

Report on Archaeological Work at the Stiperstones, 2023



Project	Stiperstones Our Upland Commons
Site NGR	336700, 298700
Site Landranger	SO367987
Client	The National Trust and Foundation for Common Land
Client contact	Renee Wallace
Document Author(s)	Matthew Williams MCIfA
Document date	November 23



Fearn
**Heritage &
Archaeology**

Table of contents

Contents

Background	4
Aims of the Project	6
Methodology	6
Cairn location and recording	7
Path diversion.....	13
Survey at Blakemoorgate	16
Summary	21
References.....	22

Figures

Figure 1 – Stiperstones location with Shropshire County inset	4
Figure 2 - Location of cairns as recorded in SHER	8
Figure 3 - Cairn 1 looking north	9
Figure 4 - Cairn 2 looking north	9
Figure 5 - Ring cairn in area of cairns 5 and 6. Looking northwest	10
Figure 6 - Ring cairn in area of cairns 5 and 6. Looking east	10
Figure 7 - Cairn 7. Looking southeast	11
Figure 8 - Cairn 8. Looking north.....	11
Figure 9 - Cairn 9. Looking northeast	11
Figure 10 - Cairn 13. Looking northeast.....	12
Figure 11 - Location of path diversion and blocks	13
Figure 12 - Block at point 1. Looking north.....	14
Figure 13 - Block at point 2. Looking east.....	14
Figure 14 - Point 3 before block. Looking east.....	14
Figure 15 - Stones at point 4 to discourage access. Looking south.....	15
Figure 16 - Small block at point 4 to discourage access.....	15
Figure 17 - Block at point 5. Looking south.....	15
Figure 18 - Blakemoorgate scheduled monument area (red) showing smallholdings (yellow) ..	16
Figure 19 - Smallholding 4 as shown on 1882 6" OS map	17
Figure 20 - Smallholding 4 as shown on 1902 25" OS map.....	17
Figure 21 -Area of smallholding 4 as shown on 1949 1:25k OS map.....	17
Figure 22 - West structure looking west. 2m scale.....	18
Figure 23 - West structure looking north. 2m scale.....	18
Figure 24 - Looking east to east structure from west structure.	18
Figure 25 - East structure looking east. 2m scale.	19
Figure 26 - East structure looking west. 2m scale	19
Figure 27 - East structure looking north. 2m scale	19
Figure 28 - Plan of smallholding 4.	20

Background

Introduction

This document has been prepared by Fearn Heritage and Archaeology as part of the Our Upland Common (OUC) project, which is a three year NLHF funded project aiming to conserve and enhance the heritage of commons and commoning in upland England.

This document describes the results of heritage work carried out with volunteers on the Stiperstones (hereafter the Site) during Autumn 2023. They focussed on Bronze Age cairns in the south of the site and Post Medieval settlement remains in the north (Figure 1). The work was carried out in accordance with the Method Statement submitted to the Our Uplands Common project and Natural England (landowner).

Thanks is due to Renee Wallace, OUC Project Manager; Simon Cooter, Natural England Stiperstones site manager; and Janine Young, National Trust Archaeologist, for their help and advice during the project. Also thanks to Phil Cawood, Deborah Chalk, Duncan Elliot, Greg Forster, Sarah Griffiths and Andrew Wood for their invaluable help and efforts during the project.

