

Supplemental report on suspected firing range, possibly used by Auxiliary Units in woods between Faringdon and Coleshill.

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Introduction

This supplemental report should be read in conjunction with the February 2013 report on the same site.

This supplemental report is the result of two further site visits on 23rd September 2013 and 27th March 2014. These provided additional information about the site not previously recorded.

Walk over surveys

The walk over surveys revealed the presence of a large amount of metal cable in a corroded condition. A review of the previous site photos indicates that this was present before but had been overlooked, the appearance of the cable being similar to the branches and tree roots in its corroded condition. The cable appears in loops above the ground level on the bank near the central tree that is marked on the map on the previous report. The cable appears to be coiled, with the upper part of the coils protruding from the surface. It is not possible to know if there is a single coiled piece, or multiple pieces of cable. The cable is of single metal core design from superficial inspection, approximately 4mm in diameter.



Fig 1.
23rd September 2013.
Lengths of metal cable circled, standing proud of the bank surface following erosion.



Fig 2.
23rd September 2013.
Multiple strands of rusted metal cable lying parallel exposed on edge of bank.

As on previous visits, the area below rabbit burrows was examined for evidence of finds excavated by the animals. Two spent bullets were identified in similar areas to the previous visits. Finds were not noted in any of the surrounding areas within the likely range area, namely the sandy bank and the hollow beneath it stretching to the track.



Fig 3.
23rd September 2013.
National Grid Reference 25730 94780
Bullet 5 as found on surface.



Fig 4.
27th March 2014.
Find site for bullet 6 circled centre.



Fig 5.
27th March 2014.
National Grid Reference 25733 94774 Elevation 450 feet
The tip of bullet 6 is seen protruding from the bank. Unlike previous finds, it is possible that this may have been in situ, though it is unusual that the bullet would be facing out of the bank.

On the 27th March 2014 visit, extensive excavation of the area of the range by recreational cyclists was noted. This included building a large ramp across one part of the range bank, using excavated sand to build up the area. There was also more extensive animal burrowing visible in the area than on the previous visits. The early 2014 period of extremely heavy rain did not seem to have significantly altered the site.



Fig 6.

Comparison photographs, above 16th September 2012, below 27th March 2014.

The lower photo shows a new sand track has been built coming from the bank at the top of the of the range site to the top right of the photograph and crossing below the tree to the opposite side to create a jump. One of the find sites is to the bottom right of the top picture. Some of the metal cable is just visible directly below the tree in the second shot, partially buried by the new material.

Finds Report

Methodology

Due to the public location of the site and the risk to finds left *in-situ*, both bullets were recovered, bagged and recorded. Their locations were recorded with Global Positioning System technology (Garmin Etrex) at the time of survey. All finds were photographed *in-situ* prior to being recovered. (Figs 3, 4 and 5)

Processing

The finds were washed, with a wooden skewer used to extract dirt from cavities, and then dried. The finds are currently held by the author with the intention of delivering them to the National Trust site at Coleshill when possible, to join the collection of material from the site.

Identification

Bullet 5

This is the tip of a rifle bullet. It is 26mm long and 9.5 mm at its widest (flattened) diameter. It appears to be made of copper and is hollow. These features are typical of British .303 ammunition as used in rifles and other weapons such as the Bren Gun or Vickers machine gun.



Fig 7.
Bullet 5



Fig 8.
Bullet 5 showing hollow end.

Bullet 6

This bullet is exactly 9mm in diameter and 20.06mm long with two recessed bands and an indented base with white colouration within. It appears to have a copper coating in places consistent with a full metal jacket military round. It has not been possible to identify this round, which doesn't appear to be from a Sten gun or to be German 9mm Parabellum ammunition.



Fig 9.
Bullet 6. Two recessed bands in bullet.



Fig 10.
Base of Bullet 6 showing central white area.

Conclusion and Findings

The repeat visits have allowed an accurate location for the range to be plotted using GPS. This has confirmed that the site lies outside the Scheduled Ancient Monument area. The two additional finds have provided further confirmation of the location. It is noted that all of the spent bullet finds have been made in a limited area of the site. This may indicate that this was the location of the targets, or that the erosion is progressing at different rates on different parts of the site and other areas have already been destroyed. The range of different bullets even within this small sample indicate that a wide range of weapons was being used at this range, which is relatively unusual for a World War Two site and indicates the special nature of the Auxiliary Units training.

The finding of a large amount of metal cabling in a very rusted condition so close to the site suggests this may have been a part of the wartime structure. Firing ranges often had suspended targets and sometime moving targets. This cabling may have formed a part of such structures. Often as sites were dismantled at the end of the war, items that could not be usefully recycled would be buried in pits. The finding of apparent coils of cable eroding out of the bank would be consistent with this type of disposal.

Recommendations

The March 2014 visit has found that extensive damage has occurred with the building of large ramps for off road cycling. This has involved excavation of sand to build the structures and is already encroaching on the known archaeological remains. It is recommended that the central range area be fenced off to prevent further damage. A metal detector survey, without more extensive excavation, but with GPS finds recording, could identify if there are any other areas of metal finds that ought to be preserved for future investigation. The areas of metal cabling protruding from the surface are also a potential danger to cyclists and walkers and therefore ought to be either fenced off, or excavated and removed.