Herefordshire Nature Trust Parkland Project, Archaeological Investigations 3: Haye Park, Richard's Castle

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Herefordshire Nature Trust Parkland Project, Archaeological Investigations 3: Haye Park, Richard's Castle

Monument No: 6368
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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.

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Summary:

The investigations within Haye Park formed part of a larger project entitled: The Herefordshire Nature Trust Parklands Project. This project involved the recording of ecological and archaeological / historical features within parklands across the county. Ecological and archaeological assets were recorded by volunteers under professional supervision in order to enhance and update the data held within the Biological Record Centre and The Historic Environment Record. The final Phase of the project included the more detailed investigation of a range of parkland features within Moccas Park, Brampton Bryan Park and Haye Park.

The investigations within Haye Park comprised the excavation of a section across the external ditch of a large earthwork enclosure within Haye Park.

The enclosure appears to represent the earthwork remains of some form of Late Prehistoric and / or Romano British, defended settlement or farmstead. The original ditch was rock cut to a depth of 1.85m and was 2.6m wide. The material excavated from the ditch was used to form the bank or rampart and the small external counterscarp bank. It appears that this may have been rapidly filled to form a 2.6m wide and 1.4m deep ditch before more gradually filling up. Later, it was re-cut in order to create a 1.8m wide and 1.1m deep ditch which appears to have been allowed to gradually fill up with erosion product from both the rampart and the counterscarp bank. A single sherd of pottery was recovered from the latest, undisturbed deposit filling the ditch. This has been dated to the 1st or 2nd century AD. The location of the sherd of pottery within the soil profile, its un abraded condition and size, strongly suggest that it was *in-situ* when excavated.

This would therefore provide a date for the latest occupation phase of the monument of the 1st or 2nd century AD.

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1. Introduction

This report provides an account of archaeological investigations at Haye Park, Herefordshire, (NGR SO 4920 7223). The investigations within Haye Park formed part of a larger project entitled: The Herefordshire Nature Trust Parklands Project. This project involved the recording of ecological and archaeological / historical features within parklands across the county. Ecological and archaeological assets were recorded by volunteers under professional supervision in order to enhance and update the data held within the Biological Record Centre and The Historic Environment Record. The final Phase of the project included the more detailed investigation of a range of parkland features within Moccas Park, Brampton Bryan Park and Haye Park.

2. Aims and Objectives

The investigations within Haye Park were undertaken in order to attempt to provide a more definitive date for the earthwork enclosure and possibly understand in better detail its relationship with the medieval deer park.

