

PAL 5 Brockabarrow Common, Blisland



Transhumance huts on eastern slopes, August 2007. Now much overgrown with Molinia and low furze (Pete Herring, August 2007.)

Location, geology and topography

Centred: SX 158 750

Extent: 167 ha (412 acres)

In two parts; a smaller core area based on a Bronze Age settlement and a larger halo around that.

Geology

Granite. A small outcrop on higher SW slope, and a few large boulders mid-slopes; otherwise a scatter of moorstones and some clitter on the southern slopes.

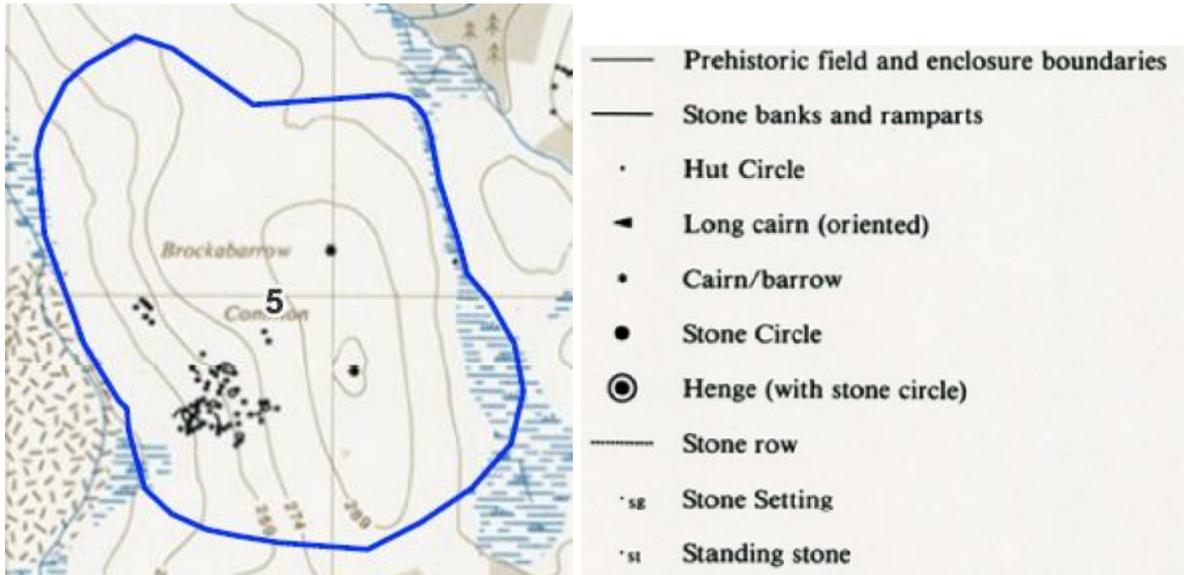
Topography

Rounded downland 230 to 306m (755 to 1003 feet) AOD, poorly drained convex tops (cut for peat). Formerly part of the Great Down or Gratton (that included Shallow-Water Common to the north and continued to the south of the modern A30 road).

