

## **PARISHSCAPES REPORT**

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### **Introduction**

Parishscapes evolved out of a desire from English Nature and the AONB to develop biodiversity and landscape understanding with local communities at an area based level, in particular within the hinterland to the Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site.

The initial brief was to “work with parish councils in identified parishes in East Devon to encourage local communities to engage in the identification, evaluation, maintenance and enhancement of the landscape, biodiversity and cultural features that contribute to the high quality and distinctiveness of the East Devon Landscape.” A tall order!

A key element in the project was to create an interactive map that collated cultural historical information with evidence on bio-diversity, and the key to this was the digitising of the 1840 Tithe Map – more than a map since it also includes land use, field names, tenurial and land ownership information. The window provided by the 1840 map was the starting point for investigations both further back and further forward in time. Without it, it would not have been possible to identify the tenurial fault line in the Branscombe (see Branscombe narrative in appendices).

The project was funded by English Nature and the East Devon AONB. A steering committee monitored the project at every stage and, in addition to the funding bodies, also included a representative of the Branscombe Project and the County Archaeologist’s office. Day to day management was provided by the AONB officer.

*The main part of this document will detail the objectives and results of the Parishscapes Project, whilst the appendices provide more detail on the tithe map work, biodiversity and educational spin-offs.*

### **The Parishscapes Project Community report**

#### **Picture 1 and caption**

**- Reasons for choosing Beer and Branscombe**

**- A short background to the landscape and settlement of the two parishes**

### ***The Beer and Branscombe landscape***

Beer and Branscombe have been protected by their topography and the absence of main roads within the parish. In Branscombe in particular the isolated and traditional character of its steep-sided combes has been preserved. Approaching from the North, we enter both Beer and Branscombe over the the clay, gravel and flint flat high lands. This drift geology overlies greensand. The flat high lands were once covered by chalk, hence all the flints, but this has mostly eroded and chalk only survives in pocket nearer the coast forming the most westerly outcrops of chalk in England and, just for the record, the very westerly-most tip occurs in neighbouring Salcombe. The flat high lands were traditionally unenclosed and used only for grazing; their recent enclosure is evident in the layout of predominantly large regular fields.

Turning briefly to the chalk cliffs and pinnacles, the inland edges of these lands, which are also in an elevated position are marked by quarry pits. These are reminders of the intense quarrying activity that took place in the late 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries). The more regular, well faced quarries further down the slopes in Branscombe are greensand quarries used for house building, whilst Beer is characterised by quarries working the 4 metre thick band of fine limestone exploited for both domestic and ecclesiastical architecture..

### ***Picture 2 and caption***

Below the greensand in Branscombe are the fingers of mudstone which penetrate the combes. Combined with rich nutrients washed down from above, the combes possess the best soils and were the earliest lands to come under the plough (hence the irregular pattern of small fields). The largest extent of meadow land on the 1840 tithe map lies within this area. The surviving woodland in both parishes lies mainly on the greensand slopes, although both scrub and woodland (mainly ash) have now re-colonised many of the ‘humps and bumps’ of the quarry areas. In some areas aerial photographs from 1947 and 1999 indicate that this only occurred in the last 50 years,

Due to the free draining nature of the upland soils, the farms in this area in both parishes were confronted with the problem of a dependable water supply, until the mains supply arrived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, two solutions existed to the problem: man-made dew ponds in the fields and powerful hydraulic rams pumping up water from the springs and streams in the combes. Bovey (Beer) and Woodhead Farm and Higher Weston Farm (Branscombe) possessed both rams and dew ponds.

### ***Settlement***

The combes that gave Branscombe its name have been instrumental in determining the contrasting historical and settlement trajectories of the two parishes. Branscombe is a large parish with several nuclei of settlement, dominated tenurially by a thousand years of association with the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral. Beer is a smaller parish which has only had an independent existence for a century, yet is centred on its fishing village, a much larger nucleated settlement. However, the shared traditional economy of the two parishes cuts across these differences: farming, quarrying, lime burning, a little fishing, lace making and smuggling. Today, the two parishes provide some of the richest and most varied landscapes in Devon, already an exceptionally varied county by any standards.

The localised differences in topography are reflected in different patterns of land use, highlighted in the digitized tithe map produced by the Parishscapes Project (see appendix). Land use categories such as withy beds are entirely absent in Beer, whilst meade is present but accounts for a much smaller area. The different farming regimes of the two parishes are also marked by the dominance on the uplands of Beer of the large and ancient Bovey farm and the consequent paucity of the older middling and smaller farms that are so typical of Branscombe (Hole, Edge, Gay's, Berry Barton, etc.). The enlightened management of Mark Rolle in Beer, as elsewhere in East Devon has produced many examples of Victorian estate workers cottages which are entirely absent in Branscombe.

*Picture 42 and caption*

### **The Parishscapes project**

The Parishscapes Project worked with the communities in Beer and Branscombe along a number of different trajectories:

1. The digitised tithe map provided a bench mark for assessing changing land use over time. Whether in Branscombe Primary School as part of a project on the Victorians or with farmers and landowners, the A3 colour printouts of the map, projected onto the 1904 6 inch to the mile Ordnance Survey, formed a useful starting point for discussions of past land use, of which entire categories have disappeared – withy beds for example.

2. Against the landscape and settlement background mentioned above, Parishscapes decided to focus on three landscape features shared by both parishes. These were:

Pits (the product of centuries of lime burning), Plats (distinctive miniature cliff fields, mainly in Branscombe) and Ponds (dew ponds constructed in the upland fields).

This PPP, or 3P, designation first of all emphasises the way in which culture history and biodiversity play off each other. It also works between the parishes and allows a sharing of knowledge. Thus, for example, the camcorder interviews of Pat Farrell (Beer environment group) discussing the dew ponds, and allowed recognition of their very specific constructional features, as well as, with their populations rare fairy shrimp (*Cirocephalus diaphanus*), their particular life forms. Sue Dymond, a local natural history enthusiast and part-time IT teacher, was commissioned to do a sample habitat survey of selected PPP areas in both parishes in the closing month of the project (April 2006).