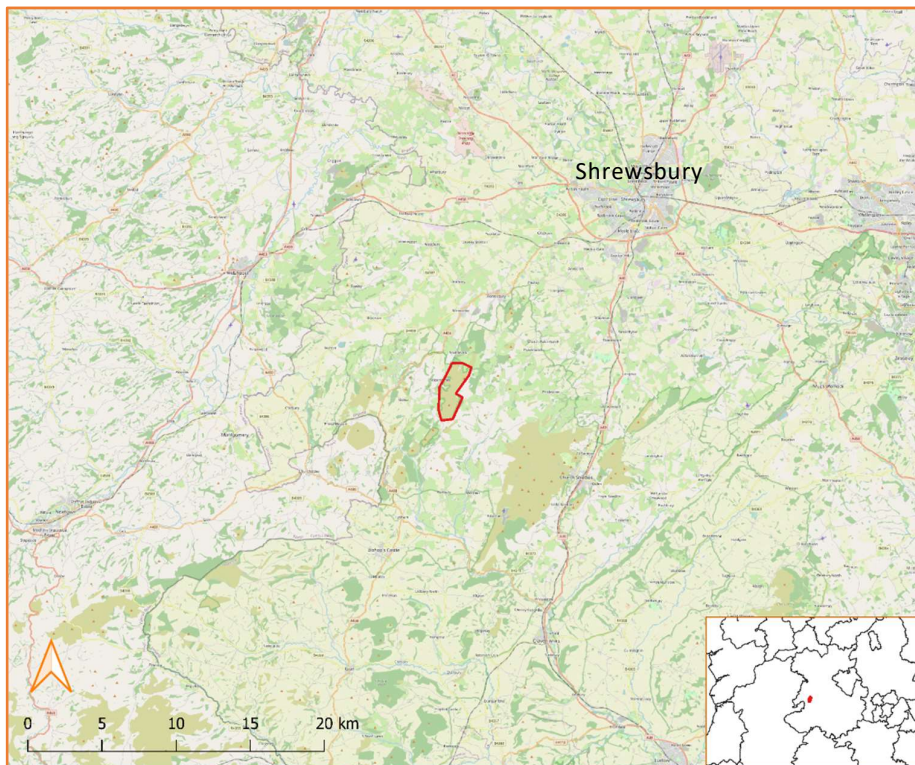


Figure 1 – Stiperstones location with Shropshire County inset.

Historical and Archaeological Summary

This section is summarised from the *Strategic Assessment of Historic Environment Data report for the Stepping Stones Project* (2022) by Janine Young of the National Trust, and *The Stiperstones Hills Archaeological Survey: A Report for Land Management Purposes* (2006) by Hugh Hannaford of Shropshire Council.

The surface geology of the uplands is solid, whilst drift glaciofluvial deposits and till are present in the valleys and on the lower slopes and fringes overlying the solid geology. The natural geology and topography of the area has had a huge influence on how the land has been managed, used and settled throughout time.

There are no archaeological monuments recorded in the Stiperstones that pre-date the Bronze Age. There are 22 cairns (stone burial mounds) recorded on the Stiperstones, of which five are scheduled monuments. There are numerous other features which have not been formally identified or dated, but may be cairns or clearance mounds. The only Iron Age feature recorded is Castle Ring hillfort in the north of the Stiperstones. It is a scheduled monument (1012869) described in the scheduling '*The enclosed area of the hillfort is roughly triangular in plan with maximum internal dimensions of 280m NNE to SSW by 190m transversely giving an internal area of approximately 3.8ha. The artificial defences are designed to enhance the natural strength of the site. The natural hillslopes fall precipitously on all sides except the south, the natural approach along the ridge top. Here the earthworks are at their most elaborate and include a strong cross-ridge rampart 8m wide and 3.5m high with an outer ditch on the south side 5m wide and 1.2m deep set across the narrow neck of the spur.*' It is covered in low heather and is currently in good condition.

There is no evidence for Roman settlement or activity on the area. There are also no features that can be confidently dated to the Early medieval period (410CE – 1066CE). The area was in the kingdom of Powys until AD630 when it was incorporated in Mercia as Magonsaete. Offa's Dyke, the linear earthwork following the border between England and Wales, runs north-south c13km west of the Stiperstones. Offa's Dyke is believed to have been built between 600 and 800 AD. The presence of this substantial feature, which would have required extensive organisation and manpower to construct, contrasts with the lack of evidence for contemporary activity in the area. Many of our current land and administrative boundaries originated during the Early Medieval period and it is likely that the use of the Stiperstones as common land began during this time.

During the Medieval period the lower slopes of the Stiperstones would have been farmed and the upper areas grazed as a common land. There is little evidence for this although a Medieval field system is recorded in the south of the Site. Many of the unidentified stone mounds may be clearance cairns that originated during this period.

There was a huge increase in activity during the Post Medieval period when mines and associated works and settlements sprung up across the Stiperstones. There are numerous mine shafts, adits (horizontal shafts) and spoil heaps in the Site area and various building complexes and enclosures. The main sites are: the Perkins Beach area which includes spoil heaps, mine buildings, houses and mines; Tin House squatter settlement which includes several enclosures and a ruined cottage; and two scheduled squatter enclosures and settlements at Blakemoorflat and Blakemoorgate in the north of the Site.

Aims of the Project

The project aims are:

- to engage volunteers and local commoners in the heritage and archaeology of the Stiperstones Common through management activities such as vegetation clearance, and archaeological activities such as survey and recording.
- to deliver a total of 20 volunteer days
- to enhance our knowledge of the archaeology of the Stiperstones and submit additional information to the Shropshire Historic Environment Record (SHER).

