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Credenhill Fort Herefordshire: An Archaeological Field Evaluation June 2008

NGR: SO 451 446

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No 257

Report prepared by
D N Williams & P Dorling

Contents

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:
An Archaeological Field Evaluation Report

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 257

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Summary

This report describes the results of an archaeological field evaluation that was carried out in June/July 2008 prior to clear felling and extraction of a mature conifer plantation within the northern half of the interior of Credenhill Fort, Credenhill, Herefordshire.

Archaeological features and deposits were recorded in three out of four trenches excavated. In two cases these appear to be beam slots possibly associated with Roman military buildings. The only artefacts recovered were two small fragments of Iron Age pottery though these are likely to be residual. Evidence of ploughing, probably during the Medieval period, was also apparent.

The results were used to agree a methodology for monitoring timber felling and extraction from the site.

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 an account of an archaeological field evaluation that was carried out prior to the proposed clear felling of a mature conifer plantation from the northern half of Credenhill Fort, Credenhill, Herefordshire. The work described comprised the excavation of four trenches located in order to establish the presence or absence of archaeological features within the area of proposed clear felling and which took place between June and August 2008. The evaluation took place in parallel with a broader long-term project that aims to investigate the archaeology of the site in order to better manage and interpret the site to visitors. This project is described briefly below. Further information is available in summary reports (Dorling and Williams, 2008 and 2009). A final excavation report will be published after the completion of fieldwork and post excavation analysis. This is programmed for completion in 2010.

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 on-going archaeological field project at the site. The aim of this project 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 the proposed programme of disafforestation of the monument. The Project Statement covers some of the same ground as a detailed Project Design prepared to support the initial application for Scheduled Monument Consent for main archaeological works at the site in 2007. Scheduled Monument Consent for the evaluation was obtained by the Woodland Trust in May 2008

