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SHOULSBURY CASTLE, EXMOOR, DEVON.

An Iron Age hillfort and a stone setting on Shoulsbarrow Common

Elaine Jamieson

SURVEY REPORT

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Summary

Shoulsbury Castle is a multivallate hillfort of probable Iron Age date, situated on the western fringe of Exmoor. In April 2005 a large scale earthwork survey of the hillfort was undertaken for the first time by the Archaeological Survey and Investigation section of English Heritage. The survey was carried out at the request of the Exmoor National Park Authority to aid with the management of the site. The hillfort comprises a rampart and ditch with an outer rampart and ditch on three sides and shows evidence of being unfinished. The excellent preservation of the earthworks and the monuments close proximity to early iron working sites add to the importance of the site. During survey work a stone setting of late Neolithic/early Bronze Age date was identified c 300m to the north-west of the hillfort. The stone setting comprises six stones set in a roughly rectangular pattern.

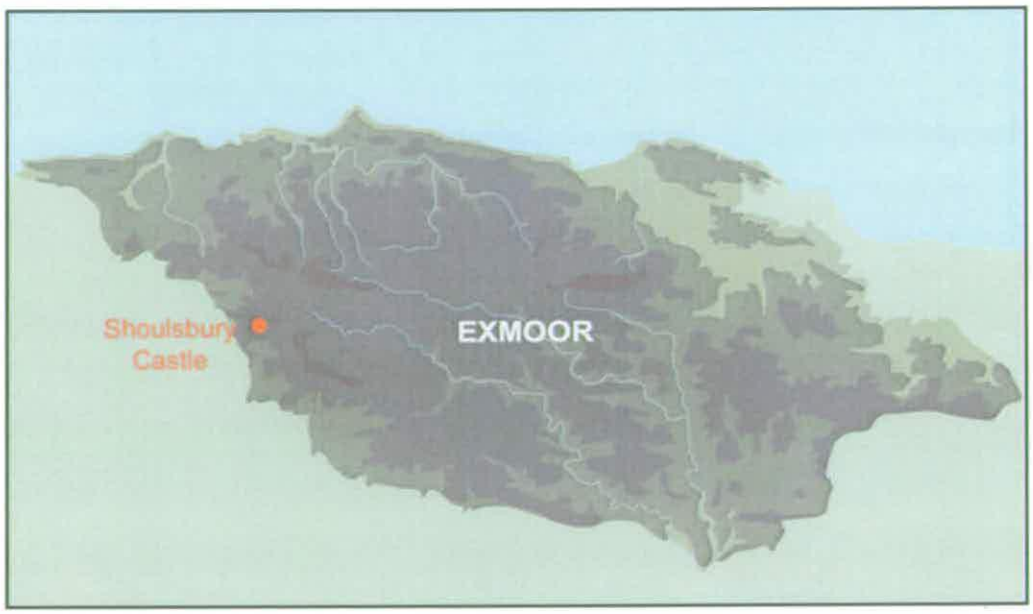

Figure 1.
Location map.

Location and geology

Shoulsbury Castle is located towards the western fringe of the moor approximately 2km south-east of Challacombe (centred SS 7055 3908) (Figs. 1 & 2). The hillfort lies slightly below the western edge of the main plateau of Shoulsbarrow Common, at approximately 460m above OD. The earthworks sit within an unenclosed area of rough grass and boggy moorland, with enclosed pasture to the south and Castle Common to the east. The ground falls sharply to the south and south-west and rises gently to the north-east. It is this natural topography which has clearly influenced the morphology of the hillfort. The site commands impressive views not only over Exmoor, but westwards out over Barnstaple Bay and northwards towards the Bristol Channel with Wales beyond. To the south the imposing massifs of Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor are visible on a clear day. Shoulsbury Castle overlooks the upper reaches of the Bray Valley where a series of steep combes feed water southwards into the River Bray.

Shoulsbury Castle lies on Morte Slates of the Devonian series (British Geological Survey Barnstaple, sheet 293).

The Survey

Shoulsbury Castle was surveyed at 1:500 scale in April 2005 by staff from the Archaeological Survey and Investigation section of English Heritage based in the Exeter office. The Shoulsbury Common stone setting was surveyed at 1:100 scale.

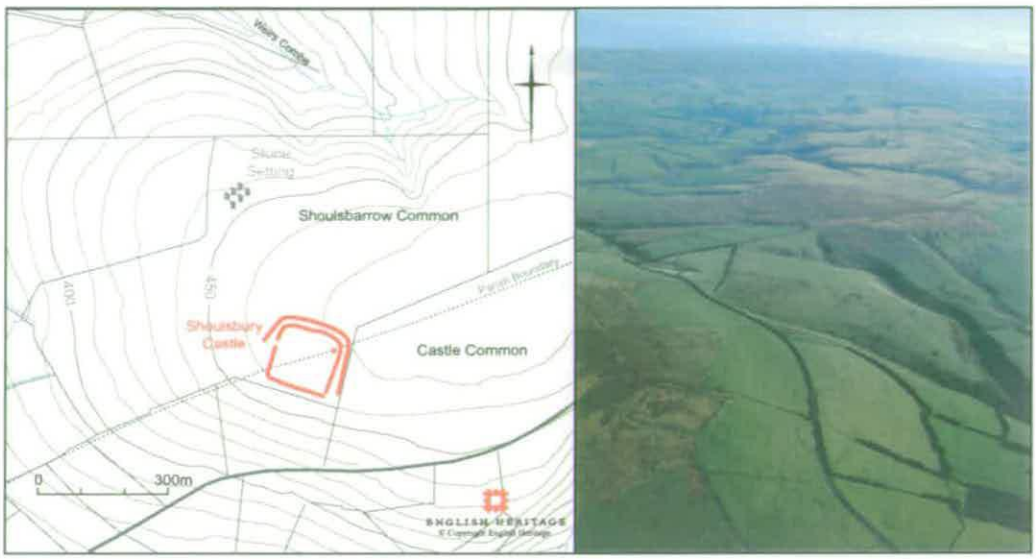

Figure 2. *Shoulsbury Castle: map showing topographic setting (left). Aerial photograph looking east over Exmoor (right) (NMR 18528/36).*

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Shoulsbury Castle is mentioned in a survey of the Royal Forest of Exmoor undertaken in 1815 prior to the inclosure and eventual sale of the forest. The perambulation states that the forest boundary went from 'a Boundary Stone placed in a Burrow called Settaburrow, and from thence in the same direction to a Boundary Stone near a place called Shrowlsbury Castle or Salusbury Castle and contiguous to a bog or swamp called Moules Chamber' (MacDermot 1973, 421). Sloley Stone near Moles Chamber was erected in 1742 to mark the boundary between the commons of High Bray and Gratton Manors at the point where it met the forest boundary and may be the stone referred to in this document (MacDermot 1973, 425).

