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Eaton Camp, Ruckhall, Eaton Bishop CP New Steps Watching Brief

**Report prepared by
Christopher Atkinson
Community Archaeologist**

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

Eaton Camp, Ruckhall, Eaton Bishop CP New Steps Watching Brief

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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.

Herefordshire Archaeology
PO Box 230
Blueschool House
Blueschool Street
Hereford
HR1 2ZB

i. Summary

This report discusses the results of a watching brief for the insertion of a gate and wooden steps constructed in order to enhance public access to the scheduled monument of Eaton Camp, Ruckhall.

The investigation forms part of the first stage of a year long study led by the Eaton Camp Historical Society with training and guidance provided by Herefordshire Archaeology.

The aim of the project was to excavate and record two foundation pits to take posts to support a gate. This was required in order to create a publicly accessible footpath onto the monument. This work was undertaken in accordance with Scheduled Monuments and Archaeological Areas act 1979.

ii. Introduction

The Eaton Camp Conservation Project was established during 2010 by Nancy Saldana, Chairperson of the Eaton Camp Historical Society. The project aims to promote and investigate the scheduled enclosure of Eaton Camp, a monument partially owned by the National Trust and identified as “At Risk” by English Heritage due to the complexity of ownership across the site.

In order to promote the monument, a circular walk leading from Eaton Bishop Village Hall would be created leading walkers through the interior of the camp. This new route would be supported by display panels and a publication, that would inform the reader of the history of the region and the results of the archaeological investigations carried out as part of this project.

The core aims of the project are:

- To add to our knowledge of the prehistory of Herefordshire and the United Kingdom through archaeological study to determine: when, how, and by whom Eaton Camp was built; its use over time; and its importance strategically and socially.
- Involve the local community and schools in ways that encourage them to view Eaton Camp as an important part of their history and heritage.
- To promote development of a Conservation Management Plan for the site in conjunction with local landowners, The National Trust, English Heritage and Herefordshire Archaeology.
- To research, record and disseminate information on other aspects of local history that help to place Eaton Camp in perspective.
- To impart new skills to local residents, students, and project volunteers that enables them to support the conservation of Eaton Camp in the future.
- To work toward the removal of Eaton Camp from English Heritage’s “At Risk” list.

A key aspect of the project is to improve public access to the late prehistoric/Iron Age enclosure of Eaton Camp. In order to improve access the National Trust sought to construct a flight of stairs to access the interior with a gate on the upslope to prevent livestock from escaping. Due to the protected nature of the site the National Trust sought Scheduled Monument Consent from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the criteria for which dictated the need for archaeological investigation prior to the erection of two gate posts.

iii. Aims and Objectives

The aims of the investigation were to identify any below ground archaeological features and artefacts to ensure their professional recording and conservation ahead of the erection of the planned gate to aid public access to the site.

The investigation consisted of the excavation of two 0.50m x 0.50m trenches, which, following investigation would form the foundation pits to hold gate posts.

Each deposit encountered was investigated fully in order to identify any artefacts or features which were recorded in full through a paper record using context/unit sheets of a professional archaeological standard. This data was then imported onto an Excel spread sheet and used to update and provide data for Herefordshire's SMR/HER.

Each archaeological deposit/feature was recorded at a scale 1:20 plan and sections made to a scale of 1:10. These would then accompany the report and database into the archive.

iv. Location and Geology

Located within the County Parish of Eaton Bishop, the hilltop enclosure of Eaton Camp (SAM 1001756/HE 10) is sited upon a promontory overlooking the River Wye to the north and Cage Brook to the south. At its highest point the promontory stands 90m OD with steep north and south facing slopes. To the west the topography gives way to gentle slopes, onto which the Iron Age ramparts were constructed in order to enclose the promontory.



Figure 1: Location of Eaton Camp in relation to the main towns and city in Herefordshire. © Herefordshire Council

The site is closely associated to the village of Ruckhall to the west, part of which is located upon the western ramparts of the partially Scheduled Monument.

The interior of the enclosure measures 6.8 hectares and is currently sub-divided into three fields. The southern two are under guardianship of the National Trust where as the northern most is under private ownership. The investigations carried out as part of the project centred on the land owned by the National Trust (who also owned the majority of the south-facing slope) as well as within the gardens of consenting homeowners in Ruckhall.

