



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



**INTERIM REPORT FOR 2007 SEASON**



***ACE ARCHAEOLOGY***

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### Introduction

The eighth season of work at Teigncombe was disrupted significantly by atrociously wet weather and as a result fieldwork planned for the surrounding area had to be curtailed with the result that most of the available time was spent planning and contour surveying Teigncombe II. The results of this work have very helpfully provided a very clear steer on the future direction of the project.

Three years after the completion of the excavation of Teigncombe I, much progress has been achieved with the post-excavation. Much remains to be completed, but at last it is possible to provide a detailed snap-shot of where the work has reached. Attached to this Interim Report is a DVD which contains a digital and incomplete version of the final report. Many folders are empty, most are incomplete, but the framework of the report is starting to emerge. Of particular interest is the photographic record which represents a selection of the thousands of photographs which have been taken. Each is captioned and using the search facility it is possible to retrieve particular photographs. The main purpose for releasing this information at this early stage is to invite feedback on the form of the report allowing the incorporation of fresh ideas into the final version. With so much information errors can creep in and again feedback on these will be welcomed.

## **What we did on our holidays**

For the 2007 season at Teigncombe we had set ourselves the usual million tasks to do over the fortnight which would have been fine and achievable with good weather. As well as doing a contour survey (20m x 20m at 20cm intervals) and detailed earthwork survey of the roundhouse, we had intended to try out the methodology of recording the impact of historic land use on a prehistoric landscape by looking at the field boundary junctions of the area.

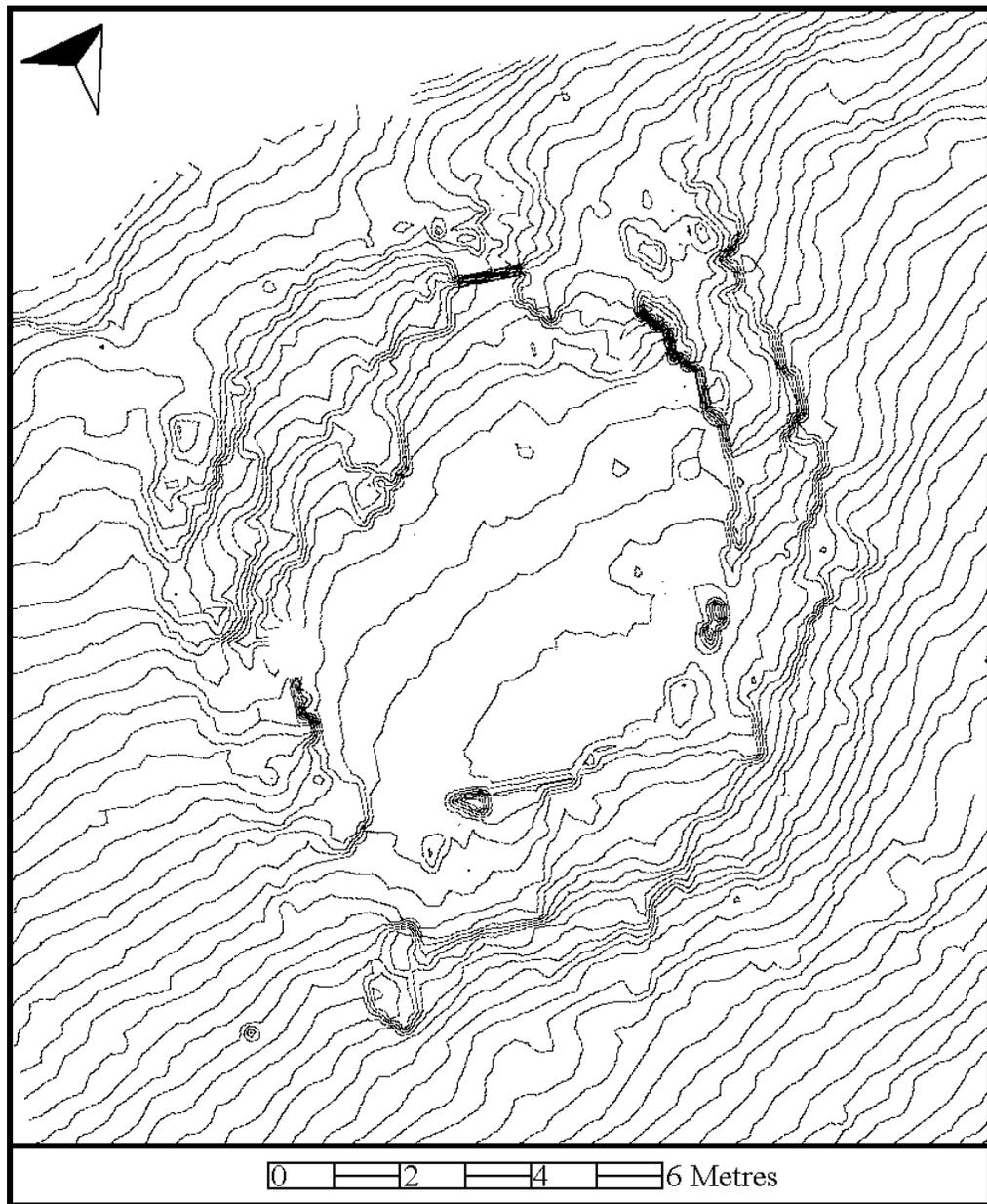
The first couple of days were spent setting up camp and preparing the site for Sandy's arrival, little did we know what the weather had in store for us! After a very fruitful meeting discussing the direction of the project with Sandy and the volunteers, the rain started. This came down in all forms from the lightest drizzle to those great big tropical rain forest drops and all sideways as it was all carried on very strong winds. Trying to set up the 20m grid in these conditions was somewhat challenging to say the least!