Location and Geology

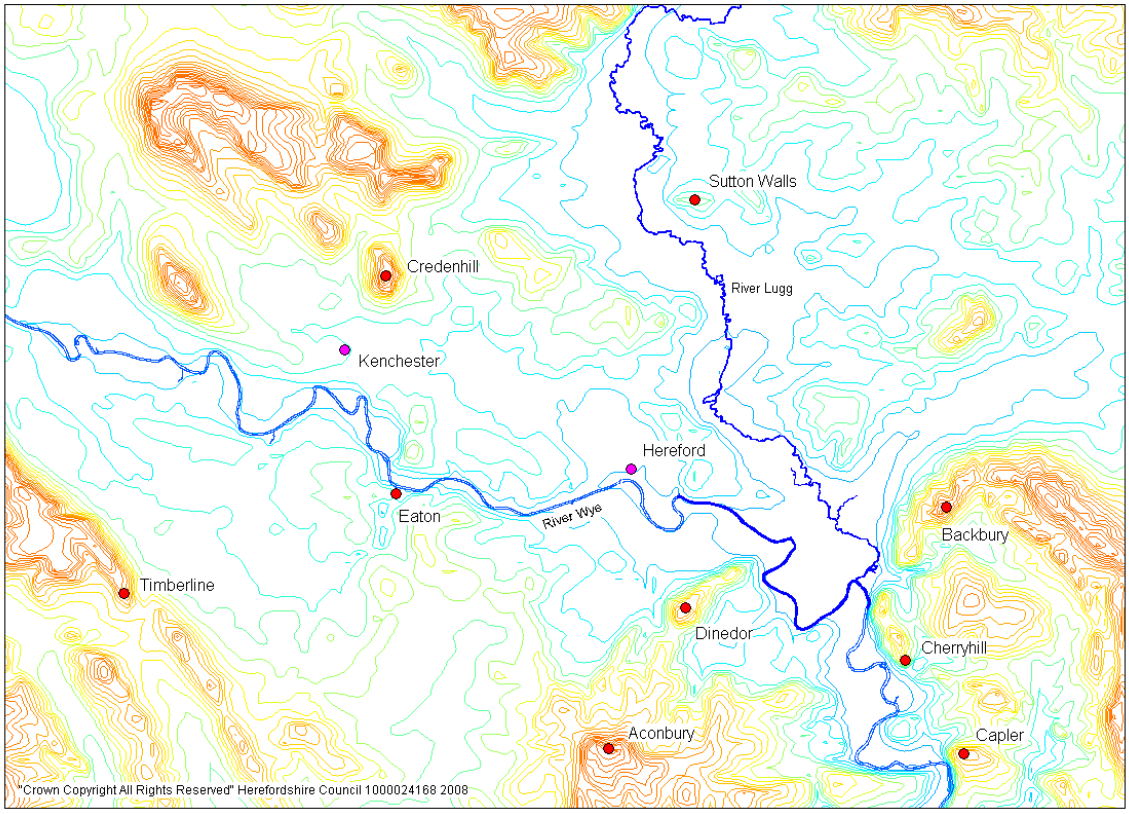

Figure 1: Site Location and topography

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

This work was carried out in parallel with a three-year on-going programme of work within the hillfort (Ray, 2003 and 2007, Dorling and Williams, 2008 and 2009). As a result of this the trench numbers in this report are part of a continuous sequence, so comprise trenches 11 to 14.

Four trenches were excavated during June and July 2008. Following detailed inspection of the topography, in order to identify areas of potential, these trenches, measuring c.4m x 4m (varied due to tree cover and root growth) were excavated along the ridgeline. The topsoil was mechanically removed under archaeological supervision, and then excavation was undertaken by hand.

The stratigraphic sequences exposed during the excavation were recorded by context and scale drawings (1:20 for plans and 1:10 for sections). Photographic records were also made on digital media.

Trenches were mapped using a hand-held Garmin GPSmap 60CSx Global Positioning System, enabling a ten-figure grid reference to be recorded for each one. This system is accurate to within approximately 10m under the tree canopy of Credenhill.

