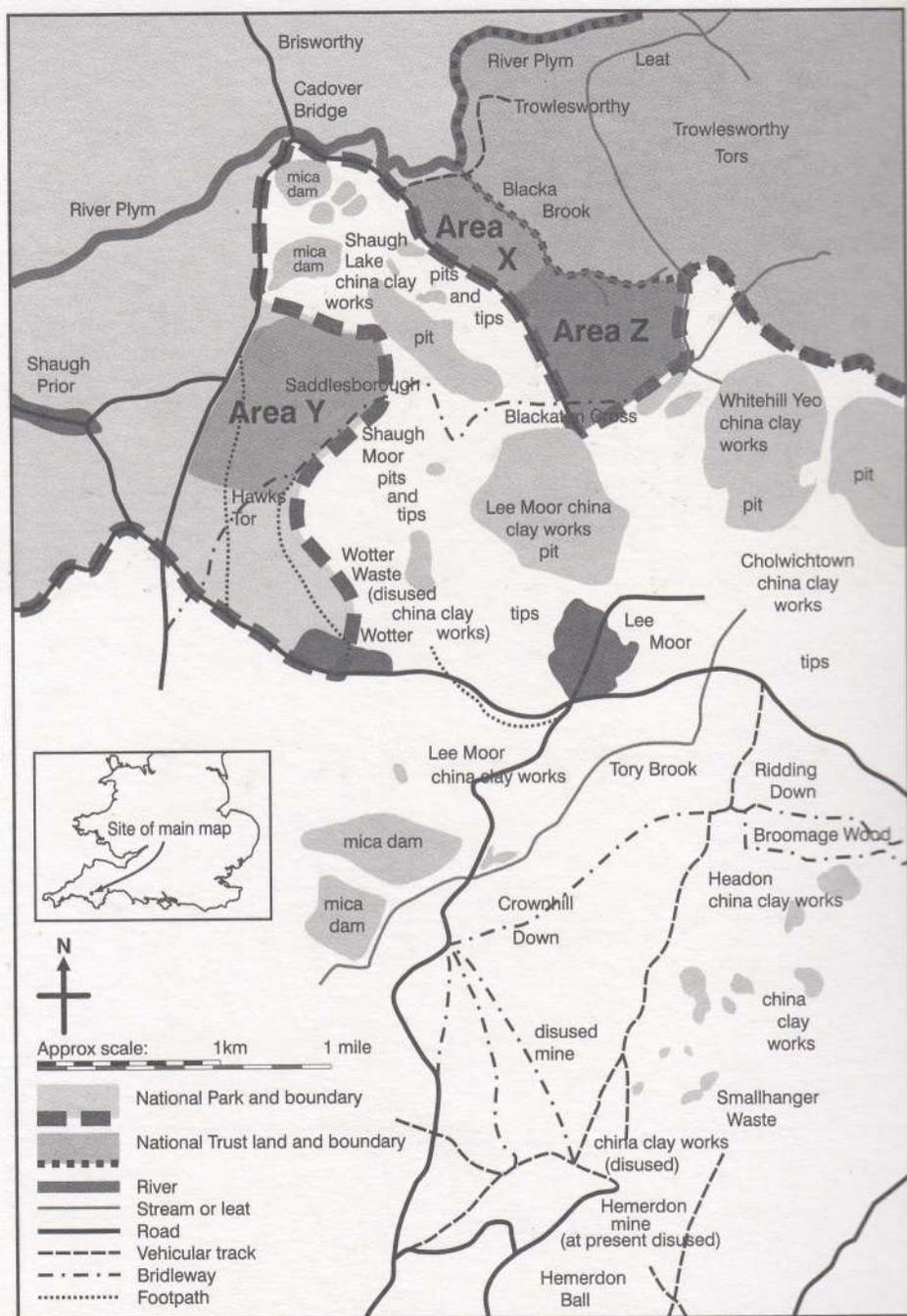




# **SACRED LAND – WORKING LAND**

**Dr Tom Greeves**



# **SACRED LAND – WORKING LAND**

**by Dr Tom Greeves**

The case for the preservation of  
the Blackabrook Valley,  
Crownhill Down  
and Shaugh Moor  
from the expansion  
of the china clay industry.

**Dartmoor Preservation Association**

Publication Number 12



# SACRED LAND



# Preface

Nearly half a century ago mineral planning permissions were granted which will allow the construction of a super-quarry in the Blackabrook Valley on southwestern Dartmoor, and the despoliation of Shaugh Moor and Crownhill Down by waste tipping. The Dartmoor Preservation Association has launched a campaign to protect these important areas forever. The DPA believes it to be quite wrong that countryside of national importance should be under threat from planning permissions granted long ago, in a world that held very different environmental values to the ones we hold today.

The DPA has asked Dr Tom Greeves, the renowned Dartmoor historian and archaeologist, to look again at the three endangered areas and to present a case for their preservation...

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## The Dartmoor Preservation Association

The DPA is a registered charity, existing to protect and preserve public access and interest in Dartmoor. It campaigns to save Dartmoor's landscape; antiquities; flora and fauna; and cultural heritage.



DPA members receive a regular newsletter; share in the ownership of parts of Dartmoor; receive discounts on books and walking equipment; and can participate in our programme of guided walks. If you would like to join the DPA please write to: Dartmoor Preservation Association, Old Duchy Hotel, Princetown, Yelverton, Devon, PL20 6QF, or telephone us on 01822 890646.