3. Location, Topography, Geology and Land-use

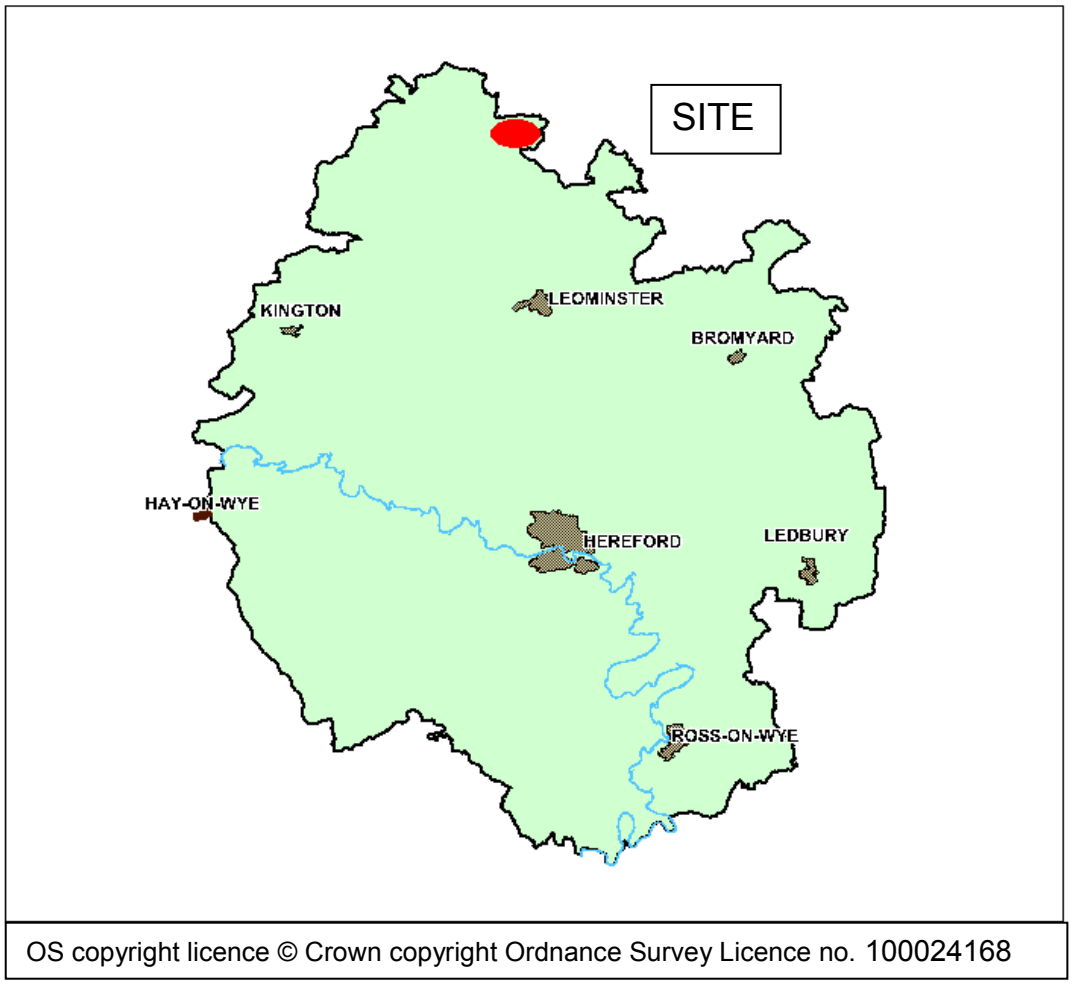

Figure 1: Location of the site within the County of Herefordshire

Haye Park, Location and Setting

The Site is located in Hayes Park Wood, part of Mortimer Forest in the County Parish of Richards Castle, Herefordshire, NGR: SO 9200 2236. It is located west of the B4361 between Overton in the north and Richards Castle in the south. The trench is located on the south side of a large enclosure (SMR 6368) northeast of the Hayes Park car park.

The Historic Landscape Characterisation Survey for Herefordshire (HLC), describes Haye Park wood as woodland, part of the Richards Castle Estate, with the adaptation of enclosures from woodland (HLC 83).

Geologically, the Haye Park wood is underlain by siltstone and limestone beds of the whitcliffe formation of the Upper Ludlow shales. The upper slopes to the northwest are underlain by siltstones and mudstones of the lower and upper Leintwardine formations. To the east and southeast lie sandstone and mudstone beds of the Downton Castle Sandstone formation of the lower Old Red Sandstone (British Geological Survey, 2000, Earp and Haines, 1971).

