



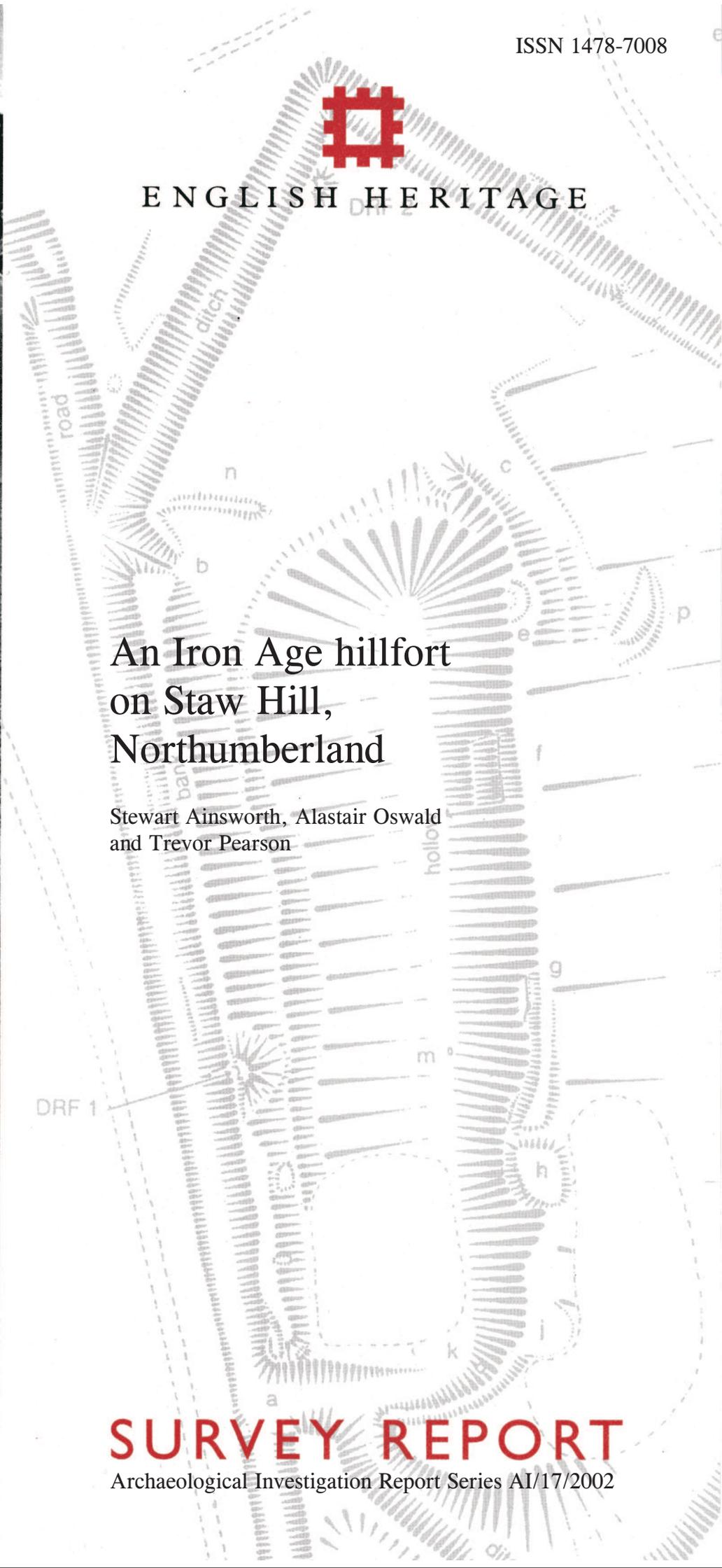
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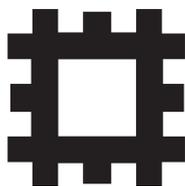
An Iron Age hillfort on Staw Hill, Northumberland

Stewart Ainsworth, Alastair Oswald
and Trevor Pearson

SURVEY REPORT

Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/17/2002





AN IRON AGE HILLFORT ON STAW HILL, NORTHUMBERLAND

Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/17/2002

**NMR No: NT 83 SE 7
NGR: NT 8845 3010
SAM/RSM No: 24568
SMR No: NT 83 SE 7**

Surveyed Nov 2001
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**English Heritage 2002
ISSN 1478-7008**

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE SURVEY

In November 2001, English Heritage carried out an archaeological investigation of an Iron Age hillfort on Staw Hill in Northumberland. The analytical field survey was one of a number undertaken by English Heritage as part of the Northumberland National Park Authority's project entitled 'Discovering our hillfort heritage', funded jointly by the European Union through the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund through the Tweed Forum initiative, English Heritage and the Northumberland National Park Authority. The investigation was intended to improve the understanding of the hillfort, both as an individual monument and as an example of the class as a whole, and to inform the conservation and management of the site (Frodsham 2000).

Staw Hill lies close to the north-eastern edge of the Cheviots, some 2km north-west of the hamlet of Hethpool, in the parish of Kirknewton and the district of Berwick

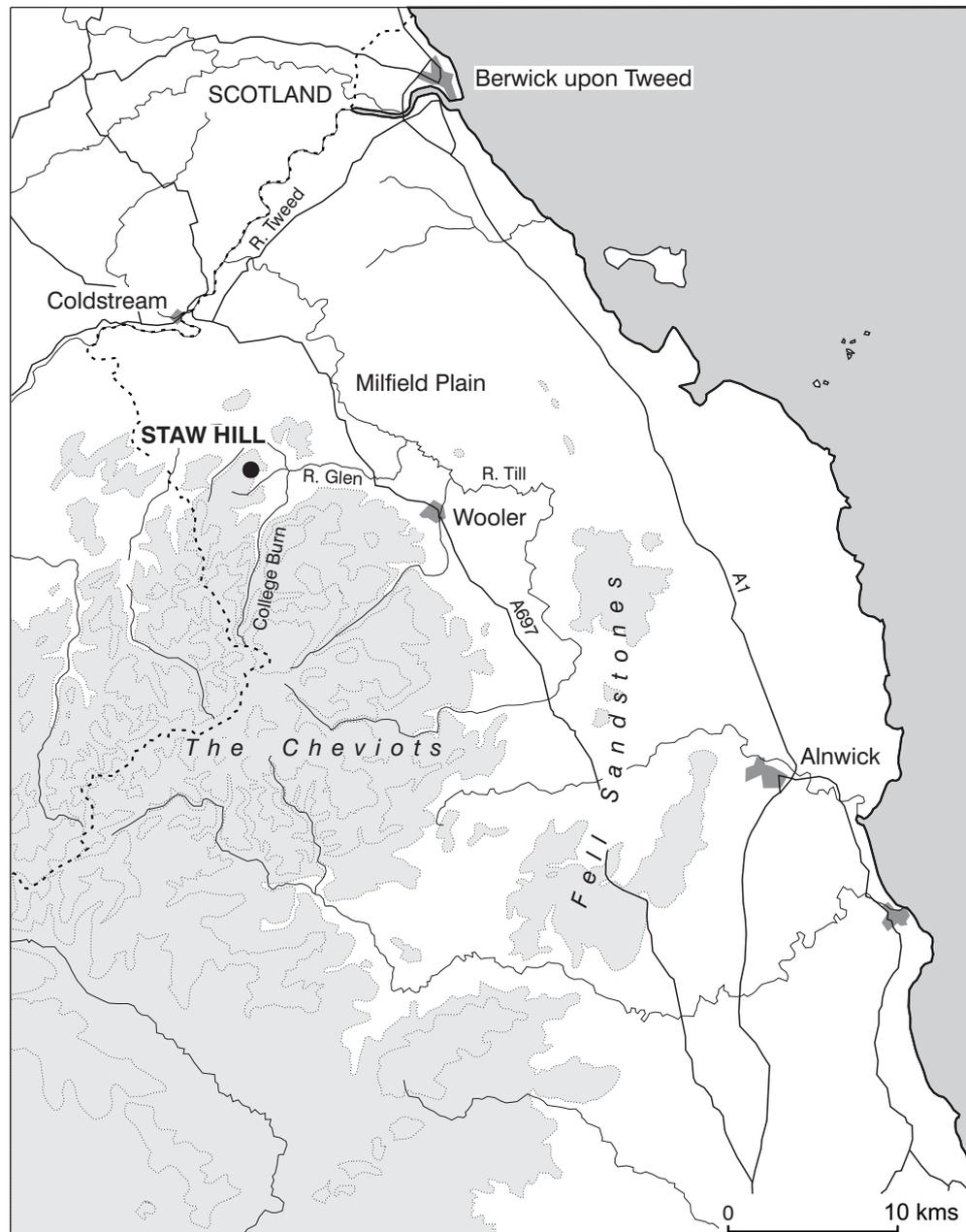


Figure 1.
Location map

upon Tweed, and is centred at National Grid Reference NT 8845 3010. Although the hill has been mapped as Staw Hill since 1860 (Ordnance Survey 1866; 1972) and is referred to as such in the archaeological records, it is now published on mapping as Straw Hill (Ordnance Survey 2000). This later spelling appears to be a cartographic error and throughout this report the site will be referred to as Staw Hill.

The hillfort, which is probably Iron Age in date, is well preserved and comprises the remains of an enclosure formed by a single stone-built rampart with an additional rampart around the south and west sides only. There is evidence of re-use of the site as a settlement in the Romano-British period. Within the main enclosure are the traces of four circular buildings. Two of these are visible as platforms which are likely to have formed the stances for circular timber structures and which are probably contemporary with the hillfort, and two have stone foundations and belong to the Romano-British phase of occupation on the site. On the slopes to the north are a number of cultivation terraces which may be contemporary with the hillfort. Later activity on the site is evidenced by two, possibly three medieval or post-medieval sheilings, associated paddocks, and cultivation remains.

It has been recognised for some time that the application of the generic term 'hillfort' is not entirely appropriate to small prehistoric sites such as that at Staw Hill, and that 'defended settlement' is perhaps a more apt description (English Heritage 1994). However, for continuity regarding earlier research on the site and consistency with the wider 'Discovering our hillfort heritage' project the term 'hillfort' is used throughout this report.

The hillfort is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (RSM 24568) and is recorded in both the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) for Northumberland and in the National Monuments Record (NMR) as NT 83 SE 7. The English Heritage field investigation, which covered an area of 3 hectares (7.4 acres), was carried out at Level 3 standard (as defined in RCHME 1999, 3-4). The fieldwork resulted in an analytical plan at a scale of 1:500. The documentary research undertaken as part of the survey was limited to a review of the secondary sources and readily available primary sources, particularly maps and plans.

2. GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE

Like the surrounding upland massif, the rock that forms Staw Hill is andesitic granite, a hard volcanic stone which varies in colour from pale grey to deep pink (Tomkeieff 1965). The rock fractures easily and has been used from prehistory onwards as a building material throughout the local area; it was the principal material used to construct the rampart of the hillfort. The soil is relatively thin on the summit of the hill and there are several natural outcrops within and immediately around the hillfort.



*Figure 2.
View of Staw Hill
from the south-west*

The hillfort at Staw Hill lies at 277m above sea-level on the spur-like end of a ridge which runs in a south-west to north-east direction. This ridge lies between two deeply cut valleys of tributary streams which eventually merge and flow into the River Glen 2kms to the north-east. A number of spurs project south-east from this ridge, and on one of them called Mid Hill some 500m to the south-west, is another Iron Age hillfort surveyed by English Heritage as part of the ‘Discovering our hillfort heritage’ project (Oswald and McOmish 2002). The hillfort at Staw Hill does not sit on the highest part of the ridge, but is located on a natural shelf on the ridge top, separated from rising higher ground to the south-west by a natural depression which crosses the ridge. To the west and east of the hillfort, the slopes drop steeply away to the valley bottoms, but on the north the slopes are less severe. Assuming that they were in contemporary use, the hillfort would have been intervisible with other prehistoric hillforts on Little Hetha, Great Hetha, Mid Hill, West Hill and St Gregory’s Hill, the furthest of which lies less than 3.5kms away. It would also have been intervisible with the largest hillfort in the Cheviots, on Yeavinger Bell, 4.5kms to the east.

The hillfort and its immediate environs are currently used for rough pasture, which is lightly grazed by sheep and cattle. The interior of the hillfort is closely cropped turf, which allows the identification of very slight earthwork traces. The English Heritage investigation suggests that the environs of the hillfort were ploughed into the

post-medieval period and that some of the nearby slopes were under cultivation at a much earlier date, perhaps in the Iron Age.

The land is privately owned, but a footpath and bridleway cross the saddle between Staw Hill and Mid Hill to the south, and plans for more open public access were under discussion at the time of the survey. There is no vehicular access onto the hill except by 4-wheel drive with the permission of the landowner.

3. HISTORY OF RESEARCH

The earliest known documentary reference to the hillfort on Staw Hill is a schematic portrayal of the defences on Greenwood's (1828) *Map of the County of Northumberland*, which has similar depictions of most of the prehistoric 'camps' in the county. Greenwood's map was the most accurate large-scale map available prior to the publication of the Ordnance Survey's First Edition 25-inch scale mapping and would have informed the archaeological research carried out in the mid-19th century by Henry MacLauchlan. MacLauchlan, himself a former Ordnance Survey Field Officer, was commissioned by the fourth Duke of Northumberland to undertake numerous field surveys of various different types of monument in the region. He began his '...extensive researches among the old Celtic camps in the fastness of the Cheviot Hills' in the spring of 1860 and completed his investigation of the College Valley and its environs by September of the same year (Charlton and Day 1984, 25-6). MacLauchlan does not appear to have produced a plan of the hillfort on Staw Hill, although he did describe a site called 'East Hill End Camp', which from both the description of the monument and the geography of its location is clearly that at Staw Hill. He described the monument as being "of an oval form, 50 yards by 40. For the great part there is one rampart, but for some reason there has been a second extended towards the south-west – perhaps to enclose cattle. The entrance was at the south-east where the second rampart terminates" (MacLauchlan 1867, 36).

In 1860, the Ordnance Survey mapped the site at a scale of 25 inches to the mile (Ordnance Survey 1866 and Figure 3). The plan depicts an oval-shaped enclosure with a second rampart to the south-west. Within the enclosure, seven circular structures are shown following the western circuit and no entrance is shown through either of the ramparts, although the eastern end of the outer rampart was not shown to join the main enclosure rampart, leaving a slight gap. The site was not annotated in an 'antiquity' typeface, perhaps indicating that the surveyors of the day did not consider it to be of any great antiquity at the time. The Second Edition map, revised in 1896, adds nothing to the earlier portrayal (Ordnance Survey 1897).

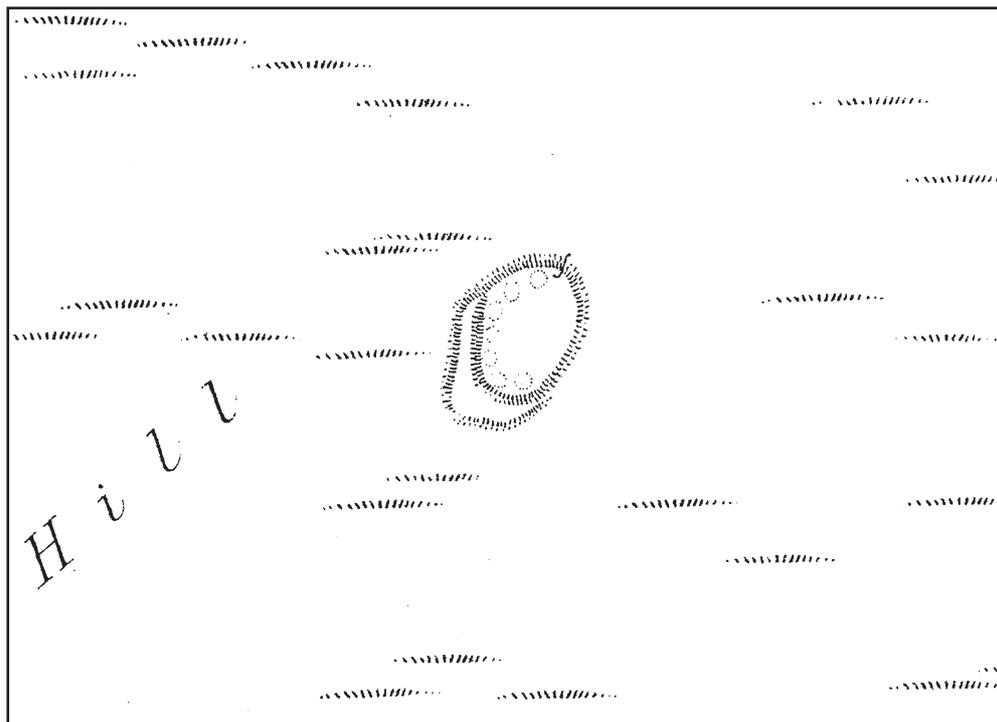


Figure 3.
Ordnance Survey plan
of the hillfort,
surveyed 1860
(reproduced from the
1866 Ordnance Survey
map)

Until the mid-1960s, the site does not appear to have been investigated in any detailed way. The *Northumberland County History* simply characterised the hillfort as being on high ground, but less dependent on the natural topography for its protection (Hope Dodds 1935, 62), whilst AHA Hogg included the hillfort in a list of ‘native sites’ with basic information as to shape, acreage and location. However, Hogg’s list does confirm that the site referred to as ‘East Hill End’ by MacLauchlan and ‘Staw Hill’ are alternate names for the same site (Hogg 1947, 154). The site was surveyed by George Jobey, at what date is unclear but certainly before 1965, when he published his corpus of information on Iron Age hillforts and settlements in the Cheviots (Jobey 1965). Jobey classified Staw Hill as a multivallate hillfort of less than 1 acre, but a plan itself was never published. However, the original field drawing was subsequently deposited in the Black Gate Museum in Newcastle (Jobey nd). This plan is schematic in places but overall it accurately reflects the shape and form of the hillfort. However, five circular structures were shown within the main enclosure, and two more appear to be portrayed within the inter-rampart area at the south. The entrance was shown at the south-east.

In 1966, Richard Emsley of the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey surveyed the site for incorporation onto the National Grid 1:2,500 mapping then being compiled from previous County Series maps (NMRa - Authority 5; Ordnance Survey 1972). He described the site as a ‘well-defined enclosed settlement with an entrance in the south-east, containing four definite hut-circles, and occupying a

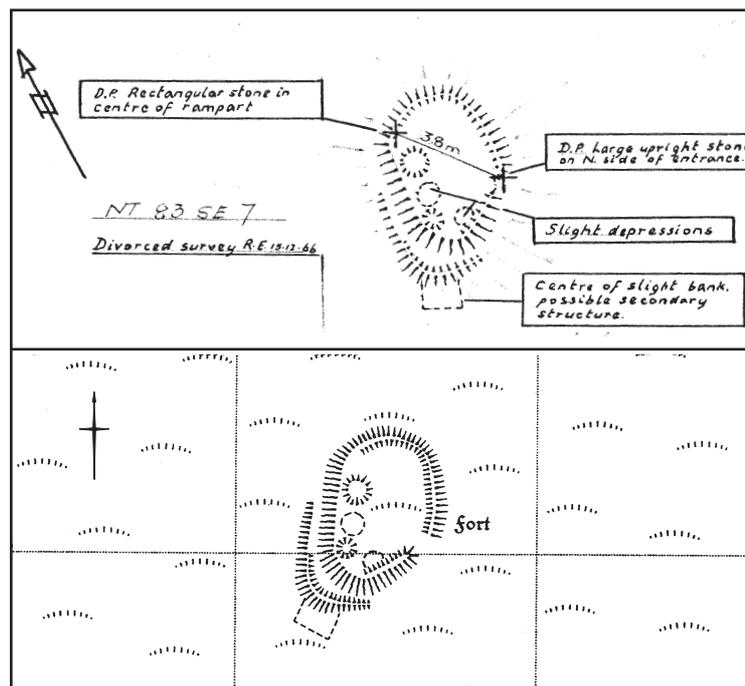


Figure 4.
Ordnance Survey Antiquity
Model of 1966 (top), and 1972
published plan of
the hillfort (bottom)
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natural defensive position’. He concluded that the south-west annexe was probably secondary, but it is unclear as to whether he was referring to the annexe created by the second rampart, or the small rectangular annexe on the outside of the outer rampart which he depicted by a dashed line on the accompanying Antiquity Model, which he annotated as a ‘possible secondary structure’ (NMRa - illustration card; - see Figure 4). It is likely that he meant the area defined by the outer rampart and the western side of the enclosure, given that his comments would have been a direct response to the description of the earlier authority on the record (MacLauchlan 1867, 36), who had suggested that the purpose of the double rampart was to enclose cattle

(NMRa – Authority 3,). The published map portrayal of the site was significantly altered at this revision stage, with an entrance being shown through the main enclosure rampart on the south-east side, and only four hut sites were depicted in the interior, compared to the seven shown previously. The outer rampart was shown terminating abruptly at its northern end mid way along the western circuit, rather than joining the main enclosure as on earlier depictions, and the small annexe on the outside of the outer rampart referred to above was added (Ordnance Survey 1972). The term ‘fort’ was applied to the monument in antiquity type, reflecting what was the then standard Ordnance Survey nomenclature for what were understood to be pre-Roman enclosures on hilltop locations.