The documentary resources used for PPP could also be shared between the two parishes. For example, an important source of information on lime-burning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century comes from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century diary of William Ford (Gay's farm, Branscombe), whilst for the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Ford family dominated the Beer lime burning industry, there are copious accounts which are now held by John Scott, the custodian of Beer Quarry Caves

3. Parishscapes also worked with both parishes on the issue of Heritage Interpretation. It emerged, in the course of a joint Parish seminar led by Barbara Farquharson (Branscombe Project) at Branscombe on 28 January 2006, following a walk over from Beer and introductory geological talk by Councillor Mike Green

(Beer), that there was much that could be learnt by pooling the different experiences of the two. One question that emerged was the respective advantages and disadvantages of permanent and temporary interpretation. The Branscombe project have to erect and dismantle their exhibition each year, a disadvantage; yet the yearly re-invention of their exhibition maintains community momentum and initiative, and avoids the fixed, finite and ultimately stale interpretations which can afflict some permanent sites. Beer, on the other hand, already possesses a small interpretation centre and is building a larger one, a distinct advantage for visitors and Heritage Coast interpretation. The disadvantages are the continuous responsibility of managing, staffing and providing day to day running costs for a permanent site and the difficulty of creating flexible exhibitions that would retain community involvement.

4. Parishscapes also had an education remit, thus on the one hand, two students from Sidmouth College were able to record the heritage seminar, and on the other Parishscapes resourced National Curriculum units in the primary schools of both parishes (see appendix for the work done in the Beer school). In Branscombe, mapped evidence of 19<sup>th</sup> century land use and census material was provided for school work on the Victorians. The site of the school was still an orchard in 1840.

5. The richest resource of Parishscapes was the people of the two parishes. Parishscapes is very pleased to have given an impetus to a project that was nascent, but temporarily dormant, in Beer: camcorder oral history recordings. The result is a series of interviews, some set in the landscape and some in the interviewees home, which cover a range of subjects concerning the two parishes (lime production, fishing, building, etc.). As Richard Muir has written:

“If the study of landscape cannot recruit a steady stream of enthusiasts then it will die and it will deserve to die. In winning such recruits, it should be appreciated that ordinary people are not interested in logos or acronyms or networking.”

(Landscapes 5.1. 2004

*Picture 11 and caption.*

### **The future**

As far as the digitised mapping project is concerned, the immediate concern must be to find the most appropriate form of delivering the Geographical Information System (GIS) layered maps. The interactive capacity of GIS, allowing the user to click on individual fields on the tithe map to call up more information or add and remove layers (geology, archaeological find spots, habitats, etc) is most easily enabled through the creation of a web-site. This is being investigated as a possible second stage of Parishscapes, potentially involving further parishes in the East Devon AONB. In the meantime, less interactive versions of the mapping can be generated, either on disk or even acetate formats. It is hoped that the mapping will provide an additional resource for parish councils deliberating on the future of their landscapes and will provide data for historical and biodiversity research in the parishes. The historicak narrative which follows accompanies the maps. It is hoped that the Parishscapes material will dovetail with the Landscape Description Units (LDUs) which are currently being elaborated county wide. Finally, it has been suggested that some of the Parishscapes work is worthy of publication and links are currently being sought with a research institution to facilitate this.

## APPENDICES

### **Branscombe and Beer landscape history narrative and Tithe Map commentary**

#### **Introduction**

The 1840 tithe map is a useful point of entry into landscape and land use history, providing hints of both what came before and a baseline for subsequent changes. Digitisation of the map allows patterns to emerge which are not apparent on the original maps and their cumbersome apportionments. The digitised map, interwoven with other sources and field work, provides the basis for a broad outline of the landscape history of Branscombe and Beer in the last two centuries; though the pages which follow do not form a definitive account – nor indeed was it the intention of the 6 months Parishscapes Project that they should. The main subjects treated are the pastoralisation of the landscape and its effect on the environment, the economy, settlement and housing; the tenorial fault lines that lie waiting to be discovered in the map; a study of an important local industry: lime burning. Although this last element can be conveniently studied in both Beer and Branscombe, the fact that Beer was part of Seaton parish in 1840 means that some aspects of the historical narrative are easier to trace in Branscombe.

#### **Aspects of changing land use**

Looking at Branscombe today it gives the impression of a timeless pastoral landscape. But this is an illusion, and, in fact, right through to the mid nineteenth century, there was more arable than pastoral land. Moreover, there is also evidence of fields that move back and forth between pasture and arable. The 1840 map provides a snapshot of land use in that year. However, a snapshot a couple of years earlier or later could well have revealed a different picture, not so much in the overall ratio of arable to pasture, though this was indeed gradually changing, but in the distribution of arable and pasture. Fussell (1951: 180) calls this ‘convertible husbandry’ and notes that the practice was widespread in Devon. It involves the periodic restoration of old and degraded grassland - which might even be covered in furze, to arable land. Once restored a ‘course’ of crops is planted before the land is once again allowed to revert to pasture. The breaking up of old grassland was called beating, or ‘Denshiring’ elsewhere in England (Hoskins 1996). It was a very labour intensive practice, involving the use of a ‘beating axe’ to cut and pare off every inch of turf, dry it, burn it and scatter the ashes. References to denshiring and burn-beating continue into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Arrish field names may have an association with beat-burning (Bill Horner, pers. Com.); there are 3 such names in Branscombe (winter oat arrish - 217, arable; hill arrish - 301, pasture; 739 - old oat arrish, arable).

Other field names in the tithe map apportionment may also indicate denshiring, whilst some point towards the more general move from arable to pasture. For example two fields called ‘furze brake’ (560,590) and two fields called ‘furze close’ (33,792) are all four described as arable. This is interesting, given that the prevailing trend was from arable to pasture and not the other way round. On the other hand another two fields called ‘furze brake’ (876) and ‘furze piece’ (996) are listed as pasture in

1840 which may suggest that they have been improved by liming and marling – a common practice (Havinden: 124). There are two examples of fields called ‘barley close’ (315, 874) which are classed as pasture in 1840 and this may be part of the gradual movement from arable to grass in Devon farming which, according to Hoskins, lasted several centuries. This trend is confirmed, from 1866, after the publication of the first agricultural statistics. By 1889, following a deep agricultural depression, the acreage under grass in Devon is, for the first time, greater than the acreage under arable (Hoskins: 101). In Branscombe in 1840, at the time of the tithe map there was almost exactly twice as much arable (1482 acres) as there was meadow and pasture combined (740 acres).

*Picture 13 and caption*

William Ford, a Branscombe farmer who also worked for William Stukey, one of the great land-owners in the parish, kept a diary between 1789 and 1791, and describes the process of taking land in for arable crops. On 17 February 1791 he records “began to break Horseclose for ley oats”. Chick, who transcribed the diary in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century confirms in a note in the margin that this is indeed grassland being taken in: “grassland new broken”. Exactly a week later (24 February) Horse Close was duly sowed; the oats were harvested on August 17 and ricked on August 26. Ford also reveals practices which are very specific to the Branscombe topography. For example on 2 October 1790 he was “drawing forehead over Brockhole”. Fortunately Chick again comes to our rescue over this otherwise impenetrable reference: “the drifted soil at the bottom of the steep field taken to top”. This back breaking practice, widely utilized in the Alps, was also current until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century on the Branscombe cliff plats (Sid Sweetland, pers. Com.). Several turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century watercolours by John White show barley growing on these pocket hankerchief sized fields.