By the 16<sup>th</sup> of August (five days in) we were ready to start the contour and earthwork surveys, the tapes were laid out and the roundhouse was neat and tidy with all the plant debris and bracken removed. Then it rained some more and continued to do so until the 22<sup>nd</sup> August, we had managed to get some work done between downpours on most days, except one when the Gazebo sheltering the level got blown apart by the gale, so we gave up for safety reasons! But progress was very slow and with only four days left we were all wondering if we would get the contour and earthwork surveys done let alone start on the field boundary survey. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug the sun came out, what a difference that made, we all worked our socks off over the next few days getting both the earthwork and contour surveys completed also contour transects through the roundhouse extending on one side over 70m to go through what we suspected was an unrecorded lynchet.

We were all very disappointed not to have been able to get to grips with the field boundary survey methodology, although we did take a little time when Sandy visited and on the last day to have a good look at some of the boundaries within the T I and T II area. We came to the conclusion that this work would be better carried out during the winter months when there is less vegetation to contend with.

## **Contour Survey**

At Teigncombe I excavation revealed an unusual deep stratigraphy which whilst very useful for demonstrating the displacement of artefacts meant that it was not possible to examine the impact of the present day rhizome mat on sensitive archaeological deposits. For this reason in 2006 the search for a round house with relatively shallow stratigraphy commenced. A number of houses in different parts of the moor were visited and initial examination suggested that Teigncombe II at NGR SX 66772 86784 would make a good candidate. In 2006 a stipe survey similar to that conducted at Teigncombe I in 1999 was successfully completed. At Teigncombe I a detailed contour survey was conducted before excavation and in 2007 it was felt that it would be useful to carry out a contour survey at Teigncombe II for two main reasons. First, if excavation was to proceed in the future, a contour survey was essential to tie in the relative depth of the rhizome mat and any artefacts recovered. Second, it was hoped that the completed survey might provide a clue to the relative depth of the deposits within the house and so determine whether excavation would be useful.



**Figure 1.** Contour survey of Teigncombe II highlights the relatively gentle profile within the eastern part of the house. However, as at Teigncombe I there is a considerable built up of deposits within the western part of the house. The contour interval is 10cm.

The resulting survey clearly illustrates the platform nature of the house with the slope within the eastern part of the house being relatively gentle and more importantly similar in gradient to the excavated occupation surface at Teigncombe I. However, the steep gradient within the western part of the house graphically illustrates that there has been a considerable build up of material within this part of the building. Indeed the contour survey indicates that there is a minimum of 1.3m of deposits above the extreme western part of the house. In reality this figure will be much higher and clearly this building at least in part does fulfil the criteria of having shallow stratigraphy. Furthermore, experience at Teigncombe I strongly suggests that the degree of post-occupation accumulation within the western part of the house will have influenced the build up of deposits in the east. It is very likely that a proportion of the material accumulating in the western part of the house will have settled in the eastern part of the house. The contour survey has therefore demonstrated that in common with Teigncombe I there has been a considerable amount of post-occupation debris accumulation and that Teigncombe II is therefore unsuitable as a candidate for excavation within the context of examining the impact of present day bracken rhizomes on sensitive archaeological deposits. This is very unfortunate because clearly it would have been very useful to have excavated a house within the vicinity of Teigncombe I

with similar characteristics. Excavation of Teigncombe could therefore only be justified within the context of a broader research programme designed to examine the prehistoric archaeology of the Kestor area and not as part of the Archaeology and Bracken Project.