Donations to help save the threatened areas of Dartmoor mentioned in this publication can be sent to the above address, and should be marked "China Clay Appeal". We would be grateful if readers could also write letters to their own MP (at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA) and to the Prime Minister (at 10 Downing Street, London, SW1). *Thank you for your support.*

# WORKING LAND



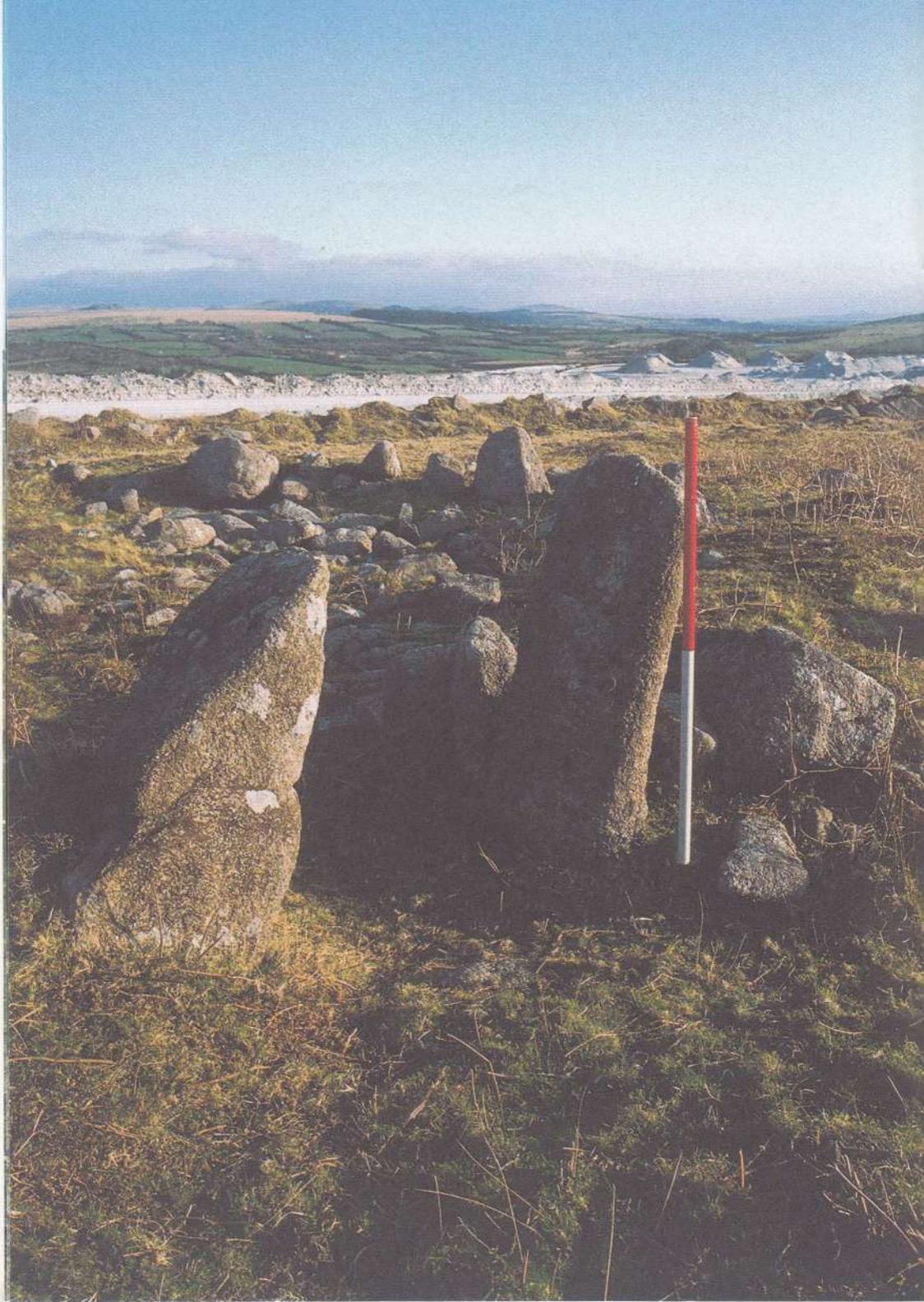
## THE MINERAL WORKING AREA OF SOUTH-WEST DARTMOOR

The car-borne travellers from Cornwood who take the road to Lee Moor, Wotter and on to Cadover Bridge across the River Plym cannot fail to notice that in their journey of five miles or so they have passed through an extraordinary industrial landscape. Dusty white buildings where china clay is processed are interspersed with huge heaps of waste and vast quarry pits.

Yet the observer also gets an impression of occasional rocky outcrops, ancient oak woodland and stretches of open moorland. Among natural gems are Whitehill Tor, perched above the Torycombe valley and Collard Tor, the latter having prehistoric stone rows and field systems close by it, a short distance above the village of Wotter. Another evocative place is Broomage Wood, accessible by bridlepaths and situated between Ridging Down and the Headon China Clay Works. Here, a long history of management of oak woodland, now sadly neglected, has preserved a rich archaeological landscape of several large prehistoric hut circles with associated boundaries, as well as a likely medieval building which may be the site of 'Nether Bromeweche' recorded in 1282. Only 200m above sea level, these are some of the lowest altitude prehistoric dwellings known in the Dartmoor area and must be representative of a type of settlement once much more widespread but now largely obliterated by agricultural fields and other activity.



Prehistoric hut circle in Broomage Wood



There is nothing new about exploiting the earth's resources in this part of Dartmoor. There are records of tinworking in the vicinity as far back as the 12th century, and in about 1540 the traveller John Leland noted that the water of the Torycombe, which flows from Lee Moor to Plympton, hugging the west side of Crownhill Down, 'is always redde by the Sand that it rennith on and caryeth from the Tynne Workes with it'. Records of stonecutting date back to the 14th century. China clay has been worked here since 1830 and local people are employed in the industry. The distinctive settlements of Lee Moor and Wotter owe their existence to clayworking. China clay is, for the moment, valuable as an export, as tin metal once was several hundred years ago. It is used extensively in the manufacture of paper, ceramics, paints, plastics and pharmaceuticals.

To many people, especially those whose livelihood is connected with it, the vigorous activity is immensely exciting. But the scale of recent work is highly destructive of the land, not only in terms of quarrying, but even more so by tipping. For every tonne of clay produced seven tonnes of waste need to be disposed of. Some nine square kilometres of ground are already affected on southwest Dartmoor and the landform has been irrevocably changed.

Where quarrying and tipping have not yet taken place and where open moorland or woodland survives, an equally extraordinary spectacle can be observed - the marks of human response to the land stretching back at least four thousand years. Prehistoric fields and houses, stone rows and cairns, medieval farmsteads, boundstones, pits of stonecutters and tanners, leats, the diggings of peatcutters and of military trenches of this century, besides a fascinating array of relics of the clay industry itself, are laid out in an amazingly rich amalgam of cultural significance which is only just beginning to be understood and recorded. *Modern clayworking obliterates all such features.* Most of what was there has been destroyed with little or no record, despite occasional archaeological comment from the early 19th century onwards. The first detailed description was published in 1973. Important excavations took place of a prehistoric stone row near Cholwichtown in 1961, and of a complete enclosed prehistoric settlement and other features on Shaugh Moor in the late 1970s. Extensive archaeological survey has taken place in some areas, but much of the ground has yet to be explored in any detail, and the discipline of archaeology is relatively new and dynamic, which means that new interpretations and discoveries are constantly being made.

