

# DARTMOOR PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION



*The Oliver Sayer gate opens on to the Waste*

*Walk this way ...  
to High House Waste*

[www.dartmoorpreservation.co.uk](http://www.dartmoorpreservation.co.uk), 2017  
Registered charity 215665



*Friends of Dartmoor*  
since 1883

# How High House Waste was saved

## Kate Ashbrook tells the story

**High House Waste is one of Dartmoor's secrets. About a mile north of Cornwood on south-west Dartmoor, the 145-acre site is embraced by Broadall Lake on the east and the Ford Brook on the west. The streams meet near the Waste's southern boundary. (See map on back cover.)**

This land has everything: streams with pools and waterfalls, a wooded valley, bog, moorland, old field-systems and Bronze Age remains. It has a wealth of archaeology and wildlife. There are fine views across the South Hams to the sea and of the surrounding moor. Here you can walk and ride in peace.

### Engulfed

It might not have been so. It is only because of the Dartmoor Preservation Association (DPA) that you can enjoy High House Waste today. It was nearly engulfed under a tidal wave of conifers.

In 1960 the land was bought by Economic Forestry Ltd for tax-avoidance coniferisation. EF intended to fence and plant 360 acres of High House Waste and the adjoining Dendles Waste. There was an outcry and in 1962 the Dartmoor National Park Committee resolved to buy

the land. Its decision was overruled by its parent body, Devon County Council.

In July 1964 the DPA launched an appeal to purchase the land to save it from afforestation. The brochure explained that time was so short that an anonymous member of the DPA had put up the £2,000 and signed the contract to save High House Waste for the nation. That generous member was DPA chairman, later patron, Sylvia Sayer. It was well worth it. The appeal raised more than the required sum.

And so this magical place was saved from becoming a dreary blanket of impenetrable conifers, unlike the neighbouring Dendles. The DPA was proud that the gates to High House Waste were unique on Dartmoor in *welcoming* people onto the land.

### Management

For many years nothing more happened. It was not until 1994 that the DPA concluded a management agreement with the Dartmoor National Park Authority to manage the land for nature conservation. In 2004 the DPA produced its own plan and now actively manages the land for nature, archaeology and public enjoyment. □

*The view south from above the mire. Photo Adam Sparkes.*



# The archaeology and history

## Bob Bruce takes us on a tour

**High House Waste, bounded on the west by the Ford Brook, on the east by Broadall Lake and on the north by the newtake wall, contains archaeological features similar to those found on the neighbouring southern slopes of Dartmoor. (See map on back cover.)**

On the slopes of Penn Beacon to the west and Stall Moor to the east there are well-preserved Bronze Age settlements, similar to the one in High House Waste.

### Reaves

There are Bronze Age reaves (low, stony banks serving as land boundaries) linking Shell Top to Penn Beacon and passing eastwards under the newtake wall of High House Waste and thence to the River Yealm.

There are six abandoned longhouses, probably medieval, on these moorland fringes above Cornwood, one of these being in High House Waste. Similarly there are small areas of tin stream-working and of moorstone working to be found in High House Waste and nearby.

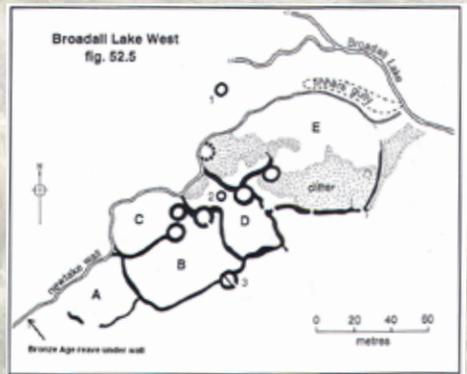
### Scheduled monuments

High House Waste has two scheduled ancient monuments (SAMs). These are the Bronze Age settlement (SAM DV 339), known as Broadall Lake West, in the north-east of the enclosure, centred at SX610631; and the ruined farmstead of High House together with its field system (SAM DV 447), centred on SX611625, on the eastern slopes overlooking the Broadall valley.

