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

Credenhill Fort Herefordshire: An Archaeological Watching Brief Report

NGR: SO 451 446

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No 258

Report prepared by
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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:
An Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 258

Herefordshire Archaeology, January 2009.

Summary

This report provides an account of an archaeological watching brief on the construction of a forestry extraction road within the scheduled area of Credenhill Fort, Credenhill, Herefordshire. The work described includes watching the excavating of the foundations of the road by machine and took place between 17th June and 23rd June 2008

In conclusion, it is clear that the upgrading of the existing forestry track to allow the mechanical removal of timber from Credenhill Wood did not reveal or disturb any underlying archaeological deposits.

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Introduction

This report provides an account of an archaeological watching brief on the construction of a road within the scheduled area of Credenhill Fort, Credenhill, Herefordshire. The work described includes watching the excavating of the foundations of the road by machine and took place between 17th June and 23rd June 2008. The watching brief 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 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 (Ray, K. 2007).

Part of this process of disafforestation involved the upgrading of an existing woodland trackway for the extraction of timber. This trackway was evaluated as part of the 2007 programme of work (Dorling and Williams, 2008) and this established that the existing trackway was of recent construction and that no significant archaeological features were present up to a depth of c.0.30m (see Plate 1). Following this work an application for Scheduled Monument Consent for the upgrading of the trackway was applied for by the Woodland Trust and obtained in May 2008.

Location and Geology

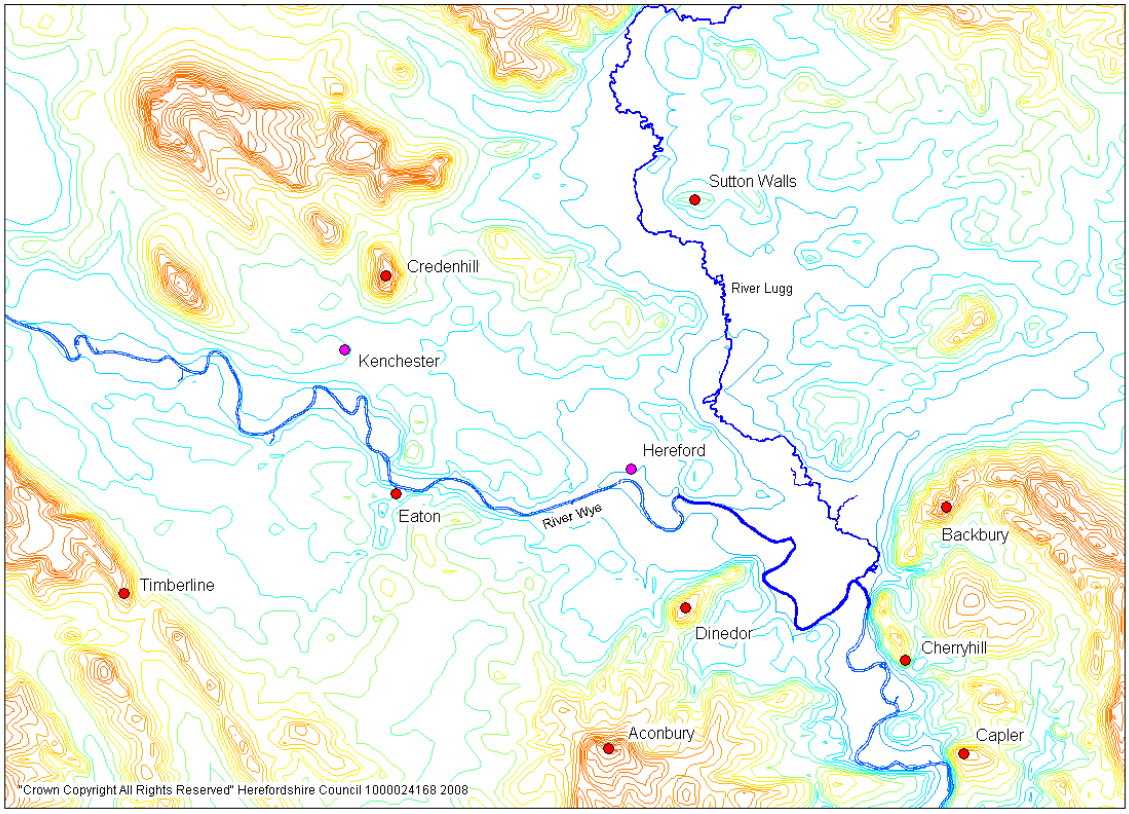

Figure 1. Site Location and topography

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

The Watching brief on the upgrading of the access road into Credenhill Hillfort took place in June 2008. The survey comprised monitoring the on-site contractor as they prepared the route for the road by excavating with a mechanical excavator down to a solid surface (clay or bedrock). Features were mapped using a hand-held Silva Multinavigator Global Positioning System, enabling a ten-figure grid reference to be recorded, for not just the course of the road, but also for any individual archaeological features. This system is accurate to within approximately 5m under the tree canopy of Credenhill Fort.