One of the earliest known depictions of Shoulsbury Castle was produced by Henry Woollcombe in the early 19th century (Fig. 3)(Woollcombe 1939, 84). Woollcombe's unpublished manuscript entitled *Some Account of the Fortified Hills in the County of Devon, whether British, Roman, Anglo-Saxon or Danish with plans of many of them*, contains a written description of the monument accompanied by a plan of the earthworks. Woollcombe visited Shoulsbury Castle

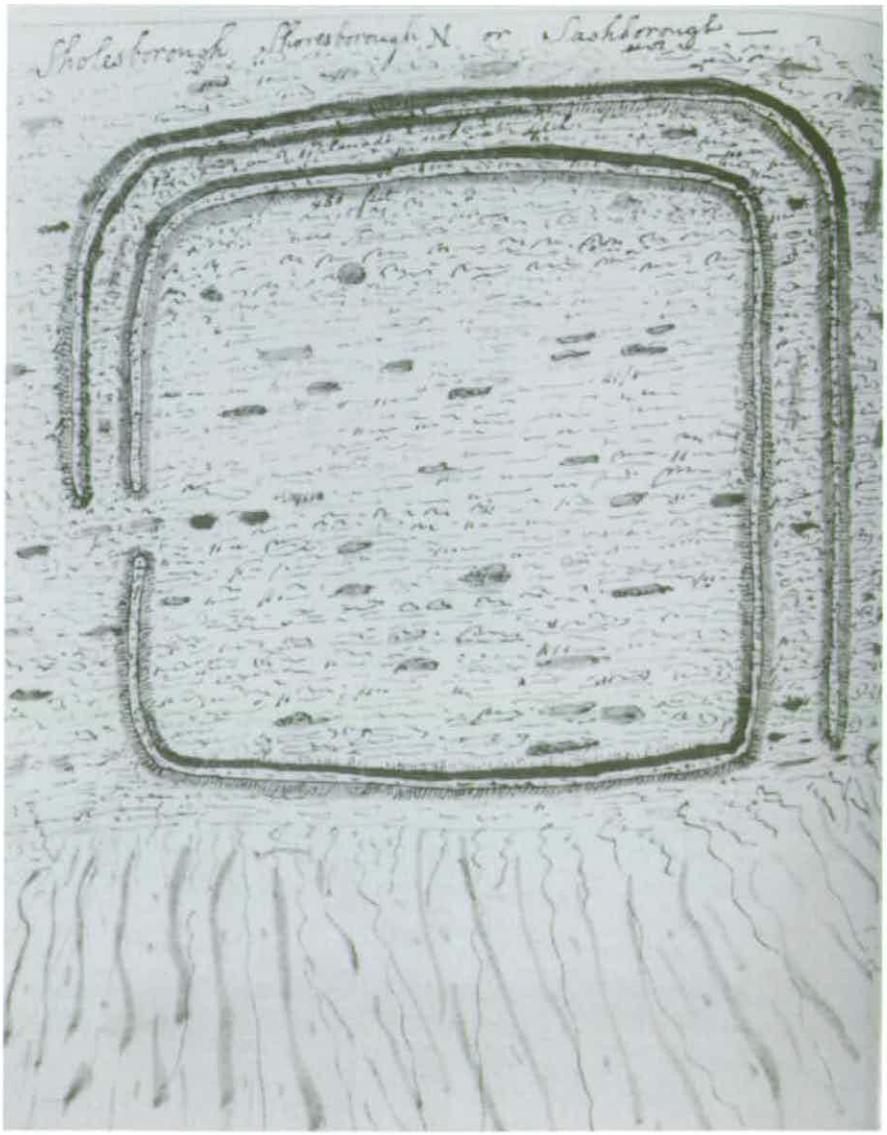

Figure 3. *Shoulsbury Castle: depicted by Henry Woollcombe . (By courtesy of the Devon and Exeter Institution Library) (AA00/0387)*

in September 1842 and was disappointed to find that 'all around was enveloped in fog, so that the distant views were not to be seen, no part of the coast was visible' (Woollcombe 1939, 85).

Woollcombe's plan names the monument Sholesborough, Shoresborough, or Sashborough and depicts the inner and outer ramparts of the hillfort. Although the plan is not drawn to scale and has obvious inaccuracies, he has included dimensions for the inner enclosure. These dimensions, 450 feet by 450 feet, are relatively accurate and would indicate that a degree of measurement must have taken place. In describing the site Woolcombe writes: 'The whole inclosure is a complete morass incapable of being walked on. Indeed the whole hill is a bog and marshy and requires great care even in this dry season to pick out your path. The parts with double ramparts was never a ditch, it was rather an esplanade for men to draw up on'. On the plan he even annotates the area between the inner and outer ramparts on the northern side of the enclosure 'esplanade and ditch' (Woollcombe 1939, 84-5).

Woollcombe states that at this time Shoulsbury Castle was commonly thought to date from the Roman period, mainly due to the square shape of the enclosure. He, however, was less convinced and wrote: 'I do not consider this camp to have been constructed by the Romans, I know of no possible reason for placing any Roman camp here' (Woollcombe 1939, 85).

The Victoria History of the County of Devon published in 1906 includes a scale plan and a brief description of Shoulsbury Castle. It also dismisses the idea that the earthworks date from the Roman period stating that two swords discovered at this location and reported to be Roman were in fact rapiers dating from the 17th century. It also mentions that the mound in the north-east corner of the enclosure was excavated some years before producing no finds (VCH 1906, 596).

