



ENGLISH HERITAGE

IVINGHOE BEACON

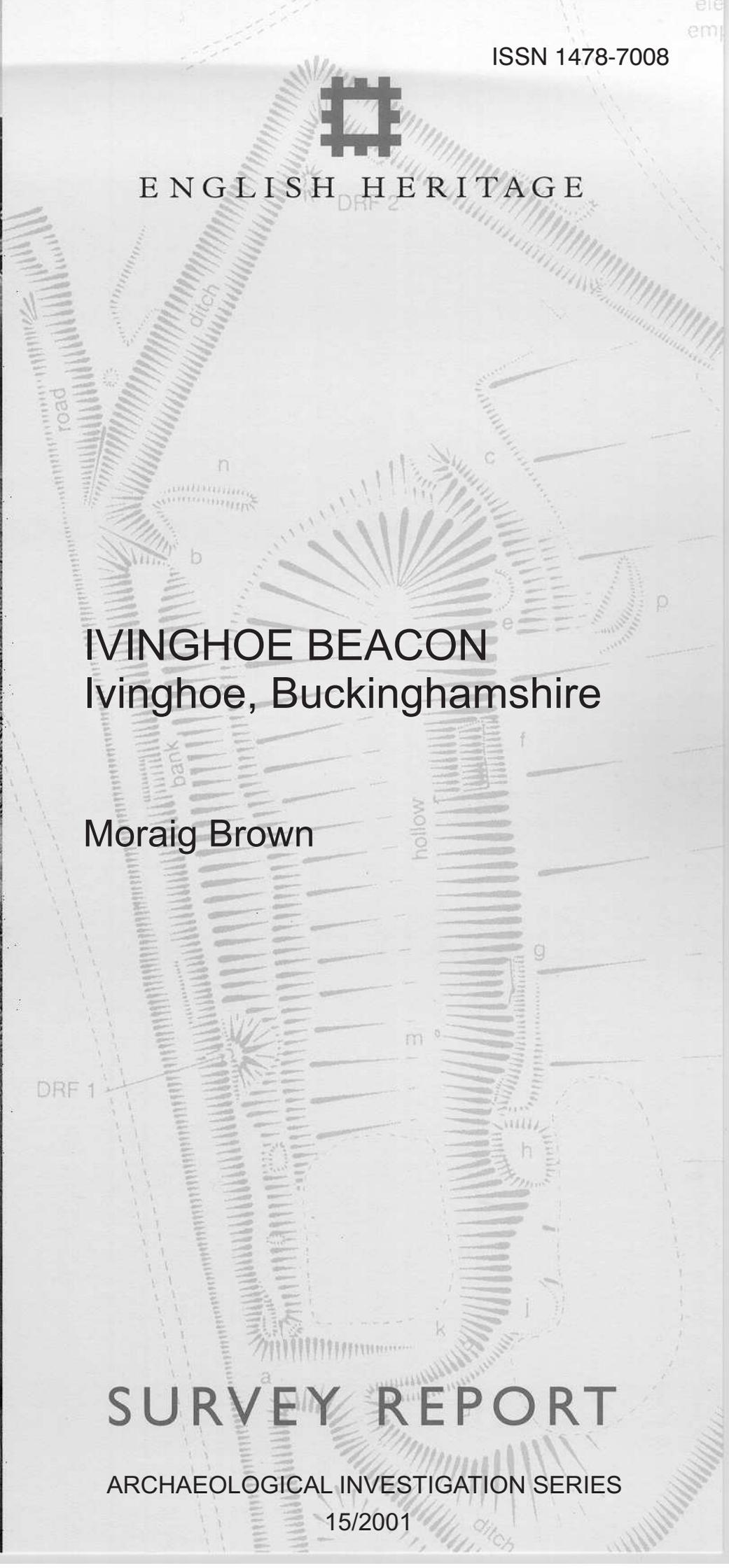
Ivinghoe, Buckinghamshire

Moraig Brown

SURVEY REPORT

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION SERIES

15/2001





ENGLISH HERITAGE

**IVINGHOE BEACON, IIVINGHOE,
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

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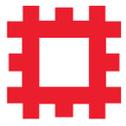
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“For much of the year the hill-top is exposed to strong cold winds and driving rain”

(Cotton & Frere 1968, 188)



Ivinghoe Beacon from the north



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1. INTRODUCTION

In November 2000 English Heritage (EH) carried out survey and analysis of the earthworks of Ivinghoe Beacon hillfort. The field investigations were the responsibility of staff of the EH Field Offices in Cambridge and Swindon. The survey was requested by André Berry, AOB Historic Landscapes, as part of the Ridgeway Heritage Project, and was one of three surveys of Ridgeway hillforts carried out by English Heritage. (The others were Liddington Castle and Pulpit Hill, each of which is the subject of a separate report.) Ivinghoe Beacon is situated on land owned by the National Trust. Despite the time of year, the ground conditions inside the hillfort were not ideal for earthwork survey, the grass being up to 0.8m high in places.

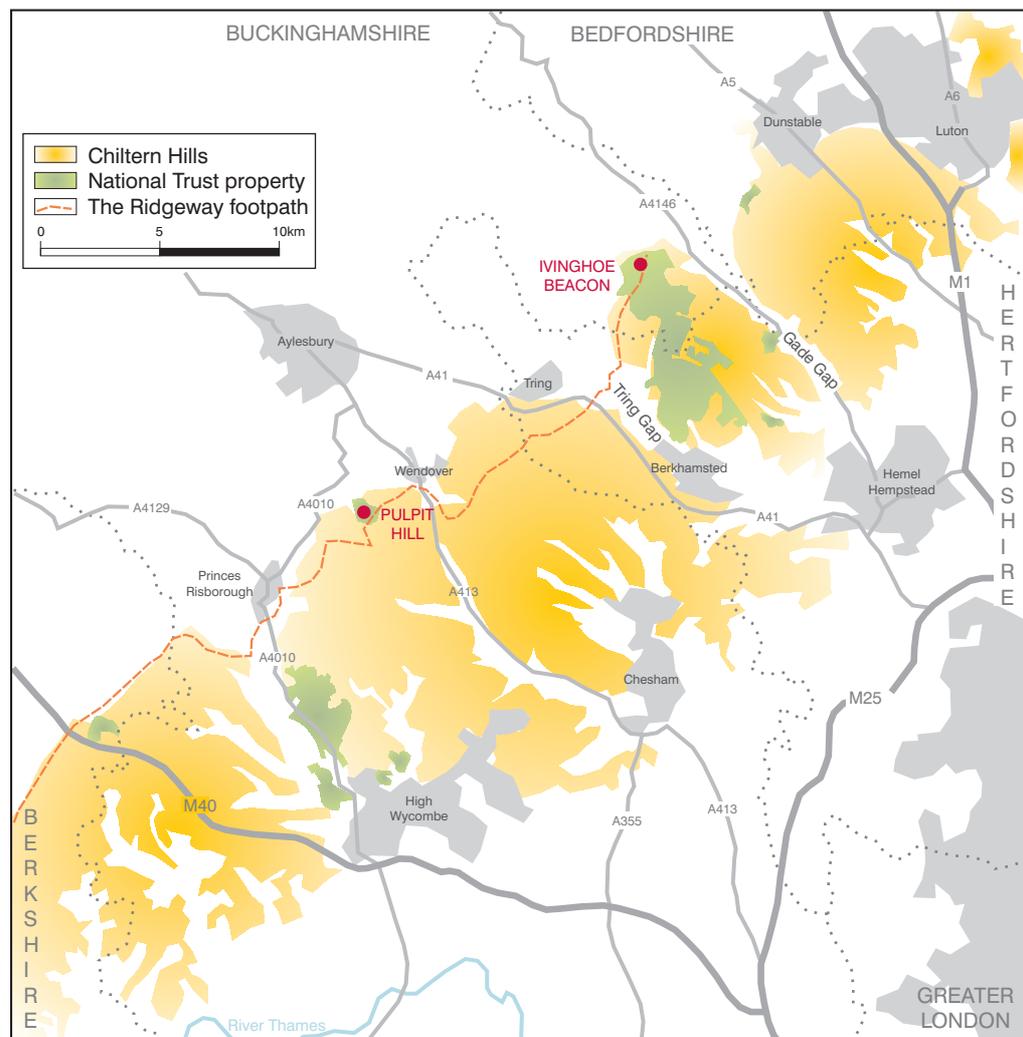
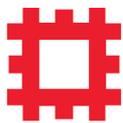


Figure 1
Location map

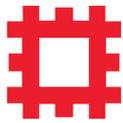


The Chiltern ridge stretches from the Goring Gap in Oxfordshire to Royston in Hertfordshire, forming part of a massive chalk upland which includes both the North and South Downs and Salisbury Plain (Figures 1 & 2). The ridge is bounded to the north-west by the steep Chiltern escarpment, while the dip slope inclines gently to the south-east, extending as far as the mid Thames Valley. The area is bisected by a series of river valleys, most of which run in a south-easterly direction, eventually draining into the Thames and its tributaries. The ridge is densely wooded in parts and supports upland grazing as well as tourism in the form of the Ridgeway long distance footpath; many of the lower slopes are given over to arable agriculture.