The boundary of Dartmoor National Park runs through the area. It was modified in 1994 to exclude some working areas, and to take in some stretches of open moorland, despite a threat of tipping waste there. Surprisingly, the ancient homestead of Cholwichtown, one of the most historic settlements on the flank of Dartmoor, documented since at least the early 13th century when the estate was granted to Benedict Siward, and a key reference point for future generations, was excluded, as was the magnificent breezy moorland of Crownhill Down.

The latter is included within the officially designated Dartmoor Environmentally Sensitive Area (1993) and was also recognised in 1997 by English Nature for its 'regional importance' as lowland heathland, a category of characteristic vegetation and wildlife rapidly declining across Europe as a whole.



Ruins of Broomage Farm, with Headon Down beyond

So perhaps society today is not really sure how to treat this land? Three or four thousand years ago people were much more confident – there can be little doubt that they considered the land to be sacred, and placed their religious and ritual sites over it in the form of burial cairns, stone rows and other structures. Often these features are on the highest places such as Saddlesborough or Headon and suggest respect for ancestors as well as a marking out of communal territory.

The success of the modern china clay industry in meeting the world's seemingly insatiable demand for its product contains real dangers for this part of Dartmoor. Nothing here is static. The majority of permissions for winning and working clay were granted in the 1950s, when 5,000 acres (2025 ha) were allocated for working, and huge areas remain under threat.

Besides clayworking, another giant industry in the form of tungsten mining by North American Tungsten at Hemerdon Ball is set to make its mark on an unprecedented scale within the relatively near future. The company has outline permission to obliterate more than one square kilometre of Crownhill Down under waste, right up to the 200m contour level. Permission was granted in June 1986 on condition that a processing plant is built by 2001.

But all is not yet lost – under the *Environment Act 1995* mineral operators have to update the conditions attached to their historic permissions (even forty or more years ago). This process is known as a ROMP (Review of Old Mineral Permission). For this part of Dartmoor ROMPs began in the summer of 1998 - these are especially relevant to Areas X and Z on Shaugh Moor. All permissions since 1982 are subject to a 15-year review.

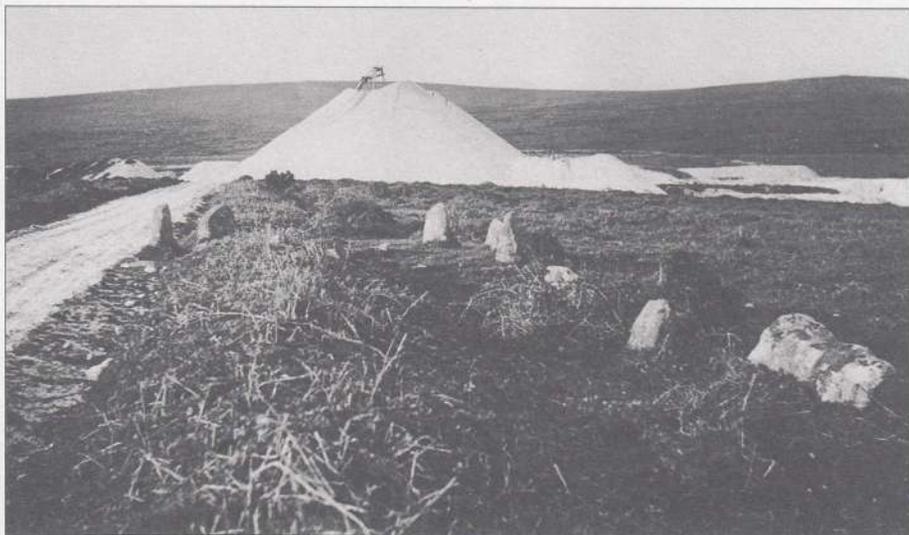
A part of Shaugh Moor known as Area Y, especially rich in visible prehistoric remains, was saved in November 1978 for 30 years and in July 1997 a further agreement was made not to tip there for at least 15 years i.e. until 2012. At the same time a formal agreement was made with the Dartmoor National Park Authority that no work would take place in a strip of land bordering the south side of the River Plym between Cadover Bridge and the Blackabrook. These agreements, whether formal or informal, show that there is always scope for negotiation. Most important of all is for the general public and local communities to be well informed about what is known about the land and why people value it, for whatever reason. The process of getting to know this land better, on foot or by horseback, will give confidence to be involved in decision-making for the future. Recognition is the key.

Society has changed so much since the 1950s in terms of environmental awareness that new criteria must be applied to clayworking in an area of such evident cultural and ecological significance as Dartmoor. Pressure must build to ensure that no future work is done without a full 'environmental impact statement'. Most importantly, this area of Dartmoor has to be seen as a vital and dynamic link between lowland (often urban) Devon and the high moor.

