



Herefordshire Archaeology
Conservation and Environmental Planning
Planning Services
Environment Directorate
Herefordshire Council

Herefordshire Woodlands Pilot Study: Phase 2 Sned Wood Aymestrey (SO 40227 65977)

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No.75

Report prepared by
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Herefordshire Archaeology is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, maintains the county Sites and Monument Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects. The County Archaeologist is Dr. Keith Ray.

Herefordshire Woodlands Pilot Scheme: Phase 2. Sned Wood Aymestrey

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Herefordshire Archaeology, November 2003.

Summary:

The survey described in this report, (HSM No.33462), formed part of a pilot study for the Forestry Commission. A rapid walk over survey was carried out in the wood concerned. A hand held Global Positioning System was used to record the location of features encountered.

Structures were recorded within the wood that illustrate the intensive use of the woodland resource since the late medieval period, i.e. saw pits, charcoal burning platforms, quarries and woodland management boundaries.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGR's are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50, and 0.02m at 1:20.

Figure 1 contains material from the Ordnance Survey. The grid in this material is the National Grid taken from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

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Introduction

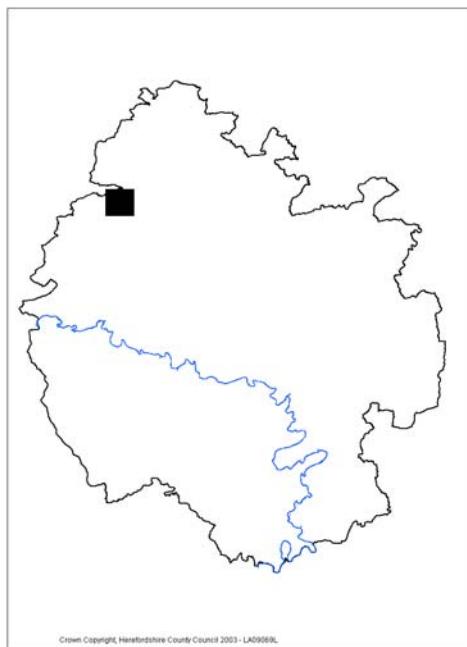
This report provides an account of a rapid survey of Sned Wood, Aymestery (HSM 33462). The survey was undertaken as part of a pilot study for the Forestry Commission in order to document the archaeology of woodlands in the county. Woodlands are areas of high archaeological potential in that they have seldom been subjected to the types of disturbance associated with intensive modern agriculture. Relatively little information concerning archaeological sites within woodland has been recorded in the past. Access is often difficult, aerial photographs are of little or no use and until recently recording an accurate location within woodland was often not practicable.

Since 1999 Herefordshire Archaeology has been involved in regular discussions with the Forestry Commission concerning the lack of archaeological data available when management plans are being prepared and applications for Woodland Grant Schemes are submitted. As a result of these discussions, the Forestry Commission has grant aided Herefordshire Archaeology to undertake a two-phase pilot study. Phase one took place in 2001-2 and involved the rapid survey of eight areas of woodland in different areas of the county. These woodlands were split into those that are owned and managed by Forest Enterprises, those owned by large private estates, those that have recently been the subject of Woodland Grant Scheme applications and those for which Native Woodland Plans have been or are in preparation.

The survey for each woodland area in the pilot study identified the potential for the survival of archaeological features and sampled the types of features present. This phase two survey consists of rapid surveys, as in phase one, but also involves re-visiting woodlands identified in the phase one study as being of high archaeological potential, so that a more detailed survey can be undertaken. This will illustrate the density of archaeological sites within the woodland and record the relationships between features to enable some degree of understanding concerning the evolution of the woodland.

It is only when the changes throughout history within a wood have been documented and understood and put together with ecological information that a well-informed management strategy can be implemented. Woodland boundaries have often moved over the centuries, sometimes expanding to encapsulate and preserve evidence of alternative land-use, e.g. field systems and on other occasions shrinking and being subject to differing forms of woodland management. These variations in land-use within a woodland influence the ecological data from that woodland. As such archaeological survey can contribute significant data concerning woodland history, management history and sequential development. This can provide independent verification of historical change from ecological study.

