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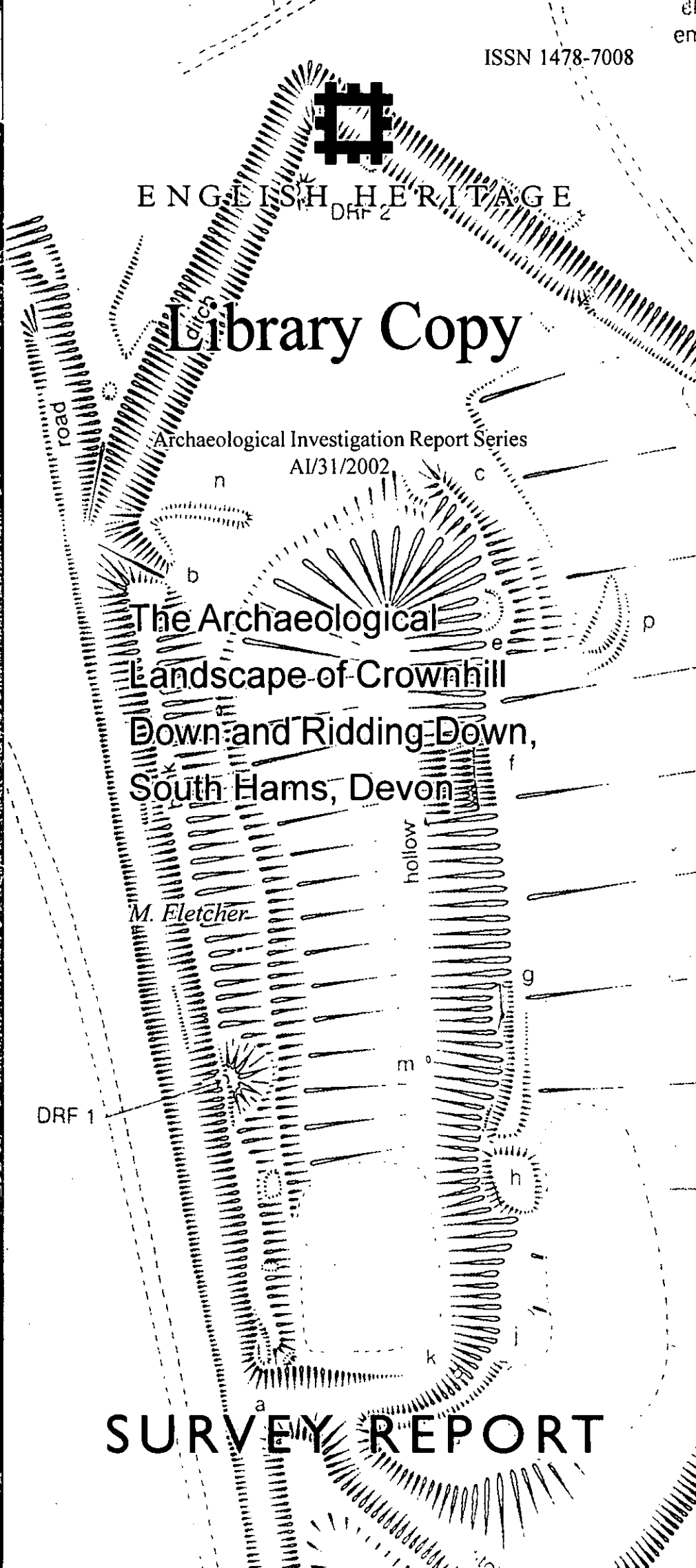
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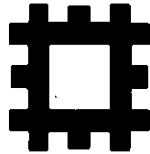
The Archaeological  
Landscape of Crownhill  
Down and Ridding Down,  
South Hams, Devon

M. Fletcher

DRF 1

SURVEY REPORT





# ENGLISH HERITAGE

## The Archaeological Landscape of Crownhill Down and Ridding Down, South Hams, Devon An archaeological survey by English Heritage