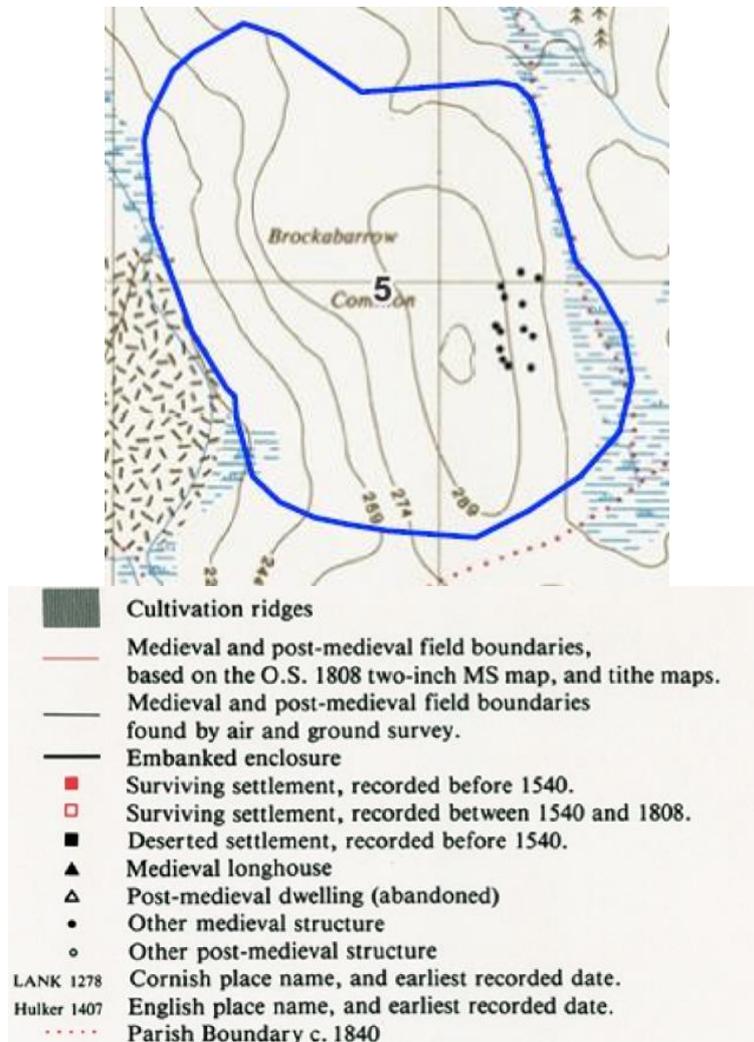
Several small outcrops of granite on the highest slopes. Clitter streams on western slopes, with one area of concave slope. The downland lies at the limits of two large water catchment areas: the western valley has a stream flowing south, ultimately into the Fowey and thus the south coast of Cornwall and the eastern a stream flowing north, ultimately into the Camel and the northern coast of Cornwall.

Current management and structures of ownership, commoners, etc:

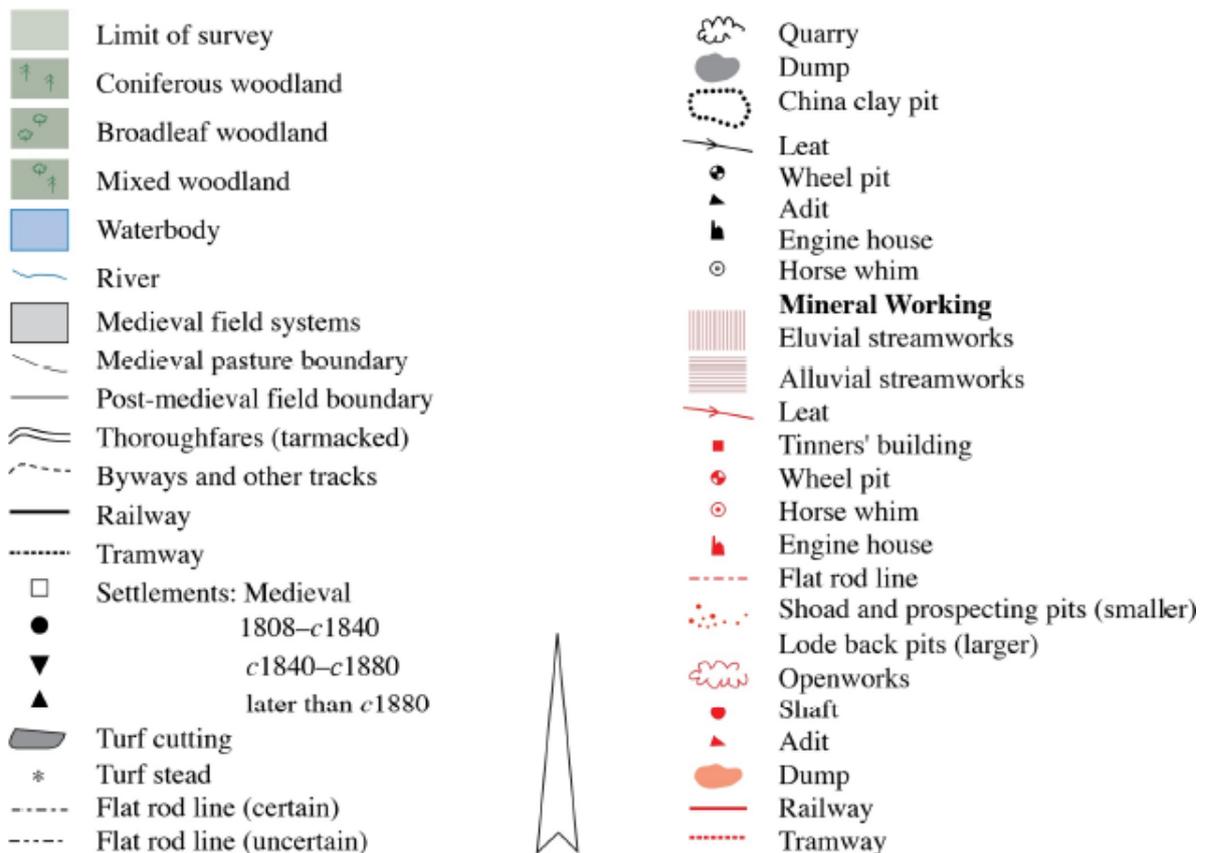
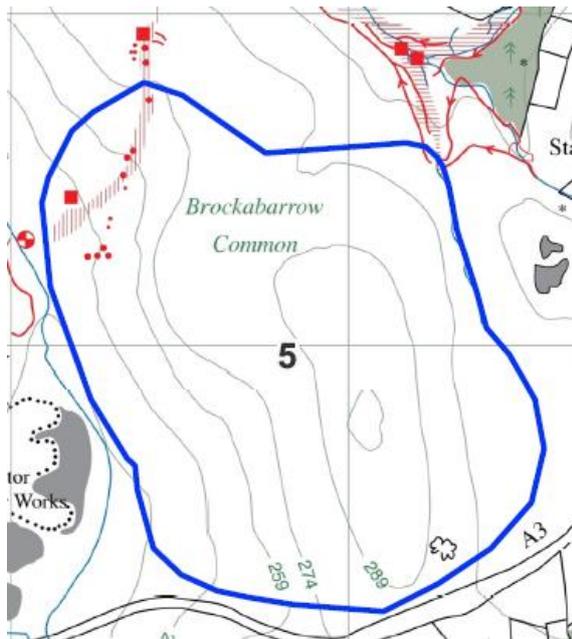
Brockabarrow and Shallow-Water Commons are a single unit (CL165). Those with rights on the Common farm in Blisland, Temple and St Neot parishes.