The stratigraphic sequences exposed along the course of the road, as well as individual features, were noted and described and in this case, due to the lack of significant features no further recording was undertaken.

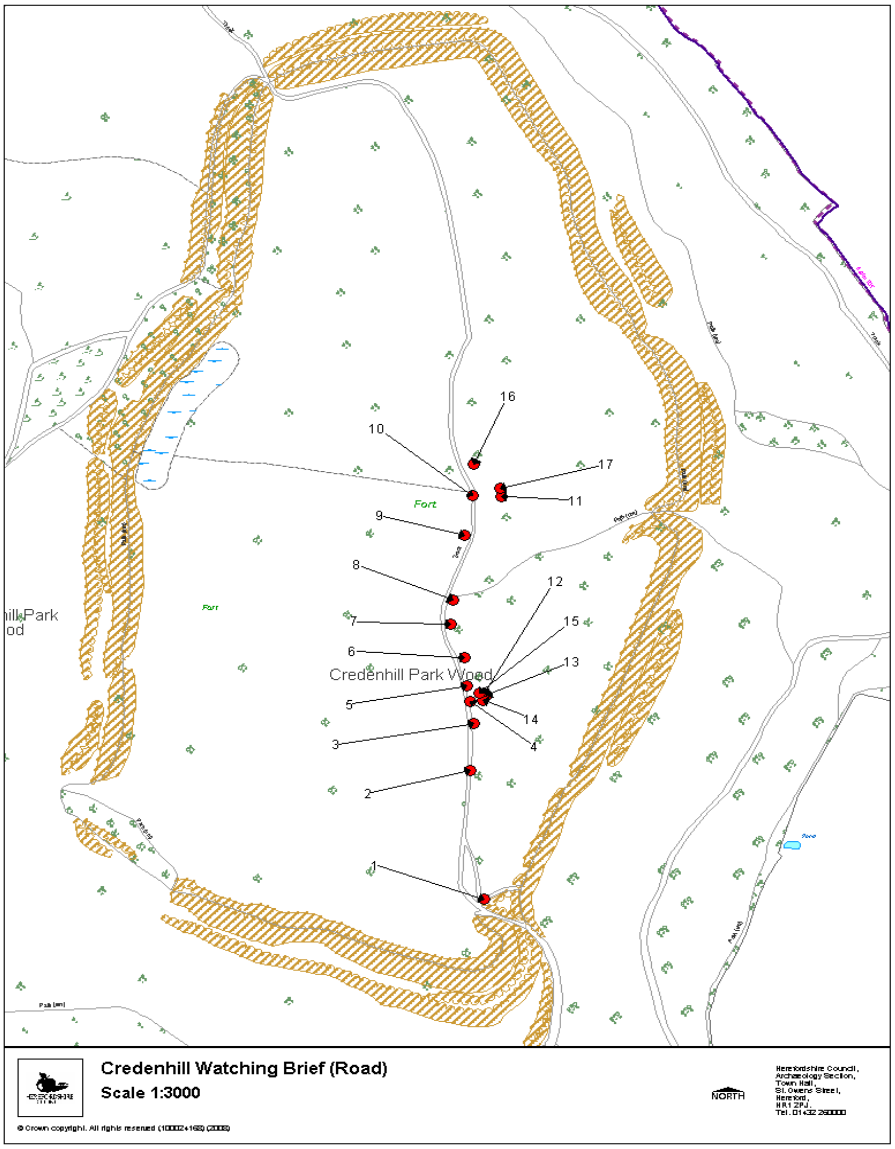

Figure 2: Course of the road and Watching Brief locations

Results

Work began at the southeastern entrance of the hillfort, following work to protect the sides of the entrance through the ramparts, and continued north through the hillfort interior. The trackway excavation between Points 1 and 4 measured c.3.6m wide and varied in depth, the west side (upslope) being c.0.40m deep and the east side (down slope) c.0.25m. The base of excavated trackway in this area consisted primarily of bedrock, although there were areas of clean clay. The only feature identified was a modern land drain at Point 2 and no finds or charcoal were recovered from this area.

At Point 5 the work continued across the area previously examined by Trench 3 (Dorling and Williams, 2008). The main course of the trackway follows the line of the existing track that in this case is marked by the timber identified at the west end of the trench and seen in the foreground of Plate 1. This timber was removed by machine as was a further 0.10m-0.15m depth of mixed clay (total depth 0.32m). Several substantial pieces of bedrock were also removed from this area. No finds were recovered from this area to alter a view established in 2007 that this track is modern and was almost certainly constructed during the 1960s when the current woodland was planted.

Plate 1: Timber rut infill (foreground) of existing forest track as seen during the 2007 excavation of Trench 3.

Point 6 represents the highest point of the road. It measures c.3.6m wide and the west side (upslope) was 0.25m deep and the east (down slope) 0.30m. The western section consisted of a 0.04m deep layer of mor humus and this overlay a dark very silty clay; no bedrock was visible at this depth. Evidence of the existing trackway was present in the form of decayed logs and brash.