Charles Whybrow included Shoulsbury in his paper entitled *Some Multivallate Hill-forts on Exmoor and in North Devon* (Whybrow 1967). Whybrow suggests that the termination of the outer rampart half way along the western side of the enclosure may indicate that the hillfort was never completed. He makes a passing reference to the excavation of one hut within the enclosure which he attributes to J.F. Chanter, although it is unclear where this information was obtained as his reference does not seem to be correct (Whybrow 1967, 16-18).

In *The Archaeology of Exmoor,* Grinsell again questions whether Shoulsbury Castle is Iron Age or Roman in date. He suggests that the name may derive from the Romano-Celtic god Sulis Minerva to whom the Roman baths at Bath were dedicated. When describing the mound towards the north-eastern corner of the enclosure Grinsell refers to the notes of Rainbird Clarke who conjectured that the earthwork may represent the base of a watchtower if not a round barrow (Grinsell 1970b, 84). In his paper on *The Barrows of North Devon,* L.V. Grinsell is uncertain whether the mound in the north-eastern corner of Shoulsbury Castle is a barrow or a hut site (Grinsell 1970a, 121).

Silvester and Quinnell included Shoulsbury Castle in their paper on *Unfinished Hillforts on the Devon Moors* (Silvester & Quinell 1993). They suggest that the undulating form of the earthwork banks and the existence of a berm between the rampart and ditch demonstrate the unfinished

nature of the hillfort. They also note the existence of dumped material along the berm and suggest this is indicative of a two-phase movement of spoil to create the initial low bank (Silvester & Quinnell 1993, 27-28).

Shoulsbury Castle was depicted as an earthwork on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" scale map of 1889-90 (Fig. 4). By the time of the 2nd edition map of 1904 the monument was named Shoulsbarrow Castle. This name perpetuated until the Ordnance Survey map revision of 1976-77 when it was again recorded as Shoulsbury Castle.

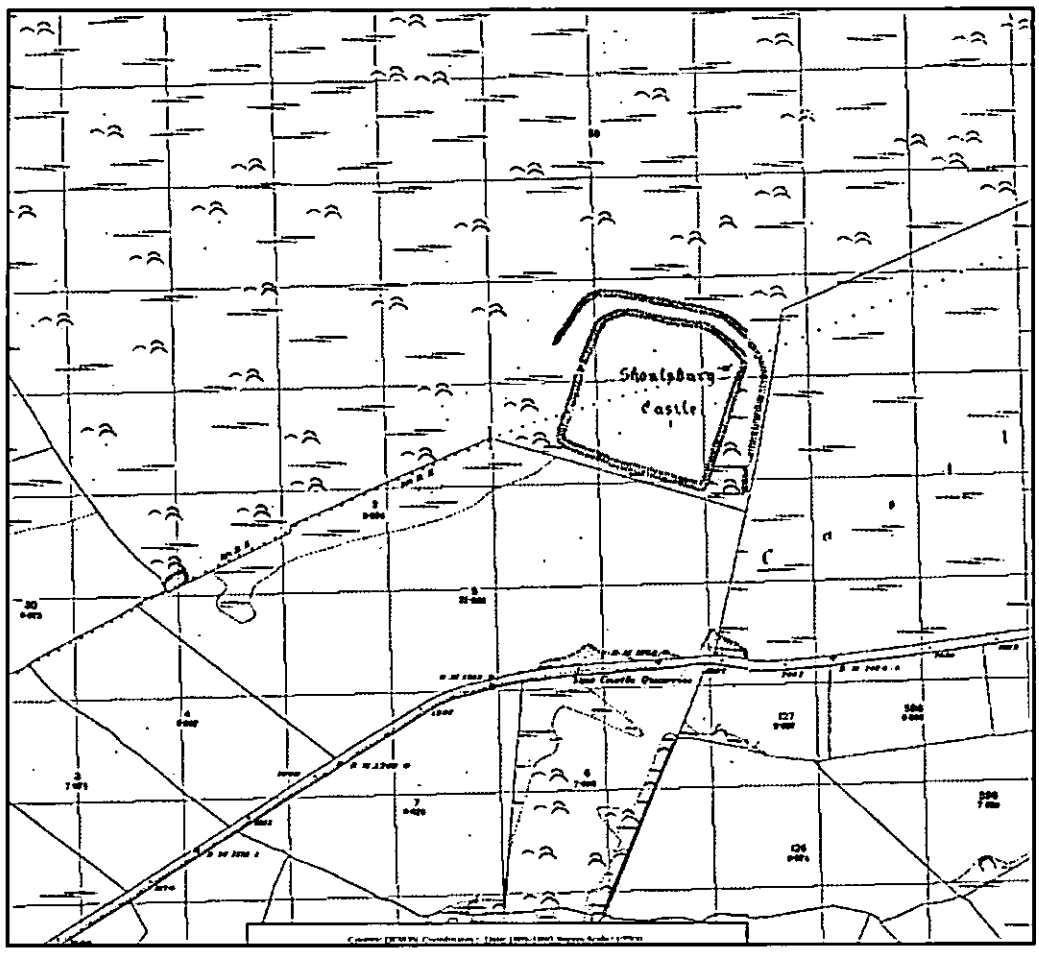

Figure 4. *Shoulsbury Castle: reproduced from the Ordnance Survey 1st edition map of 1889-90.*

SHOULSBURY CASTLE: THE EARTHWORKS

Introduction

The impressive earthwork remains of Shoulsbury Castle (SS 73 NW 6) lie within unenclosed moorland towards the western edge of Exmoor National Park. The monument is a multivallate hillfort of late-prehistoric date, most probably Iron Age, with the inner rampart enclosing an area of approximately 2 hectares. A large scale survey of the site was undertaken in April 2005 by the Exeter team of the Archaeological Survey and Investigation section of English Heritage, at the request of the Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA). Shoulsbury Castle became public access land under the CRoW 2000 Act and the survey was undertaken to assist the Exmoor National Park historic environment team and access officers manage access to the site.

