

DOLEBURY HILLFORT, CHURCHILL, NORTH SOMERSET ANALYTICAL EARTHWORK SURVEY

Mark Bowden



ARCHAEOLOGICAL

SURVEY AND INVESTIGATION



ENGLISH HERITAGE

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**DOLEBURY HILLFORT
CHURCHILL
NORTH SOMERSET**

ANALYTICAL EARTHWORK SURVEY

Mark Bowden

NGR: ST 450 590

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SUMMARY

The earthworks of Dolebury hillfort and associated features were surveyed at a scale of 1:1000 in January and February 2008, as part of the EH Research Department project on the Mendip Hills AONB. The large Iron Age hillfort, part univallate and part bivallate, occupies the ridge that forms the northern escarpment of Mendip, immediately to the east of the 'Churchill Gap'. It has an imposing western entrance. Within the fort are the remains of a rabbit warren, of post-medieval date but possibly with medieval origins. There are also slight cultivation remains, possibly associated with the warren, and later quarries exploiting the Carboniferous Limestone of the ridge.

CONTRIBUTORS

Survey was undertaken by the author with Abby Hunt. Subsequent checking was assisted by Edward Bowden and Anna Komar. The main plan, Fig 7, was drawn by Deborah Cunliffe. Fig 1 was prepared by Elaine Jamieson and Figs 2 and 9 by the author. Figs 8, 13, 14, 15 and 17 are by Abby Hunt.

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ARCHIVE LOCATION

The archive is deposited at the NMR, Swindon.

DATE OF INVESTIGATION

January-February 2008

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Frontispiece: aerial view of Dolebury from the east, 12th November 2007, showing the ridge on which it lies extending to Brean Down in the Bristol Channel (NMR 24819/39)

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INTRODUCTION

Topography, Geology and Land Use

Dolebury hillfort (NMR: ST 45 NE 3) lies within Churchill parish, North Somerset, at ST 450 590 on Dolebury Warren, part of the ridge of high ground that forms the northern escarpment of the Mendip Hills (Frontispiece and Fig 1). Immediately to the west of the fort the ground drops steeply to Dolebury Bottom or the 'Churchill Gap' (c60m OD), a narrow pass through the ridge that leads into the heart of the Mendip Hills from the north. The fort therefore overlooks lower ground to north and west, and to the south where the deep and narrow Rowberrow Bottom divides the ridge from the main plateau. To the east the ridge top is more-or-less level, though there is a slight summit at 183m OD just outside the eastern ramparts. Otherwise there is no higher ground within 2km, to the east at Hill Farm (191m OD), to the south above Shipham (249m OD) and further away to the south-east on Black Down (325m OD). The area enclosed by the hillfort ramparts lies between 130 and 180m OD (Fig 2). This substantial height difference within the fort is a very striking feature of the site; the eastern ramparts are invisible from much of the hillfort interior because of the intervening higher ground. The fort has extensive views, especially to the north and west where the Bristol Channel and south Welsh coast can be clearly seen.

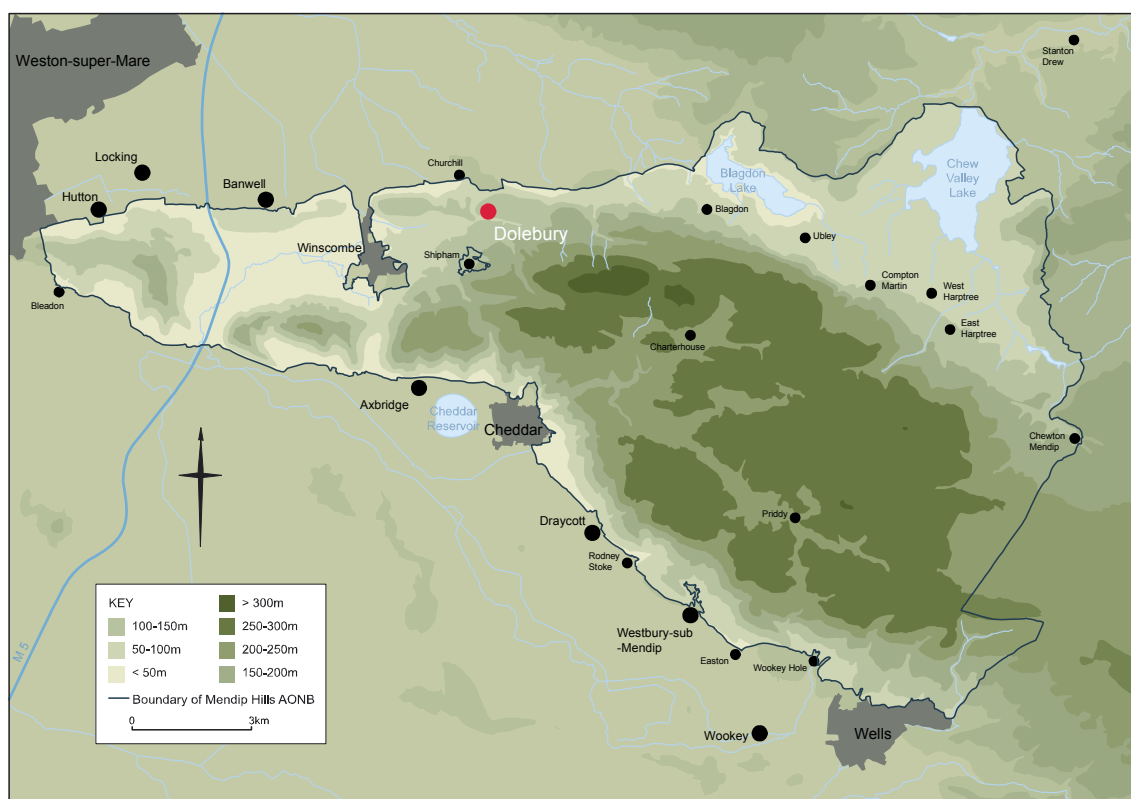


Fig 1: location

The underlying geology is Carboniferous Limestone – Burrington Oolite on the northern side of the fort and the older Black Rock Limestone to the south. The turf cover is thin and bedrock outcrops in many places, particularly on the shoulders of the ridge both within and outside the ramparts. The site is in the ownership of the National Trust and is managed for wildlife conservation by the Avon Wildlife Trust. Most of the area is open