The site was first included in the Schedule of Ancient Monuments in 1935 under the county number Northumberland 238. In 1993, the site was visited by Caroline Hardie and a detailed description was prepared to update the Schedule, which was ratified on 29 April 1994 (English Heritage 1994). Although in general terms the description merely replicated that of earlier observers, some more detailed observations were made, most of which can now be questioned. Hardie, like others before, essentially saw the site as Iron Age in date, with no recognition of the ground stratigraphy and morphological differences between the Iron Age remains and those of the Romano-British settlement. She suggested that the ramparts were of ‘dump construction’, that is a simple banks of earth and rubble, with the implication being that the banks in their present form would be little different to how they looked in the Iron Age. However, the field evidence gained during the English Heritage survey of 2001 indicates that the rubble banks are more likely to be the collapsed remains of drystone walls, rather than of simple dump construction. Hardie also only observed three hut circles, all of which she described as ‘stone-founded’. In fact, two are actually stone-founded, and probably belong to the Romano-British period, while two are earthwork platforms belonging to the Iron Age. She also noted that the area between the two ramparts was divided by slight earth and stone banks, and that there were sub-divisions within the enclosure; again the implication here was of an Iron Age date for these features. In fact they appear to overlie the Iron Age ramparts which indicate that they are later and probably belong to the Romano-British phase of occupation. She too, like Emsley, regarded the small rectangular compound at the south as a secondary feature, but additionally recognised that within it was a possible platform for a small building, which the 2001 survey would support. There has been no documented excavation on the hillfort although the survey carried out by English Heritage in 2001 has identified the sites of two probable excavation trenches (see Section 4.1).

Other than field survey and inspection, the only other form of archaeological recording carried out at Staw Hill is aerial photography. The hillfort appears on a series of black and white non-specialist vertical photographs taken by the RAF in 1951 and held by the National Monuments Record (RAF 1951). Although the photograph adds little to the understanding of the hillfort itself, it does present a clear image of the extent of the agricultural remains along the ridge. More specialised oblique aerial photography of the hillfort was carried out by Tim Gates (Gates 1986). This photography is particularly clear and illustrates well the settlement remains within the interior and the cultivation remains immediately around the hillfort (see Figure 9).

The survey carried out by English Heritage in 2001 was the most detailed investigation of the site undertaken up to that date and was the first fieldwork to examine in detail the landscape context of the hillfort.

4. DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE EARTHWORKS

4.1 The Iron Age hillfort (Figure 5)

Introduction

Although the hillfort does not occupy the highest point on the ridge, which is some way to the south-west, it does nevertheless dominate the shelf-like spur which forms the north-east terminal to this ridge. The hillfort comprises an oval-shaped enclosure defined by a single rampart with an entrance at the south-east, and measures 50m by 33m overall with an internal area of some 0.16ha (0.39 acres). There is an outer rampart to the south and west. The long axis of the hillfort is aligned almost north to south, rather than north-east to south-west along the line of the ridge as might be expected. This is because the rampart which defines the main enclosure was apparently laid out along the contours of a localised change in topography created by the shelf at the end of the ridge (the significance of this is described below – see also Figure 10). The hillfort more or less encloses the highest point of the shelf, which has been artificially flattened by quarrying during the Iron Age but which in its original form would have been more domed (see below and Figure 2). It is bounded to the east and west by the relatively steep slopes which define the ridge itself, to the north by less severe slopes which form the spur-like end to the ridge, and to the south by a natural south-east to north-west aligned depression which crosses the ridge. Beyond this depression to the south-west, the ground flattens out naturally along the shelf, before rising steeply again along the line of the ridge. Thus, although the site does not occupy the highest point on the ridge itself, it does dominate the very eastern end of this ridge, which faces out toward the valley of the River Glen, the Millfield Plain beyond and Yeavinger Bell, the largest hillfort in the Cheviot Hills.

The inner rampart

The rampart which now defines the enclosure survives as a broad rubble bank mostly covered by grass, but on the south and west sides, where there has been later re-modelling during the Romano-British period, it is visible as a grass-covered stony scarp. Around most of the north and western sections of the circuit the bank has been reduced by stone-robbing, which may be associated with the construction of three medieval or post-medieval shielings close by (see Section 4.3). Where best preserved at the east and north, the rampart varies in width from 7m to 9m, and up to 2m high on the outside but only 0.4m high on the inside. This difference in heights between the inside and outside results from a deliberate use of the underlying natural slope to enhance the external height, which seems to have taken place all around the circuit. In a number of places large facing-stones are visible *in situ* set into the ground along the external edge of the bank, but internal ones were only detected at the north-west where they have been exposed by later stone-robbing. At the south of the enclosure, on the outside of the rampart, a large recumbent stone, measuring 1.6m by 0.8m lies embedded in the turf (see Figure 6). This is much larger than all of the other stones on the site. This may be a former facing-stone which fell in antiquity or as a result of stone-robbing (a slight 0.8m wide terrace which runs from this stone some 20m round the base of the bank to the east indicates where other facing-stones have been extracted). If this stone was one of a number of this type, then an impressive face would have been presented on this side (as this stone alone would have stood to a height of 1.3m allowing for embedding in the ground, that is, almost the full postulated height of the wall - see below). This may have reflected a desire to create

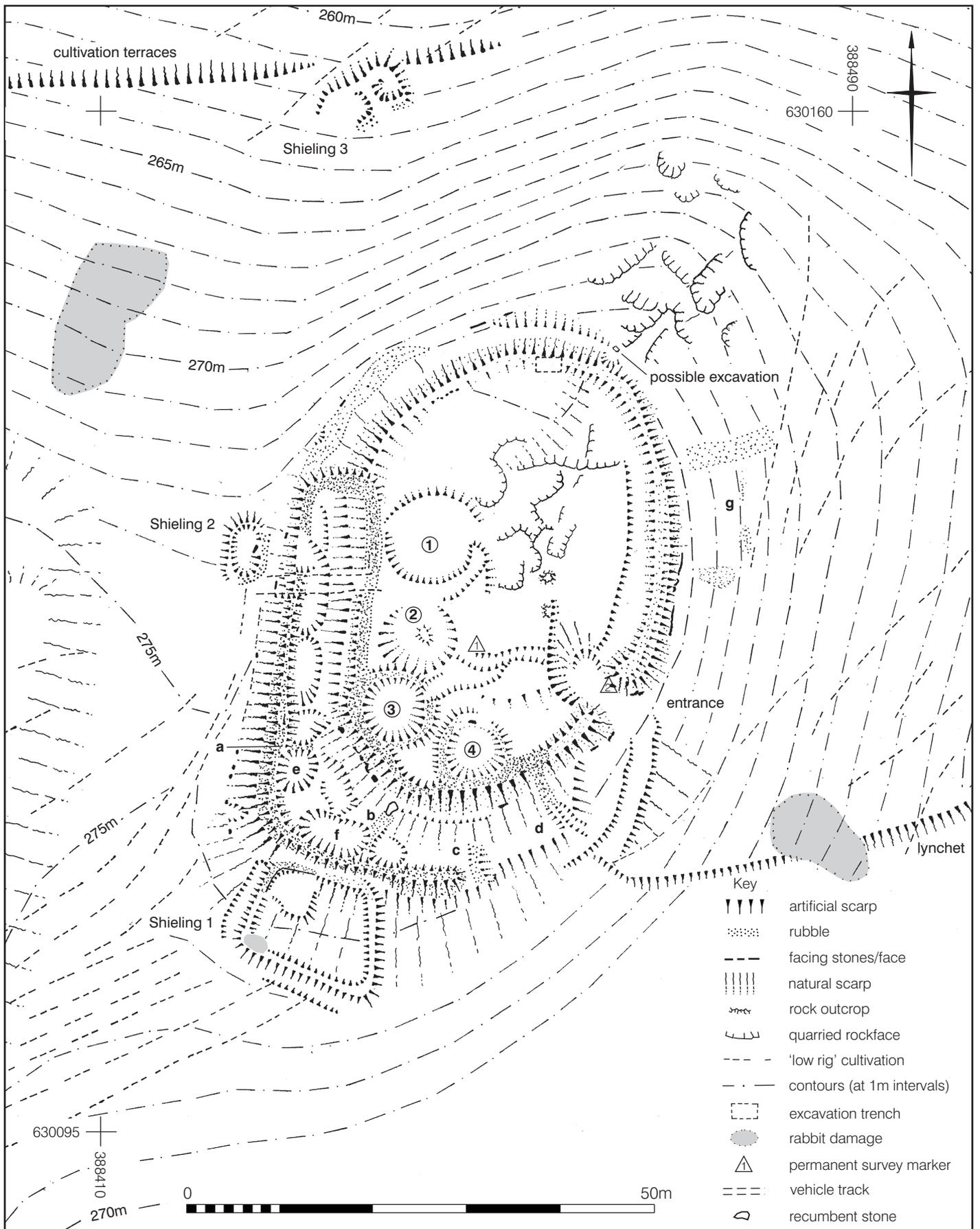


Figure 5. English Heritage plan of the hillfort and its immediate environs

either an impression of defensive strength on this side, which is the weaker side to the enclosure, and also the line of approach to the site along the ridge, or may have been intended as an item of symbolic display in its own right (see Section 5). This is the type of stone often found flanking entrances to enclosures, but there is no evidence for such a break here, nor is there any indication of a blocked entrance. However, as this is the only such stone on the site (although others may have been robbed) too



*Figure 6.
View of recumbent stone
and the inner rampart
from the south*

much should not be inferred from it, and it may have been simply a random and isolated occurrence.

At the west, the rampart which generally curves smoothly, straightens over a distance of some 25m. This straightening was apparently created during the Romano-British period when material from the collapsed Iron Age wall appears to have been robbed from this section and re-used to construct a straight length of rubble bank on top of the earlier line. At the north, this later bank clearly overlies the rampart tumble confirming that the Iron Age wall must have collapsed before this later bank was built. This later bank is clearly associated with the two stone-founded huts and courtyard of the Romano-British phase of occupation (see Section 4.2).