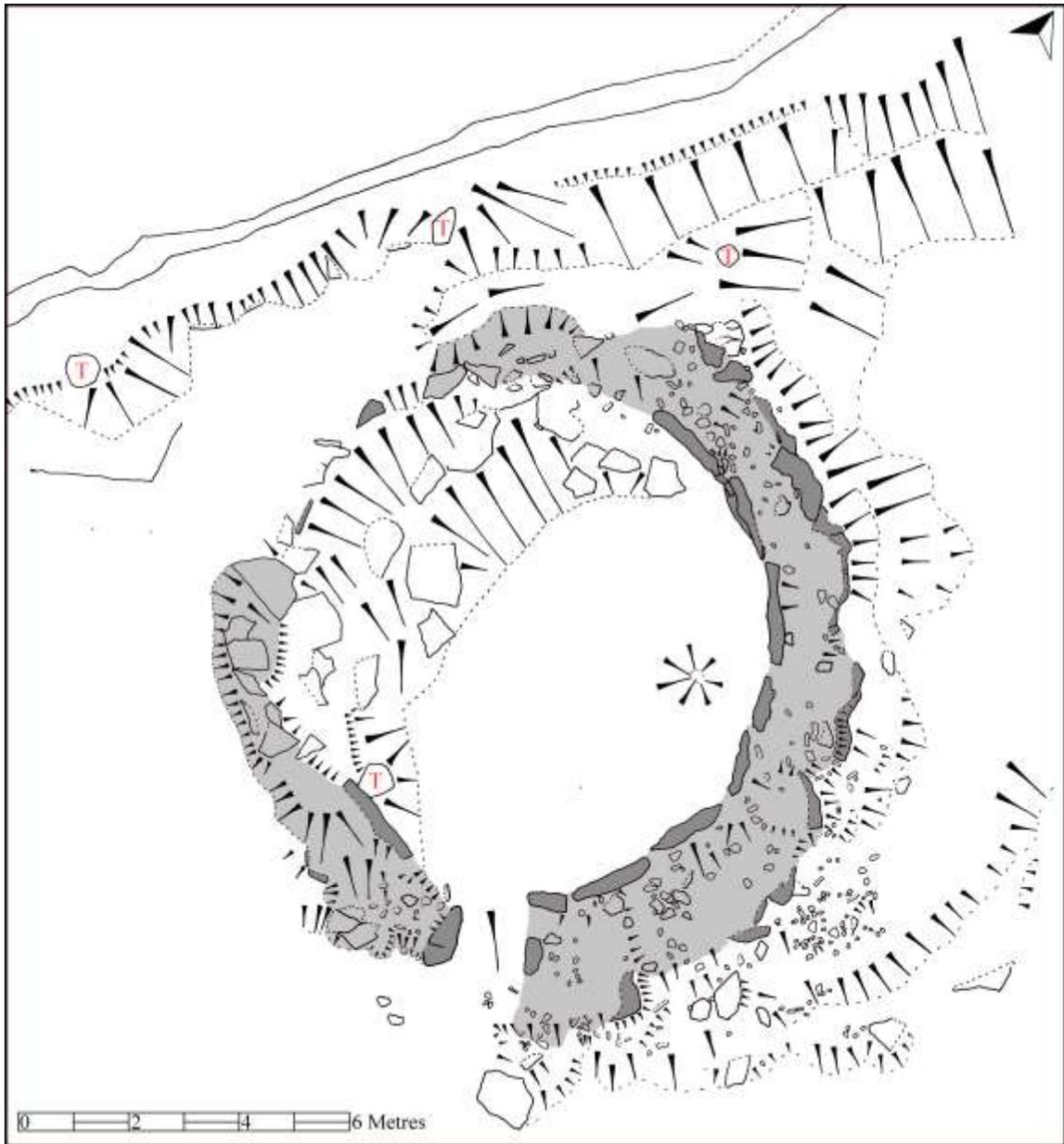
*Figure 2. Contour surveying the area south of the house.*

Teigncombe II was felt to be a good candidate because of its protected position below a reave which we felt would have prevented large amounts of material slipping into the building. This is clearly not the case and perhaps all or most of the houses built on relatively steep slopes will have relatively deep stratigraphy. If so, this is certainly good news for the archaeology, because this will be protecting the sensitive archaeological deposits. However houses built on relatively flat ground are therefore likely to be more at risk and this is another factor that should be considered when devising prioritised strategies to control bracken. If the excavation element of “The Dartmoor Archaeology and Bracken Project is to move on we need to be able to test this hypothesis and for various reasons none of the houses within the Kestor coaxial field system would appear to be suitable for this type of work.

