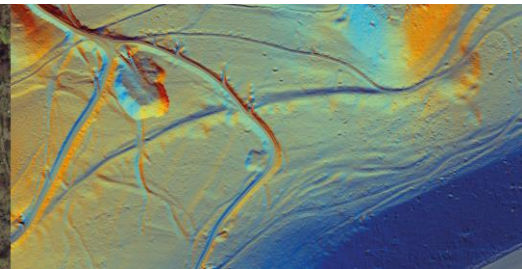




SECRETS OF THE HIGH WOODS

HERITAGE | LANDSCAPE | SCIENCE



An interim report of volunteer fieldwork conducted at Stansted Park By the 'Secrets of the High Woods' project

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Project background

The Secrets of the High Woods (SHW) project is an HLF funded project, hosted by the South Downs National Park Authority. The project seeks to identify, map and explore the archaeological heritage of a large swathe of the wooded western downs, using airborne laser scanning (LiDAR) technology.

A high resolution LiDAR survey of a 305 km² area of the wooded western downland region of the South Downs National Park was undertaken in March 2014, and a range of LiDAR visualisations have been processed from the resultant digital terrain model. A National Mapping Programme (NMP) transcription project, combining both aerial photography and LiDAR has been commissioned, to provide a full and detailed desk-based record of the archaeological resource in the area.

A series of fieldwork programmes have been devised by SHW project staff working with project volunteers to investigate, explore and record the archaeological resource. The aims of the fieldwork have been as follows:

- To introduce project volunteers to a range of upstanding archaeological features which characterise the historic environment of the South Downs National Park.
- To explore the representation of these features using a range of different visualisation techniques.
- To make a rapid record of these features to enhance our understanding of the LiDAR visualisations

Given limitations imposed by differing patterns of landownership, land management, vegetation growth and the time scale of the project, total field verification of the archaeological resource has not been attempted. Rather than a traditional transect survey, the programme of fieldwork has been targeted in areas agreed by project partners, and has been designed to explore specific questions, including:

- investigation of a sample of the different feature types captured by LiDAR to provide and confirm interpretations;
- investigation of the impact of vegetation and landuse on the representation of archaeological relief;
- investigation of specific questions generated by the NMP programme of desk-top transcription;
- investigation of physical relationships between features, to facilitate understanding of relative dating; and
- identification of sites and themes which can benefit from further field observations or desk based research by volunteers.

Ground verification is, by necessity, non-invasive and the results cannot be seen to provide definitive statements on interpretation or period. The following interpretations are therefore proposals only, based on observation of the physical topography and relationships observed at the time of the site visit informed by knowledge of the context and analogous features observed elsewhere, alongside any existing associated historic environment records.

This document is intended to summarise the main results of the programme of field verification. This document is also intended to be a working document, which will be updated and developed, as background research undertaken by our archival and oral history volunteers becomes available, or as further fieldwork takes place.

Location

Stansted Park is located in the south-western portion of the Secrets of the High Woods study area. Fieldwork was conducted in Stansted Forest, Grid Square NGR 475 111 during October and November 2014 (Figure 1).

Of the six site visits made, three were afternoon training sessions and three were full survey days. Project volunteers at Stansted were: Arthur Allden, Andrew Baker, Laurence Booth, Dick Cole, John Crane, James Dodd, Tony Douglas, Steve Enticott, , Victoria Jones, Hilary King, Peter King, Maisie Marshall, Sarah O'Brien, Michael Pengelly, Clare Perkins, Tim Pullan, Mark Seaman, Harold Spooner, and Neil Stevenson.

Permission to conduct field work was kindly granted by Michael Prior, Head Forester at Stansted Park.

Site topography and geology

Stansted Park is located on the south facing dip slope of the South Downs. The underlying geology is chalk, with superficial deposits of clay-with-flints (British Geological Society Online).