Figure 2
Aerial photograph of Ivinghoe Beacon and the surrounding area in 1946. Note the way that the ridge turns a right-angle at the Beacon, which marks the highest local point of the ridge. (NMR: 106G/UK/113/3073)

The bedrock of the Chiltern ridge consists of Lower and Middle Chalk, with steep-sided coombes filled with late glacial and post glacial chalky deposits. Overlying the bedrock is a shallow layer of calcareous soil of up to 16cm depth, though it is evident that the deposits on the top of the Beacon are much thinner and in places the chalk bedrock is exposed. Flint is widely available all over the Chilterns, well-weathered on the surface, but in tabular form where mined, though it should be noted that no flint has been identified on Ivinghoe Beacon, though there is evidence for prehistoric mining on nearby Pitstone Hill (Stainton 1994, 8; Dyer & Hales 1961, 50).



Ivinghoe Beacon is located towards the central part of the ridge, some 13km east of Aylesbury, on a segment of the Chilterns which is divided from the main massif by the Tring Gap to the south-west and the Gade Gap to the north-east (Figure 3). The ground falls steeply to the north and west, sloping away more gently towards the south-east dip slope. At 220m above OD, it is one of the highest points of the Chilterns, occupying a prominent position with commanding views in all directions, especially along the northern edge of the ridge overlooking the route of the Icknield Way. The hillfort is located at the eastern end of the Ridgeway footpath, and occupies a roughly triangular area on an open, windy, treeless knoll given over to light grazing, walking and model aeroplane flying. According to an account of the parish, a fire beacon once stood here, with the kettle and accoutrements being kept in the church (VCH 1905, 379).

In the immediate vicinity of the hillfort are at least five Bronze Age barrows, as well as a number of medieval or later trackways providing access onto and across the Ridgeway.

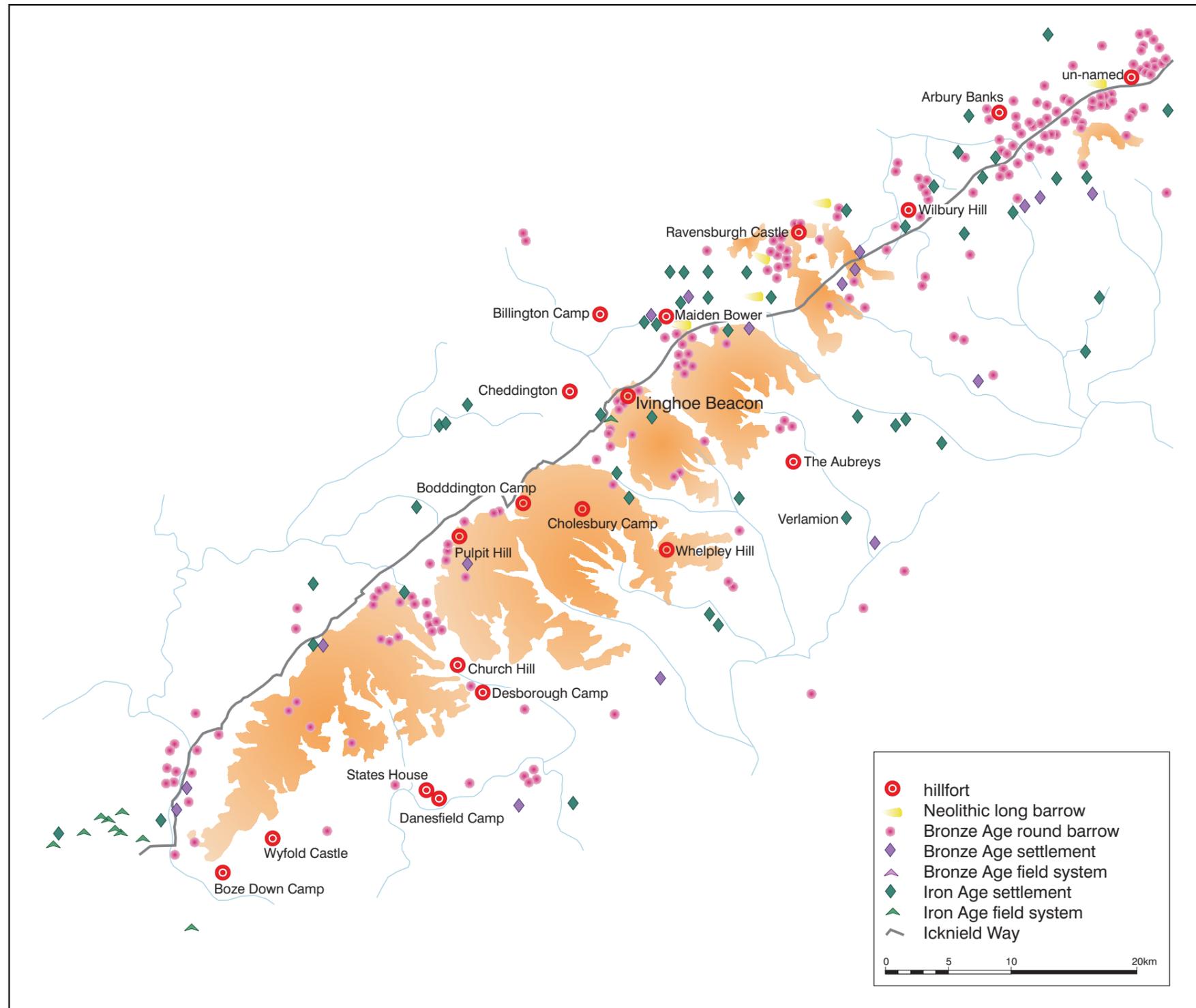


Figure 3 The Bronze Age and Iron Age landscape of the Chiltern ridge, showing the relationship between known hillforts, settlement, field systems and funerary monuments



2. BACKGROUND AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORY

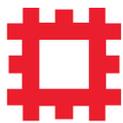
GENERAL HISTORY

Between the end of the Late Bronze Age and the Roman Conquest in AD43, it has been suggested that society in the Chiltern area developed from a loose collection of tribal groups into a single 'kingdom' with its own coinage and control over extensive areas including urban and industrial complexes (Bryant 1994, 49). Early Bronze Age settlement was located primarily on the slopes of the Chiltern ridge, continuing a pattern established during the Neolithic. The well drained fertile soils of these slopes supported a light tree cover which could be easily utilised without compromising the ready shelter it provided; in contrast, the lower valley slopes were densely wooded and therefore less suitable for cereal cultivation (Holgate 1994, 38). During the Later Bronze Age and Iron Age, however, the focus of settlement appears to have shifted from the ridges and upper slopes to the river valleys, while barrows were being constructed in areas of rough pasture (Figure 3; Holgate 1994, 45).

Following abandonment of the monuments on Ivinghoe it seems probable that most of the area was common land until fairly recently, and by the beginning of the 19th century at least the lower north slopes had been given over to arable agriculture (BRO: Ma/116/3R & Ma/116/5R).

The appearance from the Late Bronze Age of hillforts along the Chiltern escarpment marks a new type of site, occurring at regular intervals of between 5 and 10 miles, invariably situated in locations which dominate the surrounding countryside. The role of hillforts in this emerging society is still unclear, despite many years of research, and it is possible that some of them were not contemporaneous. It is likely that they fulfilled a number of roles: as centres for trade and redistribution of agricultural and other goods; as storage depots for grain and stock gathered from small farming settlements in the surrounding territory; as protected bases which could be defended in times of war; as visible monuments on the skyline attesting to the power of the tribe or the tribal leader; and as centres for ceremonial and ritual. The Chiltern hillforts formed part of a larger group stretching across southern and eastern England, extending into Wessex and into the North and South Downs. There are at least ten hillforts situated along the Chiltern ridge, with a similar number in the immediate adjoining areas (Figure 3).

A crucial element of the prehistoric landscape was the Icknield Way, a long distance trackway which runs along the northern edge of the Chiltern scarp from Goring Gap in Oxfordshire to north Norfolk. As with many other prehistoric trackways, the Icknield



Way may have begun life as a migratory animal route around 8000BC (Taylor 1979, 2). It formed a major route during the Neolithic period, when a large number of stone axes produced elsewhere in the British Isles were transported along it to various sites along the eastern edge of the fens, close to the Icknield Way (*ibid*, 16). The Icknield Way would have facilitated movement south-west to north-east, while the rivers which bisect the line of the Chilterns would have supplemented this and permitted approach from virtually any direction (Forde-Johnston 1976, 51). The close association between the Chiltern hillforts and the Icknield Way is seen to be crucial, and it is possible that Grimm's Ditch and other cross dykes along the length of the Icknield Way may have served to define and to restrict access between tribal areas (Bryant 1994, 54; Taylor 1979, 88). However, this relationship has been challenged, in part because of the assumption that the Bronze Age/ Iron Age landscape was comprehensively carved up, and also because of the implication that large numbers of people were moving about the countryside (David Field, pers comm).

