

AI/32/2002

**Berrow Hill, Martley
Worcestershire**

Level 2 Archaeological Survey

BERROW HILL
MARTLEY, WORCESTERSHIRE
LEVEL 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

AI/32/2002

County: Worcestershire
District: Malvern Hills
Parish: Martley
NGR: SO 744 585
NMR No: SO 75 NW 3

Survey, report and plan: Mark Bowden
Location map: Deborah Cunliffe

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Introduction

Geology, topography and soils

Berrow Hill is an unconformable outcrop of Haffield Breccia lying on the western side of the East Malverns Fault (British Geological Survey, Sheet 199). It is steep-sided on every approach and attains a height of 183m OD. On the western side landslips have occurred on the slopes dropping to the Teme Valley, the floor of which at this point is at about 35m OD. The hill is very dominant in the local topography in an area of otherwise gently rolling country (65-75m OD to the east), though it is perhaps not as dramatic as the lower Ankerdine Hill, 2km to the south. The soils are classified as typical brown earths of the Crediton Association (Findlay *et al* 1984, 128-31).

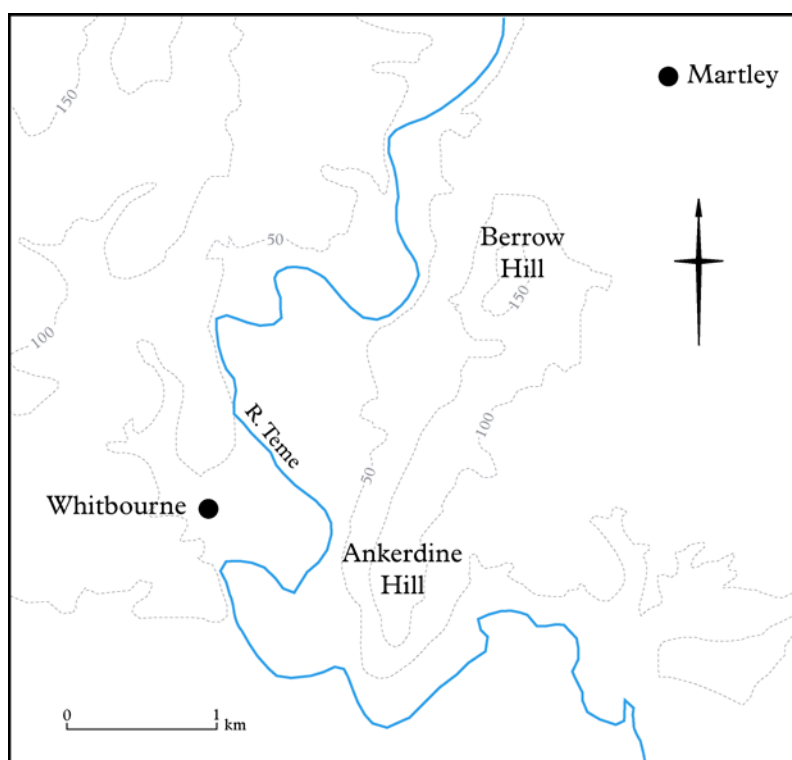


Fig 1 Location map

Archaeological history

The existence of a hillfort on Berrow Hill was noted by J Allies in the mid-19th century (1852, 213) but the Victoria County History of Worcestershire dismissed the idea, noting that while scarps existed, 'it is impossible to consider them as being part of a defensive earthwork' (1924, 424). The fort was omitted from the Ordnance Survey *Iron Age* map (1962) and for this reason was noted as 'X' (i.e. 'doubtful') by Hogg (1979, 186). The site was visited for OS Archaeology Division by DR Bark in 1970. He re-surveyed the fort at 1:2500 and described it as follows:

'The hill-fort on Berrow Hill is roughly oval, having internal dimensions of 320m long, NNE-SSW and averaging 100m in width. A single scarp up to 5.8m in height defends the camp on all sides except the NE where a double scarp is in evidence. Mid-way along the SE side the scarp has been destroyed by ploughing for a distance of 56m.

There are two possible entrances to the fort, one mid-way along the NW side and the second near the SE corner. The fort has the advantage of natural defences, being situated on top of a hill, the sides of which fall very steeply all round.'