Archaeological background

The principal historic features of Stansted Park are represented by Stansted House, its associated buildings and the wider surrounding parkland. The park comprises areas of managed historic woodland, particularly concentrated in the north and west, with some arable and pasture to the north, south and east of the house.

The Stansted Park Revision of the Management Plan outlines seven key phases of historic development which can be traced in the current landscape (ACTA, 2007: 4). In summary, these are as follows:

- The Medieval and 16th century hunting landscape, which formed part of the Forest of Arundel. In the 16th century Stansted is recorded as consisting of two parks, the Great Park and the Little Park. The manor house was located within the Little Park (ibid, 22).
- The late 17th century designed landscape, during which time the Avenue was cut through the woodland. An engraving of part of this landscape was created by Kipp and Knyff in 1707.
- The landscape was changed through large-scale replanting in the 1720s. It is possible that the other two avenues, which comprise the goosefoot, were cut in the early 1720s (ibid, 25).
- The landscape created by the Earl of Halifax in the later 18th century. He created the Racton Tower and Lumley Seat (ibid, 25).
- Landscape change in the early 1780s which may be attributable to Capability Brown. This included the laying out of a circuit of the grounds and removal of part of the Avenue (ibid, 27).
- A restructuring of the landscape in the early 19th century by Lewis Way. It is thought that Way was motivated more by the establishment of a productive landscape, rather than an aesthetic one (ibid, 30). Changes included the replanting of the Avenue, the shooting ride fell into disuse (if it had not done so before), large areas of woodland in the north-east of the park were converted to sheepwalk, and new approaches to the house were laid out.
- Changes during the Victorian period, including alterations to the house and construction of the lodges (ibid, 31).

Fieldwork results

A range of features of archaeological and historic interest were investigated during the programme of fieldwork. A summary of the principal feature types is summarised in proposed period order below. Locations are shown overlying the Local Relief Model (LRM) LiDAR visualisation on Figure 2.

Mound: Unknown Date



Feature 4. Facing north-west. NGR 475121 111771.

A mound was recorded on the 27 November 2014. This round earthen mound is approximately 13.4m in diameter and 1.3m high. It is located next to a path and a pit and is slightly truncated by the path which deviates around the mound. A substantial yew tree was noted to be growing on the mound. This tree did not appear to have significantly influenced the representation of the feature in the LiDAR visualisations.

The topography of this feature is compatible with a form of prehistoric to Anglo-Saxon funerary monument, the round barrow, which is a common feature of the chalk downland. However, other interpretations are possible. The feature appears to overlie part of a field system, and no clear external ditch was identified during the site visit. A large quarry pit is located nearby, and this feature could represent an associated spoil heap. However, it is interesting to note that no other quarries visited during the fieldwork programme were observed to have accompanying spoil heaps.

Lynchets: Probable Prehistoric



Feature 59. Facing north. NGR 475047 111096.

A network of lynchets were recorded in the area in November 2014. These were often subtle forms, generally ranging in height from 30–70cm and could be difficult to detect in the field.

These features are thought to represent a network of field systems, of the form traditionally referred to by the misleading term ‘Celtic’ fields. These networks of small, square, irregular or semi-regular fields are known to have covered thousands of square miles, surviving best in places which have escaped later cultivation. They are often identified within chalk downland landscapes. At Stansted, the field systems clearly predate the woodland structure, in all cases noted as having been ‘cut’ by later banks, ditches, rides and quarry pits.

Dating these networks of morphology alone is difficult, and in this case all recorded examples have been attributed a broad ‘prehistoric’ date.

Pits: Probable Post-Medieval



Feature 58. Facing north-east. NGR 475731 111226.

A number of pits were recorded during fieldwork, ranging from 11 to 23m in diameter, and up to 4m in depth. Sometimes two or more pits were located together, often with one larger and deeper and the other smaller and shallower.

The majority of these features are thought to represent quarry pits, for chalk and flint. Other suggestions include sink holes or bomb craters. Further field and documentary work may help to refine these interpretations.

