Ancient sites in West Cornwall

Scrub clearance

Historic Environment Service (Projects)

Cornwall County Council
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Scrub clearance

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Acknowledgements

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Within the Historic Environment Service, the Project Manager was Peter Ann Preston-Jones.

Cover illustration

Tony Shipton of Madron Community Forum clearing back vegetation at Madron Well chapel

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Abbreviations
CASPN  Cornwall Ancient Sites Protection Network
CWT  Cornwall Wildlife Trust
EH  English Heritage
FMW  Field Monument Warden
HER  Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Historic Environment Record
HES  Historic Environment Service, Cornwall County Council
NGR  National Grid Reference
NT  National Trust
OBOD  Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids
OS  Ordnance Survey
PF  Pagan Federation
PPM  Penwith Pagan Moot
PRN  Primary Record Number in Cornwall HER
1 Summary

In view of a developing enthusiasm amongst the pagan community in West Cornwall for carrying out practical work to improve the condition of ancient and sacred sites in Cornwall, it was agreed in December 2005 that the Historic Environment Service’s Scheduled Monument Management Project could provide a small grant for the purchase of tools so that small scale scrub clearance could take place more effectively. A programme of clearance work was arranged, the grant provided, and work began. This report briefly describes and illustrates the results of the first season of site clearance, at:

Sancreed Holy well          SW 41782 29285; HER 28675.1; SM 31855
Chun Castle                 SW 40500 33950; HER 30514; SM Co1088
Treen Entrance Graves       SW 43800 37150; HER 30726.1; SM Co46d
                                SW 43830 37100; HER 30726.3; SM Co46a
Boswens Menhir              SW 40011 32896; HER 16213; SM 1090
Boskednan barrow            SW 43280 35260; HER 30688; SM Co653a
2 Introduction

2.1 Project background
The Cornwall Ancient Sites Protection Network (CASPEN) is a unique group of individuals from various organisations with an interest in the ‘sacred sites’ of Cornwall, with particular reference to those in West Penwith. Groups represented on CASPN include the National Trust (NT), the Pagan Federation (PF), Penwith Pagan Moot (PPM), the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD), Cornwall Wildlife Trust (CWT) and English Heritage (EH). Members of the group have from time to time carried out tidying, repair and clearance work, for example at Boscawen Un Stone Circle, where a fire pit was repaired and a burnt standing stone cleaned in 1999 under the supervision of the EH Field Monument Warden (Preston-Jones 1999). Undesirable clouties are regularly cleared from trees at Sancreed and Madron holy wells, and recently the group has set up signs close to some of the more popular sites to encourage more respectful and careful use. With increasing enthusiasm for this sort of practical involvement, it was decided to start up a regular programme of site clearance work, and in order to facilitate this clearance work, it was proposed that a small grant should be made for the purchase of tools such as loppers, seccateurs, and bow-saws. This grant was to be conditional on the group undertaking scrub clearance at a range of Scheduled Monuments.

2.2 Aims
• To make the sites listed below more accessible
• To make the sites listed below better presented
• To create a better basis for future maintenance

2.3 Programme
The following programme was devised by the Penwith Pagan Moot, in liaison with Sacred Sites Protection Network and the Cornwall Wildlife Trust:

Sancreed Holy well  Sun 16th Jan, 2005
Chun Castle  Sun 6th March (with CWT), 2005
Treen Entrance Graves  Sun 10th April, 2005
Boswens Menhir  Sun 15th May, 2005
Boskednan barrow  Sun 12th June, 2005

The location of each of these sites is illustrated on Figure 1.

2.4 Grant
A grant of £350 was made in March 2005 to Penwith Pagan Moot, who organises and advertises the clearance programme for CASPN.

3 Results

3.1 Sancreed holy well (SM 31855) (Fig 2)
The holy well is located within an enclosure which is entirely fenced off from the surrounding agricultural land. Although laid out as a small garden by the local vicar about one hundred years ago, the monument is currently entirely unmanaged, other than by local pagans who occasionally visit with the purpose of removing clouties from trees.
overhanging the well. As a consequence, the well’s enclosure is rampantly overgrown with ornamental shrubs like rhododendron and Montbretia and by steadily encroaching bracken and bramble.

Sarah Vivian, of the Penwith Pagan Moot, reported as follows:

_The clear up went very well indeed, about 13 people so we were able to clear the whole path thoroughly down to the buildings as well. There was a staggering number of clouties and junk; a Tesco’s carrier bag size full which we hid on site (but not in a plastic bag of course!) and a very large black bin bag full of utter rubbish or synthetic stuff to take away. It all looks pristine & natural again now, I wonder for how long!_

### 3.2 Chun Castle (Part of SM Cornwall 1088) (Fig 3)

This superb stone-built hillfort is greatly overgrown with gorse and bracken. Although gorse fires have recently resulted in (accidental) clearance of the areas surrounding the fort, the fort itself remains overgrown and accessible only via narrow and limited footpaths. The fort is now part-owned by Cornwall Wildlife Trust (CWT), whose local Reserves Officer, Dave Salmon, co-ordinated a day of scrub clearance at the castle, open jointly to members of CASPN, PPM and volunteers from CWT. It was proposed that in the first instance, effort should be concentrated on clearing a path around the perimeter of the fort.