Methodology

The project comprised five days of activity:

Name	Tasks	Date
Introductory walk	General archaeology and heritage of the Stiperstones walk (weekend). Description of upcoming events.	Sat 30/09/23
Lost cairns walk	Accurately locate and record known cairns; identify any new cairns.	Sun 15/10/23
Path diversion/ Lost cairns walk	Divert informal path from public footpath. Continue cairn work.	Mon 16/10/23
Squatter cottage walk	Walk focussing on Blakemoorflat and Blakemoorgate. Survey of SW field of Blakemoorgate (smallholding 4).	Mon 23/10/23
Final walk	General archaeology and heritage of the Stiperstones walk (weekday), incorporating any results of the work.	Tues 21/11/23

The final walk was changed from 23rd October to 21st November. The results of the cairn recording, path diversion and Blakemoorgate survey are given in this report. The methodologies are described in detail in *Method Statement for Archaeological Works Stiperstones, 2023* (Fearn Heritage 2023) but the final methods were dependent on the weather and number of volunteers; the following is a summary of the methods with main diversions from the Method Statement:

- Cairn recording – Cairns were located using GIS, visited and recorded on pro-forma sheets.
- Path diversion – paths were diverted using local stone from outside the scheduled area. Photographs were sent to Simon Cooter.
- Blakemoorgate recording – One site was recorded using hand tools rather than GIS.

Cairn location and recording

Twelve cairns were selected from the SHER to be investigated. These included two scheduled cairns, some that were presumed modern and others whose location was not definite. A shooting butt is included in the list (no. 12) but this was not intended to be visited.

NO	UID	MONTYPE	DESCRIPTION
1	MSA1920 5	MARKER CAIRN	Cairn at north end of Cranberry Rock, c320 metres south-southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock. One of numerous probably recent cairns identified by the Stiperstones Survey
2	MSA1920 6	MARKER CAIRN	Cairn at the north end of Cranberry Rock, c360 metres south-southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock One of numerous probably recent cairns identified by the Stiperstones Survey
3	MSA1941 8	CAIRN	Cairn on the east side of Cranberry Rock, c480 metres south-southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock Small drystone cairn, pos. clearance- large stone fabric. 1.5m diameter x 0.5m high. Site identified by Stiperstones Hills Archaeological Survey, 2003-2004.
4	MSA1919 7	MARKER CAIRN	Cairn on Cranberry Rock, c520 metres south-southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock Recent drystone cairn. 1m diameter x 0.4m height. One of numerous probably recent cairns identified by the Stiperstones Survey
5	MSA1920 3	MARKER CAIRN	Cairn on Cranberry Rock, c555 metres south-southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock Insustantial drystone walkers cairn. 1m diameter x 0.6m high. One of numerous probably recent cairns identified by the Stiperstones Survey
6	MSA1920 4	MARKER CAIRN	Cairn on Cranberry Rock, c565 metres south-southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock Small drystone cairn. 1m diameter x 0.6m high. One of numerous probably recent cairns identified by the Stiperstones Survey.
7	MSA1919 9	CAIRN	Cairn on Cranberry Rock, c535 metres south-southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock. Untidy medium-sized drystone cairn- prob. Modern. 2m diameter x 0.6m high. One of numerous cairns identified by the Stiperstones Survey on the main ridge around Cranberry Rock and Manstone Rock. In fair condition.
8	MSA1919 8	CAIRN	Cairn on Cranberry Rock, c555 metres south-southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock Large drystone cairn, prob. Modern, and partially overgrown at base. 7m diameter x 1.2m high. One of numerous cairns identified by the Stiperstones Survey on the main ridge around Cranberry Rock and Manstone Rock. In fair condition
9	MSA1920 1	CAIRN	Cairn southwest of Cranberry Rock, c810 metres southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock Small drystone cairn to S of 759 (ring-cairn), and substantially overgrown. 6m diameter x 0.8m high. The smallest of numerous cairns of prehistoric origin identified by the Stiperstones Survey on the main ridge around Cranberry Rock and Manstone Rock. In fair condition.
10	MSA1985 2	CAIRN	Cairn southwest of Cranberry Rock, c835 metres southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock. Low circular mound- pos. cairn. 7m diameter x 0.6m high. One of numerous cairns of prehistoric origin identified by the Stiperstones Survey on the main ridge around Cranberry Rock and Manstone Rock. In poor condition.
11	MSA1939 9	RING CAIRN?	Mound (possible ring cairn) east of Cranberry Rock, c635 metres south-southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock Circular stoney mound- pos. (lost!) cairn. Low, but stands out in surrounding topography. 0.5m high. Possibly a ring cairn, one of numerous cairns of prehistoric origin identified