The range of sizes and shapes of the pits, and the relationships between features identified during fieldwork suggests that many may derive from different periods of use. Some features are respected by later banks and ditches, (i.e. one located at 475084 111486, not accessible during fieldwork due to forestry operations) while others (i.e. Feature 53), were noted to 'cut' underlying linear alignments.

Extant pits are known from Prehistoric to Medieval periods (Rackham, 1986: 351–3), and areas of later woodland could preserve these features well. However, the Post-Medieval period saw increased population numbers, with the concomitant intensification of both construction (including infrastructure and housing) and agriculture. Stansted house and its associated buildings are known to have undergone several periods of construction and redevelopment. It therefore thought that a Post-Medieval date is most likely for the majority of these features.

Banks and Ditches: Probable Post-Medieval



Feature 6. Facing east. NGR 475541 111086.

A network of substantial banks and ditches was observed respecting the woodland perimeters. Their very straight, rectilinear alignments, with sharp angled corners, and substantial earthen banks and ditches are perhaps suggestive of the coppice or plantation compartments.

Several alignments appear to respect, and therefore post-date, some large quarry features (i.e. one located at 475084 111486). Several alignments have also been noted to have been cut by, and are therefore earlier than, a series of woodland rides, which are depicted on maps as far back as Yeakell and Gardner's 2 Inch Map of Sussex of 1778–1783.

A Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments in England (RCHME) survey of earthworks in the New Forest conducted in the 1990s identified a network of timber plantations defined by rectilinear plans, with sharp angled corners, and earthen banks and ditches laid out along rigidly straight lines (Smith, 1999: 40). These were attributed a late 17th to 19th century date, and it is possible that the features identified at Stansted could date from a similar period – perhaps the early part of this range given their physical relationship with the rides depicted on the late 18th century maps

An interesting element of this network is a parcel recorded as 'Hare Warren Plantation' on the 1840 Tithe Apportionment, and still recorded as such on current OS maps (Feature 6).

Formal Park Landscaping: Post-Medieval

Some features depicted on the LiDAR are highly visible elements of the formal park woodland today.



Feature 57. Facing east. NGR 475115 111131

An avenue is clearly depicted on the LiDAR visualisations as a smooth, and vegetation-free corridor passing through the woodland, partially defined by slight banks and lined by trees.

It is known as the Shooting Ride, or the north-west running radial of the 'Goosefoot' (the network of formal avenues orientating out from Stansted House). The Shooting Ride is thought to have been cut from the early 1720s (ACTA, 2007: 25).



Feature 7. Facing north. NGR 475063 111190

In addition, a number of paths through woodland, orientated on a rectilinear alignment were identified. In the LiDAR visualisations these are clearly identifiable and represented as black rectangular lines dividing up the forest. These rides are noted to have cut across several banks and ditches, and are also noted to respect some of the pits, suggesting that the pits pre-date the paths.

These footpaths are regularly used by visitors to the park, but the alignments are of some antiquity themselves, some of which are depicted on maps as far back as Yeakell and Gardner's 2 Inch Map of Sussex of 1778–1783.

Trenches: Modern

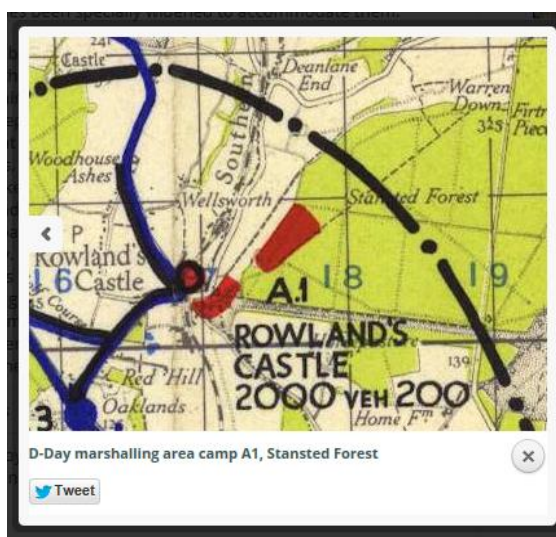


Feature 8. Facing north-east. NGR 475157 111762.

