



***THE DARTMOOR
ARCHAEOLOGY AND BRACKEN PROJECT***



INTERIM REPORT FOR 2004 SEASON



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Introduction

The fifth season of work at Teigncombe was different in many ways to those that had gone before. First, the large mess tent which had served us so well in previous years had disintegrated during its winter hibernation and fell apart into thousands of pieces when taken out of its bag on the first day. Wendy and Malcolm came to the rescue with their large frame tent which not only did not leak (very much), but without too much of a squeeze provided us all with much needed shelter. This brings me neatly onto the second major difference. The weather. It rained on the first day and forgot how to stop. On occasions the torrential rain seemed like a message from above telling us to pack up and go home. At the campsite where I was staying only two tents survived the "Boscastle" deluge and at the excavation itself a siphon was developed to suck water from the delicate surfaces. The up side of all this "weather" was that the numerous subtle soil colour changes could be easily seen and examined without the constant need for water spraying. Every cloud has a silver lining. The third difference was that very little time was spent revealing and recording bracken rhizomes and instead much of our efforts were directed to examining the myriad of stake holes, post holes, animal holes and natural hollows cutting into the subsoil beneath the house (Figure 1). In parts of the house the remainder of the occupation soil was removed and this revealed a surprisingly large number of artefacts. Amongst these were 472 sherds of pottery, 7 flints and 17 stones. To date a total of 1132 artefacts have been recovered and recorded, making this by far the most prolific of prehistoric excavations carried out on Dartmoor to date.

The Excavation

Removal of the backfill and protective plastic covering revealed that we had again successfully protected the site. The area was first cleaned to remove any traces of contamination resulting from the backfilling. In the previous season we had not managed to complete the removal of the baulks and during the first few days these were removed except at one point between Trenches 1 and 5 where a low level 0.5m wide baulk was maintained. With the removal of the larger baulks the house was photographed, contour surveyed and planned. At this juncture the survey of a nearby house was carried out by some of the volunteers for comparative purposes (Figure 20). With the recording of the Teigncombe house complete, the excavation of the large numbers of visible features commenced. The first stage was a thorough cleaning of the interior of the house and when features were identified they were labelled with a marker (Figure 4). This ensured that every possible feature discovered during the cleaning process would be examined in detail at a later date. With the cleaning complete the excavation force turned their attentions to the examination of each feature denoted by a marker (Figure 1). The first stage was to carefully define the edges of the feature to establish its size and extent. During this process some were found to be no more than a slight discoloration of the soil which disappeared on further cleaning, whilst 145 were more substantial and were emptied using trowels and spoons. The contents of each feature were kept separate until the feature was emptied. At this point, the excavation director inspected each feature together with its contents and a decision was taken as to whether the feature was of natural or artificial origin. A total of 89 stakeholes were identified in this manner and a further 56 discarded. The contents of each stakehole were kept in a sealed bag and will be analysed further once we are sure that no further examples remain to be examined. All of the excavated features and their contents were allocated separate context numbers, described in detail and their position plotted.



Figure 1 Judith Cannell excavating a stakehole. Other excavated stakeholes are marked with labels

Stakeholes

The distribution of stake holes (Figure 2A) is confined largely to the upper part of the house, with an additional small cluster adjacent to the northern wall. No stake holes have been found within hollow (325) or within the vicinity of the flagstone surfaces. The distribution may therefore in part reflect the fact that the evidence has not survived within the hollow where stakes would not have penetrated the subsoil and therefore have left no identifiable trace. This said is there anything useful we can say about the observed distribution? At a crude level there does appear to be a marked linear cluster highlighted in Figure 2A and if you remove these one is left with a significant distribution (Figure 2B). The linear arrangement of stakeholes, if real, may suggest the presence of a partition separating the upper part of the house from the remainder. The second stage of removing this cluster from the distribution is perhaps more interesting suggesting as they do the possibility of an albeit irregular shaped structure (Figure 2B). Many of the stake holes are in the general vicinity of the postholes and it might therefore be useful to superimpose their distribution on the two different groupings of stake holes. In Figure 2C there is clearly no correlation between the linear cluster and the post holes and this might support the idea that the structures represented by these different groups of holes are not contemporary. By contrast, the second grouping of stake holes appear to complement the post hole distribution (Figure 2D) suggesting that they may be contemporary and possibly related in some way. One possibility is that the structure was first built using stakes and then replaced in approximately the same position by a post built structure or the structure may have been constructed in a single episode using both posts and stakes.

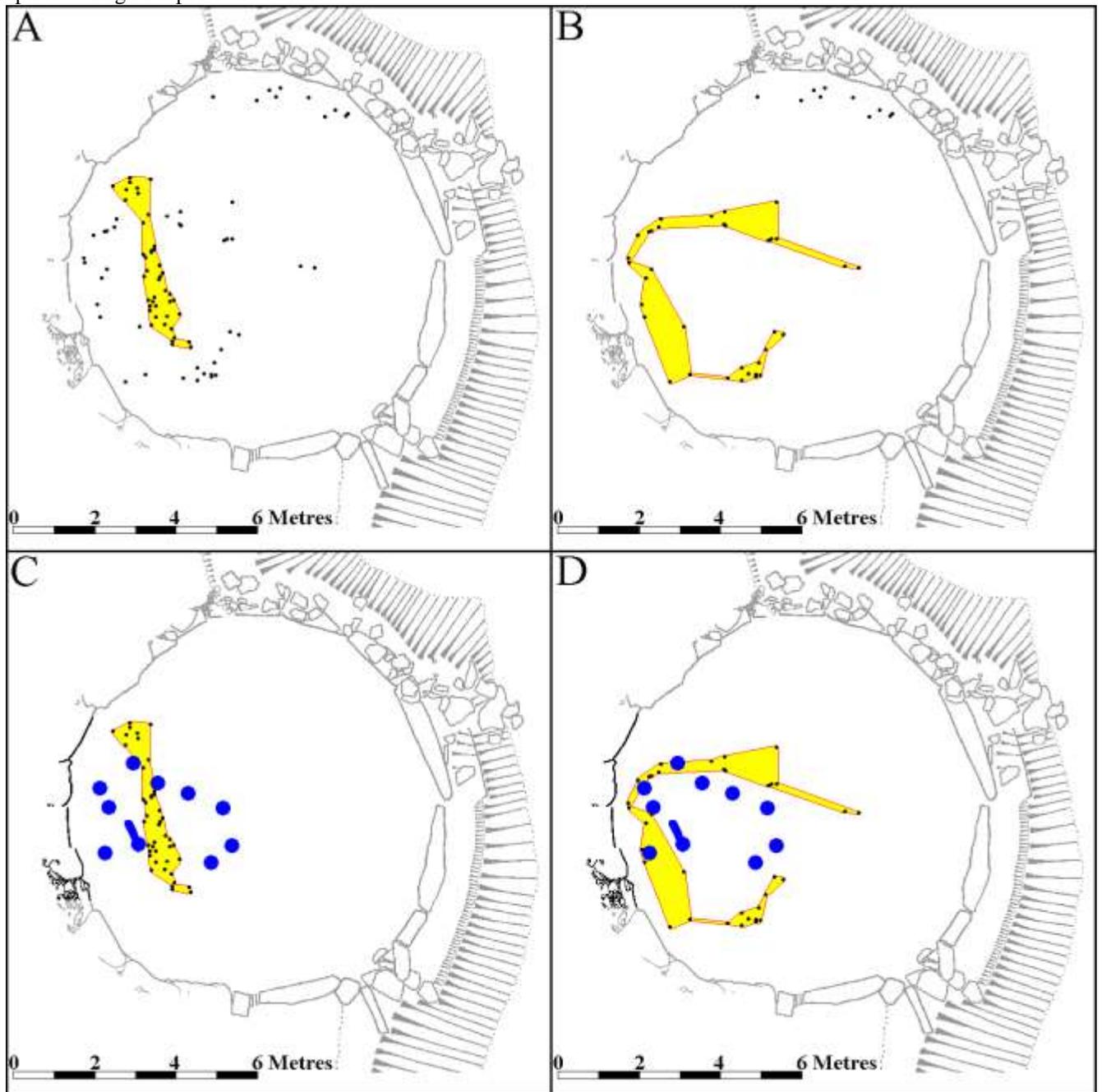


Figure 2A Distribution of all stakeholes with linear arrangement highlighted

Figure 2B Distribution of stakeholes except those within the linear arrangement

Figure 2C Distribution of stakeholes within the linear arrangement together with postholes

