

Location: Grimspound (SX 7007 8087) lies in a small valley 450 m above sea level, between Hameldown and Hookney Tors on Dartmoor in Devon. The nearest village, Widecombe-in-the-Moor, is a few km to the south.

Main period: Bronze Age

Access & ownership: The site is managed by Dartmoor National Park Authority. From Postbridge, follow the B3212 toward Moreton hampstead then turn right at a small junction known as Challacombe Cross. There is limited layby parking approximately 2 km along the road. The site is a short walk along the path to the east.



Fig. 1 Grimspound Bronze Age settlement. By Andrew Westcott

Grimspound is a Late Bronze Age settlement, with the remains of 24 round houses and a perimeter wall enclosing an area of around 1.6 ha (Figs 1 & 2). In 1893 an excavation by the Dartmoor Exploration Committee recorded many details of the site and undertook a controversial reconstruction. Hookney Tor or the high ground on Hameldown provide good vantage points to view the whole settlement.

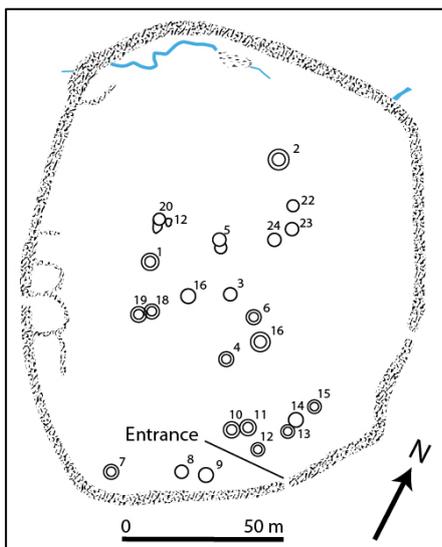


Fig 2. Plan of Grimspound. After Baring-Gould 1900

The perimeter wall, made of granite, once stood 1.7 m tall; in places its ruins are now more than 4.5 m wide (Fig. 3). It was constructed with large slabs on the outside, and a core of rubble in between. Differences of building style suggest it was built by small teams working simultaneously on separate sections, although some of these variations may reflect the reconstruction work in 1894.

The site has limited defensive value so the wall may have been built to contain and protect livestock.



Fig. 3. The perimeter wall. By Own Herby talk thyme [CC BY-SA 4.0]



The settlement overlooks a valley which would have provided open grazing land but the original entrance was on the opposite, uphill side. This imposing structure is flanked by high walls, with a passage 2 m wide and 5 m in length (Fig. 4).

A stream providing fresh water runs through the N edge of the enclosure, and this may explain the settlement's position.

Fig. 4. Entrance to Grimspound. By Own Herby talk thyme [CC BY-SA 4.0]

The 24 roundhouses range from 2.7 to 4.5 m in diameter. No house is clearly larger than the others but it is suggested that a pillar outside Hut 19 could designate this as the home of the head of the village. Low rubble banks against the internal face of the enclosure wall were probably animal pens. Immediately outside the enclosure to the SE at least 9 more houses survive, all linked to rubble banks that form part of a field system.

House walls generally are 1 m wide and comprise a double ring of granite slabs filled with rubble. They probably stood not much higher than they do today, supporting conical roofs of turf or thatch. One house has a surviving L-shaped porch, with two door frame stones still upright, although



Fig. 5. Hut circle. By Own Herby talk thyme [CC BY-SA 4.0]

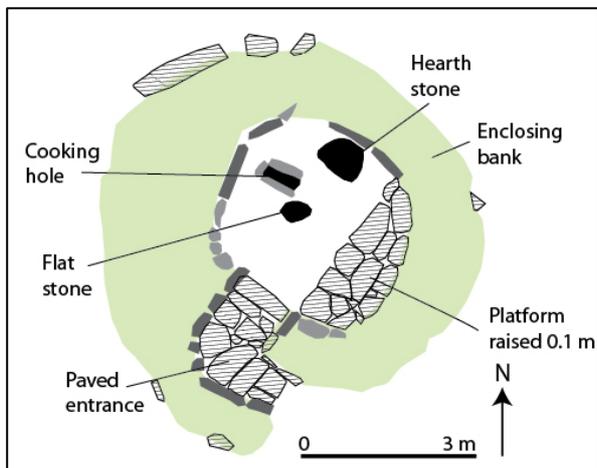


Fig. 6. Plan of roundhouse. After Baring-Gould 1900

the lintel has fallen (Fig. 5). The doorways are paved with naturally flat slabs; all face downhill away from the prevailing wind. To the right inside each house entrance is a raised, level platform, which was probably the sleeping area (Fig. 6). Four of the huts contain upright blocks, described as 'anvil' stones, the purpose of which is unknown.

The hearth was located either at the centre, or opposite the door. Ash from the hearths was found to be from oak and willow twigs (not logs) and peat. This shows that when Grimspound was occupied, local forests had been depleted and replaced by sufficient peat build up for it to be used as fuel. Cooking holes contained granite pot boilers—pieces of stone heated in the fire and dropped into pots of water sunk into the ground—the pottery of the time not being fireproof.

The 1894 excavation noted that most of the houses near the entrance had no signs of human habitation and might therefore have been used for livestock or storage. Elsewhere in the settlement, a number of finds suggest links with areas beyond Dartmoor. A flint arrowhead must have been brought from elsewhere as flint is not available locally, and the clay used for the pottery did not come from a local source. The absence of any quern stones used for grinding cereals also suggests that the people of Grimspound relied on goods from outside.

Grimspound is thought to date to the Late Bronze Age, between 1450 and 700 BC. By about 1200 BC settlement patterns were changing; the thin moorland soils deteriorated and a change in climate brought heavy rainfall, so that the land could no longer support the same levels of occupation.

The name Grimspound was first noted by the Reverend Polwhele in his History of Devon of 1797; it may have derived from the Anglo-Saxon god of war, Grim, also known as Woden, or Odin.

References and further information

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Grimspound English Heritage website: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/grimspound/>

Legendary Grimspound: http://www.legendarydartmoor.co.uk/grim_pound.htm

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