Ivinghoe Beacon hillfort

The hillfort is not shown on any estate or tithe maps of the area, nor is it depicted on the Ordnance Survey map of 1884, although the barrow at the summit is (OS 1884). By 1925 the hillfort had been recognised and surveyed - annotated 'Camp' - along with one of the

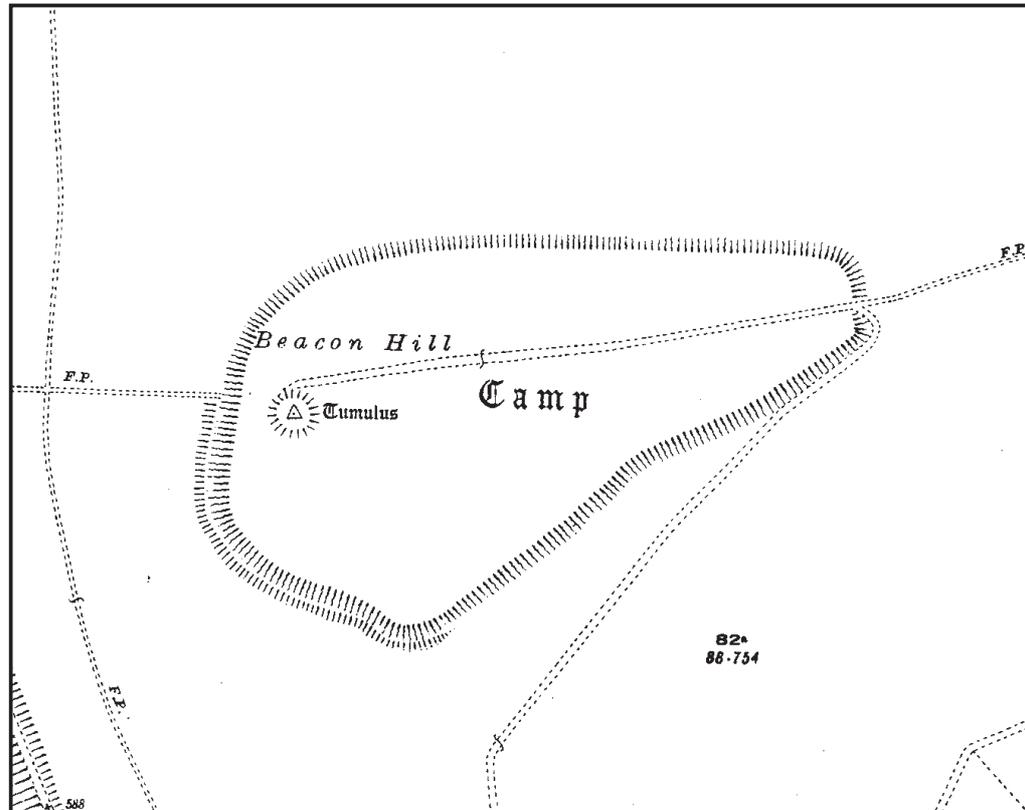


Figure 4
The first Ordnance
Survey depiction of
the hillfort on the
25-inch 1925
Edition map (OS
1925)

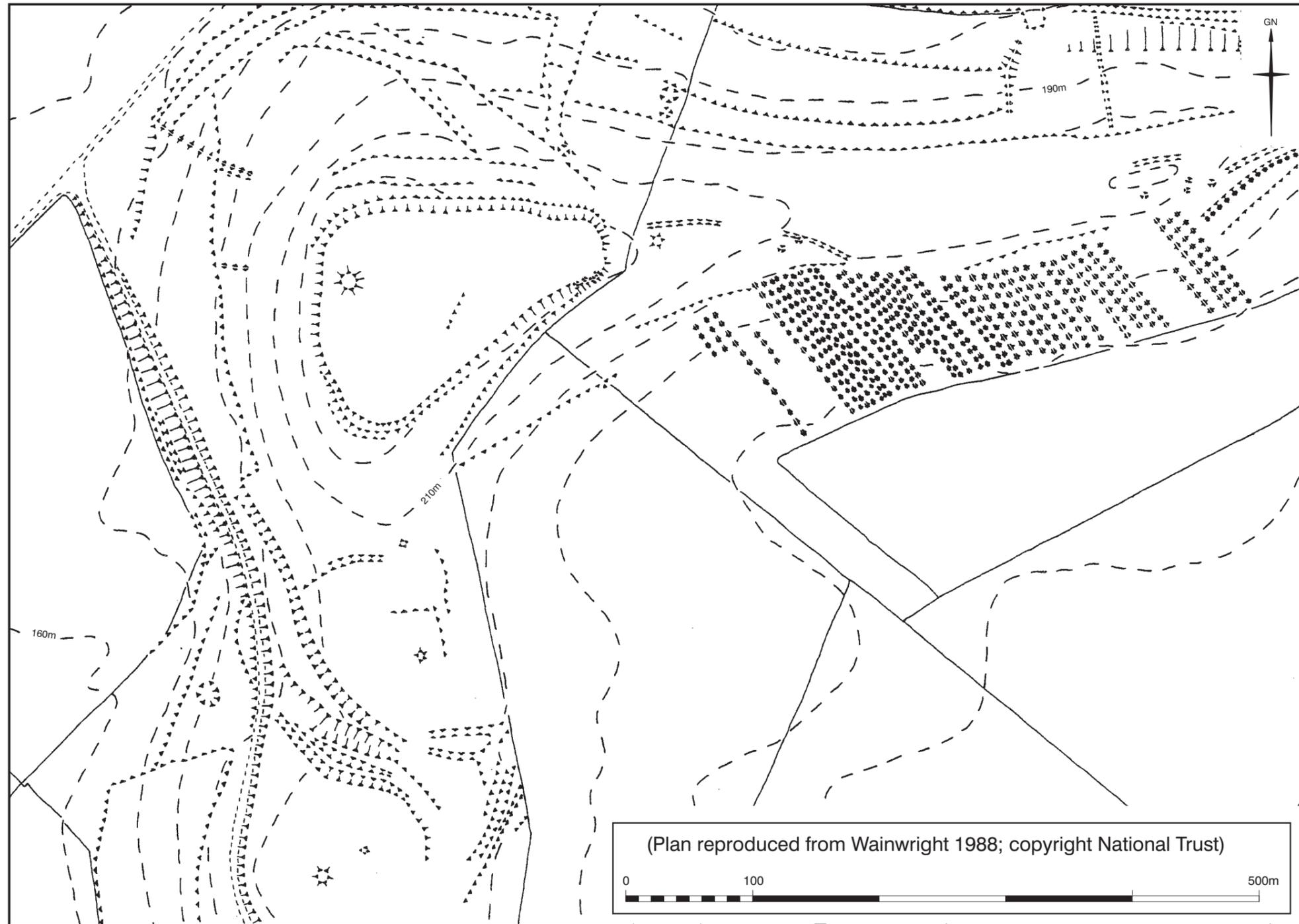
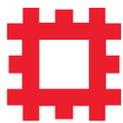


Figure 6 *Sketch survey of the earthworks around Ivinghoe Beacon (after Wainwright 1988)*



Wainwright carried out an extensive sketch survey along the Chilterns between Income Hill and Gallows Hill, including the Ivinghoe Beacon area (Wainwright 1988; Figure 6). As a tool for understanding the nature of the archaeology of this part of the Chilterns it is invaluable, as it marks the first attempt to compile the field evidence for such a wide area. It is clear that the concentration of archaeological features in the vicinity of the hillfort is immense. In the main this consists of trackways, field boundaries and ploughing remains from the medieval period onwards, though the concentration of Celtic field systems on nearby Pitstone Hill may indicate an earlier date for some of the features.

During the summer of 2000, a postgraduate student from the University of Reading carried out a geophysical survey of the interior of the hillfort using both magnetometry and resistivity (Gover 2000). In general it was found that the thin soil here was not particularly responsive to magnetometry, while the resistivity survey produced very interesting results (Figure 7). The survey indicated the presence of a ditched feature measuring 140m by 30m in the centre of the hillfort: this was tentatively interpreted as a Neolithic cursus monument or possibly a long mortuary enclosure. The survey also produced evidence for features interpreted as two possible Neolithic or Bronze Age barrows, an undated but probably late prehistoric D-shaped enclosure, and what may constitute sections of three palisade trenches along the western side of the hillfort. None of these features was identified during the earthwork survey.

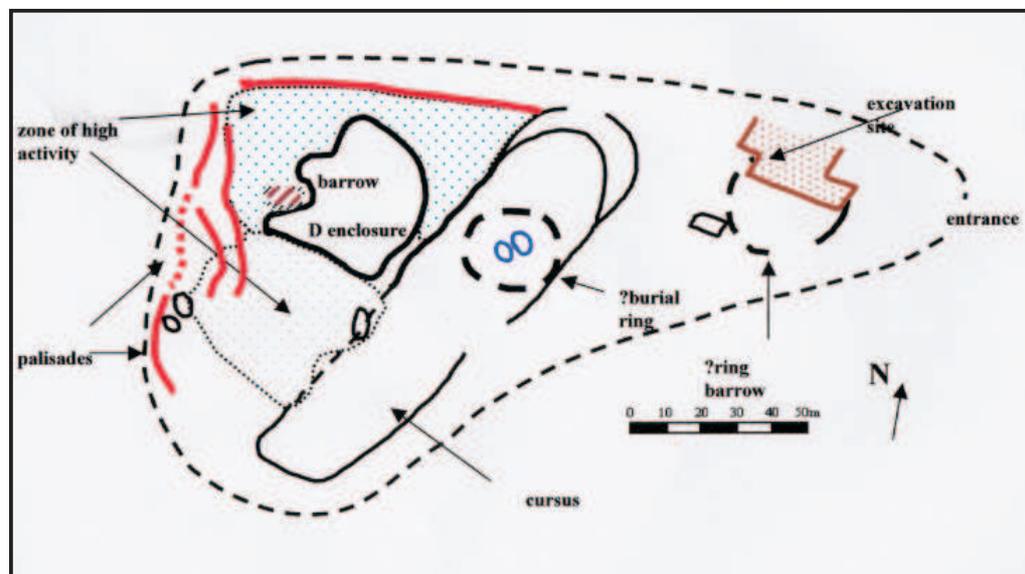
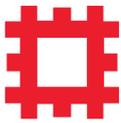


Figure 7
Interpretation of the geophysical anomalies on Ivinghoe Beacon. Note the possible cursus/long mortuary enclosure, two barrows and palisade trenches.
(Gover 2000, Fig 14)

Cotton and Frere's excavations, 1963-65

Cotton and Frere selected Ivinghoe Beacon for excavation for three reasons: its size; surface finds indicating early settlement; and a lack of previous investigation. Over three seasons totalling nine weeks they excavated five areas of the hillfort: the eastern gateway,



part of the north rampart, a small trench through the south rampart and two areas in the interior, as well as two small trial trenches, also in the interior (Figure 8).