At about the same time it was suggested that there were traces of a prehistoric field system on Berrow Hill (Worcs County Museum Index 1971), but neither subsequent air photographic survey nor fieldwork have been able to confirm this. (Nevertheless, some of the existing field boundaries on the hill are large hedge banks of some antiquity.)

The 1:2500 survey was revised by English Heritage in 2002 and this report prepared for the Malvern Hills AONB Archaeological Project.

The hillfort is scheduled as an Ancient Monument, county number Worcs 235.

Description

The fort is much as described by Bark, except that it is a waisted polygon, rather than an oval. While it is over 100m wide at either end it narrows to about 90m in the middle, following the natural contours of the hill. The hill has a summit at the north end and a knoll to the south, with a slight saddle in between.

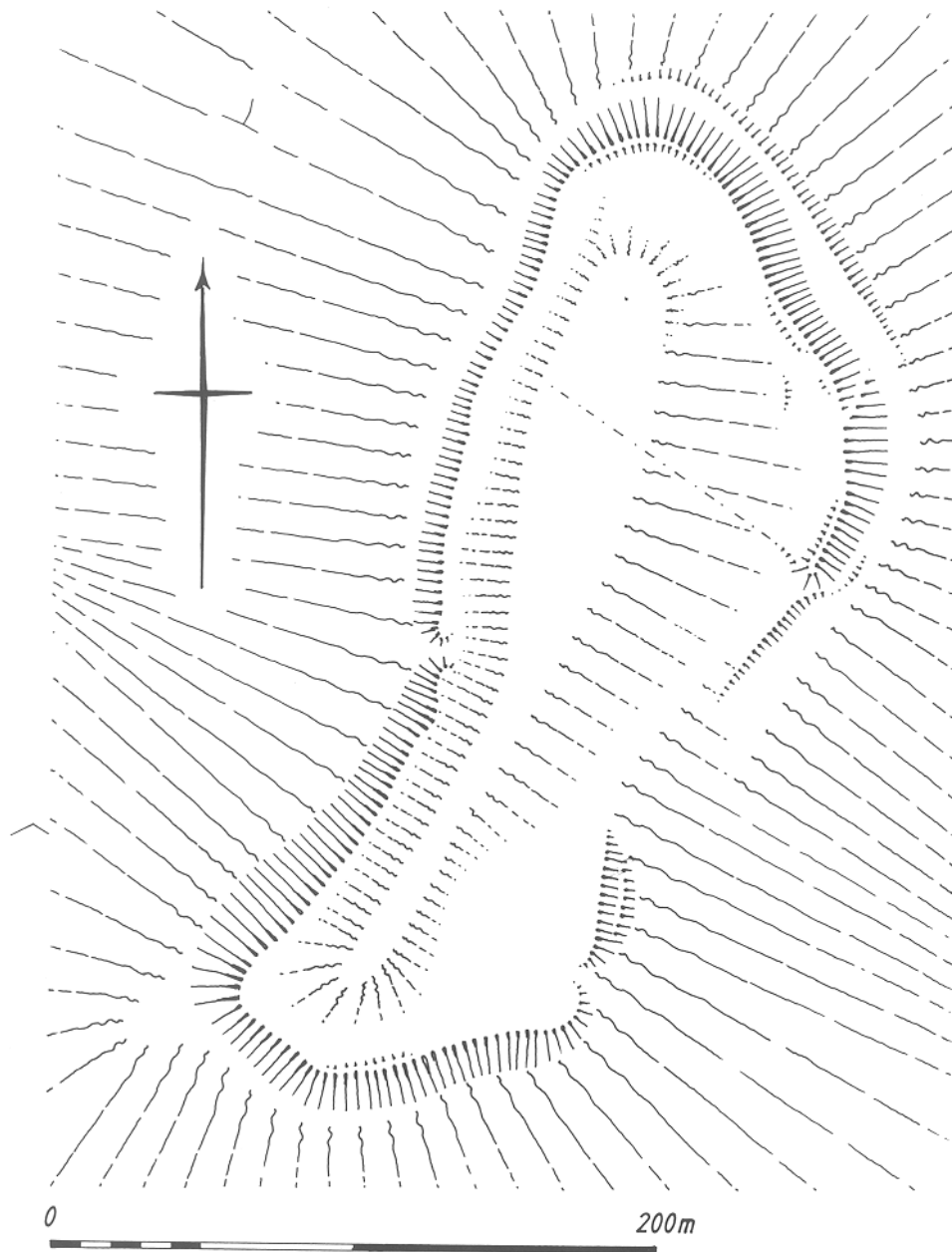


Fig 2. Plan of Berrow Hill at 1:2500. © copyright English Heritage

Rampart

Confirmation of the site's status as a hillfort is provided by short lengths of surviving backscarp to the rampart. At one point on the eastern side, shown by Bark's survey, this is up to 1.2m high. Elsewhere, at the extreme southern and northern ends and along the north-eastern side, the surviving backscarp is no more than 0.6m and generally 0.3-0.4m high. (Interestingly, Bark deleted some hachures showing the backscarp at the north end of the fort, but this feature definitely exists). Allies had previously noted that the 'intrenchment' was particularly well preserved at the north and south ends (1852, 213). There is a ledge at the foot of the rampart around much of the northern circuit, utilised as a track, but no sign of a ditch except at one point on the eastern side where a very slight inward-facing scarp hints at the existence of such a feature. This is opposite the best surviving fragment of backscarp.

Entrances

The entrance near the south-eastern corner is very clear, with strongly inturned terminals to the rampart, but the approach is very steep. A slightly less formidable approach might have been contrived at the south-western corner, where there is a natural spur just below the defences, but clearly this was not considered by the hillfort builders to be a desirable location for an entrance. The existing entrance at least has the advantage that it opens onto a relatively level part of the fort's interior.

The possible western entrance is more problematic. Here the steep natural slope of the knoll within the interior of the fort runs right down to the back of the rampart so that the entrance opens onto a steep slope within the fort. On the other hand there is a slight berm running to the north, between the rampart and the natural slope. The entrance itself is narrow and lies between hooked terminals. Whether this is an original entrance or a later breach remains uncertain.

Interior

