

SOUTH FIELD DOWN, SYDLING ST NICHOLAS, DORSET
Archaeological Observations and Recording



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South Field Down, Sydling St Nicholas, Dorset Archaeological Observations and Recording, July 2002

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Report written by:

Peter Bellamy

Prepared on behalf of:

English Nature
Slepe Farm
Arne
Wareham
BH20 5BN

South Field Down, Sydling St Nicholas, Dorset

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SUMMARY

A watching brief was carried out during the construction of a new barn on South Field Down, Sydling St Nicholas (SY 6238 9676). The southern edge of the barn was on the line of the bank of a large Early Iron Age enclosure, which was visible as an earthwork in the 1960s. No trace of the bank was observed during the groundworks, indicating that it has been completely ploughed out.

INTRODUCTION

This project, comprising an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a new barn, was commissioned by English Nature following advice from Steven Wallis, Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council.

The site is located within Hog Cliff Hill Nature Reserve, on a north-south ridge, between the River Frome and Sydling Water (Figure 1). At the southern end of the ridge is Hog Cliff Hill which rises up to a height of 192 m. The site lies on South Field Down, to the east of Hog Cliff Hill, at Ordnance Survey NGR SY 6238 9676, about 70 m to the east of the A37 Dorchester–Yeovil road and adjacent to the Sydling St Nicholas and Frampton parish boundary (Figure 2). It is on the southwestern edge of a steep coombe running down eastwards to Sydling Water. It lies at a height of about 180 m above OD. The geology is mapped as Tertiary pebbly clay and sand drift deposits over Middle Chalk (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1:50,000 Sheet 327 *Bridport* 1974).

The groundworks comprised the construction of a cut-and-fill platform about 15 m by 25 m to form a flat base for the barn construction. The southern half of this area was excavated down to a maximum depth of 1.95 m. The northern half of the area was built up. The groundworks were started by excavating a trench down to the required depth around the west, south and east sides of the area to define the limits of the site, then the topsoil was stripped off the rest of the area. The subsequent excavation for the creation of a level platform was not observed.

The fieldwork was carried out between 31st July – 1st August 2002 by Peter Bellamy.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge English Nature and Webb and Ford Ltd for their help and cooperation during this project.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies within an area rich in prehistoric remains. There are isolated Early Bronze Age round barrows on the top of the downs, the nearest to the site is 200 m to the west on Hog Cliff Hill (RCHME 1952, 153). There are numerous extensive traces of prehistoric field systems still surviving in the surrounding landscape.

The site lies on the northern edge of a large Early Iron Age enclosure (Figure 2). This enclosure was investigated in 1959–1960 by Philip Rahtz (Ellison and Rahtz 1987) and was shown to have had an external bank and internal ditch and a number of circular stone structures within it. The bank and ditch were still visible as earthworks in the early 1960s (Figure 3). The Early Iron Age enclosure incorporates part of a much smaller oval enclosure dated to the Late Bronze Age and Earliest Iron Age, situated about 100 m to the south of the site. It also had an external bank and



internal ditch and the small part of the interior excavated revealed many timber-built round houses.

The enclosures were bisected by the Roman road from Dorchester to Ilchester, which follows the line of the present A37.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of the archaeological observations was to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on the site.

The archaeological works aimed to observe and record all the in situ archaeological deposits and features revealed during the groundworks to an appropriate professional standard.

METHODS

The observations were carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (1994, rev. 1999).

The location of the groundworks was surveyed by taped measurements from the existing field boundaries. All depths have been recorded as below present ground levels.

All archaeological deposits and features exposed during the works were recorded using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records.

The records have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current UKIC guidelines and the requirements of the receiving museum, Dorset County Museum.

RESULTS

No trace of any earthwork remains of the bank of the Early Iron Age enclosure were noted in the area close to the site, though the long grass made it difficult to observe subtle variations in the ground surface.

Observations during the excavation of the initial trench round the perimeter of the site revealed a layer of grey brown clay loam topsoil about 0.3 m deep overlying natural gravels (Plates 2 and 3). There was some slight variation in the thickness of the topsoil across the site with slightly thicker topsoil in the northeast and southwest corners of the site but neither area appeared to be archaeologically significant.

The upper surface of the underlying chalk bedrock was observed in the southwest corner of the trench at a depth of 1.5 m. No archaeological features were identified.

No archaeological features were identified following the topsoil stripping of the rest of the site.

The area was scanned for artefacts during topsoil stripping. No finds were observed.