The Branscombe map includes meade as a land use category, as distinct from meadow. Ford also refers to both “meads” (“mowed the three Gays meads”, 19 July 2005) and “meadows”. Some of the Branscombe meade is on higher land and there is no association with seasonal flooding. Ralph Cox (pers. Com.) remembers his father’s mead near Bullstone Farm which he believes was never mown, only grazed and which had the springiest grass on the farm.

What effect did the move towards pastoralisation have on the landscape of Branscombe? Descriptive primary sources are hard to come by, but, fortunately, we do have the reminiscences of J.G. Cornish for neighbouring Salcombe in the 1870’s. Cornish begins by lamenting the huge decrease in the partridge population: “Partridges were plentiful then, for nearly all the red marl on the west side of Salcombe Hill [Branscombe does not have red marl] was under the plough and much of the poor light land on the hilltop, while further east and north where the hilltop clay is deeper there were few grass fields. So the partridges reared fine broods on the hillsides and the light land ...”

Cornish directly blames the changes in farming practice for this state of affairs and comments:

“And the country was far more interesting, for there was the change of crops, wheat, barley, oats, rye-grass, fallow, mangolds, turnips, where now we find only one or two arable fields to six or eight of grass. It seems strange to me now to look at a steep

hillside covered with bracken or even gorse and brambles, and to think how I saw oats being sown by hand on it and the carter standing at a perilous angle to harrow in the grain.” (Cornish: 131)

William Ford, for his part, often took time off for shooting with his dogs. Clearly, different habitats existed: “tried up Northern Edge and found usual brace of cocks” [woodcocks?] 4 January 1791. Only once does he record shooting sea fowl (7 July 1791). Rabbits and hare were plentiful: “7 rabbits with 7 shots”, but sometimes, even then: “partridge are scarce” (1 September 1791). This is an exception, however, as there are many entries concerning braces of partridges.

The flora and fauna of the area can sometimes leave evocative evidence in field names on the tithe map: ‘lapwing close’ (275), for example in the uplands and ‘dock meadow’ (376) in the valley lands. Cornish might have also added that the countryside had been more densely peopled. Arable farming is more labour intensive than pastoral; witness the 19<sup>th</sup> century demography of Branscombe. In 1851,71,81,91,1901 the figures were, respectively, 1017,951,842,742,627 (Chick 12).

Other historical sources, even unlikely ones, can sometimes inform us about land use in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Penny Jones book on smuggling describes, from Branscombe Parish Records, how William Cawley, a smuggler, was : “found dead early in the morning by John Halse in a field of oats called Five Acres, on the West side of Markel’s Hill; lying on his back with his head downhill, and a cask of spirits at some distance from him below” (14). Cawley was buried two days later on 21 June 1801. Hence we know that there was a crop of oats growing on this field on 19 June 1801. In 1840 the same field (714) was still classed as arable.

### **Tenorial fault lines**

The Branscombe tithe map displays a contrasting pattern of large regular upland fields and markedly irregular, small fields in the valley lands. On closer inspection the valley lands are less of a jumble than they at first seem. Tenorial fault lines are visible on the tithe map, and, still today, on the ground. One such line, runs straight from the cliffs into the centre of the village from South to North, separating all the holdings in Mill Tenement from those of Little Seaside. Such an arbitrary line across such varied topography, including very steep gradients, represents a very early land division. The tithe map shows that this was both a tenorial and, flowing from this, a land-use boundary, though the terrain does not change from one side of the line to the other. Fieldwork reveals that the line appears to be sighted from a mound/barrow on the cliff edge. An earlier map in the archives of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter cathedral, dating to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, reveals that the same line also divides leasehold land from copyhold land.

*Picture 4 and caption*

Less obvious, though no less interesting, are remnants of what appear to be strips, listed in 1840 as contiguous holdings; each strip being divided into several separate fields. Two such strips ran from Northern lane north across the fields and down through copses to the stream at Edge Barton. The easterly strip is formed by 342, 343, 344 (Taylor’s) with 340,341,342 adjoining to the west (Higher House). The two strips

were farmed by different tenants and only stand out from the map when linked with the tenurial data of the apportionment. In Law's 1792 map, referred to above, these strips are farmed by two different copyholders. Copyholding is a form of tenure rooted in the medieval period. Although not formally abolished until 1922, copyholding was already under threat in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and once lapsed could not be restored: "land could be held in copyhold only if it had been so held from time immemorial" (Harvey 58). There can be little doubt that these holdings are medieval or earlier – though they need not necessarily be associated with open-field farming..

Why did such archaic forms of tenure still exist in Branscombe in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.? Most of Branscombe belonged to Exeter Cathedral between Domesday and the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Law map, held in the cathedral archives, contains a long list of copyholders in the margin. Indeed there are 37 copyholder and only 13 leaseholders. Even a very cursory examination of the map reveals that copyholding prevailed in the parts of Branscombe with the smallest and most irregular fields.

### **A landscape of conflict?**

Some of the Branscombe farmhouses date to the 'great rebuilding' of c1600. Burgeoning wealth in Devon at this time is attested by the high level of entry fines which tenants were willing and able to pay for their three life leases (Hoskins: 62-65). Margells dates to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, as do parts of Hole (Cherry and Pevsner: 205). At the other end of the social spectrum, there was a growing class of rural landless rural wage earners. In the subsidy of 1534 in the 9 parishes of Colyton Hundred, fully 39% of the population were declared landless (Hoskins: 62-65). Smaller farmers in Devon were being squeezed, with the resulting amalgamation of small farms. Poverty was on the increase, as reflected in the rising cost of poor relief throughout Devon. The late 17<sup>th</sup> century hearth taxes also give an indication of poverty, since the poor were exempt (householders whose house was worth less than 20s a year and those who did not pay church and poor rates). In Branscombe in 1674, 40 non-paupers paid hearth tax for a total of 109 hearths, but 45 paupers are recorded with one hearth each.. (Stoate 1982).

Evidence of both pauperisation and depopulation can be read from the maps and the landscape. There are a number of smaller houses (eg. 885 at Bonner's or 392, 394,395; all at Northern Edge) which feature on the 1840 tithe map and are no longer there today; people do not generally abandon houses out of choice. Contrast this with the large Victorian houses and farms which sprang up between these two dates. There are also tiny plots, simply called 'plot' in 1840, which line the roads and which may well have been former house plots (eg. 429). In some cases the apportionment makes the situation only too clear: e.g.: 642 – "ruins and plot". Unlike the Rolle estates which lie both to the East and West of Branscombe, there is no evidence of landlord financed building for labourers which characterised the enlightened policy of Mark Rolle in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ford: 2000).

