

MILITARY FIELD KITCHENS of the Eighteenth Century

By IVAN D. MARGARY, F.S.A., *President*

In 1928 some air photographs taken over Ashdown Forest disclosed a row of mounds or embanked circles at Camp Hill, north of Duddleswell, and subsequently another similar row on Stone Hill a little to the west. They were put on record in *Sussex Notes and Queries*¹ under the title of Mystery Mounds, for their date and purpose was quite unexplained, and as a mystery they remained until just lately. The Society visited them during a recent walk.

Full details of their size and spacing were given in the earlier note and it will suffice now to repeat that the Mounds vary in diameter from 12 to 30 feet (*including* the ditch) and are 18 to 36 inches high. In two exceptional cases (nos. 5 and 6) they are embanked circles 50 feet across with a flat internal space. Their spacing from mound to mound showed a relation to multiples of 100 feet or subdivisions of 100, 90, 80 feet, etc., and this made it seem unlikely that they were prehistoric. Otherwise they might well be mistaken for tumuli, a fact which makes their present elucidation a matter of some general importance.

In November 1964 Mr. P. D. Wood, one of the Society's East Grinstead members, who has been making a study of early Sussex maps, came upon one deposited in the Public Record Office² showing "The Camp on Ashdown Forest in 1793". This depicted the actual camp layout of a large force of militia, two brigades with artillery, and showed by characteristic signs the lines of the encampment. Each of the lines ended in a little circular sign and Mr. Wood noticed that the alignment of these corresponded very closely with that of the Mystery Mounds. He rightly concluded that this had solved the mystery and very kindly informed me. The success of the subsequent investigation is thus in large measure due to him.

It was clearly necessary first of all to establish just what the little circles on the map represented. The Royal United Service Institution immediately supplied the answer from a little book, *An Essay on Castramentation* by Lewis Lochée (1778), which contained a diagram (fig. 1 here) showing a specimen camp layout. The signs on this corresponded in minute detail with those on the 1793 map and thus explained everything. The little circles proved to be the field kitchens! We are greatly indebted to the Director and to his research assistant, Captain the Hon. D. H. Erskine, Scots Guards, for their very prompt elucidation of this matter.

¹ Vol. III (1930), p. 101. (Note that on p. 104, 1.32, "36 feet across" should read "3-6 feet across", and in the table on p. 103 "294½" at the end should be deleted).

² P.R.O. ref. MPH 407.

