

PAL 13 Letter and Penkeastle Moors, St Neot, Historic Environment Action Plan



Penkeastle Moor, satellite photograph, March 2025. Shows eluvial streamworks centre left with long slightly bowed dam defining the reservoir at its head (at lefthand end of it). (Courtesy Airbus 2025, via Google Earth Pro.)

Location, geology and topography

Centred: SX 174703

Extent: 60 ha (149 acres)

Geology

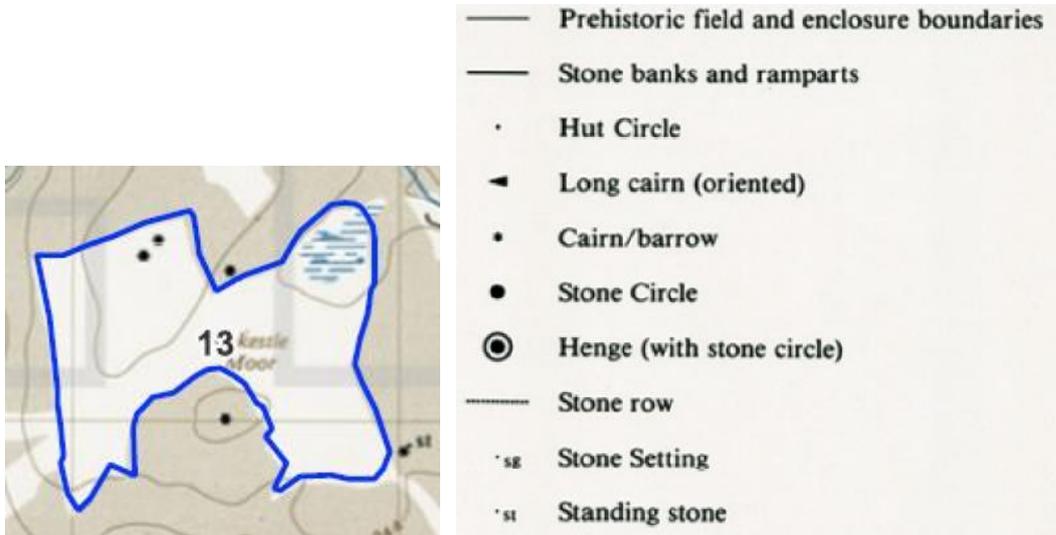
Granite, igneous bedrock formed between 330.9 and 272.3 million years ago during the Carboniferous and Permian periods.

Topography

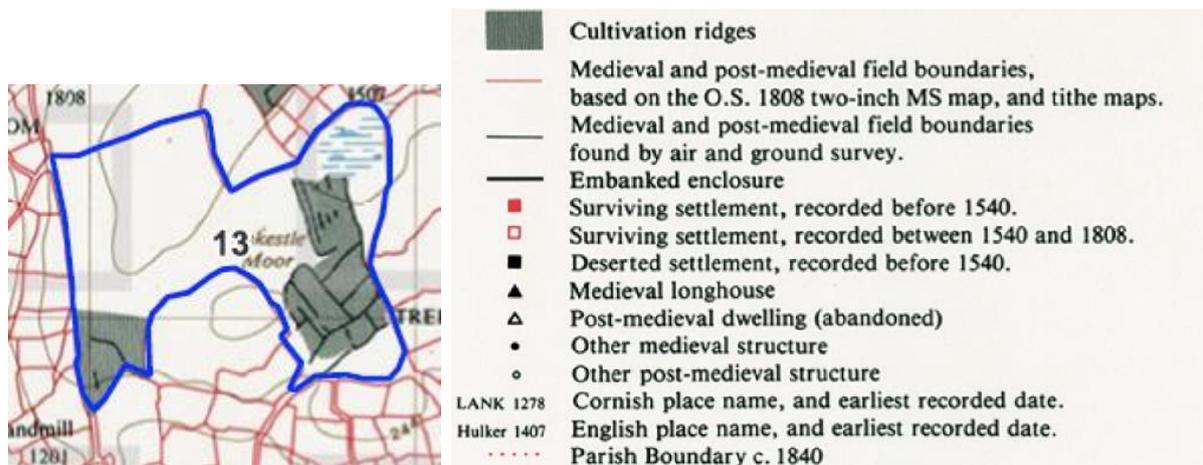
Gently rounded downland to 267 metres (876 feet) high at the northern edge of the PAL, on Letter Moor, with lowest ground to the NE where Penkeastle Moor is at the head of a shallow valley curving into the larger one of the River Loveny. Relatively few moorstones.