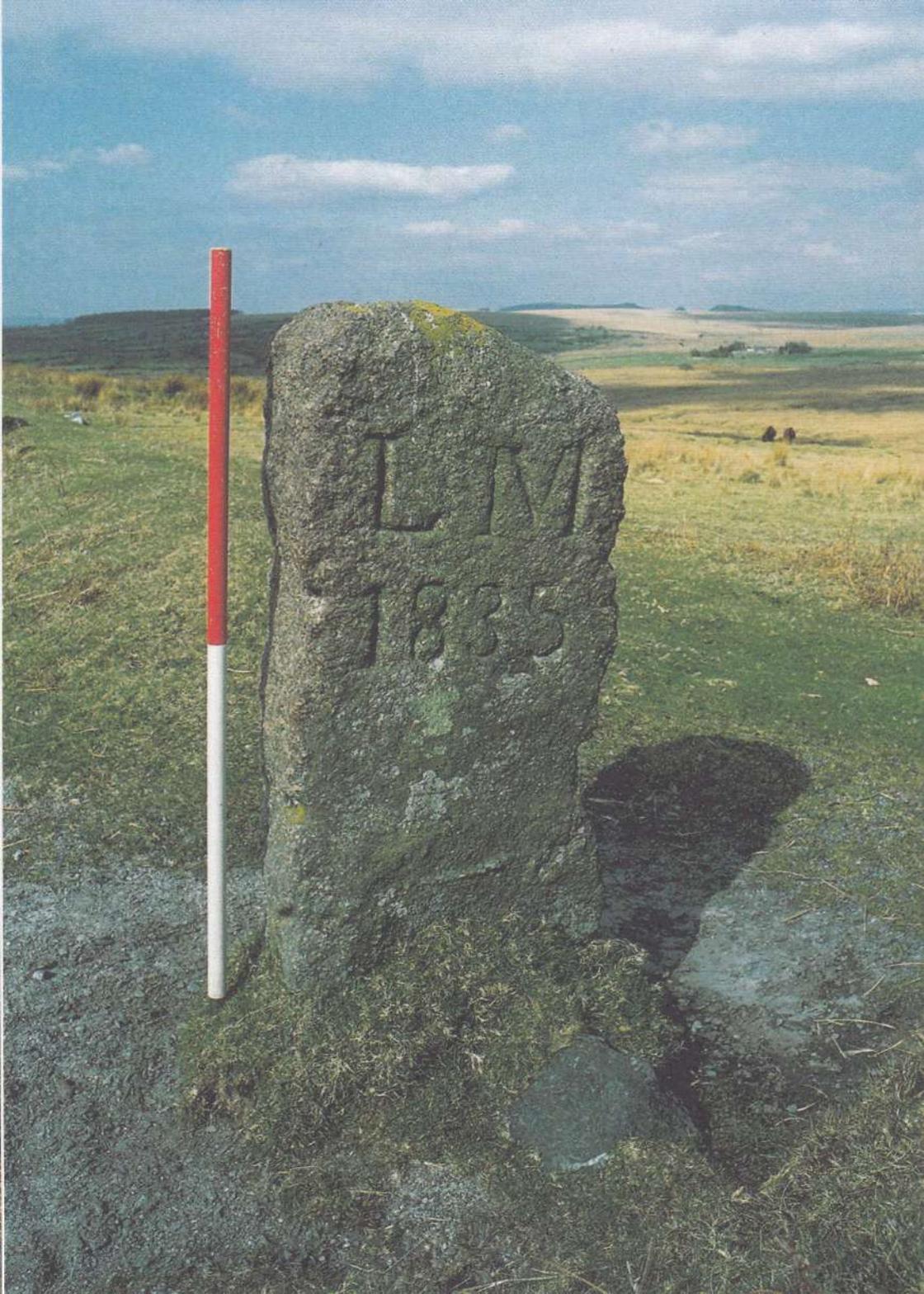
In the rest of this booklet we will take a look at the three threatened areas in more detail and explain why we owe it to future generations to argue a rational case for long-term conservation of much of this land.

The key areas are the following:

1. Cadover Bridge - Blackabrook (including Areas X and Z) (page 11);
2. Blackaton Cross - Saddlesborough - Hawks Tor (including Area Y) (page 17);
3. Crownhill Down - Smallhanger - Headon Down (page 23).



Prehistoric stone row near Cholwichtown in 1914 (since destroyed). (Photograph: S. Taylor.)



LM  
1835

## CADOVER BRIDGE AND THE BLACKABROOK VALLEY (including Areas X and Z)

Immensely popular as a place of recreation, the vicinity of Cadover Bridge is an extraordinary landscape of both ancient and modern industrial activity. A memorable incident took place at 'Cadworthybrigge' at one o'clock in the morning of St. Bartholomew's Eve (the night of 23rd/24th August) 1519, when men (armed with arrows and swords) exchanged sacks of stolen unsmelted tin which they had brought from near Cornwood.



Water from clayworks joining R. Plym above Cadover Bridge

Some of the earliest records of tinworking on Dartmoor are associated with this area in the 12th century AD, when men of Brisworthy were fined for illegal digging for tin. Standing on the bridge more than 400 years ago and looking upstream, smoke would have been seen issuing from the furnace of a tin blowing mill, close to the river below Brisworthy, where tin was turned into ingots of metal. Harry Am of Meavy, and his two sons John and William occupied this mill in 1560. Little can be seen on the site now. Then the river probably ran red with waste from tinworks; nowadays, it turns milky white when waste water is released from the adjoining clayworks to the south.



View on the Blackabrook (Areas X and Z) looking north

A wide perspective of Dartmoor is seen. Besides the visitors, it is a busy place – clay lorries trundle by, as do occasional farmers on tractors or quad bikes, checking the wellbeing of their sheep and ponies. In 1997 an agreement was made between the Dartmoor National Park Authority and Watts Blake Bearne & Co, that the clay company would not disturb the ground on the south side of the River Plym between Cadover Bridge and the start of the track to Trowlesworthy Farm. This was good news – besides the beauty of the river itself, there is much to interest the explorer: a stone with an incised ‘C’ can be found beside the road, a short distance upstream from the bridge, marking the limit of responsibility of the county of Devon for the ground extending from the bridge. A fine oxbow lake can also be found, being an old course of the river, as well as fascinating ‘finger-tip’ spoilheaps from earlier clayworkings, by the start of the track to Trowlesworthy Farm.

All seems relatively settled, but the picture is misleading. Below Trowlesworthy Farm (in the ownership of the National Trust) a stream joins the Plym from the south. It is called the Blackabrook, and it is here that the greatest changes to the landscape are due to happen unless alternative solutions are found. The area between the old road to Blackaton Cross and the west side of the stream, right to its source, has been prospected for clay and deposits found to exist to a depth of at least 100m. Permissions to quarry for clay here were given in the 1950s, and the clay companies (both Watts Blake Bearne and



Ancient tinworks on the Blackabrook (Area Z)

English China Clays International) are keen to start work within a few years. It is estimated that some 40 years of working could take place (the location is now known as Area X and Area Z in planning parlance). A quarry up to 40m deep would be created. The results would be devastating, not only to the immediate surroundings of the stream, but also wherever the waste from the works was dumped. The setting of the National Trust land at Trowlesworthy would be changed for ever.

