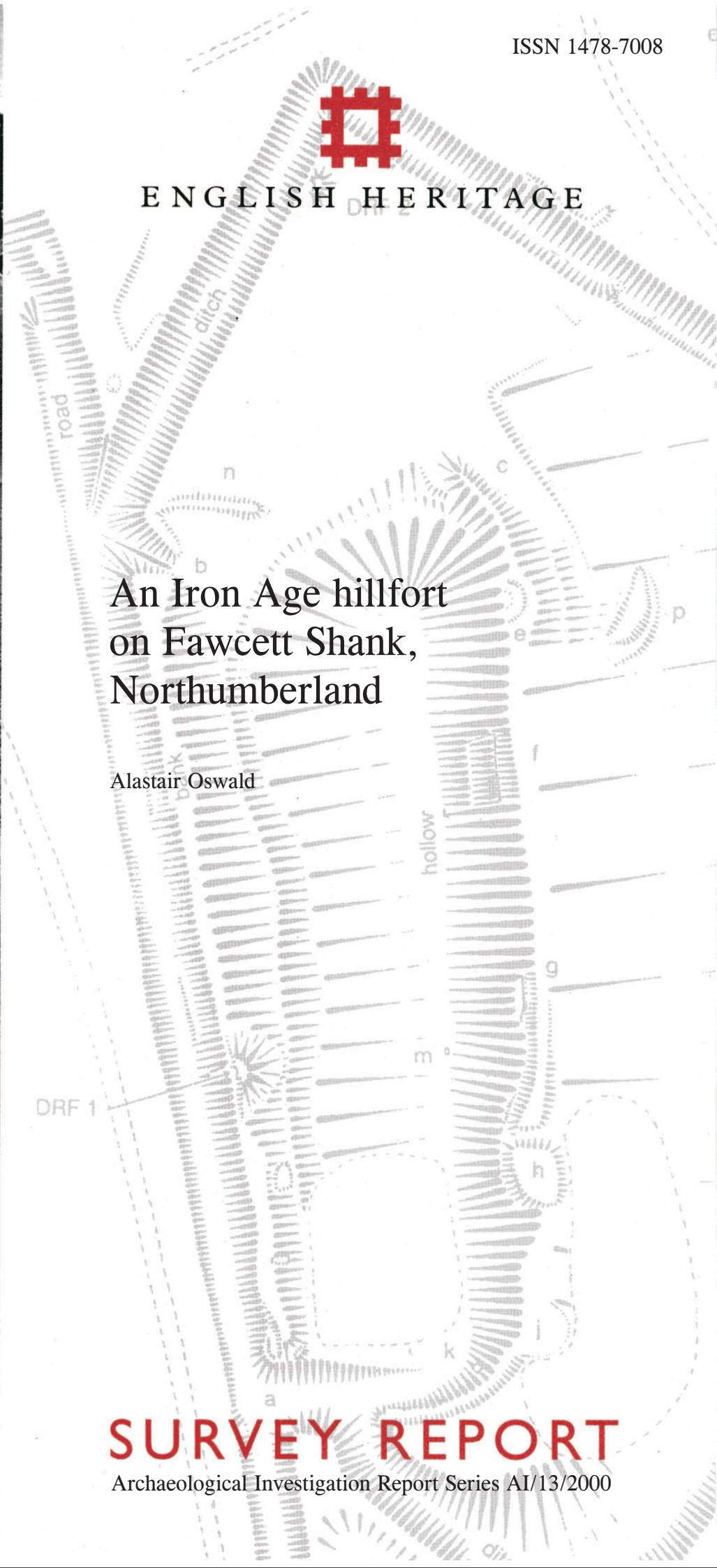




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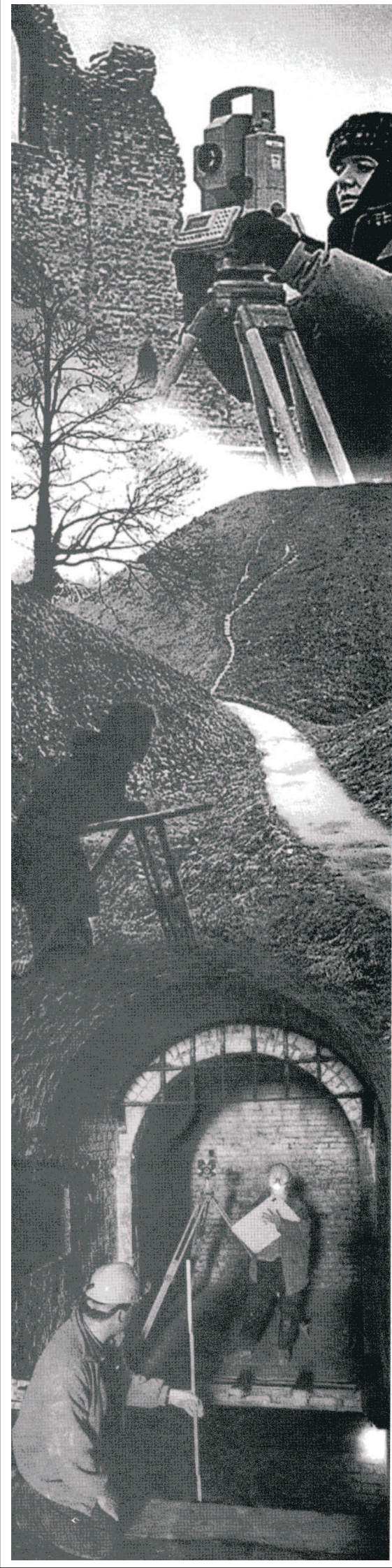
# An Iron Age hillfort on Fawcett Shank, Northumberland

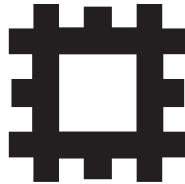
Alastair Oswald



# SURVEY REPORT

Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/13/2000





**An Iron Age hillfort  
on Fawcett Shank,  
Northumberland**

**Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/13/2000**

**NMR No: NT 82 SE 2**

**NGR: NT 8872 2308**

**RSM: 24631**

**SMR No: NT 82 SE 2**

Surveyed July 2000

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# 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE SURVEY

In late July 2000, English Heritage carried out a field investigation of an Iron Age hillfort on a hill known as Fawcett Shank, in Northumberland. The analytical survey formed part of the Northumberland National Park Authority's project called 'Discovering our hillfort heritage', funded jointly by the European Union through the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund through the Tweed Forum initiative, English Heritage and the Northumberland National Park Authority. Fawcett Shank overlooks the southern end of the College Valley, 7.5km south-south-west of the village of Kirknewton, in the parish of the same name and the district of Berwick upon Tweed. The hillfort, which occupies the summit of the hill, is centred at National Grid Reference NT 8872 2308. The field survey was one of a number undertaken by English Heritage to improve the understanding of Iron Age hillforts and comparable enclosures within the National Park and to inform their conservation and management (Frodsham 2000).