Figure 2D Distribution of stakeholes within the possible irregular structure together with postholes

What about the character of the individual stake holes and can they help us to resolve this intriguing situation? Figure 3 highlights the distribution of stake holes whose vertical axis is greater than 86 from the horizontal. The figure is presented in a cumulative style and certainly highlights that a significant number of the most vertical holes are to be found in the linear cluster highlighted in Figure 2. This is what one would expect from the construction of a partition. A large number of stake holes were found to have been inserted into the ground at angles below 78 degrees. These posts would have been far from vertical and may be thought of as being the result of stakes being driven in to provide support. The distribution of this group of stake holes (Figure 5) is extremely interesting. The bulk of these stake holes lie within three discreet clusters leading from the upper part of the house towards the centre of the building. Their distribution suggests the presence of two small compartments. The position of these “compartments” differs radically from the structures suggested by the cruder form of analysis and further work will be needed to establish whether we are looking at several phases of partition

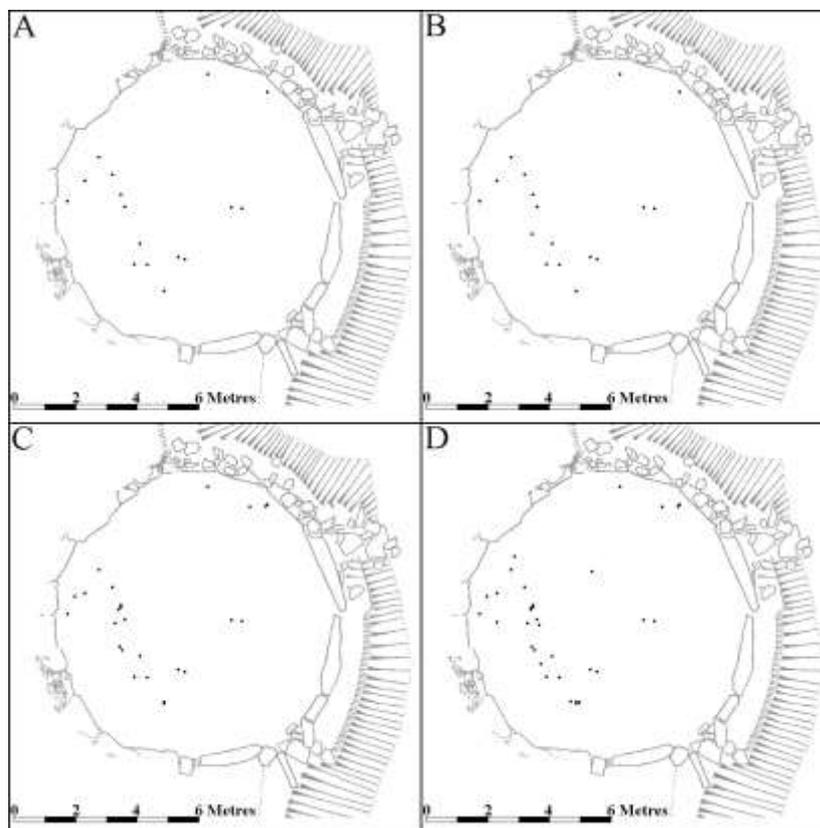


Figure 3A Distribution of stakeholes whose vertical axis is 90° from horizontal

Figure 3B Distribution of stakeholes whose vertical axis is 89° and greater from horizontal

Figure 3C Distribution of stakeholes whose vertical axis is 88° and greater from horizontal

Figure 3D Distribution of stakeholes whose vertical axis is 86° and greater from horizontal



Figure 4 View of the house with soil discolourations marked by tags for further investigation

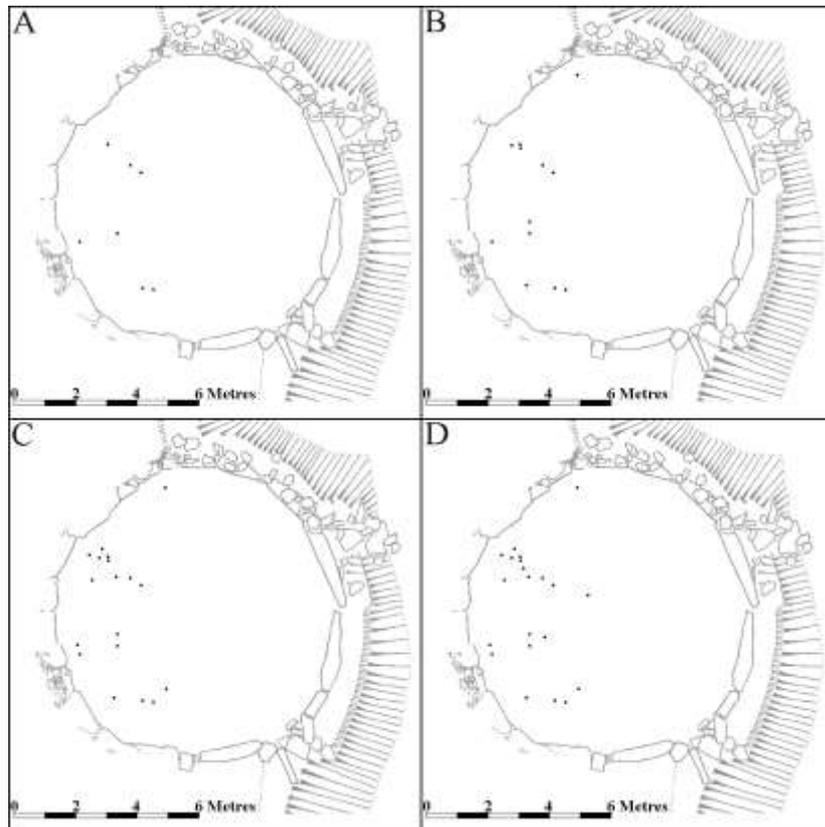


Figure 5A Distribution of stakeholes whose vertical axis is 70° and less from horizontal
Figure 5B Distribution of stakeholes whose vertical axis is 75° and less from horizontal
Figure 5C Distribution of stakeholes whose vertical axis is 76° and less from horizontal
Figure 5D Distribution of stakeholes whose vertical axis is 78° and less from horizontal

suggesting remodeling of the internal layout of the house. Further excavation within this area will refine the situation and allow future analysis to be more comprehensive and complete.

Another way of looking at the data is by comparing the excavated volume of each hole. A series of illustrations highlighting the volume of each stake hole are presented in Figures 7 - 9. Figure 7 illustrates the distribution of the smaller stake holes and demonstrates that there is a considerable variety in the sizes of the holes within the features identified above.