To walk beside the Blackabrook is to enter a typical Dartmoor world of beauty. Here snipe, dipper and heron can be seen. The crystal clear water sparkles melodiously over stones. The walker and explorer is protected from the impact of the clayworks to the west. Traces of ancient tinworking can be seen – most spectacularly in the form of at least a dozen long parallel banks of spoil near the head of the stream, which show the medieval tinnners' techniques admirably. Deep gullies cut into the land surface right at the head of the stream, revealing the white clay ground. These gullies themselves are ancient, with slight traces of ancient tinnners leats leading into them, and at least one possible small reservoir used by the tinnners to store water before washing away their waste. The peat at the very head of the Blackabrook has been found to be important environmentally as a source of ancient pollen, from which information can be gleaned about past vegetation and climate, back into prehistory.

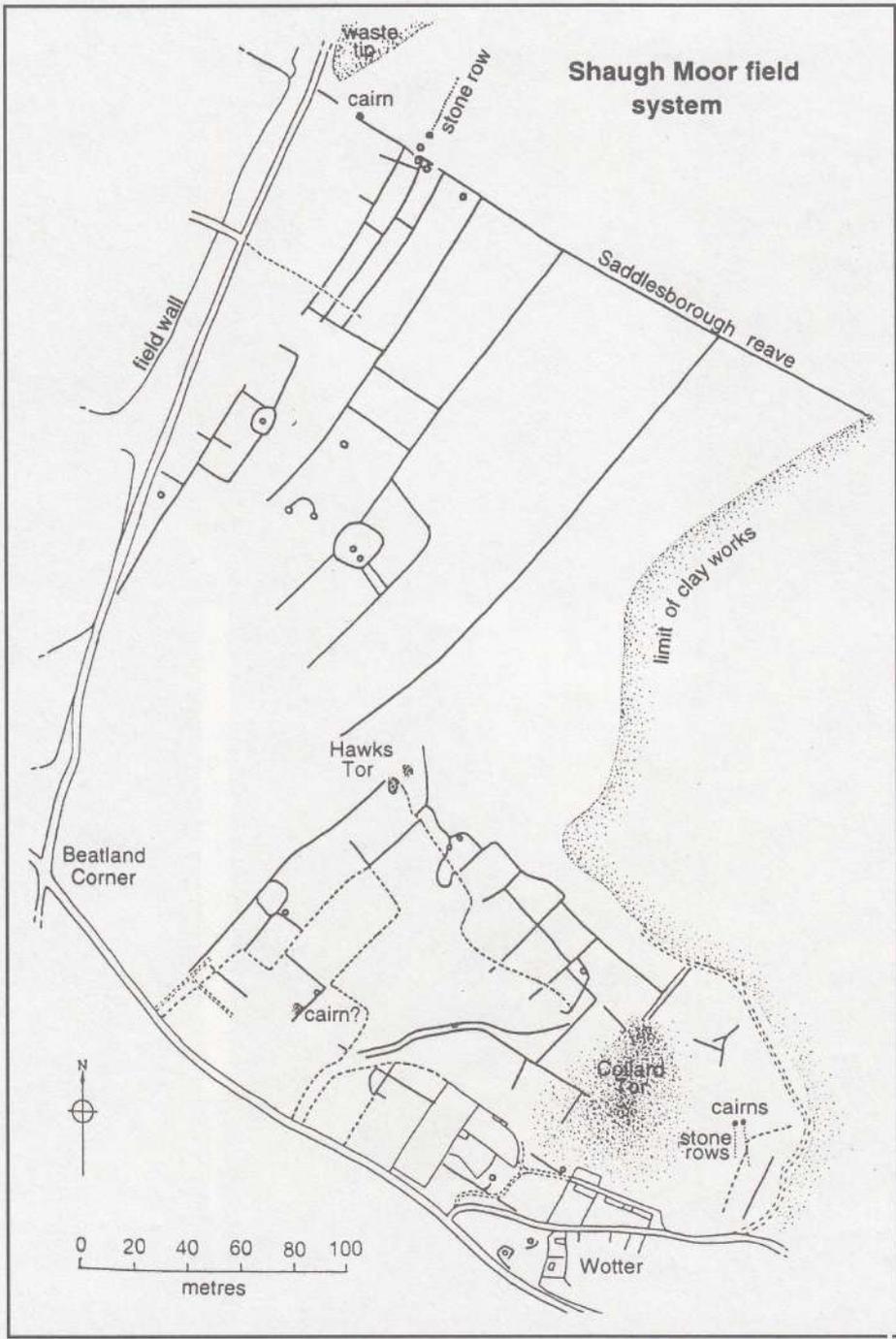


Tinners' gullies at head of the Blackabrook (Area Z)

Three inscribed stones can be found (though the middle one is lying flat and half-buried), set up to mark the boundary between Lee Moor and Shaugh Moor in 1835. Little of this ground has yet been systematically explored and surveyed archaeologically - traces of the medieval 'Tavistock road' can be observed deviating from the line of the present route from Cadover to Blackaton Cross. Fragments of prehistoric bank can still be seen close to the Blackabrook itself, as can old leats, military trenches of probable Second World War date, and trenches of turf cutters. All these contain messages for the future and ourselves. We run the risk of losing it all before we have barely had a chance to recognise its importance.



# Shaugh Moor field system



## BLACKATON CROSS – SADDLESBOROUGH – HAWKS TOR (including Area Y)

Blackaton Cross is a striking feature and ancient boundmark beside the old road that once linked Tavistock with Cornwood and Ivybridge. Now accompanied by signs warning of the adjacent clayworks, it is difficult to imagine the impact the sight of the granite cross would have made to the medieval traveller cresting the rise from the south and starting a descent to Cadover Bridge.

A short distance to the west, is the conspicuous landmark of Emmett's Post, a granite post, bearing the letters LM and SM cut on opposing faces, set on top of a prehistoric burial mound or barrow. Sadly, despite being a scheduled ancient monument and supposedly legally protected, the barrow has, on its north side, been clipped by a clayworks road marking the southern limit of the vast Shaugh Quarry. Yet it still survives defiantly and can almost certainly be identified with 'Shutaborough otherwise Shutterhills otherwise Rowtrundle otherwise Roundtrendle' according to a description of 1753.