Current management and structures of ownership, commoners, etc:

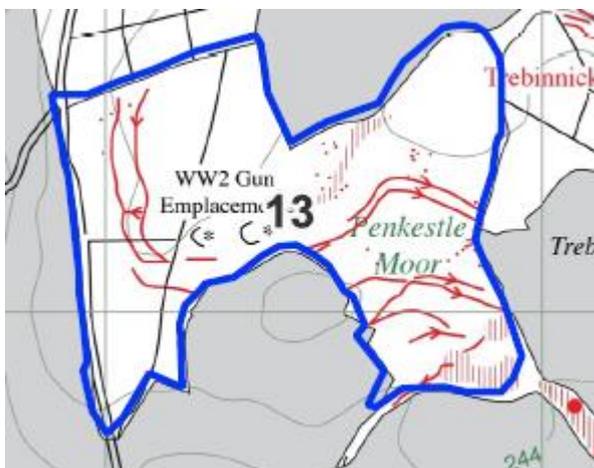
The whole area is common land, virtually the whole of CL134, Penkester Moor and Letter Moor.

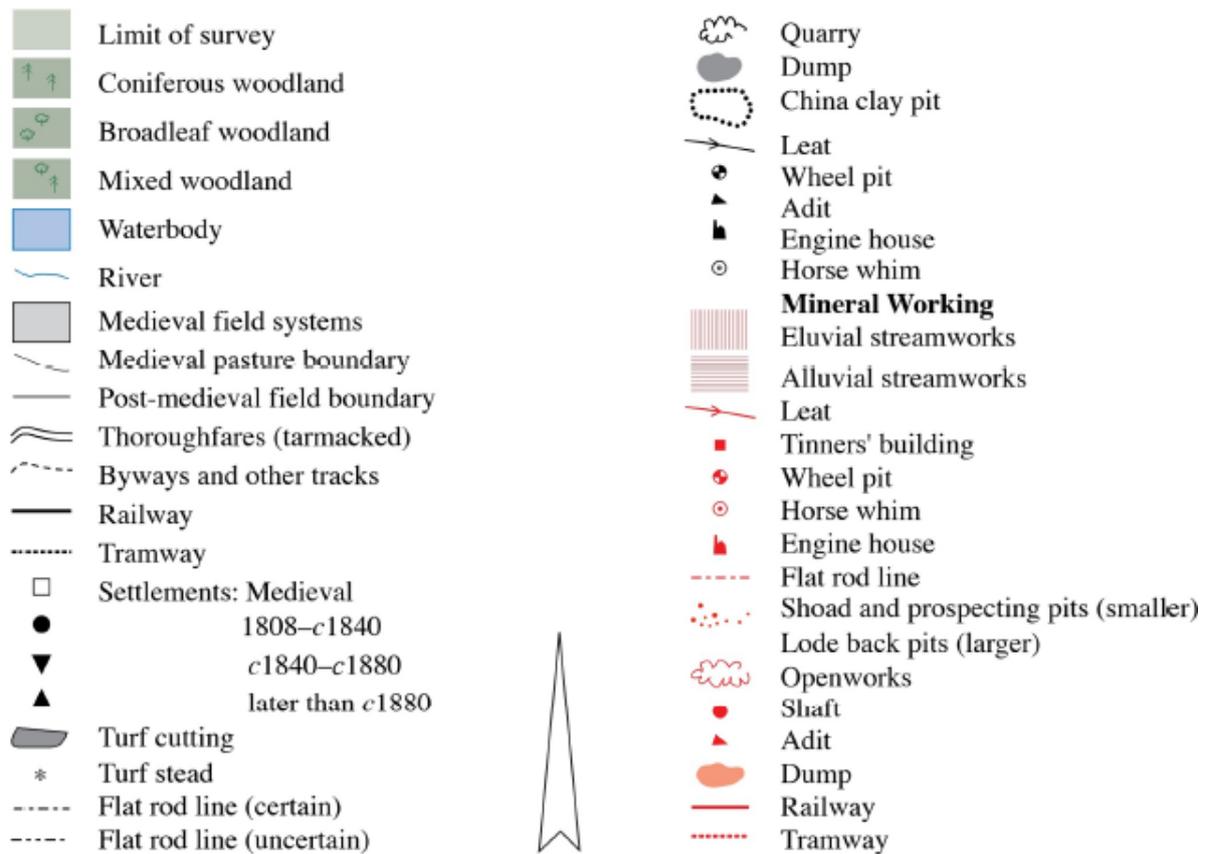


Extract from Prehistoric overview map (Johnson and Rose 1994, Map 1; reproduced with permission of Cornwall Council and Historic England).