There is a single, well-defined entrance into the main enclosure on the south-east section of the rampart circuit, which was first identified by Henry MacLauchlan (MacLauchlan 1867). The positioning and alignment of large orthostats at this entrance, which is 2m wide, combined with the broader width and slight turning-in of the terminals, indicates that this is a genuine entrance to the hillfort and was not inserted at a later date, either during the Romano-British occupation of the site or at any period subsequently. An oval-shaped hollowing into the slope on the inside of the entrance indicates the concentration of wear caused by the use of this as a thoroughfare into the enclosure. As possible paths from the Romano-British houses can be traced to this entrance (see below) and no other entrance associated with the Romano-British settlement has been identified it seems likely that this entrance remained in use through both periods. On the outside of the enclosure, a narrow terraced trackway, c. 13m in length and 2.5m in width, runs obliquely across the east-facing slope and turns towards the entrance. This is clearly the original route to the entrance from the most obvious line of approach along the ridge from the

south-west. The upper limit of this terraced trackway, defined by a cut into the natural slope, can be traced to just beyond the corner of the outer rampart, although the other side, which is defined by a build-up of material onto the slope, appears to terminate at a lynchet which cuts across the line of the route. The line of this lynchet is continued by a narrow rubble bank which forms the eastern side of the Romano-British courtyard (d on Figure 5). As the route to the entrance along this terrace-way could not have functioned as such during the duration of the ploughing which formed the lynchet, this lynchet is likely to be part of the medieval or post-medieval field system which was arranged around the pre-existing remains (see Section 4.4).

Around the northern circuit of the enclosure rampart a rectangular depression, measuring 2.5m by 1.5m and back-filled with loose stones, probably marks the site of an archaeological excavation, although none have been recorded on this site. A similar, previously unrecorded feature was noted along rampart top on the nearby hillfort at Mid Hill (Oswald and McOmish 2002, fig 7). Some 6m east of this excavation, a scoop into the outside of the rampart is evident. Although this has been enlarged by sheep-scraping, this has an artificial appearance and also may mark the site of an investigation, possibly an excavation seeking to expose a wall face.

The existence of the facing-stones, combined with the overall form of the earthwork, indicates that in its present form the bank represents the tumbled remains of a substantial drystone wall which once enclosed the hillfort, and which may have been approximately 5m to 6m in width at its base. This structure is clearly not that of a dump rampart as alleged by Hardie (English Heritage 1994). Most of the rubble which lies on the slopes of the bank is composed of fist-sized stones, and presumably represents the collapsed core of the wall. The quantity of this rubble is not great, perhaps indicating that the wall may not have been particularly high, although some may have been removed for incorporation into the later Romano-British settlement and medieval or post-medieval shielings. The form of the bank and facing-stones are very similar to those of the hillfort at Mid Hill some 500m to the south-west, where it is suggested that the height of the outer face of the wall there may have been at least 1.5m (Oswald and McOmish 2002, 11-12).

Immediately north of the entrance, and running for a distance of some 20m along the inside of the bank is a shallow quarry ditch averaging 2m in width and 0.3m deep. This is almost certainly contemporary with the construction of this section of the rampart. Elsewhere, almost all of the rubble and the facing stones appear to be unweathered fragments, as though obtained through quarrying or splitting. As well as the quarry ditch described, there is further evidence for surface quarrying both within the enclosure and on outcrops close-by and it is probable that the material for the enclosure wall was obtained from these (see below).

The outer rampart

The outer rampart is similar in appearance to the main rampart, that is, mostly grass-covered stone tumble consisting of fist-sized stones, although in much less quantity. It varies in width from 2m to 4m, achieving a maximum external height of 1.5m at the south-west, although less than 0.4m on the inside. As with the main rampart, this has resulted from a deliberate sharpening of the underlying natural slope, which on this side follows and takes advantage of the eastern edge of the natural depression which crosses the ridge in a north-east to south-west direction. This section of rampart is very straight compared to the southern circuit, as its

Figure 7.
View of inner and outer
ramparts from the
south-west, with
Yeavinger Bell in the
background



alignment is influenced by the edge of the natural depression (this straightness was later reflected in the construction of the Romano-British courtyard along the inner rampart to the east). Along the outside of the outer rampart, a number of ground-fast facing stones remain *in situ*. At the south, where the disturbance from the Romano-British settlement is least, this enhancement of the natural slope for the outer rampart has been further increased by cutting back into the slope above, creating a narrow 'berm', averaging 2.5m in width and which extends for c. 20m of the southern circuit. It seems probable that this would have continued round the remainder of the circuit, but the evidence for this is now masked by the numerous yards and depressions along this line which are associated with the Romano-British settlement, although it is possible that some of these hollows have their origins as a quarry ditch for the outer rampart. As noted above, this rampart for most of its length is overlain along the same line by the rebuild of the courtyard associated with the Romano-British settlement. However, at the north where this rebuild returns to the east, the line of the earlier rampart may be traced in a much reduced form around the north-west and northern perimeter of the main enclosure as a discontinuous slight band of small stones on the slope with two possible sections of ground-fast revetment or facing stones on the outside. The eastern-most section of this is less convincing as a continuation of the outer rampart than the section to the west, although a line of ground-fast stones is suggestive of a revetment or face. At its north-eastern end it appears to merge with the inner rampart rather than continuing as a separate circuit. Its much slighter form around the north may be attributable to collapse caused by the increased angle of slope here, which is much steeper than the remainder of the line occupied by the outer rampart, or later robbing. However, there is no sharpening of the slope to enhance the external height, as is the case elsewhere on both ramparts, and particularly on the opposing section of the inner rampart. Consequently, it is possible that only the section of outer rampart which faced the line of approach from the west was enhanced. At the south-east, the outer rampart returns to the main enclosure at a sharp angle to merge with the inner rampart 5m from the entrance. Given the existence of facing and fist-sized stones in the outer rampart, the possibility remains that this too originally comprised a drystone wall similar to, but of slighter build than the main enclosure.

There is no indisputable stratigraphic relationship between the two ramparts to support the idea proposed by Emsley that the outer may be secondary (NMRa) although it does remain a possibility. The two ramparts are not perfectly concentric, which might imply that they were constructed at different times, but in this instance the lack of symmetry may have been influenced by topographic factors. The outer rampart replicates the curve of the inner one around the southern section of the circuit, but then sharply turns north and takes a relatively straight line along the edge of the natural depression which crosses the ridge in a north to south direction to gain maximum advantage from the underlying slope, and perhaps to achieve the illusion of greater height. On this same side, the perimeter of the main enclosure appears to have been more curved prior to the stone-robbing associated with the construction of the Romano-British settlement. A similar lack of concentricity is displayed at the south-west, where the line of the inner rampart maintains a curved line, but the outer rampart has a much sharper change of direction. Again, this may simply indicate that an attempt was made to gain maximum advantage from the natural topography for the outer circuit rather than that the two were built at different times.

Settlement remains

The 2001 survey has identified the sites of two buildings which are associated with the Iron Age enclosure (Structures 1 and 2), as well as two which are of probable Romano-British date (Structures 3 and 4). Structures 1 and 2 are earthwork platforms, probably stances for circular timber buildings, whilst Structures 3 and 4 are stone-built circular foundations. Structure 3 partially overlies the scarp cut into the slope at the south end of Structure 2 and clearly post-dates it. Given the similarity of form between Structures 1 and 2 they are likely to be both of the same period and potentially contemporary with each other.

The number of circular structures previously identified within the enclosure has ranged from seven recorded by the Ordnance Survey (1866), up to seven by George Jobey (Jobey nd), four by Richard Emsley (NMRa), and three by Caroline Hardie (English Heritage 1994). The latter two sources have assumed that all of the structures that they identified were part of the Iron Age hillfort without any critical observation of their differing morphologies. Indeed, Hardie describes the three she noted as 'stone-founded' whereas in reality only two are (Structures 3 and 4), the other two being earthwork platforms. Emsley correctly identified the four sites, although he described them as 'hut-circles'. Of the seven structures portrayed on the First Edition 25-inch map (Ordnance Survey 1866), four correspond to those identified in the 2001 survey, but of the three shown around the circuit at the north no trace could be found. This might imply that during the mid-19th century three more structures were visible to the surveyors of the day but that they no longer exist. This, however, does not correlate with the ground evidence. The four structures which do survive are extremely well preserved, and given the soil is very thin and bedrock is exposed all through the enclosure, had any structures been in the position indicated by the 1866 map then some trace of them would be expected, particularly as there is no indication of any later disturbance which might have obliterated any remains. However, there are a number of slight level areas created by stone quarrying along the fracture-planes of the bedrock during the Iron Age (see below) and it is probable that the Ordnance Survey surveyors misinterpreted these as structures. Within the main enclosure, George Jobey correctly identified Structures 1 - 4, but he also portrayed a further one immediately to the north-east of Structure 1. This is in fact a quarry scoop, and is probably one of those recorded by the Ordnance Survey earlier. Two more small circular structures may be inferred from his field plan, tucked in

against the inside of the outer rampart at the south-west. These are not buildings but are small yards or pens, and although they may have their origins in the prehistoric period as part of a quarry ditch, in their present form are probably associated with the later Romano-British settlement or the medieval or post-medieval shieling close by (see below).

Structure 1

This is a large, circular earthwork platform with a diameter of 10m, cut into a slight slope to produce the level area (see Figure 8). There is no trace of any circular building on this platform, although it is likely that a circular timber structure once stood here. A break between the scarps marking the perimeter of the platform at the east probably indicates the point of access and may indicate that the timber structure would also have had an east-facing entrance. At the west, the platform is impinged upon slightly by the bank of the Romano-British courtyard which overlies the original hillfort rampart. This stratigraphy clearly demonstrates that the platform pre-dates the bank of the Romano-British courtyard and is thus likely to be associated with the Iron Age phase of occupation. Outside the south-eastern arc of the platform a slight 1m wide terrace follows the curve of the platform for *c.* 6m. Although superficially appearing to be a remnant of a ring-groove (that is, a narrow trench, circular in plan and intended to hold timber planks or uprights for a building, and usually considered to be characteristic of the Iron Age) this is more of a level cut into the slope, possibly to allow the overhanging of eaves from the timber building which is likely to have stood there.