Excavation of the north rampart (site A) demonstrated the presence of a flat-bottomed ditch (3.2m wide by 2.6m deep) outside the main scarp, but that the counterscarp bank was in fact illusory and that there were no traces of a second ditch (however, note the earthwork evidence below). None of the rampart material survived, but the presence of post-holes suggested to the excavators that it was of a box-type construction, set back 0.3m from the edge of the ditch. The width of the rampart varied considerably, from 2.1m to 0.9m in the area excavated: while the former width could support interpretation of a box rampart some 2.7m high (according to the material excavated from the ditch), this would not be possible where the width was reduced to 0.9m. The excavators concluded that this demonstrated that the fort was either constructed by amateurs and/or never completed. The ditch appears to have been back-filled soon after completion.

Behind the rampart, a layer of chalk rubble sealed an *in situ* surface, upon which lay quantities of pottery and bone, including some human skull-fragments. It is not clear how the rubble layer fits into the sequence of the site, but it is of paramount importance, since if it formed part of a ramp leading up to the rampart, the defences were not primary. Unfortunately, similar deposits were not found elsewhere on the site and the evidence seems to suggest that the rubble layer formed part of the collapsed rampart.

Excavation of the rampart on the south side of the hillfort (site C) demonstrated that two ditches were present, an inner V-shaped ditch measuring 3.0m wide by 2.6m deep, and an outer U-shaped ditch measuring 1.6m wide by 0.5m deep; there appears not to have been a counterscarp bank between them. There were no traces of rampart material *in situ* but post-holes indicated that the rampart was 3.7m wide. Once again, the ditches appear to have been filled in soon after completion, with the upper levels of the inner ditch containing, in the main, rampart material.

Excavation of the gateway at the east end of the site where access is less difficult was somewhat hampered by the presence of an existing trackway which prevented complete stripping of the area (site G). The ditch terminals were less intrenched than they superficially appeared, and the slightly funnel-shaped entrance was defined by a row of post-holes along each side. There does not seem to have been any evidence for a substantial gateway structure.

In an area of the interior abutting the north rampart (site A) there was little evidence of recognisable building structures, despite the discovery of a large number of post-holes. The presence of two roughly square four-post structures measuring approximately 3.7m

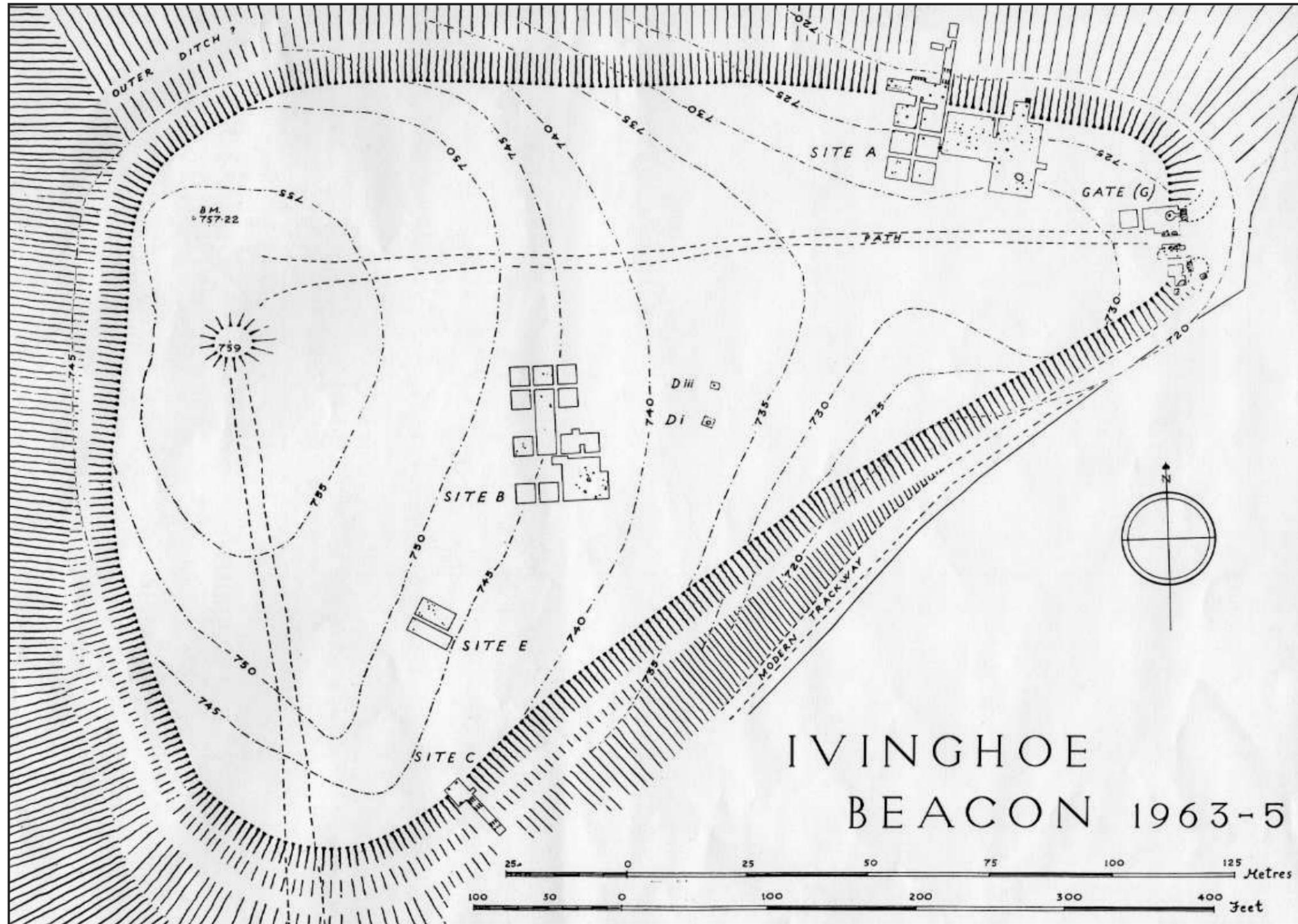
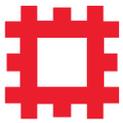


Figure 8 Location of Cotton And Frere's excavation trenches (Cotton & Frere 1968)



by 3.7m immediately draws comparison with so-called ‘granaries’ at Little Woodbury, though the examples at Ivinghoe are four times larger. The excavators didn’t favour this comparison, preferring to see the square structures as buildings. However, the presence of circular and semi-circular arrangements of post-holes, interpreted as structures, makes this interpretation difficult.

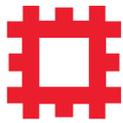
Towards the centre of the interior an area was excavated to test the nature of the archaeology away from the ramparts (site B). There was very little evidence of activity here, with only a single possible sub-rectangular hut and a possible four-post structure. An area of chalk cobbling was interpreted as the basis for a threshing floor or cart park. Aside from these structures, a number of bronze pieces were discovered, including fragments from two sword blades and a bifid razor. These, along with a number of bronze pieces from elsewhere in the hillfort, seem to form part of a background Late Bronze Age occupation scatter: at least one of the fragments is probably part of a Ewart Park sword.

The absence of storage pits, only slight pollen evidence for cereal, and large concentrations of cattle bones was cited as support for the interpretation that the economy had been based upon pastoralism rather than arable agriculture, and the excavators concluded that:

“...the hillfort was created early in the sixth century BC by a mainly pastoral people still using bronze implements but with an otherwise new and Iron Age material culture; and that after little more than a generation the settlement was abandoned, no doubt in favour of a less-exposed locality somewhere below. Thereafter, the rampart was rapidly weathered away by the elements and the ditch in time almost obliterated.” (Cotton & Frere 1968, 188-203)

Figure 9
Wilburton sword
discovered by a
metal detectorist on
Ivinghoe Beacon
(reproduced by kind
permission John
Gover)





Recent re-dating of the pottery from the excavation places it firmly within the Late Bronze Age (Marshall 2000, 7).