The enclosure

Shoulsbury Castle is almost square in form with rounded corners, measuring *c* 147m between its inner rampart tops (Figs. 5 & 6). It is orientated northeast-southwest and lies on an area of gently sloping ground, rising *c* 10m from the south-western corner to the north-eastern boundary of the site. The enclosure comprises a rampart and external ditch with a maximum overall width of *c* 18m. The grass-covered rampart is well preserved along the majority of its length and is composed of stone and earth. It comprises a series of level changes giving it an undulating appearance along most of its length.

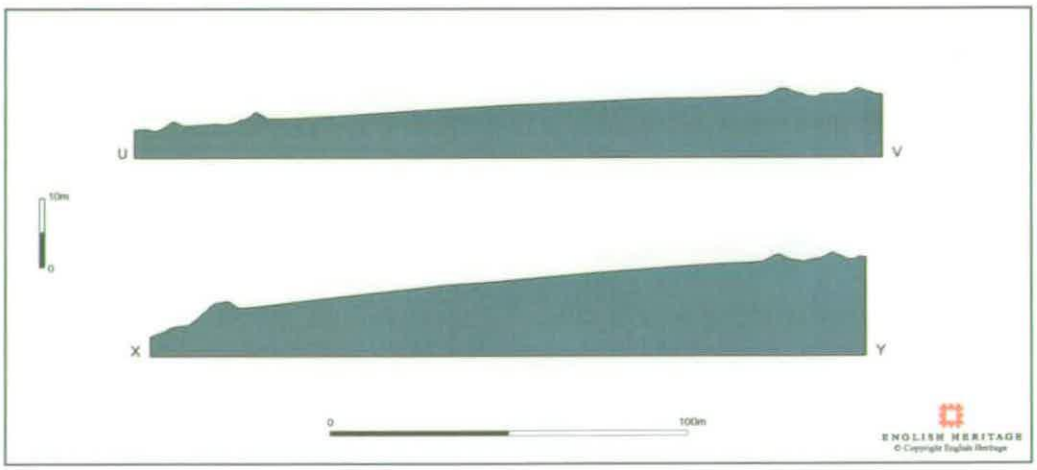

Figure 6.
Shoulsbury Castle: earthwork profiles.

The southern side of the enclosure is defined by a strong, steep rampart some 2.5-3.6m high. An outer ditch and counterscarp bank run the length of the down slope side, the bank surviving to *c* 0.5m in height and 4-7.5m in width. A modern fence boundary follows the top of the counterscarp for over 100m and forms the northern boundary of the pasture field south of the hillfort. There is a well defined terminal to the ditch at its eastern end where the counterscarp also turns and terminates at the foot of the rampart. At its western end, although less well defined, the counterscarp was surveyed rounding the south-western corner and was visible running for *c* 23m along the western side of the enclosure. The presence of reeds internally along the foot of the main rampart may suggest the existence of an internal quarry ditch which has now silted up.

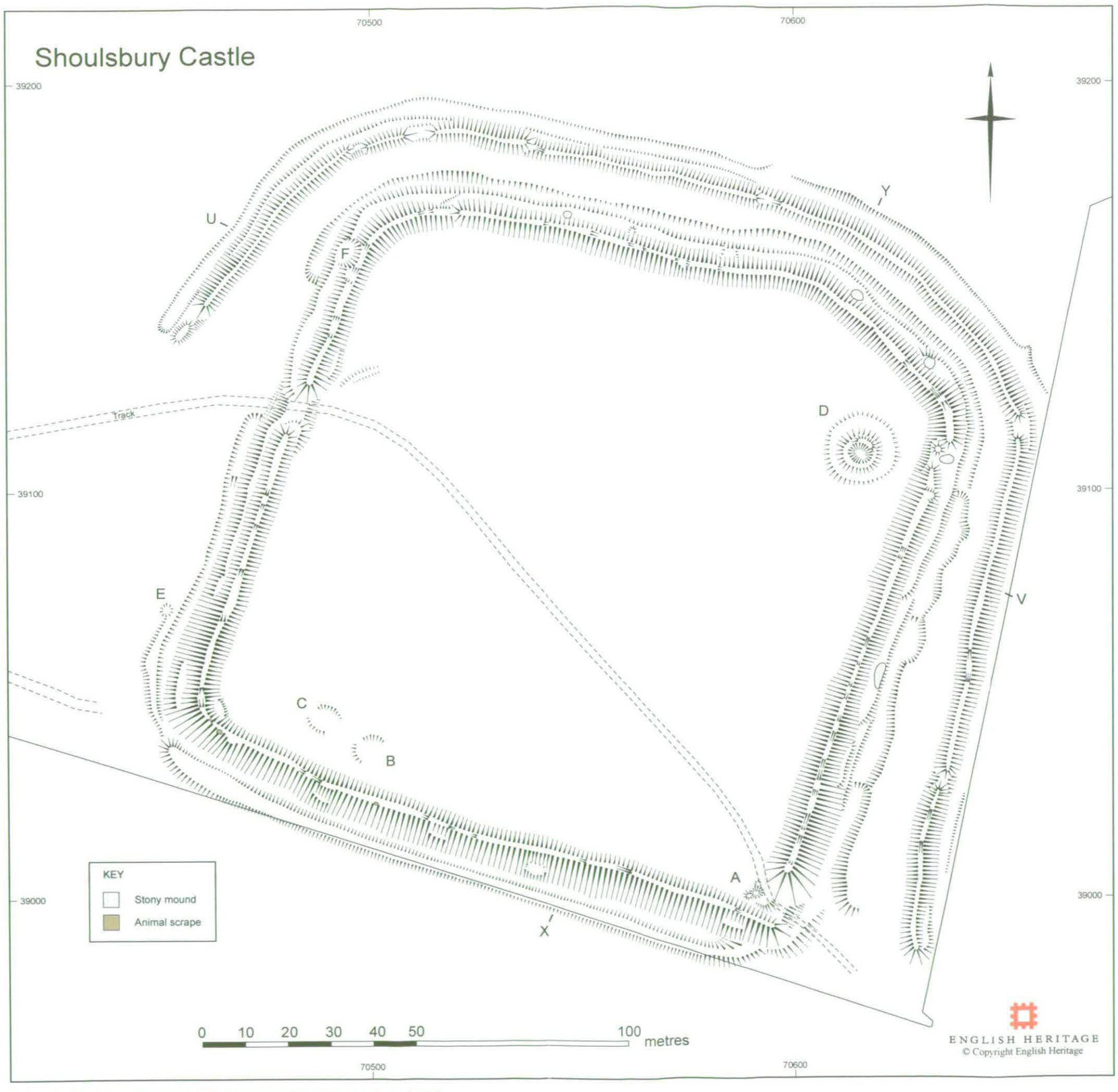

Figure 5. Shoulsbury Castle: English Heritage 1:500 scale survey (reduced).

