



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

**TEIGNCOMBE ROUND HOUSE
EXCAVATION 2005**

Report for Dartmoor National Park



Teigncombe Round House Excavation 2005

The sixth and final season at the Teigncombe round house provided a fitting end to a particularly interesting and informative excavation. Much of our effort was directed towards locating and recording the remaining features and demonstrating that we had indeed at last found the natural. This said, along the way we uncovered a great deal of interesting information which will certainly enhance our understanding of this very important site. This brief report will highlight some of the more significant discoveries and explain what needs to be done now.

At the end of the fifth season the biggest remaining mystery was how was the building roofed? Although we had found large numbers of post holes and even more stake holes they could not be successfully resolved into a system of supports for the roof. This question was answered very quickly this year with the discovery of a ring of at least 10 post holes situated just over a metre from the house wall. During this search a number of stake holes were also encountered and these may help us to understand the internal arrangements more clearly. For me one of the most significant discoveries so far was the realisation that the house walls were essentially intact. Apart from an orthostat within the doorway and two others all the remaining elements of the original house wall survived. During 2005 we excavated the north eastern wall of the house which previously was partly obscured by post medieval walling. This work revealed that the surviving wall would have carried a roof with a pitch of about 45 degrees and that therefore all of the house wall had survived. Quite an achievement for a house built over 3,000 years ago.

Within the area to the north east of the house which was investigated for the first time a shallow and clearly defined ditch was located immediately next to the outer house wall. At first we thought that this ditch might represent the drip gully formed by water flowing off the roof. However, the alignment of the ditch differed considerably from that of the house wall and sadly no artefacts were found within its primary fill. The date and function of this ditch could not be proven, but its position suggested that it may have been designed to carry flood water from the lynchet towards the nearby field boundary, thus preventing surface water from spilling over the field.

Within the house itself we concentrated on making sure that we had found all the features. Within areas containing flagstones this involved carefully removing the stones and investigating what lay below. In several places traces of rhizomes were uncovered clearly illustrating the impact that the bracken had had even at this depth. Within the entrance area the flagstones were found to be sitting on dark soil similar in character that above them and a small number of

artefacts were found. This indicates that the stone floor was established some time after occupation of the house commenced and was presumably a response to erosion within the most heavily used part of the building. A surprise in the entrance was the discovery of a series of post and stake holes indicating the presence of a small timber lined hallway immediately inside the doorway. Such a structure would have significantly cut draughts and might suggest that the door was frequently left open. Another detail of significance within the entrance was the discovery that the threshold stone had been placed within a specially dug hole. All of the other stones forming the lower half of the house had been placed on the old land surface and it is believed that special need to have a firm flat surface within the doorway had required the builders to take this action.

Apart from the post and stake holes found within the house a number of other features were discovered. Amongst these were a substantial sand filled hollow within the southern part of the house. To start with we believed that it might represent quarry similar in character to that found the previous year against the western wall. However, partial excavation clearly indicated that this particular hollow was entirely natural and had been filled by water borne lenses of sand. Throughout the upper part of the building small angular shaped hollows filled with dark soil were initially interpreted as stake holes, but their stone shaped profile suggests that they were more likely formed by the displacement of stones whose imprint was then backfilled with soil. At least one of these hollows contained a sherd of pottery suggesting that this stones may have been displaced at a time when the house was occupied.

As part of the programme of examining the natural a 1m wide sondage was excavated through the centre of the house. This work revealed in detail the varied character of the natural into which the house had been cut. In places substantial blocks of broken granite surrounded by layers of sands and gravels were uncovered. This layer was probably formed under periglacial conditions with rocks sliding down the hillside being incorporated in and finally buried by the sands and gravels formed by weathering. During this work a significant discovery was made with clear evidence of historic rhizome damage to deep natural layers a long way below the archaeological layers. This discovery generated the final piece of specific rhizome damage research. In one part of the house a "rolling section" was established to examine in cross section the impact and character of historic rhizomes. This work involved digging a small narrow trench through the natural and recording the resulting south facing section. Once this was done the trench was extended by a centimetre towards the north thus exposing a fresh section. This process was repeated several times thus allowing us to obtain a sectional view of the character of the rhizome damage to the natural in this area.