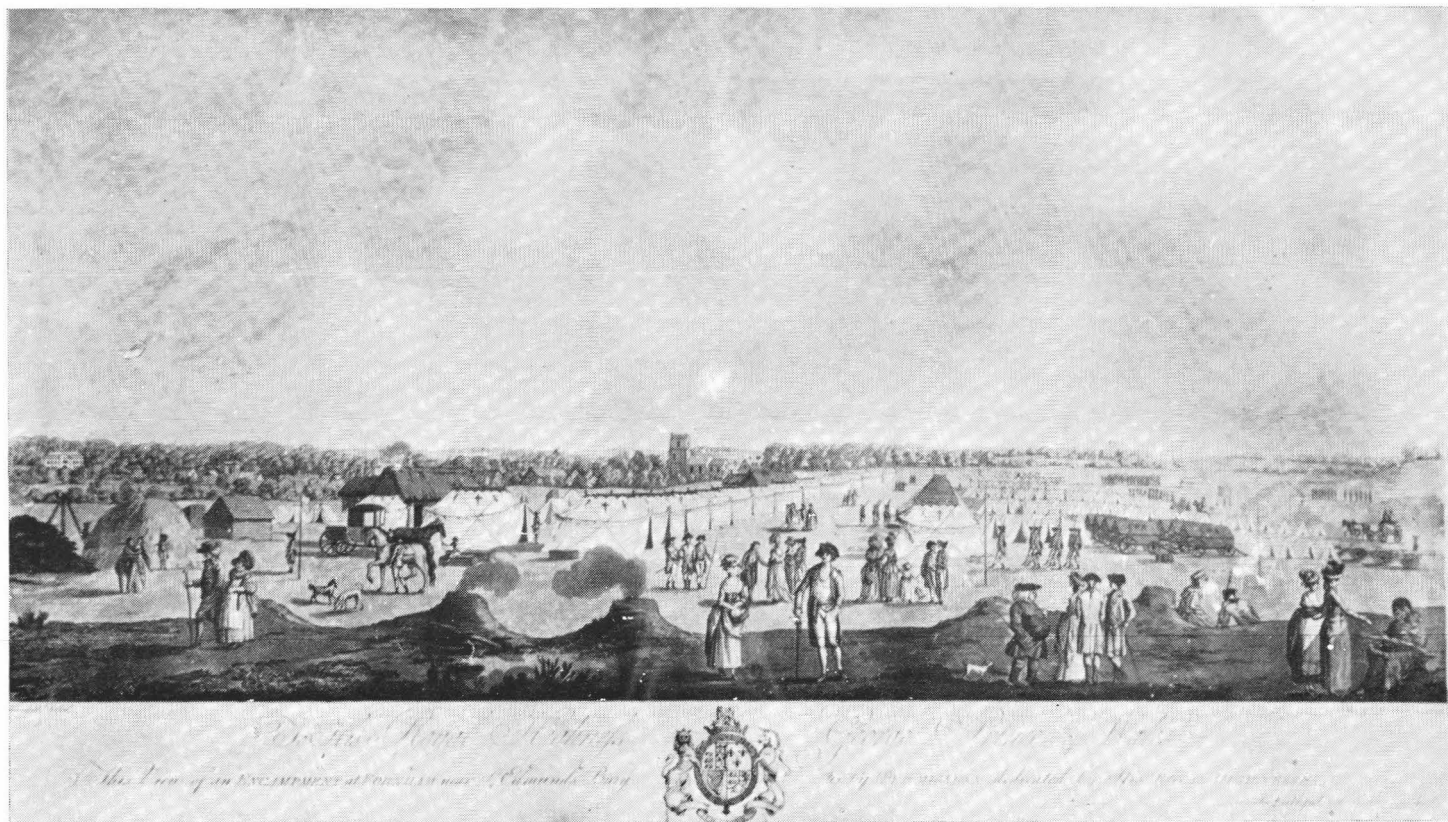


PLATE I. The Camp at Fornham, near Bury St. Edmunds, August 1782, showing Field Kitchens. (National Army Museum).

Next, it was desirable to find out for what purpose this camp was formed and for how long it was occupied. We were again most fortunate in that the Librarian of the Society of Antiquaries, Mr. J. Hopkins, was able immediately to produce the complete answer from a book, *History of the Corps of Royal Sappers and Miners* (Vol. I, 1855) by T. W. J. Connolly. In this, under 1793 (p. 79), it is stated that a detachment of the Sappers was assigned to a force of 7,000, including horse and foot, under the command of the Duke of Richmond, which was assembled for the express purpose of testing the efficiency of a new drill system introduced by General Dundas. The camp was first formed at 'Waterdown', now Broadwater Forest between Tunbridge Wells and Eridge, on 1st July, "then on 4th August the troops moved to Ashdown Forest where they manoeuvred for a week and finally marched to Brighton: there they drilled for a fortnight producing some grand military displays in the presence of the Prince of Wales, and returned to their stations on 22nd August." Thus the Ashdown Forest Mounds had a useful life of only one week.

It is somewhat remarkable that no recollection of this military incursion seems to have survived locally, for naturally some inquiry was earlier made in the hope that the name 'Camp Hill' might afford some such explanation for the Mounds. Perhaps the brevity of the occupation accounts for this.