No more than 150m of original landform now separates two of the largest clayworking quarries here and the fragile survival of this land is most apparent when walking



Prehistoric embanked enclosure, Shaugh Moor (Area Y)



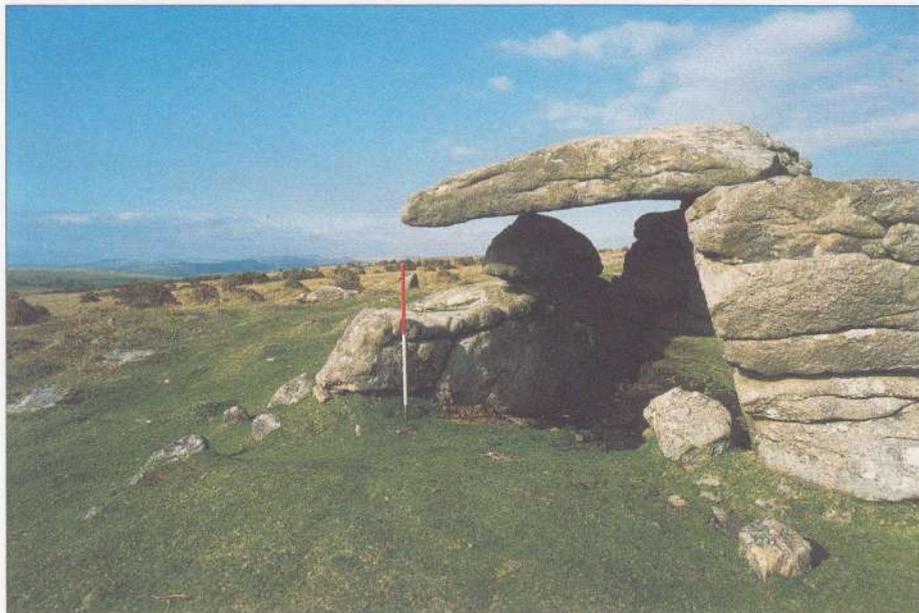
Prehistoric hut circle and enclosure on N slope of Saddlesborough (Area Y)

of several animals of that period, including cattle, sheep and ponies, as well as badger. A curious feature of this area is that it is studded with silvery 'stars' - one of the dafter ideas thought up by the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments as a means of identifying features of importance. Needless to say, they are almost meaningless in this rich zone, though it was once seriously contemplated that they might be placed all the way up the Plym valley!

Famous in conservation history, this piece of ground, some 114 acres (46 ha) in extent, is known to planners as Area Y. Controversy raged throughout the 1970s, culminating in a debate in the House of Commons in 1977. Thanks largely to the efforts of the Dartmoor Preservation Association, the clay company Watts Blake Bearn & Co. made a voluntary agreement not to tip waste over it for at least 30 years from November 1978 (i.e. to AD 2008). In 1997 this was extended by another four years to AD 2012. But the long-term threat remains.

It seems barely conceivable that a civilised society should even contemplate the destruction of such a highly accessible, visible and important range of prehistoric features which have survived more or less intact for some 3500 years, especially when the threat is posed by tipping waste, there being no commercially viable deposits of clay underneath Area Y.

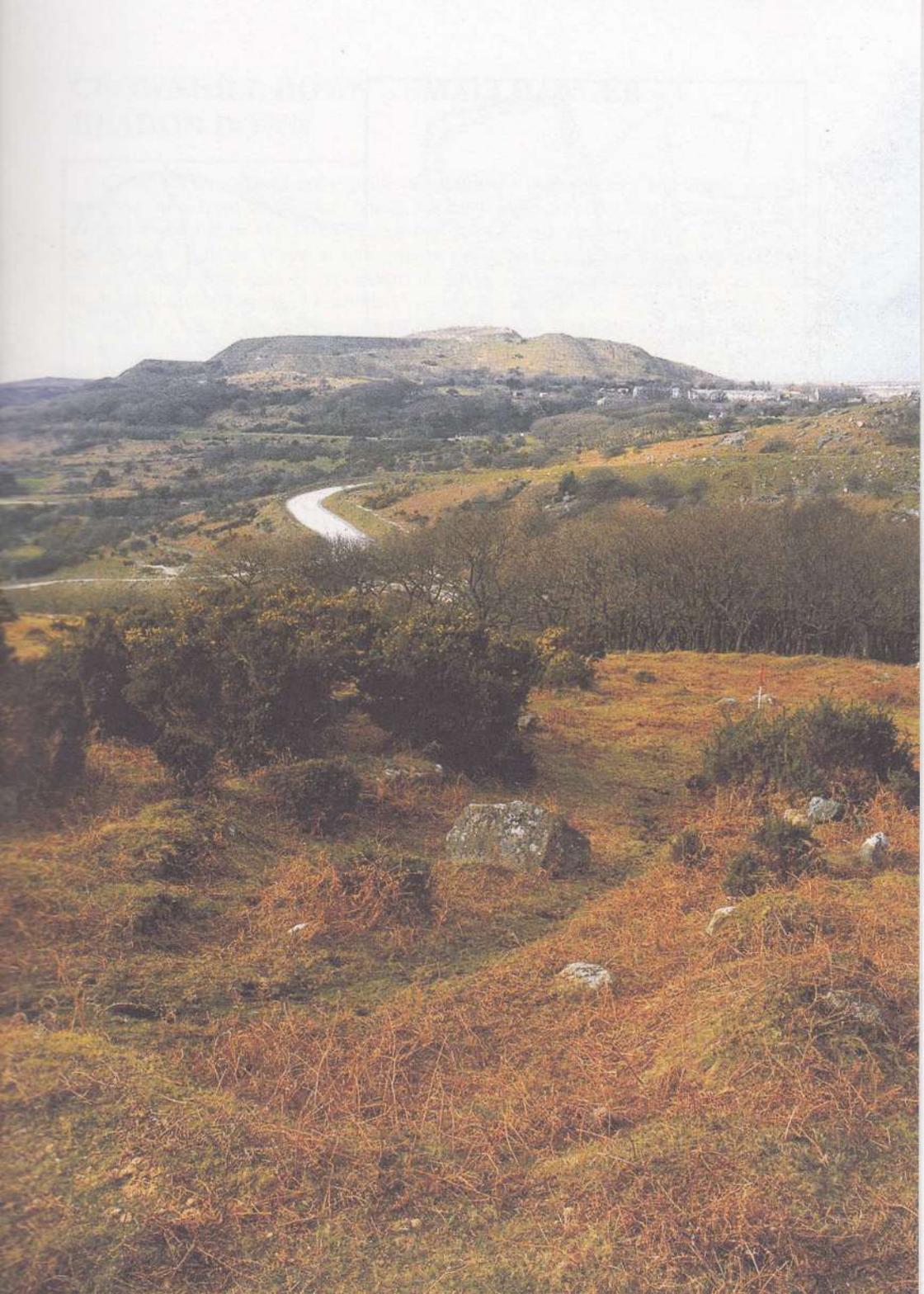
Growing awareness of the significance of this patch of ground is reflected by its inclusion within the redrawn boundaries of Dartmoor National Park in 1994. This