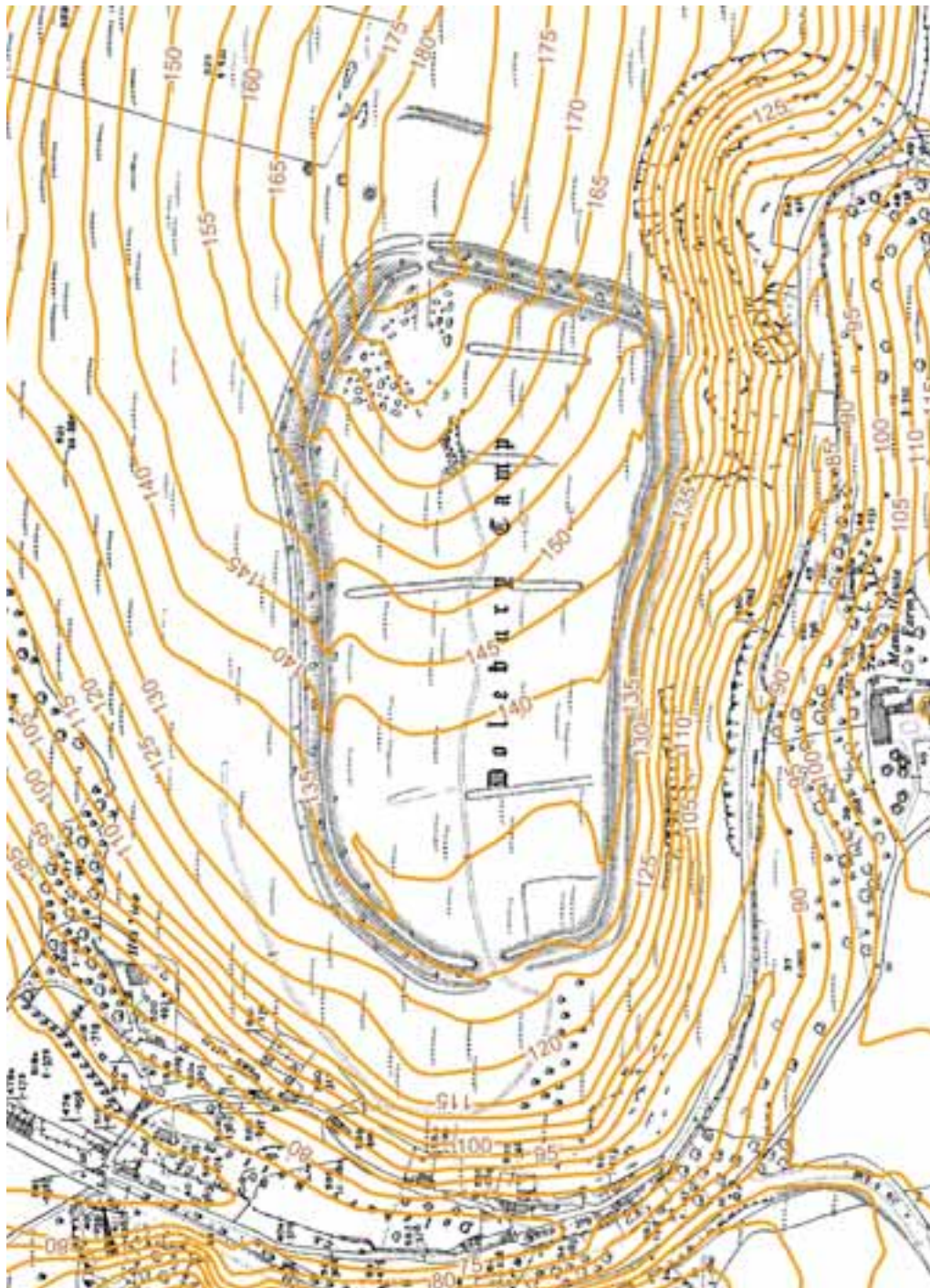


Fig 2: contour map (Reproduced from the 1931 Ordnance Survey map, reduced to 1:5000): north to left

grassland but there is some recent deciduous woodland, especially on the northern flank, and scrub is invading the inner hillfort ditch on this side. This is a recent development; historic aerial photographs (e.g. Fig 3) show the fort in the mid-20th century within an open grassland landscape. Scrub did not begin to develop significantly until the 1970s (Fig 4).



Fig 3: 1946 vertical aerial photograph showing the hillfort in open grassland (RAF 3G/TUD/UK15/21/5286)



Fig 4: aerial photograph, from the north, 1976; scrub is encroaching (NMR ST 4558/5/13)

Historical background and previous research

There are three main episodes of human activity represented at Dolebury – the prehistoric hillfort, medieval and post-medieval rabbit farming and quarrying, which also extended along the ridge. There has also been a, probably brief, period of cultivation.

