

South Wales RIGS Group Site Record RIGS Description

SECTION A

General	South Wales
Site Name: Brechfa Common Bomb Craters	File Number: AH_64
RIGS Number: 749	Surveyed by: AJ Humpage / M Mitchell
Grid Reference: SO 10800 38720	Date of Visit: 1 October 2011
RIGS Category: Historical	Date Registered: Unknown
Earth Science Category: Human	
Site Nature: Open moorland	Documentation prepared by: AJH
Unitary Authority: Powys CC	Documentation last revised: 3 October 2011
OS 1:50,000 Sheet: 161	Photographic Record: See images attached to this report
OS 1:25,000 Explorer Sheet: 188	
BGS 1:50,000 : Sheet 197 (Hay-on-Wye)	

RIGS Statement of Interest: This site is an important record of the features which bombs can create rather than the normal association with damage to civilian and military structures.

The bombs (possible large 250kg bombs) were dropped by a German Luftwaffe bomber during the Second World War, probably dropping its load before reaching its intended destination. Although no properties or structures were hit, windows in the surrounding farms were shattered giving an indication of the extent of the blast radius, with windows being rattled and cracked at Upper Brechfa Farm, some 2,000 metres distant.

The result is two well formed craters with a distinct morphological expression, 11-12 metres in diameter, almost two metres deep, with distinct central pinnacles over 1.5m high. The immediate surrounding area of the craters is undulating with small hummocks probably caused by displaced material and unlike the rest of the common, the bracken here is not harvested.

These craters are a consequence of an unsuccessful, possibly lost, lone aircraft, rather than an organised deception such as "Starfish" described in the Other Comments section below.

Geological setting/context:

These features are a consequence of enemy activity during the Second World War in Europe (3 September 1939 - 8 May 1945).

The craters preserved on the common land at this location are unusual as very rarely are the morphological expressions of such activity preserved so well. Urban and suburban areas tend to be redeveloped and damage repaired, whilst in agricultural ground, craters would tend to be infilled or ploughed in. Whilst these features are almost certainly not unique in the UK or even in Wales e.g. craters exist on the Eglwyseg Escarpment in NE Wales, they are one of the few recorded and surviving occurrences in South Wales. Well recorded events, such as the four bombs which left a 90 metre long straight line of craters 11 metres wide and 8 metres deep near Kenfig Castle on 20 August 1940 are now no longer visible.

Other such examples may be discovered in the future, as evidenced by the crater discovered in the New Forest in March 2010 (see report below).

References:

<http://www.kenfig.org.uk/waryears/>

<http://www.prlog.org/10595966-massive-wwii-bomb-crater-discovered-in-the-new-forest.html>

Massive WWII bomb crater discovered in the New Forest

New Forest Tourism Association member Phil Howe, who runs Hidden Britain Tours, discovered a huge World War II bomb crater earlier this week.







Mar 26, 2010

New Forest Tourism Association member Phil Howe, who runs Hidden Britain Tours, discovered a huge World War II bomb crater earlier this week following a controlled burning of gorse and heather close to the Tumulus (a Neolithic burial ground) half a mile south of Beaulieu Road Station. A silver birch tree seemed to have survived the fire, so Phil walked over the charcoaled heath, and found the tree growing in a perfectly outlined bomb crater; a depression about fifteen feet across and eight feet deep. The crater had been hidden for years by the old heather that had softened the landscape.

Comments Phil: "I have escorted hundreds of people right past the spot over the last two years without realising it was there. The mystery is, of course, we will never ever know why, or by whom, the bomb was dropped, or what they might have been trying to hit."

For more on a guided walk, contact Phil Howe on 01256 814 222 or visit www.hiddenbritaintours.co.uk. For general information on the New Forest including things to do and places to stay visit www.thenewforest.co.uk.

SECTION B

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS: Please score Accessibility and Safety Red Amber or Green			
Accessibility:			X 
Comment: Open access common land			
Safety:			X 
Comment:			
Conservation status: There are no known designations of this location.			

OWNERSHIP/PLANNING CONTROL: Owner/tenant: Planning Authority: Powys County Council Planning status/constraints/opportunities: There are no known planning constraints or opportunities.
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CONDITION, USE & MANAGEMENT: Present use: Rough grazing by sheep Site condition: Overgrown with bracken Potential threats: Possibility of being infilled Site Management: Maintain current grazing and land management regime.

SITE DEVELOPMENT: Potential use (general): To highlight the impacts of warfare Potential use (educational):
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Other comments: <i>Starfish Bombing Decoy Sites</i> During WW2, from December 1940, remote areas had artificial light arrays and fire pits set up (Codename "Starfish") to act as decoys for urban and strategic locations. "Starfish" was taken from the Code SF, meaning "Special Fire". The aim of "Starfish" was to light up the decoy sites after a first wave of bombers had passed. The sites were operated by lighting a series of controlled fires or other pyrotechnics during an air raid, in order to simulate an urban area targeted by bombs. There were various types of smaller decoy sites, including the "QL" decoy sites, which used lights, and the "QF" sites, which were dummy fire sites. The 'QL' decoys used a grid of muted lights to resemble factories during a poorly observed blackout.
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Subsequent bombing attacks would then target the Starfish site, rather than the intended target.

Civil and military decoys are well known in North-east Wales, with beacons set up on Hope Mountain and above Minera. In the Clwydian Range, Llandegla is listed as a Civil “Starfish” Site for Liverpool. However there is also listed a joint Army 'A' Series decoy site and a Civil 'C' series 'QF' site at Cilcain.

Elsewhere, Brownsea Island Starfish site protected Poole and Bournemouth. Similar installations at Cherry Cobb Sands in the Humber Estuary protected the Humberside Docks, whilst those at Burton Marsh in the Dee Estuary north of Connah’s Quay were designed to protect various Merseyside dock and rail installations, with the Starfish lighting arrays at both sites reflecting in pools of water designed to match the layout of the real docks.

In South Wales, the “Starfish” sites for Cardiff were located at Llanwern, Duffryn and St. Brides Wentloog whilst those for Swansea were at Bishopston, Baglan Higher and Morfa. There is no evidence for such activity on Brechfa Common.



Cherry Cobb Sands, Humber Estuary – one of a series of pools and lighting poles which formed a “Starfish” array designed to resemble the Humberside dock installations

Photographic Record



Aerial photograph of Brechfa Common bomb craters – north to top of image



Central mound of southern crater c 1.5m in height looking North-west



The southern crater looking south-east – vehicle on outer edge of disturbed ground



The northern crater looking north-west with its 2m high central mound



Standing atop the central mound

Annotated Sketch