Extract from *Prehistoric overview map* (Johnson and Rose 1994, Map 1; reproduced with permission of Cornwall Council and Historic England). PAL with blue outline.



Extract from *Medieval and later landscape to c1808 overview map* (Johnson and Rose 1994, Map 2; reproduced with permission of Cornwall Council and Historic England).



Extract from *Post-medieval and industrial overview map* (Herring et al 2008, Map 1; reproduced with permission of Cornwall Council and Historic England).

Land use history

Pre-1748

There is unusually good documentation for early post-medieval land use and land management in Blisland Manor, of which Brockabarrow is part..

In the late 16th century Brockabarrow and Shallow-Water Commons, which run together, were part of Blisland Manor's 'wasts or moores called ye outmoores, being about 9,000 acres', a situation that probably also prevailed in 1086 when Blisland's pasture was 3 leagues by 1.5 leagues in extent, that is around 4.5 miles by 2.25 miles (MacLean 1873, 91).

In the time of Queen Elizabeth I, all the manor's tenants, both customary tenants and free tenants, had 'common of pasture, sans number, & common of turbary, but with this difference that whereas both have common of pasture paying 1d for every polle [head] of their cattle, ye free tenants paid moreover 3d a journey [i.e. the produce of a single day's cutting of turves] for their turbary, but ye customary tenants paid nothing' (MacLean 1873, 91).

The control over grazing in the commons was therefore exerted by payment rather than any explicit levancy-couchancy rule, but the wealth required to pay the penny for each polle would be largely dependent on the productivity of a tenant's home farm land. It was therefore a form of levancy-couchancy at one remove.

As noted, the common was a mix of grazing and turf (peat) cutting. The latter included digging blanket bog on the rounded backs of Brockabarrow and Shallow Water Commons, the rectilinear cuttings visible in aerial photos and on Lidar.

Stannary Court Rolls have the long downland of which Brockabarrow Common was part as 'Gratton', a corruption of Great Down, and the hill was one of the largest in plan on the Moor.

Thomas Martyn's 1748 map.