Structure 2

This is a level, circular earthwork platform measuring 5.5m in diameter. It is smaller and less well-defined than Structure 1. There is no trace of any circular building on this platform, although it is likely that a circular timber structure once stood here. At the centre is a slight mound, although it is not clear if this has any association with the



*Figure 8.
Structure 1 from the
east. Earthwork
platform*

platform, the timber building, or later activity on the site. A break in the scarp at the north presumably marks the line of access onto the platform and may indicate that the timber structure would also have had an north-east-facing entrance, although this break could simply mark the limit of the cut into the slope. At the south, the scarp which defines the southern arc of the platform is partially overlain by the bank of one of the buildings belonging to the Romano-British settlement (Structure 3). This relationship indicates that Structure 2 is likely to be earlier in date than Structure 3. The fact that Structures 1 and 2 do not impinge on one another suggests that they are contemporary features. At the east, a narrow channel-like groove in the surface connects the edge of the cut for the platform with the entrance to the enclosure. Although at first inspection this might be interpreted as the remnant of a ring-groove for a timber house structure or palisaded enclosure similar to those identified at nearby Mid Hill (Oswald and McOmish 2002), its line is relatively sinuous over a short distance. Its sinuous nature suggests that it is more likely to be the line of a path or internal division such as fence line set into the ground rather than being a remnant of an earlier perimeter palisade, such as that recorded at Mid Hill. This feature is partly shown on Jobey's field plan and is labelled as 'A Trench?' (Jobey nd). It is possible that this is an Iron Age feature as it does seem to end at the platform for Structure 2 and is cut, and therefore post-dated by a path-like hollow which leads directly from the entrance to Structure 3 (which belongs to the Romano-British phase of occupation). However, it is possible that both these features are boundaries and paths associated with this latter phase. Alternatively, they may be simply natural features which have been exaggerated by the quarrying activity.

Small-scale quarrying

In addition to the quarry ditch mentioned above, within the enclosure are many shallow quarry scoops, many with angular corners. Many of these are concentrated in a band of slightly higher ground that runs in a south-west to north-east direction through the enclosure and which emerges as a prominent rocky ridge beyond the enclosure rampart at the north; this ridge is also heavily pitted. These scoops mark where stone has been quarried along the natural fracture-planes, and the impression is that the diggings still visible are only the final remnants of more intensive extraction, as they are too shallow to have provided much stone. When viewed from the higher ground to the south-west it is clear that the top of this shelf occupied by the hillfort is artificially flat compared to the surrounding slopes and it seems highly likely that the walls were constructed from the stone quarried on site from the hilltop, which was probably more domed in its original form.

There is little doubt that the quarrying is associated with the construction of the Iron Age hillfort. It is also apparent that Structure 1 merges seamlessly with the shallow quarry scoops to the east suggesting that it was constructed at much the same time that the surface was being quarried, and possibly being deliberately levelled here to create the stance for the structure. This would further support the theory that Structures 1 and 2 are contemporary with the hillfort.

4.2 The Romano-British settlement

The discovery of a small settlement of the Romano-British period extends the chronology of this site beyond the Iron Age and helps clarify some of the misinterpretations which have been reached about this site. The Romano-British period settlement essentially comprises two stone-founded houses (Structures 3 and 4), appended to the outside of a courtyard which has been subdivided into paddocks

or yards. The unusual shape of the courtyard merely reflects the re-use of existing ramparts of the earlier hillfort, but otherwise it is a fairly typical example of a 'scooped' or courtyard settlement, of which there are many examples in the Cheviots and the Borders. Despite the fact that the form of this settlement is relatively simple and has many parallels in the Cheviots, its existence has not been recognised during previous investigations (NMRa; Jobey nd; English Heritage 1994). The houses and courtyard are mostly defined by consolidated rubble banks which are very different in form from the more rounded and spread rampart makeup, over which they have been clearly built, and it seems probable that the rubble was taken from the collapsed wall of the earlier hillfort. This robbing of the earlier rampart for the later bank is most marked at the west where a distinct straightening and narrowing of the earlier rampart line is evident. Along this section it appears that the robbing furnished the banks of the Romano-British courtyard along both the inner and outer ramparts of the earlier fort, which are only 7m apart at this point. In the majority, the courtyard bank has been built on top of the lines of the inner and outer ramparts of the hillfort, simply exploiting wall lines which were already there, thus accounting for its unusual 'boomerang' shape, rather than the more normal curvilinear courtyards found elsewhere. The relationship between the courtyard perimeter and the ramparts is particularly clear at the north where the courtyard bank can be seen to clearly overlie the line of both inner and outer ramparts. At the eastern end of the courtyard, the bank which surmounts the inner rampart ends abruptly opposite a rubble bank which crosses the outer rampart (d on Figure 5), but which stops short of the inner one leaving a 1m wide gap. It is possible that there may have been a wooden fence or gate



*Figure 9.
Aerial photograph
of Staw Hill by Tim
Gates, in 1986*

here into the courtyard, although generally the banks here are less easy to see and may simply reflect later disturbance associated with the probable medieval or post-medieval re-use of this area (see below). The southern end of the bank which defines the eastern end of the courtyard has been rebuilt at some stage where it is flanked by a quarry ditch on the north side, and probably results from medieval or post-medieval agricultural activity (see Section 4.4).

Within the courtyard are a number of rectilinear hollows against the line of the outer rampart. At least two, and possibly three of these cut into the line of the rampart indicating that they are later in date. The narrow strips of residual ground between the hollows gives the appearance of the radial banks noted by Hardie and thought by her to be of Iron Age date (English Heritage 1994). In reality, there are only two genuine divisions of the courtyard (a and b). A further radial bank (c) appears to overlie the Iron Age outer rampart and disturb the Romano-British courtyard bank, and is therefore later than both these and probably associated with the medieval or post-medieval shielings nearby. Hollows and sub-divisions within Romano-British 'scooped' enclosures and courtyard settlements in the Cheviots and Border region are commonplace and usually indicate paddocks or where the ground has been lowered through trampling by animals. At least two of the hollows (e, f) may actually be associated with the later shielings, as they appear to cut into the banks of the Romano-British courtyard (see below). The linearity of these hollows at Staw Hill may simply echo the pre-existing layout dictated by the line of the Iron Age ramparts or indicate that they may have their origins as a quarry ditch associated with the construction of the outer rampart in the Iron Age. However, due to the high level of disturbance and modification in the Romano-British and later periods, such an interpretation must remain speculative.

North of the entrance into the main enclosure a *c.* 17m length of rampart may have been rebuilt in the Romano-British period, as the rubble is slightly more consolidated along this section than it is to the north. However, robbing of the rampart is more intense to the north and generally this section is not as well-defined as the banks around the courtyard and may purely represent better preservation of the Iron Age rampart at this point.

Structure 3

This roundhouse is formed by a bank of turf-covered rubble and measures 8m in diameter between bank centres (5m internally), and has a well-defined entrance at the east. At the north, the bank overlies the cut for an earlier platform associated with the Iron Age hillfort (Structure 2). The western bank of the roundhouse protrudes across and over the line of the earlier rampart where it merges with the bank defining the perimeter of the courtyard, which lies to the south-west. A slight hollowing can be traced eastwards from the entrance of the house. This appears to be a pathway leading towards the enclosure entrance.

Structure 4

Immediately east of Structure 3, and almost but not quite conjoined with it, is the second roundhouse which makes up this settlement. It is 7m in diameter between bank centres (5m internally), and this too has an entrance at the east, although it is less well-defined than the adjacent building. This is also formed by a rubble bank, but in this case an inner face to the wall is marked by a curving line of earthfast stones at the north where it has been exposed by robbing. A broad hollow to the east probably

indicates erosion caused by pedestrian traffic between the house and the enclosure entrance. As with its neighbour, this house protrudes into the line of the earlier rampart and merges with the bank of the courtyard.

4.3 Post-Roman remains

There are no structures within the main enclosure to indicate that it was re-used for settlement after the end of the Romano-British period, and there is no evidence to suggest that any of the earlier building or rampart remains were re-built in any way. However, later activity close to the site is evidenced by two probable shielings immediately to the west of the outer rampart and a further one down the steep slope to the north. Shielings of this type are difficult to date, partly because their use was almost certainly seasonal and short-lived and partly because, as simple utilitarian shelters, there is little in their form that is diagnostic of any particular period. The practice of transhumance and the construction of temporary shelters was widespread throughout northern England in the Middle Ages and continued to at least the 17th century and may have continued through to the mid-18th century in the Borders (RCHM 1970).

Shieling 1

The site of the first and southernmost of these shielings is located in the north-west corner of a sub-rectangular compound which is formed by a low, turf-covered stony bank (see Figure 7). The compound was first identified as a 'possible secondary [to the hillfort] structure' by Richard Emsley in 1966 (NMRa - illustration card), with the site of the building being noted by Hardie (English Heritage 1994). A low platform, measuring 5m square marks the site of the probable shieling, although the only structural remains which survive are some fragments of drystone walling along the west and north sides, which also form the inside edge of the bank of the surrounding compound. The way in which the walls of the shieling and the bank are apparently built as one structure at this point probably indicates that the two are contemporaneous features. The north wall of the shieling and the north bank of the compound have clearly been built into the line of both the outer rampart of the hillfort and the later Romano-British rebuild, where a robber trench has been dug to provide material for the shieling and northern bank of the compound. This relationship confirms that the shieling and compound must have been constructed later than the Romano-British period. Other linear quarry ditches occur on the west and south sides of the compound. At the south-west corner of the compound there is a probable entrance, although this is not particularly obvious as there has been some disturbance of the ground, probably by burrowing rabbits. It seems probable that the earlier yards and paddocks within the courtyard of the former Romano-British settlement were re-used whilst this shieling was occupied, as two hollows close-by (e and f) appear to cut the banks of the courtyard, suggesting that earlier yards were enlarged. A short length of bank (c), radial to the hillfort, and which overlies both the outer rampart and the courtyard of the Romano-British settlement may also be associated with the shieling. The bank at the south-east corner of the compound can be seen to overlie ridge and furrow ploughing, which is likely to be post-medieval in date (see below).

Shieling 2

The second shieling lies immediately west of the outer rampart of the hillfort. It measures 7m by 4.5m with its longer axis in a north-south direction and is generally in poor condition. It appears to have been robbed in places and its southern side has

been partly disturbed by a vehicle track which leads up into the hillfort. Because of this, its overall form is difficult to recreate, but nevertheless enough survives to identify its rectangular plan-shape, which is defined by an earth and stone bank. A single orthostat (probably a facing-stone robbed from the hillfort) is set into the inner edge of the bank on the east side. Opposite the south-east corner, some slight scarps cut across the outer rampart and yards associated with the Romano-British settlement, and appear to lead towards this shieling; these may be associated with it and either indicate robbing for the shieling or re-use of this part of the Romano-British courtyard as a pen or some other such structure. As with the compound surrounding Shieling 1, this shieling also appears to overlie the ridge and furrow ploughing, although this relationship is only visible along its southern side - where most disturbance has taken place - and therefore the interpretation of this relationship should be treated with some caution.

