

SURVEY OF PUBLIC ACCESS LAND (by Leicestershire Local Access Forum)

Open Access, in the context of outdoor recreation, refers to the status and use of Access Land which is open country (mountain, moorland, heath and down) or registered Common Land to which the public normally have a right of access on foot under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000

Name of site / location - Burrough Hill Country Park

Date surveys completed [24/5/2015]

Report compiled by Roy Denney & Chris Faircliffe –

Survey by six members in three visits and in different weather conditions

Overview

The hill is one of the highest points in Leicestershire, reaching 210m (690 feet). A toposcope at the site indicates landmarks that can be seen from the summit. The 35-hectare overall site is owned by the Ernest Cook Trust and leased to Leicestershire County Council. Burrough Hill lies on the western edge of the uplands in the east of Leicestershire and the land falls away by almost 350 feet to the south-west and commands a wide view of the Wreake valley. The mixed vegetation including mature woodlands, some newer plantations, pastureland with copses of gorse and open rough grassland combined with the inevitable amount of climb, can make this a challenging area for casual walkers.

Burrough Hill is one of the most imposing prehistoric monuments in our region and the best surviving example of a large hill fort where few exist at all. It sits on a natural flat-topped ironstone promontory and is defined by an almost continuous rampart of stone and earth almost 10 feet high. This man-made 'building' must have been very effective when you bear in mind the steep slopes on three sides. It was an impressive defensive feature.

It seems it had been reinforced and updated a number of times during its active life. There seems to have originally been a massive gate at the entrance but this area was reinforced by ironstone mounds faced with dry-stone walling in the period 370-220BC but later work created a chamber or guardhouse on one side. This substantial chamber was itself the source of many interesting finds. There appears to have been multiple floor levels some covered with crude paving.

The entrance from the car park direction is the one definitely original break in the rampart, giving access to the enclosed area of around 12 acres. We have long known that it had been inhabited since Neolithic times but recent excavations are turning up many additional interesting facts. It seems that in the Iron Age the fort was surrounded by farms and settlements and was indeed the centre of a thriving community, rather than an island in an otherwise sparsely inhabited and culturally insignificant land. The entrance passageway was over 100 feet long and had a cobbled roadway.

A recent dig has found distinct boundaries within the enclosed area, numerous pits and a series of round houses around the perimeter. They have also discovered evidence of a sizeable settlement on the flat approach to the entrance. From their contents, the pits disclose regular use right up to the fourth century AD with many remains of Roman and earlier origin. The Iron-Age finds suggest a far more sophisticated people than sometimes they are given credit for being. They have found a number of loom weights, a flute made from polished bone, dice and other gaming pieces, hooks, tools, knives and a spearhead all in remarkable condition. Burial chambers have also been found below what was the surface of the roadway.

This is a little-used Country Park given it is quite remote from sizeable communities which in one sense is disappointing but also helps avoid despoliation.

As might be expected from a hill fort it affords wonderful view in three directions

Land Management and / or ownership if known

Leicestershire County Council lease the country park from the Ernest Cook Estate and there is a tenant farmer

Accessibility

*Are the entry / exit points safe? Are there any impediments, barriers or fencing?
Is there any local parking by or near official entry points? State if on or off road.*

The main approach is from a pay and display car park between the villages of Burrough and Somerby and is well signposted and easily accessible.

There are a number of other rights of way entering the area and these are not well signed, not well maintained and generally very off putting.

There is good parking in a formal car park with toilet provision.



Safety

*Are there
a) any natural hazards which should display warnings, and
b) any man made safety issues which could be improved*

Some of the approaches are really hazardous and near impossible in wet weather.

One (D84) is through a working farmyard with beasts and a bull present on our last visit. It appears not to be a prescribed banned breed but is a daunting prospect.



The line of this path when leaving the park is difficult to ascertain but does appear at odds with the direction of the way-marker.



Signage

*Are all official entry points marked as 'Open Access'?
Where the area is part of a larger area of public access,
is there any indication that the part in question is 'Open Access'?
Has the site any interpretation boards or other information points?*

[Mostly]

[Not always]

[One by main approach]



There is a board giving the byelaws where the Leicester Round enters from the north (damaged and on the ground) and another by the car park.

By the same entrance, the Open Access land sign is largely masked by a new gate support.

There is also an unidentified logo on this entrance.



Special considerations

Are there animals grazing the area? Is the area suitable for dogs? Is there a suitable entry point for the less able? Are there litter bins; dog waste bins?

There is regular grazing within the access land .

The area provides excellent dog walking but they must be kept on a lead. The main approach is perfectly suitable for the less able and push chairs.

The other approaches are a very different prospect and not for the faint hearted.

We did not spot any litter bins away from the car park nor dog waste bins anywhere nearby. Dog waste is visible on both sides of the track, from the car park to the access land.