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

The pre-1748 history of land use is derived from the surviving above-ground archaeological remains. These show some Early Bronze Age ritual use in the two cairns on the highest north-eastern point of Letter Moor.

Large areas of both Moors were enclosed and cultivated through spade-dug lazybeds in the medieval period; the land in Penkester being subdivided into quite regular strips, indicating that they were worked by several farmers in common, probably members of the same hamlet, perhaps one of the nearest, which would have been either Trebinnick (to the east) or Penkester (to the south). If these were 'outfields' they may have been cultivated for a short period.

Beyond them in the northern part of each Moor the ground appears to have remained open, as it would have been from prehistoric times, and thus part of the summer pastures.

In the eastern half, Penkester Moor there are the earthworks of two exceptionally well-preserved eluvial streamworks, each served by leats and reservoirs and associated with prospecting and other pits. At least one phase of their working is later than the medieval strip fields as the leats slice through them.

Thomas Martyn's 1748 map

Shown as open land, the southernmost part of the rough ground that would continue uninterrupted northwards to the highway across Bodmin Moor, the present A30.

c1810 OS drawing

Still open and shown as rough grassland and part of the large area of rough ground though by now the land enclosed by Goldhill (later called Searl's Down) was hedged off, providing the northern edge of what is now Letter Moor.

c1840 Tithe Map

Shown as a single area divided by a dotted line between TA 2838 Penkester Moor Head and TA 2839 Little Moor; the name Letter Moor may therefore be a corruption of Little Moor. Both were included in the Apportionment Schedule as Common Lands under the category of Commons and Wastes. It appears that they were once incorporated into the extensive common land of Fawton manor but in the post-medieval period became isolated from that by the establishment of new farms to their north and became either a small island of Fawton common (Little Moor being named from this?), or two small home commons, one used by Penkester's and Trewindle's farmers, given that lanes lead from both those hamlets onto Penkester Moor. Several more farms appear to have had access to Little/Letter Moor by its SW corner.

c1880 OS map

Land cover was largely shown as coarse grassland with clumps of furze, most densely distributed in the southern part of Penkester Moor. Marshland lay in the valley running away to the NE of Penkester Moor. This map shows the Letter Moor split in two by a long pasture boundary running roughly NNE to SSW, from the mouth of the southern lane to just east of the summit of the hill. A second boundary then split the western half of this area, but the land within these new large enclosures was still rough grazing.

c1906 OS map

No change.

Modern

Continued relatively unchanged as rough grazing. There was a period of very different use in the Second World War when heavy artillery guns were dug in for use in practice shelling ahead of D-Day. The gun pits survive as distinctive earthworks.

Historic Environment

Headlines

Summary of main heritage assets

Prehistoric ceremonial and ritual

Two cairns on the highest ground with views north across the Moor to Rough Tor.

Early Bronze Age complex platform cairn, MCO4471, 19.5m in diameter with a flat-topped platform, 8m in diameter at its centre. The NE cairn of the two.

Early Bronze Age complex platform cairn, MCO4472, 13m diameter with a flat-topped platform, 8m in diameter at its centre. The SW cairn of the two.

Prehistoric domestic and agricultural

A possible **prehistoric roundhouse** (MCO 43968). No known enclosures associated with it. NB Not recorded by Sandy Gerrard in his detailed earthwork survey of Penkeste Moor; so, an uncertain site.

Medieval

Extensive medieval strip field system on Penkeste Moor (MCO21279) surveyed in detail by Sandy Gerrard (Gerrard 1986) covers approximately 10ha and consists of at least 3 fields, each containing strips defined by low banks and the ridging of lazybeds (c3m wide, 0.1m high). External broad banks have external ditches. N field contains strips 20m wide. The southern fields lie at right angles to each other and are jointly enclosed; the SW field has strips 200m long by 32m wide. Field system is cut by prospecting pits and leats associated with tinning. Possibly outfield cultivation associated with the settlement of Trebinnick, or Penkeste.

Area of **lazybed ridging** in the SW part of the PAL (MCO21166); c3ha in two fields defined by banks. Possibly associated with the hamlet at Penkeste.

Industrial

Excellent example of an **eluvial streamworks**, surveyed in detail by Sandy Gerrard (Gerrard 1986, fig V.13) and known as Penkeste Moor North. Well-preserved type D working (dumps at an acute angle to gully sides), a central **drainage level**, **two leats** and a **dam**. **Costeaining pits** are largely limited to two distinct areas (MCO23826).