County:	Devon
District:	South Hams
Parish:	Sparkwell
OS map no:	SX 55 NE, SX 56 SE
NGR:	SX 5710 6025(centred)
Report by:	M. Fletcher
Surveyors:	M. Fletcher, P. Newman
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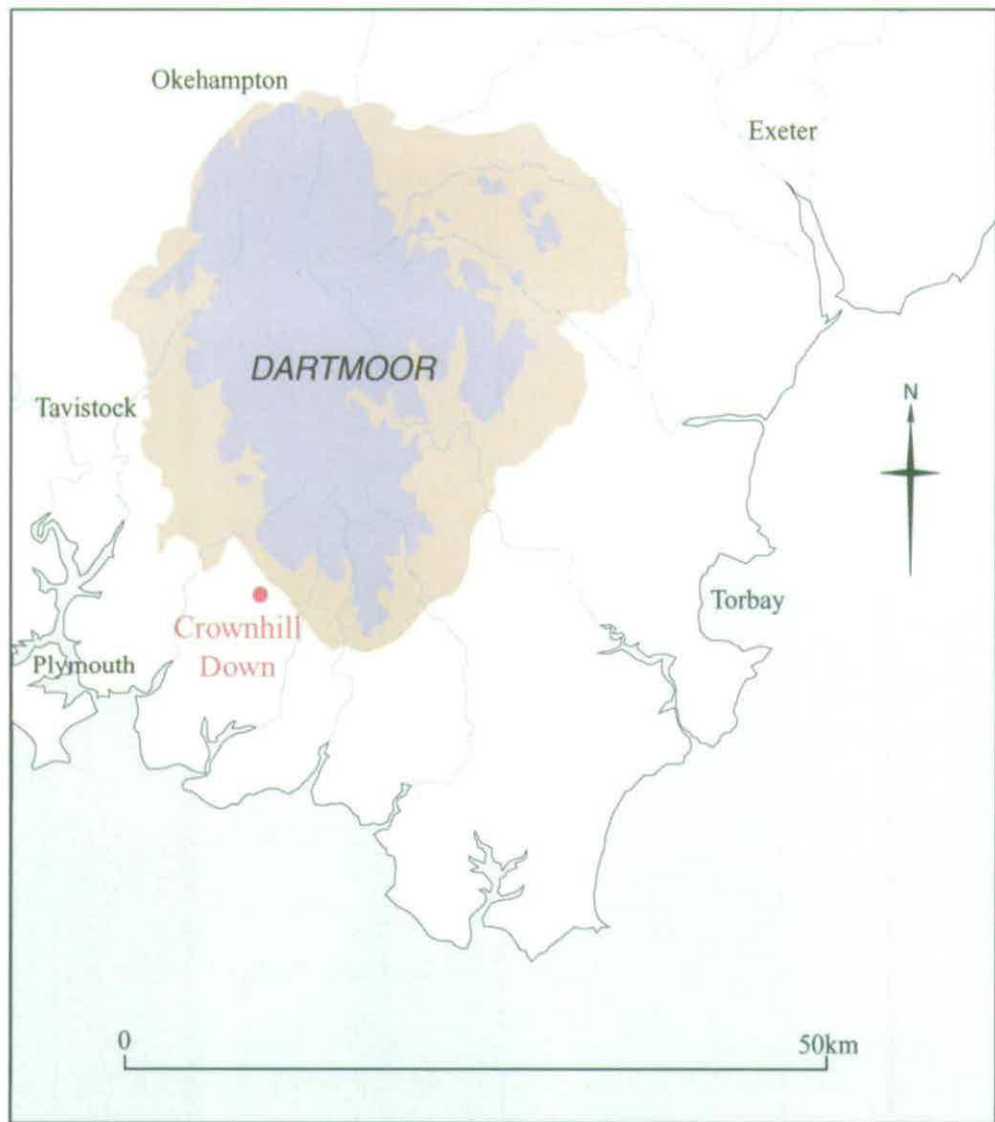


Fig. 1. Location map.

## INTRODUCTION

### Location

Crownhill Down is an enclosed moor and heath that for the most part is situated on a south and south-west facing hillside. Ridding Down of predominantly enclosed rough grassland is located immediately to the north on higher gently sloping ground. The area lies between 64m and 231m above Ordnance Datum and it affords extensive and commanding views across the south Devonshire countryside and Plymouth Sound. It is exposed to the prevailing south-westerly winds and inclement weather. Of nearly 400 hectares in area these downs form the link between the open expanse of upland Dartmoor to the north and the low-lying Devonshire agricultural landscape with its tight pattern of fields and wooded valleys to the south. The surrounding area has been extensively disturbed or destroyed by china-clay digging, processing, dumping, and settlement associated with the industry. The downs are delineated by, to the east the expansive open cast Headon china-clay pits and to the west by the Lee Moor china-clay works and also the extensive mica dams in the Torycombe valley and beyond. A massive terraced linear spoil tip overshadows the northern side of Ridding Down.

The downs are not only one of the few surviving complete 'land bridges' between two radically different archaeological landscapes but they also constitute important areas for archaeological monuments and features in their own right.

### **Previous research**

There have been a number of recording projects undertaken in the past to identify the archaeology of this area. Most have been as a response to the need to provide archaeological data to planning enquiries set up to consider applications for dumping spoil on the area and the creation of larger clay extraction pits. The principal works of research and record are listed below. Foremost among these is the work of Gilbertson and Collis (1982; 1985), though their survey did not include Ridding Down. The downs were included on the RCHME aerial photographic transcription of Dartmoor undertaken in 1985 though this plot was never ground checked. Butler (1994) has also published a sketch AP transcription mainly of the prehistoric archaeology. No metrically accurate plan of either down has been previously attempted and there have been no recorded archaeological excavations.

### **The EH survey**

English Heritage undertook an archaeological investigation and survey of the area in the autumn of 2001 and the spring of 2002 at a scale of 1:2500. The survey was carried out using differential GPS; two base stations were linked into the OS national grid by computation in conjunction with OS active stations. The completion of this survey was, in many places, severely hampered by dense vegetation cover in the form of thick and impenetrable stands of mature gorse up to 2m high. This archaeological project was instigated at the request of the EH Inspector for Devon to provide accurate information as to the significance of and threats to archaeological remains on Crownhill Down and Ridding Down. The results of this work will provide a means of informing future planning and management decisions. The abandoned china-clay pits and dumps were not included in the survey.