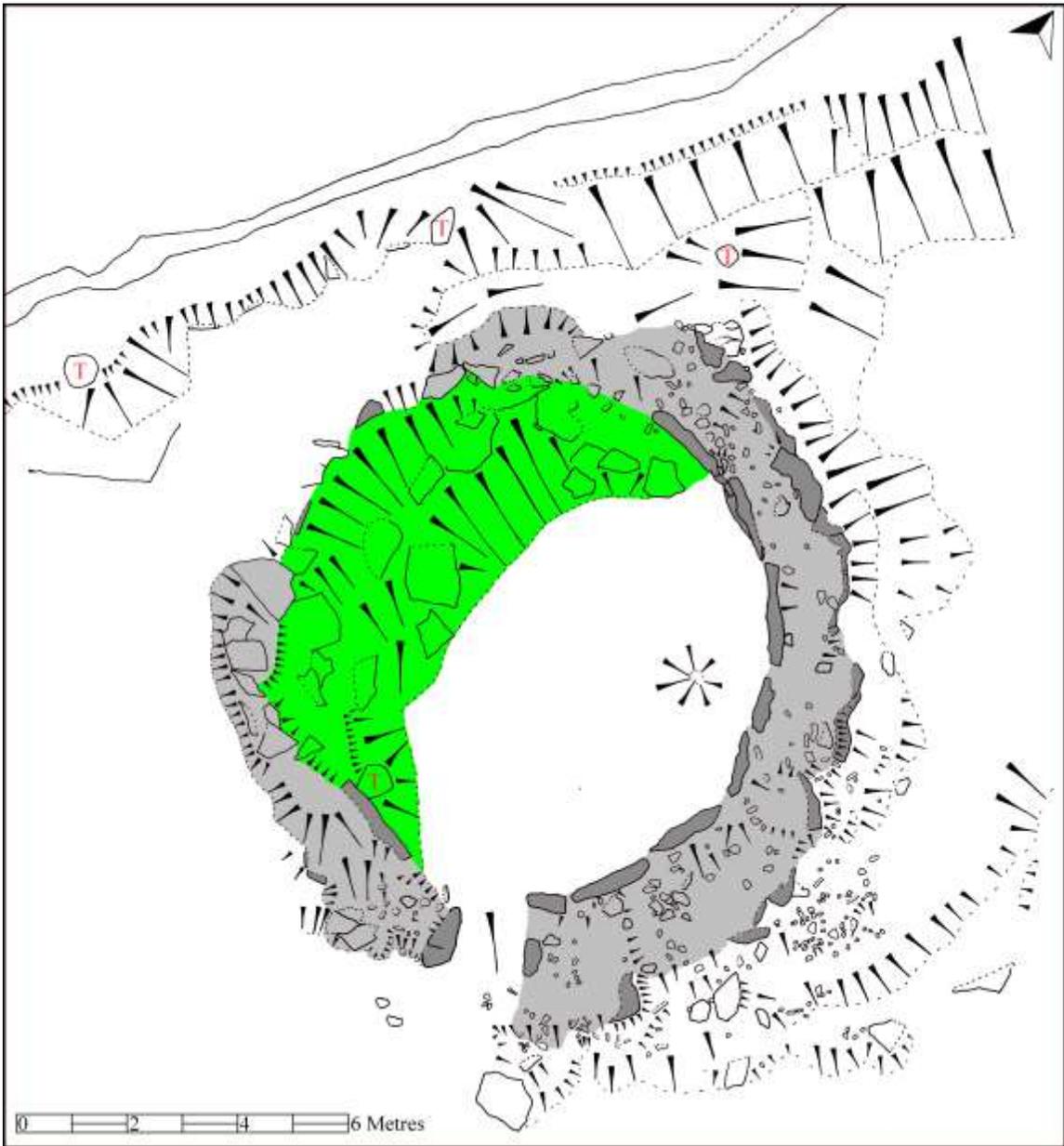
### **Earthwork Survey**

The earthwork survey clearly indicates that Teigncombe II is not as well preserved as its neighbour. Large displaced orthostats lie within the western part of the building indicating that the western wall has either collapsed or been “pushed”. The depth of surviving deposits within the western part of the building means that the lower courses of the wall are likely to survive in their entirety, but there has clearly been significant damage to the upper courses. The south facing doorway is clearly discernable, measures up to 1.22m wide and is faced with orthostats on both sides. The eastern wall is of double orthostatic construction and appears complete with only one possible gap a short distance from the doorway. Teigncombe II with a diameter of 8.6m is only very slightly smaller than Teigncombe I, the constructional details are identical, they lie within the same field system, close to each other and are almost certainly contemporary. It would therefore have been extremely useful to have excavated the building in order to provide a valuable archaeological context for our work at Teigncombe I. Unfortunately the sites are so similar that certainly within the context of the bracken project the results are not likely to justify the resources. In the future, Teigncombe II will offer archaeologists the

opportunity to build upon the archaeological elements of our work at Teigncombe I. Hopefully our stipe, earthwork and contour surveys will provide an invaluable starting point.



**Figure 3.** Earthwork survey highlighting the upright orthostats (dark grey), wall (light grey) and trees (T).



**Figure 4.** Earthwork survey of the house highlighting the area (shown in green) with significant accumulation of material. The large size of some slabs indicates that the western wall has probably seen partial collapse.