Location



Sned Wood is located at NGR: SO 40227 65977 (Figure 1), approximately 1.5km. northeast of Aymestrey. The woodland encompasses the top of an Old Red Sandstone outcrop.

The Historic Landscape Character for Herefordshire describes Sned Woods as woodland surrounded by the enclosure of former common arable fields with minimal insertion of boundaries.

Previous fieldwork / records

Prior to the survey taking place the county Sites and Monuments Record was consulted but no entries were found within the present woodland. Forest Enterprise maps were also consulted, but no archaeological sites were indicated.

Method

Sned Wood was surveyed on February 13th 2003. The survey comprised a rapid assessment of the potential of the woodland to contain well preserved archaeological features. Features were mapped using a hand-held Garmin 12 XL Global Positioning System, enabling a ten-figure grid reference to be recorded for each feature. This system is accurate to within approximately 10m under tree canopy.

The wood was walked in transects aligned roughly north / south and approximately 50m to 100m apart. If a large feature was encountered and no other features of archaeological significance can be seen, then this feature was followed and features 50m either side of it recorded. Field observations and grid references were recorded on a dictaphone and transcribed at a later date.

The following survey is only a sample of the woodland and should not be taken as exhaustive or its results as definitive. It is intended to record the type of features present, their state of preservation and their relationships to other features within the woodland.

Field conditions

Sned Wood covers the top and upper slopes of a sandstone outcrop. Approximately 20% of its area is relatively level, comprising the plateau of the hilltop. Most of the slopes are relatively gently, but the south slope is too steep to allow access.

Approximately half of the area of Sned Woods is planted with dense conifer. This is principally on the sides of the hill, away from the central plateau. Large tracts of the more mature conifer areas have an under storey of 1m high bramble and fern making survey impracticable within these areas. The remaining areas are under sparse conifer with a low under storey.

Survey Conditions

The rapid walkover survey was conducted on 13th February 2003. The weather was overcast with occasional snow flurries occurring in the late afternoon.

Results

The recorded data from the survey is tabulated in the Appendix and is described by topic area below. The results section here under is concluded by a brief discussion highlighting the historical development of the woodland as understood using the 2003 survey results. The significance of recorded features and management implications are then commented upon within the discussion section. The simple data base in the Appendix cross references each site to the Ordnance Survey National Grid, (NGR), and the series of unique Sites and Monuments "Primary Record Numbers" (PRN), allocated following the transcription. These numbers are referred to within both the text and illustrations. They are prefixed by HSM, these initials relating to Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record unique numbers

Woodland management features

A total of twenty three charcoal burning platforms were recorded. These ranged in size from 5-12m in diameter and in the main comprised a level, circular platform with a pronounced down-slope curving lip.

Twelve saw pits were recorded. Their earthwork remains comprise an oval/rectangular depression between 3 and 5m in length, 1m wide and 0.3-0.5m deep with spoil on their down-slope sides. Associated with many of the saw pits were small rectangular platforms presumably for stacking sawn or squared timber.

Fourteen rectangular platforms were recorded. These ranged in size from 4m in length and 3.5m wide to 12m in length and 8m wide. All of these platforms were in close association with both saw pits and charcoal burning platforms suggesting that they were either used for storage or seasonal accommodation. Only one platform (a series of three) HSM 33497, was immediately adjacent to a hollow way and thus can be linked to the transportation of wood rather than its processing. The most unexpected location for two platforms, was in a shallow cutting (HSM 33507) on the very steep

south face of the hillside and connected to the existing forest trackway by a Holloway (HSM 33504) that was even difficult to walk up.