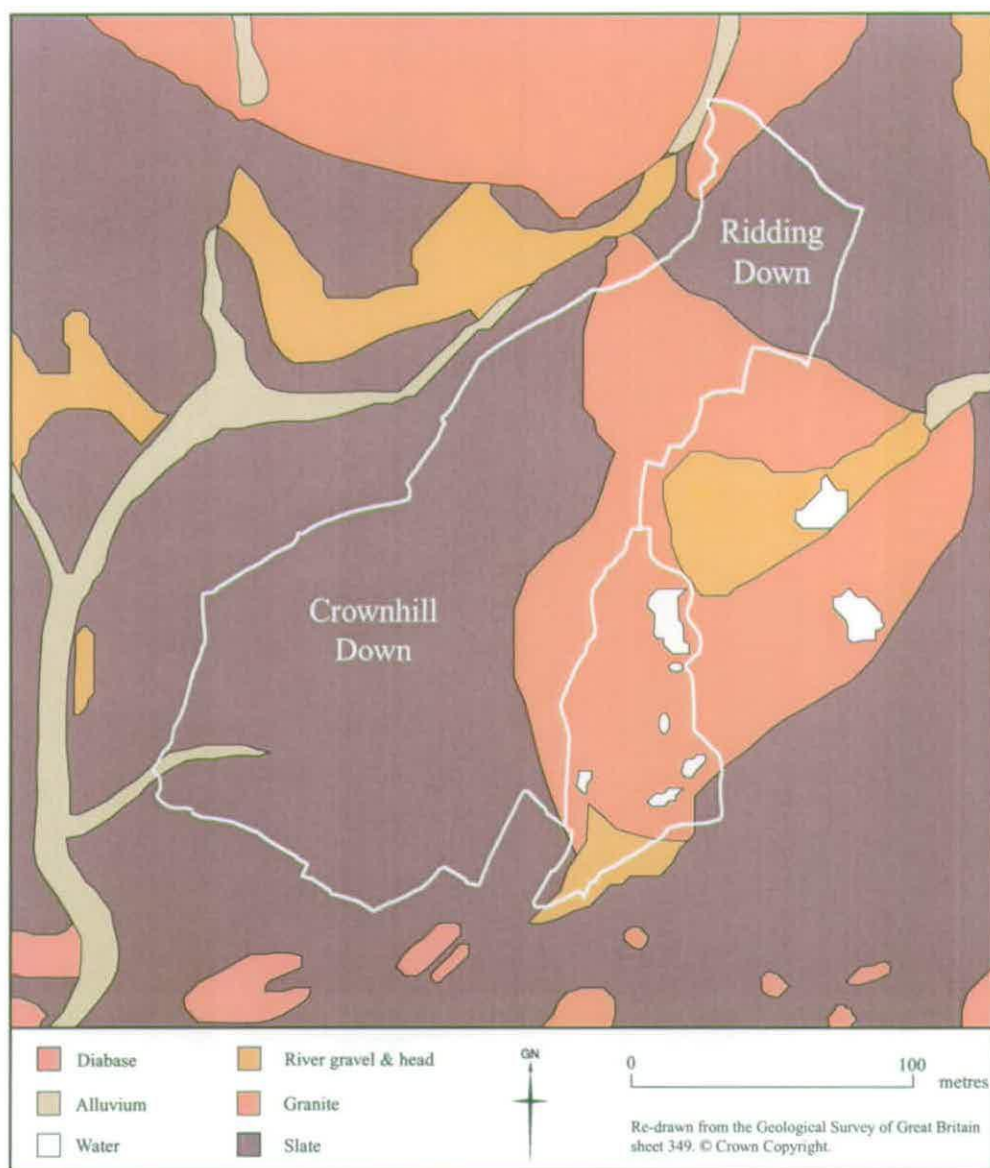
The products of this new EH survey are:

- o An interpretation of the visible archaeology linking it with all the previous research and survey results. This includes industrial sites, some of which were recorded for the first time.
- o The provision of digitally generated, geo-referenced survey data which will be linked to the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 scale Landline survey and incorporated into the EH GIS (HSIS) system, to include archaeological remains from all periods.
- o An overview of the archaeological multi-period landscape and an individual record for each site for the National Monument Record and the Devon Sites and Monuments Register.
- o The provision of an assessment on the current condition of the area including notes on vegetation and effects of current land management.

### **Geology, topography and land-use**

Crownhill Down and Ridding Down occur at the interface between the intruded granite mass and the altered shales of the metamorphic aureole. The geological map (Fig. 2) reveals that much of Ridding Down as well as the western and southern parts of Crownhill Down are composed of slate of the Upper Devonian period. There is very little surface stone visible here save for a few minor outcrops of slate - much with pronounced white quartz veins - and widely scattered surface stones. The remainder of the area, including the northern part of Crownhill Down and the north-western fringe of Ridding Down, is formed from granite of the igneous period. The extent of this granite intrusion is indicated on the surface not only by a prominent outcrop called Crownhill Tor but also by a number of minor outcrops as well as the spread of large boulders and stones.

The surface cover of peat and soil is very sparse such that much of the surface of both downs is extremely fragile. The vegetation is currently close-cropped moorland turf on Crownhill Down and



*Fig. 2. Map showing underlying geology of Crownhill Down and Ridding Down.*

rough grassland on Ridding Down - although significant areas are covered by either dense concentrations of mature gorse or scattered gorse clumps with localised swathes of bracken. The dense gorse, which provides shelter for livestock but obscures significant tracts of land, was largely absent in the late 1970s (RCHME APs 1978).

