



ENGLISH HERITAGE  
DRF 2

Archaeological Investigation Report Series

AI/23/2001

Halwell Camp, Bickleigh  
Brake Barrow Group and the  
Boreston Catchwater System,  
Devon

Martin Fletcher

DRF 1

SURVEY REPORT



## ENGLISH HERITAGE

Halwell Camp, Bickleigh Brake Barrow Group and the  
Boreston Catchwater System, Devon

An archaeological survey by English Heritage

County:	Devon
District:	South Hams
Parish:	Halwell and Moreleigh
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NGR:	SX78425321
NMR No:	SX75SE10,11,20,21
SAM No:	Devon 6
Surveyed:	December 2001
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### Summary

Three archaeologically significant areas of farmland, which lie within an ESA Stewardship scheme, were surveyed and recorded in December 2001 by staff from the English Heritage Exeter Office at the request of the FRCA.

Two of the areas - which each include Scheduled Monuments - are Halwell Camp, an Iron Age settlement and a group of Bronze Age round barrows located on the adjacent summit area of Bickleigh Brake. The third area, located on a river valley to the north west of the village of Halwell, is a well-defined catchwater system of 19th century origin.

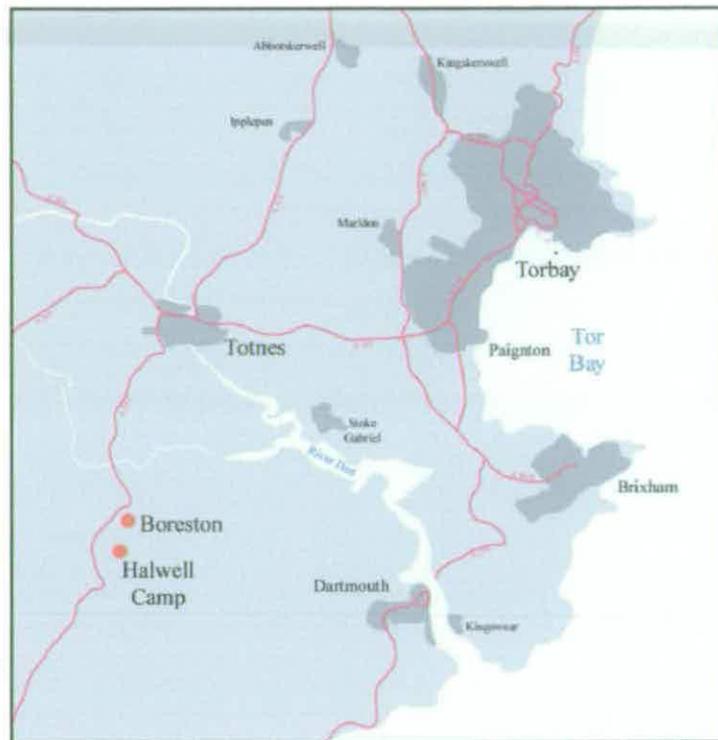


Fig. 1.  
Location Plan

### DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

Halwell and Moreleigh parish is situated in the heart of the south Devonshire countryside. The landscape is characterised by gently rounded hills and broad, often wooded valleys. Scattered farms set amongst the traditional Devonshire pattern of small fields support mixed dairy and arable agriculture.

Halwell Camp, an earthwork enclosure of prehistoric origin, is situated on gently sloping ground at 178m above OD. It lies to the south of a rounded highpoint occupied by a linear prehistoric barrow group; the highest barrow stands at 198m above OD. This high ground affords extensive views in all directions – including, to the SE, undulating agricultural land, Start Bay and the English Channel and, to the NW, the southern uplands of Dartmoor.

The enclosure and the barrow group have both been comprehensively damaged by many centuries of agricultural activity and much of the area is still regularly ploughed. The enclosure is bisected by the busy Halwell to Dartmouth road which could possibly follow the alignment of an ancient ridgeway route.