			by the Stiperstones Survey on the main ridge around Cranberry Rock and Manstone Rock. In fair condition
12	MSA1919 2	SHOOTING STAND?	Shooting butt south of Cranberry Rock, c770 metres southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock
13	MSA1359 8	ROUND CAIRN	Round cairn south of Cranberry Rock, c685 metres south-southwest of the OS trig point on Manstone Rock SCHEDULED MONUMENT 1016823 The monument includes the earthwork and buried remains of a round cairn on the boulder-strewn spine of the Stiperstones, south of Cranberry Rock. The cairn is composed of angular blocks of stone placed on a rock outcrop, aligned N-S with its west face showing. The cairn is c. 7m N-S and 4m E-W, and survives to a maximum height of 1m. Material used in its construction was obtained from the surrounding clutter and from a ditch which surrounded the eastern half of the cairn. Although not visible at ground level, the ditch is believed to survive as a buried feature, about 1m in width



Figure 2 - Location of cairns as recorded in SHER

Cairn 1

Modern cairn on the west side of the path. Approx. 3m across. Mostly small angular stones with larger stones tumbling away from path to west.



Figure 3 - Cairn 1 looking north

Cairn 2

Modern cairn at path crossroads. Approx. 5m across and 1.10m high. Large angular stones with some well bedded into the ground, possible evidence for an earlier feature? It can be noted here that the similar modern cairn at the path crossroads to the north near Shepherds Rock (SHER MSA19349) was started by Geoff Sproson, now owner of the Stiperstones Inn, in the late 1970s.



Figure 4 - Cairn 2 looking north

Cairn 3

Small modern cairn on east side of path, same side as putative Medieval field system (SHER MSA13595). Large stones, so probably a clearance cairn, which could be the same date as the field system, ie Medieval.

Cairn 4

Could not be identified during the survey.

Cairns 5 and 6

Both cairns are described in the SHER as small, modern walkers' cairns. Some rock piles were visible but these appeared to be scree from the ridge to the east, and no modern cairns could be identified during the survey. However, in the same area was what appeared to be a large ring cairn. It is roughly circular and measures 8.5m across. There is a small upright rock in the centre c.0.85m high.



Figure 5 - Ring cairn in area of cairns 5 and 6. Looking northwest



Figure 6 - Ring cairn in area of cairns 5 and 6. Looking east

Cairn 7

Moderately large cairn, described as 2m across in SHER but measured 3.5m across and 0.80m high in survey. Large angular rocks, no ditch visible.



Figure 7 - Cairn 7. Looking southeast

Cairn 8

Large drystone cairn, described as modern in SHER – could be natural scree as it is not close to a path.



Figure 8 - Cairn 8. Looking north.

Cairn 9

Small cairn, as described in SHER but overgrown and difficult to locate.



Figure 9 - Cairn 9. Looking northeast

Cairn 10

This cairn could not be identified during the survey.

Cairn 11

The location of this cairn was not visited during the survey.

Feature 12 – Shooting butt

The location of this feature was not visited during the survey.

Cairn 13

A substantial and well preserved cairn as described in the SHER; the mound is clear and the large stones forming the ring are still visible. There is well established heather growth over the feature.



Figure 10 - Cairn 13. Looking northeast.

Path diversion

The informal paths that ran past the scheduled Tor Cairn (NHLE 1007706) were blocked or diverted in five places using stones from the scree at the base of nearby outcrops or material that was on the path already.

Points 1, 2, 3 and 5 were blocked with small walls. Point 4 was a wide, open stony area with less vegetation which was not possible to block with a single line; access was discouraged by placing large rocks around the area.

Unfortunately the 'after' photograph of Point 3 did not come out.



Figure 11 - Location of path diversion and blocks



Figure 12 - Block at point 1. Looking north



Figure 13 - Block at point 2. Looking east.



Figure 14 - Point 3 before block. Looking east.



Figure 15 - Stones at point 4 to discourage access. Looking south.



Figure 16 - Small block at point 4 to discourage access.



Figure 17 - Block at point 5. Looking south.

