



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

A Reconnaissance Survey of Credenhill Hill-fort, Herefordshire

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 33

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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.

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Herefordshire Archaeology, May 2001.

(Revised, March 2003)

Summary:

The survey described in this report, (HSM 33543), involved a rapid survey of the internal area of Credenhill hill fort. A hand held Global Positioning System was used to record the location of features encountered.

In addition a number of features associated with the hill-fort were noted but not recorded in any detail. These included two small enclosures, embanked track ways leading from the main entrances, a possible postern gate and other features relating to early occupation inside the fort.

The report was revised in March 2003 in light of further visits in preparation for Woodland Trust project activity at the site in 2003/4, following their successful acquisition of the site in late 2002.

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.

Figure 1 contains 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. This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

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Introduction

This report (HSM 33543), provides an account of a rapid walk over survey with particular reference to a linear feature noted during a previous site visit in addition to a brief description of features noted at the same time. These and other features were checked in the field in early 2003, and this has led to the partial revision of the early report.

Credenhill Iron Age Hillfort is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Hereford and Worcester No. 61, HSM 906) covering approximately a quarter of the Park Wood, Credenhill site (see attached location plan). At over 20ha in extent it is the largest hillfort in the Central Marches (with the exception of Titterstone Cleve Fort), which is an area renowned for and densely covered by hillforts. It is considered to have been an Iron Age tribal capital or central place. The presence and location of Credenhill hillfort led to the construction of the Romano-British sub-cantonal 'capital' at Kenchester, just 2 km to the south, and to the eventual modern day City of Hereford. At its zenith it is estimated that the hillfort served approximately 4,000 local inhabitants – a population the equivalent to the modern day settlement of Credenhill.

In a national context Credenhill fort is larger than the famous Maiden Castle in Dorset and is thought to be within the largest dozen or so of similar aged hillforts (c.500-100BC) in England. The scale of the ramparts is at the upper limits of the national average with a horizontal spread of over 250m and a vertical height of over 60m in places

Despite its Scheduled status and the conduct of a series of excavations near to the east gate in 1963, little is known or recorded about the hillfort in terms of the structures and features either within the SAM area or associated features outside.

Location

Credenhill hillfort occupies the top of a large hill approximately 220 meters above sea level. The underlying geology consists of St. Maughans Formation, red/brown blocky mudstone with beds of sandstone and conglomerate.

The Herefordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation describes the area as woodland flanked by re-organised common field to the north and west, the intake of former common field to the east and recent degradation of the enclosure pattern through boundary removal to the south.

Previous fieldwork / records

Prior to the survey taking place the county Sites and Monuments Record was consulted. Excavations have been undertaken at the site by Kathleen Kenyon, and latterly by Stan Stanford. These exploratory investigations have been published in reports in *The Archaeological Journal* (in Kenyon, K.M., 'Excavations at Sutton Walls', *Arch J.* 110, 1954, 1-87; and Stanford, S.C., *Arch. J.* 127, 1970, 82-129).

Method

The initial survey visit took place on 23rd April 2001. The principal linear feature recorded was located at its eastern extent and followed to its western extent. The ground cover was relatively light and visibility good. This feature was mapped using a Garmin GPS 12 XL hand held global positioning system accurate to approximately 10m even under woodland. Its location was recorded every 20 – 30 meters, (see Appendix 1 for details). A further walkover survey was conducted at the time, and was supplemented by a further site visit in February 2003. The latter visit sampled both areas of the hill-fort and also took in areas of Park Wood. A number of features were noted.

Results

The G.P.S. Survey

The linear feature is very eroded and only possible to see when observed from positions down-slope. It consists in the main of a well spread lynchet varying in height from 0.3m to 0.9m high. However, some areas on its western extent suggest that this was once a bank in that it is occasionally visible as a slight upstanding feature when viewed from its up-slope side. The feature was recorded running over the hill top and for a short distance down the western flank of Credenhill. Its entire recordable length spans approximately one third of the distance between the eastern and western ramparts.

The eastern-most point of the possible first phase rampart is at SO 45117 44574. Here it is a well spread lynchet, approximately 5 or 6m wide and 0.6m high. It passes through SO 45111 44575 and SO 45077 44579 by which time it is running over the crest of the hill and is only 0.4m high. At SO 45052 44591 it is almost 1m high and appears to be more of a bank than a lynchet in that it can be detected from both up and down-slope directions. It continues through SO 45049 44595 and SO 45016 44606 and at SO 45001 44607 it is cut by a series of quarries and cannot be traced any further westwards.

Embanked Trackways

Embanked trackways were noted running outwards from the eastern, the south-eastern and the northern entrances of the hill-fort. These comprise a slightly sunken track sheltered by a large bank on one or both sides. The trackways appear to 'radiate' from the entrances with the south-eastern and northern entrances having two such features running, initially at least, away from each other. All these features curve diagonally

down-slope, in one direction and then another and can be traced for up to 500m from their point of linkage to the fort.

Woodland features

A small number of features associated with past woodland management were noted both inside the circuit of the hill-fort defences and outside. These in the main consisted of saw pits. The steeper slopes contain charcoal burning platforms.

Enclosures

Two earthwork enclosures were noted. One is sited so that it is contained within the internal quarry ditch for the innermost rampart to the south-west of the south-eastern entrance of the hillfort. This enclosure appears to have used the topography to form its northern side but its western side comprises a low but wide bank running directly across the internal quarry ditch, from north to south.