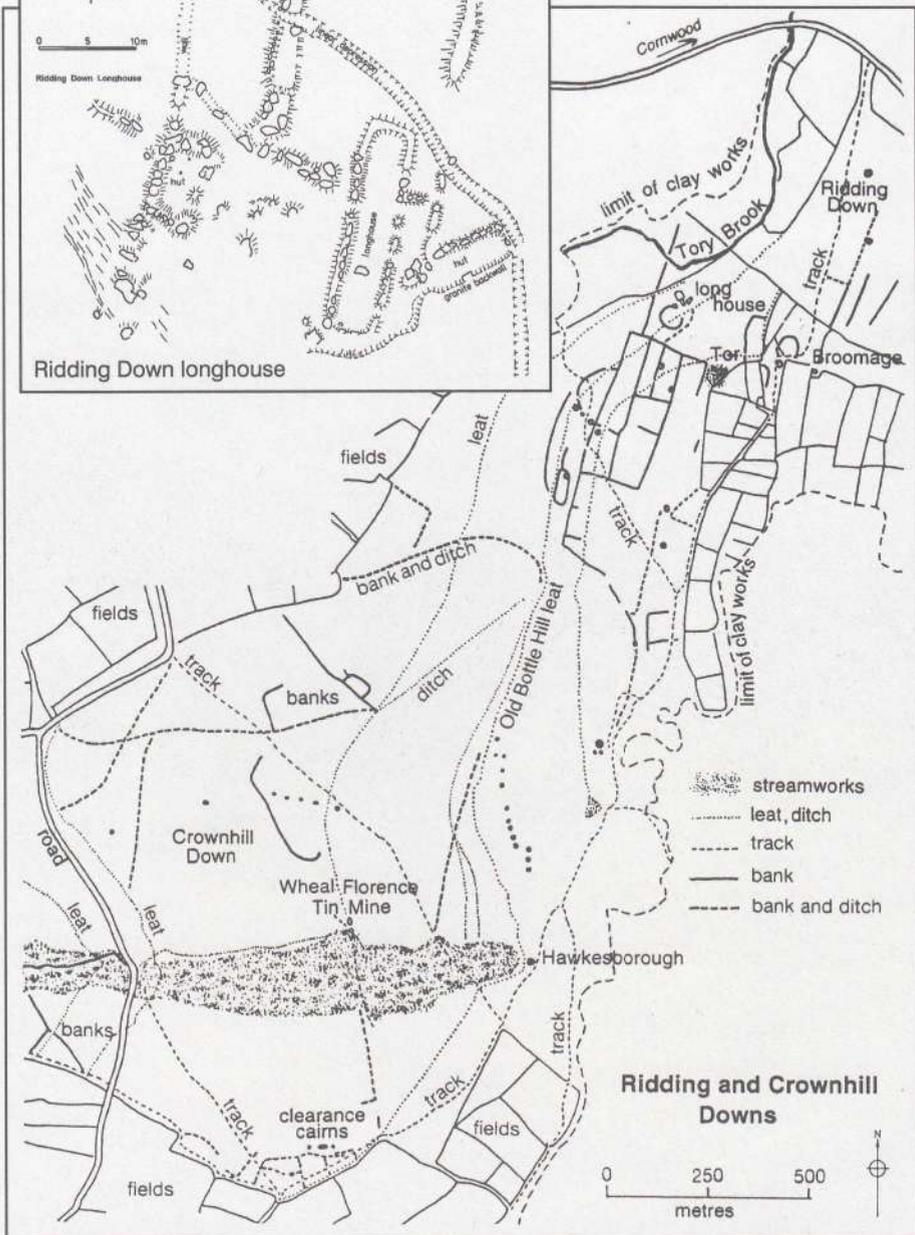
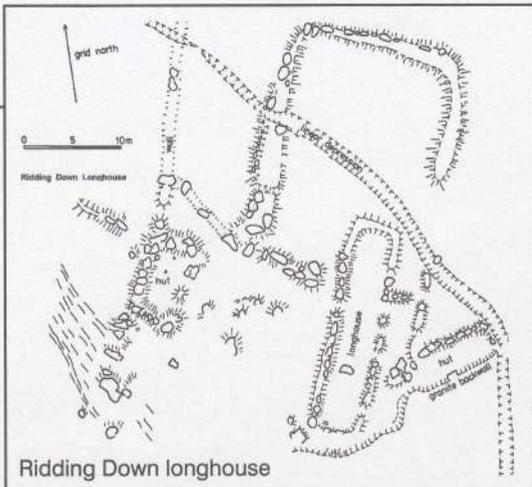


Hawks Tor (Area Y)

continual process of increasing recognition of what the land contains that is important to society as a whole is very pertinent to the other areas of known archaeological and ecological interest.

Area Y extends southwards as far as Hawks Tor, a striking outcrop of granite which has had a massive slab artificially turned through ninety degrees to form the roof of a little shelter. The slab itself has been cut with wedges, and a natural rock basin on the tor has an eroded inscription cut into its base, ending in the word ...WELL. Fine views may be had to Shaugh Prior church and Plymouth Sound, besides Brentor to the northwest. Plovers, larks and buzzards are all likely to be seen in this wonderful extent of ground. The well-preserved prehistoric field system continues in a broad sweep to the southeast, as far as Collard Tor above Wotter village, where stone rows and cairns can be seen.