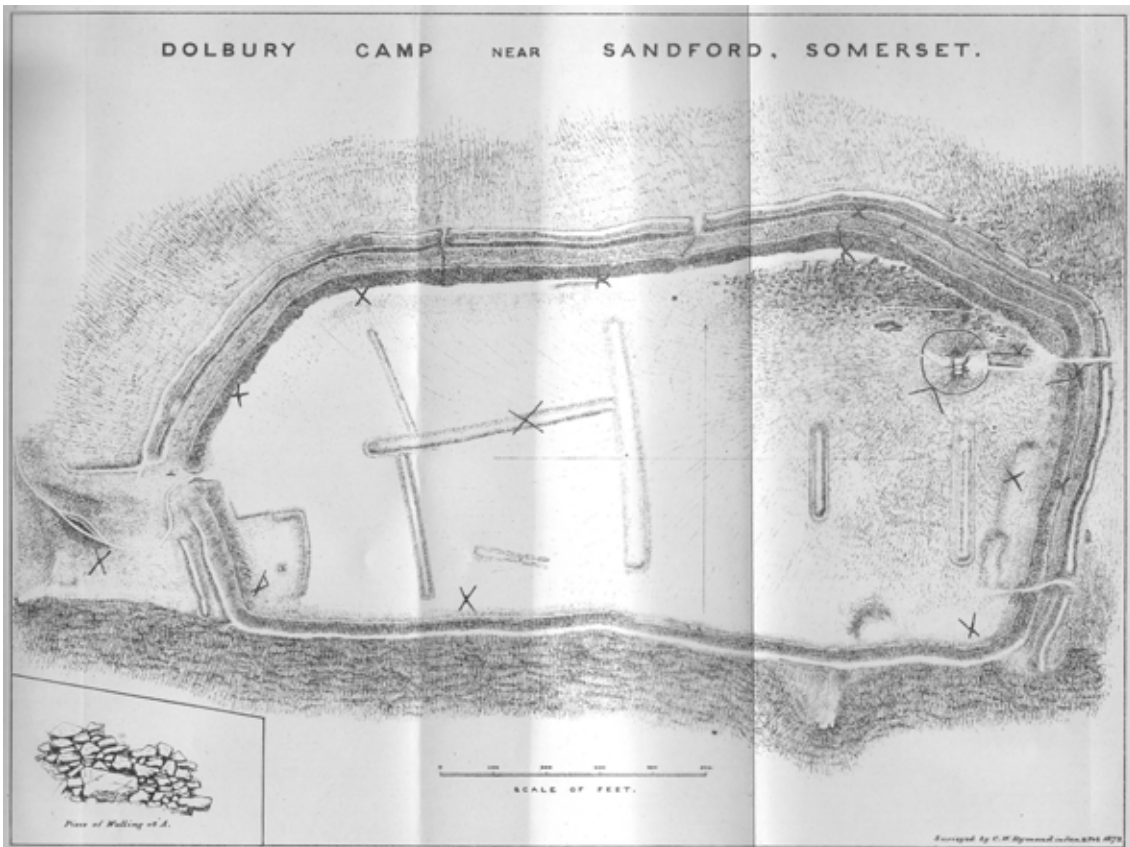


Fig 5: 1872 survey by CW Dymond, published in 1883

Late Iron Age, Roman (and possibly later) coins and pottery sherds were found in the 18th century and later (Collinson 1791, 579; Rutter 1829, 114; Knight 1915, 199-208; Dobson 1931, 126, 238). A bronze spear head was found in the ditch at the eastern end of the fort and Bronze Age pottery in Taunton Museum is thought to have come from the site (*Proc Somerset Archaeol Natur Hist Soc* 94 (1950), 51). Allcroft reported the discovery of a socketed iron spearhead in 1905 and part of a pentagonal sandstone floor tile (1908,

694). Part of a rotary quern and three late Roman coins have been found more recently (Bennett 1970, 18; NMR: ST 45 NE 3 Auth 15).

The site was mentioned by Leland in the mid 16th century and visited several times by the Rev J Skinner in the early 19th century (Hollinrake and Hollinrake 1986, 7-8). The hillfort was surveyed accurately and in considerable detail (for the time) in 1872 by CW Dymond (1883; the plan reproduced here as Fig 5), studied in the early 20th century by Allcroft (1908, 682-97) and Burrow (1924), and investigated by Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division in 1966 (Fig 6). In 1985 the fort and its environs, including traces of a field system to the east, were surveyed on behalf of the National Trust (Hollinrake and Hollinrake 1986); their methodology is not explained in the report but their plan of the hillfort (fig 2) is clearly derived from the Ordnance Survey Antiquity Model, with additions. There are no recorded excavations within the site, except for a casual examination in the centre of the fort, reported by Dymond (1883, 109) and a trench dug in 1904, which recovered some pottery, animal bone and a whetstone (Allcroft 1908, 693-4).