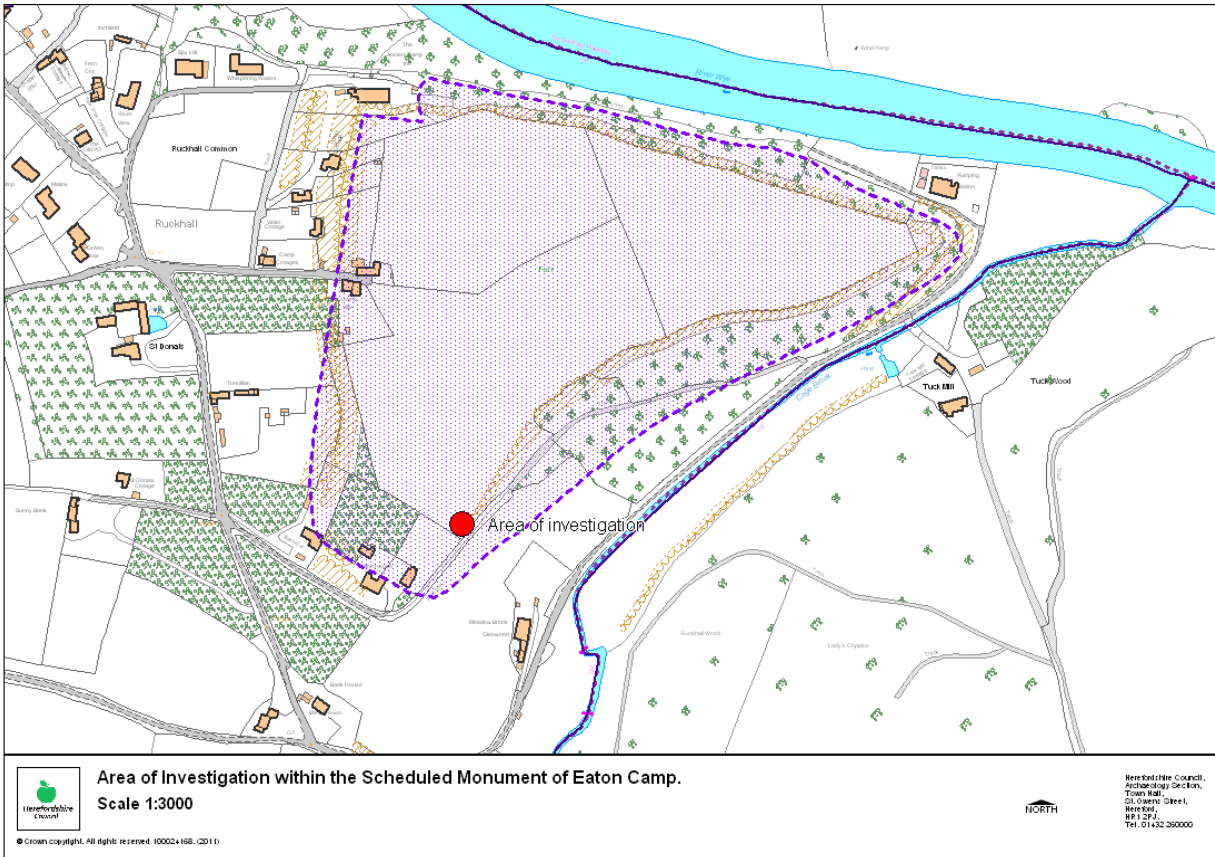


Figure 2: Location of Investigations within the Scheduled Monument of Eaton Camp, Eaton Bishop CP. © Herefordshire Archaeology

The geology underlying Eaton Camp and Ruckhall consists primarily of mudstones and siltstones of the Raglan Mudstone Formation. Further geological deposits include the second terrace deposits of the River Wye within the east of the enclosure. Underlying the western ramparts and village settlement of Ruckhall are 'Glacial Deposits, which include morainic sandy tills, gravels and clays¹.

¹ British Geological Survey, 1:50 000 Series, England and Wales Sheet 215, Ross-on-Wye, Solid and Drift Geology © Crown copyright 2000.

v. Past Fieldwork

Listed below are records obtained from Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record. They list relevant fieldwork carried out within and around Eaton Camp, Eaton Bishop, Herefordshire.