The eastern side of the enclosure comprises a rampart and ditch, well defined at its southern end where the rampart stands *c* 2.7m high and the ditch *c* 0.4m deep. The rampart becomes less substantial *c* 35m north of the south-eastern corner where a berm, *c* 3m wide, is visible separating the rampart and ditch. In approximately the same location the ditch also becomes less well defined, with its eastern scarp running northwards in an uneven form for *c* 75m. This unevenness may suggest that this section of ditch has been re-cut. Core samples taken from this area indicate the presence of over 1m of recent silting in the ditch (pers. comm. R Wilson North). Towards the north-eastern corner of the enclosure a later breach in the rampart is clearly visible. The Challacombe/High Bray parish boundary runs through the site from the north-eastern to the south-western corner and the breach in the rampart towards the former may be connected with this.

The western side of the enclosure is also formed by a grass-covered rampart and ditch, the majority of which is separated by a berm. The most substantial section of rampart survives towards the south-western corner where it stands *c* 2.5m high. Where the berm is evident, the rampart stands between 0.9m and 1.3m high and the ditch a maximum of 0.5m deep. It is interesting to note that the berm commences at approximately the same location along both the western and eastern sides of the enclosure.

To the north the enclosure is again formed by a rampart, berm and ditch. The berm is up to 2.8m wide and several small mounds comprising earth and stone were recorded sitting upon it, possibly related to the construction of the rampart. The rampart stands a maximum of 1.1m high and a later breach is evident near the north-western corner of the enclosure. Towards the north-eastern corner, the rampart and ditch swing out to form a bulge along the northern side. There is no apparent topographic reason for this but it is possible that the bulge is related to the method of construction. Silvester and Quinnell (1993) suggest it may indicate that the hillfort was constructed using gang practice, the bulge or 'kink' due to the gangs working on slightly different alignments (Silvester & Quinnell 1993, 28). It is also possible that the bulge in the rampart was dictated by a pre-existing feature which is now lost, possibly a second round barrow, the rampart having to swinging out to go round it.

The entrance

There is a clear breach in the rampart on the western side of the enclosure, slightly north of centre (Fig. 7). It is shown as the only break in the earthworks on Woollcombe's plan of 1839 (above) and on the Ordnance survey 1st edition map of 1889-90. The breach is *c* 6.8m wide and is formed by two good earthwork terminals of the rampart and a terminal of the ditch on the southern side of the breach. The ditch on the northern side appears to terminate *c* 30m north of the opening. A berm was recorded running up to the entrance on this side therefore it is possible that a ditch did originally exist along this section but has subsequently silted up. The berm is wider north of the entrance, and the rampart less substantial, suggesting less material may have been excavated from this section of ditch. There is a slight rise of *c* 0.2m across the entrance but this may be due to later disturbance. The Ordnance Survey 1st edition map depicts a triangulation pillar in this location in the 1880's. A triangulation pillar is now located at the north-western corner of the Castle common enclosure, *c* 35m to the north-east of the hillfort.

Figure 7.
Shoulsbury Castle: the western entrance looking north.

A second breach in the ramparts was identified at the south-eastern corner of the enclosure. The breach is *c* 3.6m wide and is formed by a nicely rounded terminal to the eastern rampart and by a good terminal to the southern rampart, although the rampart terminals do not face each other. It is difficult to know whether this is an original entrance or a later breach. There is some evidence to suggest that the eastern rampart originally continued round at this point - the ground rises *c* 1.1m across the breach - but if that was the case then the southern rampart must have been deliberately extended to create the existing earthwork. It is unlikely that a later knocking through of the rampart would have resulted in the rampart taking this form. It is also significant that the ditch does not carry on round this corner as it clearly does on the other three. There is a good terminal to the ditch on the southern side and the ditch on the eastern side appears to swing eastwards away from the corner. It is therefore possible that this opening was created in the prehistoric period. There are obvious topographic limitations to where a second entrance could be located which may account for the slightly unusual positioning of this opening.

The interior

The interior of the hillfort is relatively level, dropping slightly to the south-west, and comprises rough grassland and reeds. There is some evidence of ridging running north-east/south-west, but the earthworks are very slight and may simply represent run-off from the hill. During survey work a small, sub-circular pit (A), *c* 3m in diameter and a maximum of 0.3m deep, was identified just inside the south-eastern entrance of the enclosure. Two small earthen mounds were recorded on the northern and western rim of the pit and were formed by up-cast from the hole. It is possible that this feature represents a small prospecting pit.

Towards the south-western corner of the enclosure the slight earthwork remains of two possible platforms were identified (B & C). Platform (B) measures *c* 6m north-south and *c* 7m east-

west, although its eastern extent is partly obscured by reeds. Platform (C) measures *c* 5.5m north-south and *c* 6.1m east-west, with its rear scarp standing no more than *c* 0.2m high. In a sheltered position, tucked behind the southern rampart, it is possible that these features represent the remains of contemporary prehistoric settlement.

The round barrow

The earthwork remains of a probable round barrow (D) lie towards the north-eastern corner of the enclosure. The sub-circular feature measures *c* 18.5m east-west and *c* 18.4m north-south and takes the form of a low, flat topped mound, *c* 0.2m high, with a substantial pit near its centre. The pit measures *c* 5.3m north-south and *c* 5.9m east-west with a maximum depth of *c* 0.7m. The pit is surrounded by an earthen bank formed by up-cast created during excavation. Although mutilated by later robbing, the regularity and location of the feature would suggest that it represents the remains of round barrow of Bronze Age date.