Seventeen sections of holloway were recorded and most appear to date to the post medieval period. The number of holloways in this area suggests quite intensive management over a considerable period of time. At two points, a series of holloways converged. The first was at SO 40144 66536, where the junction of three holloways converged and SO 41153 66447 where five hollow ways converged. This suggests that these points were important for the distribution of supplies and the bringing together of wood and charcoal for its transportation down hill. Both of these junctions are visible on maps dated 1890, but it is noted that these holloways often cut or overlay earlier, quite substantial ones. This fact suggests that these convergent points had been in use over a long period. It is also noted that these two points all lead to the wood and charcoal having been extracted from the east end of the woods near Ballsgate Common (Figure 2), the nearest road to the woods, that leads southeast to Aymestrey. It is also possible that the River Lugg, which is also present at this point, may also have been utilised for processing if not also transportation.

Woodland boundaries

A number of wood banks were recorded, but these were mostly fragmentary due to recent forestry, so it was not possible to determine a definitive connection between them. The majority of these boundaries (HSM 33463, HSM 33495, HSM 33503) consisted of a significant drop down to the surrounding fields c.2.5-3m, especially on the north side of the woodland. A single boundary (HSM 33533) on the west side of the woodland measured 1m across and 0.30m high. It roughly followed the existing, western forest boundary, until it reached the top of the hill and became the western side of a Holloway. It is also registered on the Tithe map (Figure 3) that this boundary is also the parish boundary. Lastly, there is no clear indication of medieval activity on this site, whether farming or woodland management. It is possible therefore, that boundaries currently listed as post-medieval, may be earlier.

A single compartment boundary was recorded. This has been attributed to the post medieval period primarily due to the lack of evidence linking it to the medieval period. This boundary consisted of a ditch, (HSM 33488), approximately 3m wide and 0.50m deep, with no sign of a bank on either side. The scarcity of such features suggests that either Sned Woods was divided into relatively large woodland compartments, which may have changed little since the late medieval period, or that the wood has been “re-designed”.

Industrial features

A single quarry (HSM 33471) was recorded during the course of the survey. The quarry measured 10m by 5m and was 3m deep, and perhaps most significantly cuts the wood bank (HSM 33463), dating the quarry to the post medieval period. This quarry was located on the northern side of Sned Wood, next to the existing forest trackway.

Indications of former land use

Sned Wood appears to have been woodland for most of the Post-medieval period. The boundaries of the wood have changed little over this period of time, and the paucity of internal boundaries indicate that there has either been little change in the size of woodland compartments throughout this time, or that at some point in time the entire wood was re-designed and previous boundaries erased.

There was no definitive indication of farming activity within the wood, although a single east-west aligned lynchet was noted just below the summit of the wood. The function of this remain unclear, although it may represent a ‘transhumance’ limit. The only area of ground disturbance outside the woods, was in the northeast corner, where a possible Holloway is visible. This feature consists of substantial bank, aligned north-south, that runs parallel with the existing road to Aymestrey, but starts at the eastern corner of the woods, the extraction point.

Site and feature condition

The majority of features recorded were well preserved, especially the holloways, the exceptions are a series of charcoal burning platforms and saw pits that have been damaged by modern extraction.

Most of the woodland was open to survey except for the south side of the wood that was too steep. Also some areas had been badly damaged by extraction activities, especially on the western slopes of the wood.

Discussion and Implications

Implications regarding the archaeological resource

The topography and geology of Sned Wood dictates that it is particularly susceptible to erosion. The large, relatively flat central plateau with its shallow, sandy soils in conjunction with steep slopes on all sides means that there is the potential for large scale erosion if large areas are clear felled during or prior to periods of heavy or prolonged rainfall. This makes the earthworks present within Sned Woods particularly vulnerable.

Implications regarding site condition

The wood banks and compartment boundaries generally survive well even though they are fragmented. Relationships can be established between them and later features but only in a limited way. Traces of past communications also survive well in the form of holloways and tracks and some can be related to specific features, particularly log stores and quarries.