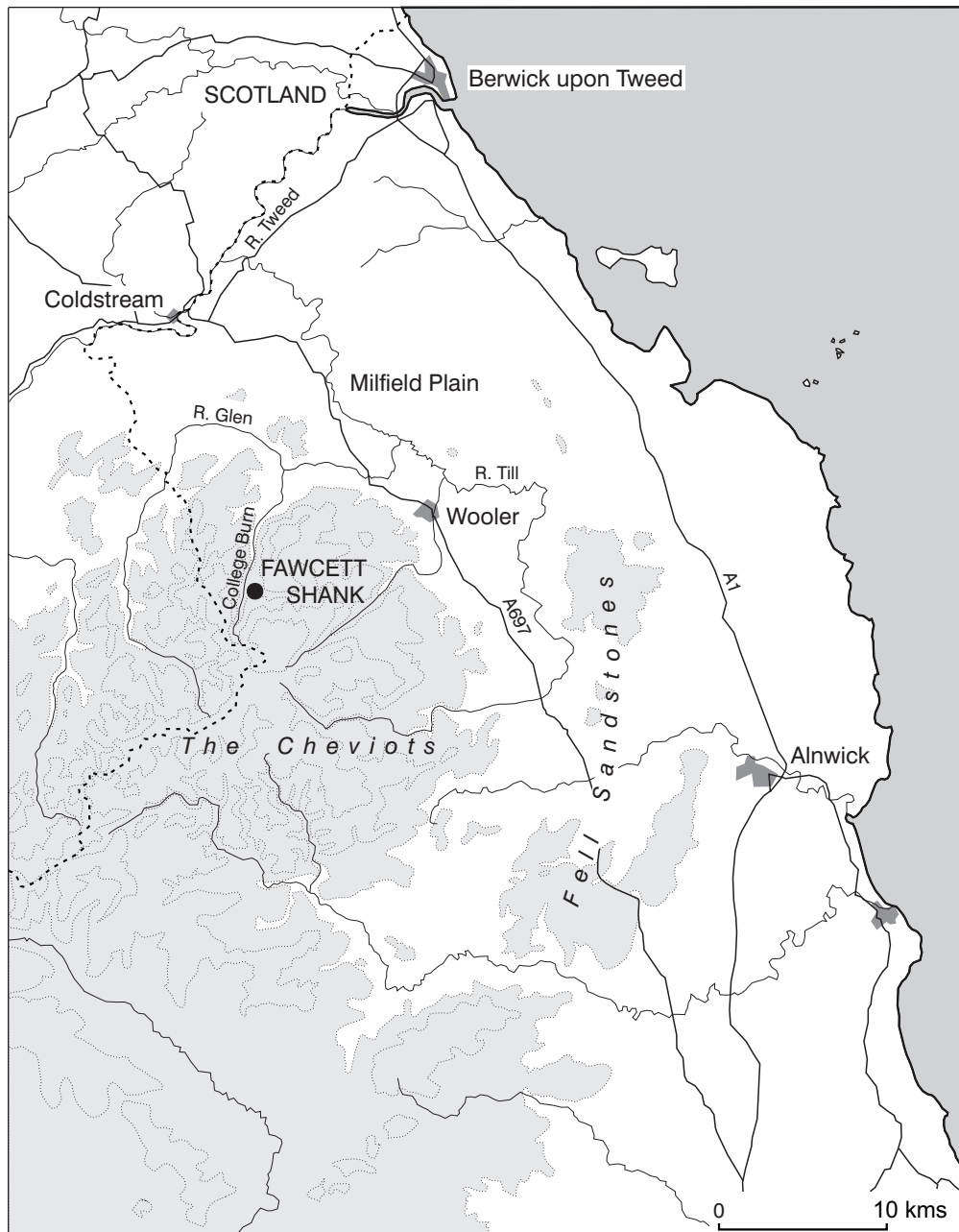


Figure 1.  
Location map

The hillfort was first tentatively identified as a prehistoric monument in 1949 and has not previously been subject to any intensive archaeological investigation (see Section 3). The remains of the stone-built rampart are almost entirely masked by a dilapidated sheepfold with associated pens and other structures. This complex is perhaps of medieval origin but was evidently re-used intermittently throughout the post-medieval period, probably until the mid-20th century. The site as a whole is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (RSM 24631); the hillfort itself is recorded in the Sites and Monuments Record for Northumberland and in the National Monuments Record (NMR) as NT 82 SE 2. The English Heritage field investigation, which covered an area of 0.8 hectares (2 acres), was carried out at Level 3 standard (as defined in RCHME 1999, 3-4) and resulted in the first metrically accurate plan of the remains, at a scale of 1:500.

## 2. GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE

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The hill known as Fawcett Shank overlooks the upper reaches of the College Valley, a narrow, steep-sided valley which cuts *c.*12kms into the north-eastern side of the Cheviot Hills. College Burn, which runs along the length of the valley, is a small fast-flowing stream that rises on the western flanks of The Cheviot itself, the highest peak in the range at 815m above OD. Fawcett Shank is the highest point of a spur that runs northwards from The Cheviot, dividing the College Valley on the west from the valley of a tributary stream called Lamden Burn on the east. Like the surrounding upland massif, the underlying rock is andesitic granite, a hard volcanic stone which varies in colour from pale grey to deep pink (Tomkeieff 1965). The rock fractures easily and is widely used in the local area as a building material. Although the soil is relatively thin on the summit of the hill, there are no natural outcrops in the immediate vicinity of the hillfort.

Fawcett Shank reaches an altitude of 363m above Ordnance Datum (OD). The western side of the spur slopes steeply into the College Valley and the eastern side somewhat more gradually into the valley of the Lamden Burn, while the northern tip tapers gently towards the confluence of the two streams. To the south the ground falls by *c.*7m to form a slight saddle, but beyond that it rises sharply to West Hill, which is effectively a shoulder of The Cheviot.

Prior to the planting of coniferous plantations around the hilltop, the site would have commanded panoramic views, with especially good visibility along the College Valley to the north. The summit is itself overlooked on all sides by the hills that enclose the valley: The Cheviot and West Hill to the south-east, Coldburn Hill to the north-east, Black Hag and Blackhags Rigg to the north-west and The Schil to the south-west. The hillfort would probably have been intervisible with prehistoric enclosures on Great Hetha, Sinkside Hill and the north-eastern shoulder of Blackhags Rigg, all of which lie less than 5kms to the north.

With the exception of the small clearing on the summit within which the hillfort stands, Fawcett Shank is entirely covered by mature coniferous plantations under the management of the Forestry Commission. Planted from 1960 onwards, these comprise tracts of Norwegian Spruce on the western side of the hill, and a mixture of Scots Pine, Japanese Larch and Norwegian spruce on the eastern side. Deep 'backhoe' ploughing was undertaken prior to the planting; while the limits of this disturbance could seldom be precisely ascertained, it is clear that in some areas the ground was ploughed to within two or three metres of the perimeter of the hillfort. The clearing still supports rough pasture, which has become long and rank due to the lack of regular grazing since the imposition of the surrounding plantations. At the time of the English Heritage survey, this grass was up to 0.4m high, reducing the likelihood of identifying any slight surface traces that may exist, such as the foundations of prehistoric houses or similar structures. There are no buildings in the immediate vicinity, but the isolated farmsteads of Mounthooly, Fleehope, Coldburn and Dunsdale all lie within 1200m of the site, to the south-west, north-west, north-east and east respectively. The ruinous remains of the post-medieval farmstead of Fawcett, from which the summit takes its name, lie at the foot of the western side of the hill, some 400m to the north-west.

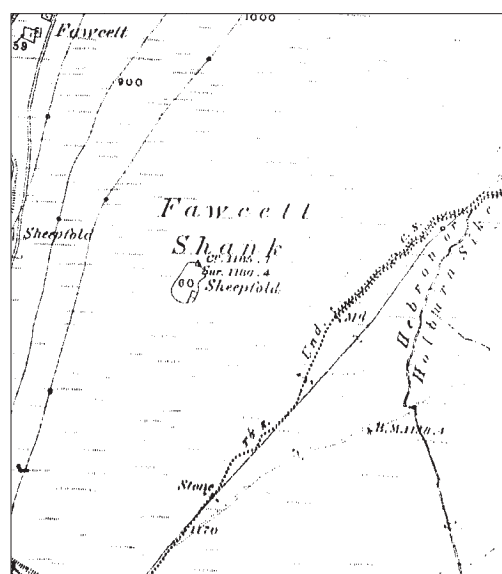
Public vehicular access to the southern end of the College Valley is strictly limited to a maximum of twelve vehicles per day. Fawcett Shank itself is managed by the Forestry Commission, but a public footpath follows the contours around the foot of the spur, passing through the plantation. There is no vehicular access onto the hill except by 4-wheel drive; the final stretches of the forestry tracks that approach the summit are only passable with difficulty on foot.