Marshall's excavation, 2000

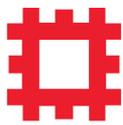
Following the discovery by a metal detectorist of a well preserved bronze sword during 2000 (Figure 9), the National Trust decided to excavate the area of discovery to try to ascertain the context for the find (Marshall 2000). The excavation determined that the sword had been lying at the base of the topsoil, roughly mid-way down the north face of the rampart, and was therefore unlikely to have been in its original context when removed by the metal detectorist. The sword is of Wilburton type, dating between *c*1150-950BC. A number of sherds of pottery were collected, and although generally undiagnostic, the assemblage was Late Bronze Age in date.



ENGLISH HERITAGE



Figure 10 *English Heritage earthwork survey at 1:1000 scale*



3. DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE EARTHWORKS

In the following description words and letters that appear **in bold** are shown on the figures indicated. Other figure references of relevance appear in the body of the text.

THE HILLFORT (Figures 10 & 11)

The hillfort occupies a broadened part of the ridge which turns a right angle at this point. The ground slopes away on all sides, most steeply to the northwest, where there is extensive evidence of soil slippage, and the north. Arable agriculture in the bowl to the south has encroached close to the line of the ramparts, and thus evidence for extramural activity here will have been removed. There are traces of settlement evidence on the north slope below the hillfort, as well as a few remains of hollow ways and other trackways. There are at least five, possibly six, round barrows in the close vicinity. The

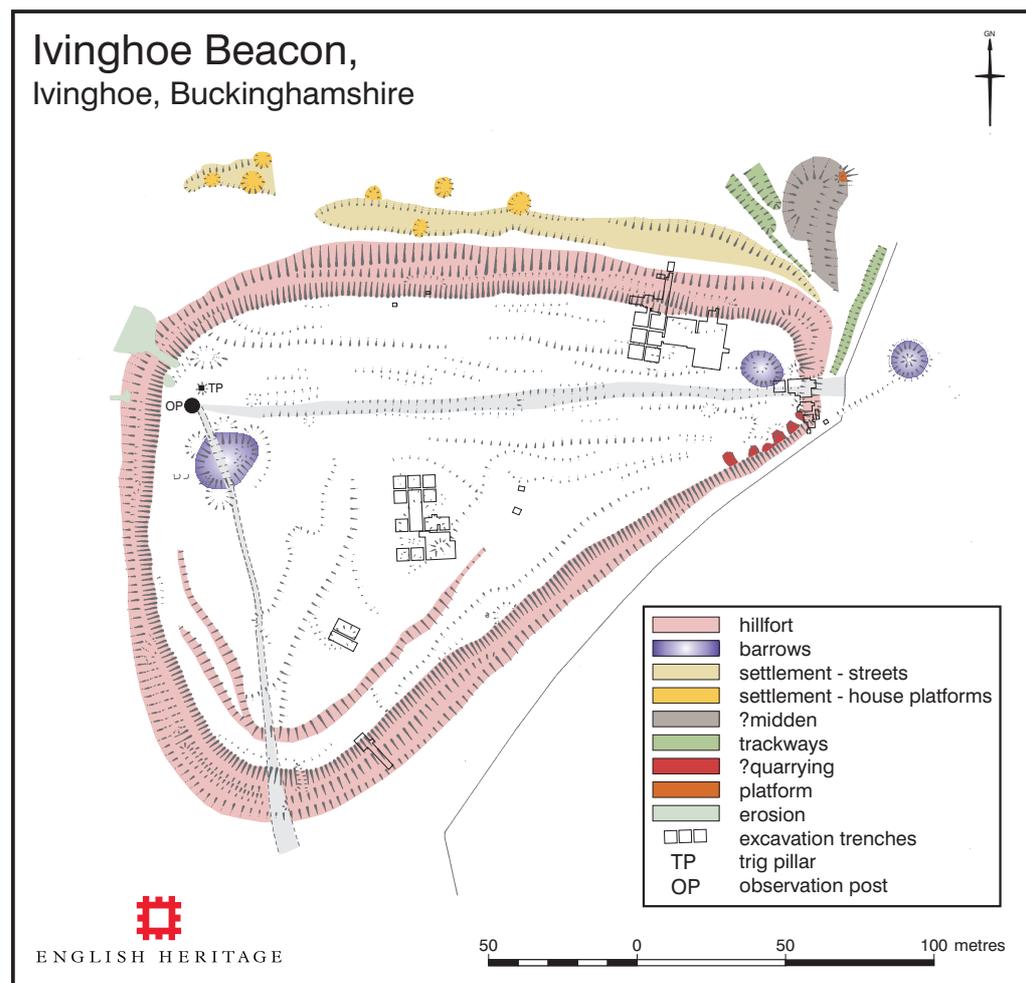
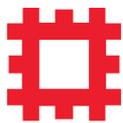


Figure 11
Ivinghoe Beacon
interpretative plan
of the earthworks,
also showing the
location of Cotton
& Frere's
excavation trenches



slight nature of the earthworks suggests that the interior has been ploughed at some point, thereby removing traces of internal features and possibly reducing the ramparts considerably.

The ramparts

The rampart is reduced to a scarp averaging 2.0m high with no trace of an inner bank, defining a roughly triangular area around the summit of the hill. Along the northern and part of the western perimeter, a denuded counterscarp bank, 5.0m wide by 0.8m high, is separated from the main scarp in places by the very fragmentary remains of a slight ditch, at best 2.1m wide by 0.2m deep. To the south-west, the ditch appears to have been re-cut, creating two substantial ditches, 1.8m wide by 0.5m deep, separated from both the main scarp and the outer scarp (a continuation of the outer bank) by a slight berm. On the ground, this appears as a slight projection, underlying the main rampart, but this is in fact illusory. The rampart at the southern limit of the hillfort has been severely eroded by walkers, stock and vehicles using the Ridgeway footpath. The south-eastern perimeter of the hillfort is defined by a series of terraced scarps, on average 1.4m high, with no obvious traces of ditches or counterscarp banks between them.

At the eastern end of the hillfort, a gap in the line of the rampart marks the position of the only known **entrance** into the interior (Figure 12). At either side of the 3.6m gap, the main rampart scarp turns back on itself to form embanked terminals. Traces of the outer ditch on the north side turn into the terminal on that side, though it should be noted that traces of the 1965 excavation backfilling may be confusing the pattern of earthworks (Cotton & Frere 1968, Fig 5). Some 60m north of the entrance is a large mound (described below).

At (a; Figure 10), a small rectangular hollow measuring 4.5m by 2.2m by 0.1m deep bites into the back of the upper rampart scarp. There are no features associated with this hollow, and no break in the line of the ramparts below; its origin is unknown.

Immediately south of the main entrance, a series of small hollows in the rampart may mark the site of **quarrying**, perhaps for chalk or flint. Measuring on average 2.0m by 1.7m by 0.5m deep, six hollows are arranged in a line along the upper edge of the main rampart scarp.

The interior (Figure 10)

The most prominent archaeological features inside the hillfort are the two barrows described below. In the northern half of the interior are a series of shallow east-west scarps, most of which are the various cuts of the Ridgeway footpath. A slight scarp 13.5m

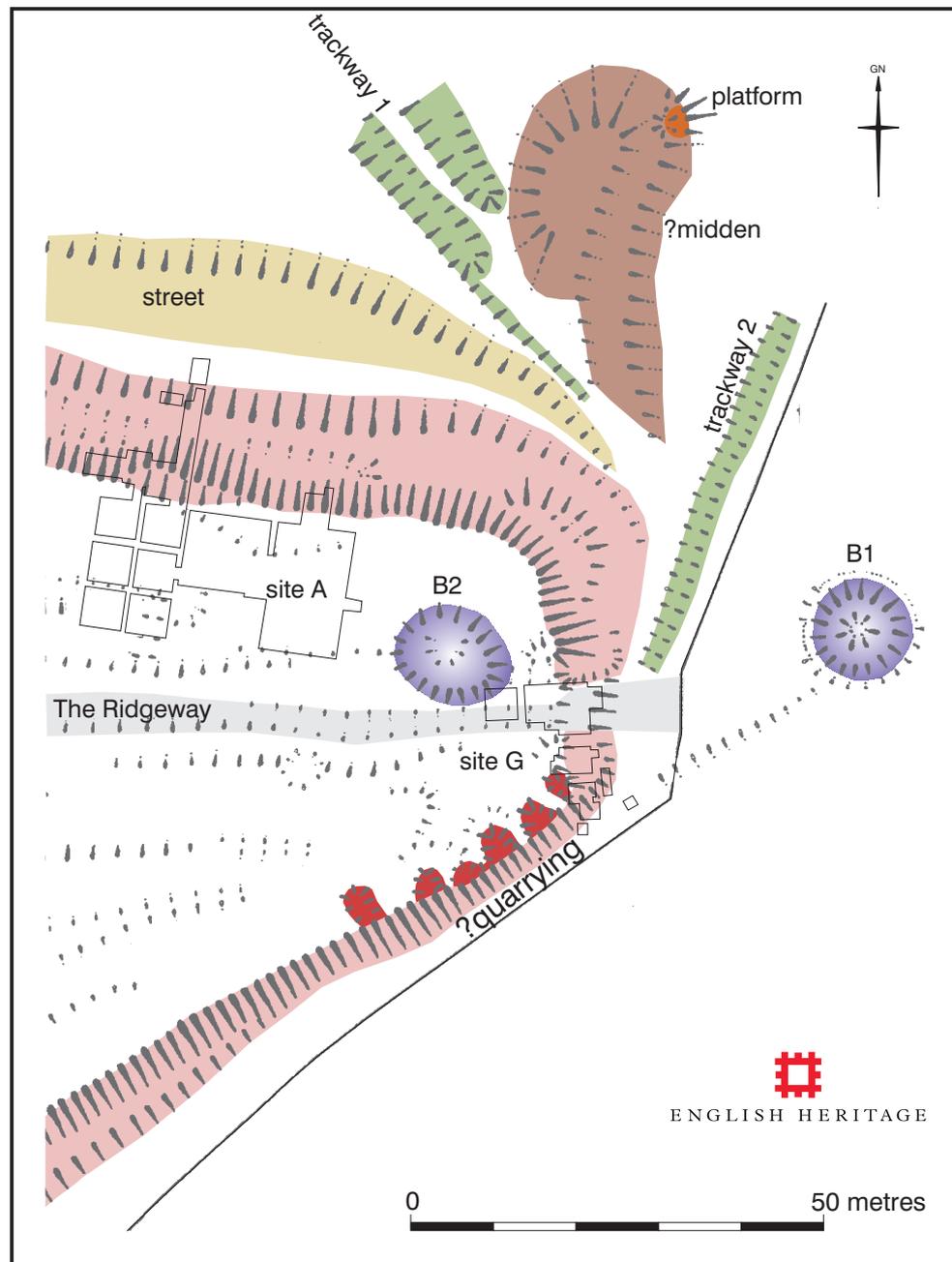
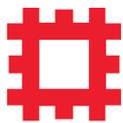
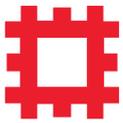