Implications for future management

The area on the west side of the wood appears to have been subjected to recent clear felling and ploughing/scarification, and are now virtually devoid of any archaeological features above ground. This system of management is not suitable for areas as archaeologically and ecologically rich as Sned Wood. Further clearance and surface intrusion of this type should be discouraged.

Implications for future field work.

Sned Woods contains a high density of archaeological features relating to intensive woodland management and industrial scale production of charcoal and sawn/processed timber.

From this survey it is clear that Sned Woods has been extensively managed as woodland for a considerable period of time. The number of charcoal burning platforms in relation to the number and ware of the holloways, may suggest that timber was removed as the primary resource, while charcoal production was secondary.

This area of woodland has a high potential for the presence of well preserved archaeological features and it should be possible to recognise relationships between many features and hence produce at least a rudimentary series of phases illustrating the changing management of the woodland.

Prior to further clear felling or other significant extraction of areas within the survey area these areas should be subject to a more detailed walk over survey in order to record and assess the location, archaeological potential and significance of any features present.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the help and co-operation of Forest Enterprise for assistance with access for this survey, and to the Forestry Commission for their commitment to this pilot scheme.

Dr. Keith Ray, County Archaeologist, for his editorial input into this report.

Archive

- 1 Dictaphone tape
- 1 Transcription Record
- 1 Excel Database
- 1 Mapinfo data file
- This document