Figure 6 View from north west of excavated stakeholes and four postholes (P)

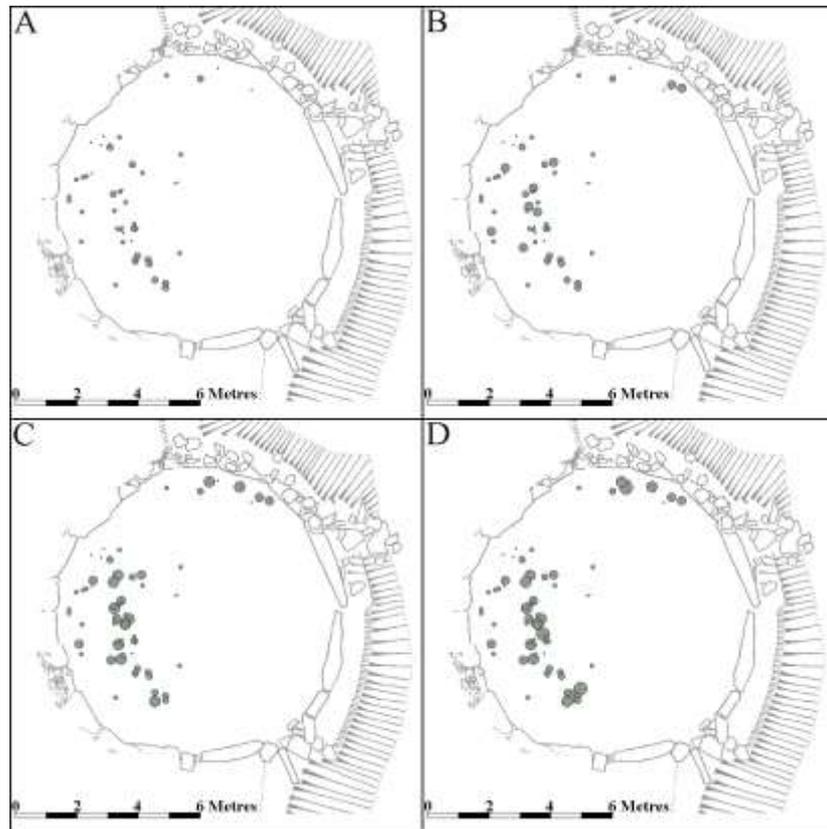


Figure 7A Distribution of stake holes with volume under 200cm^3

Figure 7B Distribution of stake holes with volume under 300cm^3

Figure 7C Distribution of stake holes with volume under 400cm^3

Figure 7D Distribution of stake holes with volume under 500cm^3

(In all four illustrations the size of the circle is proportional to the volume of the stake hole)

This is perhaps not unexpected because in a single structure there would be need for occasionally placed larger stakes to hold it firmer than would otherwise be possible using stakes of a single size. More significant however, is the distribution of stake holes with volumes exceeding 500cm^3 . In particular, the distribution of the largest stake holes greater than 800cm^3 is worth some discussion. The first observation worth making is that the distribution is relatively dispersed and more so if you accept the idea that the two abutting examples represent replacements. One is almost tempted, by the distribution alone, to see these as representing posts which could have held up the roof. Extension of this pattern to fill in the gaps would have resulted in a total of around 14 large upright stakes holding the roof. But would these stakes be strong enough to hold the roof? The answer is probably yes, because the substantial orthostatic walls would have carried much of the weight. However, such an arrangement in a house of this size would be unusual, but certainly until we find evidence for an alternative, this remains (although far from satisfactory) the only available explanation. During the 2005 season further work to try and locate the illusive roof bearing post holes will be a priority.

Viewing the stake holes greater than 800cm^3 within the context of other large stake holes found within the house leads in a very different direction and illustrates that care needs to be taken when interpreting information derived from a site which is still being excavated. The primary purpose of the analysis at this stage will be to inform the excavation strategy for 2005 and further work may radically alter all of the interpretations offered here. This said, it is perhaps interesting to note that the distribution of all stake holes greater than 500cm^3 produces the outline of a trapezoidal structure with a grouping of five stake holes towards its centre. Perhaps more significantly when one superimposes the distribution of post holes, one finds that the distribution of these stake holes neatly surrounds that for the stake holes. This would suggest that the larger stake holes form part of the same structure denoted by the posts.

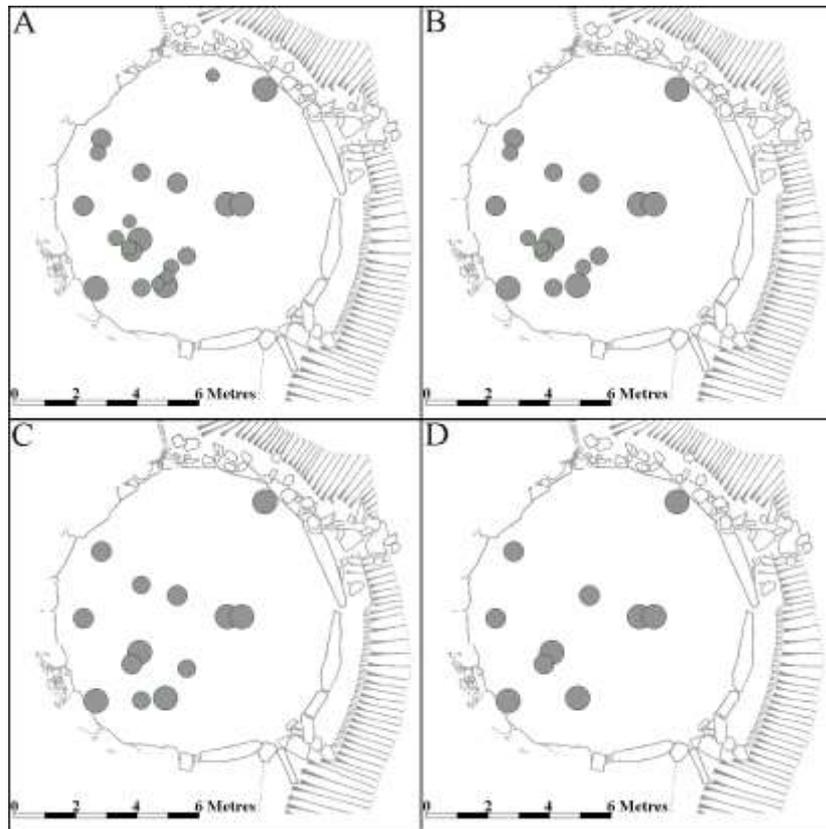


Figure 8A Distribution of stakeholes with volume greater than 500cms^3
Figure 8B Distribution of stakeholes with volume greater than 600cms^3
Figure 8C Distribution of stakeholes with volume greater than 700cms^3
Figure 8D Distribution of stakeholes with volume greater than 800cms^3

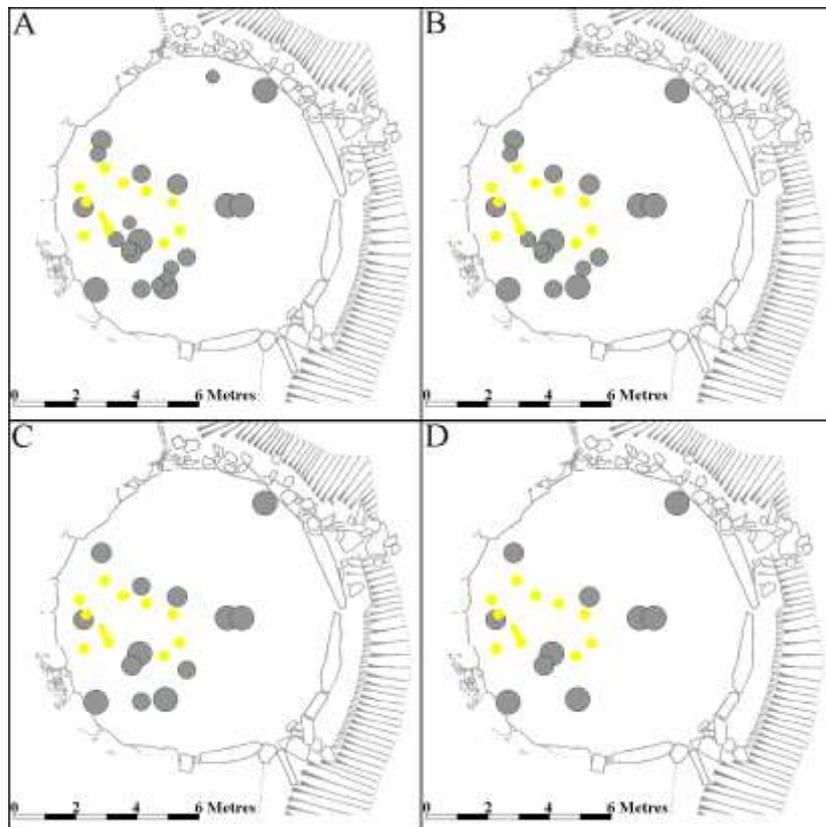


Figure 9A Distribution of stakeholes with volume greater than 500cms^3 and postholes (lighter circles)
Figure 9B Distribution of stakeholes with volume greater than 600cms^3 and postholes (lighter circles)
Figure 9C Distribution of stakeholes with volume greater than 700cms^3 and postholes (lighter circles)
Figure 9D Distribution of stakeholes with volume greater than 800cms^3 and postholes (lighter circles)