The outer bank and ditch

The enclosure is surrounded on its north, east, and part of its western side by an outer bank and ditch. This grass covered, earth and stone feature has a maximum overall width of *c* 10.2m, with the bank standing up to *c* 1m in height and the ditch *c* 0.5m deep. Along part of its northern and western sides there is evidence of a berm. The ditch on the eastern side has been lost due to the construction of a 19th-century field bank. Like the inner enclosure, the outer rampart undulates along most of its length. The distance from top to top between the inner and outer ramparts ranges from *c* 15.3m to a maximum of *c* 31.8m at its south-eastern end. The ramparts become closest where the inner bank 'bulges' along its northern side, the bulge not being mirrored in the outer rampart. The outer rampart clearly begins to splay out from its north-eastern and north-western corners to where it terminates near the entrances on the western and eastern sides. There is a breach in the rampart at the north-eastern corner which corresponds to a break in the inner rampart, and may again be related to the parish boundary passing through this location.

Other features

A small pit (E) was recorded on the western side of the enclosure, *c* 23m north of the south-western corner. The sub-circular pit has a maximum diameter of *c* 3.3m and a depth of *c* 0.2m. It is uncertain what this feature represents but it may be mineral prospecting pit.

A small area of probable stone robbing was recorded on the western side of the enclosure (F), *c* 37m north of the entrance. The quarry scoop measures *c* 7.6m north-south and stands *c*

Figure 8. *Shoulsbury Castle: two animal scrapes located at the western end of the southern rampart.*

0.7m high. The only other apparent damage to the earthworks takes the form of two animal scrapes located towards the western end of the southern rampart (Fig. 8).

Interpretation

Shoulsbury Castle dominates the western approaches to Exmoor and at 460m above OD is one of the highest hillforts in England (Forde-Johnston 1976, 54). The sub-rectangular, almost square form of the enclosure has led people to compare it to the Roman fortlets at Martinhoe and Old Burrow and to suggest that Shoulsbury Castle may have its origins in the same period (Grinsell 1970b, 84). Grinsell also sites the relatively slight nature of the earthworks compared to other hillforts as a further indication that the enclosure may be Roman in date. However, the sub-rectangular form of the enclosure is not unusual for Iron Age sites on Exmoor. The hill-slope enclosures of Road Castle, Timberscombe and Bury Castle, Selworthy, are all sub-rectangular in form. Although situated in a more extreme location, the topographic position of Shoulsbury Castle has resulted in it having more in common morphologically with the hill-slope enclosures than the other hillforts of Exmoor. The natural topography has had an obvious influence on the shape and orientation of the enclosure as the southern rampart clearly lies parallel to the steep, south-facing slope of the upper Bray valley. The remaining sides have apparently been set-out in relation to this and, although remarkably regular, are typical of a monument dating from the Iron Age.

Compared to other hillforts on Exmoor, the ramparts of Shoulsbury Castle are of similar proportions. They are most impressive on the southern side of the enclosure where they stand 2.5-3.6m high, falling to 1.1m along the northern side. Compare this to Cow Castle where the ramparts stand 1.6-1.8m high and Mounsey Castle where the ramparts are 1.5-2m high, and it becomes evident that there is nothing unusual or slight about the earthworks (Riley 1997, 3; Riley 1999, 1). The less substantial earthworks on much of the east, west, and northern sides of the enclosure may be regarded as a function of the unfinished nature of the hillfort. The existence of a berm associated with these less substantial ramparts and the undulating nature of the earthworks can be interpreted as the visible remains of an incomplete phase of construction. Mounds of earth and stone recorded sitting on top of the berm on the northern side of the enclosure could also represent an abandoned phase of construction. The presence of a berm may suggest that the hillfort was constructed using a box rampart method, generally thought to be an earlier form of construction (Riley & Wilson-North 2001, 59). Although there is a berm visible along parts of the northern and western sections of the outer rampart, much of the earthwork would appear to be complete. The termination of the outer rampart near the entrance on the western side is most likely due to the natural topography, as the ground begins to drop steeply at this point, than the unfinished nature of the hillfort. It is unclear, however, why the outer ramparts splay outwards towards both their eastern and western ends. Suggestions that the outer rampart was constructed as a stock enclosure seem improbable as there is comparatively little space between the inner ditch and outer rampart. It is possible that the outward splay is related to the entrances of the enclosure and that the unfinished nature of the hillfort has prevented us from understanding their intended function.

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

Shoulsbury Castle is an exceptionally well-preserved hillfort, mainly due to its isolated location on unimproved moorland. This good preservation and the unfinished nature of the ramparts help give us a tentative insight into the methods employed in their construction. Although the earthwork evidence indicates that much of the rampart was never completed, this does imply the hillfort was simply abandoned and never used. The inner rampart forms a complete circuit and it can be argued that there are topographic reasons why the outer rampart does not. The southern rampart and short sections of the western and eastern ramparts were completed, suggesting a degree of significance was attached to this side of the hillfort. These are arguably the most visible sections of the enclosure and dominate the upper Bray Valley (Fig. 9). The southern side of Shoulsbury would have been visible from the hillforts of Beara Castle (SS 63 NW 4) and Mockham Down Camp (SS 63 NE 15), both located 5-6.5km to the south-west. The function of the monument can not be known for certain. At such a high altitude the site could not have functioned comfortably as a permanent settlement. Shoulsbury's prominent location may indicate it played a more symbolic role and possibly served as a focus for the inhabitants of the surrounding area. As such, less importance may have been attached to the sections of the circuit not visible from the surrounding hinterland which lay to the south and south-east. This may go some way to explaining the incomplete nature of the northern, western and eastern ramparts but without further research the function and period of occupation of the hillfort can not be known.