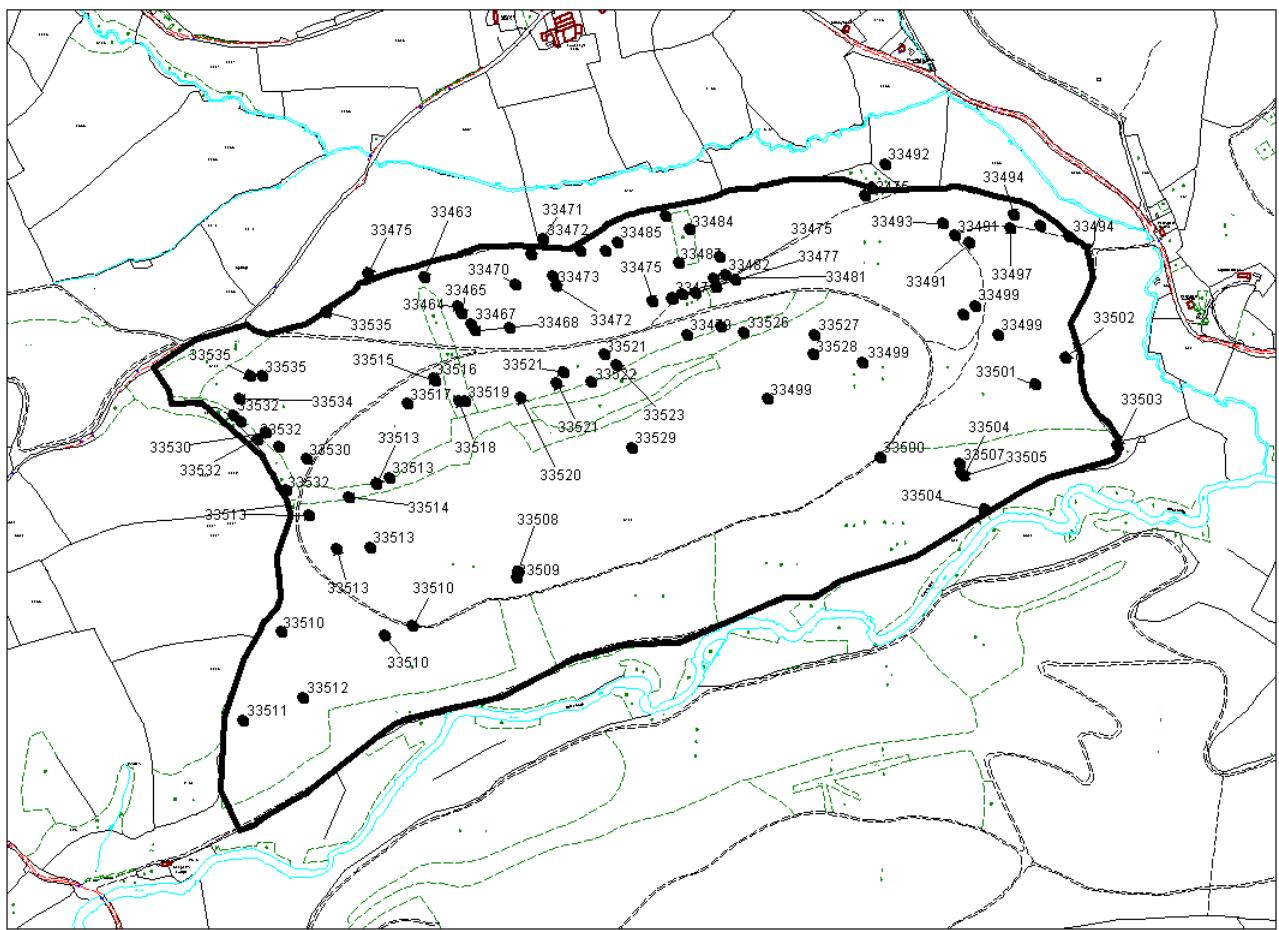
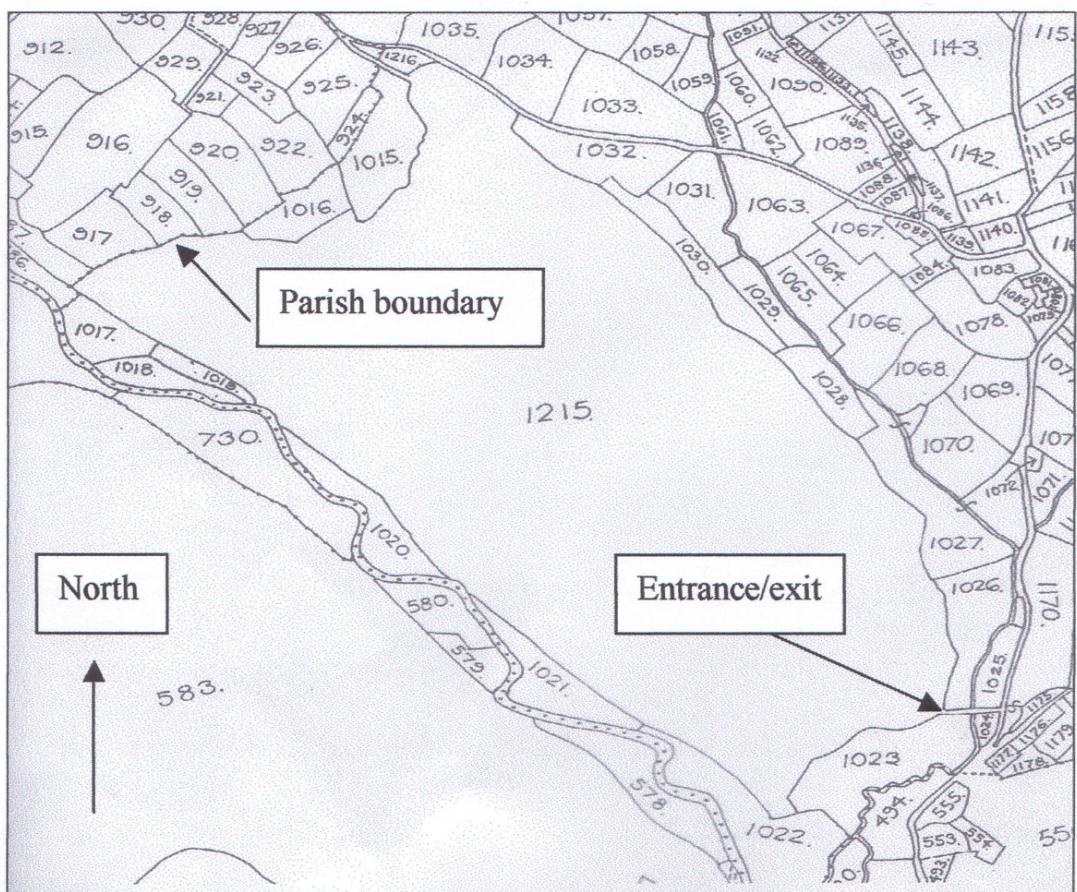