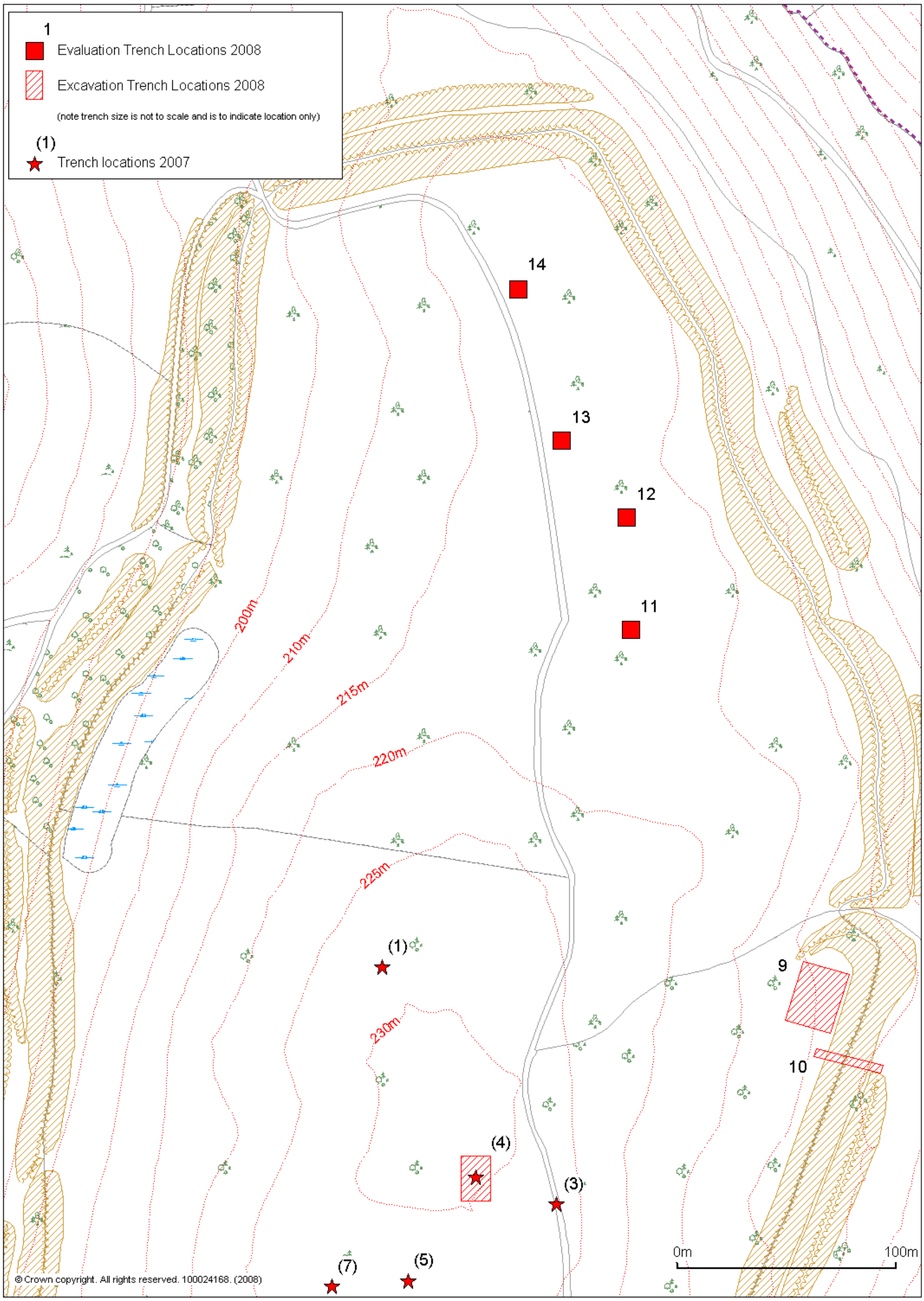

Figure 2. Trench Locations

Results

Trench 11 ([NGR SO 45171 44735] Figure 2, Plate 1)

Underlying the 0.01m deep mor humus layer (001) and a 0.11m deep layer of dark red-brown, humus stained silty loam (002) was a red-brown silt (003) with very small angular stones. Below this the natural subsoil consisted of a red-brown compact clay with some rounded stone of variable density. Cut into the natural (004) were two slots. The first slot (005) consisted of a small linear cut that extends from the northern trench section in a roughly south-easterly direction. The section of this feature within the trench was 1.10m long x 0.32m wide and 0.08m deep. It contained a clay silt mix (006) with flecks of fired clay and charcoal and a single tiny sherd of mudstone-tempered ware. The second slot (007) was parallel to the north trench section and measured 3m long x 0.40m wide x 0.08m deep. The fill (008) of this feature again consisted of a clay silt mix with charcoal flecks but no fired clay. What was evident is that this feature was clearly different from the first. The first was classically beam slot shaped with regular sides whereas the second varied in width throughout its length and had irregular sides. What was evident however was that the first appeared to respect the second and did not cross it suggesting the two may be contemporary. Lastly, again cut into 004, were three more linear features that appeared to be plough marks (010, 011 and 012). The average size of each was c.2.20m long x 0.15m wide but the depth was not established. It was also noticeable that the west end of each slot was tapered. The fills of each linear, 013, 014 and 015 respectively, were also the same, being an orange-brown silty clay with inclusions of degraded stone.

Plate 1: Trench 11 viewed from the north. Linear features in the foreground, plough marks to the rear.

Trench 12 ([NGR SO 45171 44790] Figure 2, Plate 2)

Underlying the 0.01m deep mor humus layer (001) was a 0.10m deep dark brown silty topsoil (002). With depth, this layer has an increasing clay content and an abundance of small angular stone. The next layer (004) comprised a very thin layer of brown-black organic soil immediately overlying both a dense stone deposit (005) and a layer of red-brown compact clay (008). Due to the shallow nature of these deposits the upper surface of the stone layer was removed during initial machining as a consequence this was only recorded in section.

Plate 2: Trench 12 as seen from the south. The 'road surface' is seen behind the ranging pole and can be seen to dip on either side.