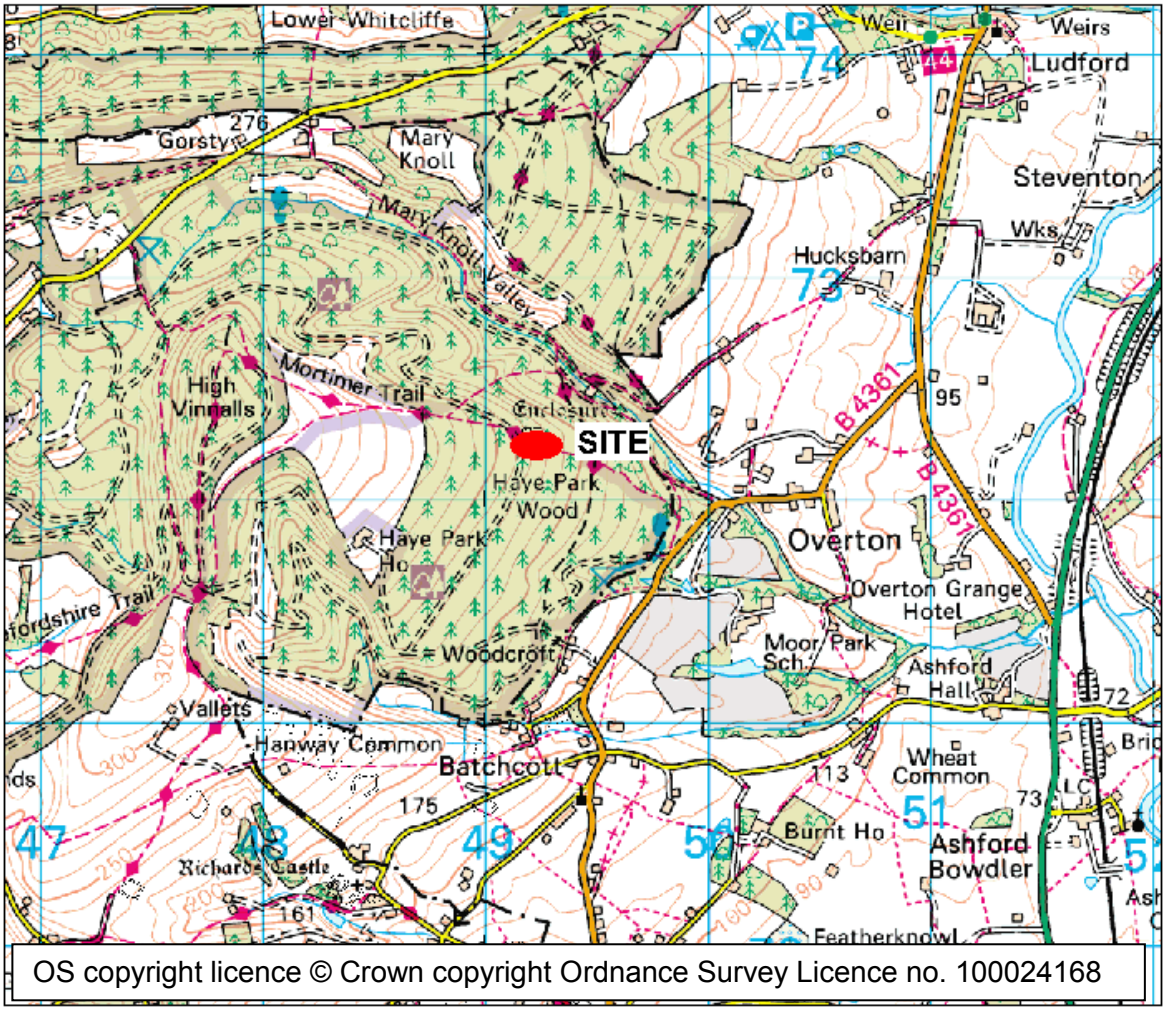

Figure 2: Location of site investigated within this report.

4. Methodology

Full written and drawn records of all excavated contexts were be made in accordance with best archaeological practice. Archaeological deposits, which are not excavated, were recorded to the maximum extent possible. Records included the overall excavation area and phase plans, as appropriate.

All on-site recording was undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Institute For Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations* (as amended 1999).

A continuous unique numbering system was operated. Written descriptions were recorded on pro-forma sheets comprising factual data and interpretative elements.

Where stratified deposits were encountered a Harris matrix was compiled during the course of the excavation.

Hand drawn plans and sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20 or 1:10 as appropriate.

The site grid and plans were accurately tied into the National Grid.

A register of plans was kept.

A register of sections was kept.

A full digital photographic record, illustrating in both detail and general context the principal features and finds discovered was maintained. The photographic record also included working shots in order to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological work.

Upon completion of the excavation, the trench was backfilled by hand.

5. Current Knowledge

The Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record records two possible origins of the enclosure (HER 6368). The first, recorded in 1934 by the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments, suggested that the enclosure possibly represents the remains of a homestead moat, and the second, suggested by the Ordnance Survey in 1972 that this is the “possible site of a lodge almost certainly connected to the park”. Both of these suggest that the site is of Medieval origin.

Further work was undertaken by Richard Lello (2003), Lello not only gave a more complete description of the site but also noted that the medieval Deer Park Pale cut the enclosure in half and on this evidence suggested the enclosure was not related to the deer park and that its origins may be far earlier.

The enclosure (HER 6368) is located on the South side of Haye Park Wood at NGR SO 349161 272294. It is roughly, rectangular, aligned north to south, approximately 85m long on the west

side. The enclosure consists of a ditch with an inner bank on the west and south sides and an outer bank on the north and east sides. It is generally in a good state of preservation, but is cut on the east and west sides by a medieval park pale (HER 33652) and by a footpath (Mortimer Trail). The ditch on the west side of the enclosure of the enclosure has been damaged by a modern forestry road, and the site is covered with immature conifers, birch, bramble and bracken.