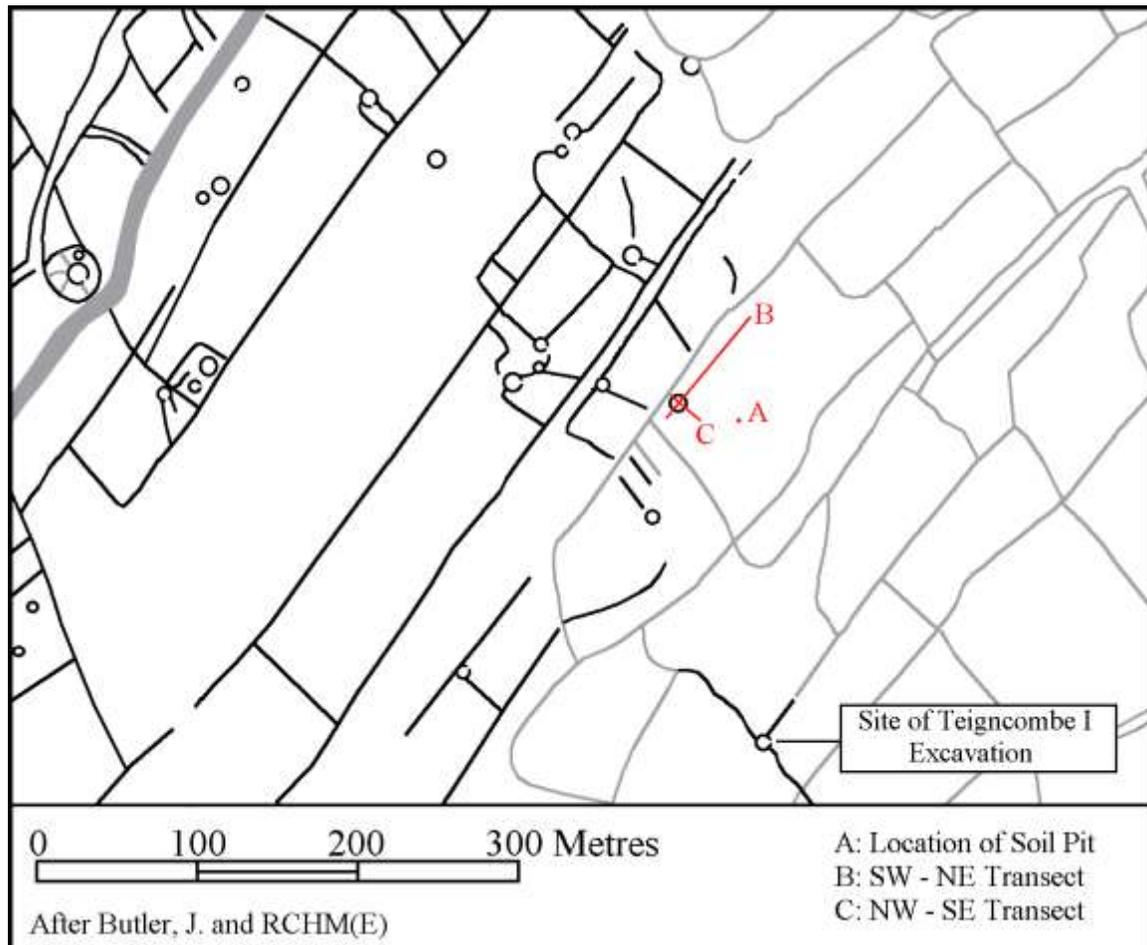
*Figure 5. The main part of the survey was carried out using planetables at a scale of 1:50.*



