

NOTE

FIELD SURVEY AND EXCAVATION OF TWO LINEAR WOODEN FEATURES AT HOOPER'S GROUND, WESTHAY HEATH, 1992

INTRODUCTION

Hooper's Ground, a 2.5 ha undulating field, centred on ST 421422, has been subject to peat extraction since 1990. Prior to this it was used for seasonal grazing. During routine archaeological monitoring, two parallel linear concave features lined with brushwood were observed in the peat over a distance of 86 m. The features were between 62 and 63 m apart, similar in construction and level (2.30 m to 4.0 m OD).

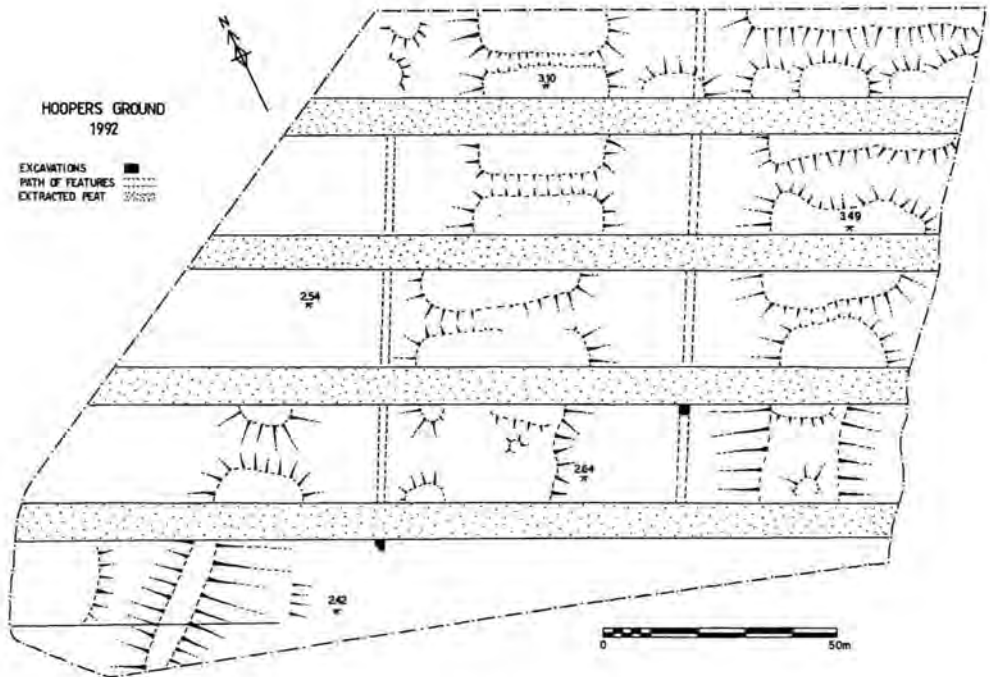


Fig. 1

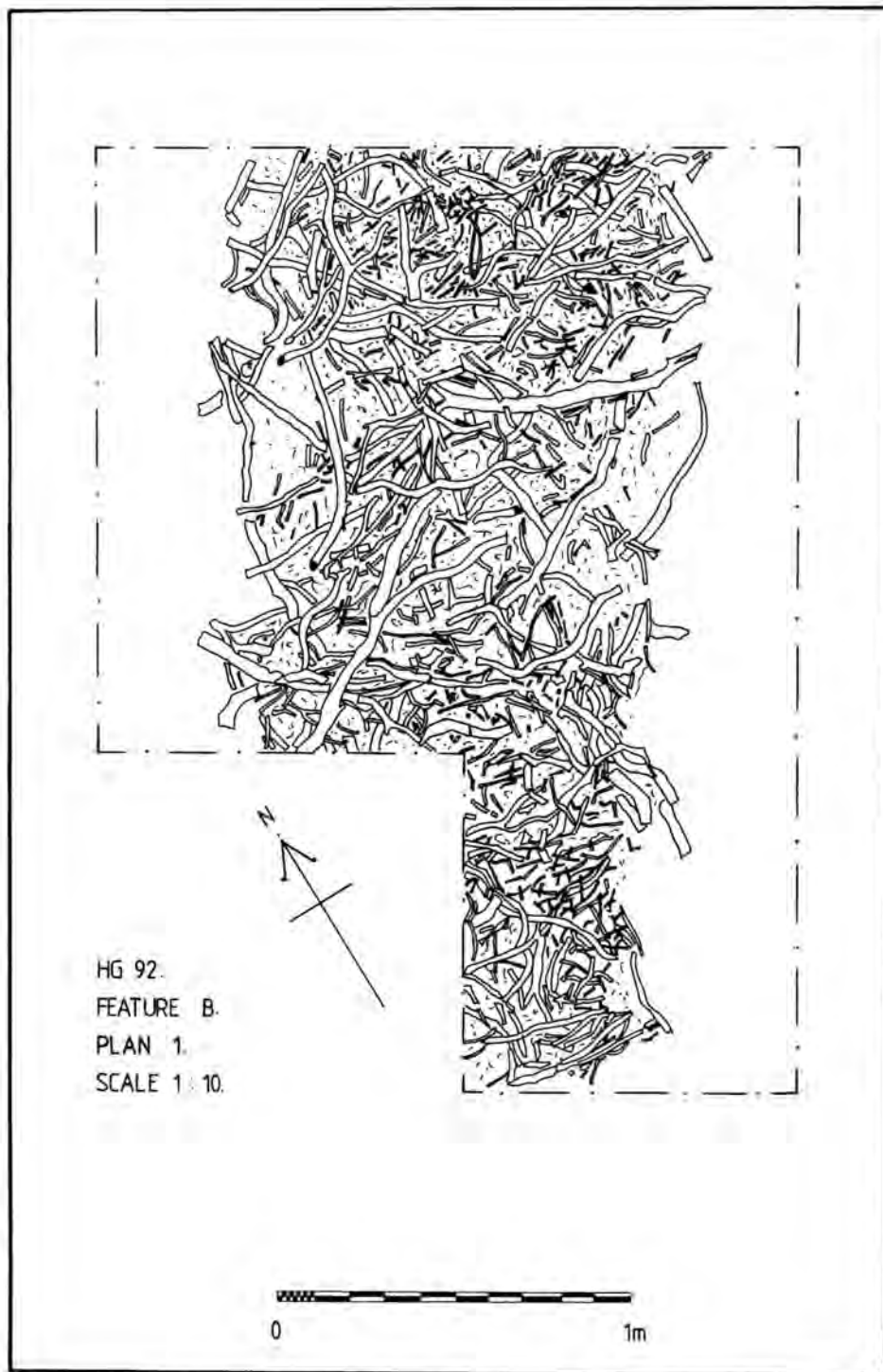


Fig. 2

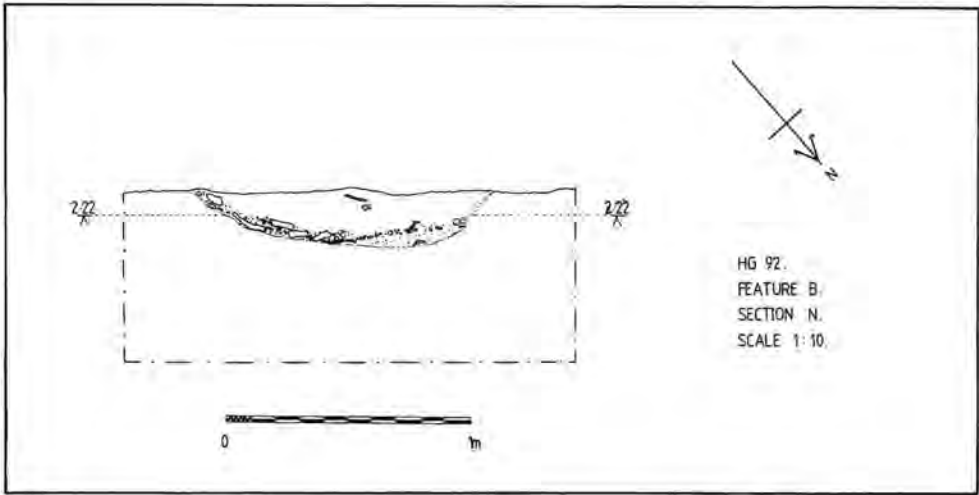


Fig. 3

SURVEY AND EXCAVATION

The field was subject to a topographic survey in July 1992. The survey revealed two series of mounds, approximately 1 m higher than their surroundings, running north-east to south-west across the field (Fig. 1). The wooden features run parallel through the low lying areas in the same direction. One sondage was opened across each of the two linear features (A and B) after the field had been newly cut for peat. Full details of the survey and excavation are archived with the Somerset County Museums Service.

THE FEATURES

A plan and section of Feature B is shown in Figs 2 and 3. The fill of both features comprised a loose peat/loam/soil matrix with some disturbed oak (*Quercus* sp) brushwood fragments and cones from local Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*).

The brushwood deposit was laid down randomly and was up to 60 mm thick becoming less substantial as the sides curved up. The brushwood was predominantly oak roundwood between 10 and 100 mm thick. Some of the thicker wood had cut ends reflecting a single angled blow from a metal implement. Radio carbon dates of 290 ± 50 BP and 220 ± 50 BP were obtained. Beneath the brushwood lay a yellowish layer, predominantly a monocotyledon.