There were piles of rubbish in a few locations within the access land and on approaching rights of way.



Additional Information

There may be a fire risk in the gorse areas in hot, dry weather.

Overall, the area is very attractive and appears to require minimal maintenance. The approaches however could do with considerable attention. The status of many paths is not clear but many appear to be permissive.

The actual Access Area does not coincide with the boundary of the Country Park and there is additional land open to the public to the NE of the park owned by the Ernest Cook Trust.



There is a BOAT leaving the country park to the north which is downright dangerous. Where it leaves the park footpath D98M splits from it and is a pleasant walk out but there is no signpost at that point to indicate it is a public footpath. The on-the-ground indication would tempt people to follow the BOAT and this is steep in places with wheel ruts cutting into the clay sometimes as much as 18 inches deep, making walking it extremely precarious.

It would also appear difficult for horses to handle and there is evidence of horse riders using the footpath to avoid it. Understandably!

The BOAT has what appear to be drainage channels cut across it which, deliberately or otherwise, prevent it being used safely. It is unsafe in poor weather conditions for people on foot or horse riders.

Where the BOAT meets the road there is no signage to indicate that it is a legal route never mind its status. Given the damage appears to be caused by casual motor cycle use, it may be that this is a deliberate tactic to not encourage them.



The stile just down the road where footpath D98M leaves the highway is in good condition and properly signposted.



The BOAT

Left the ruts and below where it leaves the road

Start of D98M



The actual line of this BOAT on the ground seems quite different from the maps.

The information board at the main entrance is comprehensive and useful but does say there are signs showing when you leave the 'Open Access' area but we saw no evidence of these.



There were signs in several locations throughout the park showing where private land started.

Private no entry

Start of open Access



There were a few locations where paths entered the access land where there was no sign to that effect. Leaving Burrough Hill Covert for example.

The Leicestershire Round enters the area from the north and in wet wether gets badly chopped up.

Where it passes through the Access Area it is rutted but the open aspect gives dry areas to walk along although this does mean the path is progressively widening.



Outside the Access Land but within what we take to be the Country Park (Burrough Hill Covert), three trees are down blocking a permissive path.

On the occasion of our last visit, the area was remarkably dry but on two earlier visits by members after modest amounts of rainfall the conditions were very different in the park and on the approach paths.

See gallery below.



Gallery

The point where the Leicester Round leaves Melton Lane heading for the park and a blocked culvert contributing to the flooding.



The County Road outside the site boundary leading to down to the lane and (right), more evidence of the effect of horse traffic on inappropriate surface.



There is nothing can be done about the weather or the nature of the soil but some work on the worst areas is obviously needed.

It may then also be necessary to consider whether the status of the BOAT needs addressing as the terrain and conditions suggest the use by motorised vehicles is not sustainable.