Postholes

Some discussion of the post holes has been necessary above to inform our consideration of the stakehole evidence, but we do need to briefly consider the evidence relating to the postholes alone. Given the size and substantial character of the round house it is perhaps surprising that so far we have found very little certain evidence relating to how it was roofed. A total of at least 9 post holes were located, identified and excavated, but all of them lie within one area of the house and do not appear to relate to the position of the stone wall (Figure 10). All of the post-holes lie within a cluster in the upper part of the house denoting an irregular shaped area measuring 3m by 1.9m. It is not known whether the post holes are all contemporary and therefore relate to a single unusual shaped structure or whether they relate to a series of smaller structures denoted by two or three posts. An elongated slot (454) towards the southern edge of the distribution is probably connected in some way with the post holes (Figures 10 & 13). The eastern end of this slot may indeed represent a tenth post hole. This slot contained at least 36 sherds of pottery which have been identified by Henrietta Quinnell as belonging exclusively to the Middle Bronze Age fabric types identified previously. 31 of the sherds are of Fabric 3 “gabbroic” pottery, whilst the remainder belong to Fabrics 2, 5 and 6. Most sherds are fresh suggesting that they may have been incorporated into this feature either not long after they were broken or were stored elsewhere before being used. The former interpretation seems the most likely and therefore allows us to provisionally place slot [454] into the Middle Bronze Age use of the house. The distribution of this pottery shown in Figure 11 clearly shows a “horse-shoe” shaped spread around a circular area containing no artefacts. This means that the material containing the artefacts is almost certainly the remains of packing material and therefore the finds were incorporated into the hole at the time it was cut rather than when it was dismantled. Other post holes containing pottery include [413] in which a large fresh thick body sherd of Fabric 3 was found, [450] in which three fresh or slightly abraded Fabric 2 body sherds were recovered together with a sherd of Fabric 3 and two sherds of Fabric 5 both of which contained significant residues. Finally in posthole [608] was a fresh sherd of probable Fabric 3 type. Together this evidence strongly supports the idea that this apparently related group of postholes dates to the Middle Bronze Age.

Each posthole was half-sectioned (Figure 12), but with generally disappointing results. Only in holes 450 and 608 was there evidence for the post pipe, the others containing either a single fill or horizontal layers.

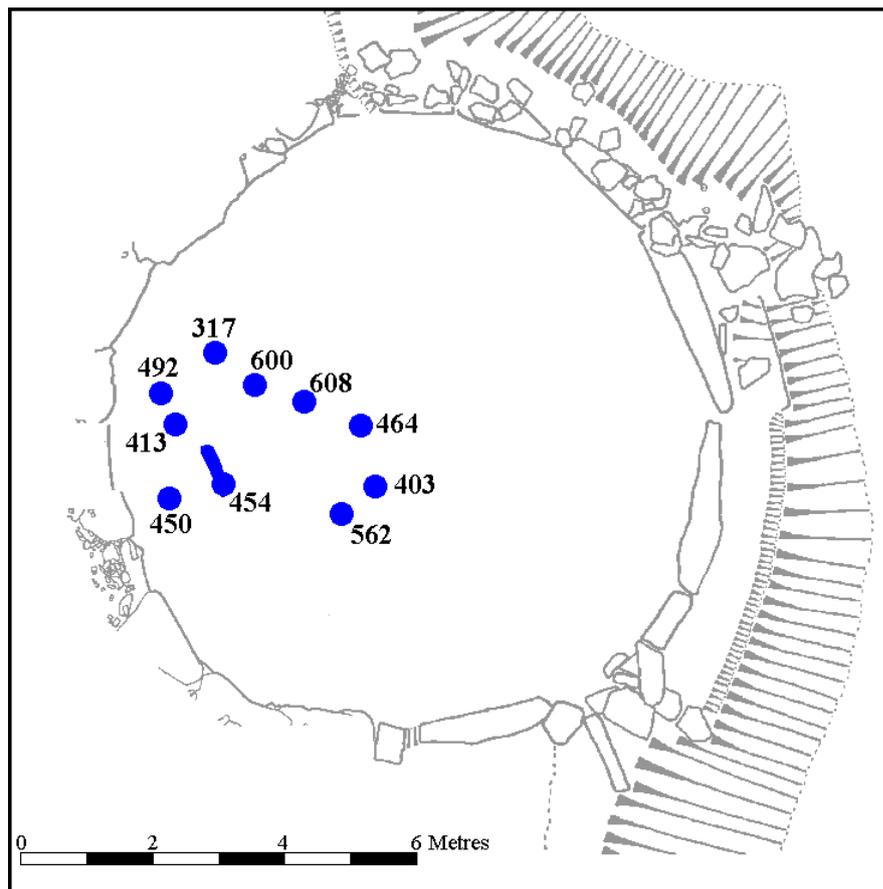


Figure 10 Plan showing the position and context number of postholes

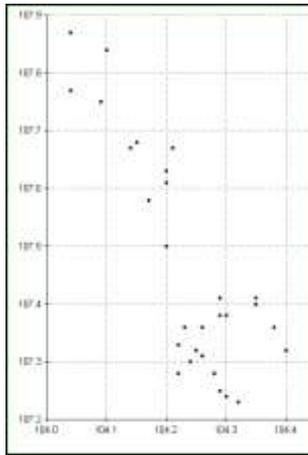


Figure 11 Distribution of artefacts within elongated slot [454]