The size of the various units is indicated on the map by the number of lines of tentage, as under:—

Camp Hill area: 2nd Brigade—East Middlesex 8 lines, North Devon 8, North Hants 8; 4th Brigade—Sussex 12, Dorset 10, West Suffolk 8.

Stone Hill area: 3rd Brigade—Westminster Middlesex 8, South Devon 8, Oxfordshire 9; 1st Brigade—West Essex 8, Berkshire 9, East Norfolk 8.

The map shows the field kitchens as spaced at regular intervals, usually four to the smaller units and six to the larger, but the positions of the Mounds in the Camp Hill area indicate that in actual practice this was not followed. The most probable allocation of the Mounds to the units is as under:—

Camp Hill area: East Middlesex, nos. 1 and 2 (large); North Devon, nos. 3 and 4 (large); North Hants, nos. 5 and 6 (large circles); Sussex, nos. 7-18 (small); Dorset, nos. 19-23 (small); West Suffolk, nos. 24-27 (small).

Stone Hill area: Westminster Middlesex, nos. 28-31 (small); South Devon, nos. 32-35 (small); Oxfordshire, nos. 36 and 37 (large); West Essex, Berkshire and East Norfolk, no surviving Mounds traced. Perhaps the 1st Brigade ordered their destruction.

The much larger number of small Mounds which appear to be most probably related to the Sussex sector is of interest. The com-

missariat arrangements have not been investigated, but it seems possible that this unit being situated so near home may have been able to supplement its basic rations more extensively and thus needed more cooking accommodation.

The standard camp layout shows tents adjoining the kitchens line for the 'Grand Sutler' and 'Petty Sutlers'. The term 'sutler' appears to mean one who sells provisions to troops, not the actual cooks, and we may perhaps infer that this was some kind of pre-NAAFI arrangement. There might well therefore be considerable variation in the feeding of different units, to the advantage of those near home supplies.

We now know that this force was first encamped during July 1793 at Waterdown (Broadwater) Forest near Tunbridge Wells. Further investigation at the Public Record Office resulted in the discovery of a companion map of the camp there, evidently by the same hand.¹ The line of field kitchens is again clearly shown, and when the ground was examined another row of Mounds duly appeared; 27 have been recognised in the northern half of the line. The camp extended from a point near the cross-roads on the Eridge-Tunbridge Wells and Frant-High Rocks roads (TQ 565366) and along the latter for about a mile (to TQ 556378). The field kitchens lay mostly on the east side of the present course of this road, and where the Mounds still remain they will be found 60-90 yards back from the road. Towards the north end Charlton's Nursery has obliterated the traces for a short distance, but the Mounds occur to the north of this (11) as well as southward. It should be noted that the present road is *not* that shown on the 1793 map, which is now a track or derelict hollow way a little to the east. Southwards from a point near the fork of the roads from Langton Green and from High Rocks the Mounds no longer appear. The line of kitchens would here coincide more or less with that of the old hollow way and it seems possible that the banks of this may have been utilised in some way to serve the same purpose.

The surviving Mounds are very similar in appearance to those on Ashdown Forest. Practically all are close to 20 feet in diameter (including the ditch) and normally about 2 feet high, occasionally 2½. Frequently, but not always, a dimple appears in the crown, which is now known to have been the site of the chimney. No. 20 (counting from the north) is, exceptionally, an oval, 16 x 22 feet. Between nos. 17 and 18 there is a straight-sided pit, 11 x 12 feet, now at least 3 feet deep, exactly upon the alignment of the Mounds, perhaps for water storage. The spacing of the Mounds is given in the Table (p. 66) but lacks the curious relationships noted at Camp Hill.