Shown as open land, with the hill shown as a simple profile, labelled 'Brocka Barrow'. 'Peverals Cross' is shown on its S side, suggesting that the cross has since moved 2.5 miles or 4 kilometres west to Trehudreth Down.

c1810 OS drawing

Shown as rough grassland, with the barrow or cairn, labelled 'Brocka Barrow' at its summit.

c1840 Tithe Map

Shown as a single unit, TA 1781, and recorded in the Tithe Apportionment Schedule as 'Shallow Water Common', covering 997 acres. It was owned by Sir William Molesworth of Pencarrow (Egloshayle) and thus still part of the Blisland Manor commons.

c1880 OS map

Shown as coarse grassland with clumps of furze, crossed by several unfenced trackways. Sufficiently open for archaeological remains to be visible and surveyed, including five of the relatively slight transhumance huts on the eastern side of the hill, and 20 of the roundhouses on the western side.

c1906 OS map

Little change.

Modern

Little change as it remains part of the Blisland manor commons.



Brockabarrow Common (far right) in 1967, the road being the pre-improvement A30. Vegetation is largely the ancient semi-natural grassland (Charles Woolf, courtesy of the Institute of Cornish Studies, ICS12.9908).



The ancient grassland of the western slopes in July 1988 (Pete Herring).

Historic Environment

Headlines

- The archaeology and landscape of summer grazing.
- An ancient common, part of the medieval Blisland Manor commons, never enclosed and never subject to any form of farming and land use other than grazing and turf cutting, with the exception of very confined stream-working, quarrying and mining.
- Every indication of having been a common through later prehistory, from at least as early as the Middle Bronze Age, when round houses were built by those who enclosed small pens to support their pastoral use of the hill.
- Transhumance huts of the early medieval period and a fine Bronze Age round house settlement that was also probably used by transhumants.
- Bronze Age cairns on summit and crests of the hill.

Summary of main heritage assets

Prehistoric ceremonial and ritual

A large Bronze Age **summit cairn** (MCO4206, PRN 1783), with upright slabs forming a kerb of a platform cairn that incorporates a low natural tor. The barrow was labelled Brocka Barrow on the OS 2-inch drawing of 1805 but was largely dismantled in the 19th century, apparently to provide materials for the building of the main road (Maclean 1868, 24).



A **cairn** placed on the false crest of the hill on its north-eastern slope (MCO4207, PRN 3163) was shown on the 1882 OS 1:2500 map as a 'barrow'. It is 10m in diameter and 0.5m high.

A doubtful **cairn** (MCO4208, PRN 3184) was apparently noticed by Richard Thomas in the mid-19th century but has never been found since. It may be one of the two mentioned above.

Both of the certain cairns fall within the viewshed of Roughtor (Farnworth et al 2024, fig 4).

Prehistoric domestic and agricultural

On its western slope, in the inner PAL, is a fine multi-phase **prehistoric settlement** of around **62 roundhouses** with seven associated **enclosures** (MCO18934, PRN

1767). The houses are concentrated in an area of approximately 16 hectares, set in a slight bowl (the concave slope) on the western slope which has better drainage than the rest of the hill, and some shelter. There are a few dense clusters of houses on the downhill (west) side, but more dispersed higher up the hill. A further cluster of six houses lies to the north west. Many of the houses are incorporated into the walling of the enclosures. Roundhouses range in internal diameter from 3.5m-10.0m with walling of various types - slab and block facing to each side of a rubble core, simply an inner facing to rubble, or of large piled blocks, particularly in areas of clutter. Proportionally more small houses are freestanding while more of the larger houses are associated with enclosures, perhaps indicating that they served different functions, at different dates.

The associated enclosures are generally small and roughly rectilinear form. Six have clear entrance gaps. Walling varies in the same way as the houses. All the enclosures incorporate apparently contemporary houses, either inserted into the perimeter wall (in which case their entrances face out of the enclosure) or attached to the inner faces (when entrances face inwards). It is generally considered that this was a pastoral settlement, possibly used mainly in the summer months.

Medieval

Brockabarrow Common also contains the best-defined group of **early medieval transhumance huts** in Cornwall. Some of these are scattered among the abandoned prehistoric round houses on the western side of the hill, but the clearest group, of more than a dozen sub-rectangular huts, with a shared square **pen**, are on the eastern side (PRN1751). Most of the huts are around twice as long as they are wide, typically around 6m long and 5m wide internally, their long axes running with the contour, and with entrance gaps on their long sides, cut through the 1.0m wide, 0.5m high stony banks that are their tumbled walls.

Other huts are found on the higher slopes between the two main sites and on the western slopes of the NE of the Bronze Age round house settlement. Not all of these have been mapped and so are not all included in the Historic Environment Record. Because the remains are only 0.2 to 0.5m high they are particularly vulnerable to vegetation growth.