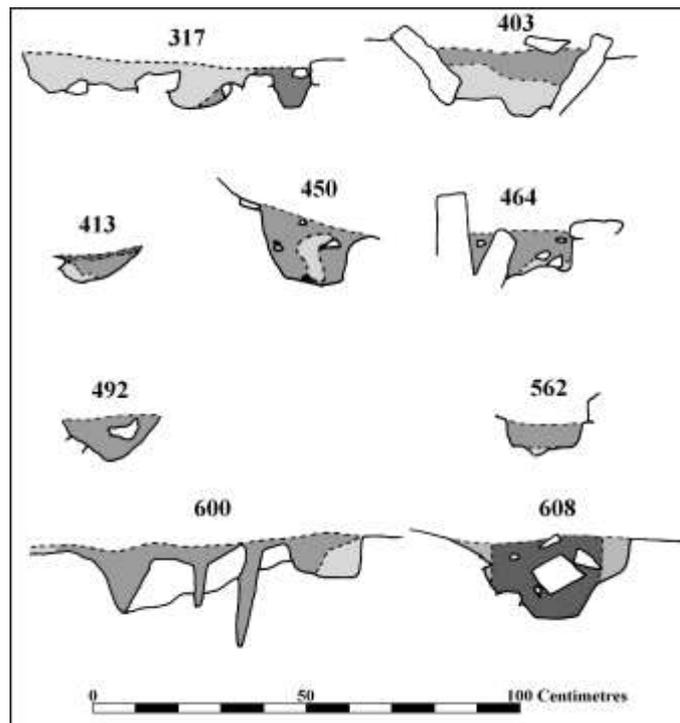


Figure 12 Sectional views through the postholes

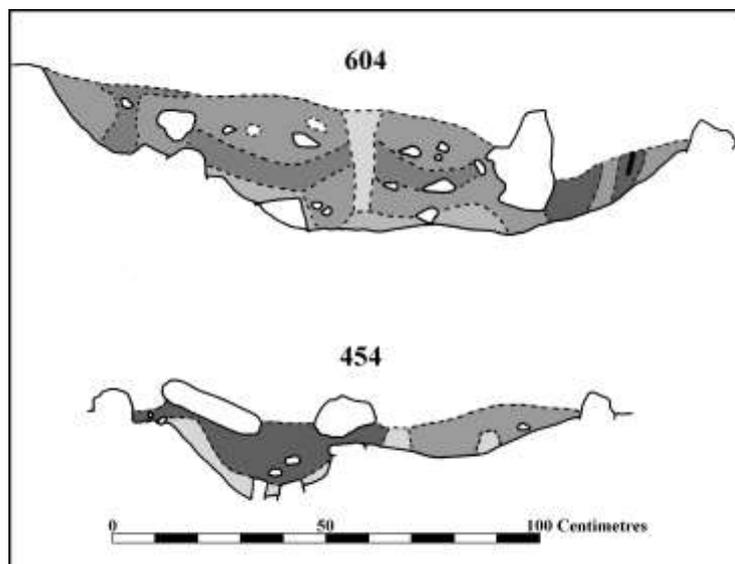


Figure 13 Sectional views through the small quarry [604] and elongated slot [454]

Quarry

Situated against the south western wall of the house an area of disturbed ground measuring 1.7m by 1.5m was identified. This feature was half sectioned (Figure 13) to reveal a pit measuring up to 0.32m deep whose base was denoted on the south west by a large slab of granite. No artefacts were found within the pit which has been identified as a small quarry from which a slab of granite would have been removed during the construction of the house in order to level the floor and perhaps provide some stone for building purposes. The eastern edge of this backfilled quarry was cut through by slot (454).

Artefacts

A total of 496 artefacts were recovered during 2004. Of these 472 were pottery, 17 stone tools including 3 whetstones, and 7 flints. Figure 14A illustrates the distribution of all the artefacts recovered and highlights the areas where the remaining “floor level” was investigated. Figure 14B shows the distribution of all the artefacts recovered to date and illustrates very clearly at a simplistic level how little material has been recovered from the north western part of the house. The large hollow [325] within the south eastern part of the house is also highlighted as an area containing substantial quantities of artefacts. The distribution of both flint and other lithics (Figure 14C & 14D) can best be described as dispersed with no obvious clustering. The whetstones (Figure 15A) were all found in a wide band leading through the centre of the house. This distribution is certainly not random and with further analysis an explanation may be possible. The distribution of water rounded pebbles (Figure 15B) including a number of “pot boilers” is also worth further consideration. Together they form a sub-rectangular shaped distribution, given the impression that they have been deliberately placed. If so, this may give us further insight into the idea of ritual decommissioning mentioned by Henrietta in the Interim Report for 2000. The pottery distribution (Figure 15C) is clustered with most of the material coming from hollow [325] and the remainder from small clusters in the upper part of the building. Finally, for comparative purposes the distribution of plastics (Figure 15D) illustrates marked clustering in the lower part of the house. This reflects the light weight of the material and its susceptibility to being washed or even blown into a low lying sheltered hollow.