Figure 2: Location of earthworks recorded during this survey.



917	Over yards	918	In Sned Field
919	In Sned Field	1015	Riddings
1016	Drapers Garden	1017	
1019		1020	Lugg Meadow
1021	Round Meadow	1022	Herring Meadow Plock
1023	Herring Meadow	1026	Highburn Leasow
1027	Pitt Meadow and Orchard	1028	Lower Cow Pasture
1030	Sned Leasow	1032	Washington
1034	Upper Roadway	1035	Dirty Meadow
1215	Sned Wood	1216	House and Garden

Figure 3: An extract from the Tithe map dated 1842, and its associated field names. Note the entrance/exit to the wood on the south eastern side, between fields 1023 and 1026. It is to this point that most of the hollowways converge.

Appendix: Database of features and grid references.

HSM	Eastin	Northin	Site type	Period	Description
33463	340310	266390	Woodbank	Post-medieval	Aligned east/west, height of bank 2.5-3m high. Condition poor.
33464	340363	266349	Saw Pit	Post-medieval	2.5-3m long x 1-1.5m wide, Condition, poor.
33465	340369	266338	Saw Pit	Post-medieval	2.5-3m long x 1.5m wide. Condition, poor.
33466	345037	276632	Wood store	Post-medieval	4m east/west x 3m. Condition, fair.
33467	340384	266322	Wood store	Post-medieval	4m east/west x 3m. Condition, poor.
33468	340388	266312	Saw Pit	Post-medieval	2.5m long x 1m wide, Condition, fair.
33469	340443	266315	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	7m north/south x 4.5m, upper bank 1.5m high. Condition, poor.
33470	340452	266382	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	7-8m north/south x 5m. Down slope lip 1m. Condition, good.
33471	340476	266429	Quarry	Victorian	5m north/south x 10m x 3m deep on up slope. Cuts wood bank (1). Condition, poor.
33472	340494	266453	Hollow way	Post-medieval	3.5-4m wide, 1m deep. Condition, good.
33472	340514	266381	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Second reading, Hollow way ends.
33473	340514	266381	Wood store	Post-medieval	Shallow platform, aligned east/west, 12m x 3m. Condition, poor.
33474	340509	266396	Saw pit	Post-medieval	Aligned east/west, 3.5m x 1.5m, Condition, fair.
33475	340220	266410	Hollow way	Post - medieval	4.5-5m wide, down slope bank 1.5m high.
33475	340695	266363	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Second reading.
33477	340693	266360	Saw pit	Post-medieval	Aligned east/west, 2.5m x 1m. Condition, good.
33478	340710	266368	Saw Pit	Post-medieval	Aligned east/west. 2m x 1.5m. Condition, poor.

