Bozedown Camp, Whitchurch Hill, near Pangbourne, Oxfordshire

An Archaeological Survey

For Mr Richard Hazell

by Steve Ford
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code BCW04/32

January 2005
Summary

Site name: Bozedown Camp, Whitchurch Hill, near Pangbourne, Oxfordshire

Grid reference: SU 6419 7850

Site activity: Survey

Date and duration of project: 16th April–8th January 2005

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Sarah Coles

Site code: BCW04/32

Area of site: c. 350 sq m

Summary of results: A partial section across the hillfort rampart was recorded. No archaeological finds or deposits were identified other than the hillfort rampart

Monuments identified: Hillfort rampart

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course (accession number OXCMS:2004.49).

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Preston 03.02.05
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological survey and recording carried out on land within the circuit of Bozedown Camp, Whitchurch Hill, near Pangbourne, Oxfordshire (SU 6419 7850) (Fig. 1). The site is an Iron Age hillfort of c. 22 ha extent located on the plateau margin overlooking the Thames Valley to the south. The hillfort is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM130). The work was commissioned by Mr Richard Hazell of Mount Pleasant Farm, Coombe End, Whitchurch Hill, Pangbourne, Reading, RG8 7TB. The field investigation was required following recent damage to the site, and was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Chris Welch, Inspector of Ancient Monuments at English Heritage and followed a brief prepared by him. Scheduled Monument Consent was gained from the DCMS for the work. The various phases of fieldwork were undertaken by Sian Anthony, Sarah Coles, Richard Oram, Leon Fern and Steve Ford between April 2004 and January 2005. The site code is BCW04/32.

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Location, topography and geology

The hillfort is located on a spur at the south-western dipslope of the Chilterns overlooking the Thames Valley. The site lies at a height of c. 130m above Ordnance Datum on relatively level ground and the underlying geology is plateau gravel overlying chalk (BGS 1946). An orange-brown gravel with a sandy clay matrix was observed during the fieldwork.

Archaeological background

Bozedown Camp is an Iron Age hillfort with a single ditch and rampart. No known excavations have taken place within the interior of the camp although a trench was dug and profiles taken across the rampart in 1952 (Wood 1954). That fieldwork produced finds of Iron Age pottery, a shale bracelet and also medieval pottery and a post-medieval iron blade. To the west, fieldwork on the Castrol Technology Centre recorded a Bronze Age ditch which might indicate a pre-Iron Age origin for the hillfort (Howell 1996). Not so recent damage has levelled
some parts of the ramparts which were shown as extant on Ordnance Survey maps dating from the 1960s. A profile recorded in the 1950s in the environs of where the current work has taken place indicates that the rampart was then about 1.2m high, in contrast to the 0.4–0.5m recorded recently. The recent damage which has resulted in the work described below removed superficial deposits within a part of the interior and removed a length of the rampart earthwork.

The hillfort circuit is sub-circular, perhaps better described as square with rounded corners, but with a distinctive rectangular corner at the north-western end of the site. This corner has the appearance of being eccentric to the main circuit of the hillfort yet if it reflects a later addition, it is difficult to visualize its function unless it was created to form a triangular enclosure using the (now levelled) original rampart as the third side. There are though no obvious joins such as minor changes of line or variations in height or width of rampart. If the corner is a later addition, this is likely to have taken place in antiquity, or perhaps in medieval times, as the parish boundary shown on the modern Ordnance Survey maps follows the outside line of the rampart including the extended corner for much of the north-western circuit of the hillfort. It is possible that the corner is in fact a primary component of the hillfort circuit perhaps representing a small rectangular enclosure which was subsequently enlarged to form the hillfort but incorporating two of the original sides.

It is within this rectangular corner that the survey work described below took place.

**Objectives and methodology**

The damage which has taken place within the Scheduled Monument comprised the removal of superficial deposits (mainly leaf litter and a thin topsoil) from an area of about 4m x 25m and its replacement by scalpins to form a hard but porous surface for storage of plant and logs. More invasive damage comprised the levelling of part of the north–south rampart on its western side, with the spoil dumped on top of and beyond (west of) the remaining section of rampart. The east–west rampart was not truncated but spoil from the internal scraping was dumped on top.

To mitigate this damage, a programme of archaeological recording and possibly restoration was considered necessary, and this report documents the recording component of the project. The aims of the project were:

To carry out a topographic survey of the damaged zone and adjacent areas to act as a baseline.

To remove the infill of the area formerly occupied by the rampart for an area about 4m x 25m, record any deposits exposed and excavate selected examples to enhance knowledge of the site, with the agreement of English Heritage.

To record the section(s) of exposed parts of the rampart.
Results

An irregular area of roughly 4m by 25m was stripped of scalpins by a JCB-type machine under archaeological supervision. This revealed that the scalpins overlay the natural plateau gravel on the western margins where the rampart formerly stood for a strip between 1–3m wide but only overlay topsoil/subsoil to the east (Fig. 3 and Pls 1–3). It was apparent from this that, apart from the rampart area, the placing of the scalpins to create the hard standing had only required the removal of superficial deposits such as leaf mould and at most a thin skim of topsoil. The remaining areas of scalpins were therefore not removed.

The stripped area was cleaned by hand (Pl. 2) and the exposed sections cleaned with minimal excavation. No cut archaeological features were revealed, with all disturbed subsoil areas relating to the presence of current and former tree roots.

A cross-section of part of the rampart was cleaned and recorded at the southern end of the stripped area (Fig. 4, Pl. 1). The position of this section, which was the only location suitable for recording, and a requirement for minimal excavation meant that at most only a 1/3 width of the rampart was examined. Most of the exposed section comprised topsoil/subsoil with many roots from a nearby sapling present. The rampart core, if that was what was observed, comprised an orange gravel with a sandy clay matrix closely similar to the natural geology. No tip lines nor buried soil were observed and an interface between rampart and natural geology could not be established. No archaeological finds were recovered. A second cross-section of the rampart was examined (Pl. 3) but could not provide details of construction due to the presence of an adjacent mature tree.

Finds

No finds of any archaeological interest were discovered.

Conclusion

Apart from recording of part of the rampart section, no other archaeological deposits were observed nor finds recovered. No information was retrieved as to the origin and function of the enigmatic rectangular corner of the hillfort where the works took place.

References

Howell, L, 1996, ‘The excavation of a Bronze Age ditch at the Field Test Centre at Castrol Technology Centre, Pangbourne, Berkshire’, Oxoniensia, 61, 36–39
Bozedown Camp, Whitchurch Hill, near Pangbourne, Oxfordshire, 2004 Archaeological Survey

Figure 1. Location of site within Whitchurch Hill and Oxfordshire.

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Figure 2. Detailed location of site (after Howell 1996).
Figure 3. Plan of site showing area scraped for placement of scalpins, area stripped of scalpins under archaeological supervision and hand cleaned, area scraped and replaced with scalpins, tree section, spoil from scraping, area of removal of rampart, recent spoil dumping and area archaeologically recorded.
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Figure 4. Section of rampart (part).
Plate 1. Part section of rampart looking south. Scales: 2m and 0.5m.

Plate 2. Central section of exposed natural beneath removed rampart looking west. Scale: 1m.
Plate 3. Section of rampart looking south. Scales: 2m and 0.3m.