The transhumance huts are placed quite high on the eastern side of the hill so that their occupants had wide views over grazing to which their livestock were probably hefted. Maintaining visibility to and from these remains is therefore important.

Industrial

At the north-western edge of the PAL is a fine **eluvial tin streamworks** (MCO24019, PRN 12500), probably of medieval origin, but clearly reworked in the post-medieval period when a large **count house** and **smithy** complex was built nearby (now ruined).

A dam at SX 1540 7593 created a **reservoir** serving the eluvial streamworks; this comprised a curving bank circa 1.5m wide, and up to 0.5m high. The workings themselves are very simple, just a narrow channel c 4m wide, and 0.8 to 1.1m deep with no heaps (i.e. Gerrard's eluvial type A). Towards the northern end there seems to have been a re-cut of the gully served by a linear side **reservoir** c 10m long and 2.5m wide. There is a very loose scatter of small **prospecting pits** around the central and northern part of the streamworks, c 0.3m deep with heaps c 0.2m high

The reservoir is cut by a later, water-filled, **lode back pit**, one of a series of five pits cut into the base of the streamworks at the upper end of its southern half, indicating a later working, possibly associated with the **tinners' building** to the north of the streamworks' lowest western end. This (MCO24020, PRN 12500.01) has a stone built fireplace in its west downhill wall and the entrance is in the south wall. Possibly a forge / **furnace** in the south east corner subdivided by a stone wall. There are no tare-and-feather marks visible on the stones, suggesting a pre-1800 date.

There are further **lode-back pits** to the south of the streamworks. Note that a small dressing floor (MCO24251) with round buddles survives on the western side of the river, on Hawk's Tor.

A possible ruined **tinners' building** (MCO22743) survives low on the eastern side of the hill.

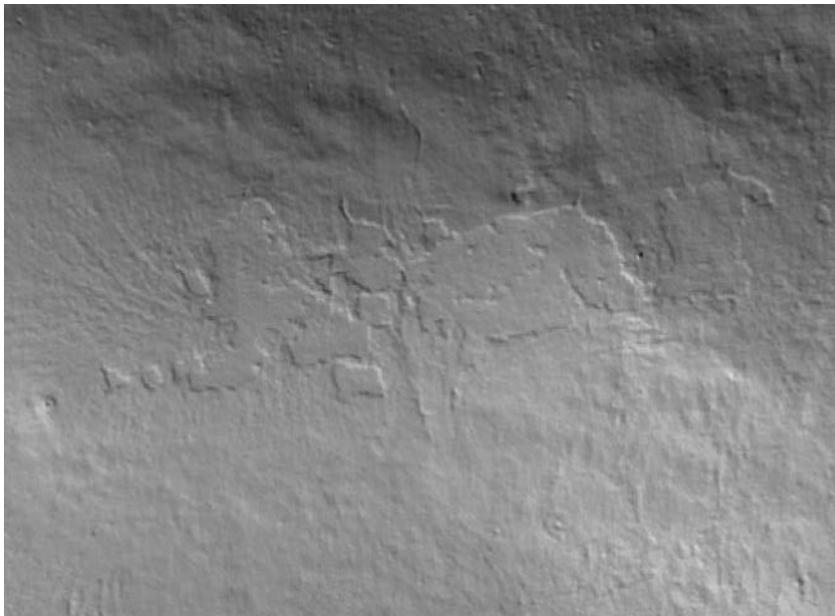
At the summit and on the higher slopes are numerous examples of **granite stone splitting**, both from tors and from moorstones.

On the south-eastern slope of the hill is a **rab quarry** (MCO24223, PRN 12675), its gravelly product presumably used in the surfacing of the nearby main road.

Post-medieval and modern

The Brocka Barrow cairn was allegedly robbed for road-building stone for the turnpike immediately to the south (Maclean 1868, 24).

There are distinct traces of extensive **turf cuttings** in the shallow blanket bog on the back of Brockabarrow Common (MCO24022, PRN 12502). They are most easily seen on the Lidar of the hill (below).



A line of granite boundstones runs down the eastern valley. Inscriptions of M for Molesworth (Blisland manor) and G, possibly for Grylls (owner of Sprey Moor, to the east) (Moore 2024).

Significance of landscape visibility

The platform cairn and its central tor on the summit of the down would have been visible as a small pimple from afar. They stand where there are spectacular views north past Garrow Tor towards Rough Tor and Brown Willy.

