



HOW WE INVESTIGATED FIN COP

Fin Cop was investigated using a variety of methods including archive and desk-based research, geophysical survey (top right), earthwork survey (right) and excavation (bottom right), so that a rounded understanding of the site could be achieved.

Most of the work on site was undertaken by local volunteers. As well as the members of Longstone Local History Group and volunteers from the local community, all the schoolchildren from Longstone Primary School came on site to dig, along with older schoolchildren, students, and members of the Young Archaeologists Club. A DVD of the dig was filmed by the Great Longstone Church Youth Choir and the Cornerstones Youth Group and some of this can be viewed on the following website: www.greatlongstone.net.



Volunteers learning about geophysics



Measuring the turf-covered ramparts as part of the site survey



Longstone school children excavating test pits inside the fort



Exposing the stone rampart after removal of the turf

FIN COP HILLFORT

Solving a Derbyshire Mystery

Recent survey and excavation by Longstone Local History Group has shed new light on the mysterious remains of the hillfort known as Fin Cop



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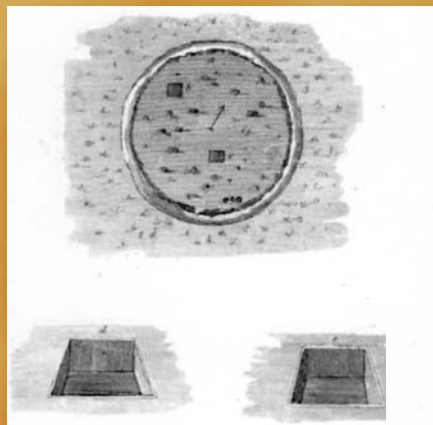
The hillfort is a Scheduled Ancient Monument on private land and should not be visited without permission.

The steep-sided hilltop overlooking Monsal Dale is known as 'Fin Cop', a name that broadly means 'Head of the Heap' in Old English, denoting its status as a high point in the landscape not only physically (325m) but also possibly in its importance. The hill also has longstanding mythical associations. Among other folk legends, Fin Cop was the home of the giant Hulac (also called Hector) Warren whose love for Hedessa, a young shepherdess, led to both their deaths.



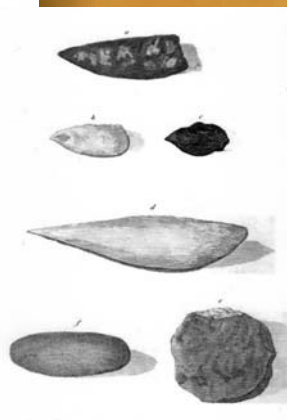
Fin Cop fort from the air looking north with Monsal Dale below

The earthworks visible today on the summit of Fin Cop are the remains of an Iron Age hillfort. Dating of human remains found in the ditch show that the fort fell out of use around 300 BC.



Plan of the cairn and stone grave or 'cist' along with some of the stone tools excavated by Hayman Rooke and illustrated in his 1796 report

Long before the Iron Age, Bronze Age farmers living in the area around 2000 BC chose the highest point of the hill for burying their dead. Rock-cut graves with stones piled over them were raised along the crest of the hill. When these



graves were excavated in the 18th and 19th centuries, adult human skeletons were discovered accompanied by pottery vessels that may have contained food and drink for the afterlife.

During the recent excavations undertaken by Longstone Local History Group a truly unexpected discovery was made. Activity on the hilltop dating back to the time of the early hunter-gatherer groups who settled in the area after the last Ice Age was found. A series of test pits excavated across the interior of the fort produced over 1700 chipped stone artefacts made from chert.

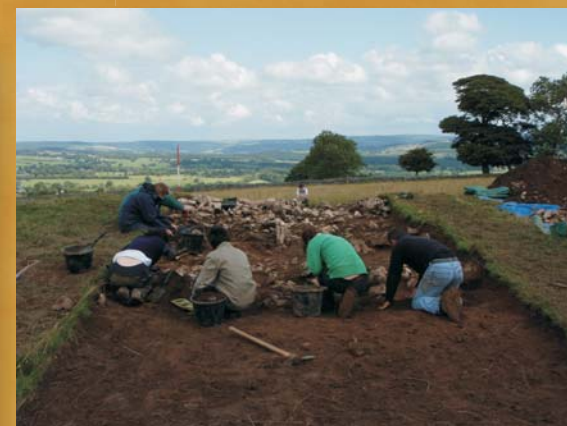
Chert is a locally occurring rock that is found within the limestone bedrock and is chemically identical to flint. Although not as smooth as flint it can be chipped into a wide range of tools. Large quantities of chipping waste were found in the test pits indicating that Mesolithic hunters were quarrying and chipping chert on the hilltop between about 10,000 and 4,000 BC.