Figure 9. *Shoulsbury Castle: aerial photograph looking southwards towards the Bray Valley. (NMR 23827/020)*

The distribution of hillforts on Exmoor is striking. Almost all lie towards the fringes of the moor overlooking major river valleys, the exception being Cow Castle which is located on a valley floor knoll in the middle reaches of the Barle valley. We can not be sure of the reasons behind this distribution pattern but a correlation between hillforts and later iron working sites has

already been highlighted by Riley and Wilson-North and may suggest a connection between the location of hillforts and sources of iron ore (Riley & Wilson-North 2001, 80). Exmoor is known to contain evidence of early iron working, both extractive and processing sites, which until recently were thought to be medieval or post-medieval in date. Work carried out as part of the Exmoor Iron Project has shown that some have much earlier origins. The iron processing site at Blacklake Wood has recently produced radiocarbon dates from the mid-3rd to the mid-4th centuries AD (pers. comm. R Wilson-North). The site is located in the Barle Valley and forms part of a cluster of iron working sites which stretch from Dulverton to the hillfort of Mounsey Castle. Towards the western edge of the moor the iron processing site at Sherracombe Ford, *c* 3km south-east of Shouldbury, has produced radiocarbon dates from the late Iron Age – Romano-British period. Recent excavations carried out at Sherracombe Ford have uncovered pottery evidence which dates the site to the later 2nd century AD (Juleff 2004). Iron processing sites have also been identified at Brayford, Charles and at Sindercombe, south of Twitchen, the latter producing radiocarbon dates from the late Iron Age (*Devon Arch Soc Newsletter* **70**, 11). However, without secure dating information for the occupation of Shoulsbury Castle, or the sites within the Barle Valley, we can not know if the hillforts were occupied at the same time as these metal working sites were in operation. More work is required before a clear link between the two can be made.

Place-name evidence gives us an insight into the early medieval landscape around Shoulsbury Castle. Early settlement names such as Muxworthy and Kedworthy indicate the existence of small, low status settlements in the upper reaches of the Bray valley. Wallover, south-west of the hillfort, is one of the few names on Exmoor with Celtic connections and is interpreted as 'farm of the Britons or slaves' (Gover *et al* 1969, 60). The *ley* element of Natsley and Rockley Farm, immediately below Shoulsbury, would suggest the area was once more heavily wooded. Nomeclature therefore indicates an early medieval landscape comprising a series of small settlements, possibly located within woodland clearings, nestled above the steep sided wooded combes of the upper Bray valley. It has been suggested by McDermot that the parishes of High Bray and Challacombe may have formed part of the Royal Forest of Exmoor in the 12th century before being disafforested in 1204 (MacDermot 1973, 112). In the area around Challacombe, to the north-west of Shoulsbury Castle, an extensive area of strip lynchets was recorded from aerial photographs (Riley & Wilson-North 2001, 99). These lynchets are concentrated around the hamlets and farms and are visible below Shoulsbarrow Common near Challacombe and Shoulsbarrow Farm. These areas of open field agriculture were subsequently enclosed, probably in the later medieval period, possibly indicating a change in farming practices. Much of the higher ground including Shoulsbarrow Common, Castle Common and Fullaford Down remained unenclosed until the 19th century and would have been used as rough grazing for livestock. Located within an area of common grazing land, the ready-made enclosure of Shoulsbury Castle would have proved useful for stock management and was undoubtedly re-used for this purpose in the medieval and post-medieval periods. The boundary of the Royal Forest also passed approximately 1.75km to the west of Shoulsbury Castle and anecdotal evidence for a telling house at Moles Chamber would suggest a route in and out of the forest close to the hillfort (Riley & Wilson North 2001, 92). The earthwork remains of a hollow way are visible running east-west across Castle Common, *c* 250m below Shoulsbury

Castle, and may represent the remains of this earlier route. The forest was used for pasturing stock and with this route into the forest passing so close to the hillfort it is possible that the enclosure was also used in the medieval and post-medieval periods as a collecting point for stock before entering the forest.

Shoulsbury Castle represents a good example of a probable Iron Age enclosure with an outer bank and ditch. The excellent preservation of the earthworks and the monuments close proximity to early iron working sites add to the importance of the site. Geophysical survey of the interior may help clarify the original function of the monument. The survey could target the north-eastern and south-western quarters of the enclosure in order to determine if these areas did contain settlement or earlier features. Many hilltop enclosures have been shown through excavation to have their origins in the late Bronze Age therefore targeted excavation may help determine the chronological development of the site. Information regarding the period of occupation could also prove useful in the study of early iron working on Exmoor.

SHOULSBARROW COMMON STONE SETTING

During reconnaissance work the survey team discovered a previously unrecorded stone setting, approximately 300m north-west of Shoulsbury Castle. The stone setting is located in an area of rough grassland and reeds on Shoulsbarrow Common, *c* 1.7km south-east of Challacombe (SS 7034 3943) (Fig. 10). The monument sits on a north-west facing spur at *c* 440m above OD, the spur defined by Weirs Combe to the north-east and Goat Combe to the south-west. The stone setting is located on a small natural terrace, tucked-in at the foot of the slope, with good views down over the River Bray and beyond to Rowley Down.

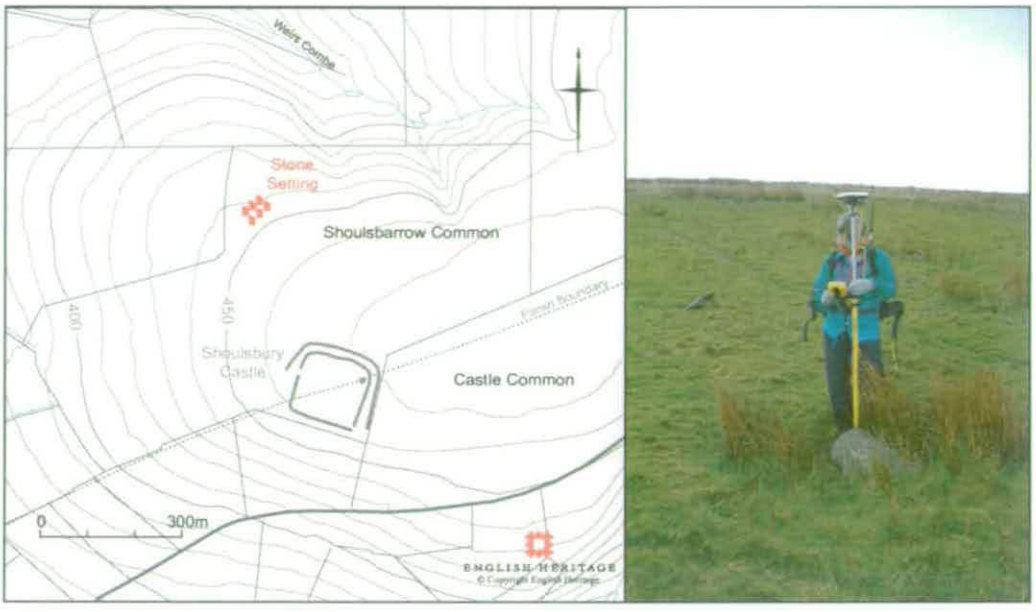

Figure 10. *Shoulsbarrow Common stone setting: map showing topographic setting (left). Surveying the prehistoric stones using GPS equipment (right).*