During the course of the 2013 fieldwork, further details were noted concerning the form of the enclosure. There was some discussion in Lello's account regarding the disposition of the bank and ditch, whether one was inside or outside the other. During the walkover it became clear that despite varying erosion the main bank was inside the ditch but that there was also a slight counterscarp bank on the outside.

Lello also recorded that this enclosure is similar in form and dimension to enclosures identified only 5km away on Bircher Common i.e. HER 7021 that is only c.5m larger. These enclosures are identified as either Iron Age or Romano-British dating from 500BC to 400AD.

It appeared likely, prior to the excavation, that the origins of this enclosure would be Roman or earlier.

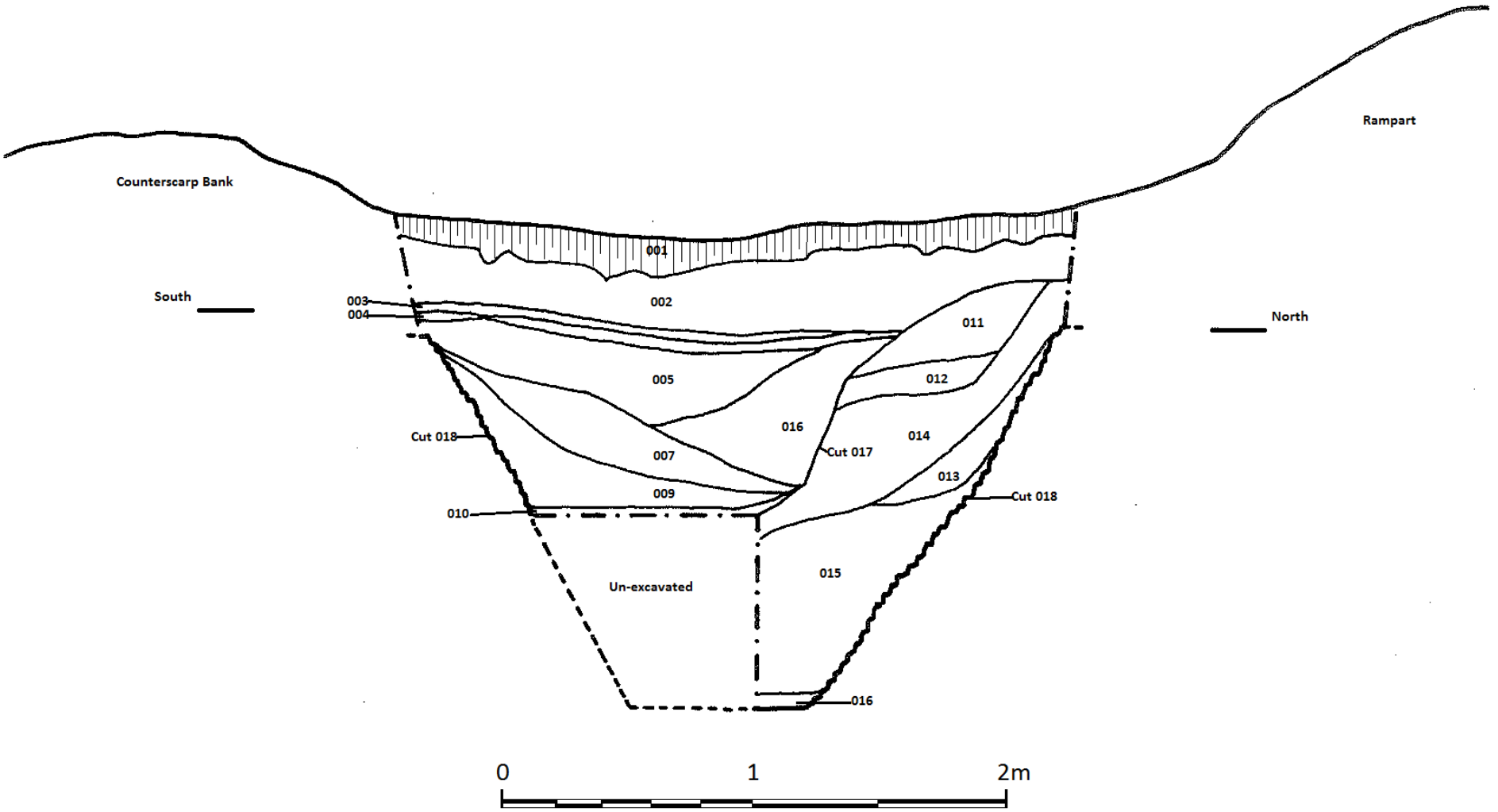

Figure 3: Drawing of Section across ditch, looking west.