Eaton Camp

SMR Number: 907

Grid Reference: SO 454 393

Parish: EATON BISHOP, HEREFORDSHIRE

Promontory camp on S bank of Wye at junction with Cage Brook. Triangular form c18 acres (internal) steep natural slope forms only defence on N & SE sides except for length of scarp at S angle. Slight mound at E apex of triangle. Base of promontory on W side defended by rampart, somewhat denuded towards N end but average height of 11' towards S. Return scarp at NW angle may indicate position of original entrance. (1) Defences on approach side are massive, bivallate, although outer bank is now much spread & destroyed in places. Inner bank up to 5m high & turns at S end to complete defences. Several modern breaks, entrance though no longer apparent, prob at NW corner. Mound at E tip artificial. Possible additional strong point or belvedere. (5) Excavation by CEU in advance of pub extension in NW corner of rampart. (6) Salvage recording undertaken in mitigation of unsanctioned works within Eaton Camp. Part of the core of the internal rampart had survived. This was overlain by deposits of the 19th or 20th century. (7) Members of the archaeology section of the Woolhope Club visited the site to discuss the possibility of that it was also once the site of a castle. They noted the presence of a large mound within the interior of the fort. Loose stone lay on top of the mound and at its base and there appeared to be the remains of wall foundations extending from the mound on both banks of the fort. Possibly medieval, certainly later than Iron Age in date as there are traces of mortar and lime? (8) Watching Brief undertaken at Tresillian in 1999 but no features or finds of archaeological significance were present within the excavations monitored. (9) Scheduled Monument Consent granted by English Heritage for construction of flight of steps to facilitate safe access to the monument, 11/05/2011. (10)

Tuck Mill, E of Eaton Camp

SMR Number: 4838

Grid Reference: SO 45617 39239

Parish: CLEHONGER, HEREFORDSHIRE

'House, Mill & Garden' 'Mill pond Meadow' & 'Mill Flern Orchard' (1) Tuck Mill - OS 1964 (2) On the Cage Brook a bungalow stands on what appears to be the stone footings of the mill with some of its stone walling incorporated into the later brick walls. The leat is distinct for about 600 yards. (3) A watching brief revealed two stone features which may be associated with stone walling or they may be field drains. (4)

Ruckhall Mill, SW of Eaton Camp

SMR Number: 4782

Grid Reference: SO 4519 3892

Parish: EATON BISHOP, HEREFORDSHIRE

'Ruckhall Mill' on W side of Brook. (1) On the Cage Brook the mill has now gone and a brick house stands on the site. The mill was destroyed around 1920, it was believed to have had two external overshot wheels. On Cage Brook. Mill itself has been demolished but mill house remains. This mill closed down c1914. (2)