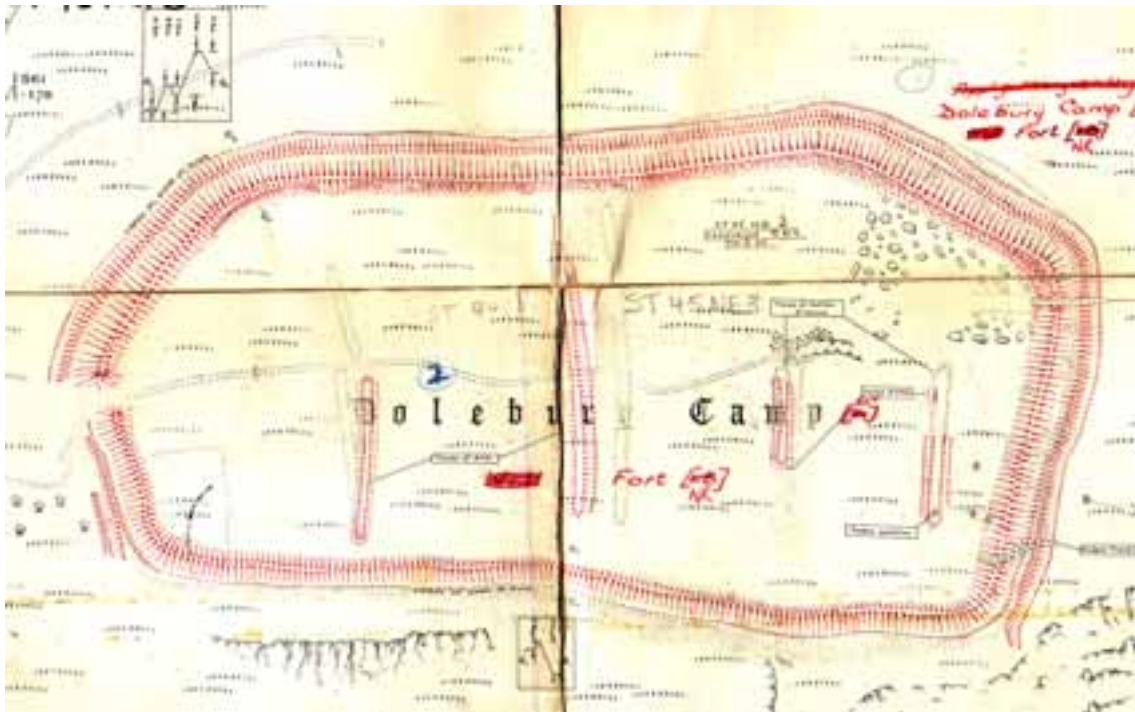


Fig 6: extract from Antiquity Model, OS Archaeology Division, 1966, overdrawn on the 1931 Ordnance Survey map; reduced from 1:2500

The 2008 survey

Analytical earthwork survey of the hillfort was undertaken in January and February 2008 by the Archaeological Survey & Investigation team of English Heritage Research Department, as part of a major landscape project on the Mendip Hills AONB, which has included the survey of several late prehistoric enclosures in the area.

DESCRIPTION

The letters and numbers in the text refer to Fig 7 (inside back cover).

The hillfort

The hillfort is partly univallate, on the south side where the natural slope is particularly steep, but mainly bivallate, though the outer ditch is slight along the northern side. There is an original entrance at the west end (**a**) but apparently not at the east where two gaps (**b** and **c**) in the ramparts are clearly later breaches. The ramparts enclose an area of just over 9ha (22 acres).

The ramparts are generally in good condition though there is minor erosion, generally caused by paths and tracks, at various points. The maximum internal height of the main rampart on the north side is 2.5m and the height of the rampart from the bottom of the ditch 6.0m. The outer bank is at most 1.0m high internally and 3.4m externally. The maximum depth of the outer ditch is 1.0m but it is generally not more than 0.5m deep. There is no sign of a counterscarp except for one short length, about 0.4m high, at the north-west corner (**d**). The eastern ramparts (Fig 8), facing along the ridge, are an almost straight length; here the outer rampart is separated from the inner ditch by a berm, which does not occur elsewhere in the circuit.



Perhaps because of internal quarry scoops or later quarrying, the interior of the fort here is actually lower than the exterior: the internal height of the main rampart is 5.0m and its external height 3.6m; the inner ditch is 2.0m deep, the outer ditch 2.0m deep internally and 1.2m externally. The external height of the rampart on the south side of the fort is only 2.6m and the internal height about 1.8m, though it appears greater because of internal quarry scoops and other disturbances.

Fig 8: the eastern rampart, with internal quarry, looking south

One curiosity is the extensive areas of bare scree-like stone on the main rampart, particularly on the north side (Fig 9). The reason for this is unclear but it is unfortunate as the loose stone affords an opportunity for casual vandalism by visitors to the site, something noted by Burrow three decades ago (1981, 207). Dymond noted wall faces at several points around the northern part of the circuit in the outer side of the main rampart (1883, 108, with the elevation of a small part illustrated – see inset on Fig 5) but no trace of this was seen during the 2008 survey. Dymond compared the style of masonry he saw here to that at Worlebury, concluding that though the building differed slightly this was no indication, necessarily, of chronological difference (*ibid*, 108-9). As no wall facing is currently visible at either site, no further comment can be made.

The western entrance (**a**) is a very impressive feature, the main rampart terminals on either side being subtly enlarged to enhance its visual impact. The rampart terminals have been cut back slightly to widen the entrance at some time, particularly on the south side.

There is no sign of an intum to the ramparts or any outworks to the entrance, though the Hollinrakes suggested that both are present (1986, 7); the 'outworks' appear to be natural features and a later hollow way (see below), which they elsewhere refer to as a 'horn work' (*ibid*, 8). Antiquarian plans also suggest the presence of outworks here but Dymond was quite explicit that, 'There neither is, nor, evidently, ever was any such outwork' (1883, 106). Below the entrance, but offset to the south of it, is the head of a natural gully (e) leading up from the lower ground in 'Churchill Gap' and this presumably formed the original approach route to the fort; the modern track still follows this route. The visitor approaching the fort is therefore confronted by the formidable defences and has to turn left and then right to gain the entrance. A hollow way (f), up to 1.5m deep, to the north of this leads not to the fort entrance but into the main ditch on the northern side and is presumably a later feature. It extends for approximately 50m beyond the fort; at its western end it turns to the north and fades into the natural slope, as depicted by the Hollinrakes (1986, figs 2 and 3).



Fig 9: the main areas of bare stone on the ramparts, shaded

The gaps at (b and c) do not have the signature of original hillfort entrances; they are relatively narrow, the terminals are not enlarged and appear to be cut, and there are indications that the base of the rampart continues through the gap in each case, particularly at (c). Dymond noted that (c) is not even shown on earlier plans of the fort; on the other hand he did consider (b) to be original (1883, 105). The antiquity of gap (b) is discussed further below.

Within the hillfort and immediately behind the rampart are internal quarry scoops (g, g), which presumably result from winning material for the original rampart construction, or a later heightening of it. These extend around the north-west, east and south-east sectors. They are particularly substantial in the latter area, where they attain a depth of up to

4.0m. Along the western part of the north side there is a relatively slight and poorly defined scarp which might indicate the existence of further quarry scoops, though it might only be a natural slope. Further internal quarries might be expected along the southern side, as there is no substantial ditch here from which rampart building material could have been extracted, but along most of this side no such quarries are visible. Apart from these quarry scoops there are no internal features which can be definitely dated to the prehistoric use of the hillfort.

