

Mendip Hills AONB



1. Black Down, WWII and Starfish

In World War II (1939-45), Black Down became a key site in the defence of Bristol.

The threat of invasion troubled everyone, particularly at the start of the war when our Allied Command and the German Luftwaffe battled for control of the skies. Obstacles were created anywhere that the Luftwaffe could land their aircraft.

On the long, narrow plateau at Black Down, in the summer of 1940, the approximately 1800 tumps that are still visible today were built to address this fear of invasion.

After the heavy bombing of Coventry and the Bristol Blitz in November 1940, more needed to be done. A top secret national programme of decoy sites was soon developed to protect cities as well as airfields and naval sites. The decoy town at Black Down was one of the first, may have been the largest, and there is some evidence to suggest the site might have been used experimentally.

Black Down actually invited enemy bombs by becoming one of these decoy targets. Enemy bombers approaching from the south would reach Black Down before Bristol.

It was hoped that by making the site resemble a poorly blacked-out Bristol at night, bombs would be dropped here instead. Black Down became what was known as a QL site (Q=night; L=lit).

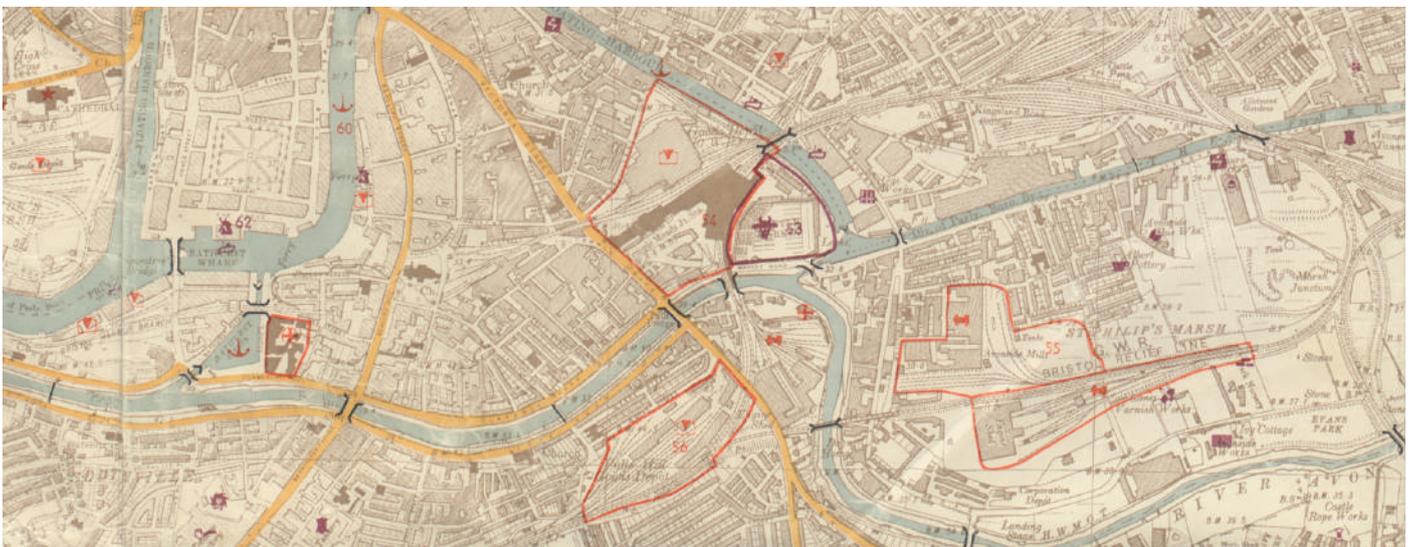
Ruth Coleman



▲ *The tumps were built in a grid formation at carefully calculated intervals to prevent enemy aircraft landing and taking off again.*

▼ *The Luftwaffe's map of Bristol - a key target because of its factories, railways and docks all supporting the war effort. Bristol Temple Meads Station, and the railway sidings were singled out and marked in red.*

Thanks to John Penny



Mendip Hills AONB



OS MAP

Explorer 141:
Cheddar Gorge &
Mendip Hills West
Landranger 182:
Weston-super-Mare

CONTACT

01761 462338
mendiphills@somerset.gov.uk

WAR WALK

A new War Walk on Black Down is available to download from the Discovering Black Down project website.

You can also listen to interviews with people who were involved and download this and other factsheets in this series.

OS GRID REFERENCES TO DECOYS

Burrington a (QL)
Canon's Marsh: ST 467578

Burrington b (QL)
West Depot: ST 465557

Burrington c (QF/QL)
Temple Meads: ST 475574

Burrington d (QL)
Pylle Hill: ST 481575

Burrington e (QL)
Kingsland Road: ST 482572

Burrington f (QF/QL)
East Depot: ST 497570

Q=Night
L=Lit
F=Fires

Black Down was then to become a QF site (F=fires). The Luftwaffe typically first sent pathfinder bombers to mark the target for the bombers that followed. If the pathfinder's bombs were extinguished at the same time as controlled fires were lit on Black Down, perhaps the second sortie would be fooled into bombing the wrong target.

In a further development of the decoy, different types of fire to imitate different ground conditions were lit. These were called Special Fires – code-named Starfish. Black Down was one of 12 decoy sites around Bristol and about 800 nationwide.

The final development, controlled from a bunker near Tynings Gate, was the installation of launch pads for anti-aircraft rockets known as a Z battery.

Black Down is now protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Thank you for respecting the archaeology.

▼ *The individual decoy sites on Black Down and a suggested walk to see the west bunker that controlled the electrical circuitry on the sites at their QL stage. The walk also passes through the tumps and areas replicating different targets in Bristol. Download a more detailed War Walk from the website:*

www.discoveringblackdown.org.uk



© Crown copyright and database right 2015. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100052600

Landscapes
for life
.org.uk

MENDIP
HILLS
One of the
AONB Family

 heritage
lottery fund
LOTTERY FUNDED