Survey at Blakemoorgate

The group walked the area of the Blakemoorgate and identified all the structural remains within the enclosure. The SHER records five smallholdings within the scheduled area as well as a small enclosure (possible pond) and a clearance mound. There was limited time and resources and so the remains of smallholding 4 were chosen to record, as this was one of Natural England's preferred sites (see methodology p.6).



Figure 18 - Blakemoorgate scheduled monument area (red) showing smallholdings (yellow)

The enclosure is trapezoid with a maximum length of 39m and a width of 28.90m. The Blakemoorgate enclosure forms the west boundary of the smallholding, and the structures run along the north side of the enclosure.

The structures comprise a small, square building against the Blakemoorgate boundary, which measures 5.30m E-W by 3.30m N-S. There is a small internal wall, 0.80m long, running north from the south wall to the centre of the structure. There is a possible entrance at the north end of the east wall. The walls are all collapsed but were originally c.0.70m wide; the west wall appears to be part of the Blakemoorgate enclosure wall which suggests they are contemporary, but it the structures are too collapsed to be confident. There is a small amount of dry-stone coursing still visible on the interior of the west wall.

In the northeast corner of the smallholding is a larger building measuring 8.40m N-S and 6.30m E-W. The building is completely collapsed with only a small amount of dry stone coursing visible on the exterior of the west wall and in the southwest interior corner. Also in the southwest interior is a circular depression in the rubble, c.3m across, with some 19th/20th century domestic pottery sherds. Its not clear what this feature is.

There is no evidence for slates, window frames, glass or beams and the overall poor condition suggests it may have been robbed for building material after use. There are two piles of stone on the north side of the structures; these may be from dismantling the buildings or they may be clearance cairns dating to the establishment of the smallholding.

A low ridge with occasional random stones, 17.60m long, joins the two buildings and marks the northern boundary of the smallholding.

Historic maps show two separate buildings. The most detailed in the 1902 25 inch map which shows a rectangular building against the west enclosure boundary and an irregular shaped building to the east. A small outbuilding on the north side could be a privy or root store. The structures are gone by the late 1940s.



Figure 19 - Smallholding 4 as shown on 1882 6" OS map

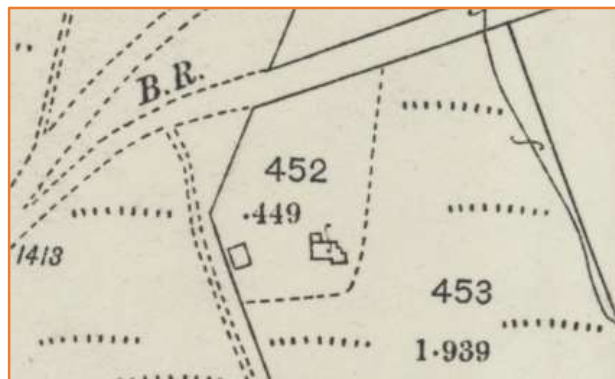


Figure 20 - Smallholding 4 as shown on 1902 25" OS map



Figure 21 -Area of smallholding 4 as shown on 1949 1:25k OS map



Figure 22 - West structure looking west. 2m scale.



Figure 23 - West structure looking north. 2m scale



Figure 24 - Looking east to east structure from west structure.



Figure 25 - East structure looking east. 2m scale.