The field system on the ridge to the east of the hillfort consists of fragmentary banks and lynchets aligned on a north-west to south-east axis, the earthworks surviving to a maximum of 1m high (Hollinrake and Hollinrake 1986, 9). No traces of this field system can be seen close to the fort, however, and it was not surveyed.



Fig 10: central part of the hillfort showing pillow mounds, vermin traps, ridge-and-furrow and quarries; 7th March 1979 (NMR ST 4559/1/105)

The rabbit warren and cultivation remains

The most prominent features within the hillfort are a number of pillow mounds (Fig 10). Some of these (**h**, **j**, **k**, **m** and **n**) are extremely large and well formed features with steep sides and comparatively wide and deep drainage gullies along their sides; the mounds are up to 0.6m high and the ditches 0.4m deep. Others are altogether slighter (**p**, **q**, **r** and **s**), and in some cases doubtful (**t**, **u**), features without such clear side gullies; these mounds are no more than 0.4m high at most. While there are no definite chronological relationships between these features the spatial relationship of (**q**) to (**m**) and the fact that (**q**) fades out towards (**m**) suggests that the smaller mounds represent an earlier phase of activity. Certainly there is nothing that contradicts this suggestion. An added piece of evidence in support is the presence of a vermin trap, one of several on the site (see below) which is cut into the top of one of the smaller mounds (**r**); this shows that the

mound had gone out of use at a time when rabbit farming was still taking place on the site. Mound (j) may be unfinished; a length of gully (v) continues the alignment of its western side to the north, though it is now separated from (j) by an intervening area of later quarrying. Mound (h) may have been truncated by quarrying at its northern end. Three of the larger mounds (j, k and m) are slightly curved. This could be explained by the fact that they are overlying cultivation remains which, at the time of survey, presented as isolated surviving patches of ridge-and-furrow, following the same curved alignment as the mounds. However, there is no direct chronological relationship between the mounds and the ridge-and-furrow, so the sequence might be reversed, with the cultivation following the alignment of the mounds. There is also no relationship between the ridge-and-furrow and the smaller mounds, so the sequence is again unclear. Most of the ridges are very narrow.

The ridge-and-furrow was noted by Skinner (Hollinrake and Hollinrake 1986, 8-9, fig 6) but does not seem to have been mentioned by later antiquaries. Skinner thought that the ridge-and-furrow ran over some of the slighter east-west aligned pillow mounds but, as stated above, no trace of this was noted in 2008. However, the ridge-and-furrow is clearly shown in some aerial photographs (e.g. Fig 10) and this tends to support Skinner's observation.

Dymond and the Hollinrakes treated mounds (n) and (r) as one continuous mound but in 2008 there seemed to be a definite gap between the mounds and, though (r) fades at its west end, (n) seems to have a definite eastern terminal (though this has been disturbed by the modern path that crosses the mound obliquely). The Hollinrakes also state that there is another 'doubtful north-south mound visible only on air photographs' (1986, 9, figs 2 and 5; air photograph reference not given) which they place to the east of (k). Nothing suggesting a pillow mound was seen here in 2008 (but it is noteworthy that pillow mound (k) has been erased from approximately this position on the Ordnance Survey Antiquity Model and re-drawn in its correct position – see Fig 6). Perhaps more relevant is a group of broad ridges in this area, amongst the otherwise very narrow ridge-and-furrow (see Fig 10).



A feature not noted by previous surveys (though it is partly visible on some historic aerial photographs, e.g., Fig 11) is the low circular ditched mound (w). This is believed to be another pillow mound. It is up to 0.4m high and its surrounding ditch 0.2m deep.

Fig 11: detail from Fig 3

Vermin traps (see Figs 5 and 10) are cruciform arrangements of stone construction, designed to funnel vermin into central traps (Williamson 2007, 78-81). Dymond recorded 15 vermin traps within and in the area immediately around the fort (1883, 107) and the Hollinrakes increased this number to 21, some of which were only seen on aerial photographs (1986, 9-10). The present survey (undertaken without prior reference to the previous surveys) identified four vermin traps definitely and a further six fragmentary or doubtful examples. The Hollinrakes' numbering scheme is adopted here:

Dymond 1883	Hollinrakes 1986	EH 2008
yes	1	outside area of survey; not seen
yes	2	well preserved
yes	3	well preserved
yes	4	one limb only surveyed
no	5	not seen
no	6	not seen
yes	7	2 limbs surveyed but not identified
yes	8	not seen
yes	9	surveyed but not identified
yes	10	recent disturbance noted
yes	11	one limb only surveyed
yes	12	well preserved
yes	13	not seen
yes	14	part of one limb (doubtful) surveyed
no	15	not seen
no	16	one limb (doubtful) surveyed
no	17	not seen
no	18	one limb (doubtful) surveyed
yes	19	well preserved
yes	20	not seen
yes	21	not definitely seen

Table 1: concordance of vermin traps

All the traps, with the exception of **7**, are turf-covered and no more than 0.3m high. Some of the discrepancies can be explained possibly by differing ground conditions at the times of the three surveys. For instance, vermin traps **6**, **15** and **21** were probably missed in 2008 because of dense vegetation (but see below for **21**). Vermin trap **5** is in an area disturbed by quarrying and **20** is now crossed by a well-worn footpath. This does not explain the other missing traps, however; **8**, **13** and **17** are all in open ground (but **8** might have been a victim of the casual vandalism mentioned above). Features surveyed in 2008 at **7**, **9**, **11**, **14**, **16** and **18** would not necessarily have been identified as parts of vermin traps but for the evidence of the earlier surveys. Two of the vermin traps, **9** and **10**, lie against vertical faces (a wall in one case and a quarry face in the other) and only had two limbs, rather than the usual cruciform arrangement. Vermin trap **9** is very clearly defined

on an undated aerial photograph from the Crawford Collection (ST 4558/3/6130) and this photograph also shows 10, 11, 13, 16, 17 (faintly) and 18. Another photograph from the same series (ST 4558/2/6128) shows vermin trap 20. Vermin trap 10 has been all but destroyed by recent disturbance.