Later it was found by our Editor, Mr. F. W. Steer, the County Archivist of West Sussex, that this pair of maps was also included in the archives from the Duke of Richmond's own collection de-

¹ P.R.O. ref. MPH 415,

posited at Chichester. Upon inspection it was noted that although the maps appear identical with those in the P.R.O. collection and are evidently by the same hand (probably by Thos. Gardner, in Mr. Steer's opinion on stylistic grounds), there are in fact small differences which show that all must be hand-drawn originals. These differences appear mainly in the surrounding detail, especially of the permanent buildings shown, and in the depiction of some of the trees. The north point of the Waterdown map is also placed in quite a different position on the two copies and is much more elaborate on the P.R.O., formerly War Office, copy, which may suggest that this copy was the earlier or more important.

What were these kitchens like in their heyday and how were they operated? Inquiry was made of the Institution of Royal Engineers, Chatham, and we are much indebted to Lieut.-Colonel F. T. Stear, Secretary of the R.E. Historical Society, for an explanatory diagram, shown here in fig. 2. The size of kitchen here indicated would have been $26\frac{1}{2}$ feet in diameter (including ditch), closely equivalent to the larger Mounds on Ashdown Forest, and was designed for use by 1,000 men but practically for 600. The radial trenches were designed so that those favourable to the wind might be used, fires being lit on the stone bottom of a trench and kettles or dixies placed over the openings between the stone covers above. A central chimney was constructed of earth, brushwood and clay to provide draught.

Colonel Stear states that it was the practice at that time to break down such installations when striking camp, and the spoil inside the circular ditch would account for the present appearance of the Mounds. No doubt useful objects such as the stone cover-slabs were removed for use at the next camp. The Sappers were responsible for the provision of the field kitchens, and one n.c.o. and 7 men were expected to construct one of this size in 8 hours. It is evident from the remains, however, that units in these two camps had kitchens of varying size, generally smaller and more numerous than this.

Application was also made to the National Army Museum, Camberley, in the hope that these objects might be shown on old prints. Yet again we were lucky, for a print (Plate I) was found showing a camp at Fornham, near Bury St. Edmunds, in August 1782, with a row of seven such Mounds in the foreground, some actually smoking away! The artist has, of course, only depicted them quite roughly, like small erupting volcanic cones, but their character is at least quite evident. We are indebted to Mr. P. Hayes, Archives Department, and his assistant Mr. Doyle for this find.

Mention of this novel form of field antiquity at the half-yearly meeting of the Council for British Archaeology in January immediately elicited an exactly analogous case at Easthampstead Common, Berkshire, where in 1949 a line of 34 Mounds had been