There is a marked difference between the appearance of the upstanding archaeological features located on the granite areas and those that lie on the shale areas. The granite monuments, constructed of large boulders and stones are far more robust than their neighbours built from shale fragments and soil. The latter survive mostly as slight features - in many ways reminiscent of the archaeological monuments located on the Exmoor shale.

In the absence of recorded archaeological excavations on the downs interpretation of standing monuments relies on observation and comparison with similar features on Dartmoor and elsewhere. The dating and identification of the numerous stone and earthen banks relies on the somewhat basic observation, borne out by excavation elsewhere, that prehistoric banks on Dartmoor are generally built of stones, slabs and boulders; there is usually no visible associated ditch. This type of prehistoric wall is predominantly of Middle Bronze Age origin. Banks of medieval date, whilst fairly substantial, are usually of earthen construction, incorporating usable stone, with one, perhaps two,

side ditches. This rule of thumb does however depend to some extent on the locally available building materials; it is also complicated by the fact that boundaries are often reused such that the line of a prehistoric bank can be fossilised and obscured by a medieval bank built over it. Similarly some linear, contour-following banks and their ditches have been integrated into the alignment of a leat used to convey water across a slope. The characteristic form of construction in prehistoric features on the downs includes large in-line granite grounders and slabs in the areas where an abundance of surface granite is readily available. However, where this material is not to hand, prehistoric banks can be very slight with just a thin core of stone often covered by soil. The majority of the banks on the downs, whether prehistoric or medieval, are now no more than 0.7m high. It is possible that the remains that survive served as the bases for thicket hedges (Fleming 1998,110) although erosion and stone robbing have damaged many features. The exceptions are the few surviving medieval corn ditches which comprise a vertical stone-faced bank averaging 1.2m high with a deep ditch to the outside.

## FIELD EVIDENCE

### **Prehistoric remains**

Two groups of round barrows occur on Crownhill Down, including a very fine ridge-top alignment of ten barrows; these probably represent the earliest upstanding archaeology. Both groups comprise earthen round mounds on average 9m in diameter and 0.5m high; some stones are visible within the fabric of the disturbed areas. A number have flat tops, one is a ring bank and most have been at least superficially disturbed in one way or another. One round barrow on Ridding Down is apparently respected by a nearby reave whilst its near neighbour stands within a prehistoric plot.

The dominant prehistoric features are a number of well-defined reaves and parallel field patterns which are laid out in a systematic way mostly on a NE-SW orientation. A particularly impressive linear system, which lies to the west of Crownhill Tor is demarcated by strong stony banks and lynchets incorporating numerous large granite boulders and stones. This particular field pattern was laid out with apparently scant regard for the topography as it lies diagonally across a steep, undulating part of Crownhill Down. A straight reave which crosses Ridding Down is visible as a very slight stony line which has in places been overlaid and fossilised by a medieval bank. Parts are being disturbed by agricultural activity. The fragmentary remains of an associated parallel reave system to the south-east are evident as an 0.3m high, 0.5m wide earth and stone bank in rough grassland. This system extends southwards into enclosed farmland where the parallel pattern clearly survives either as slight banks or is fossilised by 18/19th-century field walls. On the western part of Ridding Down a number of curvilinear boulder/stone field boundaries clearly indicate the western extension of the central prehistoric reave system.

A significant number of hut circles and hut platforms survive on Crownhill Down; all are likely to be chronologically associated with the reaves system if not physically so. The sites of a few of the round huts are visible simply as 7m diameter circular platforms cut into the slope with a slight enclosing bank perhaps containing one or two boulders. Some of the huts have an internal diameter of 11m, whilst the largest is 15m with a double-faced stone wall on average 0.6m high.

Non-reave settlement, of a probable later date, is represented by a small sub-circular enclosure on the NW slopes of Crownhill Down. It has no associated hut circles and was probably re-used in the medieval period.

No ritual monuments in the form of standing stones, stone circles or stone rows were identified on either Ridding Down or Crownhill Down.

### **Medieval remains**

During the medieval period parts of both downs, especially on their fringes, were enclosed by earthen field banks. The prehistoric reave system was at least partially incorporated into this medieval scheme. These earthen banks, usually ditched on one side, are on average spread to 1.9m wide and are up to 0.7m high.

An undocumented medieval settlement located towards the north-west part of Crownhill Down comprises the well-preserved footings of a longhouse, cut into the slope, plus two smaller outbuildings - probably barns. A further undocumented settlement nearby to the south, now completely obscured by gorse, comprises the footings of one longhouse, appended to a former reave, and one outbuilding ( National Monument Record SX 56 SE 129). The occupants of these farmsteads most probably reused the prehistoric plots in addition to enclosing fresh areas of moorland. The associated enclosures of the medieval farmstead at Broomage (on the northern edge of Crownhill Down) first documented in 1249 (Gover et al 1969, 269), also utilised parts of the adjacent prehistoric field system. Expansion of the farm, probably between the 17th and 19th centuries included additional stone-walled fields on the west side which also follow the general alignment of the reaves. The robust granite buildings of the farmstead, still roofed in 1951, are now roofless ruins standing to gable height; fields are used for grazing livestock, though some of the walls are derelict.

