



Herefordshire Archaeology
Conservation and Environmental Planning
Planning Services
Environment Directorate
Herefordshire Council

Credenhill Fort
Herefordshire:
A Summary Excavation Report
Phase 1, 2007
NGR: SO 451 446

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No 231

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Herefordshire Archaeology is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, maintains the county Sites and Monument Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects. The County Archaeologist is Dr. Keith Ray.

Credenhill Fort Herefordshire: A Summary Excavation Report

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 231

Herefordshire Archaeology, January 2008.

Summary

This summary report describes the rationale, extent and results of excavation carried out at Credenhill Fort, Credenhill, Herefordshire by Hereford Archaeology in 2007.

This work is the first season of a projected three-year project at the site. The purpose is to provide information on the type and preservation of archaeology on the site in order to provide a better picture of the use of the site in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods, to provide interpretative material, and inform future woodland management on the site.

One of the main aims of the work in 2007 was to examine earthwork remains that it had been suggested might be part of an early smaller defensive enclosure. The results showed that there was no evidence to confirm this and that the earthworks were either part of the main Iron Age defensive works or were later, perhaps Medieval or Post-Medieval features associated with agricultural use of the site or quarrying. Iron Age and Romano-British features were recorded in other areas of the site and in one case may provide a focus for work in 2008. Damage caused by Tree planting and growth on the site both ancient and current was confirmed. Part of the course of a trackway that is planned to be upgraded for timber extraction was examined and confirmed to be a modern feature.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGR's are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50, and 0.02m at 1:20.

Figures contained within this report contain material from the Ordnance Survey. The grid in this material is the National Grid taken from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (100024618 2008). This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

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Introduction

This report provides a summary account of archaeological excavation at Credenhill Fort, Credenhill, Herefordshire. The work described is the first of an intended three seasons of excavation on the site and was carried out between the 20th August and the 12th October 2007.

Credenhill Fort is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (HSMR 906, SAM Herefordshire 61) surmounting an elongated hilltop 5km northwest of Hereford city (figure 1). The site is now heavily forested largely with plantation conifer, having been stripped of its former cover of broadleaved woodland in 1965. The monument stands within Credenhill Park Wood, which originated from a Medieval deer-park, and which retains a substantial part of its deciduous woodland. The Woodland Trust purchased this woodland, along with the fort, in 2004.

The project to purchase and to establish plans to restore the former woodland cover of the site was supported by Herefordshire Archaeology, acting as advisors to the Trust. Works following the purchase included archaeological surveys (specified and monitored by HA staff but undertaken by AIL Ltd of Hereford), and the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan for the Fort linked to the Management Plan for the site as a whole. A Project Statement was prepared in part as a means of specifying the background to and provisions for the current archaeological field project at the site. The aim is to investigate for conservation and information purposes key areas of the massive and presently tree-covered Iron Age hillfort/Romano-British settlement partly in advance of and partly in tandem with a programme of disafforestation of the monument. The Project Statement covers some of the same ground as a detailed Project Design prepared to support an application for Scheduled Monument Consent for archaeological works at the site in 2007.

Scheduled monument consent was obtained in August 2007 for a programme of work involving the opening of 8 trenches (the specific details of each trench are set out below). The two main trenches (1 and 2) were located in order to investigate earthwork features within the hillfort interior that might represent remnants of an earlier Iron Age enclosure on the hill (figure 2). Of the other 6 trenches one (trench 3) was designed specifically to examine a trackway that the Woodland Trust wish to upgrade for timber extraction and the others were designed to test for archaeological activity, features and deposits in various areas within the southern part of the hill, and to try to assess the effect that tree growth has had and is having on the archaeology. The latter objective will inform future management at the site especially the level of tree cover, if any, desirable within the hillfort interior.

Due to time constraints only 6 out of the intended 8 trenches were opened, those trenches not opened were numbers 6 and 8.