Flint and chert chipped stone tools made into a blade point and scrapers



Excavations underway in the main trench with volunteers starting to reveal the rock cut ditch



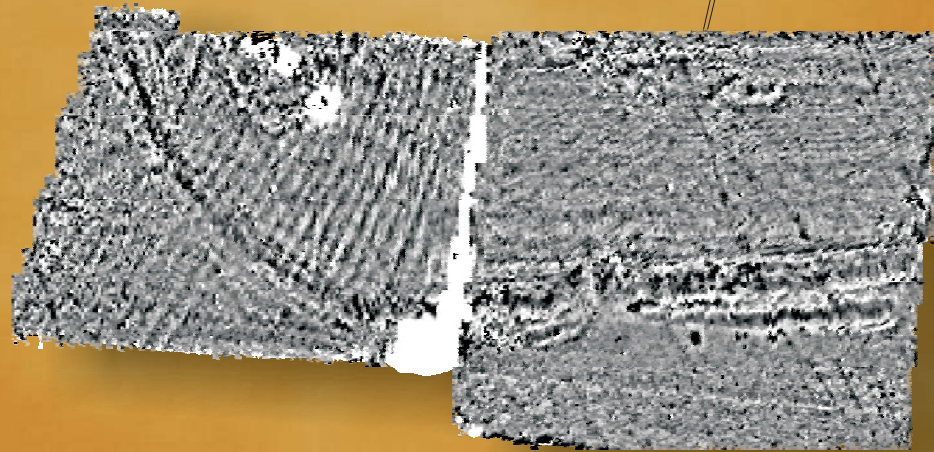
The inner face of the ramparts under excavation from where commanding views can be had to the east

So long I slumbered since the day of terror, blood revenge in all their eyes and my proud body, with that smallest life - my innocent, who died for me - cast out for their rage... cast down, falling beneath the crushing stone.

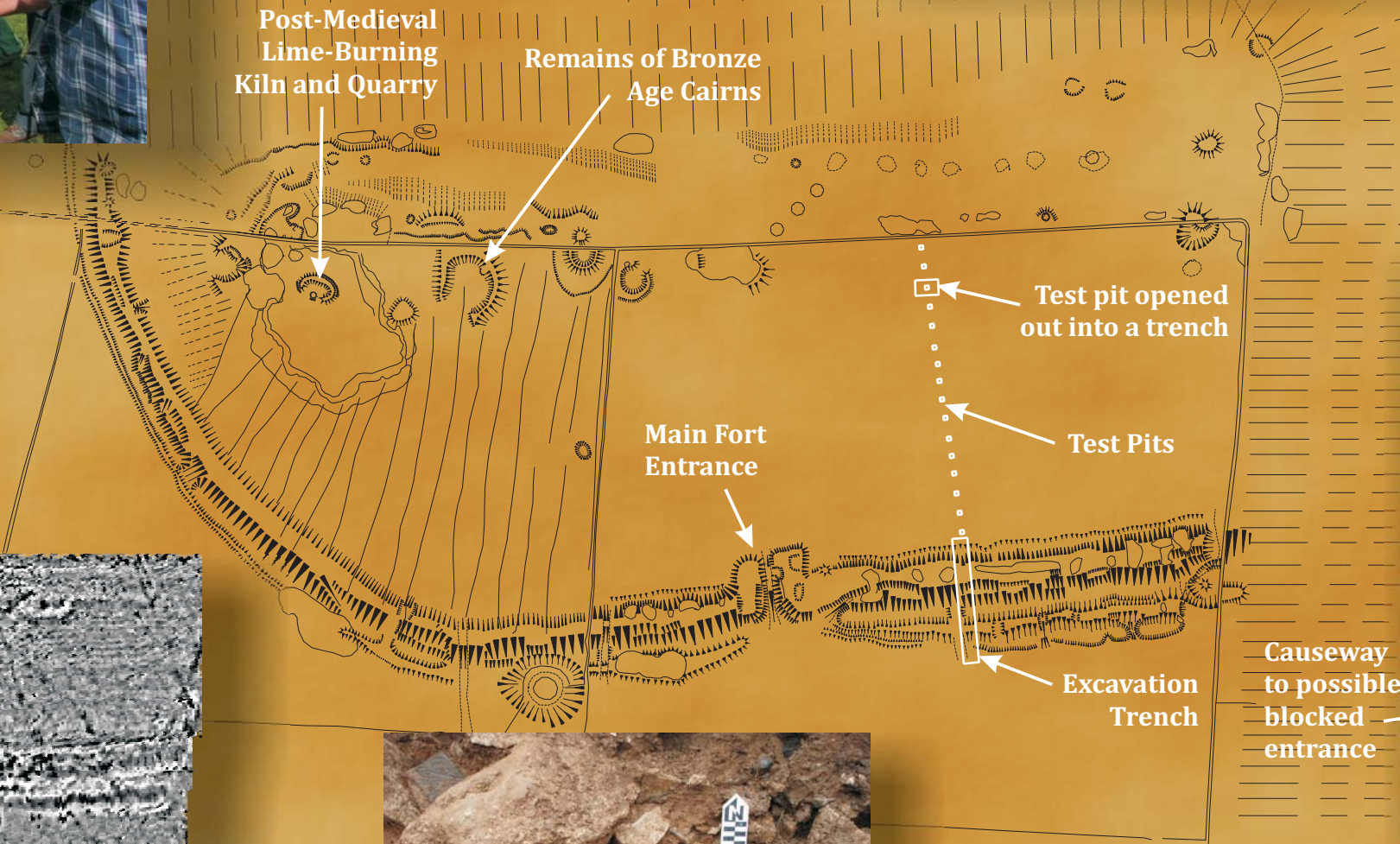
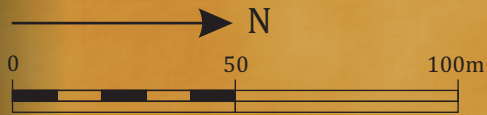
FIN COP HILLFORT