Internal enclosures

There are two enclosures within the hillfort, a circular one (x) occupying the highest position with the fort near the eastern end and a sunken rectangular one (y) occupying the lowest point in the south-west corner.

The circular enclosure (x) (Figs 12 and 17) consists of a drystone wall, surviving to a maximum of 0.5m high, surrounding a knoll on which stand the remains of a well-built rectangular masonry structure. This structure survives to a height of 1.5m.

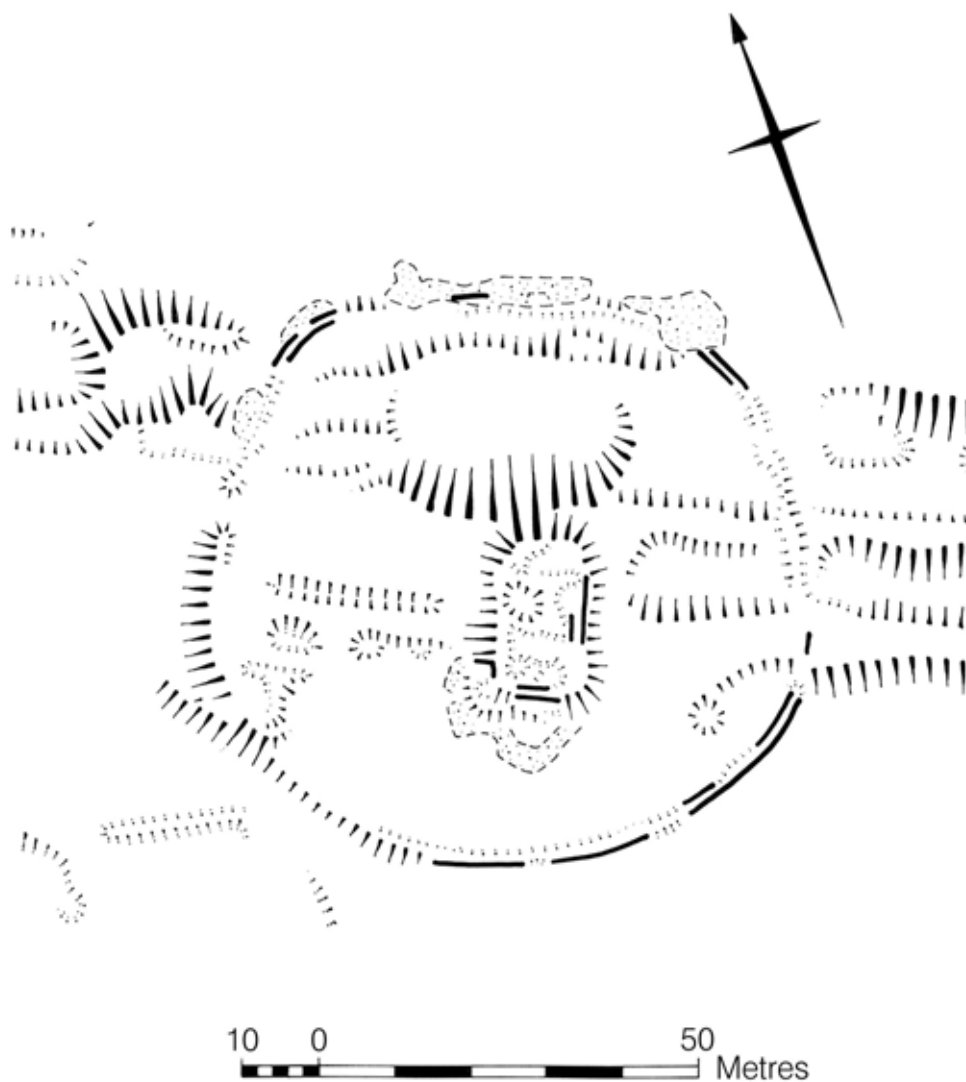


Fig 12: detail of the circular enclosure, the probable warrener's lodge and garden

Enclosure (y) is an unusual, if not unique, feature. It consists of a sunken area demarcated by a regular scarp occupying the south-western corner of the hillfort (Fig 13). The overall depth of the feature is 2.4m. On the floor of the depression is a small circular mound, 0.5m high, with a surrounding gully up to 0.2m deep and, lying against the internal foot of the western hillfort rampart, the footings of a rectangular building, standing up to 0.4m high. It is possible that it is the southern end of this building that Dymond and the Hollinrakes have interpreted as a vermin trap (Hollinrake number 21). Dymond's plan (see Fig 5) indicates a possible entrance to this enclosure in its north-western corner and this accords with what is visible on the ground now, though it is less clear than Dymond's plan indicates.



Fig 13; rectangular sunken enclosure in the south-west corner of the hillfort, beyond the western entrance (right)

Quarries

Quarries of various sizes are apparent in many parts of the interior of the hillfort and outside it. Most of these are grass covered (Fig 14) but a few quarry faces are visible, especially in the area near enclosure (x) and here some are of considerable depth, up to 1.7m. Some of the turf-covered quarry pits are also up to 1.5m deep but most are less than 0.5m. In all cases where chronological relationships can be seen the quarries are shown to be relatively late features. There are examples of both pillow mounds and ridge-and-furrow that are cut by quarries. There is an extensive area of exposed bedrock on the northern shoulder of the ridge within the hillfort and above vermin trap 7; this has presumably been quarried but no definite quarry faces can be identified.



Narrow gullies, up to 0.4m deep, extending from the eastern side of the fort in some places appear like cultivation furrows but elsewhere are shown to be the result of quarrying. The trench (z) perpendicular to the line of these gullies, 80m to the east of the hillfort, has been taken by some authorities (e.g. Hollinrake and Hollinrake 1986, 8, fig 3) as an outwork to the hillfort but its slight yet sharp profile probably argues against this. However, it is earlier than the gullies, which seem to cut through it. This trench is 1.2m deep and its flanking mounds are no more than 0.4m high. The mound on the western side continues to the north for a short distance (not surveyed) before being lost among further quarries on the flank of the ridge.