Figure 26 - East structure looking west. 2m scale



Figure 27 - East structure looking north. 2m scale

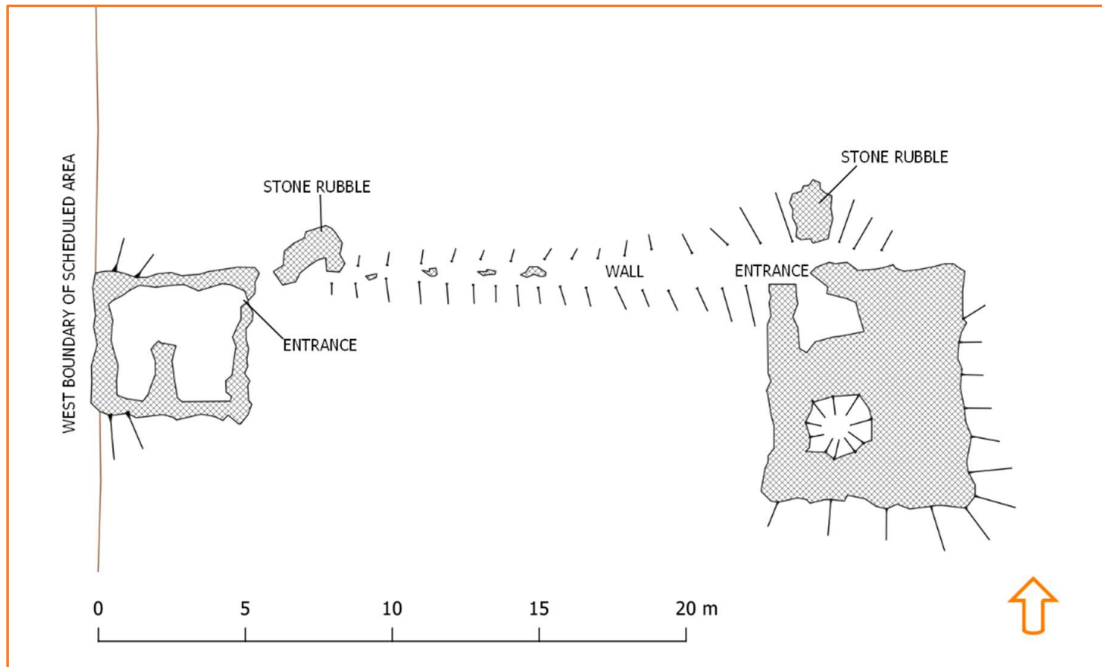


Figure 28 - Plan of smallholding 4.

Summary

The project has succeeded in engaging commoners and locals in the history and archaeology of the Stiperstones. Some of the volunteers had been involved in previous OUC projects (e.g. Pole Cottage excavation 2022 at the Long Mynd) but the majority had no previous experience.

The most popular activity was the introductory weekend archaeology walk. A walk was considered a suitable introductory event as volunteers could experience the terrain of the Stiperstones, see the locations of further events and get to know each other whilst walking. The main reason for the success was the timing at the weekend, which allowed more people (including families) to attend. The event was well advertised by the OUC project manager and promoted in the local newsletter by Geoff Sproson, the landlord of the Stiperstones Inn. Unsurprisingly the least attended event was the final walk; this may have been due in part to the weekday timing, but is more likely a result of the late rescheduling. Eight people had signed up for the original walk, but only two could make it on the rescheduled date.

The volunteers particularly enjoyed trying to locate and identify the cairns in the south of the Stiperstones (15th and 16th October) and the structures in the Blakemoorgate enclosure (23rd October). The walk routes and some general features had been checked by Fearn Heritage prior to the event, but most features had deliberately not been located so that the search and sense of 'discovery' was genuine throughout the day. This was a major factor in the success.

The data generated from the surveys will add to the knowledge of the Stiperstones. The SHER and Natural England records of the cairns can be updated which will assist with management. This is the first detailed survey of the minor smallholding 4 at Blakemoorgate and the results will be shared with Historic England and the SHER.

The target number of volunteer days was 20. Overall, there were 40 volunteer days throughout the project.

DATE	EVENT	NO OF VOLUNTEERS
30 Sept	Introductory walk (weekend)	21
15 Oct	Lost cairns recording	7
16 Oct	Path diversion	4
23 Oct	Blakemoorgate survey	6
21 Nov	Archaeology walk (weekday)	2
TOTAL		40

As always with such projects, the results have raised further questions and there are some clear avenues for further work. These are the suggested main opportunities:

- Detailed survey of the squatter enclosures – Blakemoorgate, Blakemoorflat and Tin House. The results could be used to consider Tin House for scheduling (as suggested by Hannaford 2006).
- Investigation (excavation) of the possible Neolithic long cairn at Shepherds Rock (MSA19334). If this is Neolithic it is the earliest (and only) evidence from this period on the Stiperstones, and a rare feature worthy of scheduling.

References

Fearn Heritage and Archaeology. 2023. *Method Statement for Archaeological Works Stiperstones, 2023*. Unpublished client report. Ref 033-methodology-2023.

Hannaford, H. 2006 *The Stiperstones Hills Archaeological Survey: A Report for Land Management Purposes* (2006) Shropshire Council unpublished report.

Historic England 2023 *Settlement Remains at Blakemoorgate*
<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1017765> (accessed 23/11/23)

Shropshire History and Archaeology *Blakemoorgate Holding 4, The Most Westerly Of Holdings In The Southern Half Of The Settlement*
http://search.shropshirehistory.org.uk/collections/getrecord/CCS_MSA20018/ (accessed 26/11/23)

Young, J 2022 *Strategic Assessment of Historic Environment Data report for the Stepping Stones Project* (2022) National Trust unpublished report.