### 3. HISTORY OF RESEARCH

The discovery of the hillfort on Fawcett Shank has been credited to Henry MacLauchlan, a former Ordnance Survey Field Officer who, in the mid-19th century, carried out numerous archaeological field surveys in the region for the Duke of Northumberland. However, there is strong evidence that MacLauchlan was referring to a different site and that the remains on Fawcett Shank were not correctly interpreted until nearly a century later. In 1860, MacLauchlan recorded that near Fleehope there lay ‘...a small camp, principally formed of stones, and about 50 yards [45.7m] in diameter...called Ring Carn’ (MacLauchlan 1867, 39; 1919-22, 469). He did not produce a plan, so the identification of Ring Carn was left open to doubt. Dick Emsley of the Ordnance Survey in 1969 and subsequently Peter Topping of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England inferred that MacLauchlan had been describing the hillfort on Fawcett Shank, which is the nearest to Fleehope Farm. However, Greenwood’s (1828) *Map of the County of Northumberland*, which has schematic depictions of most of the prehistoric ‘camps’ in the county, shows one named Ring Cairn on the opposite side of the College Valley, on the summit of Blackhaggs Rigg (NGR: NT 879 245). No hillfort actually exists on that summit, but the location would correspond reasonably closely to a hillfort on the shoulder of the hill 750m to the north-east, centred at NT 8836 2505. This hillfort, which for convenience has become known as North Black Hagg, is of similar size and plan to the one on Fawcett Shank and was also evidently constructed almost entirely of stone, but with two circuits of rampart (Topping 1989-90). It was not subject to such major modification in the medieval period or later and so is much easier to identify as a prehistoric monument than is the circuit on Fawcett Shank. Given the relatively good state of preservation of North Black Hagg and the fact that the site had already been mapped by Greenwood, it would be remarkable if the hillfort had not been recorded by MacLauchlan. Yet he makes no reference to it – unless Ring Cairn and Ring Carn are one and the same. The fact that MacLauchlan’s description of Ring Carn makes no mention of any sheepfold, which would seem a rather serious omission if he were describing the indistinct prehistoric remains on Fawcett Shank, also seems to support the theory that he was actually describing North Black Hagg hillfort. Greenwood’s survey was the most up to date and largest scale map of the area available in 1860 and a source of archaeological information undoubtedly well known to MacLauchlan’s patron, the Duke of Northumberland. Therefore MacLauchlan would very probably

have used the map as the basis for his own research (the author is grateful to Tim Gates for this observation). The farmstead of Fawcett is shown on Greenwood’s map, and was still occupied in 1860, but MacLauchlan does not refer to it in his description of Ring Carn. North Black Hagg actually lies closer to Southernknowe than to Fleehope, but Southernknowe is not shown on Greenwood’s map, and Greenwood’s incorrect placement of the hillfort itself also makes Fleehope the nearest farm in the locality which the Duke of Northumberland could have used to identify the site. The Ordnance Survey map surveyed in 1860-1 at the scale of 6-inches to the mile (1:10,560),

Figure 2.  
Ordnance Survey  
First Edition  
6-inch scale map  
of the area  
(surveyed 1860-1)





which was not published until 1866 (Figure 2), is unhelpful in resolving the confusion, for there is no indication that the remains on Fawcett Shank were recognised as anything more than a sheepfold and North Black Hagg hillfort was not portrayed at all. In summary, it seems more likely on balance that Ring Carn (or Cairn) can be equated with North Black Hagg hillfort, rather than with the one on Fawcett Shank. It also seems likely that MacLauchlan did not visit the site in person but relied on a second-hand report of its position and form, which was in fact slightly misleading. MacLauchlan's uncharacteristic lack of thoroughness in this case perhaps stems from the inexact location of the monument by Greenwood some twenty-two years earlier.

So the credit for the discovery of the hillfort on Fawcett Shank must go to the Ordnance Survey's local archaeological correspondent Sir Walter de la Aitchison, who visited the site in 1949, probably having noted the unusual plan of the sheepfold on excellent aerial photographs taken in the previous year (see below). Aitchison also recorded the presence of 'secondary buildings' in the interior and outside the rampart on the north (NMRa). However, Eric Geary of the Ordnance Survey's Archaeological Division, who examined the site in October 1955, was cautious in dealing with Aitchison's proposal (NMRa). He commented that there was no evidence with which to date the older foundations visible beneath the 'modern' sheepfold and suggested that they might be the remains of a similar livestock enclosure. While accepting the possibility of a prehistoric origin, he dismissed the idea of it being a defensive 'fort', though he did not put forward the reasoning on which he based this assertion.

Subsequent field observations by the Ordnance Survey added to Geary's conclusions (NMRa). In August 1960, Jimmy Davidson made the first sketch plan of the remains (see Figure 3), which identified many of the features recorded by the English Heritage fieldwork, including the original entrance into the hillfort. A schematic version of the sketch plan was published on the subsequent revision of the 6-inch scale map of the area (Ordnance Survey 1962). In July 1969, Dick Emsley reiterated Geary's doubts that the earlier remains were really part of a prehistoric hillfort. However, he also pointed out the parallels with the enclosure on Sinkside Hill, on the opposite side of the College Valley, which was at that time more widely accepted as being an Iron Age hillfort. He drew attention to the similarities in the topographic situations of the two monuments and the fact that the hillfort on Sinkside Hill had very clearly been converted into a post-medieval sheepfold. Tom George, who had only recently begun work as a Field Officer (information from S Ainsworth), visited the site in July 1976, but merely stated that he could not positively identify any trace of the earlier foundations referred to by previous investigators.

In March 1987, Peter Topping produced another sketch plan and description of the remains as part of a rapid survey of the area for the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (NMRb and Figure 4). In addition to the post-medieval enclosures recorded by previous investigators, he identified a possible early stone-built 'hut circle' lying immediately outside the rampart on its north-eastern side. Conditions were not ideal for field survey at the time of the English Heritage survey, but it seems likely that the stony banks interpreted by Topping as a 'hut circle' represent another post-medieval structure adjoining the exterior of the hillfort (see Section 4.2).

In January 1996, Iain Newton carried out a rapid field inspection of the site as part of English Heritage's Monuments Protection Programme, prior to the protection of the

Figure 3.  
 Ordnance Survey  
 sketch plan  
 of the hillfort  
 (surveyed  
 August 1960)