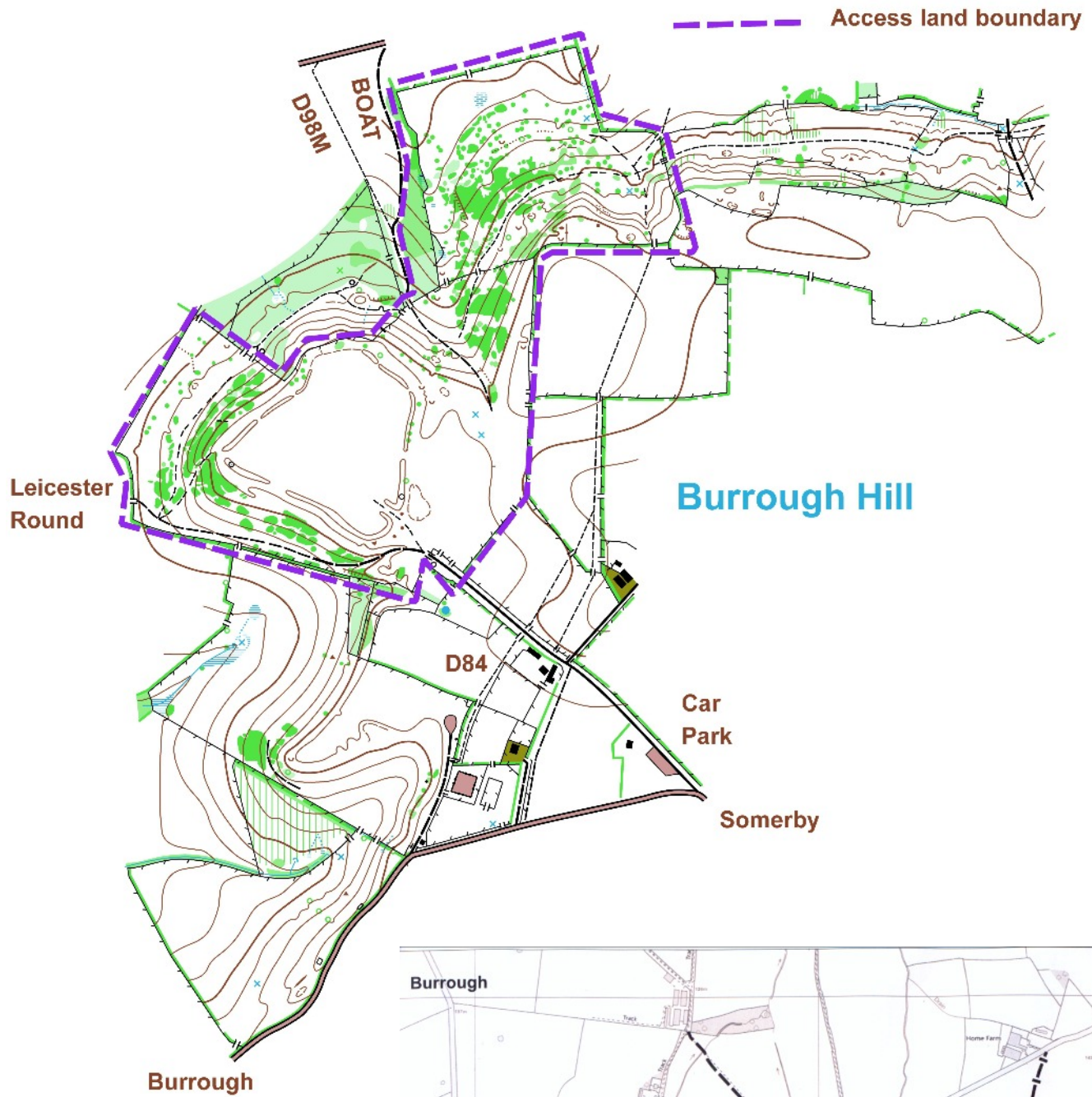
Some of the footpaths within the access area could do with some cutting back of the gorse which in places makes them unusable



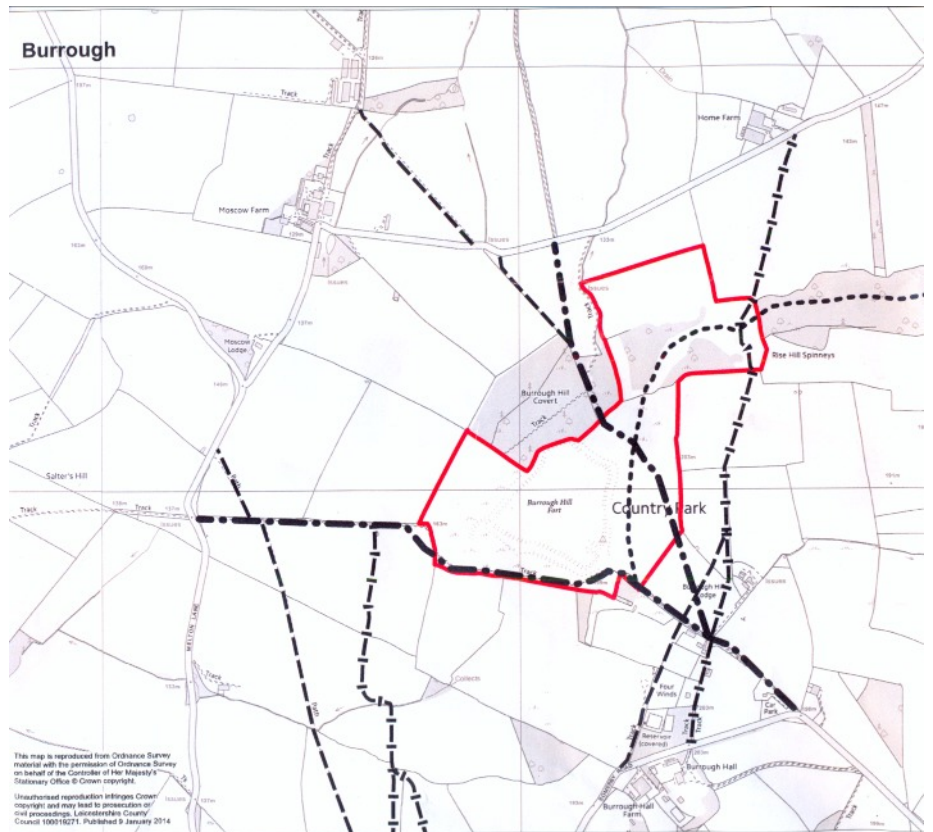
More evidence of the impact of horse traffic.

Consideration should be given to some form of segregation to allow horse riders to enjoy the area but leave walkers with a surface that is useable.





Burrough



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