

Sheet 1

Goonhilly

WORLD
WAR
TWO



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Oblique aerial view of RAF Dry Tree during the war, taken from the north-east ©IWM



Some of the most obvious historical remains on Goonhilly are less than 100 years old. But they still bring an air of mystery...what, for example, are those straight lines of small, vegetation-covered mounds marching across the heath?

During World War Two, radar stations across the country were set up to detect and monitor approaching enemy aircraft and alert the RAF to potential attacks.

One of these stations – RAF Dry Tree – was built at Goonhilly, and many of the buildings are still there, albeit in varying states of repair.

Although you can't go inside, you can climb onto the roof of the largest remaining building – the receiver block [B] – and enjoy a panoramic view of the heathlands, while imagining how beneath your feet radar operators (mainly women from the Women's Auxiliary Air Force) would have busily monitored the skies round the clock, alerting the nearby RAF Predannack or RAF

Portreath airbases to incoming raids. The buildings of the transmitter station are now beneath the Earth Station site, but from the receiver station roof you can spot other buildings, including air raid shelters and a small building called the 'friend or foe' cubicle from which enemy aircraft would be identified by sight. Many of the buildings, however, have an uncertain function, as there is no site map from the time RAF Dry Tree was operational.



Radar operator ©IWM

How did the radar stations work?

During World War Two, a ring of radar stations – called Chain Home – was built along the coastline of south and east Britain. Radar detection works by transmitting pulses of radio waves that bounce off objects and are returned to a receiver dish or antenna, enabling the location, speed and height of objects, such as aircraft, to be monitored.

This is what happened at RAF Dry Tree. Radio wave pulses were transmitted from four 360-foot tall steel transmitter masts, and received by antennae located on two tall wooden towers next to the receiver block: you can still see the concrete bases for the latter immediately to the south of the receiver block.

So, what are those lines of mounds?



Goonhilly is flat and open, and close to the south of the country, and so there were fears that German gliders would use it to land. An ingenious solution was found to prevent this: lines of earth mounds were built, each supporting a tall pole, thus stopping a glider from landing. In fact, no enemy gliders ever tried to land on Goonhilly, but they would have found it difficult.

The poles are long gone, but the mounds remain, covered in heather and other heathland flora.