Much of the interior of the fort is taken up by natural slopes, especially steep to the west. With one possible exception, any hut circles or other features which might have been apparent have been lost by cultivation, which has clearly taken place at some time in the past, smoothing the interior surface as well as removing a stretch of the rampart on the eastern side, as noted by Bark. One earthwork platform, about 6m across, remains in the interior, near the north-eastern side. This platform has a distinct forward scarp but the back is marked only by a retreat in the foot of the natural slope. This could be interpreted as a hut circle but it might be due to more recent activity. A fence line of recent date can be traced across the interior of the fort just to the south of the beacon which occupies the northern summit of the hill. There is a trig pillar on the southern knoll (not shown on plan).

Current land use

While most of the interior of the fort is grazed, much of the western side has been planted recently. Older planting is evidenced by some holly trees along the rampart top at the southern end of the site and some large pollards elsewhere on the rampart.

Discussion

Berrow Hill is a small univallate hillfort, presumably of early-middle Iron Age date. Though the earthworks are not particularly impressive, by hillfort standards, they may conceal considerable subsurface remains. A natural tendency to slippage on these steep slopes will have been enhanced by later disturbance through cultivation, passage of vehicles around the ditch, and tree planting. The importance of this site as a potential repository of archaeological information is therefore considerable.

The east- and west-facing entrances conform to the Iron Age norm in southern Britain for the orientation of hillfort and enclosure gateways (Hill 1996, 110). This is particularly significant at this site, where the local topography suggests that approaches from the south-west and perhaps the north might have been expected. (The most convenient current approach to the hill is from the north.)

The nearest hillforts to Berrow Hill are Woodbury, near Great Witley, 6km to the north, Wall Hills, 12km to the west, and British Camp, 18km to the south. (These three forts are all considerably larger than Berrow Hill.) Berrow Hill therefore occupies what would be a considerable gap in the eastern edge of the main Welsh Marches group of hillforts. Otherwise, Berrow Hill sits within an area that currently appears to be a void in the Iron Age. There is a very thin scatter of isolated finds recorded. There are no other known settlement sites closer than those at Holt (Hunt *et al* 1986; NMR SO 86 SW 22) on the Severn to the north-east, and the one recently excavated at Cradley, Herefordshire (Keith Ray and Tim Hoverd pers comm) to the south. There are no definitely identified contemporary field systems.

Acknowledgements

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