Shieling 3

The third shieling is located at a point where the steep slope immediately below the hillfort starts to level out. This structure is rectangular in shape measuring 10m by 5m, and is formed by stony banks and spreads of rubble, with its longest axis almost east-west. The banks have been cut through by a series of narrow striations which run in a north-east to south-west direction which appear to be an attempt at land improvement ploughing and which may be of relatively recent origin. Although disturbed by this ploughing and masked by vegetation, there are indications that this may have been a two-roomed building of which the eastern cell is the best preserved, although it is equally possible that one of the units may have been simply a conjoined animal pen. Although the apparent height of the northern wall is somewhat exaggerated because it has been built on top of an earlier, probably prehistoric lynchet (see below), this shieling is the most substantial of the three.

At the east of the hillfort, two low rubble banks radiate from the rampart although they have no direct stratigraphic relationship with it. These appear to be the north and south sides of an enclosure (g), of which the western side was formed by the collapsed rampart of the hillfort, and the eastern side of which has been mostly destroyed by ridge and furrow ploughing along the same alignment, although a short section marked by stones protruding through the turf still survives. This is probably an animal paddock or yard associated with the medieval or post-medieval activity on the site.

4.4 Agricultural remains in the surrounding landscape

In the area immediately adjacent to the hillfort, there is clear evidence that agricultural activity has taken place there in the past. The less severe slopes to the east, south and west are covered in traces of ridge and furrow ploughing, whilst to the north are distinct lynchets forming a series of narrow cultivation terraces, which are in part overlain by ridge and furrow. Evidence from aerial photography (RAF 1951; Gates 1986) and ground inspection indicates that the ridge and furrow is extensive and continues along the ridge to the west and forms part of the field systems in close proximity to the nearby hillfort on Mid Hill.

At the foot of the steep slope to the north-west of the hillfort the gradient becomes less severe, forming a sheltered basin-like area. In this area at least eight well-defined cultivation terraces were identified running in an east to west direction (see Figure 10). At the east they terminate short of the edge of the basin where the slopes steepen



Figure 10. English Heritage plan of the landscape setting of the hillfort

towards higher ground, whilst at the west the lower ones end where the slopes drop off steeply down to the valley below. The higher terraces are shorter than the ones further down the slope reflecting the breadth of the sheltered basin. The spacing of the terraces, ranging between c. 5m and 15m, appears to be dictated by the varying steepness of the slope. Although the lynchets vary in height from 0.5m to 2m, and are quite widely spaced, the width of the terrace created on the upslope side is very narrow, generally 2m to 3m. The lynchet which defines the uppermost terrace is overlain by the northernmost of the three shielings identified above (Shieling 3) and along with the three lynchet/terraces below is cut by ridge and furrow which runs obliquely across the contours of the slope and which may have destroyed the eastern parts of the second and third terrace down from the higher ground. The ridge and furrow here is confusing and it is difficult to precisely determine how many phases are represented in the earthworks but all post-date the cultivation terraces. There are at least two phases, one running north-east to south-west, which overlies another phase running north-north-east to south-south-west, both of which appear to be narrow ridges and similar to the 'low rig' identified to the south, west and east of the hillfort. This is in turn overlain by very narrow furrows (c.1m apart) which are probably a post-medieval attempt at land improvement. There was no obvious trace of any underlying broader ridge and furrow (see below), although this may be simply masked. These cultivation terraces, which clearly pre-date the post-medieval ridge and furrow are similar to those identified as the earliest cultivation remains in the vicinity of the hillfort at Mid Hill and which are likely to be prehistoric in date (Oswald and McOmish 2002). At NT 886 299, some 200m to the south-east of Staw Hill, at the base of the south-east facing slopes of the ridge occupied by the hillfort is a 'scooped' settlement of a type which is generally accepted as being characteristic of the Romano-British period. Here, similar lynchets and terraces to those close to the hillfort on Staw Hill can be observed, one of which is directly truncated by the enclosing bank of one of the enclosures associated with this settlement. This relationship would indicate a possible pre-Romano-British context for this type of terrace. By analogy, the terraces at Staw Hill are likely to be of a similar date.

Given that the terraces identified on Staw Hill are immediately adjacent to the hillfort, and isolated from other identifiable settlements, they are likely to be associated with the occupation of the hillfort in the Iron Age. It is possible that they may have been re-used in the Romano-British period, although there are none of the diagnostic agricultural remains usually associated with this type of settlement on this end of the ridge, such as the embanked field boundaries and trackways found on other sites recorded in this project and elsewhere such as West Hill (Oswald *et al* 2000). The only feature which may fit into this category is a single lynchet, possibly a field boundary, which can be traced from the south-east side of the hillfort across the slopes to the east. Where this meets the outer rampart of the hillfort it becomes a bank with a slight quarry ditch to the east running transversely across the line of the outer rampart (d). As noted above, the southern section of 'd' is a rebuild of the bank of the Romano-British courtyard, demonstrating that it is later in date. Further round to the east, the lynchet is both overlain by ridge and furrow in part, whilst also appearing to be retained in the alignment of the ridge and furrow. The way that this lynchet cuts across the line of the approach up to the entrance of the hillfort and Romano-British settlement suggests that the trackway was probably out of use when the lynchet evolved, and this together with the rebuilding of the courtyard bank near the hillfort suggest that the lynchet is most likely to have a post-Roman context. Consequently, it is likely that the lynchet had its origins within the medieval period or post-medieval period, followed by a re-alignment of the ridge and furrow at a later stage. It is possible that complex fields like the ones identified at other Roman period settlements

in the region did exist here, but have been destroyed by the later ploughing, although elsewhere traces of such features are still detectable despite the changes in land use.

In general, the ridge and furrow on Staw Hill follows the contours and extends well beyond the immediate area of the hillfort. The form of the ridge and furrow ploughing is best seen at the west where in low light it can be seen that there are probably two phases of ridge and furrow ploughing, one broader and earlier in date than the other. The broader phase is mostly defined by distinct furrows which are spaced every 5m to 8m, within which are a number of narrow ridges, 2m to 3m in width and which occasionally impinge on, and therefore post-date the more distinct furrows. This morphology and sequence is consistent with that identified in close proximity to Mid Hill, and is in effect part of the same field system. At Mid Hill, the broad ridge and furrow has been demonstrated to be of likely medieval origin, with the narrower ridging representing a later phase of agriculture similar to that identified at Menstrie Glen in central Scotland known as 'low rig' and which can be attributed to the century or so before 1760 (Oswald and McOmish 2002; RCAHMS 2001). At no point on Staw Hill is there any direct relationship between the hillfort or the later Romano-British settlement and either phase of the ridge and the ploughing. However, two of the wider spaced furrows of the earlier broad ridge and furrow are overlain by the south east corner of the compound at the south noted above, and the same relationship is evident (although heavily disturbed) at the middle of the three shielings. This would suggest that both these structures fall late in the sequence of activity on the site and can be firmly attributed to the late medieval or post-medieval period. The relationship between the later 'low rig' and these structures could not be firmly ascertained but it does appear to be interrupted by the western corner of the compound suggesting that the compound is later than the 'low rig'.

5. DISCUSSION

The Iron Age

The dating of the hillfort to the Iron Age (700 BC to AD 50) is secure given the general form and location of the monument, but in the absence of excavated evidence, the precise dates of its construction and occupation must remain open to question. Excavations at the hillfort at Wether Hill, some 18km to the south-east, have shown that the inner stone-built rampart was constructed somewhere between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC (Topping and McOmish 2000, 8) and it is generally agreed that many hillforts were constructed from the 6th century BC onwards, often replacing earlier palisaded enclosures (Jobey 1965, 23-4; Gates 1983, fig 14; Burgess 1984, 159-64). In contrast to the nearby hillfort on Mid Hill, within which a possible early Iron Age palisaded phase pre-dating the stone-built ramparts has been identified (Oswald and McOmish 2002, 16), no such structure could be seen at Staw Hill. The form of settlement within the two hillforts is also very different, despite their proximity. At Staw Hill no ring-groove buildings could be identified (which are likely to be indicative of an earlier phase of settlement), and only two platforms for buildings likely to be contemporary with the stone-built rampart could be identified, despite the fact that the ground conditions are exactly the same as at Mid Hill and would have preserved the evidence for further structures had they existed (there would be room for a third structure under the two later Romano-British structures, but three would be the maximum figure). In contrast, at Mid Hill the sites of up to eight buildings