The roundhouses and the small irregular enclosures on the western slope are densely packed together in an area with many natural boulders and much clutter. People today can experience how they were tucked into a shallow declivity in the side of the down, slightly out of the prevailing winds and overlooking the valley of the Bedalder or Warleggan River.

On the eastern side of the hill, the early medieval transhumance huts are placed on the higher and mid-slopes with long views east across Sprey Moor and northwards to the great commons of Altarnun.

Semi-natural Environment

NB this section has not been updated.

Notified Features:-

Acid Grassland – Bristle Bent grassland (U3 - *Agrostis curtisii* grassland), Bent-Fescue grassland (U4 - *Festuca ovina* - *Agrostis capillaris* - *Galium saxatile* grassland), Mat Grass grassland (U5 - *Nardus stricta* - *Galium saxatile* grassland)

Wet Heath – Deer Grass – Cross-leaved Heath wet heath (M15 - *Scirpus cespitosus* - *Erica tetralix* wet heath), Cross-leaved Heath – bog moss wet heath (M16 - *Erica tetralix* - *Sphagnum compactum* wet heath)

Valley Mire and other mire communities – Bog Asphodel – bog moss mire (M21 – *Narthecium ossifragum* - *Sphagnum papillosum* mire), Purple Moor-grass – Tormentil mire (M25 - *Molinia caerulea* - *Potentilla erecta* mire), bog moss bog pool community (M2 - *Sphagnum cuspidatum/recurvum* (fallax) bog pool community), Bottle Sedge – bog moss mire (M4 - *Carex rostrata* - *Sphagnum recurvum* (fallax) mire), Star Sedge – bog moss mire (M6 - *Carex echinata* - *Sphagnum recurvum* (fallax) *lauriculatum* (*denticulatum*) mire)

Aggregations of non-breeding birds – Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

Populations of nationally scarce butterflies – Marsh Fritillary (*Eurodryas aurinia*), Silver-studded Blue (*Plebejus argus*).

Butterflies which have experienced substantial declines – Dark Green Fritillary (*Argynnis aglaja*), Grayling (*Hipparchia semele*), Green Hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*), Silver-washed Fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*).

Nationally rare and scarce dragonfly species - Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura pumilio*), Small red Damselfly (*Ceriagrion tenellum*).

Outstanding Dragonfly Assemblage

Designations

Historic Environment

Scheduled Monuments

None.

Heritage Assets assessed as being of National Importance

This part of Bodmin Moor was not covered by English Heritage's Monuments Protection Programme (MPP), undertaken in the 1990s and early 2000s.

The existing Scheduled Monuments (above) were not reviewed in light of the findings of the Bodmin Moor Survey.

Neither were those following sites which were assessed as satisfying the criteria for National Importance using the criteria employed by the MPP and were therefore proposed as candidates for formal assessment for Scheduling during the Evaluation of Bodmin Moor (Rose and Herring 1990).

Following the guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) these non-designated heritage assets are demonstrably of equivalent significance to Scheduled Monuments. 'Substantial harm to or loss of [these] should be wholly exceptional' (NPPF, para 206).

- Bronze Age **summit cairn** (MCO4206, PRN 1783).
- Fine multi-phase **prehistoric settlement** of around **62 roundhouses** with seven associated **enclosures** in two distinct groups on hill's western side (MCO18934, PRN 1767 and 1768).
- The best-defined group of **early medieval transhumance huts** in Cornwall; more than a dozen sub-rectangular huts, with a shared square **pen** on the eastern side (PRN1751).

Natural environment designations:

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

The whole of the PAL lies within the Bodmin Moor North SSSI.

Special Areas of Conservation

NA

County Wildlife Sites

NA

Cornwall Conservation Areas

NA

Other designations

Common Land

Part of Brockabarrow Common, CL165

CROW Access Land

Yes, whole PAL.

Registered rights of way.

None

Neighbourhood Development Plans

No

Change between 2005 and 2025

(Overview derived from comparison of CCC 2005 aerial photography, available as a basemap on the Cornwall and Scilly Historic Environment Record, and the Airbus 2025 satellite imagery as viewed from Google Earth aerial photos.)

- Significant increase in furze cover on west slopes of hill.

- Unfortunately, this is worst at the site of the excellent Bronze Age roundhouse settlement, where there is also significant increase in soft rushes, including in the interiors of several of the roundhouses.
- Hundreds of small furze bushes between the roundhouse settlement and the streamworks to the north. Can expect these to grow and merge and eventually crowd out the grassland.
- Still largely grassland (molinia) on the north and east slopes.



