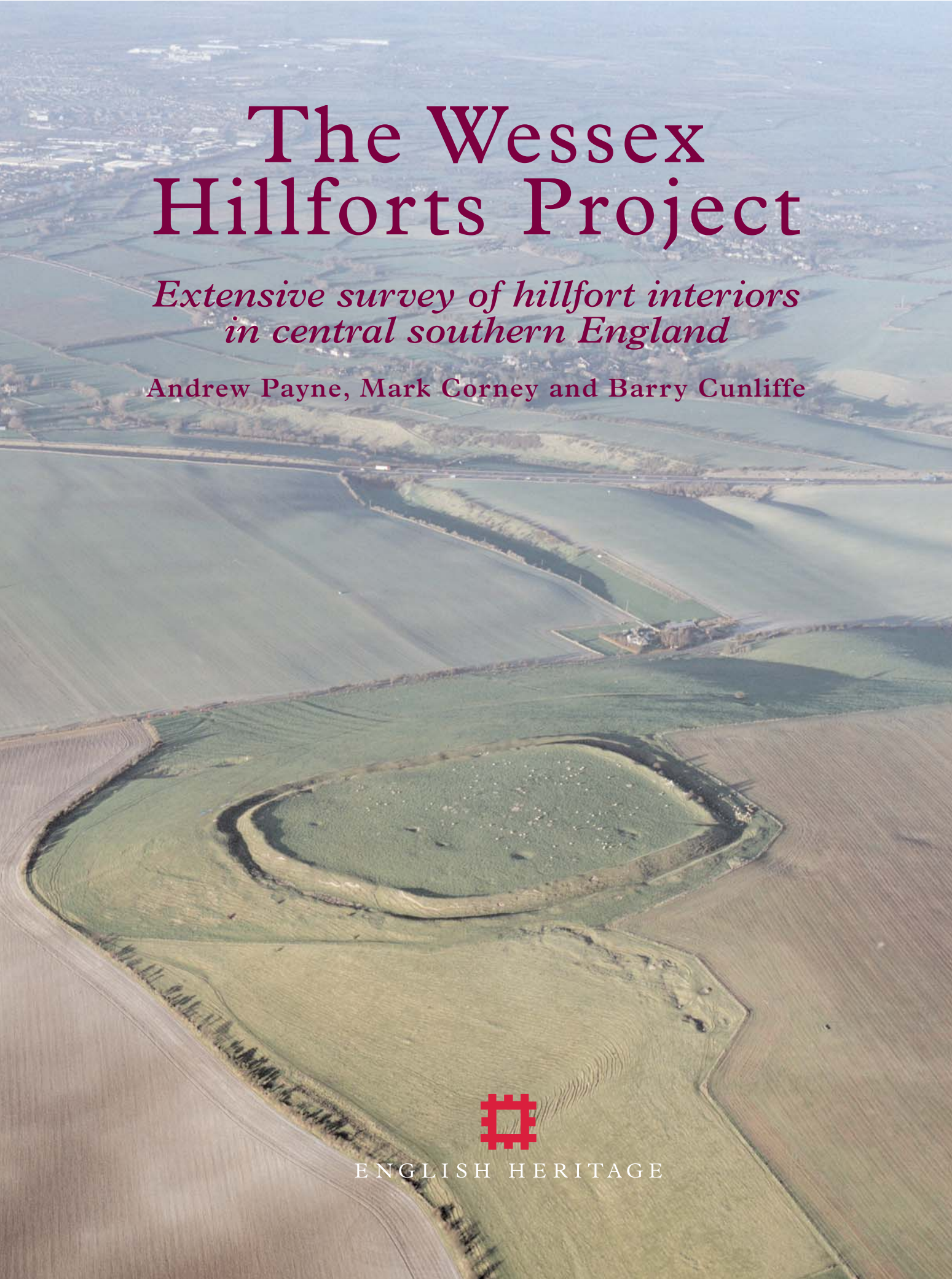

The Wessex Hillforts Project

Extensive survey of hillfort interiors in central southern England

Andrew Payne, Mark Corney and Barry Cunliffe

ENGLISH HERITAGE

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Summary

The numerous earthwork forts that crown many of the hills of Southern England are among the largest and most dramatic of the prehistoric features that still survive in our modern rural landscape. These enclosures, occupied from the end of the Bronze Age to the last few centuries before the Roman conquest, have long attracted archaeological interest and debate on their function and significance remains central to the academic study of the Iron Age. The sheer scale of the enclosing earthworks at many sites indicates great expenditure of communal effort and a high degree of social organisation. Despite the attention given to these sites it remains unclear whether they were strongholds of Celtic chiefs and their retinues, communal centres of population akin to large villages or temporary refuges occupied seasonally or in times of unrest. Reliable interpretation of their role continues to be hampered by the small number that have been extensively examined archaeologically. The Wessex Hillforts Survey was designed in response to the need for more wide-ranging data on hillfort interiors, which realistically was unlikely to be obtainable by traditional more costly, time consuming and damaging intrusive excavation.