Fig 14: quarries

Other external features

The Hollinrakes noted the existence of a linear earthwork 300m to the east of the hillfort and traced this intermittently around the northern slopes of the hill to join with their supposed outwork at the western entrance; they also suggested the existence of annexes outside the south-west and north-east corners of the fort (1986, 8, figs 2 and 3). The 'annexe' to the north-east is largely based upon trench (z) which, as noted above, is possibly too slight and too sharp to be convincing as a prehistoric earthwork.

The south-western 'annexe' could not be identified during the present survey. The 'bank' extending from the south-western corner of the fort is in fact only a south-facing lynchet, about 1.0m high, at the lip of the very steep slopes down into the ravine, suggesting that a fence or other boundary has at some time stood in this position; the back of the 'bank' is a natural slope. The rectangular platform in the south-west corner of this 'annexe' is extant but whether it is a large building platform or the result of quarrying is not certain. The other earthworks depicted by the Hollinrakes in this area are not convincing except as the result of quarrying.

The large linear earthwork 300m to the east of the fort was not surveyed during the present project but consists of a bank 0.5 m high on the west and 1.6m high above the base of the ditch on its eastern side; the depth of the ditch to the east is 0.5m. The course of the ditch is as depicted by the Hollinrakes (1986, fig 3) though it is possibly rather more sinuous in reality. Whether this is an Iron Age outwork, as suggested by the Hollinrakes, or a later feature is not certain. The only field observation that can be made regarding its antiquity is that it is overlain by the enclosure field walls. There has been much quarrying on this flank of the ridge.

DISCUSSION

The hillfort



The Hollinrakes suggested three phases at Dolebury for what they considered a 'fully developed hillfort' (1986, 5). Though Skinner's evidence for a layer of earth within the rampart (*ibid*, 8) could be taken as evidence for heightening or rebuilding the rampart, the field evidence does not absolutely require more than one phase of hillfort building activity. This is not to say, however, that there may not have been several phases and the existence of quarry scoops could be read in that way. The ramparts are massive and would not be out of place in a 'developed' Wessex hillfort (Fig 15). There is a distinct possibility, however, that any late phase might belong to the post-Roman period rather than to the Iron Age.

Fig 15: the northern ramparts

One curiosity of the hillfort is that it has apparently only one, west-facing, original entrance. Typically hillforts of this size in southern Britain have two entrances, east and west, and where only one entrance is present it almost invariably faces east. Other hillforts in the region with only western entrances include the near neighbour Burlledge, Dudsbury (Dorset), Milber Down and Sidbury (Devon) but none of these is strictly comparable to Dolebury in other respects. However, the eastern ramparts at Dolebury are quite distinct in form from those around the other sides of the fort. It is possible (though the field evidence is inconclusive) that these eastern earthworks pre-date the rest of the fort and constituted originally a cross-ridge dyke which was then enlarged and incorporated into the hillfort. The breaching of these ramparts to form the entrance at (b) might therefore have taken place in antiquity so that the hillfort did, in effect, have an east-facing entrance.

The hillfort is undated but is likely to have been built in the early or middle Iron Age, somewhere between 700 and 400BC; by analogy with similar sites elsewhere in southern Britain it is likely to have been abandoned at or soon after 100BC, though it might have been used in the Roman period and re-occupied in the post-Roman period, like other similar sites in the region (Burrow 1981, 74-6, 207-8, 277). As mentioned above, some Romano-British pottery and several coins and other objects have been found on the site. Though there is no definite structural evidence for activity at this period, these finds indicate a substantial Romano-British phase of activity within the hillfort, the nature of which, however, remains unclear.

The relation of the hillfort to other Iron Age sites in the vicinity needs to be explored. Unfortunately, though there are other enclosures nearby, at Dinghurst immediately to the west with Banwell Camp beyond (Fig 16), and at Burrington to the east, for instance, none of these is securely dated so whether they are strictly contemporary is unknown; a more interesting relationship may be to some of the caves and swallets in the area, such as those in Rowberrow Bottom, for instance. Read's Cavern and Rowberrow Cavern, like other Mendip caves, have both yielded Iron Age artefacts (Tratman 1931 and refs therein; Taylor 1926). In summing up this material, Fowler was inclined to view it as evidence of occupation and remarked that caves were a 'significant part of the settlement pattern' (1970, 21). It is, however, unlikely that caves were occupied as part of the normal pattern of Iron Age domestic or agricultural life. More probably the artefacts found there, which include bronze brooches, are the result of special ritual or religious activities. If there was 'occupation' it may have been by seasonal herders bringing domestic animals up into the hills for the summer grazing. The hillfort itself may also have played a role in such a transhumant system, though precisely what that role might have been remains obscure.



Fig 16: Edward Burrow's evocative drawing (1924) shows the northern rampart and the low ground to the north and west, with Brean Down and Worlebury in the distance; Dinghurst is on the ridge immediately beyond the 'Churchill Gap' with Banwell Camp beyond

The Hollinrakes were, quite rightly, tentative about the date of the field system on the ridge to the east but believed that it 'was presumably in use during the life of the hillfort and may also have been associated with a Romano-British farm site at Springhead Farm' (1986, 9). On recent dating evidence from elsewhere in the country there is now no reason to assume that the field system is contemporary with the hillfort; it is unlikely that the thin soils of the Mendip plateau were cultivated in the relatively poor climatic conditions of the Iron Age. The field system could be earlier and date to the Bronze Age; there could however, perhaps more probably, be an association with the Romano-British site (NMR: ST 45 NE 62) at Springhead, near the foot of the slope to the north-east.