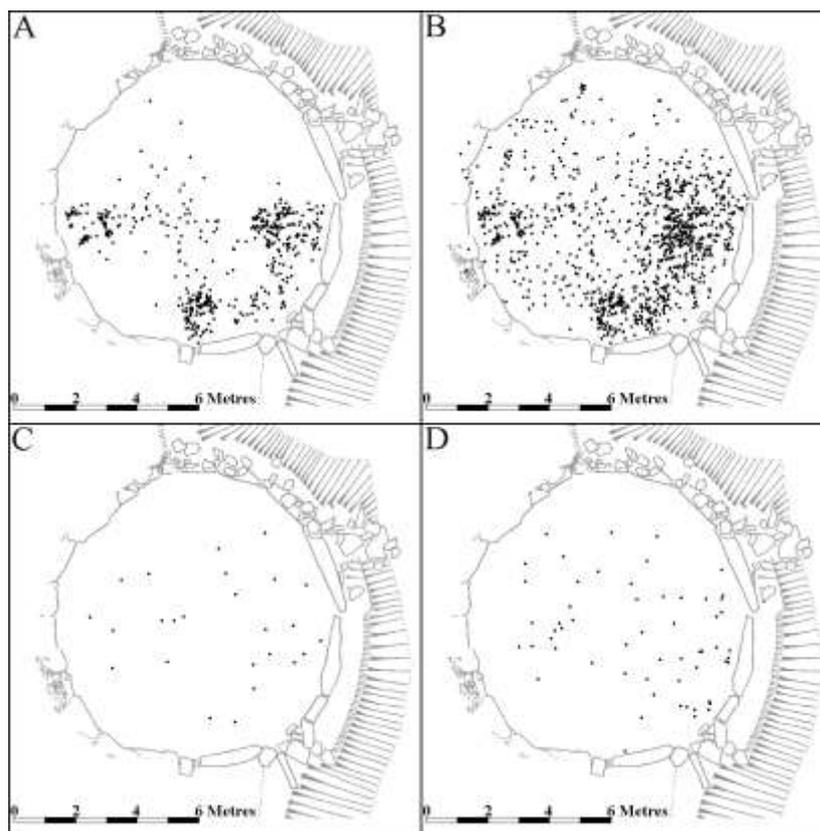


Figure 14A Distribution of artefacts found during 2004

Figure 14B Distribution of all artefacts found to date

Figure 14C Distribution of all flint found to date

Figure 14D Distribution of all other lithics found to date

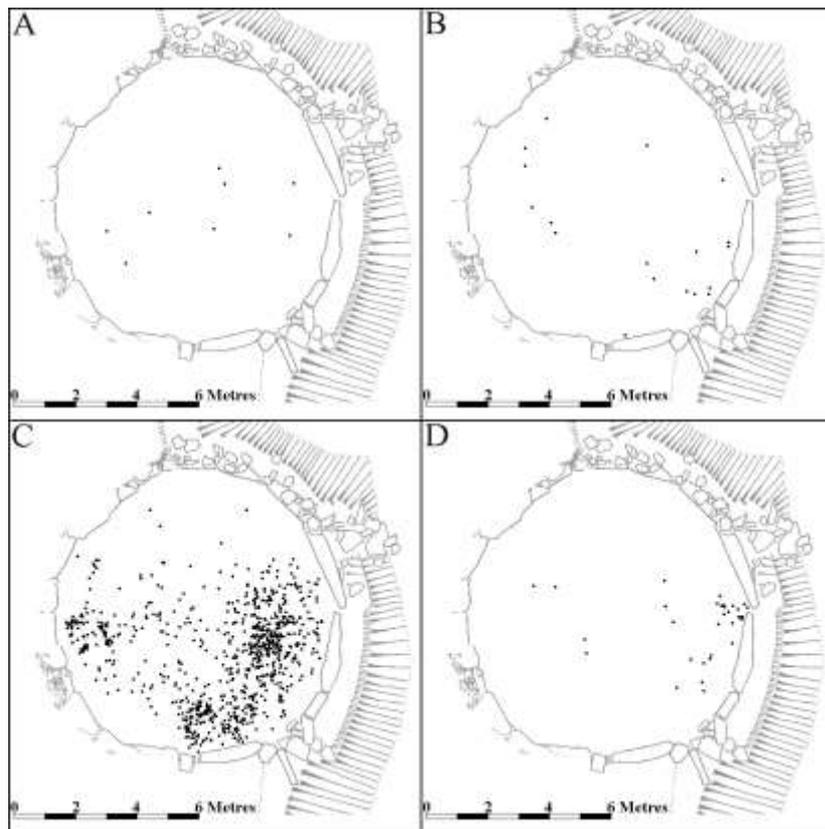


Figure 15A Distribution of all whetstones found to date

Figure 15B Distribution of all pebbles found to date

Figure 15C Distribution of all pottery found to date

Figure 15D Distribution of all plastics found to date

Since the start of the excavation in 1999 the position of every artefact recovered has been three dimensionally recorded. At the start of the 2004 season the decision was taken to enhance this by recording two further dimensions, namely the orientation of the artefact and its angle relative to the horizontal. It was hoped by examining the orientation of the artefacts it might be possible to establish whether a single post depositional process had re-deposited a significant amount of the artefacts in a single plane. Preliminary analysis of the results (Figure 16) would appear to indicate that the orientation of artefacts is random, although there was a slight increase in the number lying at right angles to the predominate slope perhaps suggesting some limited re-deposition - a detail confirmed by our analytical work for the 2003 Interim Report.

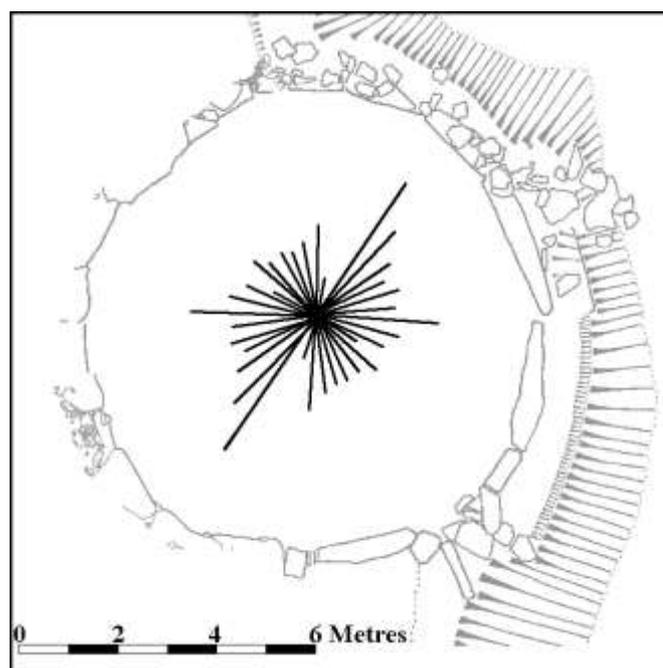


Figure 16 Illustration showing the orientation of artefacts recovered during 2004

Recording of the angle of each artefact was carried out using a clinometer and the reason for recording this information was to ascertain whether there was any evidence for significant displacement of artefacts. During the previous year, a flagstone displaced by a tree root was uncovered and from this observation, the idea that bracken rhizomes could be capable of displacing smaller artefacts was born. To test this hypothesis when every artefact was found its angle was recorded before it was removed from the ground. It was possible to take 470 separate measurements and the resulting average reading of 50.04° from the horizontal was certainly higher than one would expect from undisturbed ground. Unfortunately without a control it is not possible to quantify the precise degree of possible disturbance caused by post depositional displacement. However, a clue may be provided by comparing the angle with the depth. In general terms if post depositional disturbance caused by something like rhizome activity was present one might expect to find a correlation between angle and depth. The basic premise being that deposits at a certain depth may have been subjected to more rhizome activity than others. Thus by establishing the average depth of groups of similarly displaced artefacts it might be possible to demonstrate rhizome activity as a possible cause. Figure 17 illustrates the average depth for artefacts within certain ranges of angle.

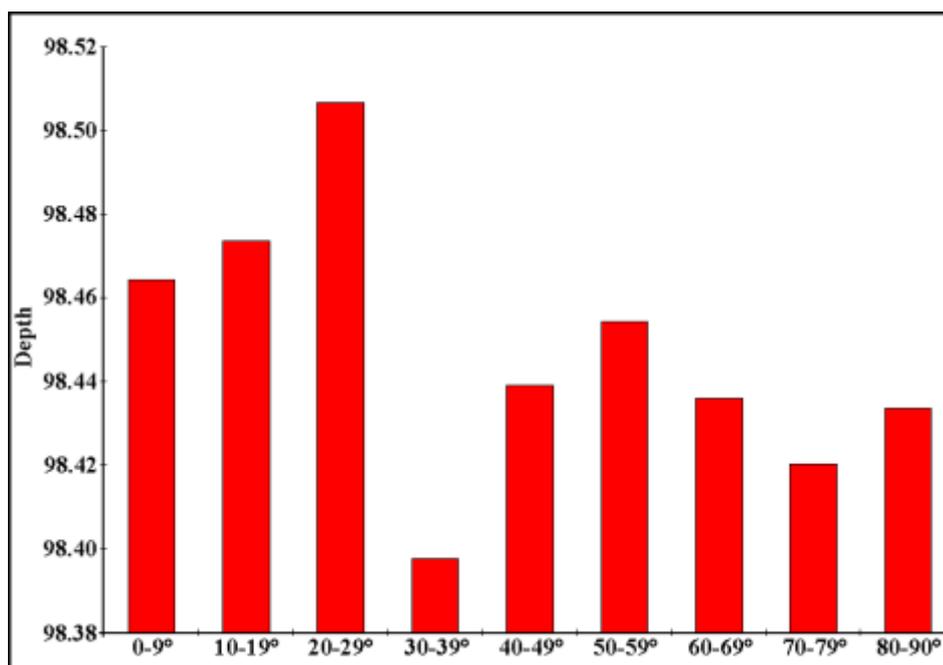


Figure 17 Bar graph illustrating the average depth of artefacts grouped according to their angle relative to horizontal

The first notable point is that three tallest columns which represent the shallowest belong to the groups of artefacts with angles less than 29° . This would suggest that the shallowest artefacts have been displaced less than the deeper ones. A detail confirmed by the artefacts between 60° and 90° being amongst the deepest. The obvious anomaly in this pattern is for artefacts with angles between 30° and 39° , which on average were found at the deepest levels. The results of this analysis are therefore not conclusive, but are indeed very suggestive of a correlation between depth and angle which might indicate that a factor such as rhizome activity might be responsible for the unexpectedly high number of apparently tilted artefacts.

In the 2003 Interim Report considerable effort was directed towards examining the relative position of MBA and LBA/EIA pottery and seeking ways to demonstrate the presence of any disturbance. Most of this analysis looked at the data in section, but since the production of the report it has been possible to look at the same information in some sort of detail in plan. Using the information supplied by Henrietta Quinnell for the 2003 Interim Report it has been possible to create a contour map showing the interface between the MBA and LBA/EIA ceramics and by default the approximate shape of the MBA surface in the period just before the LBA/EIA material started to accumulate. In order to produce a contour map with 2cm intervals all of the pottery within each 2cm layer is plotted onto a base plan showing the outline of the house. The first plan shows the pottery between 99.23m and 99.24m and a line is drawn around to represent the 99.24m contour. The pottery from the next two centimetres is then added. In Figure 18 the MBA pottery is shown with a + symbol, whilst the LBA/EIA is shown as x. The 99.26m contour is then added by drawing a line which surrounds + symbol but excludes the x. This process was repeated at 2cm intervals until a contour map (Figure 19) was produced which outlines the character of the surface in the period between the MBA and LBA/EIA. The resulting contour map has two pronounced hollows, but this simply highlights the position of the unexcavated baulk. Once the finds from the 2004 season are analysed, a clearer picture of the appearance of the floor surface at the end of the BA period will emerge.