The research published in this book is the result of a three year partnership project between the former Ancient Monuments Laboratory of English Heritage and Oxford University. The project was designed to shed new light on the internal character of a wide range of hillfort sites in Central Southern England with a view to improving the future management and furthering greater public understanding of the monuments.

The Wessex Hillforts Survey was based entirely on non-invasive methodology primarily involving the use of fluxgate magnetometry or gradiometry. This technique locates archaeological features by means of the slight magnetic variations caused by past human activity and unlike excavation does not cause any damage to in-situ archaeological remains. At a selected number of sites, the magnetometer surveys were supplemented by magnetic susceptibility survey and digital terrain modelling. The surveys of each hillfort interior were further augmented by analysis of the aerial photographic record from a two km radius around each site firmly anchoring the individual hillforts in the context of the archaeological landscapes of which they were a part.

The results of the project significantly advance our comprehension of hillfort interiors in the eastern part of the region of Wessex, which in the absence of excavation, would otherwise have remained poorly understood and characterised. The eighteen hillforts surveyed across Hampshire, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire produced very varied results. These range from sites largely devoid of internal features to sites containing complex patterns of round structures, pits, roadways and in some cases internal enclosures and ditched boundaries. Overall assessment of the results has enabled more elaborate distinctions to be made between different classes of hillforts than has hitherto been possible. The wealth of new data revealed illustrates the great complexity of the archaeological record preserved inside these sites and it is apparent that this complexity can vary considerably locally from one site to the next opening up many new archaeological questions to explore further. The survey has also highlighted the fact that hillforts are far from isolated features in their contemporary landscape settings.

Résumé

Les nombreuses forteresses avec terrassement qui couronnent bien des collines du sud de l'Angleterre se classent parmi les plus étendus et les plus dramatiques des vestiges préhistoriques qui survivent encore dans notre paysage rural moderne. Ces enclos occupés de la fin de l'âge du bronze jusqu'aux tous derniers siècles avant la conquête romaine, ont depuis longtemps suscité l'intérêt des archéologues et le débat sur leur fonction et leur signification demeure au centre des recherches universitaires sur l'âge du fer. Sur beaucoup de ces sites, l'énormité de l'échelle des levées de terre qui les ceinturent témoigne des gigantesques efforts fournis par l'ensemble de cette société et atteste qu'elle jouissait d'un niveau élevé d'organisation. Malgré l'attention qui a été apportée à ces sites, il n'est toujours pas clair s'ils étaient des forteresses des princes celtes et de leur entourage, des centres communautaires de population apparentés à un village ou des refuges temporaires occupés en fonction des saisons ou en période d'instabilité. Le fait qu'un petit nombre seulement a fait l'objet d'une étude archéologique extensive continue à entraver toute interprétation fiable de leur rôle. L'étude des forteresses du Wessex a été conçue en réponse à ce besoin de données plus étendues sur l'intérieur des forteresses, ce qu'avec réalisme,il aurait été peu probable d'arriver à obtenir par des fouilles traditionnelles plus coûteuses, plus longues et susceptibles de causer plus de dégâts en pénétrant le site.

Les recherches publiées dans cet ouvrage sont le résultat d'un projet sur trois ans en partenariat entre l'ancien Laboratoire des Monuments Anciens d'English Heritage et l'Université d'Oxford. Le projet fut conçu pour jeter un nouveau jour sur les caractéristiques internes d'une importante gamme de sites de forteresses dans le centre de l'Angleterre du sud afin d'en améliorer la gestion dans l'avenir et de favoriser une meilleure compréhension des monuments parmi les membres du public.

L'Etude des Forteresses du Wessex reposait entièrement sur une méthodologie non-envahissante impliquant essentiellement l'usage de magnétométrie par induction ou de gradiométrie. Cette technique localise les vestiges archéologiques grâce aux légères variations magnétiques causées par des activités humaines dans le passé et contrairement aux fouilles, elle ne cause aucun dommage aux restes archéologiques in-situ. Sur un nombre de sites sélectionnés , les prospections au magnétomètre furent accompagnées d'une étude de susceptibilité magnétique et d'un modelage numérique du terrain. De plus, aux examens de l'intérieur de chaque forteresse vinrent s'ajouter une analyse des photographies aériennes répertoriées, à partir d'un rayon de deux kilomètres autour de chaque site, ancrant ainsi les forteresses individuelles dans le contexte des paysages archéologiques dont elles faisaient partie.