The Bronze Age settlement (see figure

1) consists of five, irregular enclosures (small fields or garden plots), with eight hut circles (round houses) grouped loosely near the centre. The reave coming down from Penn Beacon underlies the newtake wall, and its tortuous course (see figure 2 on page 4) suggests that several hut circles have been lost to the wall builders.

The enclosure walls survive as low, stony banks partly covered with turf, while the hut circles have levelled interiors with some upright wall-stones



*Figure 1: the Bronze Age settlement. Adapted, with permission, from Jeremy Butler, 1994, Dartmoor Atlas of Antiquities, vol 3, fig 52.5.*

and occasional door jambs still in position (see figure 3 on page 4).

By analogy with excavated sites elsewhere on Dartmoor, the settlement can be dated to c1500 BCE (before the common era) with the reave perhaps slightly later.

The farmstead (see figure 4 on page 4), on the hillside above the west bank of



*Figure 2: looking south-west over Broadall Lake at the newtake wall of High House Waste. The wall overlies the Bronze Age reave coming down from Penn Beacon and its dramatic wiggles show where the 18th-century builders have taken advantage of the surviving enclosure walls of the Bronze Age settlement.*

the Broadall Lake, is thought to be on the site of a longhouse, but shows signs of later development, and is probably no earlier than 16th century.

The ruins show three rooms, a fireplace and a porch, all on a raised platform set on a shelf cut in the hillside, with two other crude structures nearby and approached by two trackways.

The associated fields rising up the slope to the west above the buildings are extensive and demonstrate a variety

*Figure 3: one of the eight round houses in the Bronze Age settlement.*



of boundary types. The most common are corn ditches, but there are also lynchets, revetted by drystone walls, free-standing drystone walls and earthen banks with ditches.

## **Field system**

The field system clearly is of more than one phase and was probably in use into the 18th and 19th centuries. The earliest documentary reference to High House Waste is 1781, but it seems that by the time of the 1842 tithe map the farm was abandoned.

The newtake wall is likely to have been built in the 18th century but a documentary reference has yet to be found.



*Figure 4: looking east-south-east over the ruins of High House farmstead, across the valley of Broadall Lake towards Hawns and Dendles Waste.*

There are small areas of possible medieval tin-streaming on both the Ford Brook and Broadall Lake, and scattered traces of granite moorstone working, most common on the moorland above the field system, centred on SX610627. There is evidence for both the earlier ‘wedge and groove’ and the later, post-1800, ‘feather and tare’ methods of cutting. □

*Photos and plan (back cover): Bob Bruce.*

# The natural history of High House Waste

Hilary Marshall describes what you may find

High House Waste's mosaic of habitats includes grassland, heathland, mires and oak woodland, all of which have been designated in two Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Splashes of colour on the **grass moor** are provided by Tormentil (yellow), Heath Milkwort (usually blue), Heath Bedstraw (white) and Eyebright (white). Small Heath butterflies fly from June to August, lay their eggs on grasses and overwinter as caterpillars.

The **heathland** is dominated by Western Gorse which flowers from August onwards. Heather, Cross-leaved Heath and Bilberry, along with the taller European Gorse are also present. Stonechats and Green Hairstreak butterflies breed in habitat mosaics which include gorse.

Several springs give rise to **wetlands**: valley mires and wet heath communities, the most important habitats for nature



*Heath Milkwort*

conservation on High House Waste. The largest mire is towards the south of the site. Widespread plants include Round-leaved Sundew, Many-stalked Spike-rush, Marsh Violet and Bog Asphodel. June and July are good months to visit for the flowers when the cottongrasses, Pale



*Green Hairstreak butterfly*

Butterwort, Heath Spotted-orchid and the red leaves of sundews, provide a colourful display.