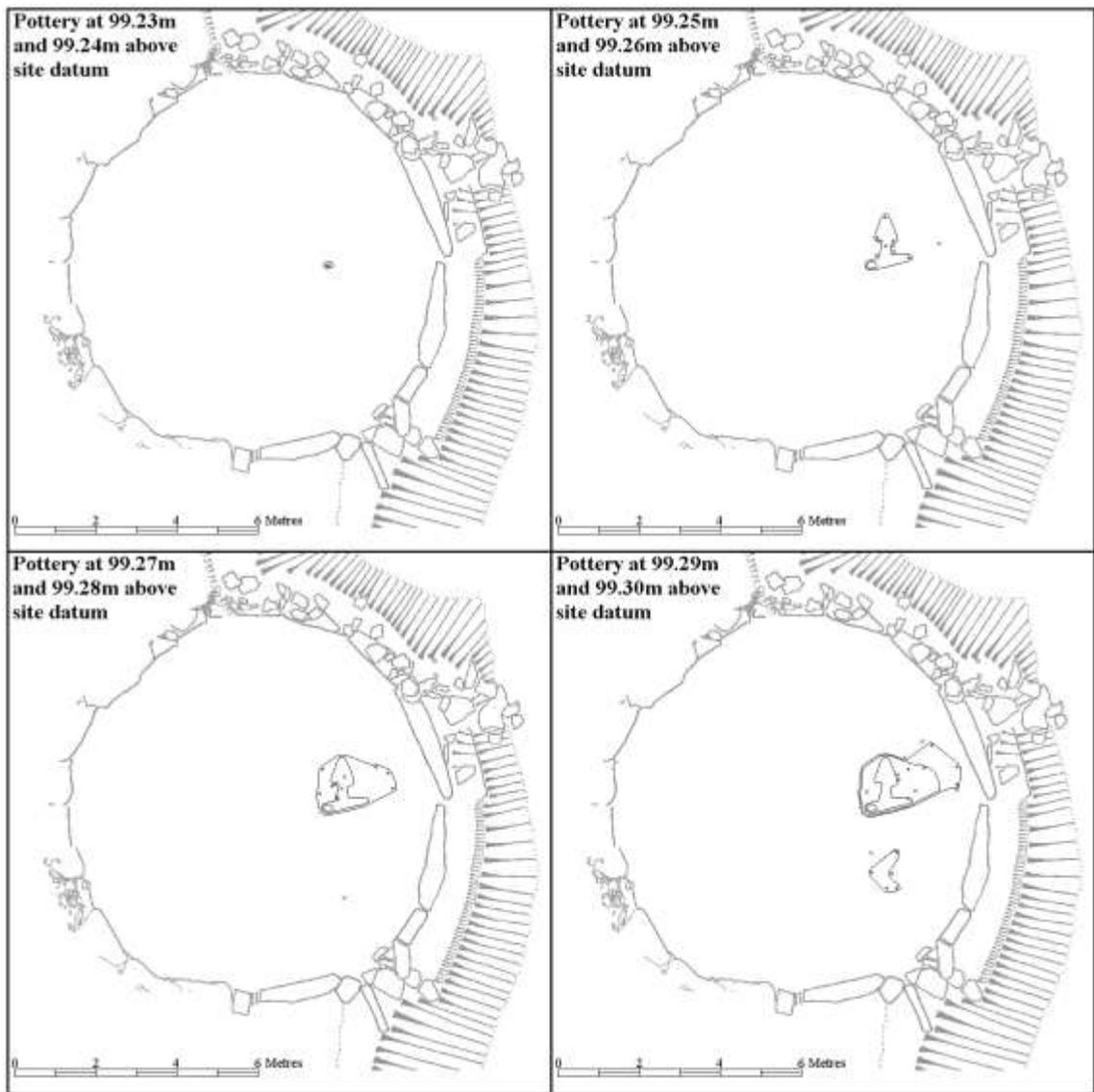


Figure 18 Series of plans showing the technique used to generate the contour plan of the interface between Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age layers.

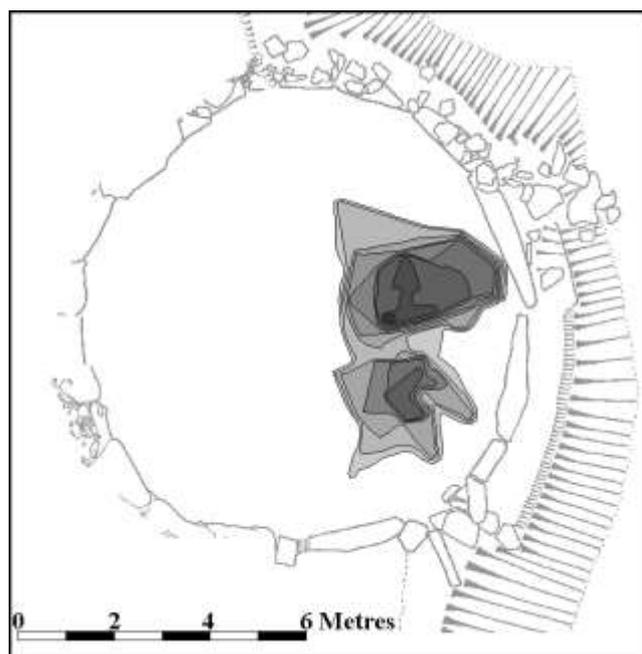


Figure 19 Contour plan illustrating the character of Middle Bronze Age hollow[325] within the house. The darker shading represents the deeper levels. The contour interval is 2cm.

Neighbouring House

The round house at Teigncombe forms part of an extensive settlement sitting within a substantial and well preserved coaxial field system. The settlement includes at least 41 round houses scattered around the northern and eastern slopes of Kestor. One house situated close to the Teigncombe one at NGR SX 66668680 is of similar size and character. For comparative purposes this building was surveyed using a planetable to plot the stones within the house and the orthostats forming its wall, whilst planning frames were used to record the detail of the walls. Figure 20 represents an amalgamation of the resulting field drawings. A number of useful observations are possible. The first is that the internal diameter of 9.3m means that this house is essentially the same size as the excavated one at Teigncombe. Second, the entrance faces 90° whilst the Teigncombe one is some 20° different at 110° . So both buildings have a very similar outlook. Third, the surveyed house has evidence to suggest that its doorway may have been protected by a porch, whilst at Teigncombe the doorway is protected by the field wall leading south from the house. So both houses had protected doorways, although this was achieved in rather different ways. Fourth, an arrangement of edge set orthostats within the northern wall of the surveyed house may suggest the survival of a cupboard, although it is possible that the two orthostats apparently situated within the wall represent the outer face of an orthostatic wall at this point. Fifth, compared with the Teigncombe house there is no post-medieval hillwash obscuring the upper part of the house. This is because the house is situated on a much less steep slope and the area above has not been ploughed. Finally, the walls at both houses are very similar in character with double orthostatic construction on the lower side and a combination of single orthostatic and coursed walling on the upper side.

During the autumn and winter months members of ACE have carried out further survey work on individual houses in the vicinity of this one and hopefully it will be possible to present their work in the next Interim Report.