Figure 12
The entrance area,
showing Cotton &
Frere's excavation
trenches and the
possible midden
immediately outside
the entrance to the
hillfort as well as
two of the barrows

above the north rampart measures 2.1m wide by 0.4m high (b). This may be part of an inner rampart which is also evident along part of the southern side of the hillfort (c).

Traces of Cotton and Frere's excavation trenches are visible at d (site A), e (site B) and f (site E), though the alignment of the features at e and f does not conform to the excavation plan (Cotton and Frere 1968, Fig 1).



Elsewhere within the hillfort the ground was remarkably level, and it is probable that the interior was ploughed during the post-medieval period, thereby removing traces of earlier activity. The thin nature of the soil and the absence of rock for building also indicates that wooden structures may have predominated, and these often leave little or no trace above ground. It should also be noted that survey conditions within the hillfort were not ideal, and the long grass may well have obscured some of the more subtle earthworks.

THE OUTLYING AREAS

Immediately downslope of the outer bank on the north side of the hillfort, two slight scarps run parallel with the line of the main rampart for 100m (Figure 13). Along the line of these scarps are four small circular platforms cut into the hillside, measuring on average 3.1m by 2.7m by 0.1m deep. Three more platforms are situated some 20m further west, with fragments of associated scarps. Cursory examination confirms the presence of more activity of this nature on the lower north slope, though this area was not surveyed or examined in detail. These earthworks are the possible remains of prehistoric **settlement**, representing a short street with regularly spaced house platforms along either side. The earthworks are extremely slight, and in places almost indistinguishable from localised natural terraces resulting from soil creep. It is probable therefore that the activity is more widespread than is at present apparent.

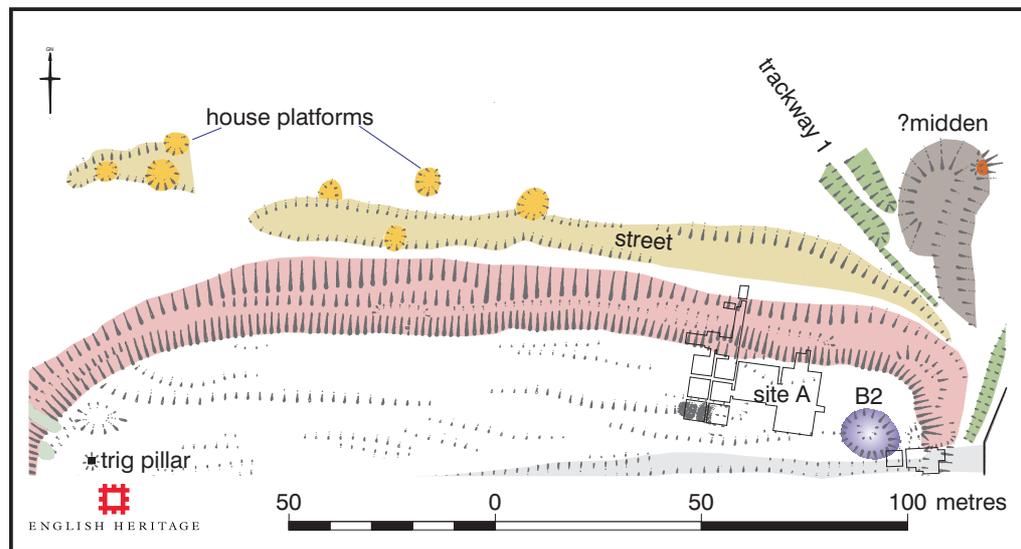


Figure 13
The northern flank
of the hillfort,
showing the
settlement
comprising house
platforms along
either side of a
street

Some 60m north of the entrance, a large mound measures 30.5m by 20.3m by 1.0m high, and tails away towards the south. It is possible that this mound is a natural feature, possibly a hard chalk outcrop which has weathered more slowly than the surrounding material though the possibility that it is the remains of a **midden** or similar feature should not be ruled out. The function of middens in prehistoric sites is undergoing new thinking, and it seems likely that they performed a more significant role than simple rubbish dumps. In fact middens may have served as status indicators: the larger the midden the



more wealthy and important the group (David McOmish, pers comm). The placing of such a feature immediately outside the entrance to the hillfort serves two purposes - waste is removed from the immediate area, and the impressively large mound is visible to all entering the hillfort. A similar association between hillfort entrances and large mounds is found elsewhere at Uffington (Wiltshire) and Danebury (Hampshire), though the interpretation of these mounds as middens is as yet a cautious one. It has also been suggested that the mound may form part of an outer defence, constraining trackway 1 (see below) so that it passed between the mound and the hillfort ramparts (Gary Marshall, pers comm).

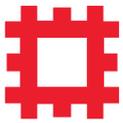
Set into the mound on its north-east side is a small circular **platform** measuring 1.7m in diameter with a large apron-shaped earthwork on the downslope side. The platform is very well defined and appears to be relatively recent. Given the good condition of the platform and its location immediately above the main road, it is possible that it represents Second World War activity, although there are no similar examples in this area, and there is no trace of the feature on aerial photographs dated January 1946 (NMR: 106G/UK/113/3073-4).

Two parallel ditches, on average 2.8m wide by 0.4m deep, run up the hill in a south-easterly direction, terminating at the possible midden (Figure 13). The ditches seem to mark the line of a **trackway (1)** which once headed directly towards the entrance of the hillfort. Wainwright noted it and suggested that it was not prehistoric, but more likely a medieval version of an earlier route (Wainwright 1988, 7). It may be associated with strip fields shown on a probable early 19th century plan of the parish, though it is not shown on any other early mapping; it is visible on aerial photographs dated 1946 (BRO: Ma/116/5R; NMR: 106G/UK/113/3073-4). There is slight evidence that the trackway continued past the top of the midden.

Immediately outside the main east entrance of the hillfort, a 1.6m wide by 0.8m deep **trackway (2)** runs down the hill along the line of the fence. This is probably a relatively recent feature, not shown on any early mapping.

Barrows

Beyond the eastern perimeter of the hillfort at NGR SP 9620 1688 are the remains of a denuded round barrow (Figures 10 & 12, **B1**). It is a circular mound, measuring 12.0m in diameter and surviving to a height of 0.5m, with traces of an external ditch, 0.7m wide by 0.1m deep. A shallow pit in the centre of the mound measures 2.3m in diameter by 0.1m deep and may indicate an attempt to excavate or rob the barrow. This is a classic bowl barrow. It is interesting that although denuded, there are no obvious signs that the barrow was disturbed because of its location immediately outside the main entrance to the hillfort. Either those occupying the hillfort respected the barrow, or the hillfort was reached via tracks from the north and/or south rather than along the line of the ridge from Gallows Hill.



Immediately inside the entrance to the hillfort at NGR SP 9615 1688 is a mound, measuring 7.2m by 5.9m by 0.9m high which may have been slightly disturbed by the Ridgeway footpath. This appears to be a denuded barrow (Figures 10 & 12, **B2**), with traces of a robbing mound in the centre of the top.