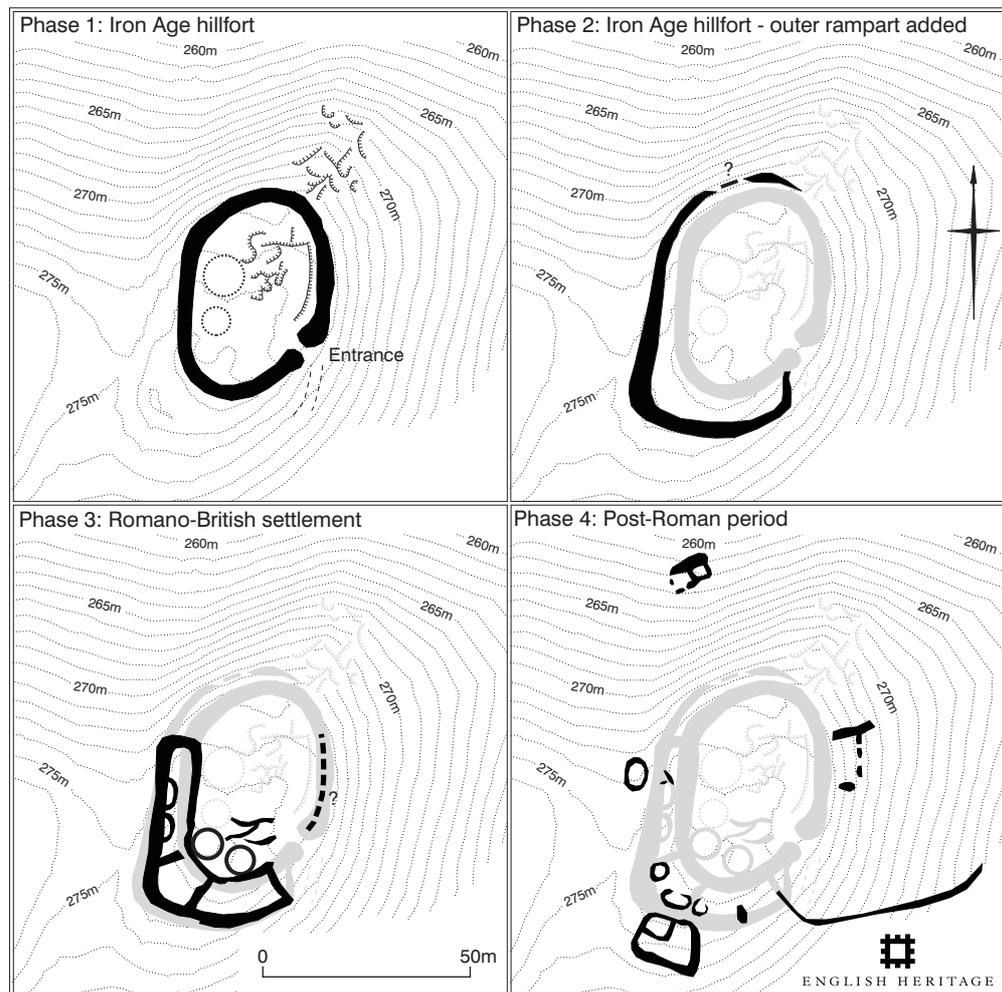


Figure 11.
English Heritage
interpretative plan
of the hillfort

likely to be associated with the hillfort were identified. The inescapable conclusion has to be that Staw Hill was a much smaller settlement than Mid Hill, and possibly not much more than a single family group. Although there is no physical evidence for a palisaded pre-cursor to the stone-built hillfort at Staw Hill, the possibility cannot be discounted.

The term 'hillfort', when used in the context of central and southern England, normally carries connotations of a defensive capability. Enclosures such as that on Staw Hill unquestionably occupy commanding topographic situations and the siting of the gateway above the steep natural slope is a common characteristic which seems to have been intended to constrict the approach. However, it is worth remarking that most of the interior of the hillfort would have been visible from the higher ground to the south-west, even allowing for the former existence of an outer rampart. It has been pointed out that, even allowing for the possibility and danger of transferring modern perceptions into defensive logic in the Iron Age, this must constitute a weakness in strategic terms (Bowden and McOmish 1987; 1989). The location of a possible cross-ridge dyke to the west (see below) may reinforce the suggestion that the direction of approach was from the south-west along the ridge top, given that the terraced track leading to the entranceway also approaches from this direction. Presenting an *impression* of strength on the side of the hillfort first visible to visitors may have been as important as actual defensive strength in itself. If the hillfort is approached from this direction along the ridge, when viewed from a distance it actually disappears from view below some locally higher ground beyond the cross-ridge dyke. However, once beyond the dyke the natural route to the hillfort is through a saddle in this higher ground, and once this has been reached the hillfort re-emerges and is framed perfectly by the gap between the higher ground either side of the saddle. This factor may provide the context for the addition of the outer rampart. From this view, and with the addition of an outer rampart on only the south and west sides, the hillfort would appear to have double ramparts and visitors would be unaware that these did not continue around the rest of the perimeter as the east and north sides cannot be seen. Similarly, as visitors got closer to the hillfort they would be below the natural summit upon which the hillfort is located, thus the double rampart would look even more intimidating when combined with the deliberate enhancement of the natural slopes. The addition of an outer rampart along this side would have had the cumulative effect of not only looking very impressive as the site was approached (particularly if large facing-stones like the recumbent one were used), but also would have functioned as a defence commanding the approach to the entrance. That no additional rampart was taken around the east and north sides implies that defence cannot have been its sole function as these sides would have been vulnerable without additional outworks. Even when directly approaching the entrance visitors would not be able to perceive the lack of a double defence round the other sides. Given this intricate use of natural topography to fulfill both the practicality of defence of this dead ground approaching the entrance whilst also creating the illusion of height and strength in depth, it seems unlikely that this outer rampart was added simply to create an annexe either for stock or additional living space.

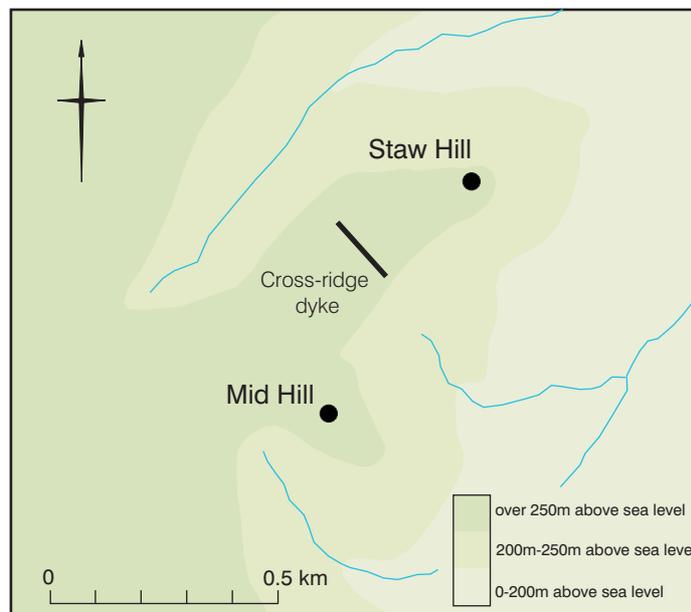
It was MacLauchlan (1867) who first raised the idea that the function of the second rampart may have been to enclose animals, with the idea of this as an annexe being continued by Emsley (NMRa) and Hardie, who also noted that the area was sub-divided by radial banks (English Heritage 1994) lending further weight to the earlier theory. However, as these 'radial banks' and the more obvious return walls are clearly part of the courtyard complex of the later Romano-British settlement, the

function of this area in the Iron Age can be challenged. Indeed, there was sufficient space within the main enclosure to keep animals, and the size of the area between the ramparts could not have accommodated roundhouses of the size comparable to those within the enclosure. Even if smaller structures had been erected there, traces of platforms would be expected to survive on the slopes even with its later use as a courtyard, and none have been detected. Also, if the primary function was for stock, an entrance, either from inside or outside the enclosure might be expected but there is no obvious indication of one. Thus, although it is not now possible to determine why the outer rampart was added, the balance of evidence suggests it was clearly necessary at some stage during the Iron Age to either reinforce the strength - or at least the apparent strength - of the hillfort on the side of the main approach only. At nearby Mid Hill, there is also an enhancement of the rampart around the perimeter of the enclosure facing the line of natural approach. The logic of the positioning of this reinforcement in relation to the hillfort there has also been proposed as being a display of strength to the approaching visitor (Oswald and McOmish 2002, 23). This conclusion finds parallels at other hillforts in the region: for example, the outer ramparts of nearby Ring Chesters are far larger on the sector overlooking the low ground to the north than they are on the sector facing towards the level approach from the south (Oswald *et al* 2002, 39). Along similar lines, the near-circular stone-built circuit on West Hill, overlooking Kirknewton, is sited so that it tips across the contours, making it more visible from the low-lying ground to the north-west (Oswald *et al* 2000, 53).

Perhaps the only indication that the outer rampart is secondary comes from comparison with other hillforts in the area. Apart from the existence of the outer rampart, the general overall form, technique of construction and topographic setting of the main enclosure at Staw Hill is similar to, but smaller and less complex than, that at nearby Mid Hill and it is probable that the two were in use broadly at the same time. In addition to Mid Hill, there are examples of other hillforts in the area which are enclosures formed by a single rampart (those at Fawcett Shank and Sinkside). Others are bivallate/multivallate (for example those at Little Hetha, Great Hetha, Ring Chesters, St Gregory's Hill). Only one, that at Gledsleugh 7kms to the east, has a similar outwork to that exhibited at Staw Hill, which recent investigation through field survey has demonstrated was a secondary addition on the approach side to the main enclosure (Pearson and Ainsworth 2001). At Ring Chesters and Great Hetha, recent field survey has demonstrated that the stone-built enclosure was likely to have been added into earlier circuits (Oswald *et al* 2002; Pearson and Lax 2001), but there is no evidence of such a sequence at Staw Hill. Thus, although there is no observable ground stratigraphy to unambiguously demonstrate the sequence of rampart development at Staw Hill, circumstantial evidence based on local analogy with the hillfort at Gledsleugh suggests that the outer rampart is likely to have been added to a simple enclosure as a secondary feature at some stage during the Iron Age, but evidently before the Romano-British phase.

Although the term 'hillfort' has been used throughout this report, its application to a small enclosure such that at Staw Hill requires qualification. In central and southern England, this term has an implication of defensive capability, impressive size, intensive settlement and centre of economic importance. It has become increasingly clear during the recent work by English Heritage at other 'hillforts' in this region that this term can no longer be uncritically applied to small enclosures such as that at Staw Hill as has been the case in the past (NMRA; Jobey 1965) and that they should be viewed more as 'defended settlements'. The small size, coupled with the number of roundhouses (two, maximum of three) cannot in any way be seen as meeting the

criteria noted above for impressive size and intensity of settlement seen in hillforts further south. Similarly, the evidence from the earthworks suggests that the wall of the enclosure, whilst providing some defensive capability, could easily have fulfilled pragmatic requirements such as keeping wild animals out, and not an insignificant matter in this type of upland location would also have created a very effective windbreak for the settlement. As stated above, even the addition of the outer rampart at Staw Hill should not purely be viewed exclusively as a defensive feature, but its origins may lay more in making an symbolic architectural statement, even for a very small community. This may have reflected the status or locally dominant physical location of this small settlement within a localised economy based on the same ridge occupied by the site at Mid Hill, and centred around the large and dominant hillfort on Yeavinger Bell. Thus, to consider such a site as Staw Hill as a ‘hillfort’ with an implication of conflict and or centre of economic or military significance, is unwise. It is clear from this English Heritage project - which has examined a number of sites in the region - that there are a range of sizes and forms of walled enclosures previously interpreted as ‘hillforts’. Even the immediate neighbouring site at Mid Hill seems to display a chronology and degree of complexity which is not mirrored at Staw Hill, despite the fact that they are likely to have co-existed at some point during



*Figure 12.
Topographic relationship
between Staw Hill and Mid Hill*

the Iron Age and are not massively different in size. At Staw Hill we may be seeing no more than a simple enclosed family farmstead within a landscape hierarchy of other more complex settlements and local centres of economic or political power.