33479	340717	266304	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	7-8m in diameter, down slope lip 1m. Damaged by modern forest track, which is c. 3m above.
33480	340729	266370	Platform	Post-medieval	5m east/west x 4m. Drops down to hollow way 33475.
33475	340761	266379	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Continuation of 33475.
33481	340758	266392	Hollow way	Post-medieval	25m south of 13, 4m wide, up slope bank 1.5m. Condition, good.
33482	340777	266398	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	Cuts hollow way 18. 7m in diameter. Condition, good.
33475	340791	266390	Hollow way	Post-medieval	At this point hollow ways 33475 and 33481 converge.
33483	340766	266425	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	7m in diameter. Condition, very good.
33484	340720	266467	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	7-8m in diameter, visible entrance. Condition, good.
33485	340683	266488	Hollow way	Post-medieval	From forest track, southwest, 3.5m wide, Condition, very good.
33485	340609	266448	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Second reading on hollow way 33485.
33486	340591	266435	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	8m in diameter, damaged by extraction. Condition, poor.
33485	340551	266435	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Third reading on Hollow way 33485.
33487	340703	266416	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	8m in diameter. Condition, poor.
33488	40797	66508	Compartment boundary	Post-medieval	3m wide x 0.50m deep, aligned north/south, straight and regular.
33475	40816	66432	Compartment boundary	Post-medieval	Ends at hollow way 33485, not visible
33489	40850	66489	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	6-7m in diameter, Condition, good.
33475	340991	266520	Hollow way	Post-medieval	At this point hollow way 33475 splits.
33490	340991	266520	Hollow way	Post-medieval	New hollow way, splitting off 33475.

33490	341002	266531	Hollow way	Post-medieval	End of hollow way 33490.
33475	340144	266536	Hollow way	Post-medieval	End of hollow way 33475.
33491	340144	266536	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Extends southeast, 4m wide. Condition, good.
33492	340144	266536	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Extends northwest, 2.5-3m wide.
33493	341111	266478	Platform	Post-medieval	5-6m in diameter, entrance onto hollow way 33491, log store?
33494	341130	266459	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Extends northwest, 4m wide. Earlier than 28. Condition, good.
33494	341220	266491	Holloway	Post-medieval	Second reading on hollow way 33494.
33494	341306	266457	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Third reading on hollow way 33494.
33495	341306	266457	Wood bank	Post-medieval	Identified at this point.
33496	341261	266473	Hollow way	Post-medieval	3m wide. Condition, good.
33497	341216	266469	Platform	Post-medieval	Three platforms adjacent to hollow way, largest 4-5m in diameter, cut into down slope.
33491	341153	266447	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Hollow way 33491.
33498	341153	266447	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Extends to the south, 3m wide. Oldest hollow way at this junction. Condition, very good.
33499	341153	266447	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Extends to the west, visible for 50m, 2.5m wide. Condition, poor.
33499	341161	266350	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Second reading on hollow way 33499.
33499	341143	266336	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Third reading on hollow way 33499.
33499	341196	266305	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Fourth reading on hollow way 33499.
33499	340988	266263	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Fifth reading on hollow way 33499.
33499	340841	266207	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Hollow way 33499 disappears.

33500	341016	266116	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	7-8m in diameter. Condition, fair.
33501	341254	266228	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	8m in diameter. Condition, good.
33502	341300	266269	Wood bank	Post-medieval	Drop to forestry track c. 3m. Condition, fair.
33503	341380	266135	Wood bank	Post-medieval	Drop to fields 2.5m. Condition, poor.
33504	341176	266036	Hollow way	Post-medieval	1.5m wide, extends north, incredibly steep. Condition, good.
33504	341143	266088	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Hollow way 33504 ends at this point.
33505	341143	266088	Platform	Post-medieval	5-6m in diameter, possible wood store.
33506	341140	266091	Platform	Post-medieval	Similar to 33505.
33507	341138	266106	Cutting	Post-medieval	Very sloping but a cut out visible in the slope, 10m x 14m. Condition, very poor.
33508	340455	265940	Platform	Post-medieval	9m east/west x 6m north/south, possible log store. Condition, fair.
33509	340454	265930	Platform	Post-medieval	5m in diameter, possible log store. Condition, fair.
33510	340293	265856	Trackway	Post-medieval	1.5m wide, down slope bank 0.30m. Condition, poor.
33510	340249	265841	Trackway	Post-medieval	Trackway 33510 continues.
33510	340090	265848	Trackway	Post-medieval	Not visible beyond this point. (33510).
33511	340032	265710	Platform	Post-medieval	7-8m in diameter. Condition, poor.
33512	340124	265746	Saw pit	Post-medieval	Aligned northeast / southwest, length 3m. Condition, poor.
33513	340134	266026	Hollow way	Post-medieval	3.5m wide. Condition, good.
33513	340176	265975	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Second reading on 33513.
33513	340227	265977	Hollow way	Post-medieval	33513 peters out at this point.