The stunning yellow flowers of Bog Asphodel are followed by orange fruits towards the end of July when Bog Pimpernel, Cross-leaved Heath and the first few flowers of Marsh St John's Wort appear.

There are good-sized patches of the uncommon White Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba*, particularly in the southern mire. The leaves have a distinctive yellowish tinge but this species is easiest to see in July and August when the white flowers are present.

The most abundant dragonfly is the



*Bog Pimpernel*

Keeled Skimmer which may be seen in hundreds on sunny days in July. Males are blue, females yellow-brown.

The small area of **oakwood** is on the edge of a much larger semi-natural woodland which is ancient (ie has been wooded continuously since at least 1600), part of which is a national nature reserve. It is



*Hard-fern*

rich in species which would not be found in more recent woods. In May the Bluebells are accompanied by less conspicuous woodland flowers, such as Wood Sorrel, and ferns including Hard-fern and, by the stream, Lemon-scented Fern. The clean air and damp sheltered conditions enable bryophytes and lichens to flourish.

Some of the oaks are dying from Honey Fungus; it is not clear why. However the dead trees, both standing and fallen,



*Small Heath butterfly*

provide habitat for invertebrates and other wildlife such as bats and the rare Blue Ground Beetle which live under loose bark. Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers can be heard and seen around the farmhouse, the latter feed on ants in the grassland there.

There has been little natural regeneration in or near the woodland. Seedlings of Pedunculate Oak, Downy Birch, Rowan, Holly, willows and Hawthorn are grazed by sheep, cattle, deer and smaller animals. In places the dense Western Gorse has protected Rowan saplings. The deer likely to be seen are Fallow and Roe.

Characteristic flowers on the **walls and rocks** include English Stonecrop and Navelwort. Common Lizards bask on the rocks in sheltered spots. □

*Photos: Hilary Marshall.*



*White Beak-sedge*

# Managing High House Waste

## Val Barns explains the volunteers' work on the ground

Since 2004 the DPA has managed High House Waste to maximise its conservation potential.

This is in line with its own management plan, an Environmentally Sensitive Area agreement (2004-14) and, since 2014, a Higher Level Stewardship agreement with Natural England as part of the Rural Development Programme for England. There is an agricultural tenancy, by which a local farmer grazes cattle on the land.

### Management work

Most of the work is organised and undertaken by an enthusiastic and dedicated team of DPA conservation volunteers (pictured below) who spend the first Sunday of most months working on the site.



They have:

- cleared gorse from several kilometres of walls and other features dating from prehistory to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These features are now visible;
- strimmed and bashed Bracken in the central farmstead area;
- swaled (burnt) a mosaic of patches in the northern part of the site. Swaling keeps the gorse from becoming dominant and allows growth of other

moorland vegetation, including Bilberry, heather, moorland grasses and other flowering plants;

- protected Oak and other tree seedlings from damage by stock where they are naturally regenerating, with the aim of allowing the woodland to extend;
- surveyed White Beak-sedge (a Dartmoor rarity) to monitor whether there is any change in the mire where this plant grows;
- installed information boards, and repaired fences, gates and walls, to keep stock in, while allowing people to come and go.

### Access

There are five gates: one in the west (Oliver Sayer gate); three in the east (including Frank Beech and Neil Main gates) and one in the north (Matt Collins gate). The National Park Authority kindly installed two stiles (see map). The DPA has dedicated public rights to ride and camp here (in addition to the right to walk), so the access is the same as on the adjoining commons under the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985. □

### How to get to High House Waste

The land is four miles north of Ivybridge and two miles from the nearest car-park on Heathfield Down by the road from Cornwood to Wotter (SX600602).

From the car-park, walk north up the road to West Rook Gate (SX604614) then aim just east of north for  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile over Penn Moor, leaving Rook Tor to the left and aiming for the western wall of High House Waste which runs along the Ford Brook. The entrance gate is at SX607623.