In profile the surface of the stone appeared to be cambered on the east and west sides, suggesting it may have formed a track or narrow roadway. However as only a small area was examined there is the possibility that this could have resulted from localised ground disturbance.

Trench 13 ([NGR SO 45142 44805] Figure 2, Plate 3)

Underlying the 0.05m deep mor humus layer (001) was a red-brown silty loam subsoil (002) that was 0.08m deep. Below 002 was a 0.06m deep layer of grey-brown clay with silt (003) and occasional small rounded stone. Underlying this was a 0.14m thick layer of brown compact clay. At the base of the trench was a compact red-brown clay (005) that was interspersed with occasional small rounded stone. Cut into this layer were a series of linear features. On the east side of the trench a slot (006) (left hand side of Plate 3) extended the full length of trench. It was 0.27m wide and its base was between 0.12m and 0.16m below the surface of 005. The second slot (007) extended from the northern section (near section, right hand side on Plate 3) to a junction with 011, a similar feature running at right angles west beyond the area of excavation (Plate 4). It was 0.45m wide and varied in depth from 0.09m to 0.06m.

Plate 3: Trench 13 as seen from the north. The junction of the three main slots is located on the right hand side of the trench.

Plate 4: Close up of the slot junction as seen from the east. 007 extends to the right and 015 to the left.

Feature 011 was narrower than 007 but was 0.14m deep. Careful excavation of the junction between these two features (Plate 4) suggested that 011 was stratigraphically later. However the presence of an area of clean orange-brown clay, within the area defined by 007 and 011 may represent an internal floor surface (northwest corner of the trench) suggesting that they are common elements (beam slots) of a building.

The fill of both 007 and 011 (009 and 012 respectively) consisted of a dark grey-brown silt with inclusions of both charcoal and flecks of fired clay. The only artefactual evidence from this feature was a small sherd of Malvernian ware Iron Age pottery.

The final slot (015) extended from the junction to the south and was different in nature to the previous two. This slot was 0.26m wide and only 0.05m deep, stratigraphically it was the latest in the sequence.

Trench 14 (NGR SO 45135 44877] Figure 2, Plate 4)

No archaeological features were recorded within trench 14. Underlying the 0.01m deep mor humus (001) was a 0.10m deep layer of a dark red-brown humic stained silty soil (002). Underlying this was a 0.11m deep, orange-brown, natural looking silty clay (003) that was moderately compact and contained frequent very small angular fragments of bedrock. With depth the bedrock fragments became increasingly degraded (004). The base of the trench, at a maximum depth of 0.32m, consisted of bedrock (005).

Plate 5: Trench 14 as seen from the west

Conclusion

The evaluation trenches have clearly demonstrated that well-preserved archaeological features are present within the area of the northern half of the hillfort interior and, in this location, at a relatively shallow depth. The evidence for ploughing in the area suggests that only negative features survive, however away from the ridge top the build up of colluvium in hollows and at the base of slopes may have helped to preserve features and deposits.

The evidence from the evaluation was taken into account when considering the impact of the timber extraction on the site and a suitable methodology for monitoring the work was agreed with English Heritage and the Woodland Trust prior to the work commencing. In the event there was little impact on the site from the extraction, which was carried out by sky-lining whole felled trees to a central processing area of hard standing. After clear felling the stumps and any brash left on site were ground and mulched by machine in order to facilitate grassland recovery and one that could be machine mown if necessary. The success or otherwise of this will be seen over the next few years.

The results of the evaluation will be incorporated into the final overall excavation report. However it is interesting to note at this stage that the features in trench 11 and 13 support the evidence of Roman occupation of the site and the possible military nature of that occupation. Although only small areas were examined the features appear to be timber beam slots and their plan form corresponds to that which might be expected in barrack blocks. The features are unlikely to be Iron Age, the two small sherds of Iron Age pottery in the fill of the features could easily be residual. The lack of Roman ceramics though unusual, might be accounted for by the ploughing activity on the hilltop.

Site archive

1. Site notebook
2. Context sheets
3. Site drawings
4. Site photographs
5. This report

Bibliography and related reports

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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