The decline in housing stock for the poor continued until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The houses at 392, 394 and 395, cited above, were only abandoned after 1904. The minutes of Honiton RDC housing committee record a closing order on two Branscombe cottages in 1922 due to delapidation (13.10. 1922). Shears comments that in this period: "Housing conditions in the villages [of East Devon] were nothing short of scandalous .... The general excuse for inaction was that low rentals were

insufficient to enable substantial housing improvement to be made. Many cottages were deserted by their occupiers and many fell to the ground” (1968). More substantial houses were also abandoned. The long house clearly marked as a farm at Bullstone on the Tithes Map (120) is no longer there today. The new farmhouse is marked on the 1904 map on the corner of the lane to the West. This is reputed to be an early insurance swindle (pers. com. Ralph Cox). The census data, as we have already seen above, also tells a story of depopulation in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The population declined by over a third in 50 years.

The decline in arable farming and the surplus manpower formed a ready-made pool of labour for the fishing, lime burning, quarrying, lace and smuggling industries, though many families, including Hoskins’ own ancestors, joined the growing migration to the towns. Hoskins great-great grandfather lost his farm just outside Sidmouth and was classed as a labourer in 1827. His son walked into Exeter in 1825 and did not return (98).

Hoskins considers that Devon was overpopulated in relation to available resources by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This apparently Malthusian view assumes that the food resource base is fixed, whereas of course labour intensive arable farming has a higher carrying capacity than pastoralism. The conversion rate of crops to calories is higher than that for grass to meat to calories. Arable only bucked the pastoral trend during the Napoleonic Wars and two World Wars.

There were other ways in which the wider landscape differed from the one we see today. Quite apart from smaller fields and a larger extent of arable and meadow, the landscape was much less densely wooded in 1840. This is immediately visible in 19<sup>th</sup> landscape paintings depicting the area (see John White’s view over Branscombe from Stockham’s Hill in the Albert Museum collection – Exeter). The poor had to rely on hedgerows, verges, waste and common to graze their animals. Wood and animal dung were the only available fuels for the poor; leaves; furze, etc. were the only bedding. Hedgerows are listed and quantified as a resource in the margin of the Law map. In the same time frame (late 18<sup>th</sup> century), William Ford’s diary several times refers to measuring hedgerows and pricing them for their usable resources: “measured the hedge against Hole wheat field 30 rope at 6d 1 ¼ of wood, ditto of ... (Undecipherable) 100 gads [used in thatching]” (9 Feb 1791). Although today we have to travel to the Eastern rim of Europe to find farming communities which still make such intensive use of what we today consider as marginal resources, documentary sources can help reconstitute the past uses of these resources. In the *History of Middle* (c1700), Richard Mercer, “a very waggish fellow ... did imagine Reece would tear his master’s hedges to burne the oven.” Reece was caught out by the boring out of a piece of dry wood, which was then filled with gun powder and replaced in the hedge. Reece duly stole the wood and it blew up his oven. But slowly the amount of woodland increases, and in Branscombe even some land classed as arable in 1840 appears as woodland on the 1904 map (for example, field 765). On the other hand, the high acreage of orchard - 141 acres of orchard in 1840, remained fairly constant right through until the middle of the twentieth century, when, with the offer of government subsidies to uproot trees, it went into steep decline. The largest orchards were sited near to the big farms (418, Hole) – a reminder that wages were partly paid in cider. William Ford writes : “warned people out [ordered] to repair water course at Branscombe Mouth, I gave them a barrel of cider” (30 March 1791).

*Picture 23 and caption***Lime burning and quarrying**

Lime burning made a huge impact on the landscape, pock-marking much of the rim of the higher lands and apparently having scant regard to the associated loss of grazing or arable caused by this activity. Field 542 (Culverhole) was classed as arable in 1840 and was pitted by 1904. Tithe map names also help identify quarries and fix a terminus ante quem for dating purposes: “pitts” and “quarry close” (419, 421 – Hole). Whilst lime was of course used locally, the account books of lime burners such as Mrs Leigh, who held land in both Salcombe and Branscombe, evidence commercial lime burning on a large scale. In 1802, 1037 transactions for 95 customers were recorded, only 17 of whom came from Branscombe and Salcombe. John Stuckey (Branscombe) was also selling to the north and west in parishes where there was no chalk (Wilson: 12-17). In the 1851 census returns, 6 lime burners are listed; all are heads of households. There were certainly others who worked as part-time agricultural labourers and lime burners. Thus John Ford, aged 72 (Gays) is listed as one of the lime burners; furthermore he employed 10 men and 3 boys and is unlikely to have done any of the work himself. John Ford’s younger brother, William Ford, the diarist who died at the age of 28 in 1797, records the key events in the lime-burning year. In 1790-1791, for example; the last ship load of culm was discharged on August 5 1790, (capt. Durnford 150 quarters). 19 February 1791 saw William in Bideford : “Went to cap. Williams, engaged with him for a cargo of culm. On 18 April, back in Branscombe, W. Dowell “tarred culm boats and corked [caulked] them. These small boats were presumably used when the culm boat could not discharge directly onto the beach. On 6 May we read: “discharged Cap. Williams” and the lime burning year gets under way. On 7 May: “fired little kiln” and on 19 May : “fired great kiln”. Culm was discharged throughout the summer: 1 June (Cap. Harvey); 13 June (Cap. Harris); 22 June (Cap. Row); 27 June (Cap. Harvey); 4 July (Cap. Harris), 14 September (Cap Harvey). After that date no culm was delivered. This does mean that lime was not burnt later in the year. Indeed we know from many accounts that the warmth of the kilns attracted travellers and vagrants in winter (Planel 2004 ). However, as we have seen, the diarist feels it was worthy of mention that the Ford kilns, probably at Gays (where masonry can still be seen) were fired in May.

All did not always go to plan in the supply of. The difficulty in offloading coal is made only too clear in a letter concerning an order for coal in mid-winter at Budleigh Salterton a little further down the coast:

“7 December 1813. I am sorry to say that it’s impossible any vessel can come to your place with culm at this season of the year. Indeed it is considered very hazardous even in summer.” (Williams 2001 41). The difficulties at Branscombe were obviously similar. On 22 June 1791 Cap. Row was only discharged “in part, having imprudently filled one of the boats and damaged it”. Sometimes the weather intervened more directly. In 1790 Cap. Reed could not be discharged on 18 June and was only discharged 10 days later on 28 June. William Ford, incidentally, seems to be as comfortable with sea travel as he was on land. He was even at home in the sea and records, 4 June 1791: “bathed in sea”. Probably a fairly unusual activity at the time.