The proximity of the nearby hillfort on Mid Hill raises questions as to how the landscape between these sites may have been used and apportioned during the Iron Age. The identification of cultivation terraces close to both sites which may be contemporary with the hillforts suggests that both communities practiced arable cultivation in close proximity to their settlements in the Iron Age. The discovery of what seems to be a low bank running straight across the saddle mid-way between the hillforts on Mid Hill and Staw Hill (National Grid Reference NT 8818 3002 to NT 8825 2989) may indicate that there was also a formal division or boundary between the two communities (Oswald and McOmish 2002, 24). The location of the earthwork with respect to the two intervisible hillforts is suggestive of a cross-ridge dyke or similar boundary, perhaps defining the limit of the grazing land associated with each settlement (see Figure 12). A cross-ridge dyke in a similar topographic

location has been recorded near the hillfort on nearby Great Hetha, 2.5 km to the south, and the isolation of this example in relation to other agricultural remains suggests that it is very likely to be contemporary with the occupation of the hillfort (Pearson and Lax 2001, 21 and fig 10). Excavation of a comparable earthwork in a similar topographic situation below Wether Hill has suggested that it was built around the end of the 3rd century BC, contemporary with the occupation of the nearby hillfort and that it was perhaps maintained into the 5th century AD (University of Durham 1998, v-vi; Topping and McOmish 2000, 8). However, in the case of the cross-ridge dyke between Mid Hill and Staw Hill, its dating must remain speculative, both because the earthwork has been so degraded by medieval and later ploughing that its identification is far from secure, and because both hillforts were evidently re-occupied in the Romano-British period. However, if the dyke is genuinely Iron Age in date, the fact that it is equidistant from both sites may support the idea that communities at both sites co-existed within the same overall landscape and time-frame and that there was some formalisation of land holdings between them. Given that the large lynchets and terraces noted close to the hillforts have not been identified on the ridge top, this may indicate that this higher ground was mostly used for grazing and that the cross-ridge dyke acted as a boundary to this activity. Thus it is possible to envisage a small community living on Staw Hill in the Iron Age, possibly no more than an extended family group, supporting themselves by a mixed agricultural regime of arable cultivation and animal husbandry.

The Romano-British period

One of the significant discoveries of this survey has been the identification of a small courtyard settlement on the site which probably dates to the Romano-British period. The term Romano-British has been used throughout this report, but it must be stressed that for most of the period between AD 50 and AD 410, the area north of Hadrian's Wall lay beyond the bounds of Roman rule. It has been suggested that at some point in the 3rd century AD, the Cheviots may have been deliberately depopulated by the Romans (Burgess 1984, 172). With the possible exception of this speculative event, it seems likely that the influence of Roman culture on the uplands of the north-eastern Cheviots would have been slight and very indirect (Higham 1986, 224-6). Most settlements lack the normal trappings of Roman culture, implying that the invasion itself brought about very little change in the pattern of daily life. Yet on balance, there seems little reason to reject the widely accepted hypothesis that stone-founded buildings belong to the Romano-British period although it has yet to be established beyond doubt that this style of construction is genuinely of sub-Roman origin, rather than late Iron Age.

The relative chronology displayed between the stone-founded house (Structure 3) and the earlier platform (Structure 2) on Staw Hill has been observed at a number of other hillforts in the north-east Cheviots where later settlement in the Romano-British period has been identified, for example Ring Chesters (Oswald *et al* 2002) and Mid Hill (Oswald and McOmish 2002). Platforms of the size recorded at Staw Hill are well within the size range for buildings associated with the Iron Age hillforts in this area, for example at sites with no obvious later occupation in the Romano-British period such as at Gleadscleugh (Pearson and Ainsworth 2001), and Yeavinger Bell (Pearson 1999). The observations at these sites and other sites such as West Hill (Oswald *et al* 2000), St Gregory's Hill (Oswald and McOmish 2002) also would endorse the sequence proposed for Staw Hill, where the evidence indicates that the platforms and stone-built ramparts are likely to be contemporary features, and also that the walls of the Iron Age hillfort must have collapsed before the structures

associated with the Romano-British phase were constructed. Thus, whether the two settlements at Staw Hill are separated by a long period of time, or whether there is a more rapid and functional desire to change the architectural nature of the settlement cannot be determined from the field evidence alone. One striking feature which may point to continuity of function and similarity of size of settlement unit, is the fact that two buildings are evident in both periods. Even allowing for the possibility that an earlier building may underlie the Romano-British buildings, this is still no more than a small family group in the later period, rather than being an organised division of the interior of the earlier hillfort (as at Mid Hill) or complex organic settlement (as at West Hill, Ring Chesters and St Gregory's Hill). It is unclear whether the majority of the earlier hillfort circuit was re-used as has been seen on other sites (West Hill, Mid Hill, and Ring Chesters for example) as there is little or no evidence for rebuilding around the east and north circuit, although robbing may account for this. It is possible that at least some of the interior of the earlier hillfort was re-used or re-enclosed by the later settlement as the entrance seems to have continued in use in both periods, although this may have been simply a matter of convenience. Hedges or fences, which have left no surface traces, may have sub-divided the area, as may be hinted at by the tentatively identified feature close to Structure 3, but there is no ground evidence to support wholesale division of the hillfort interior. Also, there is no evidence for an intensive division of the surrounding slopes into fields with boundaries and trackways as has been seen at West Hill, Castle Hill at Alnham and St Gregory's Hill, again perhaps pointing to a continuity of agricultural practice from the Iron Age based principally on localised open grazing rather than movement of stock over larger distances away from arable fields. That the landscape surrounding Mid Hill also shows little evidence of Roman period field evolution (Oswald and McOmish 2002) suggests that this ridge was essentially used as open pasture, possibly only in the summer months. If this is the case, it may be that the smallness of size of the settlement in the Roman period is not simply that it is a small family group, but that it was never permanently occupied throughout the year.

The post-Roman period

In the north of England, the origin of the custom of herdsmen living in shelters (shielings) while tending stock on summer pastures, often well away from more permanent settlements is unknown, but is documented from as early as the 10th or 11th centuries in the Lake District and continued through to as late as the mid 18th century in the Borders although in general, the tradition (known as shielding) had begun to decline by the end of the 17th century (RCHM 1970, 5). Three shielings have been identified at Staw Hill. In the absence of excavation, historical documentation or diagnostic stratigraphy, it is impossible to precisely date them. All appear to have been constructed from material robbed from the hillfort or the later Romano-British settlement. The choice of location was no doubt influenced by this ready source of building stone, and all three occupy relatively sheltered sites, nestling close to the natural depression which crosses the ridge. At least two (the southern one and the middle one of the three) appear to overlie the tracts of 'low rig' ridge and furrow close to the hillfort and thus are likely to represent the last phase of occupation on the site, albeit of a seasonal nature. Both have very different morphologies, with the southern one residing within its own purpose-built compound. Other than that they both appear to be later than the 'low rig' which is likely to be mid 1700s at the latest, there is no evidence to indicate a relative chronology between the two. The furthest north shieling is larger than the other two and may be a two-roomed structure, although this is far from clear from the earthworks. It is possible that this is not simply a seasonal shieling but a more permanent farmstead, possibly with its own

associated cultivation. This suggestion is supported by the fact that one phase of the two ridge and furrow phases identified close to it actually is aligned on the same orientation as the long axis of the building, perhaps suggesting the two are associated, but on the scant evidence available this must remain as speculation. That two of the shielings possibly overlie the 'low rig' cultivation may suggest that they were constructed towards the end of the tradition of summer pasturing and as such represent the end of a long standing tradition in this part of the northern uplands.

6. METHODOLOGY

The field investigation was carried out by Stewart Ainsworth, Alastair Oswald and Trevor Pearson from the York office of English Heritage. The survey was carried out using a Trimble dual frequency Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) system with some graphical infill. The base receiver was set up on the summit on permanent survey station ST01 and two receivers (Trimble 4700 and 4800 models) were used to record the remains, working independently in real-time kinematic mode. The co-ordinates of the base receiver were initially calibrated to the National Grid (OSGB36) using Trimble Geomatics software, based on the position of the receiver relative to Ordnance Survey active GPS stations at Carlisle, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Newcastle, following an occupation of four hours. In addition to permanent survey station ST01, a second marker (Ref 02) was established, intervisible with the first, to allow future work with conventional survey equipment. Their positions are indicated on the 1:500 plans and further details are recorded in Appendix 2. The resulting plan was plotted at 1:500 scale via Key Terrafirma, AutoCAD and Coreldraw 8 software.

The digital photographs used in this report were taken by Stewart Ainsworth, and these together with a number of other images are held on disk as part of the project archive. The hand-drawn archive plan was drawn by Stewart Ainsworth and CAD-based drawings were prepared by Philip Sinton. The report was researched and written by Stewart Ainsworth, and edited by Alastair Oswald.

The site archive has been deposited in English Heritage's National Monuments Record, Great Western Village, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ, to where applications for copyright should be made.

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7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

English Heritage would like to thank Paul Frodsham and Iain Hedley of the Northumberland National Park for commissioning and facilitating the field investigation. The author is grateful to Tim Gates for making available his own copy of Greenwood's 1828 map and for permission to reproduce the aerial photograph in Figure 9. Thanks are especially due to the landowner, Mr Douglas-Home, for allowing access to his land.

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APPENDIX 1. Table of NMR numbers linked to the survey

Iron Age hillfort and Romano-British settlement	NT 88453010	NT 83 SE 7
Shielings	NT 88439 30161 NT 88424 30113 NT 88429 30075	NT 83 SE 58

APPENDIX 2. Location of permanent survey stations



SURVEY STATION INFORMATION

ENGLISH HERITAGE

SITE NAME	Staw Hill hillfort, Northumberland		
Station number	ST 01	Status	Permanent
Type of Mark	Brass rivet in rock outcrop	NMR number	NT 83 SE 7
Date of Survey	Nov-2001	SAM number	24568
Office of origin	York	Surveyors	SA; TP; AO
OS National Grid	Eastings	Northings	Height
	388449.790	630101.950	277.464



View from south

**SURVEY STATION INFORMATION**

SITE NAME	Staw Hill hillfort, Northumberland		
Station number	REF 02	Status	Permanent
Type of Mark	SW corner upright stone at hillfort entrance	NMR number	NT 83 SE 7
Date of Survey	Nov-2001	SAM number	24568
Office of origin	York	Surveyors	SA; TP; AO
OS National Grid	Eastings	Northings	Height
	388463.901	630097.884	-



View from south-east