CONCLUSIONS

The southern part of the site lay on the line of the ditch of a large Early Iron Age enclosure. However, no traces of the bank were observed, either as earthworks in the field surface, or during



the groundworks. It is known that the bank was visible as an earthwork until at least the early 1960s. It would appear that the bank has now been completely ploughed out.

PROJECT ARCHIVE

The archive (Terrain Archaeology Project No. 53097) will be deposited with Dorset County Museum, which has agreed in principle to accept the archive, subject to fulfilment of the Museum's requirements of the preparation of archaeological archives. A copy of the microfilmed archive will be deposited with the National Monuments Record.

REFERENCES

Ellison, A., and Rahtz, P., 1987 'Excavations at Hog Cliff Hill, Maiden Newton, Dorset'
Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society **53**, 223–69.

RCHME 1952 Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England 1952 *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the county of Dorset* 1, West.

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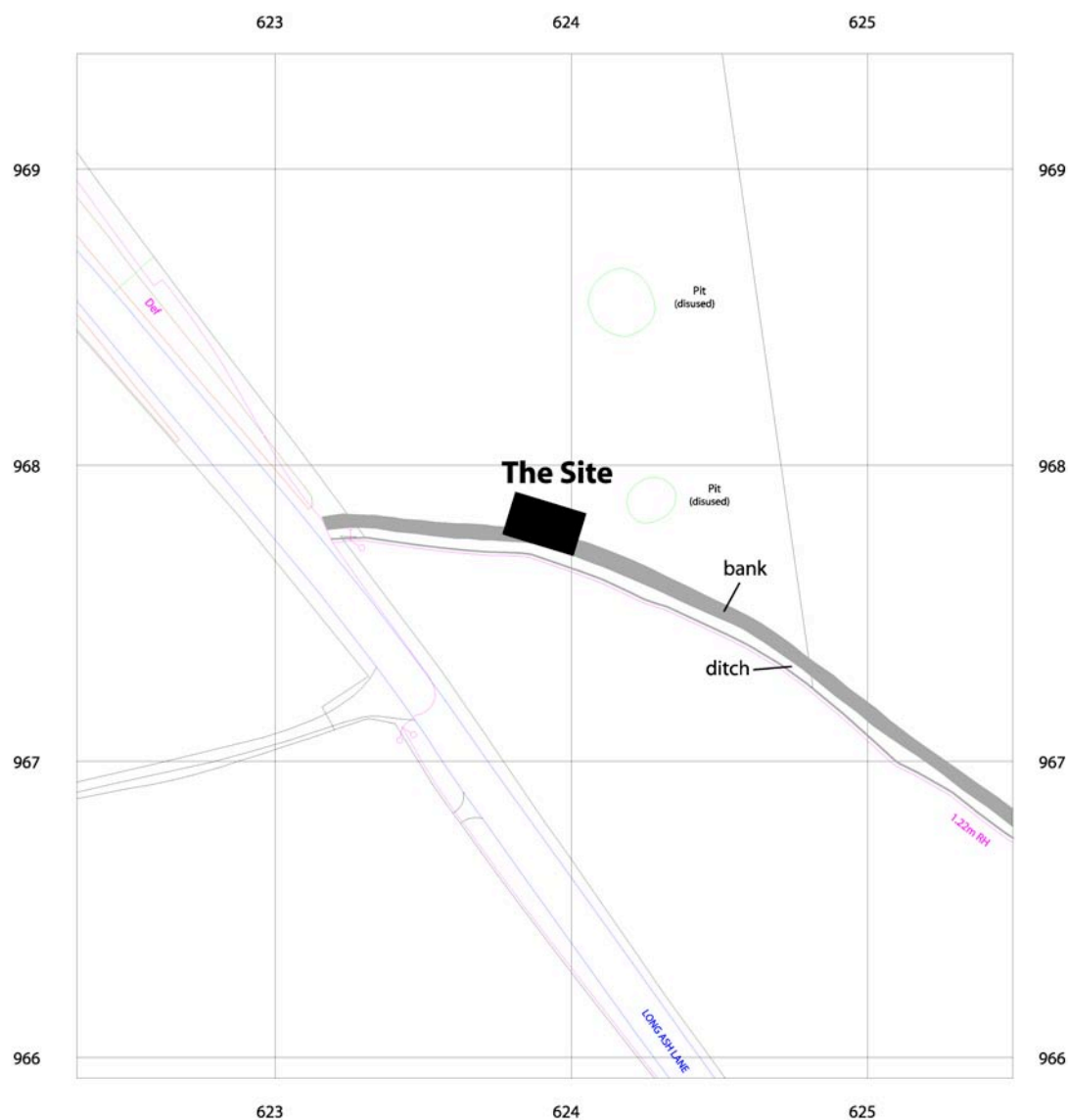


Figure 2: Location of the site in relation to the former earthworks of the Early Iron Age enclosure.