On the lower slopes, stone was quarried for house and wall building; these quarries tend to be straight-sided, unlike the lime quarries which resemble so many bomb

craters. Fieldwork has revealed remains of lime kilns with their characteristic access paths, spoil heaps and associated finds of lumps of coal.

Lime burning and quarrying still form part of Branscombe's hidden past. There is no mention of these important industries on the NT interpretation board at the Bakery Tea-room, though other industries are mentioned. Swete (late 18<sup>th</sup> century) described the lime burning landscape at Beer as "abundant in the picturesque and the romantic"; on reaching a Branscombe kiln and quarry, he described these as "if possible more romantic"! and produced a water-colour of the scene (132-133). Over the hill at Beer, the lime kilns opposite the quarry caves only closed in the 1960's (camcorder recording 21 March 2006).

*Pictures 16 and 17, and caption*

Finally, lime burning even left its mark on Branscombe culinary habits: "A duck was never so good as when roasted in its feathers on top of the red hot kiln" (Chick 43).

*Picture 35 and caption*

### **Beer landscape history narrative and Tithe Map commentary**

Although Beer is a smaller parish, the tithe map is harder to analyse. Beer was part of Seaton parish in 1840 and the holdings in what are now two different parishes are scattered throughout the apportionment. This complicates land ownership analysis, but does not affect land use. From a visual analysis of the tithe map, and this is what makes the digitised map so useful, the density of arable in relationship to pastoral appears to be even greater than in Branscombe. The patchwork of land use of the three main Branscombe combes is absent in Beer. On the other hand, on the digitised Beer map, the eye is led straight to Bovey Farm where there is indeed a patchwork of different colours, demonstrating the highly organised distribution of resources around this important farm: meadow, meade, orchard, pasture, arable, ponds. The latter category are particularly interesting as they seem to cluster around Bovey and are entirely absent on the Branscombe Parish map. Are we dealing with a different cartographic signature or a different reality? It would appear, from people's accounts today, that these ponds did also exist in Branscombe. In both parishes many of these ponds have been filled in since mains water became available. Interestingly, Sue Diamond has studied a transitional mode of water supply (hydraulic water rams c1850-1950) in both parishes and there remains some further work to be done in understanding the water supply for animals and humans on these farms (AQA personal study). Sue has identified the remains of a hydraulic ram in the valley North of Bovey as a source of water for the farm. Did the ponds serve a separate need for animals out in the fields?

*Picture 41 and caption*

By far the largest area of pastoral land in Beer is down on the cliffs. This includes Beer Common which, like most commons, was not on prime agricultural land. An 1807 coastguard report describes the area above Hooken where: "great quantities of [smuggled] goods are landed, and carried up by a winding path, at least half a mile in length, to the top where a large furze brake affords shelter to the goods till they can be carried away" (quoted in Hathaway – 77). However, within living memory, this common was gradually enclosed (interview with Derk Barrett - 29.03.06; Beer

Heritage Society). Arthur Chapple (1986 15-16, 21-23) writes affectionately about the common and describes the gorse and foxgloves that abounded there. The gorse was regularly burnt off and the blackened stems were uprooted and rolled into large bundles which were themselves rolled back down into the village by the village boys and used as household fuel – coal was very expensive and the only other source was driftwood. The bracken was used for animal bedding, whilst ponies and donkeys were grazed on the grass. The common, however, was enclosed and became part of Southdown Farm. Chapple comments that: “The village has lost a rightful heritage”. Nationally of course, hundreds of thousands of acres of common were lost between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, resulting in the migration of many country dwellers to the towns when smallholders lost their grazing and other rights.

Chapple points out that the cliff path was the preferred route for Beer fishermen to sell their fish in Branscombe and, in the opposite direction, for Branscombe potatoes grown on the plats to be sold in Beer. It must have been a busy path. In 1800, the Rev Puddicombe records the death of Elizabeth Ford (from Branscombe, but grandmother of the Beer lime kiln entrepreneur, Nicholas Ford) and we get a glimpse of a moment in time on the path one early one February morning:

“For some unknown case, she form't the horrid resolution of putting an end to her own existence by drowning herself in the sea. She was met in a Field, call'd Five Acres, on the top of Stockham's Hill, on February 13th, between 6 and 7 o'clock in the morning by two carpenters - Joel Bartlett and Daniell White, coming from Beer, where she had lived for 3 or 4 months with her Son-in-Law, Mr Miell, a dissenting minister and his wife, her daughter. She was afterwards met by Joseph Tucker, Farmer, in Sea-Side Lane, who spoke to her observing it was a cold morning; to which she replied How d'ye do? - I don't know your name. Having said this, she pass'd briskly towards the sea. She was observed by two young men from the Cliffs; walking on the shore with great speed towards the West; and about two miles to the Westward of Branscombe-Mouth they saw her walk into the Water, and awful to relate launch herself into Eternity ....” (Branscombe Project Archive).

More light-hearted is the tale of a Beer man who persisted in getting seaweed from the Hooken Undercliff for his garden, even after the enclosure of the common. Although the path was open a stile had been put up. The man was of renowned strength and, after first unloading his donkey, would lift the donkey over the stile (pers. Com. John Scott).

The Branscombe narrative describes the importance of the lime industry and the Ford family loom large in this activity both in Branscombe and Beer. Henry Ford, son of Nicholas mentioned above, had three sets of lime kilns in Beer (Rock, Elton and Berry); the production tallies survive (John Scott archive).

In 1844, the best year, Henry Ford's kilns in Beer produced a total of 25,859 hogsheads of lime. This equates to about 6,000 tons of lime a year ! ( requiring 8000 tons of chalk). The quantities tail off towards 1870, no doubt due to the agricultural depression.

On the Rolle estates in the early 19th century, Havinden (p. 126) calculates a lime burning operating profit of £136 pounds, for an outlay of £722 (including such things a kiln depreciation, interest on working capital etc.), and receipts of £859. This works out at a 19% profit.

William Ford's accounts (diary) show that he had been selling at, approximately 10 hogsheads a pound (each deal seems to have been negotiated separately). At these

prices per hogshead, Henry's income for 1844, in Beer alone, would have been £2,500. His profits (at 19%) would be £491.00.

It is not difficult to see how, in the span of a couple of generations, the family could in 1867 pay £18,000 into the account of the church commissioners, buying the entire manor of Branscombe (cathedral archives 80/126507 & 509). Of course, removing thousands of tons of chalk every year for generations, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the agricultural depression of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, had a huge impact on the landscape, as can readily be observed today. The quarry opposite Beer Quarry caves continued to produce lime and, more intermittently, Beer stone. Indeed production increased after World War 2 when there were subsidies for liming fields and figures of 30 tons a day were the norm. Production only petered out in the 1960's (see Beer Heritage Society interview – 21 March 2006) and the huge surviving lime kilns in the quarry are the only reminders of this important industry.