*Figure 6. Details were added to the survey using planning frames.*

## Transect Survey

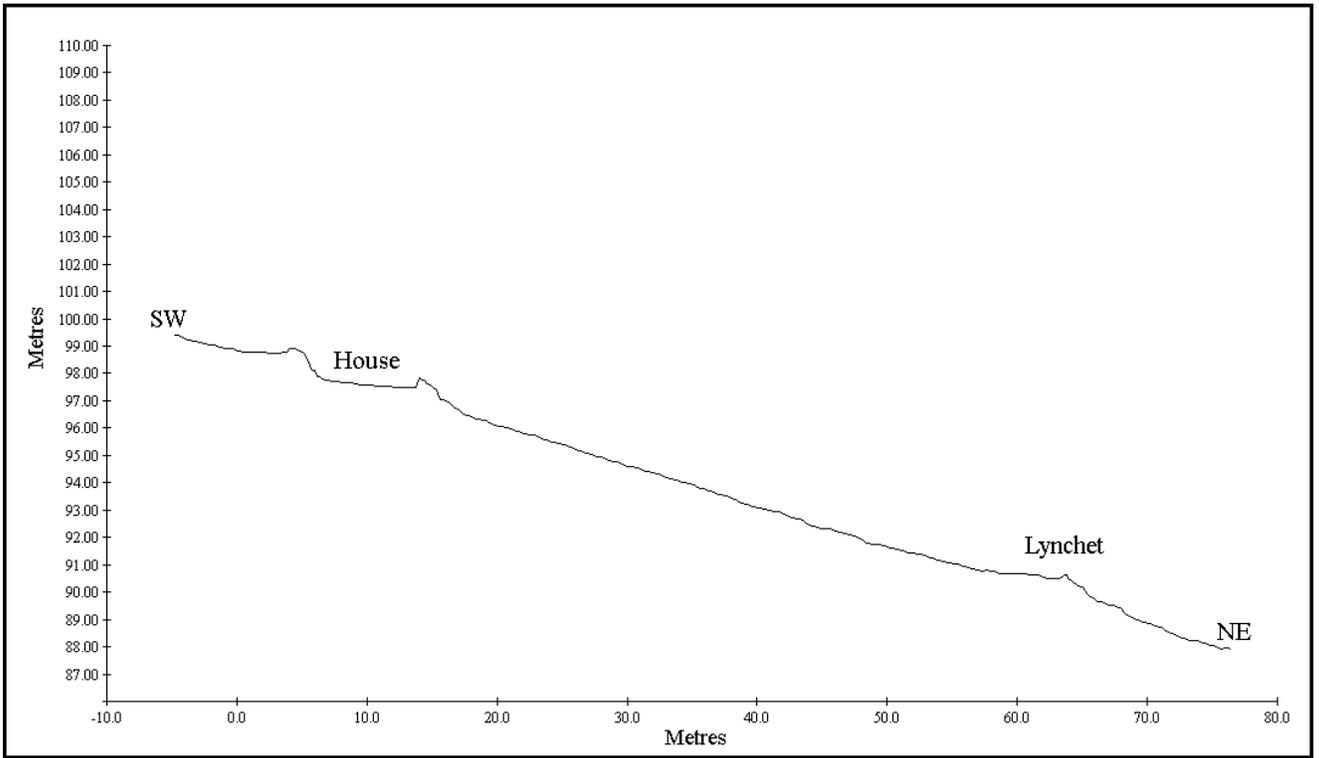
These simple surveys place Teigncombe II within its morphological context. Their purpose is to graphically illustrate the character of the slope on which the building was erected. The purpose of the exercise was also to establish whether there were any earthworks or breaks in slope within the vicinity which were not clearly visible. The position of these transects is shown in Figure 7.



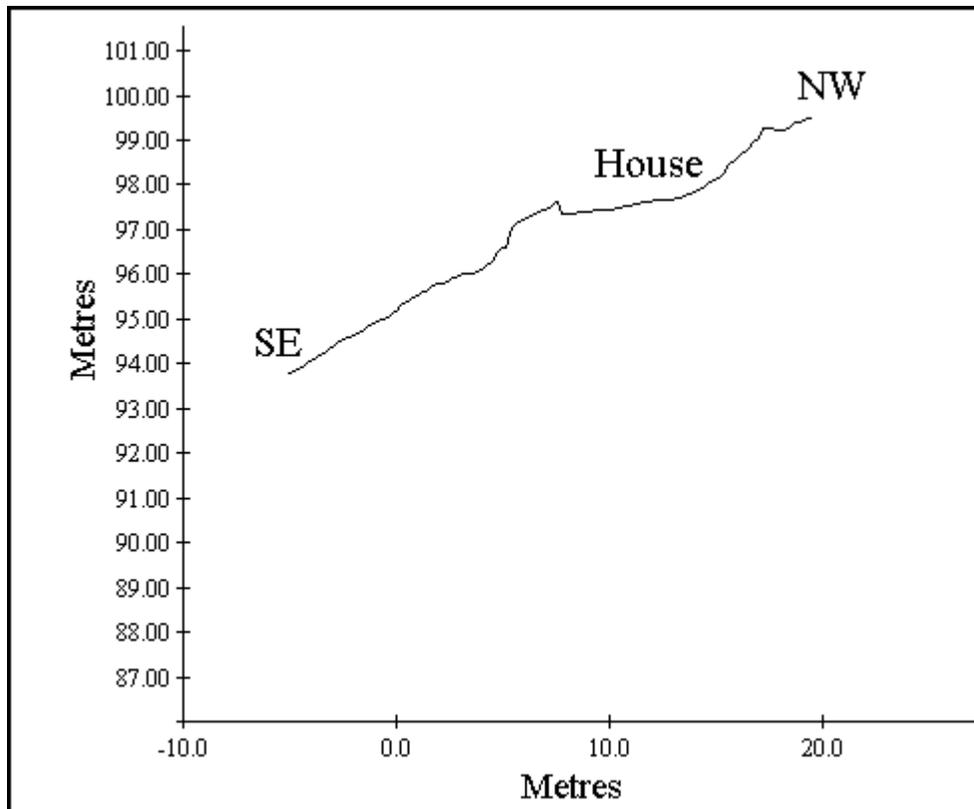
**Figure 7.** Map showing the location of the transects and soil pit.