The second enclosure is located immediately outside the eastern gate and appears to be dug into or is integral with one of the sheltering banks for an embanked trackway leading eastwards.

Postern Gate

There is a small, deeply cut opening through the western rampart, near to the south-western angle of the defences. This opening cuts the rampart at an angle and appears to be of some antiquity. It is not wide enough for machinery or carts and is of very different character to the other openings associated with quarrying on the western side of the hill-fort. It is suggested that this could represent the earthwork remains of a postern gate providing quick access on foot in and out of the hill-fort.

Terracing

A series of slight terraces were noted cut into the west facing slope within the hill-fort. These follow the contour and have been cut through by both quarrying and historic woodland management features. It is assumed that these represent terracing in order to aid the construction of buildings associated with the hill-fort.

Quarrying

It is clear that much quarrying has taken place both inside and outside the hill-fort. Within the hill-fort quarrying has mainly taken place within the western quarry ditch. Outside the hill-fort there is a major series of quarries within the southern portion of Sally Coppice. These appear to follow a fault line running on a NW / SE axis and have broken through the Sandstone and has exposed the underlying mudstone and conglomerates. The quarrying has also partially exposed caverns that have formed at the interface between the sandstone and the softer material bedded beneath it.

Recent land management related disturbance

There has been considerable drainage works undertaken on the eastern side of the hill, within the rampart circuit. This takes the form of both drainage ditches and excavated rectangular pools.

The archaeological excavation trenches opened by Stanford in 1963 are clearly visible to the south-west of the east entrance to the hill-fort, and appear not to have been back-filled.

A scrambling course has recently been constructed within the internal quarry ditch close to the south-eastern entrance, and will require conservation attention in the near future (2003).

Site and feature condition

Conditions of survival for earthworks on the site are variable. The eastern side appears to have been subjected to intensive drainage prior to the planting of the present conifer plantation. The eastern slope of the hill within the rampart has been covered by a significant amount of erosion product originating from the hill top, (Stanford, S.C., Arch. J. 127, 1970, 82-129), covering most features of antiquity. The hilltop has been subject to much erosion hence the low height of the principal recorded linear feature in this area. The feature is best preserved on the western flank of the hill. However, it is truncated well before any relationship with the main rampart or internal quarry ditch can be ascertained. This truncation is due to the presence of a substantial area of quarrying covering much of this part of the fort.

The terracing on the west facing slope is fairly well preserved although subtle in nature.

The embanked trackways are generally well preserved except where they have been truncated or their course followed by modern tracks.

The two enclosures noted appear to be well preserved.

Discussion and Implications

Implications regarding the archaeological resource

The location and scale of the linear feature would suggest some form of division within the hill fort or the extent of the hill fort during an earlier phase of its development. Bearing in mind the size of Credenhill hill fort it would seem likely that its origins were relatively modest and that it developed through a number of phases to become the impressive monument that it is today. The eroded appearance of such a large feature seemingly with no entrances suggests, at least at this stage of investigation, that it represents the northern extent of an earlier phase of the hill fort.

The embanked trackways are of major significance. They do not appear to take full advantage of the topography suggesting that they are aligned on landscape or built features that are now lost.

The recent disturbance including the drainage and the scrambling course are in the main relatively shallow intrusions. The drainage has made it difficult to distinguish historical

surface features in some areas. The scrambling course is cut into the upper deposit of the internal ditch fill, suggesting that its actual impact on the buried remains may be minimal.

Implications for future management

Future drainage works and other invasive ground works should avoid all significant earthwork features. Future tree planting should not take place on or in proximity to the crest of the possible earlier phase rampart, as this will cause further erosion both when planting and when felling / extracting. It also makes the feature prone to damage by wind-thrown trees.

The scrambling course should be removed and the intrusions back-filled.

Implications for future field work

To further a better understanding of this feature in relation to the rest of the hill fort a more detailed, measured, survey is desirable. This would need to record all visible earthworks associated with the hill fort both internal and external to the ramparts.

The embanked trackways can be followed for several hundred meters and these would benefit from GPS mapping to their full extent.

The extent of quarrying should be surveyed and planned both inside and outside the hill-fort.

The terracing, the possible postern gate, and the possible rampart feature need detailed survey in order to map their extent and location in relation to the rest of the monument.

The entire scheduled area would benefit from a detailed survey to include the relationship between its ramparts and the embanked trackways.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the assistance and co-operation of the landowner and land agent during this survey.

Dr. Keith Ray, County Archaeologist, for his editorial input into this report.

Archive

- 1 Dictaphone tape
- 1 Transcription Record
- 1 Excel Database
- 1 Mapinfo data file
- This document

Appendix 1

HSM No.	Easting	Northing	Site type	Period	Description
33544	45117	44574	Bank/Rampart	Prehistoric	Well spread and 0.6m high
33544	45111	44575	Bank/Rampart	Prehistoric	0.45m high
33544	45077	44579	Bank/Rampart	Prehistoric	0.4m high
33544	45052	44591	Bank/Rampart	Prehistoric	0.5m high
33544	45049	44595	Bank/Rampart	Prehistoric	0.7m high
33544	45016	44606	Bank/Rampart	Prehistoric	0.9m high
33544	45001	44607	Bank/Rampart	Prehistoric	0.95m high

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. K. Ray, County Archaeologist.