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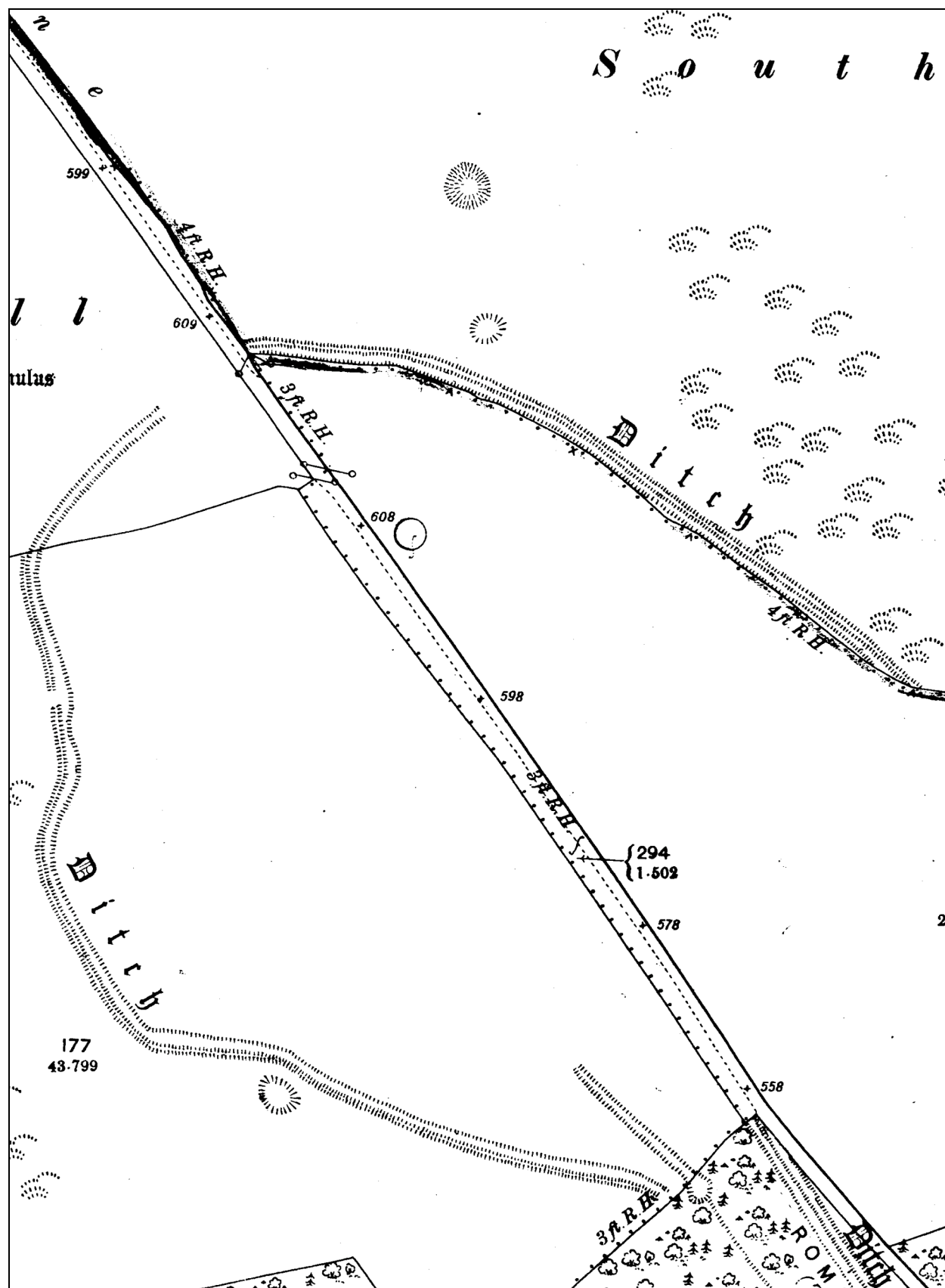


Figure: Extract from 1902 25-inch Ordnance Survey map Dorset Sheet XXX.16, showing the earthworks of the Early Iron Age enclosure. (Crown Copyright)



Plate 1: General view site from east



Plate 2: South end of site from west



Plate 3: West end of site from north