*Picture 33 and caption*

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Exeter Cathedral Archives – 80/126507, 80/126509

John Scott personal archive

Sue Diamond – 'Hydraulic Rams in East Devon' (AQA archaeology personal study – Sidmouth College 2003)

## Beer CE Primary School

**Subject:** Geography  
(How settlements differ & change; issues arising from land use)

**Class:** 4

**Year Group:** 5 & 6

### **KEY QUESTION(S):**

**How is the geology of Beer linked to how people earned a living? What impact has this had on change and development? How has Beer grown over the last 150 years?**

(Geology – rocks and stones tell us about people earning a living e.g. quarries therefore houses built for quarry workers; flint, limestone, chalk – each tell a story linked to the economy; farming – arable then pastoral so less labour needed, transfer to legal and illegal work)

### **Learning Objectives (Children should learn.....):**

- To develop an understanding about local rocks and stones
- To understand how local geology relates to living – land use
- To understand that settlements differ, change and grow over time
- To consider why settlements differ, change and grow over time
- To consider the impact of the latter on the local land/community and economy
- To consider the links between the locality and its inhabitants (work etc)
- To identify significant changes in land use through comparative work (e.g. maps)
- To understand how land use from the past relates to current land use e.g. past influences street names

### **Success Criteria:**

To be able to articulate an answer in response to the key question and support their view using information from research. To present ideas and findings to others in a clear way that takes into account the needs of the audience. To demonstrate an awareness of the links between land use and the community both past and present through discussions and responses

### **Possible Activities:**

- Ask children to bring in a rock or stone from the beach, country path etc. Look at rock or stone and use secondary sources (incl. WWW) to try and decipher what it is – what story could it tell us? Encourage creative thinking about the history of the rock! How could it link to the economy in the past?
- Using results from last week research the different types of rocks (WWW) and how the job they did/were used for. Think about where they may find examples of these types of rocks/stones in Beer e.g. quarry caves, certain houses, cliffs. Do they think that would have created work e.g. caves (links between locality and inhabitants)
- Look at the role of lime stone and use of lime kilns (could relate to science – reversible and irreversible changes e.g. Lime stone was solid, ground to calcium sulphate, a powder then water was added, a liquid, which dried out and produced a different solid – mortar! ). Look at how lime used, process it went through, workers this would need and therefore bring to community, the role it could play in the development and extension of a settlement etc. (See info on lime kilns, production of lime and the spooky and scary true stories – info provided by Phil Planel)

### Possible Activities (cont.):

- Possibility of a talk by John Scott (Quarry caves – poss. Visit too) – when they were used, what people did there, the function of the caves in the economy, where the mined rock went and what happened to it. Link this in with work – would it bring people to Beer or keep workers staying in Beer? Discuss change in land use due to quarry – houses were built for the workers
- Think about how this use also changes over time (land use as above) – quarry no longer working so houses residential now.
- Look at the role of farming in the geology and land use issues; originally arable, now pastoral which required less labour therefore workers transferred to other industries (both legal and illegal)
- Comparison of maps (settlements) – Beer at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Concentrate on earlier map first – what can they see, say about it? Are there any familiar places there? Compare earlier map to later map and study the development that has taken place. Why has it grown so much? How does this link to the geological and economical aspects? Do people still need accommodation in Beer as they work there or do more people commute to other places? Why do you think they still live in Beer then?
- Explore economic growth of Beer today – local facilities, local work, local skills, local trades etc. What would happen if these ceased to exist? Look at links between locality and inhabitants
- Explore how the street/road names provide an insight or indication into the use of the land many years ago before it was developed. Look at a list/undertake field work to collate a list. Pick some and consider what the name tells you about what happened there in the past (orchards too!) Research using secondary sources and WWW to find out previous use
- Think about collating all information gathered through research and discussions and making sense of it as a whole in preparation to responding to the key question

### Cross-curricular links and references (including ICT):

English (EN1)	1a, 1b, 1c, 1e (discussing ideas with consideration to audience)
	2b, 2e (listening to and responding to others)
(EN2)	3a, 3c, 3d (reading in order to gather information)
(EN3)	2a (taking notes and developing initial ideas)
Maths (MA4)	1f (organising and presenting findings)
ICT	1a, 1b, 1c (using ICT to find things out and developing findings)
	3a, 3b (using ICT as a tool when sharing information)

History 2c, 2d, 4a, 4b (understanding and making sense of changes that happened in the past, considering why these changes happened. Historical enquiry skills)  
7 (study focus relates to local history and the locality in which they live)

**6. PPP (Pits, Plats and Ponds) Biodiversity report prepared by Sue Dymond for the Branscombe Project in April 2006.**

Brief: To conduct a Biodiversity and Habitat Survey

Survey carried out 3/4/06 to 20/4/06

Surveyor – Sue Dymond

Digital images accompany this report

### **Introduction**

The ponds, pits and plats of the title are found in the parish of Branscombe and Beer and appear on the historic tithe map. This report looks at a sample of these sites and comments on the biodiversity and changes, if evidenced, to the sites over time. The sites were all part of a working landscape whose methods or production are now discontinued. The calcareous grasslands in East Devon, though small in area, are an important feature and have regional importance. This is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and part of the Jurassic Coast Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site. Farming and tourism are important in this area.

### **Note**

The time of year of this survey and unusually prolonged cold winter has meant a rather late season for most plants.

### **Survey summary**

The ponds of the title were dew ponds used to water stock on the free-draining calcareous grasslands at the time of the tithe map. These clay-lined, man-made, naturally filling water features have been made obsolete by mains water supplying water troughs and many have been filled in or modified. Two were examined, one in Beer and one in Branscombe parish, that have received no alteration or maintenance and they both hold water on occasions, with one being important as a habitat for the red data list fairy shrimp. The biodiversity for both seems to be poor overall.

The plats on the cliffside, mainly at Branscombe, were plots where early crops, mainly potatoes, were grown for over a hundred years from the mid 1850s to 1960s. There were possibly over sixty of these plats which varied considerably in size. They were formed when landslips settled to form flat or slightly sloping areas large enough to cultivate. The approach paths are steep and winding and donkey power was used to bring in and take out from the plats what was needed. The area has a microclimate and proximity to the sea which makes it frost-free and this enabled early premium crops to be grown and that unusual warmth is still very noticeable today. The plats are now sites of holiday chalets thus enabling some to still be identified. The luxuriant

native undergrowth now present around the plats is accompanied by much non-native planting and escapes which are extensive in places.