One of the first phases of the project was to survey the hillfort and produce an accurate plan of the surviving remains (right). In the picture above, members of Longstone Local History Group undertake the survey using traditional methods under the guidance of English Heritage and Archaeological Research Services Ltd.

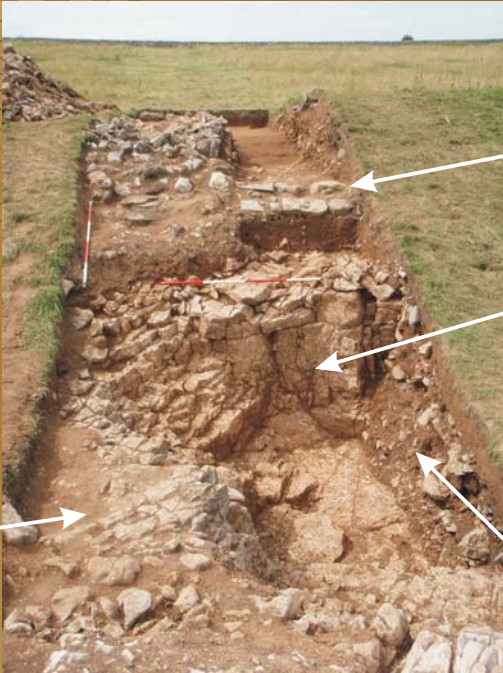


The geophysics plot above shows anomalies in the magnetic field across the site. The defences show well on this plot as does the presence of ridge and furrow agricultural cultivation remains running top to bottom on the left hand side even though they are barely visible on the ground.



The schoolchildren from Longstone also came to help alongside the other volunteers and excavated 16 test pits. In the test pits were thousands of stone tools showing that Fin Cop had been a centre of activity many thousands of years before the fort was built.

One of the test pits also uncovered an assemblage of prehistoric pottery, and when this test pit was opened out into a larger trench over 200 pieces of pottery were recovered. The charred residues on these pots have been radiocarbon dated to around 750 BC in the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age.



Original facing stones still in place

Rock cut ditch

Remnants of the original wall, pushed into the ditch

The main focus of the excavations was a trench over the southern rampart of the hillfort. The purpose of this trench was to determine the form of the defences as they would have originally stood and also to find dating evidence to tell us the age of the monument. In the photograph above, the rock-cut ditch can be seen, along with a causeway showing where a possible earlier entrance had been blocked up.

Within the ditch fill there was an unexpected find of human skeletal remains (left) which appear to have been unceremoniously thrown into the ditch as the hillfort rampart was pushed in. The remains are that of a woman accompanied by an infant and have been radiocarbon dated to around 300 BC, which provides the date at which the use of the fort came to an end.



I was the highest once, now deep in ground. If others followed, near to me, I will not know. Some day you may discover them, those who now I leave behind. Carried away, a pile of bones In a plastic box. (poem by volunteer R.D. Melling 2009)