Beyond this point the topography drops back down to the north. At point 8 there was no humic layer and the soil changed from a dark brown as previously mentioned to a more dark red brown clay. Again evidence of previous trackway consolidation in the form of two parallel depressions (wheel ruts) filled with decaying logs and brash was uncovered. It was also noted that this side of the hill was significantly wetter than the south side. This

may account for the gravel that marked the bottom of the excavated area from this point to Point 9.

The last four Points, 10, 11, 17 and 16 mark the four sides of the extraction working area at the northern end of the trackway. Within this area the trees were cut to ground level and the area gravelled so as to produce minimal ground disturbance. The only excavation took place at Point 11. At this location a section of bank was levelled prior to being gravelled over. This bank is the same feature as was identified in Trench 3 (Dorling and Williams, 2008) [top of Plate 3]) and consists of the down slope side of the 18th/19th century woodland track. This bank was reduced in height by c.0.15m over a length (north-south) of c.3.90m x 1.90m wide. The levelled area consisted of dark brown organic topsoil.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that the upgrading of the existing forestry track to allow the mechanical removal of timber from Credenhill Wood did not disturb any underlying archaeological deposits. This was either because the bedrock was located very close to the surface or that the excavation was not deep enough to do damage below the modern topsoil.

Site archive

1. Site notebook
2. Audio tape

Bibliography and related reports

BGS, 1989. *British Geological Survey*. Hereford, England and Wales Sheet 181, Solid and Drift Edition 1:50,000 Series.

DCMS, Scheduled Monument Consent letter, 15th August 2007.

Dorling, P. and Williams D.N. 2008. Credenhill Fort, Herefordshire: A Summary Excavation Report, Phase 1. Herefordshire Report Number 231.

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Ray, K. 2007. Credenhill Fort, Herefordshire A Project Statement: Proposed Archaeological Studies, July 20th 2007.

SSEW, 1983. *Soil Survey of England and Wales.* Soils of England and Wales, Sheet 3, Midlands and Western England.

Appendix*: Database of features and grid references for Credenhill Watching Brief.*

No.	Date	Easting	Northin	Description
1	17/06/08	345152	244310	Watching brief begins on the road into the wood. Starting just inside the southeast entrance, extending roughly to the north.
2	17/06/08	345143	244408	Remains of land drain cut across the road ie roughly east west.
3	17/06/08	345145	244444	Bedrock visible in base of road, very shallow soil.
4	17/06/08	345143	244460	More bedrock at this location as we reach the top of the highest point of the proposed road. Track c.3.6m wide, varies in depth, west side at this location c.0.40m deep on east side (down slope) it is c.0.25m. Track cuts through mor humus, the organic topsoil and the underlying red brown clay soil mix.
5	17/06/08	345140	244472	Bedrock encountered again and removed in sizable chunks c.0.50m x 0.50m. This area marks the west end of trench 3 (2007), where a series of logs laid in wheel ruts were again identified during the main ground clearance for the road. These were removed along with a quantity of surrounding clay and some of the slabby bedrock. No pottery, charcoal etc was revealed as a result of this, just clean silty clay.
6	17/06/08	345139	244494	Highest point of the road, east of Trench 4 (2007), west side 0.25m deep and on the east (down slope) 0.30m. 0.04m mor humus onto dark very silty clay, base of road into same. No bedrock visible, evidence of previous trackways in the form of decayed logs and brash.
7	17/06/08	345129	244519	Dropping down to the north.

8	17/06/08	345131	244537	no humic layer at this point. The soil has changed from a dark brown as previously mentioned to a more dark red brown clay. Upslope side (west) 0.40m deep, east side 0.25m deep. Again evidence of previous trackway consolidation in the form of two parallel depressions (wheel ruts) filled with decaying logs and brash. It was noted that this side of the hill is significantly wetter than the south side.
9	17/06/08	345139	244587	Significantly more stone at this point, but again appears to be trackway consolidation.
10	17/06/08	345144	244617	This marks the start of the working area for the logging. Trees have been removed leaving a significant number of tree stumps The removal of the stumps remains a contentious issue as removal of the stumps may damage underlying archaeology. It was later decided to only cut the trees to ground level and not remove them.
	18/06/08			Very wet. Contractor due to start gravel laying Work commences on the turning circle/ working area. Tree stumps being cut to ground level then gravelled over.
11	23/06/08	345164	244616	A small section of bank has been levelled. This bank is the same feature as was excavated in 2007 (Trench 3) and consists of the downslope side of the 18th/19th century woodland track. Reduced in height c0.15m over a length (north-south) of c.3.90m x 1.90m wide. The levelled area consisted of dark brown organic topsoil.
12	23/06/08	345152	244467	Trench 3 from the 2007 excavation through trackway.
13	23/06/08	345154	244465	Trench 3.
14	23/06/08	345151	244461	Trench 3.
15	23/06/08	345149	244467	Trench 3.
16	23/06/08	345145	244641	Northern edge of carpark.
17	23/06/08	345163	244622	Eastern edge of carpark.

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