Furze bushes becoming established in the Molinia on the western slope between the roundhouse settlement and the streamworks. (Pete Herring, October 2024.)

Historic Environment Action Plan

Issues

- Spread of furze
 - Reducing the diversity of the ancient rough grasslands and their flora and fauna, including their invertebrates.
 - Obscuring the more ephemeral archaeological remains – the transhumance huts in particular
 - Will begin to cause erosion as vehicles and livestock are confined to ever narrower tracks.
 - Encourage tick-borne diseases in livestock and wild fauna.
- Growth of soft rushes in western roundhouse settlement, including within several of the roundhouses.
 - Have deep and fibrous roots that will cause damage to below-ground remains.
 - Also obscure prehistoric houses and banks.
- Increase in Molinia
 - Obscuring archaeological remains
 - See David's text on Molinia



Soft rush around and within the roundhouses on the western slope. (Pete Herring, Oct 2024.)

Opportunities

- To better guide grazing levels on the common by closer understanding of the flora and fauna of the ancient semi-natural grasslands

Recommendations

Adjusting the extent of the PAL:

LIDAR and other mapped resources on the historic environment have been examined. No change is required to the PAL extent; it includes the principal known archaeological remains on Brockabarrow Common.

Specific suggestions

- Further archaeological recording, especially of transhumance huts before they are lost to furze growth. Plot using handheld GPS; record by note-taking unless especially interesting, in which cases plan at 1:100.
- Address the growth of furze on the roundhouse settlement.
- Consider how to counter the growth of soft rush in several of the roundhouses.
- Adjust grazing to push back the conversion to furze on the western slopes.

References

Moore, P, 2024 *Bodmin Moor's Boundary Markers, a Legacy in Stone*, Peter Moore

Appendix 1 2007 PAL text

5 Brockabarrow Common

Historic Environment

A large Bronze Age summit cairn, with upright slabs forming a kerb, overlooks a large rounded hill, formerly part of the Great Down (that included Shallow-Water Common) an area of the Moor that contains very well preserved remains of settlements associated with summer grazing. A second cairn

is on the false crest on the northern side of the hill and forms a rare skyline feature in this open landscape.

On its western slope is a fine multi-phase prehistoric settlement of around 62 round houses with seven associated enclosures. The houses are concentrated in an area of approximately 16 hectares, within which there are a few dense clusters on the downhill (west) side, but more dispersed higher up the hill. A further cluster of six houses lies to the north west. Many of the houses are incorporated into the walling of the enclosures. Round houses range in internal diameter from 3.5m-10.0m with walling of various types - slab and block facing to each side of a rubble core, simply an inner facing to rubble, or of large piled blocks, particularly in areas of clutter. Proportionally more small houses are freestanding while more of the larger houses are associated with enclosures, perhaps indicating that they served different functions, at different dates

The associated enclosures are generally small, internal measurements varying from 18m by 18m to 38m by 20m, taking a roughly rectilinear form and to some degree levelled into, or up from the slope. Six have clear entrance gaps. Walling varies in the same way as the houses. All the enclosures incorporate apparently contemporary houses, either inserted into the perimeter wall (in which case their entrances face out of the enclosure) or attached to the inner faces (when entrances face inwards). It is generally considered that this was a pastoral settlement, possibly used mainly in the summer months.

Brockabarrow Common also contains some of the best-defined early medieval transhumance huts in Cornwall. Some of these are scattered among the abandoned prehistoric round houses on the western side of the hill, but the clearest group, of more than a dozen huts, with a shared square pen, are on the eastern side. Others are found on the higher slopes between the two main sites. Because the remains are only 0.2 to 0.3m high they are particularly vulnerable to vegetation growth.