## CROWNHILL DOWN – SMALLHANGER – HEADON DOWN

Crownhill Down is a huge expanse of relatively low-lying moor and heath, stretching over two miles from Tolchmoor Gate in the north at 750ft OD (229m) (Crownhill Tor) to Lower Hooksburry Wood adjoining the Tory Brook at only 200ft OD (61m). It incorporates Ridding Down at its northern end, which has some impressive prehistoric cairns. The overall area is recognised as being of 'regional importance', as lowland heathland, a category of characteristic vegetation and wildlife rapidly declining across Europe as a whole. But it is not only its natural ecology that makes this place so special. Every part of Crownhill Down is covered with archaeological remains from prehistory to the 20th century. Specially important are a prehistoric linear cemetery of at least a dozen barrows on the crest of the Down, with others extending right to its lowest levels, the widespread prehistoric and medieval field systems, the site of a medieval settlement by Knowle Wood, and the remarkable tinworks running east-west at the southern end of the Down – the latter are documented from the 16th century until the 19th century (with names including Hawkesborough and Wheal Florence), and stretch over one kilometre in length and up to 250m in width. At the southern end of Ridding Down are the extensive ruined remains of Broomage Farm, a settlement first documented in 1249.



Prehistoric barrow on lower slopes of Crownhill Down

Page 22, opposite: Plan of archaeological features on Ridding and Crownhill Downs (after Butler, 1994, fig. 52.16)

Ridding Down longhouse plan (after Gilbertson, D., & Collis, J. in *Field Studies*, 1982)





Remains of 'engine house' on Crownhill Down

To walk on Crownhill Down and its immediate surroundings is to find quiet and serenity despite adjacent clayworking activity. Wide views lead the eye to Cornwall and the gleam of Plymouth Sound. It is a place of space and expansiveness. Ravens, buzzards, snipe and herons are all likely to be seen. A fleeting glimpse of deer is also possible. In most parts, especially the northern end, a skeletal framework of prehistoric and medieval fields survives.

This is true Dartmoor, and it is hard to imagine that as recently as 1986 a scheme was approved to obliterate huge portions of it under mountains of waste from tungsten mining at Hemerdon. If implemented (and much depends on the completion of a processing plant by the year 2001), much of the Down will be destroyed, right up to the 200m contour. If this were not bad enough, there is also a proposal to link the ECCI 'Hemerdon Quarry' on the east side of the Down by means of a works road right across the Down north-westwards to a huge tip in the Torycombe valley (known as Tip T3).

The eastern edge of the great city of Plymouth (pop. 250,000) has crept to within little more than a mile of this supreme open space, which, in effect, gives access to the whole of Dartmoor. Its value for recreation and understanding of our cultural heritage increases



Abandoned clay mica traps and conical tip, Hemerdon and Broomage Clay Works

year by year, as does its importance as an ecological niche of recognised European significance. It is one of the rarest survivals of a transitional zone, geologically, ecologically and archaeologically, between the high moorland of Dartmoor and lowland Devon, and so contains information and messages that future generations would be astonished to learn that we had squandered for the sake of aggressive consumption of mineral resources.

Ascending Headon Down on foot from the village of Lutton on its south side, through close-cropped heather and grass, a sense of the space of Dartmoor is apparent, the gently rising curve of the hill emphasizing solidity and permanence. Fine views are possible to the western flank of southern Dartmoor or southwards to the Cattewater and Plymouth Sound.

Sheep and cattle mingle. A lark sings overhead, and a buzzard soars on the wing.

But at the top of the hill is a rude awakening – a huge mound of clay waste, with work in progress. Deep drainage ditches and tracks have been newly constructed. This was once undoubtedly a sacred land – until the mid-1990s a perfectly preserved and beautifully subtle prehistoric ring cairn (a probable burial place) survived on the very top of Headon where it had remained undisturbed for perhaps at least three thousand years. In the mid-1990s through tragic error it was totally destroyed, despite careful negotiation with the clay company which appeared to safeguard it as long ago as 1980. And so this site has



Ancient tinworks on Crownhill Down

joined countless others lost without record. At the southwest end of Headon the clay tip makes a conspicuous loop. Here, fortunately, other prehistoric remains have been recognised and preserved – low mounds of cairns.

Within a few hundred metres to the northwest on the flank of Crownhill Down, the explorer is in a fascinating world of old clayworkings, which have left their own archaeological relics of a relatively modest scale. This is Smallhanger Waste, just north of which survives one of the few old conical waste tips now vegetated. The flooded pit, Stockers Pool, now frequented by geese and other wildfowl, and fringed by mature conifers on its north side, is a scene of beauty, and still contains the remains of a Rocker Beam Pump on its west side. On its south side are particularly well-preserved abandoned mica traps and circular thickening pits of the Hemerdon & Broomage Moor China Clay Works – all reminders that the clay industry has its own history and development spanning nearly two centuries. All these features are destined to be destroyed when English China Clays International opens up the so-called ‘Hemerdon Quarry’ here.



## Further reading

- Anon (1997) **The Nature of Dartmoor - A Biodiversity Profile** (*English Nature & Dartmoor National Park Authority*)
- Barton, R.M. (1966) **A History of the Cornish China-clay Industry** (*Bradford Barton, Truro*)
- Butler, J. (1994) **Dartmoor Atlas of Antiquities Volume Three - The South-West** (*Devon Books, Tiverton*)
- Harris, H. (1968) **Industrial Archaeology of Dartmoor** (*David & Charles, Newton Abbot*)
- Perkins, J.W. (1972) **Geology Explained: Dartmoor and the Tamar Valley** (*David & Charles, Newton Abbot*)

Text and Photographs © Dr T. Greeves MA PhD.

Area Map based on one drawn by Helen Rowett.

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Archaeological Plans © Dr Jeremy Butler and Devon Books.

The DPA would like to express its grateful thanks to Dr Tom Greeves for the time and trouble taken in the preparation of this text, to Miss Helen Rowett for drawing the original map of the area, and to Dr Jeremy Butler and Devon Books for making available to us – at no charge – plans from Dr Butler's *Dartmoor Atlas of Antiquities*.

This publication was edited by John Bainbridge and Hugh Robinson.



## SACRED LAND – WORKING LAND

On southwestern Dartmoor is an attractive landscape of international archaeological and scientific importance. It is also the nearest stretch of open moorland to the City of Plymouth, and a vital barrier between the urbanised lowlands and high Dartmoor. Yet this is a landscape under sentence of destruction, for it is destined to be destroyed by two multi-national mineral companies.

*Sacred Land – Working Land explains just why a civilised society and responsible politicians should step in to safeguard this land forever.*

The front cover illustration shows the view northwards from Saddlesborough, looking towards china clay workings – see page 17.

The illustration above shows Emmett's Post, set on a prehistoric barrow, with Shaugh Quarry beyond – see page 17.

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