

The Cannock Chase Great War Tactical Model

In 1918 troops from the New Zealand Rifle Brigade created a scale model of the town of Messines on Cannock Chase in Staffordshire where they had their training camp. The Rifle Brigade had played a crucial role in the capture of Messines in June 1917 and the model served both as an instructional tool and a memorial to fallen comrades.

In 2013, No Man's Land – a community archaeology group that includes professional and amateur archaeologists and historians, who research and commemorate the Great War – worked with Staffordshire County Council, Natural England and consultants WYG to excavate the model. The project excavated and recorded the model prior to its conservation and reburial, securing its continued preservation as a unique relic of the conflict.

No Man's Land worked with over 100 volunteers, the majority of whom were local people. Many took part in the excavation but others contributed by taking aerial photographs or, in one case, playing songs and tunes from the period. Links with industry were also fostered through placements for Jaguar Land Rover staff. Meanwhile, information panels, site tours and informal briefings were used to explain the model to well over 1,000 visitors, including ramblers, students and even a children's birthday party. All of these efforts combined to promote a strong sense of place, develop understanding of the history of the Chase and to strengthen community bonds, including a strong sense of ownership of the model and other Great War remains on the Chase.

The results of the project will contribute to Staffordshire County Council's Great War commemorative trail and add to the developing story of Cannock Chase as a major Great War training area.

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Services Department:

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Fax: 01793 414926

Textphone: 0800 015 0516

E-mail: customers@english-heritage.org.uk