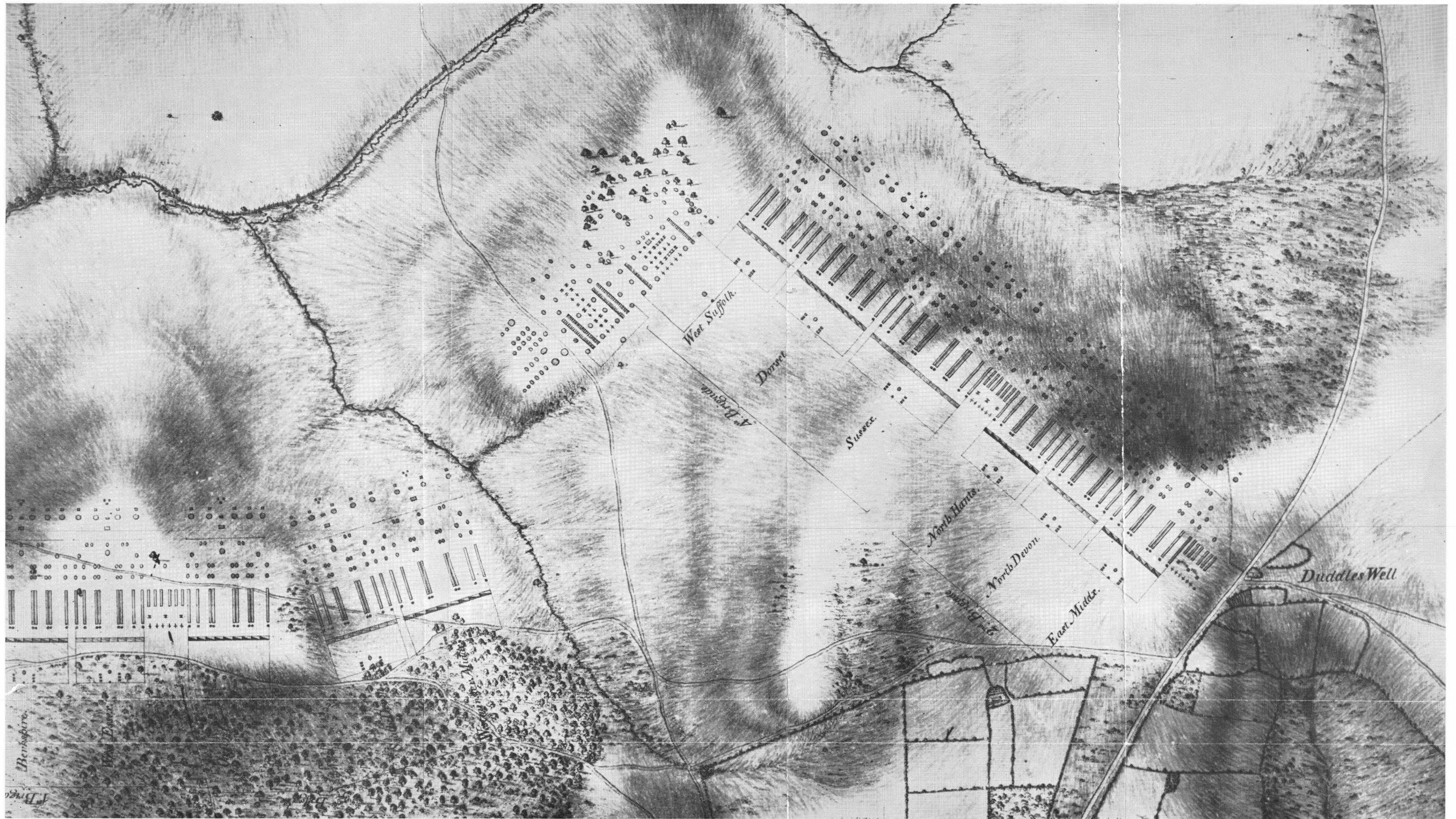


PLATE II. The Camp on Ashdown Forest, 1793. (West Sussex Record Office). The Field Kitchens ('Mystery Mounds') are shown by the small circular signs at the right-hand ends of the camp lines.