Location and Geology

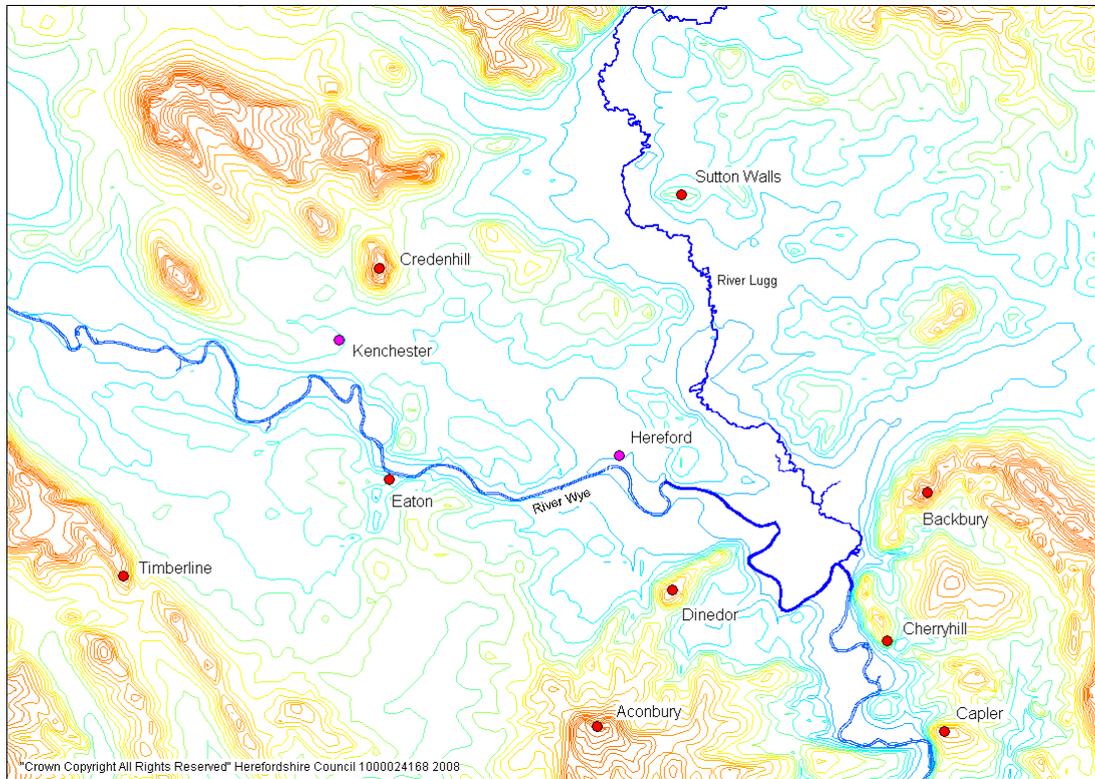


Figure 1. Site Location, nearby hillforts and topography

Credenhill Fort is located at NGR: SO 451 446 within the parish of Credenhill some 5km northwest of Hereford City. The site lies at a height of between 170m and 220m OD overlooking the Wye and Lower Lugg valleys and their confluence to the southeast of Hereford.

The underlying bedrock is Devonian Lower Old Red Sandstone of the St. Maughan's Formation. This is predominantly red-brown blocky mudstone with beds of sandstone and conglomerate, and with some inclusion of cornstones (immature calcretes). At Park Wood, Credenhill, there are also present some bands of Bishop's Frome limestone, but these apparently occur at lower elevations than the fort itself.

The soils are coarse loams of the Escrick I Association, mostly featuring non-calcareous brown earths (Ragg et al, 1984, 186-8). These soils are normally well drained, but are subject to localised periodic waterlogging.

Methodology

All trenches were opened and excavated by hand.

The stratigraphic sequences exposed in all trenches during the excavation were recorded by running context and scale drawings (1:20 for plans and sections). Context sheets were completed for all identified contexts. Photographic records were also made on digital media during the excavation.

Backfilling was carried out using a mini digger with a toothless ditching bucket.

Results

Trench 1 (25.00m x 4.00m)

Trench one was located in order to investigate a broad low earthwork bank up to 8.00m wide and c.0.40m high which was visible for approximately 90m running across the interior of the hillfort (figure 2). The size of the trench and its location (oriented north-south) was designed to establish the nature, date and structure of the bank and to test for the presence or absence of an accompanying ditch on either side.



To both the north and south of the bank below a highly organic leaf mould (001) and a silty clay loam (002), the latter on average around 0.20m deep, a rough stone surface was encountered. The density of this suggested deliberate deposition perhaps for hard standing but it is possible that the stone was derived in-situ from the underlying natural subsoil which in this location was a very stony clay.