The catchwater system was constructed to provide water for the promotion of early Spring grass. It lies in the semi-wooded valley of the Boreston Brook to the north of Halwell village. The two fields are now under permanent pasture although they have been ploughed in the past.

**DOCUMENTARY HISTORY**

The 2nd edition 1:2500 scale Ordnance Survey plan dated 1906 (Fig 2) depicts Halwell Camp and three of the four barrows more or less as they survive today - although the road which bisects the enclosure had not then been realigned. The Victoria County History of Devon dated 1906 (Fig 4) shows the earthworks. Air photographs flown in 1944 (Fig 3) and also in 1946 reveal that much of the area was under plough; by then the road had been straightened to remove the dogleg and that Halwell Barn had been demolished. In addition a lay-by had been created from the redundant section of the road and a new barn erected within the enclosure.



Fig. 2. OS plan at 1:2500 scale of Halwell Camp and the barrow group.

Fig. 3. Air photograph flown in 1944 showing Halwell Camp and the barrow group. © Crown copyright.

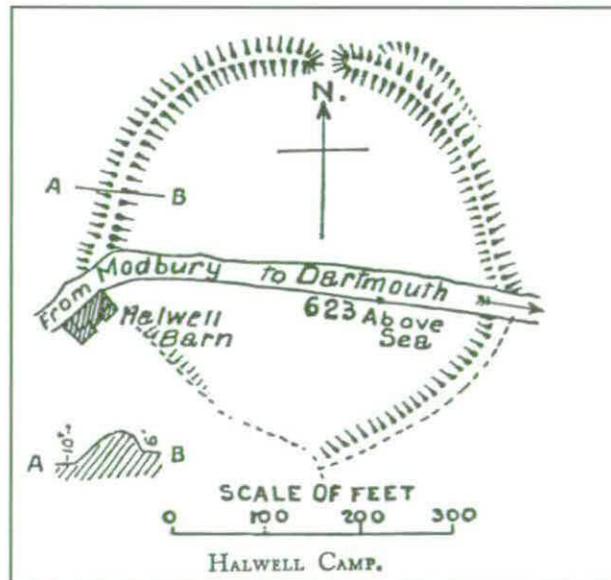


Fig. 4. VCH 1906 plan of Halwell Camp.

## **HALWELL CAMP**

Halwell Camp is a univallate hill-slope enclosure most probably built in the early Iron Age period (circa 550 BC). It may have been constructed as a defended settlement - a place of safety - for an extended family group and their livestock. Some authorities suggest that this earthwork may have been re-used in the Saxon period (late 9<sup>th</sup> or early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) as a strongpoint or fortified settlement (see Sites and Monuments Register SX 75 SE 8.01). Stanborough Camp, a smaller enclosure earthwork of similar type is located about 2kms to the south west of Halwell Camp.

The sub-circular enclosure has a strong rampart which appears to be composed entirely of soil and small stone. This weatherworn rampart now survives to a maximum height of 2.6m externally and 1.6m internally; the north eastern and south western quadrants have been cut down and refashioned to form field hedges. These hedges are on average 1.7m high, up to 4m wide with stone facing in places; they may once have been topped by a wicket fence or palisade to augment the height - a role now performed by brambles, thicket and bushes. The south eastern rampart was almost completely effaced before 1888 (OS plan). The earthwork enclosure was fully enclosed by a ditch which formed a deep, wide barrier; it would have served a two-fold purpose, firstly as a source of material to construct the rampart and secondly to enhance the rampart as a barrier against infiltration either by wild animals or humans. It is now traceable either as a slight, heavily silted, depression a maximum 10.0m wide and up to 0.5m deep or alternatively as a level terrace up to 8.5m wide. The ditch in the south eastern quadrant has been completely infilled. Vestiges of the rampart and ditch are preserved in the wide roadside verges. The interior of the enclosure measures a maximum 12.5m in diameter; the northern side is a regularly ploughed level plot whilst the southern side, now partly occupied by a barn and outbuildings is surfaced with a spread of imported hardcore