The south-west to north-east transect clearly highlights the house platform and walls together with the slope leading downward to a well defined lynchet. Excavation in 2008 will be directed towards examining the archaeology surviving in the area between the house and lynchet.

The short north-west to south-east transect highlights the accumulation of material within the house. It was originally intended to continue the transect across the adjacent reave and onto the moor. Dense vegetation made this impossible, but following a fire in this area the transect will be completed in 2008 and will highlight the relationship with nearby reaves.



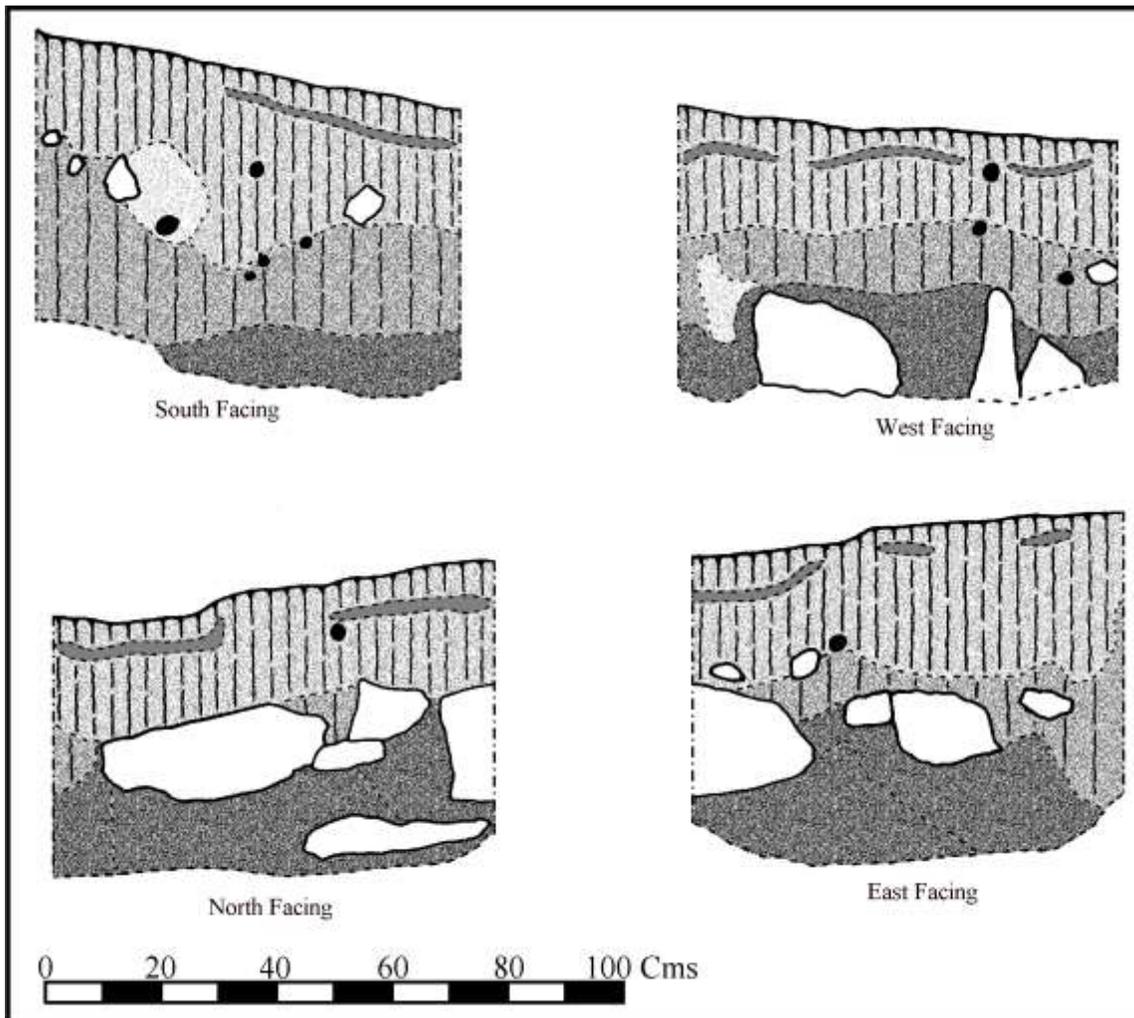
**Figure 8.** South-west to north east transect across Teigncombe II and nearby lynchet.



**Figure 9.** South-east to north-west transect across Teigncombe II.

## Soil pit

In 2006 a small pit [A in Figure 7] was excavated at NGR SX 66803 86767 for operational reasons and the opportunity was taken to record the sections exposed to provide an insight into the character of the soil profile on this part of the hillside.



