

Devon farmer sows historically important fields, reaps £31,500 bill

Press release

Braunton tenant-farmer Andrew Cooper has been ordered to pay more than £30,000 for ploughing historically important fields linked to prehistoric and Second World War periods.



Andrew Cooper defied a stop order to continue ploughing land of historical importance

When Cooper of Croyde Hoe Farm ploughed and planted fields on National Trust-owned land which experts regard as archaeologically significant, he was ordered to stop and remediate the fields by Natural England in September 2017. However, the farmer ignored the stop notice and continued to plough and lime most of a neighbouring field as well by March 2018.

The fields in question, found on the Baggy Point headland jutting out on the North Devon coast, are linked to the Mesolithic and Neolithic eras where large numbers of flint artefacts have been found. They were also used as training grounds by American forces in the Second World War ahead of the Normandy invasion, and featured dummy pillboxes, trenches and graffiti left by a soldier who was killed in the landmark battle.

Dawn Enright of Natural England said:

The historic environment is a finite, non-renewable resource. Once it is lost it is gone forever. It cannot be recreated.

Impacts from cultivation are irreversible and over time may lead to the complete removal of archaeological remains and the significant displacement of remains such as flint tools.

Bill Horner, county archaeologist of Devon County Council, said:

The making of stone tools by Mesolithic hunter-gatherers over a long period makes this a particularly important archaeological site. It marks the start of a continuous human presence in Devon after the ice ages.

While we regret that the agencies involved, despite their best efforts, were left with no option but to take legal action, we are pleased that the outcome recognises the harm that was being done to this rare and important part of our national heritage.

Mr Cooper pleaded guilty at Exeter Crown Court on 7 April 2021 to breaching the Stop Notice. He was fined £7,500 with 5 months' imprisonment in default of payment and ordered to pay £24,000 costs at Exeter Crown Court on 21 June 2021.

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