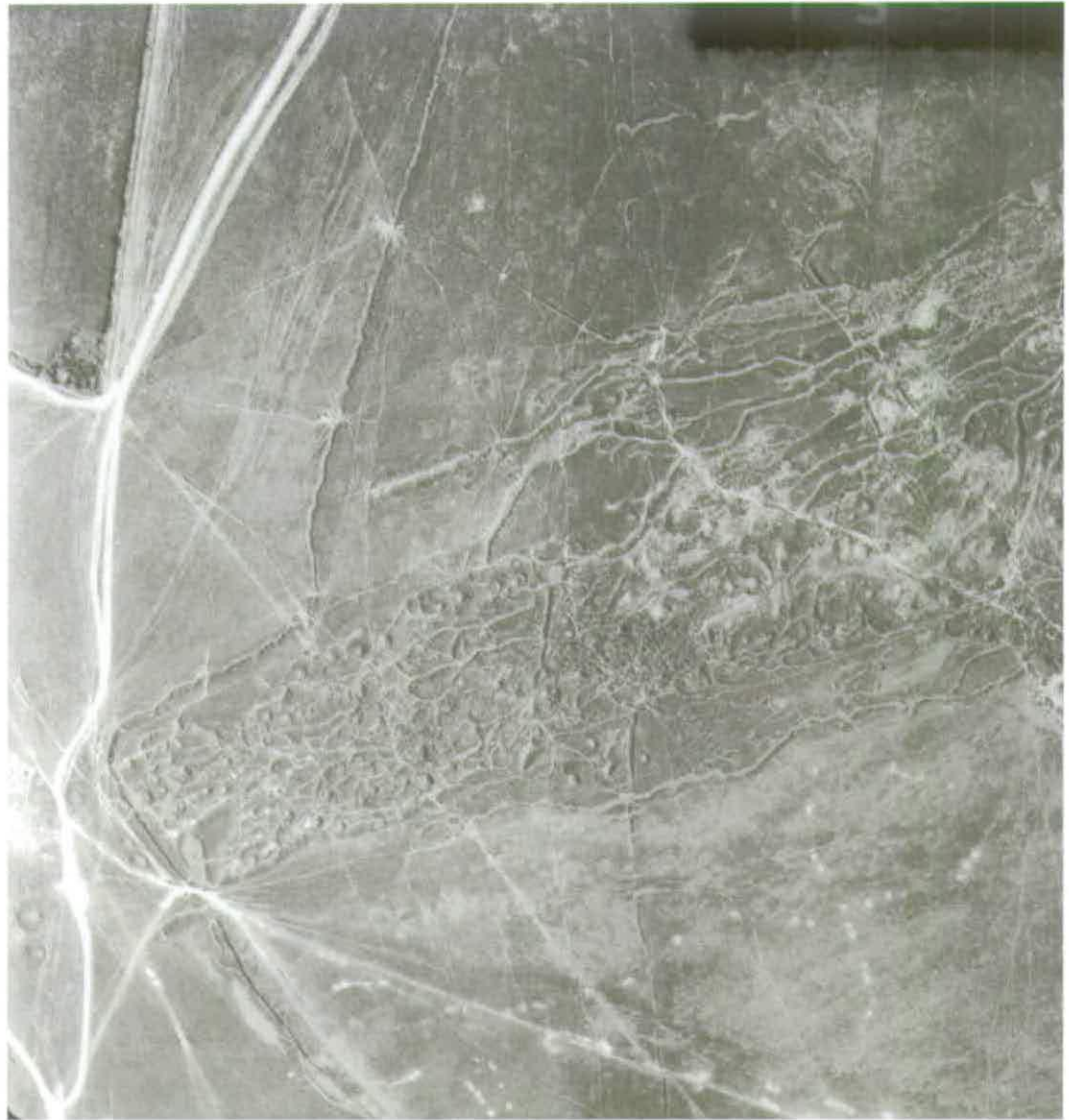
A fairly unique field pattern, identified in the 1970s lies on a moderate slope in the central part of Crownhill Down. It comprises narrow linear strips of sloping ground sub-divided by low thin banks, stony lines or narrow ditches; occasionally the bank has an associated ditch. These stony lines and thin banks are no more than 0.2m high. There is no obvious enclosure bank although two disused contour leats appear to delimit the area - which could once have been bounded by a timber fence. They were described and planned by Gilbertson and Collis (1985) who tentatively identified them as outfield cultivation dated to the medieval or post-medieval, period. A second, but much smaller area of strips, again apparently unenclosed, lies to the south of the road on the southern edge of Crownhill Down.

### **Industrial Remains**

The dominant features associated with the industrial activity are the leats, which negotiate the undulating hillside, mostly following the contours. These narrow earthwork channels diverted water from the upper reaches of the Tory Brook to various mines and clay works located near the southern end of Crownhill Down. Two of these leats, including the Old Bottle Hill leat and its several branches, originally supplied the large tin streamwork which extends across the southern end of Crownhill Down, and both once terminated at earthwork reservoirs, where water was stored for the streaming process. They were adapted for later mining; the Bottle Hill Leat supplying Bottle Hill Mine, first recorded in 1715 (Hamilton Jenkin 1974, 125) to the south while the lower leat may have supplied Wheal Florence (below). Additionally one or two leats were either built, or diverted, to provide pot-water to Broomage Farm and Mumford Cottage. Other leats at lower altitude on the down probably supplied mines to the south, including Hemerdon.