33514	340195	266054	Hollow way	Post-medieval	3-4m wide. Condition, poor.
33513	340237	266075	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Second reading.
33513	340258	266084	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Third reading.
33515	340327	266235	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	8m in diameter. Condition, good.
33516	340326	266238	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	Condition, very poor.
33517	340286	266199	Platform	Post-medieval	4-5m in diameter, possible wood store, Condition, poor.
33518	340364	266202	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	7-8m in diameter. Condition, good.
33519	340374	266202	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	Within extraction lane, 6m in diameter. Condition, poor.
33520	340460	266209	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	8m in diameter. Condition, fair.
33521	340514	266231	Hollow way	Post-medieval	3.5m wide. Condition, fair.
33521	340526	266247	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Second reading.
33522	340569	266232	Saw pit	Post-medieval	2.5m x 0.70m. Condition, poor.
33521	340589	266275	Hollow way	Post-medieval	33521, Third reading.
33523	340607	266259	Platform	Post-medieval	5-6m in diameter, possible log store. Condition, poor.
33524	340769	266318	Platform	Post-medieval	4m in diameter, possible log store. Condition, fair.
33525	340788	263320	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	Charcoal burning platform.
33526	340804	266308	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	10m north/south x 9m. Condition, good.
33527	340914	266304	Charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval?	7-8m in diameter, damaged by extraction. Condition, poor.

33528	340911	266275	Charcoal burning platform	Post- medieval	Outline totally damaged, charcoal visible. Condition, poor.
33529	340631	266130	Platform	Post- medieval	Flat area nr summit, 12m in diameter, shallow down slope bank.
33530	340130	266114	Hollow way	Post- medieval?	2.5m wide, extends to the northwest. Condition, good.
33530	340086	266132	Hollow way	Post- medieval	Second reading on hollow way 33530.
33531	340086	266132	Platform	Post- medieval	West side of hollow way, 7-8m in diameter, no charcoal visible. Condition, fair.
33530	340066	266154	Hollow way	Post- medieval	Third reading on hollow way 33530.
33532	340066	266154	Hollow way	Post- medieval	Same size as hollow way 33530, but branches off.
33532	340053	266144	Hollow way	Post- medieval	Second reading on hollow way 33522, 3m wide. Condition, good.
33532	340098	266065	Hollow way	Post- medieval	Third reading on hollow way 33532.
33533	340098	266065	Wood bank	Post- medieval	0.30m high x 1m across.
33533	340027	266171	Wood bank	Post- medieval	Second reading on wood bank 33533. 15m west of this point.
33532	340017	266181	Hollow way	Post- medieval	Hollow way 33532 extends beyond forest fence at this point.
33534	340025	266207	Charcoal burning platform	Post- medieval	12m east/west x 10- 12m east/west, rectangular. Condition, good.
33535	340042	266242	Hollow way	Post- medieval	Close too, but not adjoining 33530/33532, 3.5m wide. Condition, good.
33535	340060	266242	Hollow way	Post- medieval	Second reading on hollow way 33535.
33535	340160	266340	Hollow way	Post- medieval	Third reading on hollow way 33535.

Validation

Herefordshire Archaeology operates a validation system for its reports, to provide quality assurance and to comply with Best Value procedures.

This report has been checked for accuracy and clarity of statements of procedure and results.

Dr. K. Ray, County Archaeologist.