No ditch was present within the area of the trench and the bank material, which in nature was indistinguishable from 002, is most likely to have accumulated through ploughing as a lynchet or headland. This interpretation is supported by the presence of numerous abraded sherds of Romano-British pottery and two coins of probable Roman date recovered from within the bank material.

Plate 1 Trench 1 at a late stage of the excavation

A number of negative features were recorded within the trench, the most notable being a large pit below the bank or lynchet material. Although only part of the pit lay within the area of the trench its minimum measurements were 2.20m by 2.60m, and its base was 0.50m deep below the present surface of the subsoil. Pottery from the pit fill was exclusively Iron Age in date. None of the features excavated had an identifiable function and it is likely that they had been truncated by the later ploughing activity.

Tree roots had in places caused a high degree of damage and where these penetrated features there was potential for mixing and disturbance of deposits and contexts (Plate 2).



Plate 2 Root disturbance within a negative feature

The excavation of trench 1 established that the linear earthwork feature was not part of an early hillfort defence. It is most likely a post Romano-British feature that accumulated gradually probably due to agricultural activity within the hillfort interior. There was only minimal evidence of activity attributable to the occupation of the site in the Iron Age or Romano-British periods. Evidence of damage to archaeological features and deposits due to root penetration was recovered.

Trench 2 (17.00m x 4.00m)



Trench 2 was located on the inner (northern) edge of the Iron Age quarry ditch (Figure 2) to try to establish the nature of a complex of earthworks.

At this point the natural hill slope steepened before dropping into the inner quarry ditch, and part way down this slope a terrace ran east west along the slope.

The trench was oriented north-south. Excavation showed that there was an accumulation of hill wash (003) on this slope that was up to 1.40m deep. This deposit petered out where it met the terrace mentioned above which was defined by outcropping natural bedrock (009). Underlying the hill wash was a layer identified as a relict Brown Earth soil (005) the remains of an original ground surface.

Plate 3 A general view of Trench 2 showing the terraced platform with metallised surface

This in turn, predominantly overlay the natural clay. This was not the case however in the area underlying the previously mentioned terrace. Here it was truncated by a deliberately levelled area or platform that had been cut into the natural sub soil. The hill wash deposits here covered two stone surfaces, from both of which Iron Age pottery was recovered. It is also interesting to note that a small quantity of metalwork was recovered from underneath the eastern sealed stone surface. That these surfaces were different features is indicated by their difference in thickness and by a stone free band c. 1m wide that separated them. Their position within the stratigraphic sequence however was shown to be the same.

In the southwestern part of the terrace, cut into the bedrock was a posthole with a post-pipe of approximately 0.35m in diameter. No dating evidence was recovered from the posthole and it is unclear whether this is related to the stone surface or is a later feature.

A sample in the form of a soil monolith was taken of the putative Brown Earth soil. This has been assessed for potential for pollen analysis and soil micro-morphology (See attached specialist assessment).



The earthworks here are probably best interpreted as being associated with the hillfort quarry ditch. Iron Age activity on the edge of the ditch had become buried under some depth of later hill wash. The terrace was partially defined by a band of outcropping bedrock and this may have been utilised in the Post-Medieval period as a trackway serving the extensive quarrying in the southwestern area of the hillfort.

Plate 4 The soil profile at the northern end of Trench 2. The preserved Brown Earth soil can be seen in the lower third of the profile

Trench 3 (12.00m x 2.00m)

Trench 3 was placed specifically to investigate the nature and preservation of two trackways that at this point diverged (figure 2). The western trackway appeared to be more recent (it is the main track now serving this part of the woodland) and the Woodland Trust proposed to resurface this one to facilitate timber extraction. The other was defined by a slight depression with a low bank on the eastern side.



Trench 3 was oriented east-west. It was clear from the excavation that the western track is modern and was almost certainly constructed during the 1960s when the current woodland was planted. It had been cut down (bladed) into the gentle hill slope by (at this point) 0.40m to create a terraced trackway. A shallow drainage trench was cut along the western (upslope) side and ruts had been filled with lengths of cordwood.

Whilst no track bed could be detected for the other trackway, the material forming the low flanking bank established its date. This was 19th century brick fragments and glazed tile. The presence of a number of small limestone nodules suggests that it may have been used for the transport of limestone from the northern end of the hill (see Location and Geology above).