Dave Salmon described the day’s work here:

_Not many people showed up for the site clearance, only Dave Salmon from CWT, Ann and her two boys and a few people from the moot. Possibly the clash with Mothers Day limited numbers! Still managed to clear the paths, and part of the interior._

### 3.3 Treen Entrance Graves, Zennor (SM Co 46) (Figs 4 and 5)

This monument includes two fine entrance graves and two barrows. One of the entrance graves (46d) is almost inaccessible beneath bracken and bramble, in an overgrown field which also contains a courtyard house. The others (46a-c), in separate ownership and located on the edge of improved pasture, are overgrown with a mixture of gorse, bracken and bramble, the entrance grave in particular being rendered almost invisible and inaccessible by a thick growth of gorse.

The minutes of CASPN’s latest meeting noted that:

_This was a very successful clearing, with several people showing up and new tools in use for the first time. The north entrance grave was cleared completely of gorse and brambles, and paths were cleared of brambles to the south entrance grave. The south site is filled with soil and access is very difficult due to wide unstable hedging enclosing the site on all sides._

### 3.4 Boswens Menhir (part of SM Co 1091) (Fig 6)

This fine standing stone is a remarkably prominent feature in the local landscape. It is set in a small low barrow while the wider area contains a well preserved medieval strip field system.

The majority of the Scheduled area has a cover of relatively low heathland vegetation; but around the standing stone is a small area of short turf and beyond that a stand of tall European Gorse, which partly obscures the stone, reducing its impact.

Though unable to attend the clearance day, the EH FMW later found that

_All the tall gorse had been cleared from around the standing stone, dramatically improving the visibility of the stone, and enhancing its setting within the surrounding knee-high heathland vegetation. The clearance also revealed the barrow surrounding the stone._
3.5 Barrow adjacent to the Nine Maidens Stone Circle (SM Co 653a)
This well preserved kerbed platform barrow forms part of the ritual landscape surrounding the Boskednan or Nine Maidens Stone Circle. Management works part-funded by the ESA were undertaken at the stone circle in summer 2004, and it was considered appropriate that this further element of the landscape should be enhanced. The barrow has a cover of tall gorse and bracken.

Rory Te Tigo, sculptor, and member of the Pagan Moot, reported at CASPN’s latest meeting that

8 or 9 people showed up from the Pagan Moot to successfully clear the site. They carefully took the moss off the stones (they did not dig around the stones at all) and found that the centre stone had a very prominent V-shaped quartz seam running through it, clearly a stone selected intentionally for this feature, perhaps to mark the head or foot of a burial. Rory found a modern bronze rod close to the site that could be dangerous to visitors, but which he could not remove or cut out.

This pin, which has a diameter of ¾ inch, sticks up about 10cm above the general surface of the barrow.

4 Discussion
In all, the conclusion was that this had been a very enjoyable, successful and encouraging programme of work. The enthusiasm generated is such that a further programme has already been arranged, to include days at Madron Well (Wednesday 6th July, with Madron Community Forum and Penwith Access and Rights of Way (PAROW) officer; this has already taken place – see front cover photo), Boscawen Un Stone Circle - to follow a Live Eight Picnic on Saturday 2nd July (Sunday 17th July), Tregeseal Stone Circle (Sunday 7th August), Caer Bran hillfort (Sunday September 11th September and Sunday October 16th).

5 Recommendations
- To continue with this excellent work, and to review the need for further tools to support the work, when appropriate.
- To liaise more closely with PAROW, whose field officer is keen to clear and improve the access to monuments in West Penwith.
- The discovery of the bronze rod, embedded in one of the stones of the barrow at Boskednan, near the Nine Maidens Stone circle, is alarming and a potential safety hazard, as the barrow is a prominent feature situated close to a public footpath. Some means of dealing with this will be discussed when the work at the Nine Maidens is next reviewed, in the autumn.

6 References

7 Project archive
The HES project number is 2005PR 400623
The project's documentary, photographic and drawn archive is housed at the offices of the Historic Environment Service, Cornwall County Council, Kennall Building, Old County Hall, Station Road, Truro, TR1 3AY. The contents of this archive are as listed below:

1. A project file containing site records and notes, project correspondence and administration.

2. Digital photographs stored in the directory ..\Images\Scheduled Monument Management\ Boswens Menhir, Chun Castle, Sancreed Holy Well and Treen entrance grave

3. This report held in digital form as: \CAU\HE PROJECTS\SITES\SITES P\PAGANS PR 4006\REPORT ON PAGAN SCRUB CLEARANCE JULY 2005.DOC
Fig 2. The chapel adjacent to Sancreed holy well, cleared of vegetation

Fig 3. Scrub clearance in progress at Chun Castle
Fig 4  One of the entrance graves at Treen before scrub clearance

Fig 5  Entrance grave at Treen after scrub clearance
Fig 6  The Boswens Menhir, after clearance of surrounding tall gorse, in June 2005