vi. Results

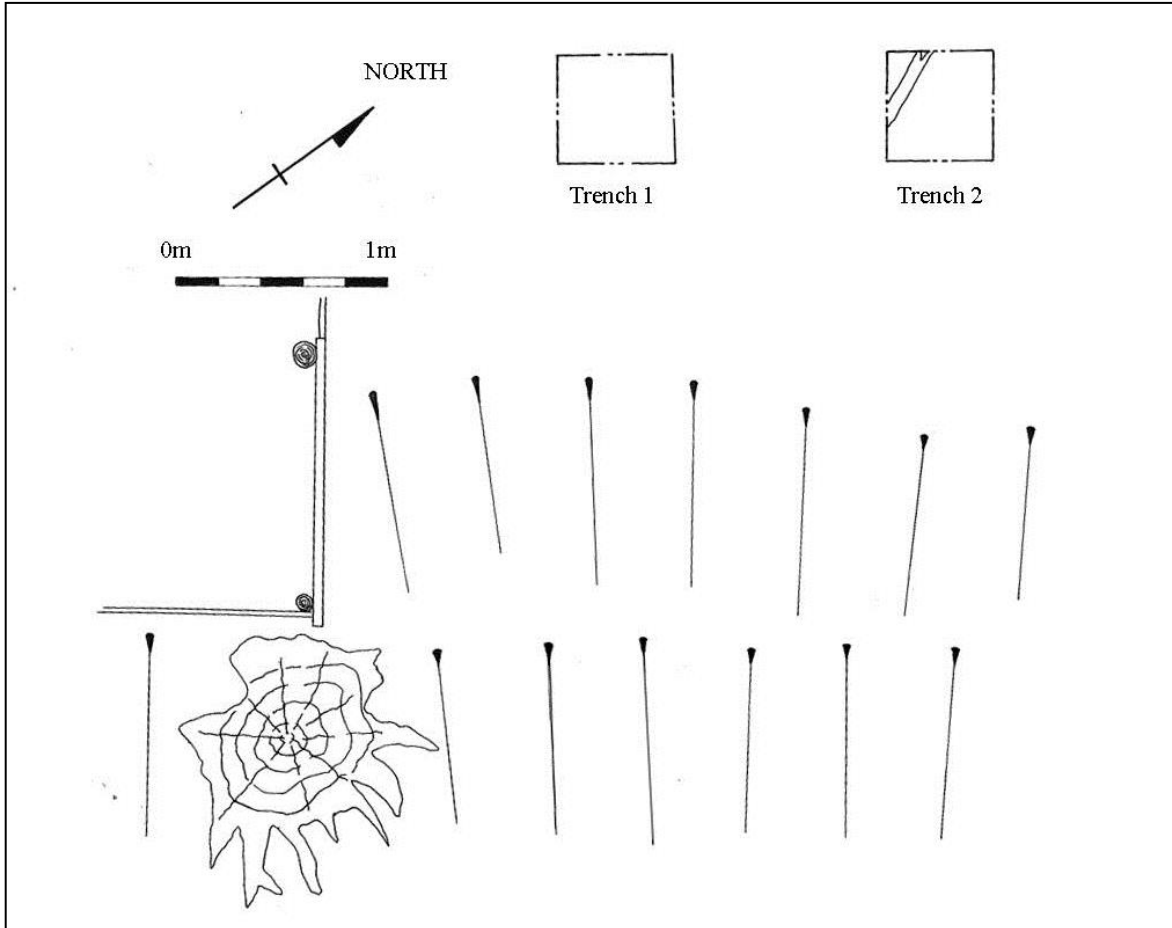


Figure 3: Detailed trench location within the interior of Eaton Camp (Scale 1:20) © Herefordshire Archaeology.

vi.1. Trench 1

Trench 1 lay to the west of Trench 2 and was excavated with the intention to facilitate a 'locking' gate post. The trench measured 0.50m x 0.50m and excavated to a depth of 0.60m.



Figure 4: Trench 1 at the end of excavation, view to the south. © Herefordshire Archaeology

The topsoil, context/unit 001 consisted of a light brown semi loam/leaf mould of friable compaction. The deposit measured c.0.14m thick.

The topsoil overlay a deposit of plough soil context/unit 002, the horizon measured c.0.27m thick. The deposit consisted of moderately compact, dark brown clay with occasional cobble/gravel inclusions and charcoal flecking. Underlying this deposit was an earlier horizon interpreted as plough soil, context/unit 003. The deposit was not fully excavated and was investigated to depth of c.0.20m. The horizon was red brown clay with gravel/cobble inclusions and occasional charcoal flecking.

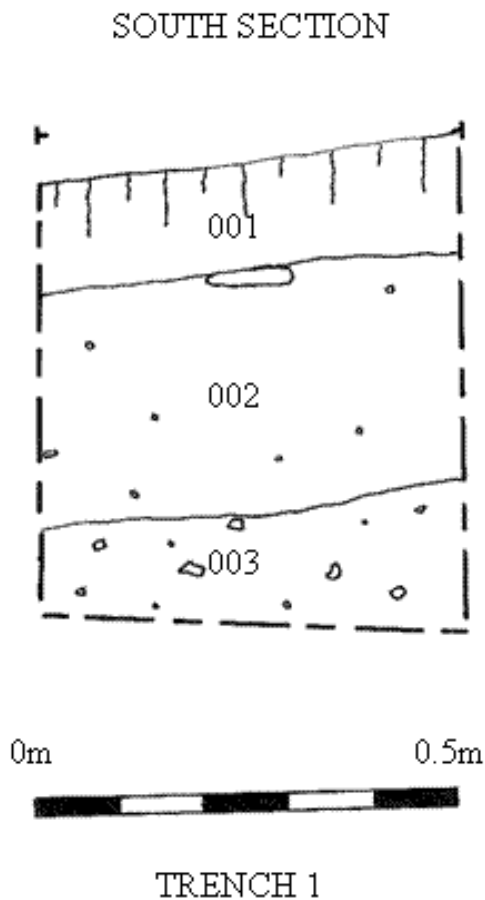


Figure 5: Trench 1 south section plan
(Scale 1:10) © Herefordshire Archaeology

No archaeological artefacts or features were identified within Trench 1.

vi.2. Trench 2

Trench 2 lay to the east of Trench 1 and was excavated with the intention to facilitate a 'swing' gate post. The trench measured 0.50m x 0.50m and excavated to a depth of c.90m.