The monument comprises six stones, two upright and four fallen, set in a roughly rectangular pattern (Fig. 11). The setting measures *c* 20m NE-SW by *c* 8.2m NW-SE, narrowing to *c* 6.3m at its north-eastern end. The two upright stones (A&B) both have a pronounced lean, (A) to the south-east and (B) to the west. Stone (A) stands *c* 0.3m high and is *c* 0.5m wide and *c* 0.2m thick. Stone (B) stands *c* 0.4m high and is *c* 0.6m wide and *c* 0.2m thick. All six stones lie within erosion hollows a maximum of 0.2m deep, with stones (C, D & F) partly covered at the time of survey. Stone (C) measures *c* 1.3m in length and *c* 0.4m in width; stone (D) measures *c* 1m in length and *c* 0.3m in width; stone (E) measures *c* 1.1m in length and *c* 0.5m in width; stone (F) measures *c* 0.4m in length and *c* 0.18m in width and may represent a packing stone.

The stone setting discovered on Shoulsbarrow Common would have formed part of the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age ceremonial landscape of the moor. These monuments are currently thought to be unique to Exmoor and less than 60 are known to survive within the National Park. The Shoulsbarrow Common setting is strikingly similar in form to the setting at East Pinford (SS 74 SE 7) which also comprises six stones forming a rectangle or 'box' (Qinnell & Dunn 1993, 43; Riley & Wilson-North 2001, 29).

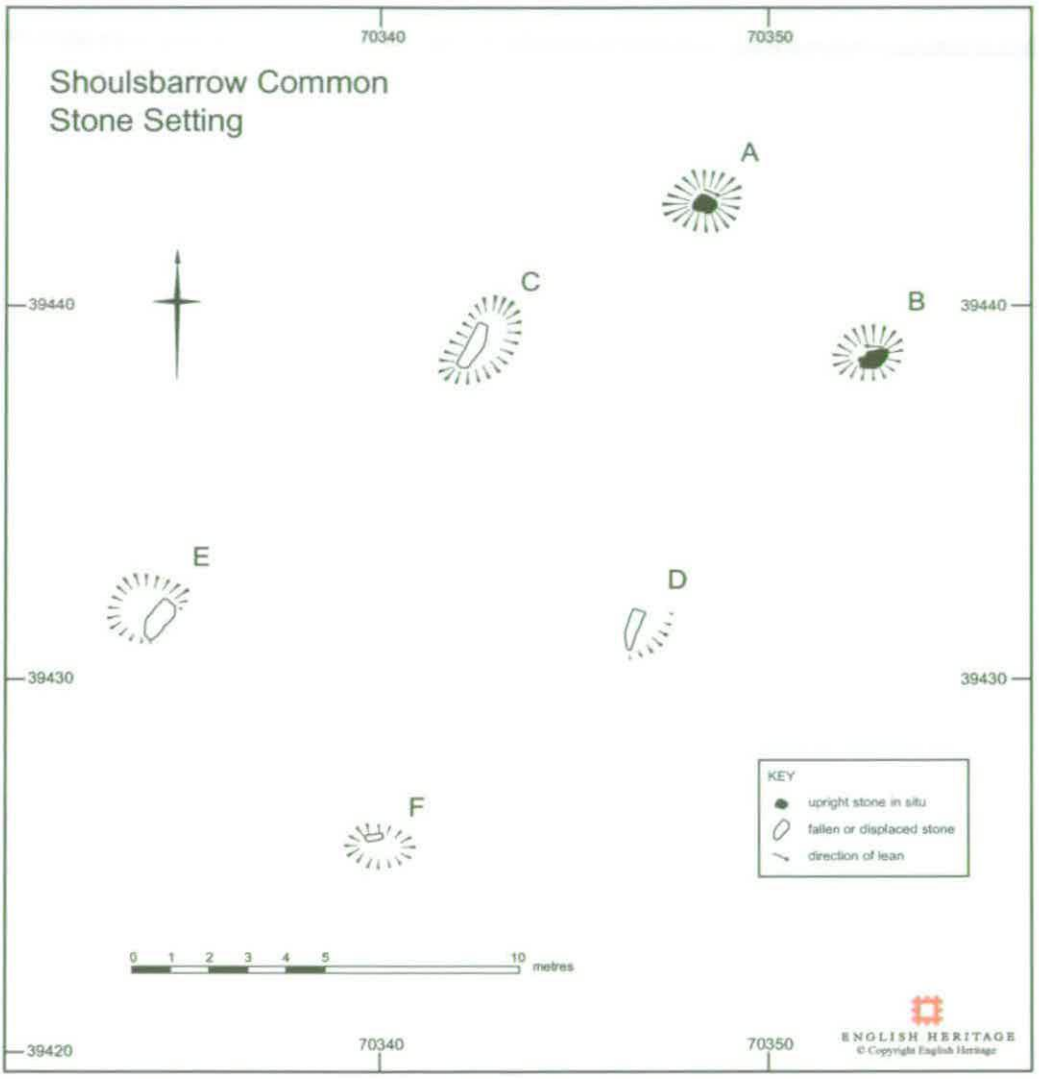

Figure 11. *Shoulsbarrow Common stone setting: English Heritage 1:100 scale survey (reduced).*

METHODOLOGY

The site was surveyed using Trimble differential GPS (Global Positioning System) equipment and completed using graphical survey methods. The GPS survey data was processed using Trimble Geomatics Office software and located to the Ordnance Survey National Grid using Trimble's OSTN02 transformation. A digital plan of the survey at 1:500 scale was produced using AutoCAD software. The stone setting was surveyed at 1:100 scale using graphical survey methods and located to the National Grid using GPS equipment.

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