Iron Age enclosures of this type which occur elsewhere in Devon often have a single, simple entrance normally approached by a narrow causeway across the ditch; often this entrance was located on the downhill side. The position of the entrance (or entrances) into this enclosure have not been identified. The 1906 VCH plan depicts a gap in the north side of the earthwork; the rampart here has been partially lowered but there is no trace of an entrance causeway across the ditch. Three other gaps occur in the northern part of the earthwork but all, including the north gap, are probably the result of agricultural activity. The evidence is the pronounced rise of the ground each gap which indicates a denuded rampart rather than a deliberate break.

There is no record of archaeological excavation at Halwell Camp. Evidence from similar sites suggest that the interior might have been occupied by a number of circular timber houses or huts often built against the uphill side of the enclosure to provide shelter. In addition to the roundhouses there were usually areas reserved for work-related activities, storage and perhaps corrals for the livestock.

## **THE BARROW GROUP**

The four earthen barrows occupy the high ground to the north of Halwell Camp, they have all been disturbed and ploughed probably for many decades. Round barrows are generally attributed to the Bronze Age and were probably constructed as ritual burial mounds during the period circa 1500 BC. Some earthen round barrows or mounds, which occupy prominent positions in the landscape, were also constructed to serve, or later adapted, as boundary markers.

Three of the four sites have been almost completely flattened. The fourth barrow stands to an average height of 2.3m and it is the only mound which is apparently ditched.

Details of the barrows are as follows (lettered on plan):

- A. SX78395358 A poorly-defined and disturbed amorphous barrow - now under pasture. This spread, ovoid mound, which is up to 22m across and 0.2m high, has been virtually effaced by ploughing and desultory digging. The OS plan dated 1888 indicates that it comprised a slight horseshoe-shaped bank complete with, on its northern side, a buried Ordnance Survey Triangulation block. Its position affords distant panoramic views in every direction. Visible as a spread soilmark on 1995 APs (SMR collection).
- D. SX78415360. An ill-defined and spread amorphous barrow now under pasture. It is evident as a low turf-covered rise measuring from about 16m to 24m across and 0.2m high with a distinct depression in its top. It is depicted on the OS plan dated 1888 as a mound some 24m in diameter and it lies on the crest of the north-facing hill slope with distant views to the South Devon coast. It is visible as a ditched soilmark on 1995 APs (SMR collection) but it was not recorded by the Ordnance Survey in 1952. (NMR No. SX 75 SE 10).

These two barrows lie on the northern part of the summit area at Bickleigh Brake. They are depicted on the OS plan dated 1888 in a scrub-covered area enclosed by field hedges. APs taken in 1944 and 1946 reveal that the barrows were still covered by scrub. Two of the field hedges and the scrub have since been cleared and the area is now regularly cultivated.

- B. SX78385351. An impressive though heavily damaged ditched round barrow. The mound is 1.9m high and approximately 24m by 22m across - although it has been slightly 'squared' by ploughing action. An pit some 6.5m across by 1.1m deep has in the past been dug off-centre into the top of the mound and its associated upcast spoil heap has dumped on the west side giving this part of the mound a total height of 3.2m. The outer ditch, approximately 30m in overall diameter and now only 0.4m deep, is visible on all but the southern side - here it has been infilled along the line of a fence (long since removed but visible on the 1944/6 APs). The barrow is apparently composed of a soil and small stone matrix with some large stones and white quartz stone; it is covered by bracken and gorse vegetation.
- C. SX78415344 A low, spread round barrow which measures a maximum 16.8m across and 0.3m to 0.4m high; no ditch is visible. It has been heavily ploughed and the surviving, slight mound is composed primarily of soil but with a concentration of small shillet stones and white quartz pieces (a spread of white quartz and shillet occurs naturally on the surface of the ploughed field.) The barrow lies on the south-facing crest of the hill with distant views to the south. It is not depicted on the OS plan dated 1888.