Rabbit farming

It is interesting that while Dymond correctly identified the function of the pillow mounds as rabbit burrows in 1872, he was dissuaded by the keeper, who told him that 'it was not so, and that these banks were not recent' (1883, 106). The vermin traps, on the other hand, were apparently made within living memory and still in use (Dymond 1885, 17). A few years later Allcroft was informed by the warrener that the traps were for catching rabbits but he was also unable to identify the purpose of the pillow mounds (1908, 691-3). Fowler was still doubtful about their attribution as rabbit burrows in the 1960s (1970, 20).

The rabbit farm is clearly of more than one phase; a relatively modest first phase with massive expansion, not in the number of mounds but in their individual scale. The Hollinrakes suggested that there were three phases (1986, 9) and this might be correct but only two phases are absolutely demanded by the field evidence. The building within the circular enclosure (x) has been taken as the warrener's lodge and, given the scale of the warren, this is a not unreasonable assumption (see below). The presence of two small round mounds (if they are indeed rabbit burrows) amongst so many rectangular mounds requires explanation but in fact it is not uncommon. About one fifth of pillow mound groups include at least one circular mound (Williamson 2007, 60); examples include Minchinhampton Common (Gloucs) and possibly Little Doward (Herefs). Williamson has stressed the possible different purposes of mounds, including the protection of the particularly vulnerable breeding does and young rabbits (2007, 56-8), and this might explain the presence of mounds of differing shape. Alternatively, round mounds could be used to support different forms of vermin traps (*ibid*, 62)

How the slight traces of cultivation fit into the medieval and post-medieval history of the place is not certain. The remains are slight and of a type which is particularly difficult to date morphologically and no relationships are apparent. However, as Fig 10 makes clear, while most of the ridges are very narrow there are some distinctly broader ones, which could indicate a different date or function. It is unlikely that anyone would cultivate this thin upland soil for normal agricultural reasons; however, the cultivation was possibly to prepare the ground and provide improved fodder for the rabbits (Hollinrake and Hollinrake 1986, 9; Williamson 2007, 21).

The hillfort formed, as the Hollinrakes have pointed out (1986, 9), an ideal ready-made enclosure for a rabbit warren, as did other hillforts such as Danebury (Hampshire), Pilsdon Pen (Dorset) and the many other examples listed by Williamson (2007, 36).

The vermin traps are particularly numerous on this warren; one at least dates to the 'secondary' phase of rabbit farming or later and as all appear to be of the same type it could be assumed that they are all of one date. Certainly the oral evidence recorded by Dymond dates them to the 19th century (whereas Williamson (2007, 80) dates the type earlier) and the suggestion was made, as noted above, that they were made to catch the rabbits themselves, rather than the vermin which might prey on the rabbits.

The circular and rectangular enclosures

The date of these enclosures is unknown. Both are depicted on Dymond's plan though not on Skinner's (Hollinrake and Hollinrake 1986, fig 6).

The Hollinrakes accept what appears to be the traditional interpretation, reported by Dymond (1883, 106), of the circular enclosure and its building, that this was the warrener's lodge and garden (Fig 17). They suggest that it was a three-storey building with storage on the ground floor and living accommodation above 'and a lookout over the warren and ridgetop' (1986, 9). Its date is unknown but it was in ruins by 1830 (*ibid*). The tower-like form of the building might suggest more than just a warrener's lodge – possibly a beacon or folly – but medieval and early post-medieval warreners' lodges could be elaborate buildings, often adopting a tower form and often occupying commanding positions with wide views (Williamson 2007, 26, 82-8). The position is similar to that of a hunting lodge in a deer park – and for similar reasons: the warrener needed to be able to oversee his stock and keep watch for intruders; and warrens, like parks, were symbols of lordly authority (*ibid*, 155ff). There is no evidence for a deer park at Dolebury, except possibly for the outer earthworks ascribed by the Hollinrakes to the Iron Age; however, these do not conform to the typical 'signature' of a park pale. The circular stone-walled enclosure in which the tower sits could have been for the warren dogs, as well as a garden.



Fig 17: the warrener's lodge and its enclosure

The date and purpose of the sunken enclosure in the south-western corner of the fort is obscure. Dymond, clearly puzzled by this feature, says, 'The theory that it was a pond for

the storage of water for the garrison seems to be the most tenable' (1883, 106) but it is unclear how it could have held water, and the presence of features, including a rectangular building, within it then needs to be explained. A connection with the rabbit farming seems to be more likely; the building is an alternative candidate for a warrener's lodge or a store building for the warren and the circular mound might be another pillow mound. The fact that the enclosure is hollowed might be explained if there was a substantial pre-existing, Iron Age, quarry scoop here.

The evidence of these enclosures and the buildings within them, as well as the vermin traps, do have a bearing on the dating of the warren. The tower-like building, in particular, suggests that the origins of the warren were in the medieval or early-post-medieval period, before rabbit farming declined from a lordly to a commercial milieu. The apparently more humble building in the south-western corner might be contemporary with this or it might relate to the later phase of warrening. Rabbit farming was a major economic activity on Mendip in the 17th and 18th centuries (Williamson 2007, 93) to the extent that the commoners petitioned against it in 1660, as the rabbits were competing with their livestock (Betty 2004, 390-1).

Quarrying

Nearly all the quarrying is on the northern part of the fort and its surroundings, which suggests that it is the Burrington Oolite that was being exploited and that the Black Rock Limestone was not required. The only quarry pits on this stratum are a narrow north-south gully near vermin trap (14) and an oval pit outside the eastern ramparts to the north of (c) (the latter also shown on Dymond's plan); these could be regarded as exploratory trial trenches.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Survey was undertaken with Trimble R8 and 5700 differential (survey grade) GPS equipment and Trimble 5600 'total-station' theodolite and EDM. The data were processed using Trimble Geosite software and plotted at a scale of 1:1000, with a few features supplied subsequently using graphical methods.

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Fig 7: survey plan reduced from 1:1000



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