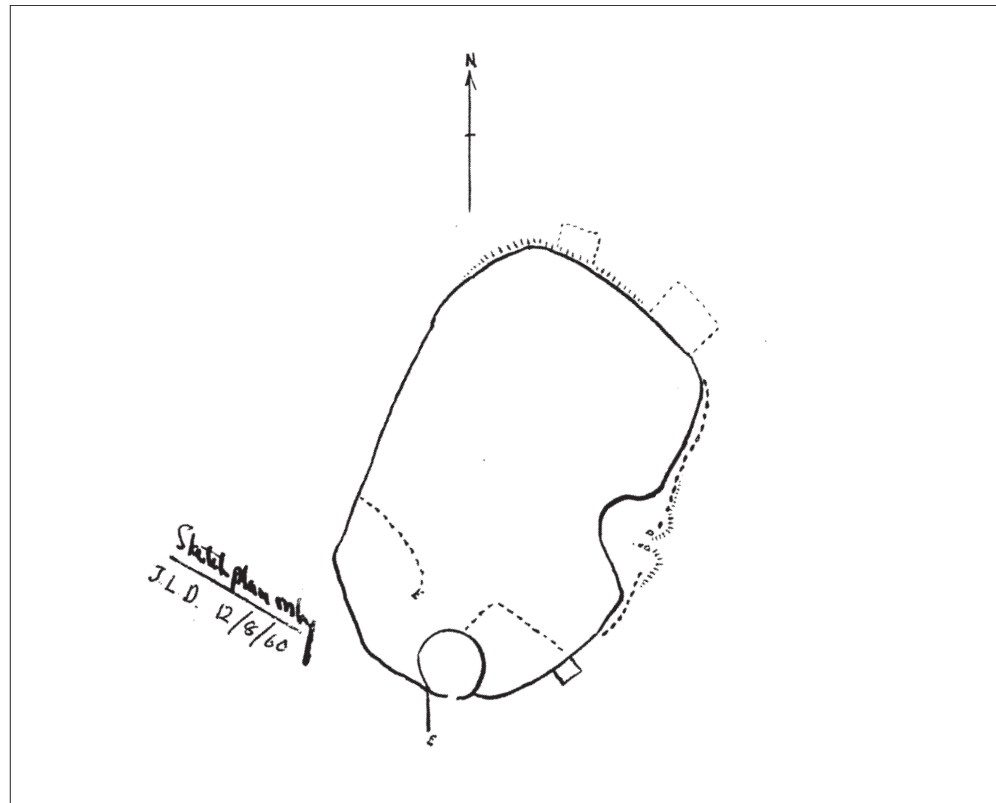
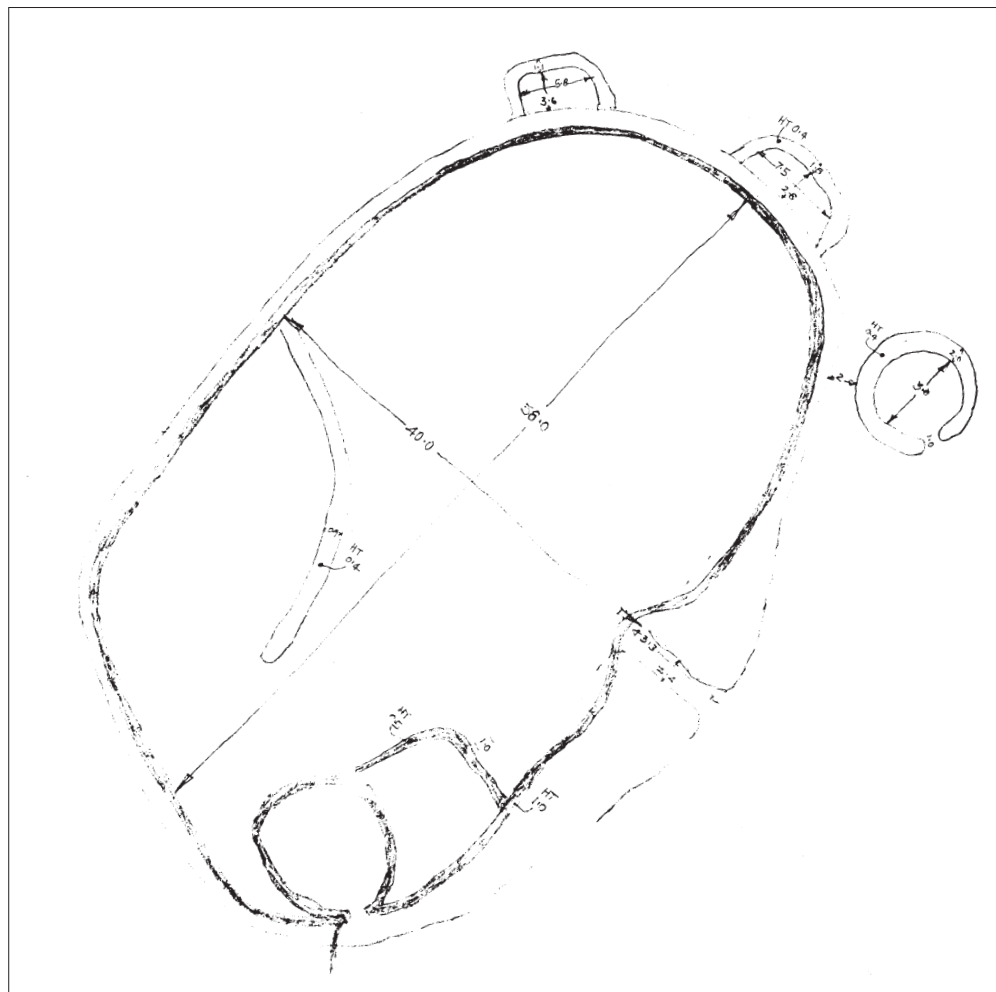


Figure 4.  
 RCHME  
 sketch plan  
 of the hillfort  
 (surveyed  
 March 1987)



remains as a Scheduled Ancient Monument on 22 May of that year (English Heritage 1996 unpublished: RSM 24631). This work suggested that one of the structures identified previously on the exterior of the south-eastern side of the circuit might in part represent an earlier rampart face. The more recent field investigation by English Heritage confirms that while the superficial appearance of the structure results from post-medieval modification, the outer wall overlies and perhaps incorporates prehistoric facing stones.

Black and white vertical aerial photographs produced by several non-specialist sorties are held in English Heritage's National Monuments Record. The earliest, flown on 18 March and 22 March 1948, represent a useful record of archaeological remains surviving on the surface prior to the imposition of coniferous plantations (RAF 1948a; b). The first series, flown at a relatively high altitude, but under excellent low-light conditions, reveal the extent of probable prehistoric cultivation terraces at the northern end of the spur, and medieval and later ridge-and-furrow cultivation on its flanks. The remains of a number of small enclosures, probably of prehistoric or Romano-British date are also visible scattered along the spine of the ridge. Photographs were taken under similar lighting conditions in October 1951 (RAF 1951) and are also fairly informative from an archaeological point of view. Those taken in June 1960 record the early stages of the ploughing undertaken prior to the planting of the present coniferous forestry, but do not reveal any further archaeological features (RAF 1960).

In April 1997, a series of specialist oblique aerial photographs at large scale was taken by Tim Gates, at the request of the Northumberland National Park Authority. These give a good impression of the siting of the monument in relation to the forestry plantations, but do not reveal any archaeological features that are not visible on earlier images.

The fieldwork carried out by English Heritage in July 2000 was the first intensive investigation of the site up to that date, and resulted in the first metrically accurate plan of the remains. The documentary research undertaken as part of the survey was limited to a review of the secondary sources and readily available primary sources, particularly maps and plans.

## 4. DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE EARTHWORKS

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(see Figures 5 and 9)

### 4.1 The hillfort

NGR: NT 8872 2308. NMR number: NT 82 SE 2

At first sight, the rampart of the hillfort is difficult to distinguish from the post-medieval sheepfold that overlies it, which is described in Section 4.2. As described in Section 3, this wholesale remodelling has led to some uncertainty in the past as to whether any prehistoric enclosure ever actually existed. However, close examination confirms beyond doubt that a hillfort did exist and reveals much about the form of the monument.

As closely as can be ascertained, the circuit of the hillfort would originally have enclosed an oval area of 0.19ha (0.47 acres), the interior measuring 57m from south-south-west to north-north-east by 39m wide. The orientation of the long axis of the hillfort corresponds to the orientation of the spur, and for the most part, the perimeter more-or-less follows the contours of the slight natural eminence that it encompasses. On the western side, however, the rampart dips markedly down the slope, without deviating in plan from a smooth curve.