6. The excavation

The excavation comprised a single trench, 2.2m in length (aligned north / south) and 1m wide. This was excavated to a depth of 1m over its entirety and a 0.35m by 0.5m sondage was then excavated in the northern end of the trench, in order to achieve the base of the ditch.

The section is described as it was excavated and phasing of the section is described within the discussion section.

The uppermost horizon (001) consisted of a 0.12m thick layer of Mull humus that overlay a band of redeposited material (002). This consisted of a 0.18m deep very silty, khaki coloured clay with occasional small rounded stone and very fine root. Underlying this layer were two different deposits. At the north end of the trench was a mid-brown silty clay (011) with angular stone inclusions averaging 0.10m x 0.10m. This layer sloped down from the north to south and was at first thought to represent the exterior surface of the enclosure bank. Butting this surface and extending horizontally across the rest of the trench was a very thin (c.0.04m) dark silty layer (003) with an abundance of small stone/grit. It was in this horizon that the only sherd of pottery was recovered. Underlying this was a layer of flat stone (004, Plates 1 and 2) that appeared to cap the ditch and as it also butted (011), it was assumed that (011) had been cut by (017) during the excavation of this ditch.

Plate 1: Stone capping (004) of the ditch with the cut (017) and the enclosure bank (rampart) at the top of the picture.

Plate 2: Stone ditch cap (004) with the dark grit horizon (003) from where the pottery was retrieved.

Underlying the stone cap were two deposits (005) and (016). The first, (016), had slumped down from north to south off the rampart and settled on layer (007) (see below). Deposit (016) consists of a very dark brown slightly silty loam with an abundance of small angular stone and fine root. The next context (005) directly overlay (007) and (016). Layer (005) was 0.26m thick and represents infilling from the opposite side of the ditch to (016), possibly representing erosion of what is now a slight counterscarp bank. Underlying both (005) and (016) was context (007). This layer also entered the ditch from the counterscarp side; it had a maximum thickness of 0.24m and was made up of a red-brown silt. This layer contained an abundance of very brittle slag and the red colouring of this deposit appears to be the result of burning or at least intense heat. Underlying this deposit was a further layer, (009). This layer consisted of a very fine, silty clay, with abundant small but very angular stones. What was of note was that this layer also sloped down from south to north like the preceding two horizons, but upon removal was found to butt a very finely cut bedrock ditch edge (018), (Plate 3).

Plate 3: Revealing the stone ditch cut (018) and the stone base.

It was also noted that the base of this cut, like the ditch cap, had been lined with flat stones (010) (Plates 4, 5 and 6). This means that this ditch was 1.80m wide and had a maximum depth of 1m.

Plate 4: Stone base of the ditch cut before the bedrock cut was revealed (left). The right side shows the cut for this ditch.

Plate 5: Revealed section at this point during the excavation.

What was clear at this point, is that the bedrock cut was only visible on the southern edge of this ditch and that although the flat stone marked the base of one ditch, the bedrock edge clearly continued downwards below it. It was also clear that the majority of the fills had entered this ditch from the outside (south) and not from the main rampart in the north. This clearly suggests that this ditch had been cut into the fills of an earlier ditch.

In order to clarify this phasing and the extent of further archaeological deposits, work continued on the northern side of the ditch with the removal of layer (011). This was an obviously a re-deposited fill that had been later cut by (017) for the secondary ditch. Underlying (011) was a thin band of mid brown very silty clay with occasional, mainly angular stone (012). This layer like (011) sloped down from north to south representing erosion from material forming the enclosure bank (rampart). This is in comparison to the previously discussed fill sequence of the later ditch, that had originated from material making up the counterscarp bank). Underlying (012) was context (014). This layer again sloped down from north to south and comprised a brown, silty clay with abundant small angular stones. This layer was also cut by (017) and was the first layer to extend underneath the stone base (010). This layer (014) in turn overlay both (013) and (015). The first of these, (013), sloped down from north to south and consisted of a thin band of orange/brown mainly silty clay and like most of the layers on this side of the trench contained occasional small fragments angular stone. It was on removal of this layer that the northern side of the rock cut ditch (018) was uncovered (Plates 6, 7 and 8). Underlying both (013) and (014) was a layer (015) consisting of abundant small/medium redeposited bedrock in a dark brown, fine silty clay matrix. This , in turn, overlay deposit (016). The thin base fill of fine silt (016), directly overlay the

horizontal bedrock base of the ditch. The total dimension of the rock cut ditch was 2.50 wide (north-south) and 1.90m deep.