A large, 1.3km-long tin streamwork which extends east to west across in the southern part of Crownhill Down, once worked shallow alluvial tin deposits. This tinwork is unusual in that the typical systematic rows of spoil are absent in favour of a more haphazard dumping system. There is also an abnormally high number of later pits within the streamwork. Both forms of evidence point to re-working of the original streamwork. Also within the streamwork are the remains of Wheal Florence or Wheal Albert Tin Mine, comprising blocked shaft-heads and spoil tips. Numerous small, silted pits with a slight mound of spoil on the downslope side occur on or near the south and south-





*Fig. 4. Aerial Photograph showing tin streamwork. (RCHME SX5760/1/157. English Heritage copyright.*

east edges of Crownhill Down (although dense mature gorse obscures much of this area.) These silted pits, which are the evidence of tin prospecting, are on average 0.5m deep.

An important industrial relic, located above the steep western slope of the Torycombe Valley, comprises the footings of a winding engine complete with a rusting steel cable still on a winding axle. In addition there are concrete bases, timber bearers and platforms complete with numerous threaded iron studs. This installation, which was roofed in 1946 (RAF AP) and roofless by 1962 (RAF AP) forms one end of an aerial ropeway which once extended across the Torycombe Valley. It may have been built to dump china-clay waste into the valley. A large spoil tip, depicted here on the Ordnance Survey map dated 1886, had been greatly extended by 1946 (RAF AP) but it has since been completely removed.

The long abandoned remains of the Hemerdon and Broomage Moor china-clay works lie on the eastern side of Crownhill Down. The small clay pit and finger dumps depicted here on the Ordnance Survey map dated 1887 had expanded into an extensive and busy china-clay extraction area by 1906 (Ordnance Survey map 1906). A set of disturbed and truncated 'sky tips' of spoil which dominate the immediate area are part of these early workings. The disused and abandoned china-clay workings to the east, visible as small water-filled clay pits with associated finger spoil dumps, mounds, and broad, dry, water channels also represent the remains of this phase of china-clay extraction. Two small disused reservoirs, which lie to the east of the sky tips, are depicted in 1887



Fig. 5. Details of the Hemerdon and Broomage china-clay works as depicted on the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 1:2500 map dated 1906 (reduced).

and are associated with the earliest phase of china-clay working in the area. Later additions are two overgrown stone and brick built circular thickening tanks with conical interiors and a linear 'mica drag' – all constructed on made-up ground.

An interesting survival on Ridding Down is a concrete pipeline which crosses the low-lying part of the down on a 1.2m-high earthen embankment. Set at fairly regular intervals along the pipe are small concrete access chambers. These are reminiscent of the chambers built into the pipe used to convey china-clay in suspension in water from the Cadover Bridge pits (4 kms to the NW) to the Shaugh Bridge Drying works (SX 56 SW 38). The chambers provided access to the pipe to clear blockages. It seems most likely therefore that this pipeline was built to convey china-clay from a source beyond Tolchmoor Gate to the drying works located in the Torycombe Valley. The precise route the pipe follows after it leaves Ridding Down was not identified because of dense gorse cover.

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### **Below-ground archaeology**

There is no available information on the character or extent of the below-ground archaeology on the downs. Archaeological excavations in the late 1970s at Shaugh Moor (Smith 1981,205) reveal that timber huts and structures lay under the stone round houses which here were dated to the 14th and 13th centuries BC. The 1970s excavations at Holne Moor (Fleming 1988, 72) revealed timber buildings adjacent to a reave. It is not unreasonable to speculate that wooden structures of prehistoric date may once have existed in some areas – most probably pre-dating at least some of the visible remains of stone huts and enclosures

### **Prehistoric features**

The remains of a number Bronze Age barrows or cairns occupy high points across the area and notably two groups form important clusters or cemeteries. One group of six mounds lies on a slight SW-facing slope and the other group of ten is situated on a slight ridge. Their presence is highly significant because they are probably unique as no other comparable barrow cemeteries survive on Dartmoor. The siting of other, individual, barrows on high points across the downs demonstrates the intensive use of the downs in prehistory for both ritual and burial.

Away from the areas which are clearly set aside for burial there is evidence of extensive and organised farming practices in the form of sophisticated patterns of rectilinear fields and reaves. The parallel reave system with its associated huts are comparable in detail, if not scale, to many other examples on Dartmoor though survival to this extent at this altitude is probably unique.

Some very fine example of stone hut circles survive; most have boulder-stone walls some faced inside and out with slabs and boulders. The majority have been extensively robbed.

### **Medieval features**

The undocumented deserted settlements are characteristic of areas of Dartmoor from where occupation and abandonment took place during a short space of time in the middle ages, probably between 1300 and 1450 judging by excavated examples elsewhere. The larger settlement with its longhouse and outbuildings is a good example of familiar type found at such parts of the Dartmoor fringes as Wigford Down, Haytor Down and Roborough Down, though many of these examples exist at much higher altitude. Around the fringes of the downs adjacent to the field walls of the enclosed lands, are the low earthen banks of an abandoned medieval field system

The narrow linear strips of ground, located on the central western slopes of Crownhill Down,

which is demarcated by slight banks, stony lines and shallow channels are a fascinating survival. The areas are now dotted with clumps of mature gorse and rough grass yet the pattern although extremely fragile can be clearly identified. A similar though much smaller set of parallel banks lie at the extreme southern end of Crownhill Down and others have been identified at Foale's Arrishes and at Holne Moor (Gilbertson and Collis 1985,65).