The rampart appears to have been formed by a substantial wall constructed almost entirely of stone. This now survives as a broad spread of tumbled rubble, which is mostly overgrown with grass, except where the material has been exposed by or for the construction of the later livestock enclosures. On average, the spread is 5.0m wide and 0.6m high externally, but generally less than 0.2m high internally. However, on the western side it is considerably broader, with an external scarp standing up to 1.8m high; this is in part caused by the greater steepness of the natural slope at this point, but also reflects the existence of a much greater quantity of rubble. At the south-western end of the hillfort, a short stretch of the external facing of the wall survives to two courses high. Around much of the rest of the circuit, short stretches of contiguous facing stones and isolated blocks survive intermittently *in situ* (see Figure 6). Almost all the facing blocks are large (up to 1.0m long and 0.3m thick) and appear to have been quarried or carefully dressed. Where two courses of masonry survive, the gaps between the courses are packed with thinner fragments of rock, suggesting that the exterior face of the wall could have presented a fairly smooth and impenetrable appearance. The field observation undertaken in 1996 as part of English Heritage's Monuments Protection Programme suggested that a small 'platform' on the exterior of the south-eastern side of the circuit might represent part of the face of the Iron Age rampart. The more recent fieldwork indicates that the so-called platform is actually part of a shieling associated with a small post-medieval enclosure (numbered 5 on Figure 5). However, the eastern wall of the shieling appears to overlie and perhaps incorporate a number of facing stones. With this exception, there are no facing stones visible *in situ* either on the south-east or north-west sides of the circuit, presumably due to the effects of stone robbing to provide building material for the later structures. Around the circuit as a whole, many of the stones used to construct the sheepfold and other post-medieval structures are large, dressed blocks, suggesting that the facing stones were deliberately selected for re-use. Nowhere can the internal face of the rampart be clearly distinguished and

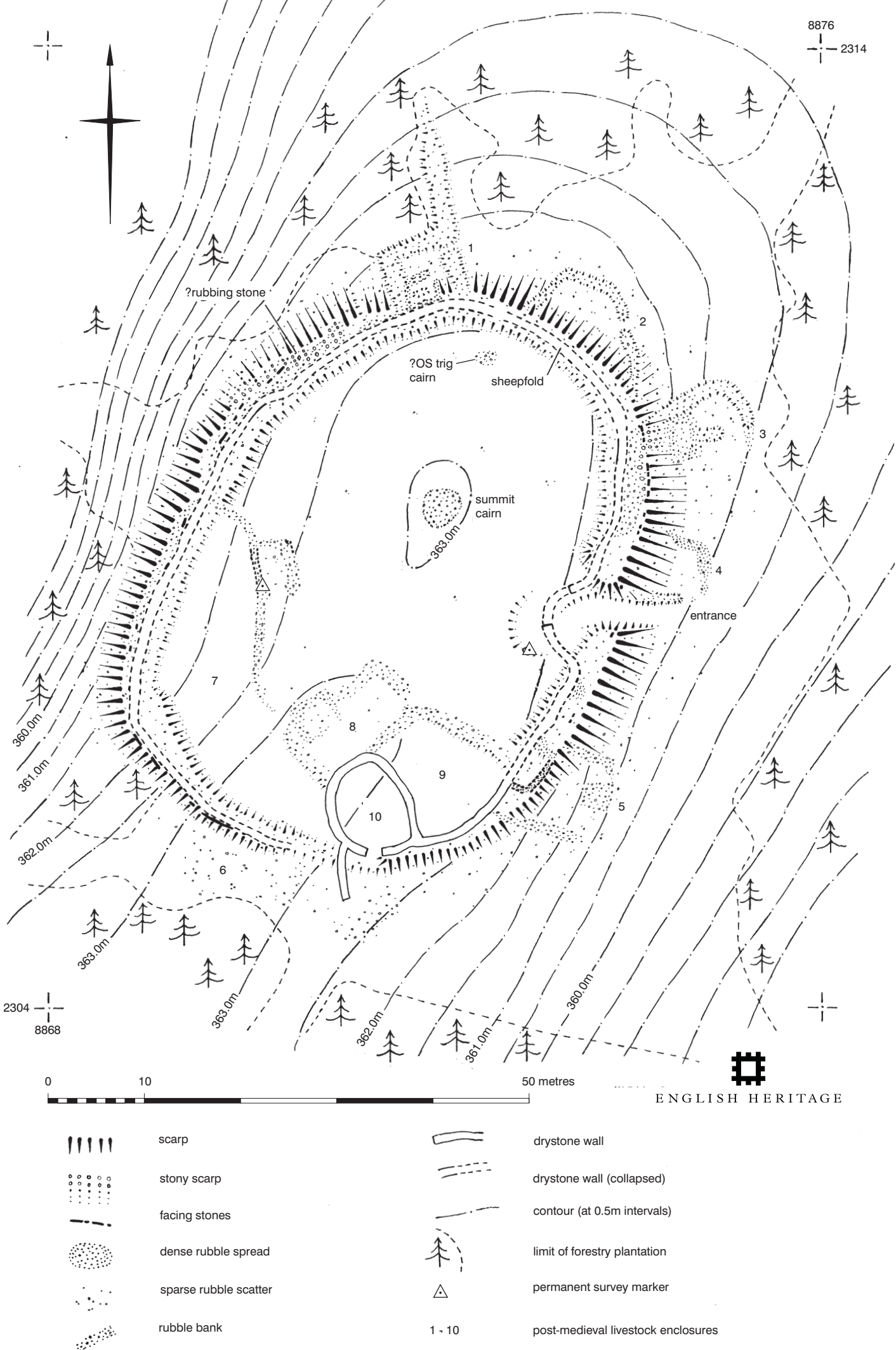


Figure 5. English Heritage plan of the hillfort at 1:500 scale



*Figure 6.  
Photograph of  
rampart  
facing stones*

within two of the post-medieval enclosures (numbered 7 and 10 on Figure 5), the inner edge of the rampart has apparently been dug or worn away. As a result, the precise breadth of the wall cannot be accurately gauged, but a width of 2m to 3m seems likely on the evidence of the form of the rubble bank. The source of the large quantity of stone required to build the rampart is uncertain, but aerial photographs hint that the area to the east of the hillfort may have been subject to some shallow surface quarrying (RAF 1948b).

The sole original entrance into the hillfort is oriented very slightly south of due east. On either side of the entrance, the bank of tumbled material is more massive, the terminals themselves reaching c. 10m in breadth with external scarps up to 1.8m high. No evidence for a timber gate structure can be identified on the surface, although one may be presumed to have existed. Large facing stones *in situ* on either side indicate that the original entrance was no more than 4.0m wide. The in-turned walling of the post-medieval sheepfold on top of the rampart seems to indicate that the entrance was re-used in the historic period. The passage between the terminals has been worn down to a depth of 0.3m and has sharply-defined edges, and this may well result from the later re-use. In the light of this, it is possible that the original gateway was about 2m in width.

As noted by previous investigators, no traces of structures or other clear indications of settlement contemporary with the rampart can be positively identified in the interior. Since the imposition of the surrounding coniferous plantations, the grass in the clearing has become gradually longer and more rank, so it is possible that such traces have been overlooked by the English Heritage survey and by previous investigators. Peter Topping suggested the existence of a ‘hut circle’ on the exterior of the rampart immediately to the north of the entrance (NMRb), but closer examination shows this to be part of a small enclosure of more rectilinear form, which is almost certainly of post-medieval date (numbered 3 on Figure 5).

On the north-west side of the circuit, at NT 88706 32105 a large rectangular block of stone that appears to have been incorporated into the rampart may be a ‘rubbing stone’ or half of a crude ‘saddle quern’. The block is rectangular, 44cms long by 34cms wide and up to 18cms deep, with a linear hollow which is curved in profile and up to 9cms deep, running diagonally across the surface (see Figure 7). The surface of the linear hollow is fairly smooth, but slightly pitted. No examples of stones of similar form were noted during the fieldwork, and it seems likely that the block was deliberately manufactured. One corner has broken off, which may explain its re-use as building material, but it is otherwise almost complete and in good condition. A stone of this form could have been used for various purposes, such as grinding or sharpening, but it is similar in size and aspects of its form to so-called ‘saddle querns’.



