

Historic Hillsborough

Newsletter 1

Since confirmation of funding by the Rural Development Programme England in the early part of the year, things have progressed in rolling out a programme of work on Hillsborough this winter

Hillsborough is a very important part of the coast and countryside within the Ilfracombe area. It was purchased by the Ilfracombe Urban District Council in the late 1890s to prevent it from being built on and to provide quiet informal recreation for both visitors and locals. Since then it has become a part of Ilfracombe's Heritage and there have been many projects to conserve and enhance the site.

The site continues to provide visitors with an opportunity to explore the area, via the extensive public rights of way network and the Open Access areas. A visit, rewards people with fine views of Ilfracombe, and the surrounding countryside. On a clear day, the coast of Wales can clearly be seen.

The South West Coast Path, an officially designated National Trail, comprising of a 680 mile long distance public footpath,



Hillsborough in the 1930s

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It is said that Hillsborough is one of the most designated and protected sites in North Devon, after the UNESCO Biosphere at Braunton Burrows. The land, now owned by North Devon Council, was designated as "protected landscape" becoming part of the North Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1960 and the defined Heritage Coast in 1992.

It is also an important wildlife site, being designated a County Wildlife Site in 1994 and a Local Nature Reserve in the following year. If that wasn't enough it was also designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 1978.

If that wasn't enough it was also designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 1978. This is due mainly to the fact that it is the site of an Iron Age Promontory Hill-fort which was constructed somewhere between 300 BC and 50 AD. Little remains, of this hill-fort, other than two earthen banks, complete with gateway entrance, hidden amongst the scrub and vegetation on site.

The current project led by owners North Devon Council and the North Devon AONB & Biosphere Service is linked to this heritage and plans are afoot to carry out scrub clearance works on the ancient earthworks, to prevent further deterioration and to help the public understand their archaeological importance.

Work will also be undertaken to improve the information provision on site, raising visitor awareness of the historical, landscape and conservation importance of the site. 5 new interpretation panels and a series of downloadable guided walks are planned to be in place for the start of the summer season in 2011.

An important element of this project is the desire to involve the local community in project delivery and the public are being asked to help with the conservation work on site, via a series of Volunteer Tasks planned for the winter.

Progress so far:

In February a group of dedicated Volunteers, from the Adult Learning Forum, assisted archaeologists from Birmingham University, with a survey of parts of the Hillsborough site. It was hoped that this work would reveal some of Hillsborough's ancient past, as the site has never fully been investigated. Our hope was that this work would also inform future management decisions and help with regard to interpretation on site.

Sadly, the investigations, which included both Resistance Meter and Gradiometer Survey, revealed little evidence of human occupation within the hill-fort itself. Whilst inconclusive, the survey has helped to inform what may have taken place on Hillsborough.

The earthworks lead to suggest that the site was an Iron Age Promontory Hill-fort, also known as a Cliff Castle and built in the "Cornish style".



In fact though frequently associated with Cornwall, there are many promontory hill-forts running along the North Devon Coast, others include Newberry Castle (Berrynarbor), Windbury Head, (near Clovelly) and Embury Beacon (on the Hartland Coast) The idea being that the site was defended by cliffs and the sea on most sides, with the promontory defended by earthen banks from landward attack.

That little evidence of human habitation has been found within the castle at Hillsborough, would suggest that the local community may only have sheltered inside the hillfort during times of attack. There appears to be no doubt that the site, is closely linked to the natural harbour of Ilfracombe below.

Another theory put forward by the Archaeologists, was that far from being a defensive structure, the earthworks may have been constructed as a tribal show of strength and power by the local chieftain. The earthworks would have been very imposing and dominated the surrounding countryside, and would have been an important status symbol.

Funding Confirmation:

Earlier in the year, we received confirmation that we had been successful in our funding bid to the RDPE, when the Rural Development Agency confirmed that the £2.1 project "Unlocking the Coastal Heritage" had been approved. The money will be spent on a variety of heritage projects linked to the South West Coast Path, all around the region.

Here in North Devon, we have received funding for four projects along our coast and these include an interpretation project at Combe Martin Seafront, and Path realignment Project at Watermouth as well as the Hillsborough Project. A further project to conserve a second Promontory Hill-fort at Embury Beacon is being undertaken by the National Trust.

At Hillsborough a budget of around £18,000 has been approved to carry out restoration/conservation works to the Iron Age embankments and for the provision of information boards.

The Advisory Group

To help guide the work on site and to encourage community participation an Advisory Group was set up in September. This group is comprised of experts, such as Officers from English Heritage and the County Archaeology Section; locally elected politicians from both Town, District and County Councils as well as representatives of the local community.

To date the group has met a couple of times to discuss the proposed works on site.

It is hoped that ultimately, this group will come under the auspices of either the Ilfracombe Town Council or North Devon Council and will be responsible for helping to maintain the site at Hillsborough in the future.



The Open Day 30th October

Exhibition Day

To assist with volunteer recruitment and engage with local people, it was decided to hold an Open Day to discuss the current proposals to manage Hillsborough.

A public exhibition was set up at the Ilfracombe Centre in High Street on Saturday 30th October, and the public were invited to attend. Members of the Advisory Group were on hand to discuss the proposed plans for management of the earthworks and the ideas for further interpretation provision on the site.

The exhibition was followed by a Guided Walk led by AONB Project officer Dave Edcombe and Archaeologist Chris Carey from Birmingham University.

As a result of this work, 52 people attended the exhibition in town and around 30 people took part in the guided walk. Currently, over 26 individuals have signed up to as Volunteer, to help with the clearance work on site.



Work Starts Now

New Information Boards

The contract to provide new information panels on Hillsborough has been awarded to a local North Devon company Nature Signs. They are charged with the task of producing 5 new information boards, to be installed in and around the site at Hillsborough.

These new boards will be replacing the old boards on site, but a board, explaining the archaeological significance of Hillsborough is planned for the area near the swimming pool car park. The other boards will help visitors explore the site, via the many footpaths, whilst raising awareness of its importance as a Local Nature Reserve and a historic site.

It is hoped that these boards will be installed by the ends of March next year, in time for the summer season.

Clearance of the Earthworks

Work will now begin on clearance of the earthen banks. This is necessary, as the current vegetation, in particular the roots, are beginning to destroy the earthworks. On advice from English Heritage and the County Archaeologist, it was decided to undertake a light clearance program to clear back vegetation from the earthen banks and the gateway/entrance.

Most of this work will be undertaken by hand, and will be carried out by a mixture of volunteers and skilled contractors. Cut vegetation will be chipped and mulched on site, so as to avoid the danger of fires, etc. It is hoped that subsequent management will involve regular cutting of the earthen banks, to prevent excessive re-growth of vegetation.

Not only will the work help to conserve the ancient earthworks, it will allow the public to view and understand the importance of these historic structures.

Inaugural Volunteer Task: 12th December 2010

To begin the season of clearance, which is best carried out in the winter months, we propose to undertake a volunteer work task. This task will begin hand clearance of the earthworks, in particular around the gateway entrance to hill-fort, which archaeologically is the most interesting.

The inaugural task is planned for Sunday 12th December and the meeting point will be at 10:00 a.m. in the Swimming Pool Car Park below Hillsborough.

All existing volunteers and member of the local community will be contacted, and anyone wishing to attend the Volunteers Day are advised to contact either:

Dave Edgcombe AONB Project Officer on 01237 423655 email: dave.edgcombe@devon.gov.uk
or Andrew Moulton North Devon Council Parks Section 01271 388326
Email: Andrew.Moulton@northdevon.gov.uk



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