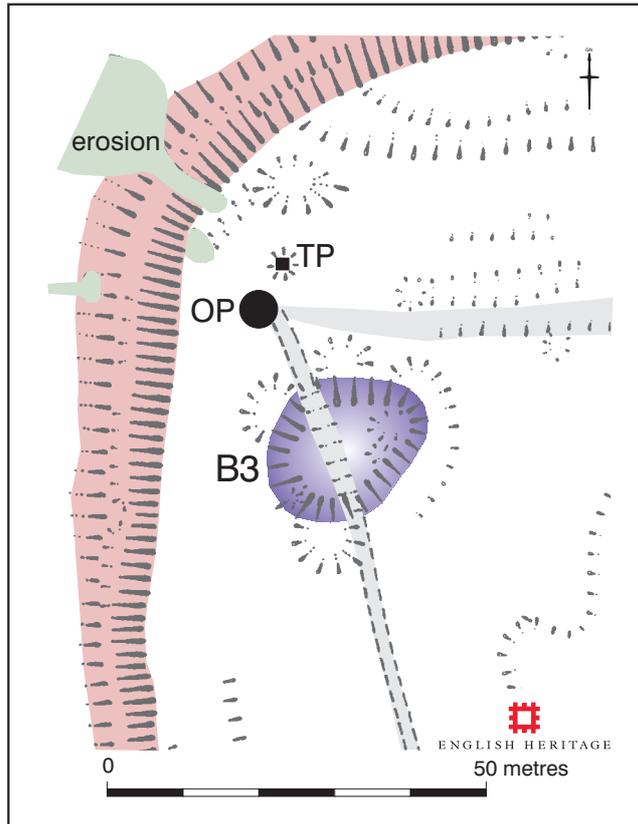


Figure 14
The north-western corner of the hillfort, showing barrow 3. Note the way the footpath crosses the barrow in its route to the observation point and trig pillar

Towards the north-western corner of the hillfort, at NGR SP 9597 1685 are the remains of a heavily eroded but substantial round barrow (Figures 10, 14 & 15, **B3**). It is located at the highest point of the hill, and the subsequent siting of both an Ordnance Survey trig pillar and a more recent observation point have contributed to its erosion. The barrow comprises an irregularly shaped mound, 12.2m by 9.1m by 1.6m high, with a narrow groove across it, 1.7m wide by 0.2m deep, caused by walkers, the latter obliterating any traces there might have been of an early excavation. Four scoop-like hollows appear to form a segmented ditch around the perimeter of the mound, averaging 2.7m wide by 0.1m

deep. The barrow does not have the typical robber hole in its centre, but there are several areas of what look like small-scale digging. This mound may also mark the site of the fire beacon (VCH 1905, 379; Wainwright 1988, 2). The barrow has been substantially restored (Gary Marshall, pers comm).

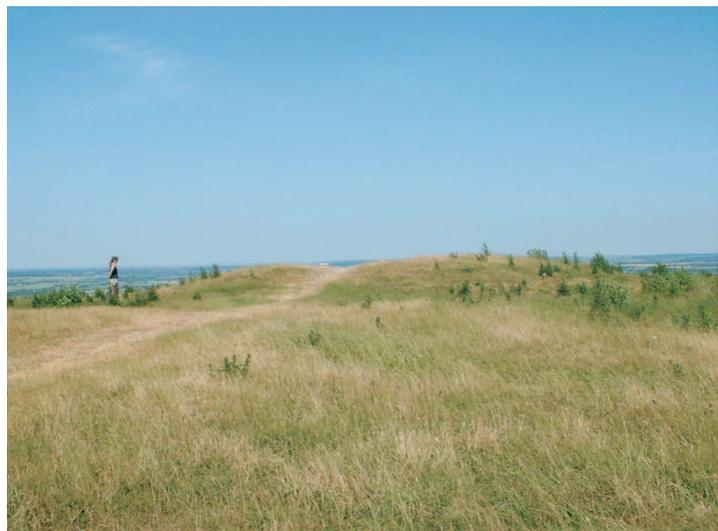


Figure 15
Barrow 3 from the southeast. Although the footpath has caused substantial erosion, the barrow survives remarkably well as can be seen in this photograph



4. DISCUSSION

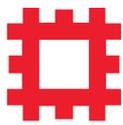
Some general points

The Chiltern escarpment formed an important part of the later prehistoric landscape, acting as a focus for settlement, agriculture and ceremony. During the Late Bronze Age society was evidently in flux, and even now the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age is poorly studied and little understood. The transition, now widely regarded as being between 850 and 700BC, is marked by a number of indicators including the cessation of bronze hoarding, the appearance of metalwork in domestic contexts, a change in the manufacture and use of ceramics to include storage bowls and jars, and the move away from the construction of large communal ceremonial monuments to that of hillforts and linear earthworks (Bryant 1994, 50).

The function of these early hillforts is obscure but it is likely that they performed a range of functions, including socio-economic, security, defence, prestige and ritual.

Excavated hillforts often demonstrate a lack of evidence for consistent occupation, possibly indicating sporadic use, and the replacement of structures at sites such as Winklebury I (Hampshire) indicates reuse. On the basis of this evidence it has been suggested that hillforts were communally built structures related to seasonal activity during the farming year and they may also have served as tribal and territorial boundaries and markers (Cunliffe 1991, 347-8; Bryant 1995, 23). It has been suggested that there is some correlation between hillforts and settlement (Bryant 1995, 25), but the distribution of these monuments does not appear to bear this out (Figure 3). However, such broad-based conclusions require more evidence than is currently available.

The presence of a box-type rampart at Ivinghoe Beacon is indicative of a new style of timber strengthening, which has come to be known after the site. It consists of a simple box rampart which appears to pre-date the conventional beginnings of the Iron Age, and has parallels in Western European Urnfield cultures as well as other sites in the vicinity, including Ravensburgh Castle (Hertfordshire), Maiden Bower (Bedfordshire) and Wilbury Hill (Hertfordshire) (Cunliffe 1991, 347-8; Bryant 1995, 24). It is interesting to note that these sites all lie towards the eastern end of the Chiltern ridge, all overlook the Icknield Way, all are closely associated with barrows and some have Iron Age settlement close by (Figure 3). Perhaps this is indicative of a local trend. The direct association between hillforts and barrows is continued throughout the Chiltern escarpment, adding weight to the ritual/ceremonial interpretation for these sites.



The traditional division between ceremonial enclosures and hillforts is no longer always clear. Recent excavation of hillforts has identified a noticeable concentration of ceremonial and ritual rubbish in pits, leading to the conclusion that these monuments, far from being exclusively defended settlements, served an important ceremonial/ritual function (Bryant 1994, 53). There is virtually no evidence for Iron Age burial in the Chilterns, but hillforts may have served as excarnation centres, thereby perpetuating the ridge-top theme of burial. However, while the presence of human skull fragments is interesting, human bone accounted for just 0.5% of the excavated bone assemblage, considered by the specialist to be normal for a prehistoric site (Westley in Cotton & Frere 1968, 252).

It is tempting to see the presence of the Icknield Way as being a major factor in the pattern of hillfort distribution in the Chilterns, but this would be spurious. However, it was an important part of the landscape and, along with other factors such as topography, soil, tribal territory and rivers, was a determining factor in the development of the physical landscape.

“...instead of seeing [prehistoric trackways] as the main or perhaps the only lines of prehistoric communication, we should look at them as being only one part of a highly complicated pattern of routes which stretched into every corner of Britain...” (Taylor 1979, 38-9).

The lack of evidence gleaned from the magnetometry survey at Ivinghoe Beacon may be the result of thin soil over chalk rubble. Alternatively, it could point to non-intensive, perhaps sporadic occupation of the site. None of the features picked up during the geophysical survey were identified on the ground during the earthwork survey. It is interesting to note that there is a lack of correlation between Cotton & Frere’s site A and the trenches identified by Gover; while it is tempting to attribute the error to the excavators given the lack of correlation between their sites B and E to the earthwork survey, site A was in its correct position.

Linear Neolithic monuments are generally divided into two groups according to their length: those over 150m are classified as cursus’, while the shorter examples are classified as long mortuary enclosures (Harding & Barclay 1999, 1). If the interpretation of the linear feature on Ivinghoe Beacon as a cursus - or more likely given its size, a long mortuary enclosure - is to be believed, it indicates a continuation of the use of the site as a ceremonial point in the landscape from the Neolithic through to the Late Bronze Age/Iron Age. The presence of long barrows along the eastern part of the Chiltern escarpment confirms the importance of the area during the Neolithic (Figure 3), and the discovery of another possible example at Cheddington hillfort provides some context for the reuse of



the same points in the landscape during the Neolithic and the late Bronze Age/Iron Age (Gover 2000, 6).

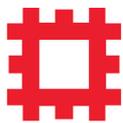
Ivinghoe Beacon hillfort

It is possible that activity at Ivinghoe Beacon began as early as the Neolithic, with the construction of a cursus monument or long mortuary enclosure on the top of the ridge, though this interpretation should be treated with caution especially in the absence of any finds of this date. Late Neolithic or early Bronze Age presence is attested to by the location of at least five round barrows in or around the hillfort, confirming the ritual importance of this location. If Gover's interpretation of the two ring-ditch features is correct (and we must be cautious here, given the excavated evidence for circular non-funerary structures and the fact that Cotton and Frere did not find any of the features shown on the geophysical survey), there are a total of at least nine barrows along the ridge between Gallows Hill and the point at which Beacon Road crosses the ridge. This constitutes a substantial barrow cemetery, and may well have affected the pattern of land use for some time on Ivinghoe Beacon.