Figure 7.  
Photograph of  
possible  
rubbing stone  
or saddle quern

## 4.2 Post-medieval livestock enclosures

NGR: NT 8872 2308. NMR number: NT 82 SE 69

Previous investigators from Aitchison onwards have observed that the hillfort is largely obscured by a relatively recent sheepfold, whose plan closely follows the course of the hillfort rampart; it has also been noted that there are a number of smaller enclosures and structures adjoining this, both outside it and within it. These surface remains are not strictly diagnostic of any precise date, but their condition and general form suggest that all were built in the post-medieval period. They almost certainly functioned as corrals for sheep or other livestock. Several rectangular huts or 'shielings', each up to 5m long by 3m wide, associated with the smaller enclosures, probably provided shelter for shepherds. Throughout this report, the large enclosure overlying the hillfort is referred to as a 'sheepfold', while the smaller enclosures are numbered from 1 to 10 on Figure 5.

The sheepfold directly overlies the line of the Iron Age rampart, and was evidently constructed with material robbed from the rubble bank; large, dressed facing stones seem to have been favoured. Since the drystone wall follows the course of the Iron Age rampart so closely, it encloses a similar area of 0.19ha (0.47 acres). Where best preserved, adjoining Enclosure 10 on the south-eastern side of the circuit, the drystone walling survives to a height of 1.4m with intact facing, but elsewhere the walling has collapsed to form a rubble bank no more than 0.9m high. It appears to have been intact when mapped by the Ordnance Survey in 1860-1 and 1896 (Ordnance Survey 1866; 1899; see also Figure 2). The condition of the bank suggests that while there was little or no effort to repair the wall properly after its collapse, rubble may have been heaped onto the collapsed material on at least one occasion in a crude attempt to heighten it. The only significant deviation from the line of the hillfort rampart is on the eastern side of circuit, where the walling curves inwards abruptly, coinciding with the position of the hillfort gateway. Close examination of this section reveals that there may initially have been an entrance c.4m wide at this point, which was blocked at some later date. As mentioned above, the eroded condition of the terminals of the Iron Age rampart on either side of the entrance also seems to indicate that the opening continued in use as a gateway into the historic period.

Enclosure 1, which was first noted by Aitchison in 1949 (NMRa), is centred at NT 88720 23113, adjoining and partially overlying the exterior of the northern side of the rampart. It comprises a small compound 5.0m square, defined by low stony banks, with an entrance in the north-eastern corner. A bank of similar proportions runs almost due north from the compound for almost 15m, but could not be traced beyond the limit of the coniferous plantation. Aerial photographs taken prior to the planting do not indicate that it continued any further (RAF 1948a; b). Set into the south-west corner of the compound is a shieling, whose interior has been dug out to a depth of 0.4m.

Enclosure 2, which was first recorded by Jimmy Davidson of the Ordnance Survey in 1960 (NMRa), is centred at NT 88735 23120, adjoining and partially overlying the exterior of the north-eastern side of the Iron Age rampart. It comprises a small quadrangular compound, defined by low stony banks, with an entrance in the eastern side.

Enclosure 3, which was first identified by Peter Topping of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England in 1987 (NMRb), is centred at NT 88749



23099, adjoining and partially overlying the exterior of the north-eastern side of the rampart. The low stony banks, which have been somewhat disturbed by the ploughing undertaken prior to the forestry planting, were interpreted by Topping as a 'hut circle', but more detailed examination suggests that they represent a small quadrangular compound, possibly with an entrance in the southern side. There may have been a shieling in the space between the compound and the rampart, but the surface traces are unclear.

Enclosure 4, which adjoins and partially overlies the exterior of the eastern side of the rampart, is centred at NT 88746 23083. It comprises the fragmentary remains of a small quadrangular compound, defined by low stony banks, possibly with an entrance in the eastern side.

Enclosure 5 is centred at NT 88734 23060, adjoining and partially overlying the exterior of the north-eastern side of the Iron Age rampart. It comprises a small quadrangular compound, defined by low stony banks, possibly with an entrance in the south-eastern corner. A roughly rectangular heap of stones on the eastern side of the compound may represent a tumbled shieling, but perhaps results from the disturbance of the earthworks by ploughing for the forestry plantation. On the western side of the compound, overlying the rampart, is a better preserved rectangular shieling which seems to be a more recent addition, although its south-eastern wall incorporates *in situ* facing stones. This structure was recorded by Jimmy Davidson in 1960 (NMRa) and was interpreted by English Heritage in 1996 as a possible element of the Iron Age rampart, a conclusion which was only partly correct.

Enclosure 6, whose existence is speculative, may be suggested by a concentration of rubble that appears to have been disturbed by ploughing. The amorphous spread is centred at NT 88700 23052, adjoining the exterior of the south-western end of the Iron Age rampart.

Enclosure 7, which is almost certainly one of the 'secondary buildings' noted by Aitchison in 1949 (NMRa), is centred at NT 88698 23070, adjoining the inner edge of the south-western side of the sheepfold. It comprises an irregular compound, defined by a low stony bank, with an entrance in the eastern side. The interior is slightly hollowed, presumably through the action of trampling livestock, and the back of the rampart bank is considerably reduced in size along this stretch. A short length of the stony bank has better-constructed faces formed by large blocks of stone at the point where it forms one side of a rectangular shieling on the exterior of the enclosure.

Enclosure 8 is centred at NT 88712 23067, adjoining enclosures 7 and 9. It comprises a small quadrangular compound, defined by a fragmentary stony bank, possibly with an entrance in the north-east corner. There are slight hints that a shieling may have been set into the south-western corner.

Enclosure 9, which is probably one of the 'secondary buildings' noted by Aitchison in 1949 (NMRa), is centred at NT 88721 23061, adjoining Enclosure 8 and the interior of the sheepfold. Along with Enclosure 10, it is depicted on the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map surveyed in 1860-1, but not on the Second Edition map revised in 1896 (Ordnance Survey 1866; 1899). This perhaps indicates that the enclosure became dilapidated in the intervening period. It comprises a small quadrangular compound, defined by a fairly prominent stony bank, without any clear indication of an entrance.

The south-western side of the enclosure appears to have been incorporated into Enclosure 10.

Enclosure 10 (Figure 9), centred at NT 88724 23058 is certainly the most recent of the small enclosures on Fawcett Shank. It appears to partially overlie and re-use Enclosure 9 and the wall of the sheepfold. Along with Enclosure 9, it is depicted on the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map surveyed in 1860-1, but not on the Second Edition map revised in 1896 (Ordnance Survey 1866; 1899). This may similarly imply that it became dilapidated in that time, but if so, it was subsequently rebuilt; it is also possible that it was simply deliberately missed off the map revision. Certainly, it was virtually intact in 1948 (RAF 1948a; b) and the presence of a rotting but upright wooden post indicates that it may have been in use immediately before the planting of the forestry. The enclosure comprises a small roughly circular compound (larger versions are known locally as 'stells') with an internal diameter of 9.0m, formed by a drystone wall standing to 1.7m, with a narrow entrance on the south. A more delapidated wall extending for 6m southwards from the south-western side of the enclosure appears to have provided additional shelter.



*Figure 8.  
Photograph of  
Enclosure 10:  
the probable  
20th century  
'stell'*

### 4.3 Probable 19th-century cairns

#### Summit cairn

NGR: NT 88721 23092. NMR number: NT 82 SE 70

A low cairn occupies the highest point of Fawcett Shank, which lies within the area encompassed by the hillfort rampart. The cairn is circular, 4.0m in diameter and no more than 0.2m high. It is formed of large, loosely-packed blocks of rubble which are of similar size and form to those that make up the bank of the rampart. If the material was indeed robbed from there, a prehistoric origin for the cairn can securely be ruled out. The condition of the cairn also seems to support a post-medieval date.

#### Probable Ordnance Survey 'trig' cairn

NGR: NT 88726 23108. NMR number: NT 82 SE 71

Both the 19th-century editions of the Ordnance Survey 6-inch scale map indicate the existence of a triangulation station on the summit of Fawcett Shank (Ordnance Survey 1866; 1899). The depiction suggests the site to be precisely on the line of the hillfort rampart and there is a break in the line of the sheepfold that may represent the site. However, given that the sheepfold was apparently intact and probably still in regular use at that date, it is slightly more likely that the site can be equated with a roughly circular patch of stones up to 2.1m in diameter, immediately inside the line of the perimeter. This may well mark the position of a marker set within a buried stone box.