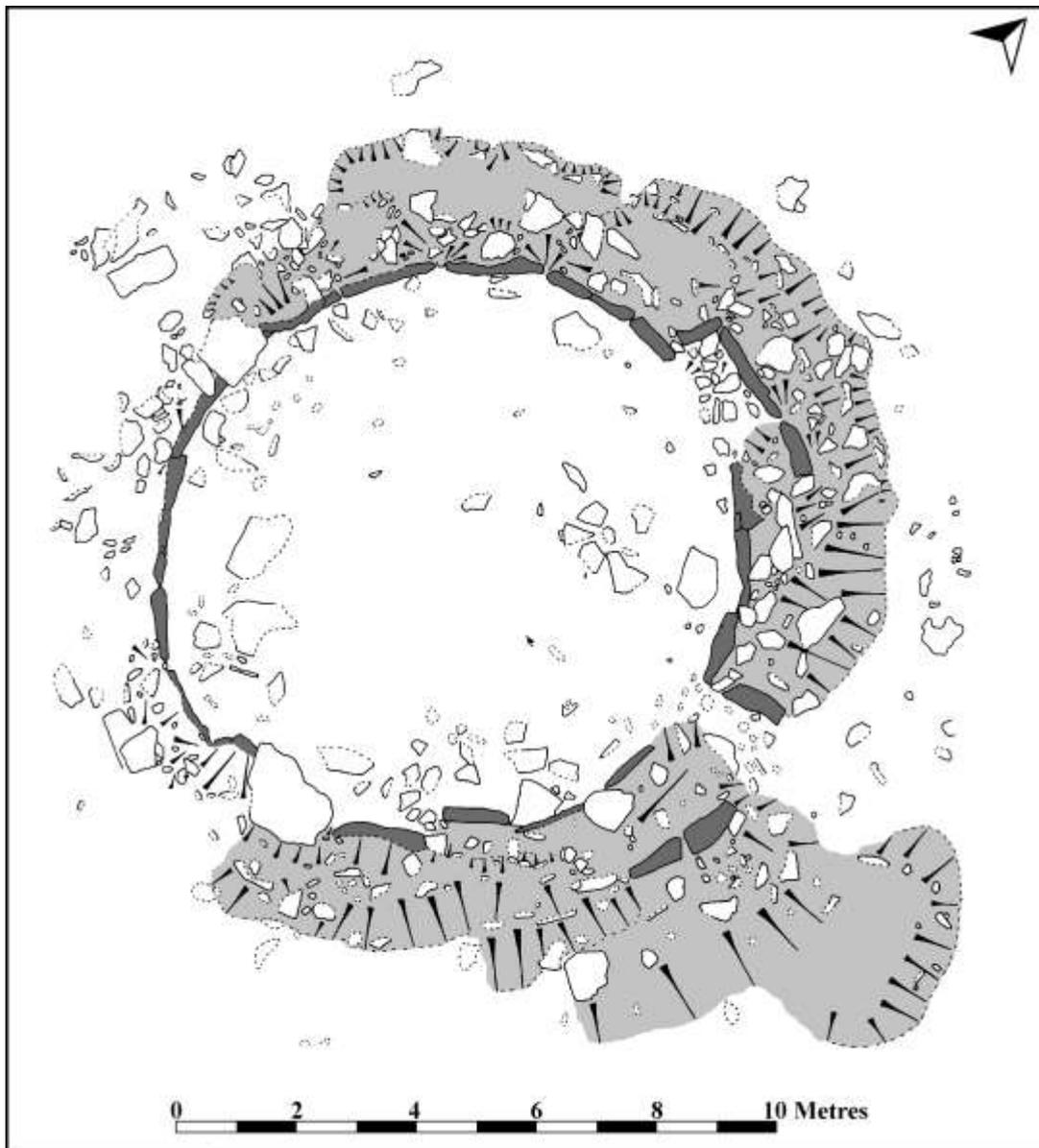


Figure 20 Survey plan of the house on Chagford Common at NGR SX
The shaded area represents a bank .

Conclusion

The fifth season at Teigncombe split fairly evenly into two parts. The first half was spent removing the remaining “floor level” to reveal underlying subsoil through which a variety of post and stake holes together with at least one small construction quarry had been cut. The remainder of the time was spent investigating and recording these various features and checking on other anomalies some of which may represent natural differences in the subsoil, whilst others are the result of voles, rabbits and rhizomes. In 2005 the apparent anomalies in the subsoil will be investigated further together with the two areas where flag stones were revealed.

Acknowledgements

After five seasons of excavation it is becoming increasingly difficult to find new words to thank everyone who has survived this far. The 2004 season was memorable in the sense that on no occasion did anybody have to tramp down the hill to the spring to fetch water for the spray so necessary in previous seasons to enhance soil colours. Instead devices were invented to empty the often substantial puddles which appeared overnight. The 2004 season was a wet one and whilst this really helped with identifying and excavating the post and stake holes the excavation team did spend much time drying out their clothes. The digging team remained pretty much the same as in the previous year. Again Janet Daynes and Gordon Fisher did much of the pre-excavation organising of equipment and without their help we would have been sitting in the rain and digging with our hands. Without Malcolm and Wendy Howard we would indeed have got very wet, for when our mess tent was taken out of its bag it was found to have totally disintegrated. Malcolm and Wendy came to the rescue with their very fine and thankfully large frame tent. Everybody played a crucial role in the success of the season and the team spirit seems to grow with each year that passes. Sadly, for the first time since the start of the excavation in 1999 Graham Carne was unable to come as the season coincided for him with a nasty bout of the shingles. Otherwise the team remained fairly unaltered including as it did:- Bob Bruce, Judith Cannell, Judi Clarke, Chloe Clifford, Geoff Day, Janet Daynes, Gordon Fisher, Judith Farmer, Malcolm Howard, Wendy Howard, Lorinda Legge, Deric Munro, Bill Radcliffe, Shirley Ryan, Helen Scobling, Esmée Sykes, Sue Watts, Anne Whitbourne, Tim Whitbourne and Roland Williams. Everybody brought and shared their skills and worked so well together that, this year, even the kettle got turned on time (well most of the time).

Patrick Stanbury kindly removed (with the front loader on his tractor) a fallen orthostat from the house and brought up and took down all our equipment. His help saved us over a day and a lot of trudging up and down the hill - for which we are always very grateful. The scaffolding tower so essential for the overview of our work was kindly provided by Forthglade (thanks again Benny)

As always we are extremely grateful to the Dartmoor National Park Authority for funding and supporting our work. We would also like to thank Mr and Mrs Edmondson for allowing us to invade part of their property each year and who together with the Duchy of Cornwall (Chris Gregory) have provided us with the crucial permission to excavate. We are always made to feel most welcome and this is really appreciated. Debbie Griffiths, Jane Marchand and Andy Crabb (Dartmoor National Park Authority) provided their usual much welcomed support and arranged for the erection of the stiles by Serina Rowse. The house is part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument and we are grateful to English Heritage (Ian Morrison and Vanessa Straker) for the consent and support to carry out the work. Pollen analysis is being carried out by Tony Brown and the flints will be looked at by Martin Tingle. This year I was very fortunate to be awarded Personal Development Leave from English Heritage and would like to thank Jill Guthrie (my then line manager) for supporting my application.

Considerable post-excavation help with analysing the stakeholes and postholes was gratefully received from Judith Cannell and Bill Radcliffe. In future it is hoped to be able to more fully utilise their results. Shirley Ryan turned her home into a finds processing shed and carefully ensured that all the finds were cared for. Deric Munro took most of the site photographs and Malcolm Howard ensured the safe erection of the scaffolding tower. Gordon Fisher spent much of his time on his knees recording angles of one sort or another.

Henrietta Quinnell's contribution to our work has been considerable and as the years go by and the pottery keeps flowing, I can't help thinking of her first letter to me agreeing to work with us on the project. In this she says I “am prepared to take a gamble that you won't find a midden”. Although we have not (yet) I am sure we have recovered much more than she anticipated and I am very grateful that she continues to play such a crucial role in our work.

Devon Archaeology Society provided us with many of the tools and equipment and I would like to specially thank in this context, David Fitter. Finally, I forgot to mention last year that the project has been adopted by ACE Archaeology Club whose increasing contribution to the work has certainly helped me to devote my time more to the archaeology than the administration – for which I am very grateful.