*Figure 10. The four sections exposed in the soil pit.*

Apparent in all four sections was a discontinuous band of rusty wire some 10cms below the surface. This represents the base of mink cages which were established in this area in the 1950's and indicates the amount of soil accumulation there has been during the last 50 years. The topsoil is between 20cms and 30cms deep. Below the topsoil is a mottled layer containing material from the layers above and below. This layer is probably the most interesting sitting as it does at the interface between the "natural" and topsoil. This layer is likely to contain information relating to prehistoric activity and excavations in 2008 will seek to establish the character of the surviving archaeology and in particular whether rhizomes or other roots are damaging it.



*Figure 11. South facing section in soil pit*



*Figure 12. West facing section in soil pit*



*Figure 13. North facing section in soil pit*



*Figure 14. East facing section in soil pit*

### **Round House Database**

The search for a suitable candidate for a second house to excavate has precipitated an idea that it would be extremely useful to create a comprehensive and accessible record of all Dartmoor's known round houses. The database would include details of each house including descriptive text, photographs and details of any threats (including bracken) and most importantly represent a benchmark against which the state of the resource could be measured in the future. In the drive towards landscape archaeology, the bigger picture, the broadbrush approach, and reliance on technology it is often overlooked that the detail which can be so useful in our understanding of the whole has been somewhat neglected. The Teigncombe Team have during the past nine years developed an understanding for round houses and are therefore well placed to carry forward this important work. The result should be a "Doomsday Book" of Dartmoor's prehistoric buildings which should eventually form a useful tool for anyone studying or managing this extremely significant and often overlooked resource of national importance.

A recording sheet has been produced which will be tested and fine tuned during the 2008 season. In the foreseeable future it is envisaged that the fieldwork emphasis of the project will be directed towards compiling this database. If you are interested in being involved with this work please contact either Sandy or Janet or speak to any member of the team.

### **Post Excavation**

The excavation at Teigncombe I finished in 2005. Since this time a considerable amount of effort has been directed towards creating a fully comprehensive record and analysis of the results of 6 seasons of excavation. During the winter of 2007/8 significant progress has been made and whilst much remains to be completed it is now possible for the first time to provide an insight into progress and in particular to demonstrate the scale of progress and invite comments and observations on the digital form of the final detailed report. Attached to this Interim Report is a DVD which hopefully contains information which has not been previously published. As with all interims the contents of this DVD must be regarded as provisional and will no doubt be updated as further progress is made. The DVD should hopefully in part explain why the report has been delayed and why it may be some years before the

final version is available. In particular, your attention is drawn to the photographic record which is very nearly complete.

### **2008 Season**

The ninth season at Teigncombe will be concerned with investigating a small area of the Kestor coaxial field system. A 5m by 5m trench close to Teigncombe II will be excavated to examine the impact of bracken rhizomes on the archaeological deposits surviving within a prehistoric field. In addition, the opportunity will be taken to examine the character of the soils in an area which has not seen the intensive occupation witnessed at Teigncombe I. This exercise should help us to define more precisely what features at Teigncombe I were entirely natural, provide a “control” for our earlier work and give an insight into the character of rhizome impact on uncontained archaeological layers.

### **Acknowledgements**

ACE Archaeology Club would like to give a big, big thank you to all those who made this years work at Teigncombe possible, these include:

The landowners Mr and Mrs Edmondson of course, without whose cooperation and patience none of our work over the past 9 years would have been possible.

Devon Archaeological Society who again let us borrow essential equipment, especially the all important latrine tent for which we are all most grateful.

Dartmoor National Park authority for their financial support, without this we would not be able to continue our work in the way we would wish.

The owners of the mess tent; Mac and Wendy Howard, without this wonderful dry space we would have been very damp and uncomfortable, as like 2006 it rained most of the time at Teigncombe.

Benny Venn and Catherine Norman for lending ACE their gas cooker ensuring a plentiful supply of hot drinks and for the few nights we stayed on site hot food also.

Anne and Tim Whitbourn, who supplied the Tardis tent for the tools, drawing kit and paperwork, another essential piece of kit which again was kept tidy by Anne for the duration. Anne and Tim also organised lots of things to make life more comfortable from making sure there was loo paper, enough coffee and midge coils etc.

Janet Daynes and Gordon Fisher did the usual organisational bit sorting tools, counting ranging poles and getting even more grey hairs, bossing people about a lot in Sandy's absence.

As cake plays an important role in archaeology, ACE is indebted to Tony Cannell for the supply of his delicious homemade ones!

Last but not least, thanks to everyone that helped out over the two weeks, ACE is very proud of the team, who worked in very difficult conditions but nevertheless got the job done.

This years team was: Janet Daynes, Gordon Fisher, Anne and Tim Whitbourn, Lorinda Legge Graham Carne, Chloe Clifford, John Spyder Parry, Judith Cannell, Bill Radcliffe, Judith Farmer, Brian Fox, Malcolm and Wendy Howard, Sue Watts and Bob Bruce.