Les résultats de ce projet ont fait avancer de manière significative notre compréhension de l'intérieur des forteresses dans la partie est de la région du Wessex, qui autrement, en l'absence de fouilles, serait resté insuffisamment compris et caractérisé. Les dix-huit forteresses étudiées dans les comtés de Hampshire, Wiltshire, Oxforshire et Berkshire ont produit des résultats très divers. Ceux-ci vont de sites en grande partie dépourvus de traces internes jusqu'à des sites contenant des traces complexes de structures rondes, de puits, de voies et dans certains cas d'eneintes internes et de limites avec fossés. L'évaluation d'ensemble des résultats nous a permis d'établir des distinctions plus élaborées entre les différentes classes de forteresses qu'il n'avait été possible de le faire jusqu'alors. L'abondance de nouvelles données révélées illustre la grande complexité des traces archéologiques préservées à l'intérieur de ces sites et il est apparent que cette complexité peut varier considérablement dans un même lieu, d'un site à un autre, ce qui pose beaucoup de nouvelles questions archéologiques à explorer plus en profondeur. L'étude a également souligné le fait que les forteresses sont loin d'être des traits isolés dans le cadre de leur environnement contemporain.

Traduction: Annie Pritchard

Zusammenfassung

Die zahlreichen Erdforte, welche viele Hügel in Südengland krönen, zählen zu den größten und dramatischsten prähistorischen Merkmalen, die bis in die heutige Zeit in unserer modernen ländlichen Umgebung überleben. Diese Befestigungen wurden seit dem Bronzezeitalter bis ind die letzten Jahrhunderte vor der römischen Eroberung besiedelt und haben seit langem archäologisches Interesse auf sich gezogen. Die Debatte über ihre Funktion und Bedeutung ist ein zentrales Thema der akademischen Studie des Eisenzeitalters. Der schiere Umfang der Erdanlagen an vielen der Standorte deutet auf einen grossen Aufwand an kommunalen Anstrengungen und auf ein hohes Maß sozialer Organisation hin. Trotz der großen Aufmerksamkeit, welche diesen Standorten gewidmet wird, ist es bisher unklar, ob sie Befestigungsanlagen keltischer Häuptlinge und ihres Gefolges, kommunale Zentren ähnlich großer Dörfer oder temporäre Zuflucht für verschiedene Jahreszeiten und in Zeiten von Gefahr waren. Zuverlässige Deutungen ihrer Rolle wird durch die relativ kleine Zahl an umfangreichen archäologischen Ausgrabungen behindert. Die Wessex Hügelfort Untersuchung wurde als Antwort auf den Bedarf für mehr weitragende Daten über Hügelfortinnenanlagen entwickelt, welche normalerweise nicht ohne traditionell teure, zeitaufwendige und beschädigende intrusive Ausgrabungen möglich sind.

Die in diesem Buch publizierten Nachforschungen sind das Resultat eines dreijährigen Partnerschaftsprojekts zwischen dem ehemaligen Altertümlichkeitslabor von English Heritage und der Universität von Oxford. Das Projekt wurde konstruiert um neues Licht auf den internen Charakter vieler Hügelforts in Südengland zu werfen und um das zukünftige Management und öffentliche Verständnis der Monumente zu verbessern.

Die Wessex Hügelfort Untersuchung basiert ausschließlich auf nicht-invasiven Methodologien, welche die primäre Nutzung von Fluxgate Magnetometern und Gradiometern beinhaltete. Diese Technik macht archäologische Merkmale durch die unterschiedlichen magnetischen Variationen ausfindig, welche durch vergangene menschliche Aktivitäten hervorgerufen wurden. Ungleich zu Ausgrabungen beschädigt diese Methodik keine der in-situ liegenden Überreste. An ausgesuchten Standorten wurden die Magnetometer-Untersuchungen durch magnetischen Empfindlichkeitstests und digitale Terrainmodellierung ergänzt. Die Untersuchungen der Hügelfortinnenanlagen wurden durch die Analyse von Luftaufnahmen mit einem 2km Radius um jedem Standort erweitert. Damit wird jedes Hügelfort fest in seinem Zusammenhang mit dem archeologischen Umfeld verankert, von welchem es ein Teil war.

Die Resultate dieses Projektes tragen wesentlich zur Förderung unseres Wissens von Hügelfortinnenanlagen in der östlichen Hälfte von Wessex bei, welche in der Abwesenheit von Ausgrabungen schlecht verstanden und charaktesiert geblieben wären. Die achtzehn untersuchten Hügelforts in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire und Berkshire produzierten verschiedene Resultate. Diese umfangen Standorte ohne irgentwelche wesentlichen Innenanlagen und andere mit komplexen Mustern von rundlichen Strukturen, Gruben, Straßenwegen sowie in einigen Fällen interne Einfriedungen und Grabenanlagen. Die allgemeine Beurteilung der Resultate erlaubt eine wesentlich detailiertere Unterscheidung zwischen den verschiedenen Klassen von Hügelforts, was bisher nicht möglich war. Der zum Vorschein gebrachte Reichtum an neuen Daten, illustriert die große Komplexität der archäologischen Überreste, welche in diesen Standorten erhalten sind, und verdeutlicht, daß diese Komplexität sehr unterschiedlich ist von einem Standort zum nächsten. Dieses öffnet die Möglichkeit vieler neuer archäologischer Fragen, welche weiter untersucht werden können. Die Untersuchung hebt den Fakt hervor, daß Hügelforts keine isolierten Merkmale in ihrer zeitgenössigen Landschaft waren.

Überzetsung: Norman Behrend

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