## 5. DISCUSSION

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### The hillfort

Until 1987, considerable uncertainty remained as to whether the rubble bank and course of facing stones underlying the post-medieval sheepfold genuinely represented a prehistoric enclosure. Even Peter Topping, whose field observation in March of that year effectively ended the debate, echoed Eric Geary's earlier doubts that the enclosure could actually be termed a 'hillfort', although he was more confident in accepting the prehistoric date of the monument. The detailed field investigation by English Heritage leaves very little room for further doubt: all the identifiable characteristics of the enclosure are entirely typical of small Iron Age hillforts in the Cheviots.

Enclosing an area of 0.19ha, the hillfort is comparable in size to many others in the vicinity, such as those on North Black Hagg (c.0.25ha) and on West Hill, overlooking Kirknewton (0.28ha). In terms of its plan, it is similar to the hillforts already mentioned and several others of somewhat larger size, such as that on Sinkside Hill (c.0.38ha) and the inner circuit on Great Hetha (0.50ha) on the opposite side of the College Valley. Although Geary and Topping have questioned whether the enclosure was truly a fort on the grounds that its location is defensively weak, its siting is comparable to the hillforts on Little Hetha and North Black Hagg, and can actually be regarded as fairly typical. Fawcett Shank is certainly a less dominant summit than those occupied by the hillforts on Great Hetha and Sinkside Hill, to name but two in the immediate vicinity. Nonetheless, it is locally prominent and commands good visibility, especially along the valleys of the College Burn and the Lamden Burn. The skilful construction techniques evident in the rampart face, especially where it is best preserved, have much in common with the hillfort on Sinkside Hill, where the external facing survives up to to six courses high in places. The care with which individual large blocks of stone were evidently dressed and laid is also comparable to the ramparts of the hillforts on West Hill and Great Hetha, where the facing is preserved to a similar degree. The precise siting of the rampart in relation to the natural topography is reminiscent of the hillforts on West Hill and Sinkside Hill. In each case, the pronounced 'tilt' of the circuit across the contours effectively orients the monument towards the College Valley, apparently so as to make the monument visually imposing when seen from the valley bottom (Topping 1999, fig 6). At Fawcett Shank, the more massive bank of tumbled rubble on the western side of the circuit hints that this stretch may have been higher, giving it increased visual impact. Although hillforts have conventionally been thought of as primarily defensive in function, it has been argued that architectural display was also an important factor in their design, in some cases over-riding what might seem to be 'common-sense' considerations from a defensive point of view (Bowden and McOmish 1987; 1989). Indeed, to judge from the size of the bank of tumbled rubble, the naturally well-defended western side of Fawcett Shank seems to have been augmented by a more massive rampart than the naturally easier approaches on the north and south. The form of the entrance, with relatively massive terminals flanking a narrow passage, is also typical. Its location on the more gentle slope away from the College Valley mirrors the arrangements at Sinkside Hill and Great Hetha, both on the opposite side of the valley. However, it is also worth remarking that the gateway at Fawcett Shank faces almost due east, an orientation which it shares with the overwhelming majority of the entrances of hillforts, enclosures and roundhouses throughout the Iron Age (Hill 1993, 66 and fig 3; 1994, 6 and fig 2, 1995, fig 7; Oswald 1997). If ease of access were a prime consideration, the gateway at Fawcett

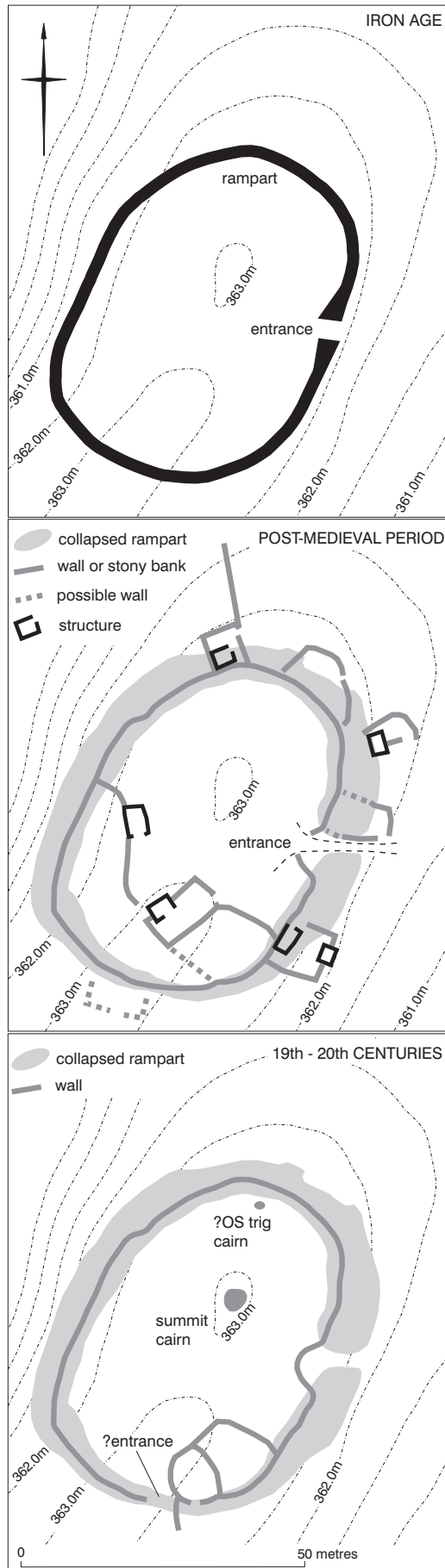


Figure 9.  
Interpretative plan  
of the remains

Shank might be expected to lie on the northern side of the hill, where the tapering spur offers a relatively straightforward route to and from the valley floor.

The dating of the hillfort to the Iron Age (c.750 BC to AD 50) is virtually secure given the general form and location of the monument, but in the absence of excavated evidence the precise date of its construction is open to question. It is widely accepted that stone-built hillforts in the Cheviots were generally constructed from the 6th century BC onwards, in many instances replacing earlier enclosures bounded by timber palisades, and coinciding with an intensification of arable agriculture (Burgess 1984, 159-64). Radiocarbon determinations from the excavated ramparts of the hillfort on Wether Hill overlooking the Ingram Valley broadly support this theory (Topping and McOmish 2000). Yet very few other hillforts have been dated accurately either on artifactual evidence or by scientific dating techniques. If the possible ‘rubbing stone’ identified on the north-west side of the circuit is indeed half of a crude form of ‘saddle quern’, this may provide some of the best dating evidence currently available for the hillfort on Fawcett Shank. This type of millstone is generally held to be of early and middle Iron Age date, and to have become obsolete when rotary ‘beehive’ querns were introduced in the late Iron Age. However, caution is necessary, for there remains some uncertainty as to whether the stone is genuinely artificial; even if it can be interpreted as a form of saddle quern, it was evidently being re-used in the rampart, perhaps long after it was used as a tool. Its presence therefore offers at best an imprecise indicator of the date of the monument.