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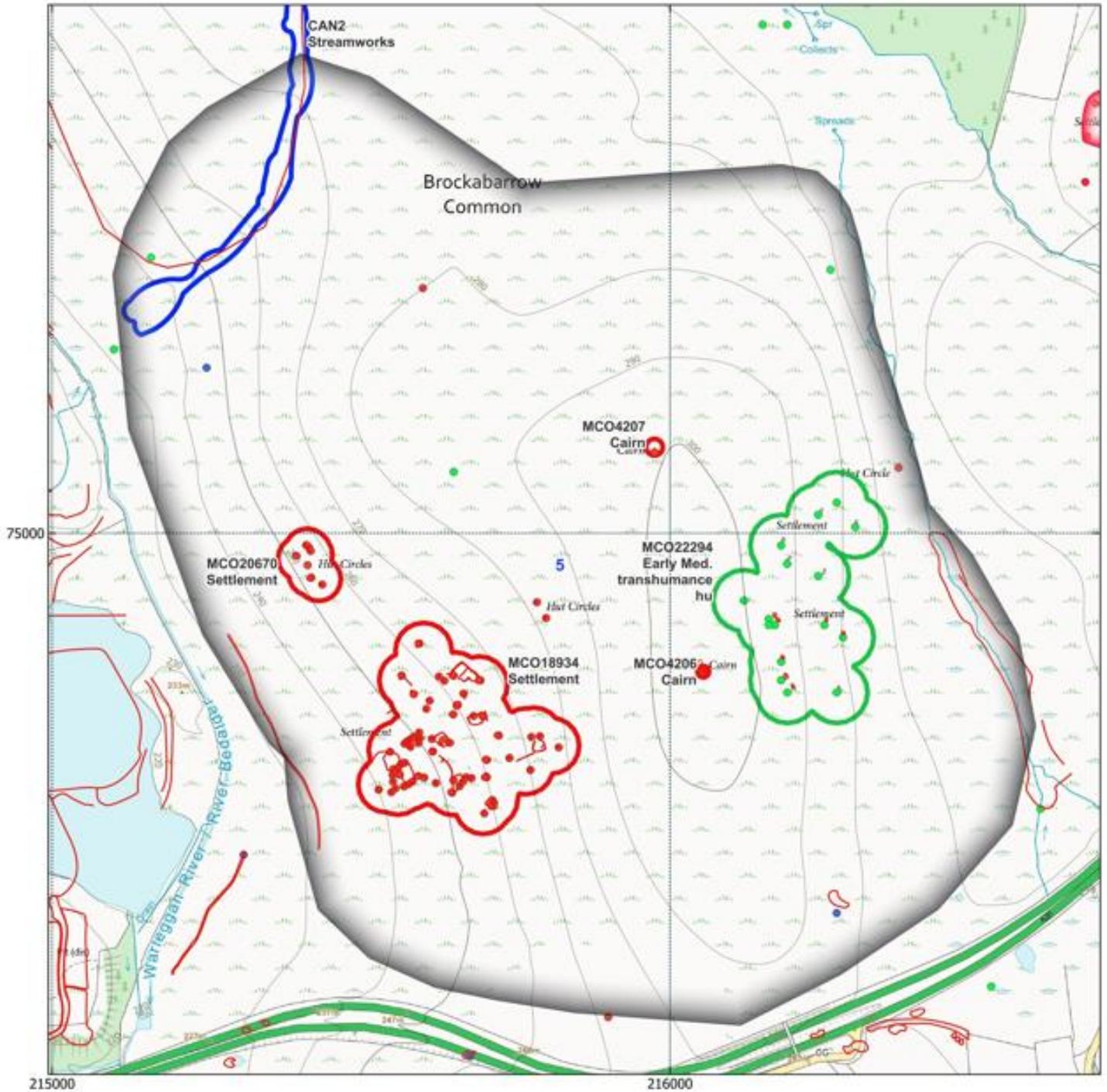
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Outstanding Dragonfly Assemblage

Designations

No current HE designations.

Bodmin Moor North SSSI (unit 2)



■ PAL Areas

■ Scheduled Monuments

■ Scheduled Monuments @ Risk

Feature Groups

■ Prehistoric

■ Medieval

■ Post Medieval

— Aerial Mapping Transcriptions

CSHER point data

● Prehistoric

● Early Medieval

● Romano British

● Medieval

● Post Medieval

● Modern

Dominant Habitat: Dry Acid Grassland

Habitat Change: Considerable

Notes: Furze cover has increased on the west slopes of the hill, especially at the Bronze Age roundhouse settlement. Soft rushes are also increasing inside the roundhouses. Hundreds of small furze bushes between the settlement and streamworks to the north. Can expect these to grow and merge and eventually crowd out the grassland. Still largely grassland (*Molinia*) on the north and east slopes.

PAL 5 Brockabarrow

www.statement-heritage.com

Cornwall Council

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AC000817921

0 100 200 m





From NW (from Hawk's Tor) in August 2005.



Summit cairn, August 2007



Ancient grasslands, northern slope / ridge, August 2007



Cattle and rab pit, SE slopes, August 2007