Several small rectilinear or sub-oval features were noted on the LiDAR. One recorded example was a c.5m long pit, approximately 1.5m wide and c.70cm deep. It had an associated bank, located on the northern side of the feature measuring up to 60cm high. A number of similar pit and bank features were also noted in the area.

This feature could represent a saw pit, although it is thought that the proximity of the spoil heap, located solely on one side of the feature may militate against this suggestion. It perhaps instead may represent military activity within the park, and could represent a large slit or practise trench.

If military in origin, these features are probably related to troops stationed in woodland on the run up to D-Day. Rowlands Castle (including Stansted Forest) was one of the camps in an area known as Marshalling Area 'A'. These were a group of temporary troop camps around Portsmouth and Gosport, where Allied troops waited (for weeks or even several months) on the run up to D-Day. These camps were usually hidden in woods, so that they would be hidden from any enemy aircraft that flew over. The camp at Stansted lay in the south-west corner, and could hold 2,000 men and 200 vehicles. Troops based here included the 2nd Middlesex, Canadians and Free French (D-Day Museum Website).



D-Day Troop camp at Stansted. Image from the D-Day Museum website
<http://www.ddaymuseum.co.uk/overlord-embroidery>

Conclusions

The LiDAR data has proved to be an invaluable resource for revealing and exploring the historic landscape of Stansted Park.

A range of features from different periods have been identified, testifying to the depth and complexity of the historic landscape of the park.

In addition to the seven key phases of historic development outlined within the Stansted Management Plan, (above), fieldwork by SHW volunteers has outlined a further two phases represented in the landscape:

- Prehistoric
- 20th century military activity

Fieldwork within the remainder of the park will continue during the next survey season (subject to relevant permissions) when it is hoped more information on the historic landscape will be added to the records summarised above. Watch this space...!

Potential for further research

Fieldwork at the park has highlighted some areas/themes which could benefit from further documentary or map research. These are outlined below.

The Historic Economy of the Stansted Estate.

- It is unknown how extensive the Stansted Park Archives are, but documentary records may be located relating to woodland/park management, (including the Hare Park) and possibly the sourcing of/extraction of materials within the estate for construction or agricultural purposes.
- Map regression to investigate in greater depth the form and function of the wood compartments, and Hare Warren.

20th Century Military Activity.

- Fieldwork next season will focus around the area of the troop camp. Can any records of this camp be located, in order to inform the next season of fieldwork?
- Bomb craters: are there any documentary/photographic records of known examples within the area? Can these be used to trace examples in the field?
- The wood yard in the centre of Stansted forest known as the 'German camp'. Who were the Germans who apparently set up the wood camp in Stansted, and why did they choose to come here? Had they been familiar with the place before? Where was their prisoner of war camp located? Any potential here for Oral History project?
- Slit trenches/practise trenches/saw pits: research into the forms of different types of trenching, to aid identification of the different forms?

It is understood that Stansted has a volunteer base conducting documentary research on the park, which may provide an opportunity for SHW volunteers to benefit from and tie up with work already being undertaken.

Sources Consulted

Maps:

Stoughton Tithe Map 1840.