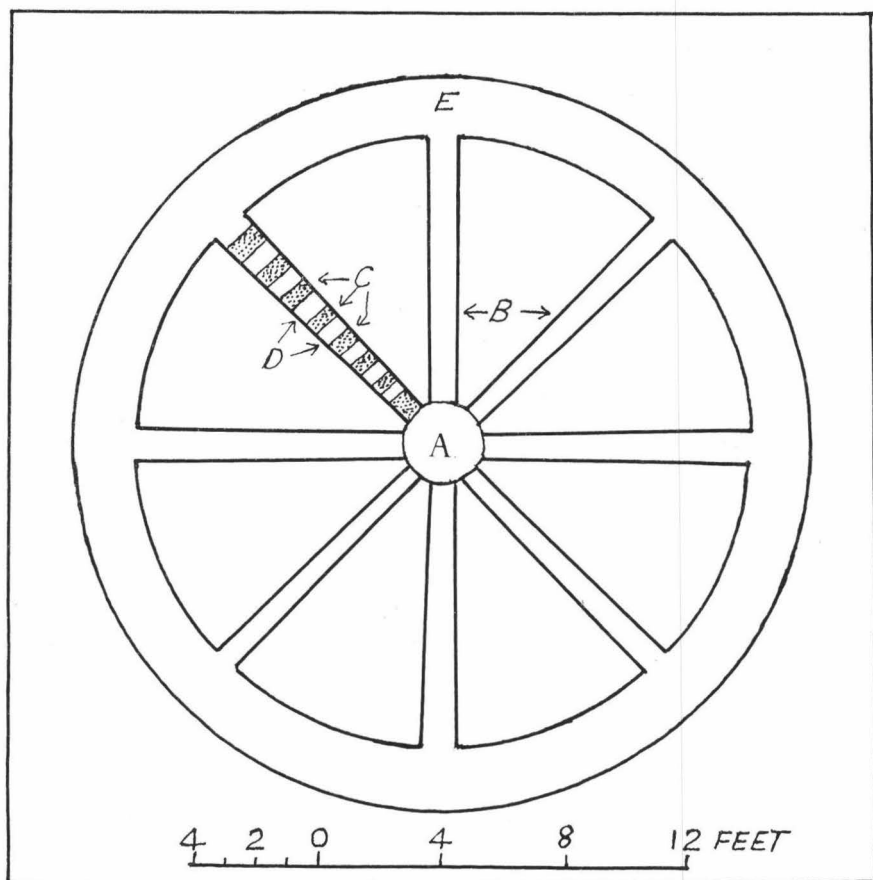


Fig. 2. Circular Field Kitchen (c.1800).

A. Chimney, built of earth, brushwood and clay to the height required, upon a circular reinforcement to form a good base. B. Kettle-boiling trenches, used according to wind direction. Width 10-12 inches, depth 10 inches at centre and sloping outwards to 14 inches. Bottom lined with stones and clay spread on sides. Fires lit on stones. C. Stone cover-slabs at intervals. D. Kettles placed over the openings, seven to each trench used. E. Circular connecting trench, 2 feet wide, drained to the lowest point.

noted by Mr. F. Hilder and subsequently reported on by Mr. W. H. Manning after a trial excavation.¹ In the specimen excavated which was 13½ feet wide (*inside* the ditch 2-3 feet wide) and 2 feet high, eight or nine pits were noted at the inner side of the ditch containing ash and much charcoal, and these were recognised as probable hearths. The purpose of the Mounds had not been discovered but is now quite plain. Most of the series has since been destroyed for re-forestation. No doubt other examples await discovery and will now be recognised for what they are.

One other series (which we had in fact quite forgotten) should be mentioned here, for it is in North Kent on Dartford Heath (TQ521732), where a row of 17 such mounds were observed in 1931 as a result of information from the late O. G. S. Crawford. A note on them was published² as an analogue of the Sussex Mounds for they are exactly similar in size and appearance. Most of them are still there but a few have been flattened or obliterated. The Fifth Edition of the 1 inch map marks them as Tumuli!

It is evident that this investigation has been greatly helped by the conspicuous efficiency with which all concerned have contributed their shares of information, and this has made its collation particularly enjoyable.

Distances between the Mounds
(centre to centre in feet)

Mounds Nos.	Actual Distance	Suggested Distance	Mounds Nos.	Actual Distance	Suggested Distance
1-2	109	110	Fence-12	22	—
2-3	32	30	12-13	24	25
3-4	40	40	13-14	23	25
4-5	23	25	14-15	26	25
5-6	70	70	15-16	25	25
6-7	23	25	16-17	25	25
7-8	43	45	17-Pit	67	70
8-9	34	35	Pit-18	70	70
9-10	70	70	18-19	39	40
10-11	40	40	19-20	29	30
11-Fence	33	—	20-21	32	30
			21-22	51	50
			22-23	34	35
			23-24	70	70
			24-25	22	22
			25-26	40	40
			26-27	28	30
Charlton's Nursery intervenes for about 257 yards					

¹ *Berks. Arch. Journal*, 61, 92 (1963-64). Nat. Grid Ref. SU866654-871647.

² *Sussex Notes and Queries*, Vol. III, p. 190.