Plate 6: In this photograph the bedrock cut (017) and the stone base (010) of the secondary ditch is clearly visible on the left side while to the right is the rock cut ditch edge clearly continuing down.

Plate 7: The finely cut bedrock (018) as identified on the north side of the excavated trench.

Plate 8: The base of the stone cut ditch can be seen in this photograph, further exposure was not possible due to its depth.

Although small in size, the excavation of this trench has proved to be of considerable significance and answered the majority of questions as set out in the aims and objectives section.

The original, (primary), ditch, which measured 2.50m wide by 1.90m deep, was cut into the natural bedrock to a depth of 1.50m; it was steep sided and flat bottomed. The base fill was c.0.40m thick and consisted of an almost horizontal layer of redeposited bedrock fragments that may suggest that it was deliberately backfilled using material from the rampart.. The overlying layers were however clearly the result of natural deposition, the differing layers sloping down from the top of the bank and counterscarp bank to the redeposited natural. Unfortunately not a single piece of datable evidence was retrieved from any of these deposits; small quantities of charcoal were recovered but were found in contexts containing significant root material.

The secondary ditch cut used the outer edge of the earlier rock cut ditch while the inner edge cut through the earlier ditch fills. This comprised a much smaller, shallower ditch which contained deposits which had eroded into the ditch from the counterscarp bank.

7. Discussion

The excavation has shown that the enclosure is not directly related to the medieval deer park, indeed it may be viewed as having stood in the way of the deer park's construction. It is unusual that the trouble was taken to cut through the ramparts in order to construct the park pale when it would have been easier and more economical to route the pale into either the north or south enclosure ditch and use the pre-existing earthwork. Indeed, pre-existing earthwork enclosures within other deer parks within the county appear to have been incorporated into the park and used as enclosures for activities such as warrening, (for example Wapley and Croft Ambrey hillforts).

Although only comprising one sherd of pottery, the artefactual evidence from the enclosure ditch suggest that the enclosure fell into disuse (at least in a domestic sense), during the late 1st or early 2nd century AD. The recorded ditch section shows that two distinct phases of occupation / use of the enclosure are apparent. These comprised the initial construction of a steeply sided rock-cut ditch and associated rampart which may or may not have included a small counterscarp bank. It is possible that this was purposefully slighted resulting in considerable quantities of rampart material filling the original ditch cut. The ditch was later re-cut, (as a much smaller ditch) and the spoil possibly used to form the counterscarp bank.

Despite the useful information recovered from the small scale excavation, a number of questions remain to be answered. The original construction date and use of the enclosure is unknown as is the date of its re-use.

It is however cleat that the enclosure was being used for some form of domestic activity into the late 1st or early 2nd century BC, suggesting that the original enclosure was constructed during the the Iron Age or perhaps earlier.

8. Acknowledgements

Herefordshire Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and co-operation of The Forestry Commission, in particular Alan Reid from the Forestry Commission and Lewis Goldwater, Project Co-odinator for Herefordshire Nature Trust, and Volunteers Gareth and Veronica Brown, Brian Jones, Timothy Epps and John Kilpatrick. The authors would also like to thank Jane Evans (WHEAS) for spot dating the pottery.

9. Bibliography

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Plate 2: Phase 2 ditch cap and associated section.

Plate 3: Bedrock south face and stone lined base of the Phase 2 ditch.

Plate 4: Stone base of the Phase 2 ditch.

Plate 5: Stone base and fills of the Phase 2 ditch.

Plate 6: Phase 2 ditch stone base and the rock cut original Phase 1 ditch.

Plate 7: The impressive north side of the Phase 1 rock cut ditch.

Plate 8: North side and base of the Phase 1 ditch.

11. Archive

43 digital photographs
1 site notebook entry
19 context cards
1Find
1 sheets of field drawings
sheets of inked drawings
This document