Yeakell and Gardner's Sussex 1778–1783, 2inch to 1 Mile. [Online]. [Accessed 24 Jan 2015]. Available from: http://www.envf.port.ac.uk/geo/research/historical/webmap/sussexmap/Yeakell_36.htm

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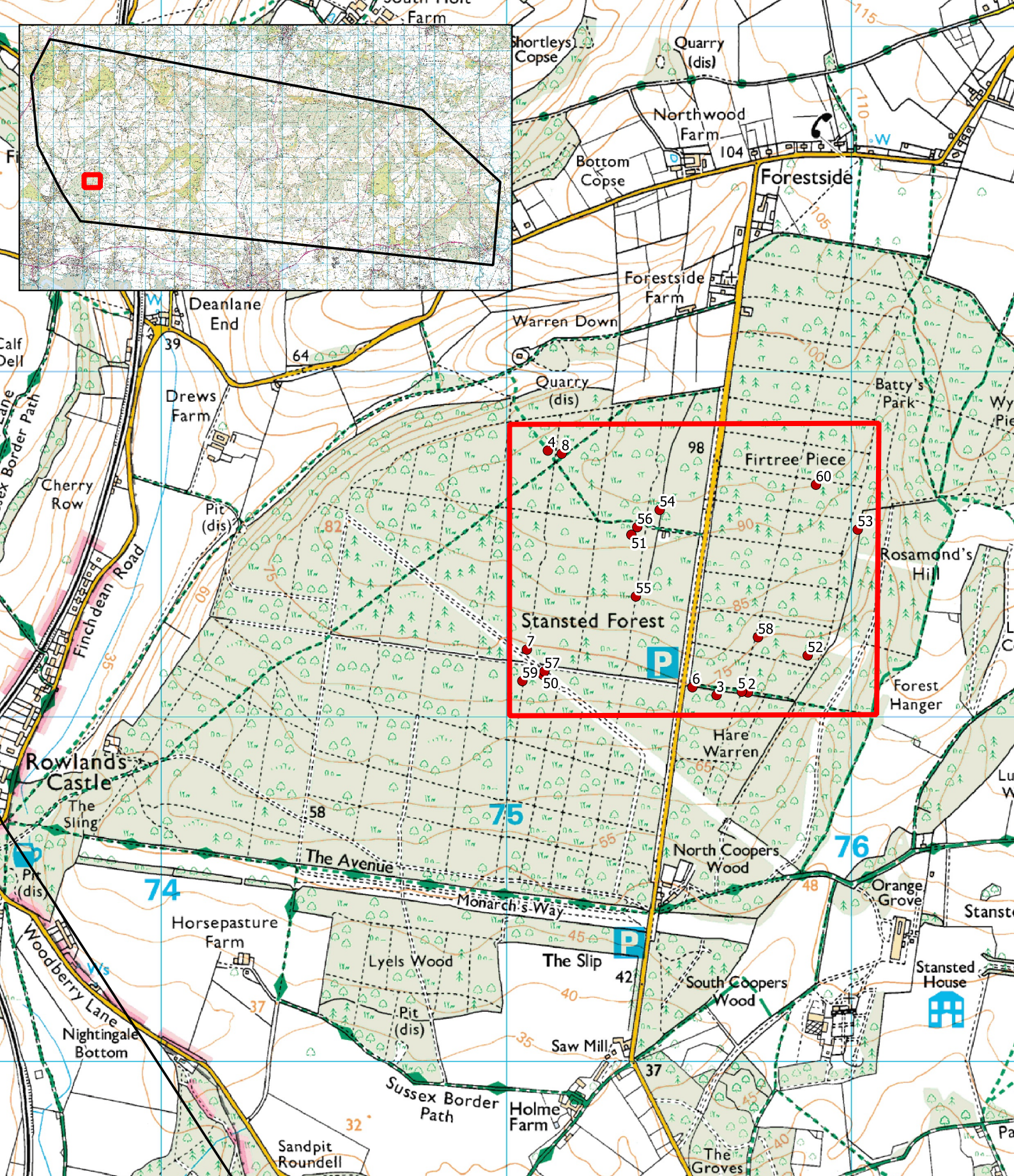


