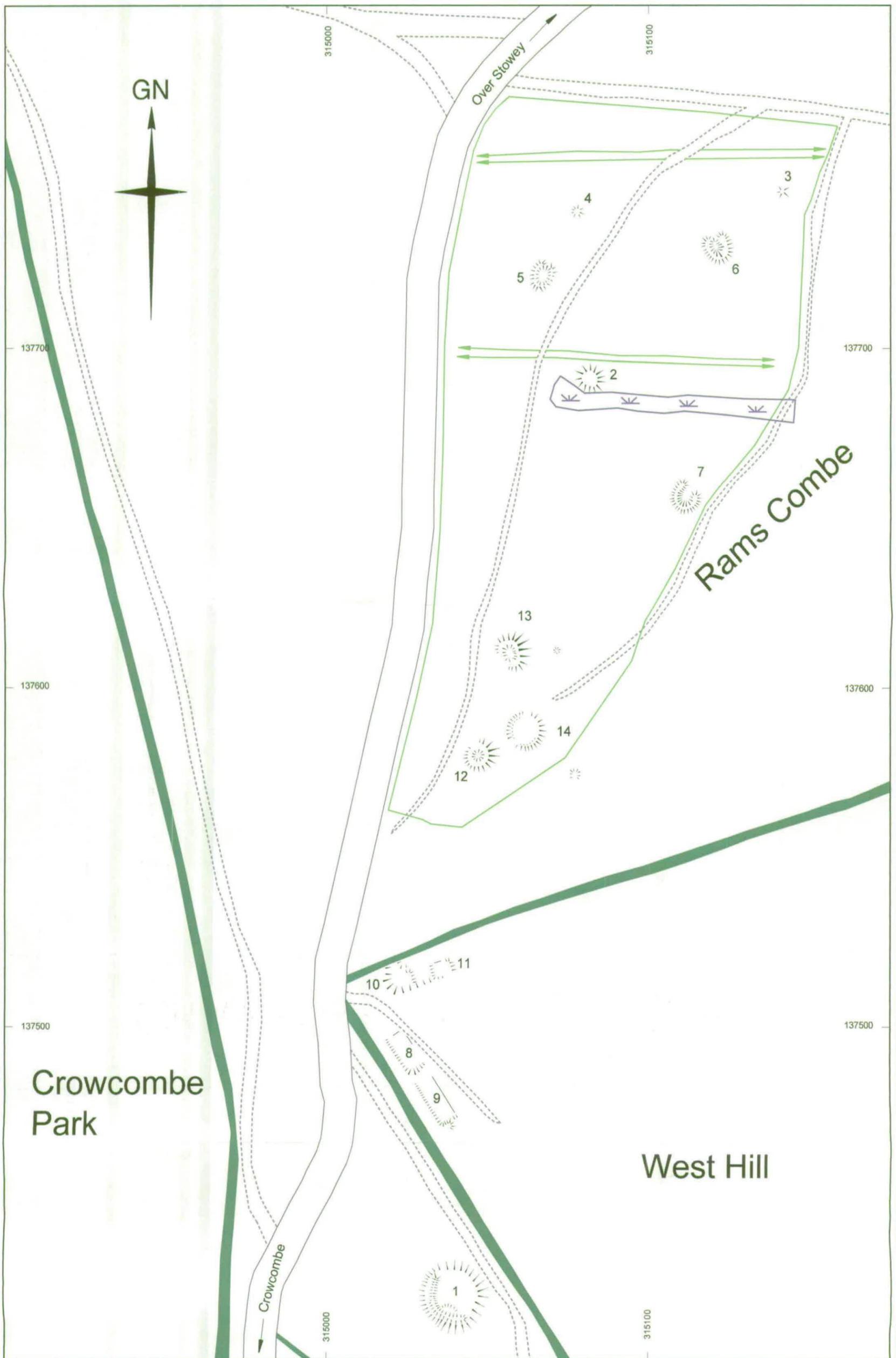
DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
11 WWII building	ST 13 NE 64
SMR NUMBER	NGR
NEW SITE	ST 315035 137516

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
12 Sound locator emplacement	ST 13 NE 64
SMR NUMBER	NGR
11394 or 11395	ST 315047 137580

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
13 Gun emplacement	ST 13 NE 64
SMR NUMBER	NGR
11394 or 11395	ST 315056 137610

DESCRIPTION	NMR NUMBER
14 Searchlight emplacement	ST 13 NE 64
SMR NUMBER	NGR
11360	ST 315061 137587

Crowcombe Combe Gate



Key

- Plough ridges
- Hedge bank
- Boggy area
- Channel




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Figure 3 English Heritage plan at 1: 1000 scale


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NATIONAL
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RECORD

*The National Monuments Record
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