Figure 6: Trench 2 at the end of excavation, view to the south. © Herefordshire Archaeology



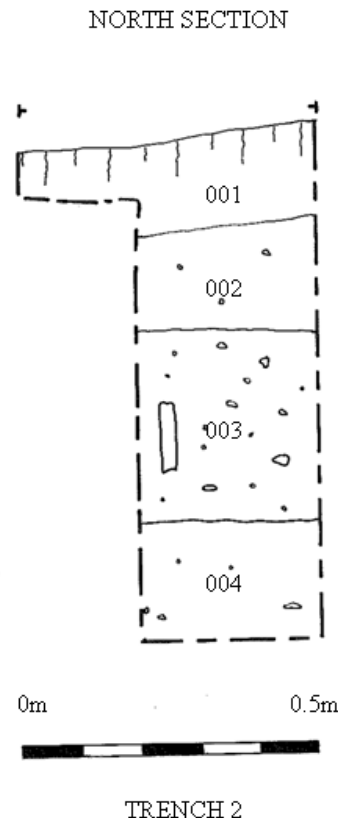
The topsoil, context/unit 001 consisted of a light brown semi loam/leaf mould of friable compaction. The deposit measured c.0.16m thick.

The topsoil overlay a deposit of plough soil context/unit 002, the horizon measured c.0.20m thick. The deposit consisted of moderately compact, dark brown clay with occasional cobble/gravel inclusions and charcoal flecking. Underlying this deposit was an earlier horizon interpreted as plough soil, context/unit 003. The deposit was measured c.0.32m thick. The horizon was red brown clay with gravel/cobble inclusions and occasional charcoal flecking.

The underlying deposit, context/unit 004 was identified as representing the natural subsoil. The horizon consisted of very compact orange red clay with degraded sandstone inclusions; unlike the overlying deposits no charcoal flecking was apparent. The deposit measured c.0.20m thick although it was not fully excavated.

No archaeological artefacts or features were identified within Trench 2.

Figure 7: Trench 2 north section plan (Scale 1:10) © Herefordshire Archaeology



vii. Discussion

The excavation of Trench 1 and Trench 2 ahead of the construction of a new gate and supporting steps revealed little in the way of archaeological features and artefacts that can be directly attributed to the Late Prehistoric/Iron Age enclosure of Eaton Camp.

The deposits excavated within Trench 1 and Trench 2 were uniform consisting of two horizons representing plough soil (context/unit 002 & 003) beneath the initial topsoil of a mixed leaf mould/loam. The topsoil lay directly above a horizon of compacted red/orange clay (context/unit 004) with degraded sandstone inclusions indicative of natural subsoil.

The plough soil deposits are likely to represent the ploughed surface of a potential rampart identified to the north during survey, early in 2011. The density of the plough soil deposit, c.0.50m thick, suggests that the material built up against the northern edge of a past boundary to the south. The boundary is no longer apparent at this location; however the southern edge of the enclosure is delineated by a mixed hedge and bank at a number of locations to the east of the investigation area (Atkinson, C, 2011).

viii. Acknowledgments

Thanks must be given to English Heritage and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for providing Scheduled Monument Consent to the National Trust.

To the National Trust for supporting the Eaton Camp Historical Society in their investigations of Eaton Camp Hillfort and improving public access to this historic site.

ix. List of Figures

Figure 1: Location of Eaton Camp in relation to the main towns and city in Herefordshire. © Herefordshire Council

Figure 2: Scale 1:25 000 extract of Eaton Camp in conjunction with the village of Ruckhall. (OS crown copyright 100024100 & Herefordshire Archaeology)

Figure 2: Location of Investigations within the Scheduled Monument of Eaton Camp, Eaton Bishop CP. © Herefordshire Archaeology

Figure 3: Detailed trench location within the interior of Eaton Camp (Scale 1:20) © Herefordshire Archaeology.

Figure 4: Trench 1 at the end of excavation, view to the south. © Herefordshire Archaeology

Figure 5: Trench 1 south section plan (Scale 1:10) © Herefordshire Archaeology

Figure 6: Trench 2 at the end of excavation, view to the south. © Herefordshire Archaeology

Figure 7: Trench 2 north section plan (Scale 1:10) © Herefordshire Archaeology

Bibliography

Atkinson, C, 2011, *Eaton Camp, Ruckhall, Eaton Bishop CP Stage 1: Field Investigation and LiDAR*; Herefordshire Archaeology Report No 296

British Geological Survey, 2000, '*1:50 000 Series, England and Wales Sheet 215, Ross-on-Wye, Solid and Drift Geology*'.