### **Industrial features**

Tin workings on Crownhill Down are recorded between 1563 and 1633 (Edwards 1979,6). The abandoned streamworks, the prospecting pits and the 19th-century Florence Mine indicate an important continuum in the history of this industry. The Bottle Hill leat dates from the 16th century or earlier but was later adapted to supply Bottle Hill Mine which is recorded from 1715. It was still in use in 1887 (Ordnance Survey map dated 1887).

The remains of the Hemerdon and Broomage Moor China-Clay Works in the form of the denuded 'sky tips', water-filled pits, dumps and tanks constitute a significant survival of clay working dating from at least 1870 (Harris 1986, 87). The remains of the china-clay working on Smallhanger Waste - on the southern side of Crownhill Down - are likely to be among the oldest surviving evidence from the clay industry on south-west Dartmoor, such features in other areas having been destroyed by the later progress of the industry. The majority of the conical spoil tips associated with the industry on the Dartmoor fringe have now been either cleared or, more likely, incorporated in large linear spoil tips

The contour-following leats crossing the downs are a reminder of the difficulty some large mining enterprises had to secure adequate water supplies. A large reservoir with an earthen retaining bank, situated behind Florence Mine is an important survival of another method of supplying water to the workings.

### **Significance of landscape context and setting**

The archaeological landscape on Crownhill Down and Ridding Down is at the very least of regional importance. It is significant because it uniquely demonstrates the activities of successive generations of settlers and workers who each in their turn used the local materials and extracted the minerals, here at the interface between moorland and hinterland. Additionally it represents the impressive survival of a combination of fragile archaeological and industrial working sites. It is not only important when viewed from within but equally when viewed from beyond its own setting because it forms part an integral part of a wider landscape which links the high moor to the north to the lowlands and the English Channel to the south.

There are a number of sites protected as scheduled monuments.

### **Archaeological overview of zones on the Down**

#### *Ridding Down*

This area, now primarily under rough pasture, is both archaeologically important and extremely fragile. The monuments, including the prehistoric reaves are very slight. Two scheduled barrows and medieval banks add to the importance. Damage in the form of two cuttings for vehicular access to a temporary horse riding course has recently been sustained. An unmarked access track to Mumford Bungalow has moved 'sideways' across a broad swathe of the down as the wet conditions dictate disfiguring the area; recent dumping of spoil on one of the tracks has further damaged the area

### *Crownhill Down*

The ridge-top barrow alignment is a unique survival of its type within the Dartmoor environs. The fragile linear field strips or 'stone lines' provide an unusual additional dimension to the archaeology here.

Over-stocking on the down in the past has resulted in close grazing of the delicate ground cover. Horse riding and off-road cycling has turned well-defined paths to rutted muddy patches. Paradoxically the dense mature gorse bushes have protected the archaeological sites from damage by animals and walkers but they will have damaged the sub surface area by their root growth.

### *The abandoned area of china-clay diggings*

The disused china-clay works is an interesting survival with its truncated and disturbed sky-tips complete with well-preserved circular and linear tanks.

The extensive area of heavily disturbed ground located on the east side of Crownhill Down comprises abandoned working, dumps and deep scars. A fishing lake has been created out of one of the smaller water-filled pits; cross-country bicycle tracks are eroding paths and the whole area resembles an overgrown lunar landscape.

### *The south eastern part of Crownhill Down and the area to the south of the road*

Car parking and visitor pressure is threatening to disturb the fragile archaeology although the dense gorse cover protects some features. Numerous tin prospecting pits, leats and low earth and stone banks comprise the visible archaeology in this area.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX GAZETTEER OF NMR AND SMR NUMBERS

<u>Hob UID</u>	<u>NMR N°</u>	<u>SMR N°</u>	<u>Description</u>
439195	SX56SE30	SX56SE79	Cross shaft
439199	SX56SE32	SX56SE63	Worked stone
439306	SX56SE70	SX56SE100	Hut circles and field system
439309	SX56SE71	SX56SE129	Cairn
439312	SX56SE72	SX56SE77	Round barrows
439444	SX56SE119	SX56SE68	Reave system
439447	SX56SE120	SX56SE94	Holed stone
439450	SX56SE121	SX56SE96	Round barrow
439453	SX56SE122	SX56SE143	Field system
439456	SX56SE123	SX56SE123	Longhouse
439474	SX56SE129	SX56SE144	Farmstead
439477	SX56SE130	SX56SE101	Enclosure
439480	SX56SE131	SX56SE330	? hut scoops
439510	SX56SE141	SX56SE135	Field system
439537	SX56SE152	SX56SE191	Hut circles and field walls
910497	SX56SE154	SX56SE157	Hut circles
910500	SX56SE155	SX56SE456	Field system
1343800	SX56SE207	SX56SE457	Leat
1343805	SX56SE208	SX56SE518	Boundary stones
1355137	SX56SE212	SX55NE145	Bomb craters
1355184	SX56SE213		Fields
1355192	SX56SE214	SX55NE144	Leat
1362200	SX56SE248	SX55NE185	Field system
1363632	SX56SE249	SX55NE155	Winding engine house
1363695	SX56SE250	SX55NE96	Boundary stones
1363697	SX56SE251	SX55NE152	Building foundations
1363730	SX56SE252		Broomage Farm
1363740	SX56SE253		Hut circle and field walls
1363907	SX56SE254		Well
1363913	SX56SE255		Scoop
438396	SX55NE4		Round barrow
438398	SX55NE6	SX55NE 1-9	Round barrow
438405	SX55NE13	SX55NE14	Tin Mine
438411	SX55NE19	SX55NE8	Round barrows
910252	SX55NE21	SX55NE160	Stony mounds
910269	SX55NE22	SX55NE33	Field banks
910284	SX55NE23	SX55NE164	Hut circles
910300	SX55NE24		Cairn
910308	SX55NE25	SX55NE140	Tin streamworks
1355107	SX55NE27	SX55NE68	Mounds
1355142	SX55NE28	SX55NE147	Prospecting pits
1355403	SX55NE29	SX55NE165	Leat
1355410	SX55NE30	SX55NE154	Field system
1361802	SX55NE31	SX55NE60	Tin pits
1363014	SX55NE32	SX56SE152	China-clay works
1363025	SX55NE33	SX55NE163	Banks
1363228	SX55NE34	SX55NE155	Leats
1363231	SX55NE35	SX55NE62	Tin pits
1363234	SX55NE36	SX55NE59	Roofless building
1363930	SX55NE37	SX56SE265	Mounds
1367667	SX55NE38	SX55NE	Reservoirs