Two circular cropmarks, which have been recently scheduled as barrows have been recorded at SX78405332 on the fairly level ground just north of the outer ditch of Halwell Camp. There is now no trace of either feature in the regularly ploughed field. The scheduling details describe these cropmarks as respectively 17 m and 18m across - the latter 0.2m high. These cropmarks are not depicted on the OS plan dated 1888 and they are not visible on the 1944, 1946 or 1995 APs.

## A CATCHWATER SYSTEM

A catchwater system designed to promote the growth of early spring grass lies on a north western facing slope to the south of Boreston Brook. Centred at SX78065427 it comprises two contour-following parallel leats which each drew water from the brook. When the respective sluice gate was opened water flowed along the gentle gradient of the hill until the leat channel was full. Water in the channel then overflowed the lower bank and spread across the slope to irrigate the grass. Both leats terminate at the broad overgrown field hedge that is the west side of the busy A381 road.

The upper leat extends from SX77865403 to SX78155435. It now commences in dense vegetation on a broad, heavily silted and marshy area on the valley floor. This area might once

have been ponded by a dam to provide a head of water - although there is now no trace of an earthwork dam across the valley as could be expected. The first part of the leat is a silted ditch with a slight bank on the downhill side; its form then becomes a pronounced 1.2m wide terrace as it traverses the slope of the steep valley of the brook (centred at SX77915412). This flat stony terrace or ledge may once have supported a timber launder or channel to convey the water (rather than an earthwork ditch) because the terrace is cut from the living rock. Beyond the wood the leat crosses the pasture field as a ditch cut some 0.5m into the side of the slope with an earthen bank which is 0.4m high internally and up to 0.8m high externally. This linear earthwork becomes progressively slighter as it approaches the overgrown field hedge where it terminates.

The lower leat extends from SX77985421 to SX78235442. It runs directly off the brook through a marsh; there is now no evidence of a sluice gate although this area is now heavily silted. It then continues as a deep narrow water-filled channel – carrying a stream which runs parallel to the brook. Here its southern side is formed by a vertical earthen slope whilst the northern side is formed by a constructed drystone wall some 0.6m high. The channel has clearly been recut and deepened and this is particularly evident at the point (SX78005424) where it now turns abruptly northwards to return the water to the brook. The line of the silted leat continues through undergrowth but it is some 0.5m higher than the water channel. It crosses the field as a dry ditch cut into the side of the slope with a retaining bank on its lower side. Here it is now on average 0.5m deep and the lower bank measures 0.4m high internally and 0.7m high externally. It follows a slight and gradual descent along the slope becoming a vague ditch or terrace before it terminates at the road hedge.

The field on the opposite side of the busy A381 road runs fairly steeply up the ridge. The course of a buried gas pipeline cuts at right angles across the line of each leat at SX78105433 and SX78125431 respectively.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks are due to the owners for permission to undertake the survey and to Naomi Oakley of the DEFRA (formerly FRCA) for arranging for the survey.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1840 Tithe Map and Apportionment Halwell and Moreleigh Parish (DRO)  
VCH 1906 Devon

**Ordnance Survey plans**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 1:2500 scale 1906  
1:2500 Landline edition

#### **Air Photographs**

USAF/31GR/LOC 31. 0023. 21.11.44  
RAF AP CPE/UK 1890, 4078, 10.12.46.  
DAP5497/11A (SMR collection)  
DAP SX7853 Jury R. 13.12.95 (SMR collection)

#### **National Monument Record Numbers**

SX 75 SE 10	BA round barrows
SX 75 SE 11	Halwell Camp
SX 75 SE 20	Catchwater system
SX 75 SE 21	Scheduled round barrows