The features were placed upon an undulating but generally concave surface of approximately 2.23 m OD at their lowest levels. There is no evidence to suggest that these linear concave depressions were deliberately cut into the peat; however, they could represent cuts which had become uneven due to vegetation encroachment. The peat was undisturbed and a radio carbon determination suggested a date of 2000 ± 50 BP. Clearly the late Iron Age peat predated the post-medieval brushwood features.

DISCUSSION

No similar features from this period have been recorded in the Somerset Levels and Moors. In comparison with pre-historic brushwood trackways discovered in the area, these are unusual in their concave profile.

The function of these features has not been determined. Despite the fact that no contemporary roadway existed between Burtle and Westhay, it is unlikely that the features were laid down as trackways because they would collect water and be neither a dry route, nor a stable surface.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was funded by Somerset County Council and English Heritage. Excavation and survey were undertaken by Keith Faxon and Robert Tatford; Caroline Earwood analysed the wood and Julie Jones the plant macrofossils. Vanessa Straker advised on the palaeo-environmental sampling and analysis. Finally, Mr Andrew Roland of Godwins Ltd permitted the monitoring and fieldwork on his land.

MARGARET COX

AUTHOR

Dr Margaret Cox, School of Conservation Sciences, Bournemouth University, Dorset House, Talbot Campus, Fern Barrow, Poole, Dorset, BH12 5BB