The dating of the hillfort is not secure. Late Bronze Age activity is certain, as attested to by the numerous bronze pieces of that date discovered during Cotton and Frere's excavations, as well as the complete Wilburton sword, dated to *c*1150-950BC. The context for the metalwork, which was probably scattered by later ploughing, is not particularly useful except that it did not form part of a hoard and was more likely to be part of a background domestic assemblage (Cotton & Frere 1968, 200-3). The date is confirmed by much of the pottery, which has been recently placed firmly within the same period (Marshall 2000, 7). Certain evidence for Iron Age activity, by contrast, is scarce.

The box rampart at Ivinghoe, as well as similar ones elsewhere in the Chilterns, was thought to be indicative of the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age transition, forming a group of early hillforts. However, the interpretation of the rampart at Ivinghoe has been called into question, and it has been suggested that the post-holes, and by extrapolation, the dating evidence, actually represent pre-hillfort settlement (Green 1981, 2). This means that the hillfort itself could be pushed forward into the Iron Age proper. It would be tempting to use the lack of evidence for an inner bank as support for this, but since it is likely that the interior of the hillfort was heavily ploughed, this argument is spurious.

Regardless of date, the form of the hillfort is worthy of note. The slightness of the ramparts today is deceptive, and in fact the main rampart is at least 2.0m high in places; it is certainly visible for some distance around, and would have been even more so when the ramparts survived to their full height. Excavation also demonstrated that the main ditch was substantial, measuring 3.1m wide by 2.2m deep on the north side of the hillfort, and



that a second outer ditch was present on the south side. The question of revetment on the main rampart is unresolved, but it seems likely that there was at least a palisade, as attested to by the ditches identified by Gover (Gover 2000). The lack of structural evidence around the entrance, however, belies the interpretation of Ivinghoe Beacon as an apparently strong defensive fort. It is more probable that the importance of the site was in being seen and providing a sense of place, rather than in withstanding attack. As such, the term ‘hillfort’ should be used with caution.

The evidence for ceremony on Ivinghoe Beacon throughout prehistory is tantalising. During the Neolithic a cursus or long mortuary enclosure may have been sited there, providing an early focus for activity. The concentration of barrows indicates that it was a significant funerary centre during the Neolithic/Bronze Age (Figure 16). The unusual nature of the hillfort may extend a ritual function into the early Iron Age, and if the four-post structures can be interpreted as excarnation platforms, the funerary importance of Ivinghoe Beacon throughout prehistory is confirmed.

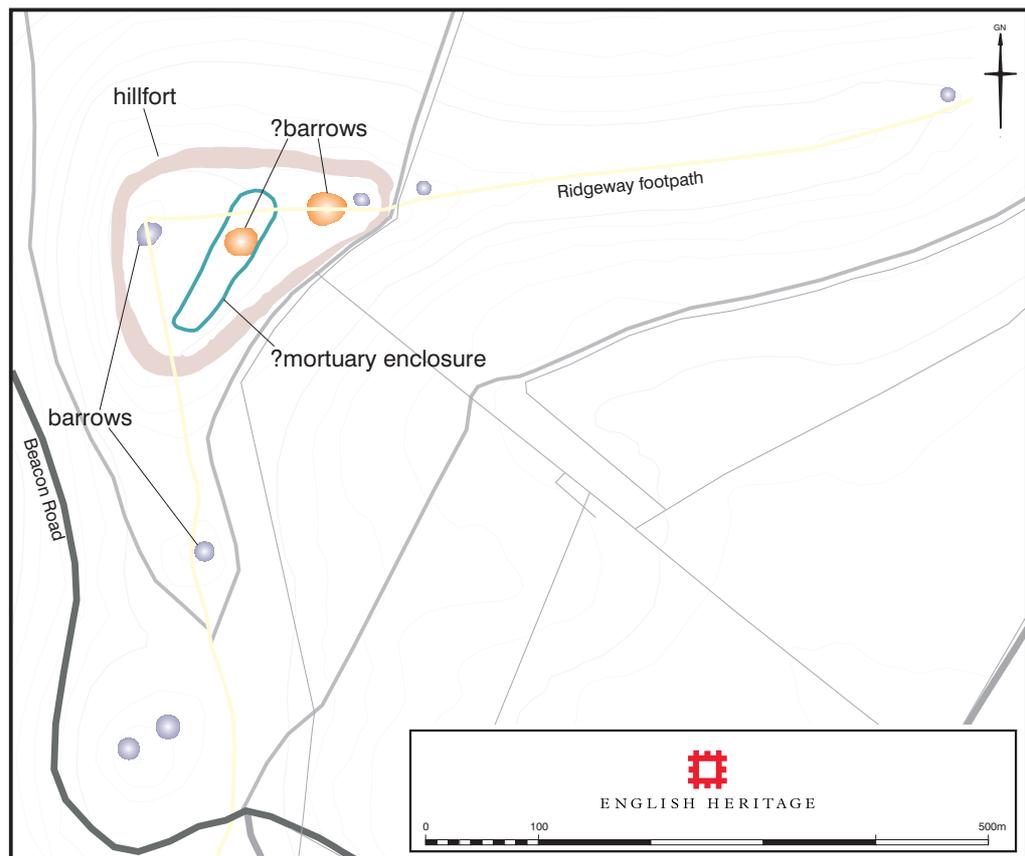


Figure 16
The possible ritual landscape around Ivinghoe Beacon, with a Neolithic long mortuary enclosure, Bronze Age barrows and the Iron Age hillfort

However, the evidence for settlement cannot be ignored. The pottery assemblage forms a cohesive Late Bronze Age group balanced between fine and coarse wares. The



metalwork does not form part of a hoard, and although there are some fine pieces notably the Wilburton sword discovered during 2000, the presence of ingot metal suggests that bronze working took place on site. Loom weights and quern fragments are both settlement indicators. The bone assemblage is dominated by cattle, sheep and pig, and in the main thought to represent the remains of meals. A number of fragments of human bone were collected but these were not considered to be statistically significant. In support, the presence of what is almost certainly late prehistoric settlement on the slopes below the hillfort is crucial. No stratigraphic relationship exists between the settlement and the hillfort, and it is unfortunate that there was no such topographical evidence inside, but it is clear that settlement formed part of the pattern of prehistoric activity on Ivinghoe Beacon.

In 1935 a beacon was lit, and piles of bricks may be the remains of donation boxes which were situated on the hill. There was limited activity on the Beacon during the Second World War when Bren Guns were placed there (Gary Marshall, pers comm).

Like many prehistoric sites, it is clear that a single interpretation of activity is likely to fall far short of the truth. The only certainty is that Ivinghoe Beacon was a highly visible and important landmark and this led to its being utilised, probably for a whole host of functions, throughout prehistory.



5. SURVEY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The archaeological survey was carried out during November 2000 by Moraig Brown and David Field. Hard detail and most of the larger archaeological features were surveyed at a scale of 1:1000 using Trimble 4800 dual frequency, differential GPS surveying equipment. Further details were supplied using conventional graphical methods.

The report was researched and written by Moraig Brown, who also prepared the illustrations and assembled the final report, using AutoCAD, CorelDraw, CorelPaint and CorelVentura software. David McOmish, David Field and Paul Pattison commented upon an early draft of the report.

The site archive has been deposited in the National Monuments Record Centre, Great Western Village, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ (NMR references 346375 and 346378).

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6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the following people who assisted with various elements of the survey:

Gary Marshall, National Trust

John Gover



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Ma/116/1R *Plan of the upper part of the parish* Unsigned, but the style suggests Michael Russell; dated 1809; scale 1 inch = 3 chains

Ma/116/3R *Map of the parish with the hamlet of Ivinghoe Aston* Unsigned, but the style suggests the surveyor George Creed; dated c1800; scale 1 inch = 6 chains (also reference IR/92AQ)

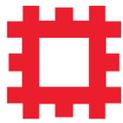
Ma/116/4R *Map of the parish of Ivinghoe* Surveyed by Thomas George; dated 1856; scale 1 inch = 3 chains

Ma/116/5R *Plan of the parish of Ivinghoe with the hamlet of Ivinghoe Aston* Unsigned; undated; scale 1 inch = 3 chains

Ma/116/6R *A plan of the hamlet of Ivinghoe Aston in the parish of Ivinghoe and County of Buckinghamshire* Unsigned; dated 1809; scale 1 inch = 3 chains

MaR/52R *Duke of Bridgewater's Estate in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire* Surveyed by G Grey of Lancaster; dated 1762; scale 10 inch = 1 mile

MaR/54R *A draught of the Estate of His Grace the Duke of Bridgewater, lying in the parish of Gt Gaddesden, Hertfordshire, and at St Margaretts in Ivinghoe* Surveyed by Ed Ashwell; dated 1729; scale 20 inch = 1 mile



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APPENDIX I

Concordance of NMR, SMR and SAM numbers for all archaeological features mentioned in the report

	NMR	SMR	SAM	NGR
Hillfort	346375	151510	19067	SP 960 168
Barrow outside hillfort entrance	346378	151503	19071	SP 9620 1688
Barrow inside hillfort entrance	346378	-	19067	SP 9615 1688
Barrow at NW corner of hillfort	346378	151504	19067	SP 9597 1685
Barrow on N knoll S of hillfort	346378	151505	-	SP 9601 1657
Barrow on S knoll S of hillfort (E)	346378	151507	19069	SP 9598 1640
Barrow on S knoll S of hillfort (W)	346378	151508	19068	SP 9596 1638