Plate 5 View of the excavation across the two trackways, the western more recent one is in the foreground

It is likely however that the track had utilized an earlier linear hollow or feature, possibly quarrying or even an earlier trackway, which appeared to date to the occupation of the hillfort. This was indicated by the fact that overlying the natural bedrock were a series of deposits that contained some quantity of Iron Age and Romano-British pottery.

Trench 4 (10.00m x 2.00m)

Trench 4 was located near the summit of the hill (Figure 2) on the edge of a flat plateau. It was oriented east-west and was located deliberately to investigate a suspected sawpit and its associated spoil heap. In this way it was hoped to test the level of preservation of any archaeology under the spoil heap where some protection may have been given from tree root disturbance. It was anticipated that it would also give a cross section through the surviving stratigraphy within the sawpit itself. The deposits in this trench proved to be complex and excavation was not completed in 2007. However the nature of the remains and the potential for a concentration of features and cultural material provide a potential focus for a larger area excavation in 2008.



On excavation the sawpit was found to have been cut through a metallised surface that in turn lay upon a deposit (021) containing some quantity of Romano-British pottery including a possible amphora handle. The sawpit itself had been backfilled with material containing a quantity of burnt clay and charcoal. Intermixed with this was also Romano-British pottery. The fill of the pit had some complexity and it is not clear if the burnt material was redeposited disturbed archaeological material or whether it was derived from a later industrial activity associated with the “saw” pit. The fragmentary remains of an iron charcoal oven were found in close association with the pit and it is therefore possible that the pit may have been dug to obtain clay for sealing the oven or for some other purpose.

Plate 6 Trench 4 during excavation. The metallised surface is on the right (north) and the burnt material within the backfill of the “sawpit” on the left (south)

In the eastern end of the trench outside the area disturbed by the later sawpit, two further large features (one linear and one circular) were identified cutting through deposit 021. The main part of these appears to fall outside the limited area of the trench and were defined but not excavated. It is anticipated that these will be investigated in 2008 when a larger area of the metallised surface and any associated features or structures might also be examined.

Trench 5 (10.00 x 2.00m)

Trench 5 was located virtually on the highest part of the hill (figure 2). It was placed to examine a quarry delve and its associated spoil heaps. In a similar way to trench 4 it was intended to test the preservation of archaeology below later spoil heaps and to examine deposits where these may have been cut through by the quarry activity.

In terms of features and archaeology this trench proved to be disappointing. It appears that the area of quarrying, fairly extensive in this area, had either been stripped of overlying topsoil (including archaeology) prior to quarry digging or that the area had been extensively reworked. No features or deposits were identified either within the area of the quarry scoop or below the associated spoil. Some quantity of Romano-British pottery was however recovered including two small sherds of Samian ware.

The quarry was shown to be fairly shallow, undisturbed bedrock being encountered only 1.00m below the surface of the modern ground level. The quarries were probably exploratory rather than productive.

Trench 7 (10.00m x 2.00m)

Trenches 6 to 8 were located on gently sloping ground to the south west of the summit of the hill and within the southwest quadrant of the hillfort (figure 2). Due to time constraints only the middle one of these, trench 7, was excavated.

No features relating to the hillfort were recorded, a modern drainage ditch being the only feature within the area opened. The stone free subsoil was exposed over most of trench with natural bedrock outcropping at the southwest end.

Post Excavation Programme

All the finds recovered from the 2007 excavations have been processed and dispatched to artefact specialists or conservators. Pottery has been washed and re-bagged and metalwork has been packaged in secure containers with silica gel.

Jane Evans of WHEAS is examining the Iron Age and Romano-British pottery to provide an initial assessment. It is obviously anticipated that further material will be recovered from the excavations in 2008 and 2009.

The conservation department at Cardiff University is carrying out conservation work on the metalwork recovered. This includes several pieces of iron, two coins and fragments of cast bronze and lead objects.

Dr Michael Allen of Allen Environmental Archaeology has already assessed the soil monolith from trench 2 and the report is attached.

Site archive

1. Site notebook
2. Photographs
3. Site drawings
4. Drawing Catalogue
5. Context Catalogue
6. This document
7. Assorted finds

Reports and other documents referred to in the text

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Validation

Herefordshire Archaeology operates a validation system for its reports, to provide quality assurance and to comply with Best Value procedures.

This report has been checked for accuracy and clarity of statements of procedure and results.

Dr Keith Ray, County Archaeologist