A second area of **eluvial streamworking** at the SE corner of the PAL (MCO23899), Penkeste Moor South. Surveyed in detail by Sandy Gerrard (1986, fig V.14). Three distinct areas of **type B eluvial streamworks** and **7 leats** leading from Letter Moor **reservoirs** to 4 **smaller reservoirs** on the edge of the streamworks. Leats cut medieval field system, so at least one phase of streamworking is more recent. **Two primary drainage levels**; one leads west and the other south. **Costeaining pits** throughout the area indicate an extensive search for lodes. An **E-W trending line of pits** (MCO43965), some cutting into the eluvial earthworks were probably **lode-back pits**, exploiting the lode from which much of the eluvial stream cassiterite was released.

Post-medieval and modern

Second World War gun emplacements on Penkeste and Letter Moors. A cluster of four on the southern slopes of Letter Moor (MCO53291) and a cluster of six more on the northern side of Penkeste Moor (MCO53290) are known to have been firing towards the back of Brown Willy in the build up to D Day (Herring 2008, 135). Another gun emplacement has been recorded within the eluvial streamworks at Penkeste Moor South (MCO43963),

A line of four circular **bomb craters**, presumed to have been created by German bombers, survives in the NE part of Penkeste Moor (MCO52085).

Two **turf steads** were recorded by Sandy Gerrard in his survey of the Penkeste Moor South eluvial streamworks (see MCO43967). Their presence indicates **turf cutting**, presumably of marsh turf.

Intangible cultural heritage

Significance of landscape visibility

The earthworks of the medieval fields and the streamworks and their leats and reservoirs are low, easily obscured by scrub growth.

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 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).

- **Early Bronze Age complex platform cairn**, MCO4471.
- **Early Bronze Age complex platform cairn**, MCO4472.
- **Extensive medieval strip field system** on Penkester Moor (MCO21279).
- Excellent **eluvial streamworks** known as Penkester Moor North. including **two leats** and a **dam**. **Costeaning pits** are largely limited to two distinct areas (MCO23826).
- **Eluvial streamworking** (MCO23899), Penkester Moor South. Includes **7 leats** leading from Letter Moor **reservoirs** to 4 **smaller reservoirs** on the edge of the streamworks.
- **Lode-back pits** (MCO43965).

Natural environment designations:

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

NA

Special Areas of Conservation

NA

County Wildlife Site

Yes, part of NC/CN7/S4, 'Colliford Reservoir'.

Cornwall Conservation Areas

NA

Other designations

Common Land

Wholly within CL134, Penkester Moor and Letter Moor.

CROW Access Land

Yes, whole PAL.

Registered rights of way.

Bridle way between Penkester and Trebinnick crosses SE part of the PAL.

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.)

- Furze cover on the streamworks and medieval fields in the southern half of Penkester Moor is so dense that there is extensive closed canopy, preventing livestock moving other than through narrow passages, causing erosion. The streamworks and fields are barely visible, even in winter.
- Some increase in furze cover on western slopes of Letter Moor and that in the northern half has also expanded. Possibility of extensive furze cover in a few years' time, to the great detriment of the semi-natural vegetation and the visibility and condition of the archaeological remains.

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.
- Will begin to cause erosion as vehicles and livestock are confined to ever narrower tracks.
- Encourage tick-borne diseases in livestock and wild fauna.

Opportunities

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

Recommendations

General approach

Retain open ancient semi-natural grassland with easy movement in all directions. Keep the important remains of the medieval fields and the eluvial streamworks and their leats clear of furze.

Specific recommendations

- Address the growth of furze on the cairns at summit.

- Reduce the furze in the Penkeastle Moor South streamworks.
- Adjust grazing to push back the conversion to furze.

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 Letter and Penkeastle Moors.

References

Appendix 1 2007 PAL text

13 Letter and Penkeastle Moors

Historic Environment

Letter Moor and Penkeastle Moor are notable mainly for the medieval and post medieval features that they contain. There are however, two prehistoric cairns on the highest point of Letter Moor which, although now slightly obscured by gorse, hold a commanding position with views all over the southern portion of Bodmin Moor, including many notable summits and/or tors.

Much of Penkeastle Moor is covered with the low banks of extensive medieval field systems and ridge and furrow cultivation marks. These probably represent outfields from a nearby medieval farmstead, as there is no evidence of a settlement actually on Penkeastle Moor itself.

The whole of the PAL is covered in the remains of lode back pits and prospecting pits with streamworking in the valley bottoms. A number of large leats cross the length of the PAL, feeding into reservoirs which served a significant area of eluvial streamworking and lode back pits to the south-east. Turf steads are also dotted around the moor.

A fine line of boundary stones mark the division between the two moors and a number of earthworks represent activity by the American Army during World War Two (both artillery emplacements, for firing at the back of Brown Willy, and bomb/shell craters).