The pits that can be seen in the parish as humps and bumps, often covered in undergrowth and woodland, are the sites of former quarrying for limestone. Where these are not overshadowed by trees typical calcareous-loving flowers can be seen and later in the year more invertebrates will be present.

## **The survey**

### **Ponds**

The calcareous grasslands along the clifftops are free-draining and clay-lined shallow dew ponds were created for watering stock in the past. Mains water and cattle troughs now replace this method and the ponds are not needed for their original use. Most have been filled in but a small number remain often modified or in an unmaintained state. In their original state it is unlikely there would have been much associated vegetation due to stock trampling. However one remaining dew pond close to the cliff edge whilst grassed over does still hold water and has fairy shrimps present which would have liked the trampled conditions caused by stock in the past. All the ponds examined were on field boundaries on the tithe map.

Five ponds were considered for survey at Higher Weston Farm, Weston. Two no longer exist, a neighbour's pond remains, one is now a wildlife pond and one remains as a dew pond.

#### **Pond 1 - SY168 886**

This pond had been completely filled in the past with rubbish and the present farmer has excavated it and created a wildlife pond. This is an attractive large pond with sloping banks providing good habitat and cover. The pond is sunken and rain filled only. Surrounding the pond, beyond the banks, are hedges, one of hawthorn, with several metres of natural growth between them and the pond bankings. There is a little copse at one end of the pond providing a habitat corridor but the pond otherwise is surrounded by pasture. Native and non-native flowers and trees were noted although native predominated. No frogs or toads breed here but there are newts according to the farmer.

#### Flora

Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*)

Daffodils (cultivated)

Periwinkle (possibly introduced)

Willows (various) possibly not all native

Laurel

Lonicera nitida

Also various pond plants e.g. bullrush

A similar wildlife pond has been created at the site of another pond close by and this has a young plantation of natural woodland adjoining it which goes some way to creating a wildlife corridor between the two ponds. Surrounding this again is

pastureland. It has newts. I did not examine this as it was not on the tithe map but is present on modern maps and was an old pond that had been emptied out according to the farmer.

The owner of the two wildlife ponds says they do not have frogs and toads but plenty of newts. He commented these were the common type – not great crested. Grass snakes were rarely seen but he commented on the large number of adders on the coast.

### **Ponds 2 and 3 - SY 166 886 & SY 168 888 (apx)**

A further two ponds, present on the tithe map have now gone completely on this farm and I photographed what I presume is the depression indicating the site of one.

### **Pond 4 - SY 166 886**

A pond on an adjoining farmer's land is still present and I was able to photograph this one over the hedge. It is heavily shaded by the mature trees of the hedge that runs along one side of the pond. Scrub is present on the other sides. It is fenced presumably to prevent stock entry. Size and shape look very similar to the pond marked on the tithe map. I was unable to get a clear view of this pond but I think it is probably surrounded by pasture and the hedgerow would be the only wildlife corridor.

### **Pond 5 – SY 176 883**

To the east of the farm and just inland from the cliffs I looked at a dew pond which is marked on the tithe map. This was found to have completely merged into pastureland and only the outline and depression now indicate its position which I would not have noticed had it not been pointed out to me. At the time of my visit there was very little water present – about 2 sq. metres - and another visit 2 days later showed even less. A link fence has been erected dividing the land into two fields here and this bisects the western edge of the pond. The adjoining field had been cultivated last year, I think, and this cultivation seems to have damaged the perimeter of the small portion of the pond that falls on that side of the fence. Around the base of the fence a thick growth of nettles and some docks has appeared. The fence appears to have trapped vegetation and caused dampness and enrichment of the soil. Possibly run-off of crop fertilizer has also collected here and added to the enrichment. The site was very species poor – grass, nettle and dock. The water had very small beetles in but no fairy shrimps which are a known feature of the pond. The field alongside the pond had long grass which might have been improved.

### **Pond 6 - Pond in a field at Bovey House (SY 213 903)**

This pond on a field boundary survives from the tithe map time. It fills with, and holds, water at times according to the landowner. At the time of my visit, with the landowner, it was completely dry and we thought we could see evidence of the clay lining but possibly this was just accumulated sediment. Trees have grown up adjacent to the pond and are a part of the hedgerow. The roots of a large tree must now be under the pond. A row of old fence posts were seen across the centre of the pond and in the past they would have formed a barrier to stock trying to cross the pond from one field to another. The position of the fence which did not exclude the animals

would have meant though that the farmer was able to use the pond for its original use of stock watering. The fence posts may have damaged the clay lining.

The pond is very overhung with a large tree and when the leaves come out it will be a very shaded site. The only vegetation noted was nettles around what will be the perimeter of the pond when it holds water. The bare earth of the pond site indicates that it holds water sufficiently long enough in the year to deter plant growth. There is mature woodland very close by and the hedge would form a wildlife corridor.

The landowner told me that the fields on either side of the pond have been arable for many years and so the pond has not been used for stock watering for a long time. Its position along the hedgeline probably means it does not interfere with farming methods and probably this has saved it from being filled in.

## **The Plats**

The cliff-side growing plots, known as plats, which were in cultivation for over a hundred years (1850s to 1960s), were formed when a landslip in the past formed relatively flat but sometimes sloping areas large enough to grow crops. The plats were at different heights and of varying sizes with some men working two or three. There was a large network of paths from the cliff-top and from the beach enabling access to the plats and to the beach for seaweed for fertiliser. Donkeys were the preferred method of transport on these steep and narrow tracks for both crop and seaweed carrying. The advantages of being south-facing and frost-free meant early premium crops could be gained and sold locally, distantly or for home consumption. The huts on the plats where the cliff-farmers occasionally slept and stored their tools etc. have given way to holiday chalets and their presence is the indicator of where the plats once stood although it is still possible to see one original plat's shed close to the beach. The history of the plats is still in living memory. It is recalled that up to 60 men were working their plats at one time and these men were also fishermen when the conditions were suitable.

The plats stretched from Weston Mouth in the west to Beer in the east but I have looked at the ones at Branscombe above the area of beach known as Littlecombe Shoot.

## **The Survey**

### **Plats ( SY 182 880).**

Although the cliffs are fairly stable to have enabled this farming to have lasted so long this is not the case in all areas nearby or even in the plat areas. I saw evidence of slippage along the paths in this area and more serious erosion close by. Some of the plats have been lost to becoming overgrown, suffering erosion and slippage. These factors are still at work on the plats today. Some of these historic plat sites now have holiday chalets on them which give some idea of how many plats there were although

many have been overgrown since the time of the tithe map. For ease of maintenance most former plats with chalets on them have grass surrounds but in defining and defending their properties the chalet owners have planted many non-native species. The escape of these non-natives into this area of cliffside has led to considerable areas that are gloomy with no undergrowth and little light admitted.