The term ‘hillfort’ has been used throughout this report, although Geary and Topping (NMRa) deliberately

avoided applying the term to the enclosure on Fawcett Shank. As discussed above, their caution is not really justified when the formal characteristics of the remains on Fawcett Shank are compared to other enclosures in the Cheviots which have long been classed with confidence as Iron Age hillforts. However, the doubt shown by Geary and Topping does underline the fact that most so-called 'hillforts' in the Cheviots do not conform closely to the stereotypical model of a 'proto-urban' centre of impressive size and primarily defensive function (Cunliffe 1991, 528-40). Indeed, it has been remarked that the only example that bears comparison with the size and scale of occupation of hillforts in central and southern England, and indeed with some of the larger examples in southern Scotland, is the fort on Yeavinger Bell (Hogg 1943, 138; Cunliffe 1983, 86 and fig 4; Ferrell 1997, 231). Smaller hillforts whose defences are of questionable strength, such as that on Fawcett Shank, seem instead to result from the adoption of the same style of defensive architecture by small, highly autonomous groups within a social structure without any pronounced hierarchy: defended farmsteads, in effect (Ferrell 1997, 233). Although the English Heritage (1996) Scheduling description refers to the hillfort as a defended settlement, there is as yet no firm evidence for Iron Age buildings on the site. This, together with the apparent absence of subdividing boundaries in the interior of the hillfort suggests that there may have been relatively few occupants, with a close social bond between them - perhaps an extended family group (Ferrell 1997, 234).

The extent of the land that may have been farmed, or otherwise exploited, by the occupants of the hillfort is uncertain. The potential for understanding the wider landscape within which the monument stood has been severely reduced by the imposition of the forestry plantations across much of the surrounding area. A series of cultivation terraces extend across the tip of the spur to the north of Fawcett Shank, and a few settlement sites which may well be of prehistoric date are scattered along the ridge. While it is possible that both the cultivation terraces and the settlements were associated with the hillfort, it is unlikely that any connection between them is still be detectable through field survey. The available aerial photographs taken prior to the imposition of the forestry plantations do not cast much more light on how the broader landscape was used.

## **The medieval and post-medieval periods**

The remains of the livestock enclosures built within and around the collapsed remains of the Iron Age hillfort are not exceptional in the regional context, either for their form or for their condition. As Dick Emsley pointed out in 1969 (NMRa), the complex on Fawcett Shank has close parallels with the enclosures within the hillfort on Sinkside Hill, on the opposite side of the valley. The existence of the enclosures on the same sites as the hillforts without doubt simply reflects the availability of a ready-made enclosure and a convenient supply of building material, rather than any continuity of occupation or activity on the hilltop. It is clear that more than one phase of construction is represented and it seems likely that the complex evolved through a prolonged process of modification and reconstruction year by year, which would therefore have been far more piecemeal than Figure 9 suggests. While a medieval origin for some of the enclosures cannot be ruled out, the form of the delapidated structures gives no hint that they are any earlier than post-medieval. Similarly, the summit cairn and probable Ordnance Survey cairn are similar to examples found on many other hilltops in the region. The archaeological importance of all the post-medieval remains therefore lies primarily in the effect that their construction had upon the Iron Age hillfort.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

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The field investigation was carried out by Alastair Oswald, with assistance from Sarah Whiteley of the Peak District National Park Authority. Bernard Thomason helped with the initial control survey. A number of digital photographs taken by Alastair Oswald are held on disk as part of the project archive.

The measured survey of the hillfort and overlying complex of stock enclosures was based upon points laid out using a Leica TC1610 Electronic Theodolite with integral Electromagnetic Distance Measurement (Total Station), from a baseline traverse of two stations. From these stations, observations were logged to fix a network of additional temporary control points, from which the earthworks were plotted using hand tapes by conventional graphical techniques. Using a Trimble 4800 dual frequency Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) system, the stations of the traverse were subsequently related to the National Grid (OSGB36), through a transformation programme based on their positions relative to a base station on Great Hetha, which had in turn been fixed in relation to three Ordnance Survey trigonometrical pillars. These were located respectively on the summit of Blackchester Hill, 17.3kms to the south-east at NGR NU 00379 10250, Whitton Hill, 6.5kms to the north-east at NGR NT 92809 34584, and Linton Hill, 11.5kms to the west at NGR NT 78735 27954. Both the stations of the baseline traverse were permanently marked using brass rivets, and their National Grid references were calculated on the basis of the GPS data. Their positions are indicated on the 1:500 plans and in Appendix 2. Sufficient points were taken with the electronic theodolite to contour the immediate vicinity of the hillfort at 1m intervals. The resulting plan was plotted at 1:500 scale via Key Terrafirma, AutoCAD and Coreldraw software.

The hand drawn archive plan and CAD-based drawings were prepared using CorelDraw 8 software by Alastair Oswald. The report was researched and written by Alastair Oswald, and edited by Stewart Ainsworth.

The site archive has been deposited in English Heritage's National Monuments Record, Great Western Village, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ, to where applications for copyright should be made (reference number: NT 82 SE 2).

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## **7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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
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## **APPENDIX 1. Table of NMR numbers linked to the survey**

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Iron Age hillfort	NT 8872 2308	NT 82 SE 2
Post-medieval stock pens and structures	NT 8872 2308	NT 82 SE 69
Post-medieval summit cairn	NT 88721 23092	NT82 SE 70
C19th OS trig cairn	NT 88726 23108	NT 82 SE 71

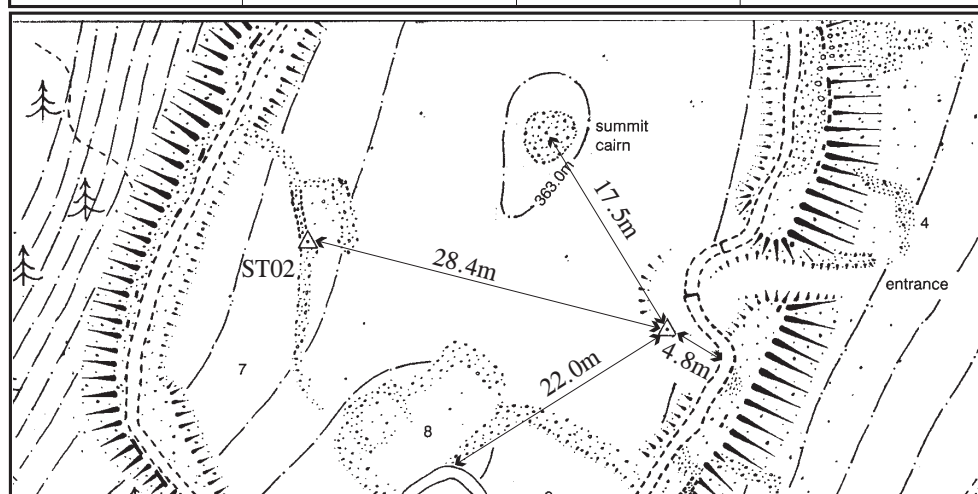
## APPENDIX 2. Locations of permanent survey stations

### SURVEY STATION INFORMATION



<b>SITE NAME</b>	Fawcett Shank, Northumberland		
<b>Station number</b>	ST01	<b>Status</b>	Permanent
<b>Type of Mark</b>	Brass rivet set in rock	<b>NMR number</b>	NT 82 SE 2
<b>Date of Survey</b>	14-JUN-2000	<b>Sam number</b>	-
<b>Office of origin</b>	York	<b>RSM number</b>	24631
<b>Surveyor(s)</b>	AO, BT	<b>Neg number</b>	Digital

<b>Co-ordinate Scheme</b>	<b>Eastings</b>	<b>Northings</b>	<b>Height</b>
OS National Grid	388729.895	623077.228	362.852



## SURVEY STATION INFORMATION

<b>SITE NAME</b>	Fawcett Shank, Northumberland		
<b>Station number</b>	ST02	<b>Status</b>	Permanent
<b>Type of Mark</b>	Brass rivet set in rock	<b>NMR number</b>	NT 82 SE 2
<b>Date of Survey</b>	14-JUN-2000	<b>Sam number</b>	-
<b>Office of origin</b>	York	<b>RSM number</b>	24631
<b>Surveyor(s)</b>	AO, BT	<b>Neg number</b>	Digital
<b>Co-ordinate Scheme</b>	<b>Eastings</b>	<b>Northings</b>	<b>Height</b>
<b>OS National Grid</b>	388702.189	623083.974	362.590