Natural Environment

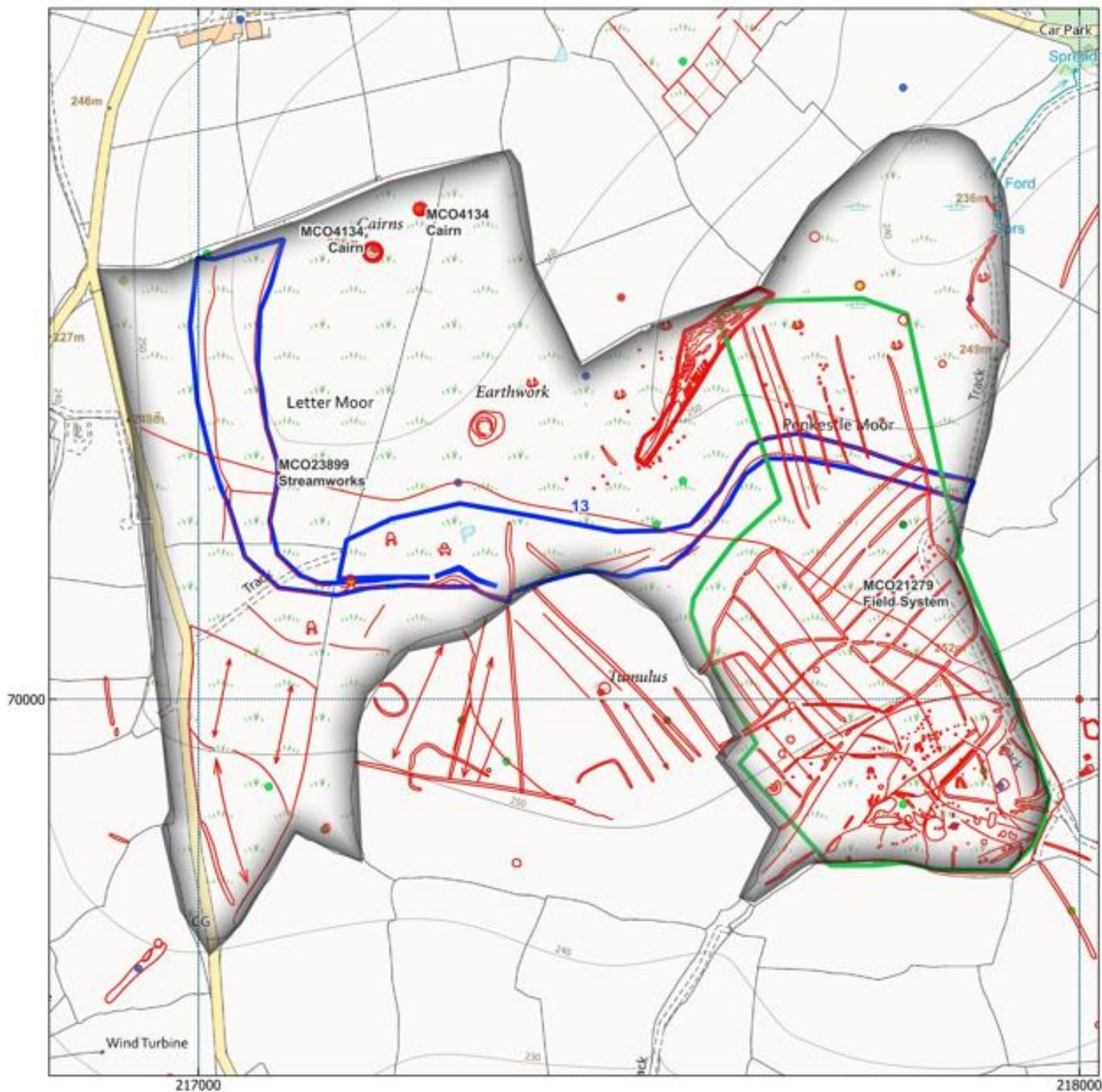
Acid Grassland, Fragmented Western Heath and Scrub

Specific notes:- Penkeastle Moor contains extant **Marsh Fritillary** (*Eurodryas aurinia*) colony

Designations

No current HE or NE designations.

Vision



- 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: Western Heath Mosaic
 Habitat Change: Considerable

Notes: Furze cover on streamworks and medieval fields in s. Penkestele Moor is dense, causing erosion. Streamworks and fields barely visible. Furze cover on w. slopes of Letter Moor has expanded threatening semi-natural vegetation and archaeological remains

PAL 13 Letter and Penkestele Moors

www.statement-heritage.com

Cornwall Council

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