The whole area of the cliffs where the plats were is now very overgrown, ivy and brambles being dominant with trees where the slope is least. The height of the vegetation and the narrowness of the old tracks in many areas excludes the light and nothing much will grow. In a few places the extra width of the track and the south-facing aspect allowed more light to ground level and produced a flush of plants to be expected on chalk – common rockrose leaves, sweet violet flowers and salad burnet leaves were a few identified. Invertebrates too enjoyed the bare sunny paths where these were in evidence. I saw three oil beetles and a tiger beetle in a short length of sunny track. Nothing rare was seen during this survey but it was particularly noticeable how species-poor the dense overgrown area was especially when this consisted of light-excluding shrubs and trees. It was only possible to match actual plat sites in the field to the old tithe map at beach level as the overgrown nature of the cliff in this area is not how it would have been when cultivation was taking place. Several chalets were in the process of being engulfed by vegetation and I understand this can happen over less than two seasons because of the frost-free and mild conditions.

## Species

### Reptiles

Adder

### Invertebrates

Tiger beetle (*Cicindela campestris*)

Oil beetle (*Meloe proscarabaeus*)

Comma butterfly

Tortoiseshell butterfly

Small blue butterfly (unidentified)

### Birds

Blackcap

Garden Warbler

Peregrine (overhead)

Raven (overhead)

### Large mammals

Rabbit

Badger (signs of)

Otter (signs of on beach adjacent to the survey area)

### Flowers \* indicates found at the base of the cliffs along plat edges/beach

Ground ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*)

Common calamint (*Calamintha ascendens*)

Sweet violet (*Viola odorata*)

Common Rockrose (*Helianthemum mummularium*)

Large Periwinkle (*Vinca major*)  
 Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*)  
 Wood spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*)  
 \*Wall Pepper (*Sedum acre*) possibly introduced  
 Common forget-me-not (*Myosotis arvensis*)  
 \*Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*)  
 \*Sea kale (*Crambe maritima*) – one plant only on beach just below a plat site  
 Salad burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*)  
 Bramble (*Rubus?*)  
 Ivy (*Hedera helix*)  
 Unidentified Broomrape (old seedhead)  
 Old man's beard (*Clematis vitalba*)  
 Common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*)  
 Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)  
 Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)  
 Wayfaring tree (*Viburnum lantana*)  
 \*Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*)  
 \*Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*)  
**Non-native \*\* Indicates high invasion of the site**  
 Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)  
 \*\*Shrub Honeysuckle (*Lonicera nitida*)  
 Flax  
 Pampas grass  
 Bamboo  
 Cultivated Rose  
 \*\*Butterfly bush (*Buddleia*)  
 Cabbage Palm (*Cordyline australis*)  
 Monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*)  
 Xmas tree types

## Pits

The lime pits around the parishes are quite numerous. Many are totally overgrown and now in woodland. I looked at some just inland from the cliffs at Branscombe and others further inland in the parish of Beer.

## The Survey

### Coastal quarries at Branscombe - SY 193 881

The quarries here are covered in trees and scrub or completely open (spoil heaps possibly) and mainly covered in grass. Excavating is still carried on at one heap so it is possible to examine the strata. The vegetation on these heaps is mainly grass, nettle and buttercups. I did see a couple of salad burnet leaf clusters and this was on a very steep side of the heap. There was evidence of cattle grazing on this area which was generally species poor at this time. The quarry area under trees adjacent to the grassy humps had ash and hazel with elder, dogrose, bramble and blackthorn round the perimeter on the topmost edge facing the sea. Some of the multi-stemmed trees in the quarry areas perhaps indicate coppicing in the past as farmers made use of the wood for general farm tasks such as hedging. It seems to be fairly species poor at this site.

## Inland quarries at Bovey Lane, Beer - SY 217 901

The woodland along Bovey Lane contains old quarry sites but they are overgrown with woodland vegetation and I was not able to gain access to them. As the lane opens out into fields I came to the old quarrying site known locally as 'Beer Mountains' because of the very steep lime spoil heaps which have formed them. This is a County Wildlife Site and is managed to benefit the special flora of calcareous grassland. Sheep graze here but not permanently and the site has many rabbits. Both these animals keep the grass short and there was a wealth of calcareous loving plants evident, although mainly only at leaf stage at the time of the survey. Below and around the site are little groups of trees and bushes, often small in area, which will form important refuge for invertebrates for example. These comprised hawthorns in many cases with larger ash trees as the open area gave way to woodland. It was noted that a lot of sapling trees at the two leaf stage were sprouting on the site and the rabbits and sheep will ensure they do not gain a foothold. The site is fenced off from the main surrounding pasture. At the time these quarries were in active use the land here would have been bare so we are looking at a different scene to the one at the time of the title map.

### Species.....\* indicates numerous at the site

#### Flora

\*Common Rockrose (*Helianthemum mummularium*)

Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*)

Cowslip (*Primula veris*)

Ground ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*)

Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*)

Stinking iris (*Iris foetidissima*)

Creeping cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*)

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)

Lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*)

Common daisy (*Bellis perennis*)

\*Unidentified Hawkweed

\*Lambs tongue (*Plantago media*)

Cuckoo pint (*Arum maculatum*)

Horseshoe vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*)

\*Birds foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*)

Bramble (*Rubus?*)

\*Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

\*Salad burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*)

Stinking Iris

Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)

Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)

Hazel (*Coryllus avellana*)

### Conclusion

The sites visited all have some degree of inaccessibility due to their topography. This has probably led to their remaining little changed over time although it could be said neither has maintenance benefited them. From a biodiversity point of view the pits and heaps known as 'Beer Mountains' are the most species rich and this will be even more evident as the season progresses. This site shows what can be achieved with management to benefit the special flora. The plats benefited from the warmth of a microclimate and anecdotal and other evidence indicates a much more open aspect in this area in the past. The few small areas of open path had a wealth of flowers and beetles. There are many overgrown areas with buddleia and *lonicera nitida* being particularly invasive with bamboo getting a toehold as well. Gardening by chalet owners has introduced non-native species in addition to the ones mentioned and some of these will no doubt spread beyond the chalet garden confines eventually. Whilst this area was always a more stable part of the cliff it is probable that the loss of open aspect has been detrimental to some species. The few remaining dew ponds again have hung on probably because they are not in the middle of fields and thus easy to fill in. Their field boundary sites mean they are not too intrusive in the farming methods and so have survived. The two remaining ones are in a poor state and not species rich. They do however hold water and, as noted, one is important for the fairy shrimp.