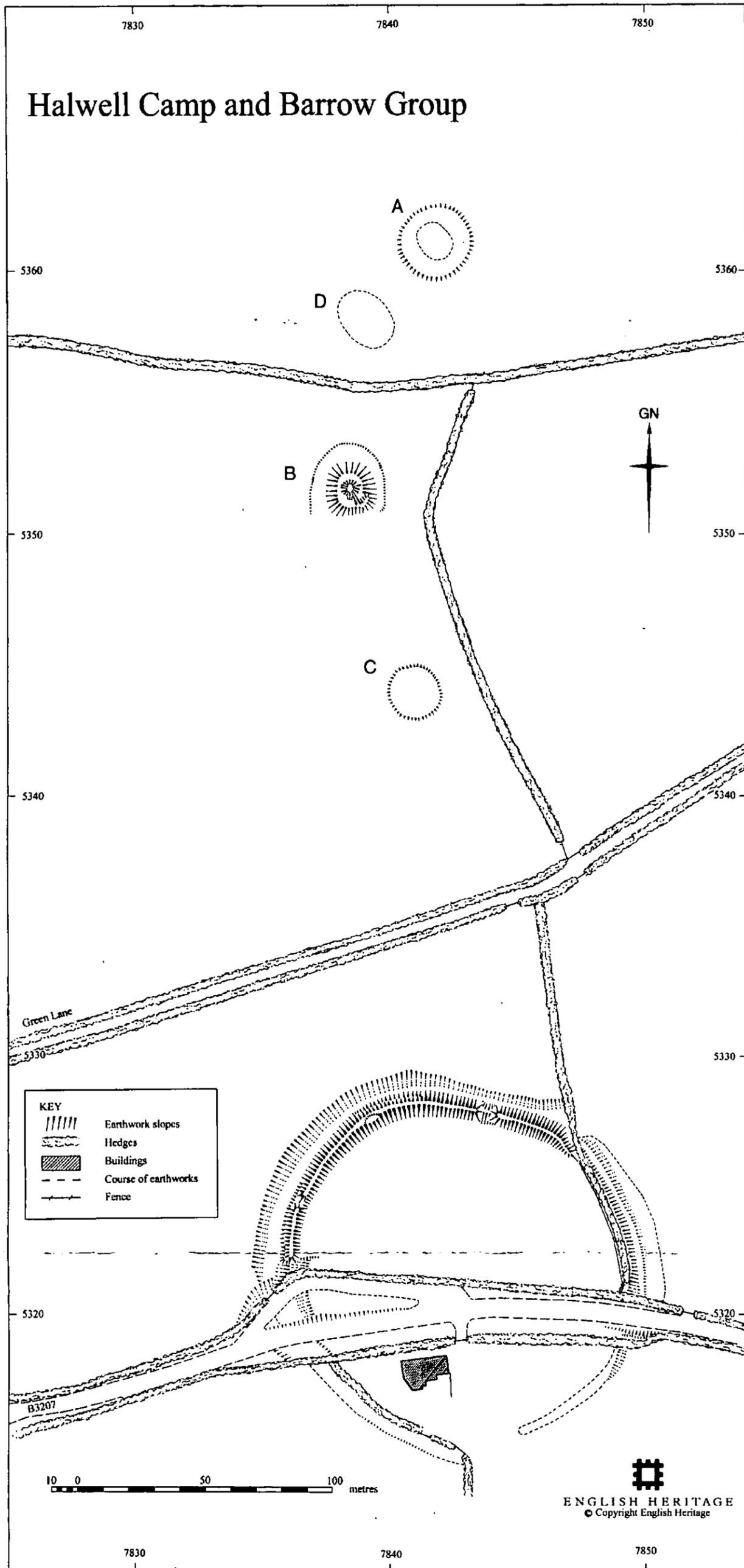


Fig. 5. English Heritage 1:1000 survey (reduced).