# Crownhill Down and Ridding Down

  
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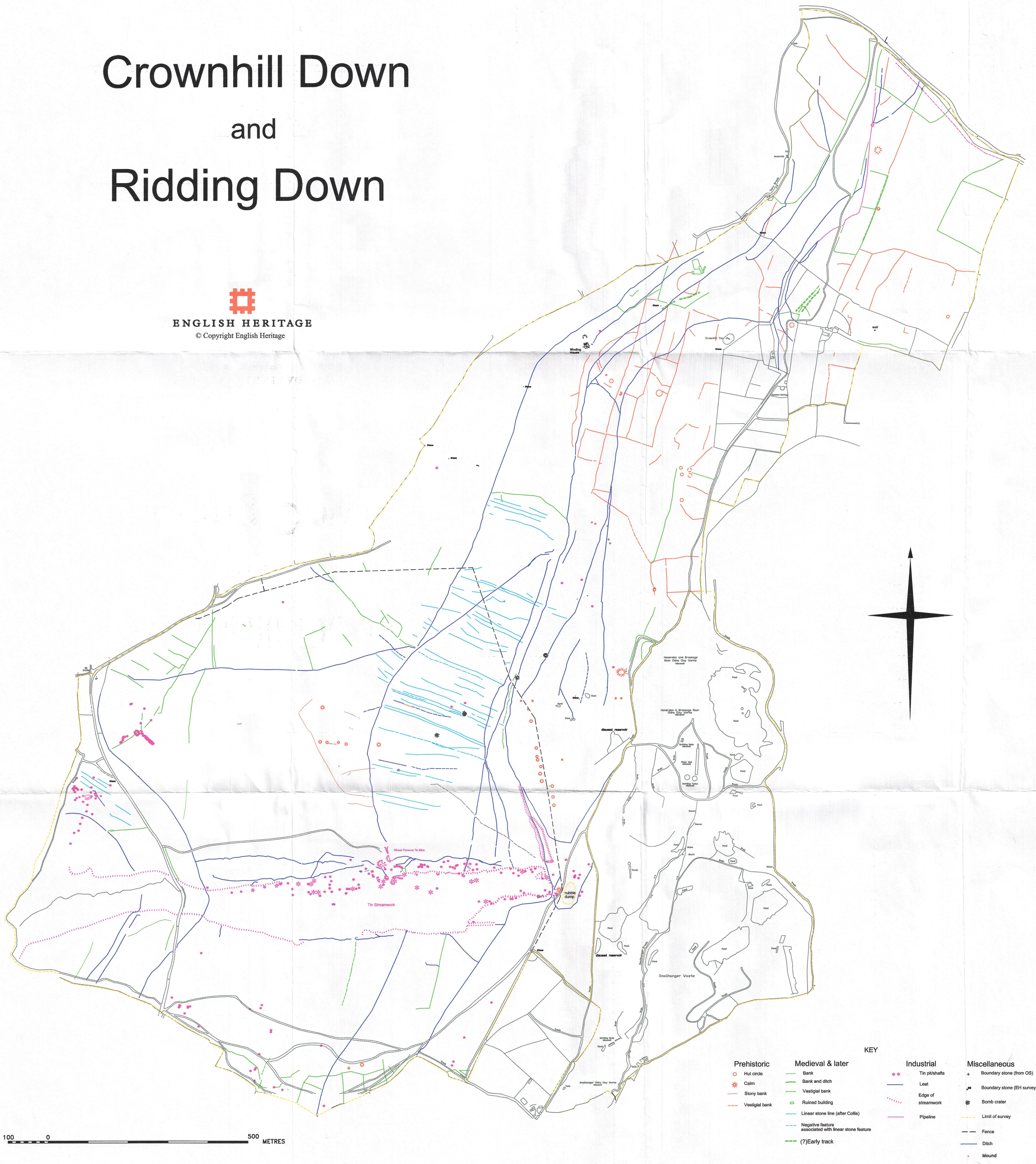


Fig. 3. Crownhill Down and Ridding Down. English Heritage 1:2500 survey on OS Landline base (reduced). For full scale plans see EH Crownhill Down 1:2500 survey sheets 1-3.

  
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