Fig 1.
Stansted Forest

Legend

Survey_area

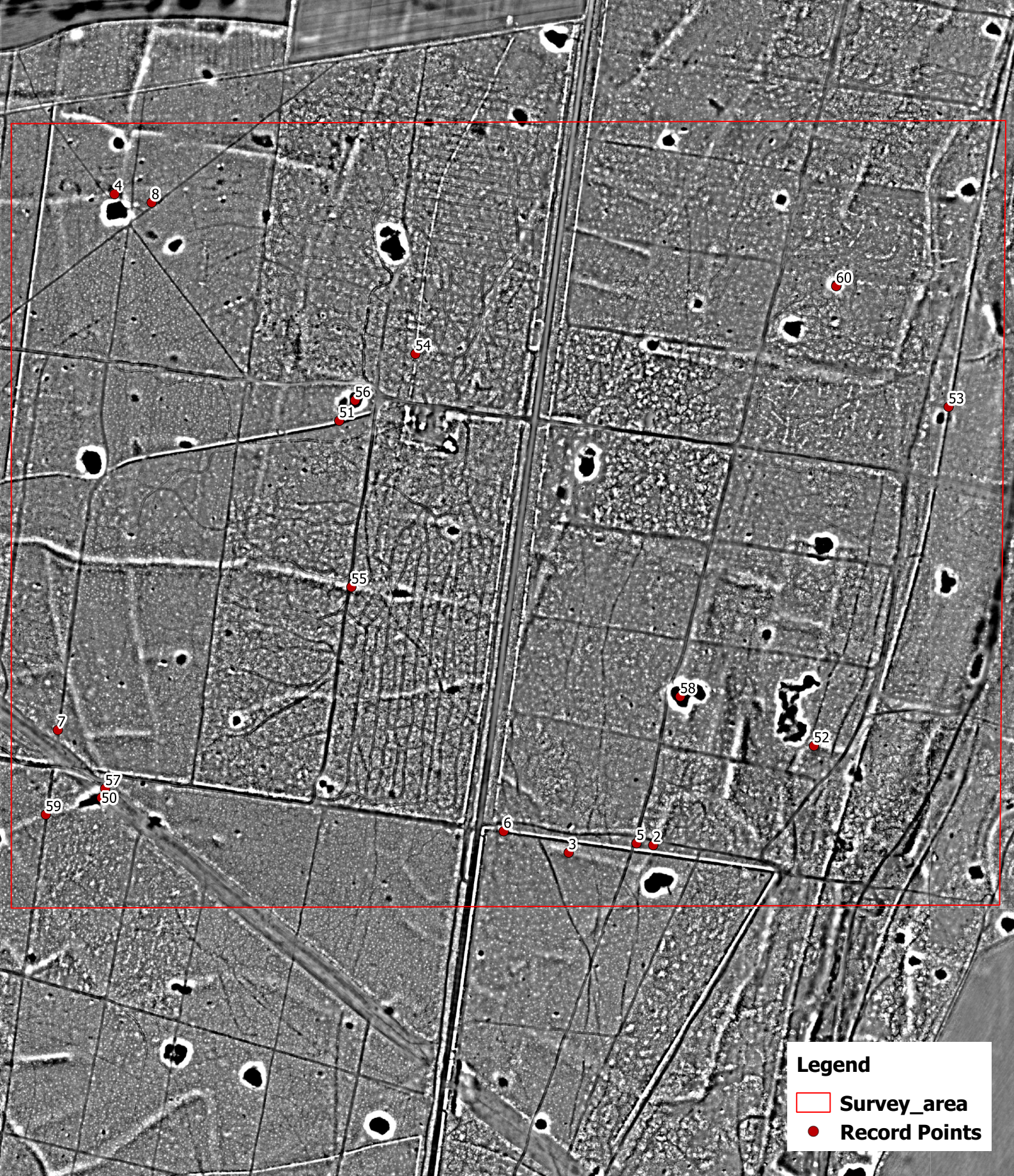


Fig 2.

Stansted Forest: Fieldwork records

Site centred NGR475554 111430