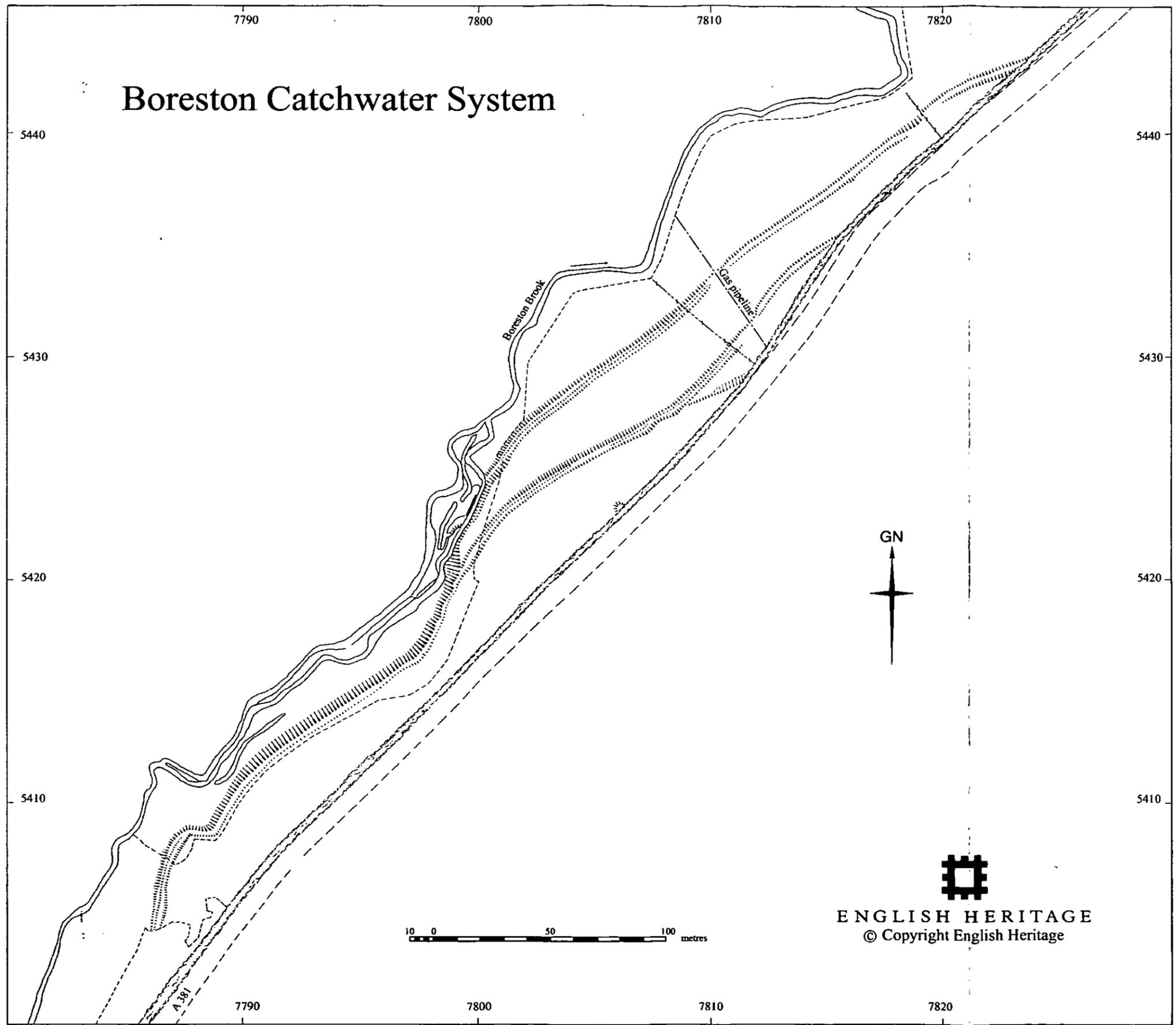


Fig. 6. English Heritage 1:1000 plan (reduced).

  
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