



ENGLISH HERITAGE
DRF 2

Library Copy

Archaeological Investigation Report Series
AI/30/2002

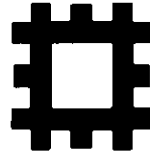
Plainsfield Camp,
Over Stowey,
Somerset

Elaine Jamieson

DRF 1

SURVEY REPORT

Archaeological Investigation Report Series
AI/30/2002



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Plainsfield Camp, Over Stowey, Somerset
An archaeological survey by English Heritage

County:	Somerset
District:	Sedgemoor
Parish:	Over Stowey
OS map no:	ST 13 NE
NGR:	ST 184 362
SAM no:	24004
NMR no:	ST 13 NE 17
SMR no:	11128
Surveyed:	May 2002
Report by:	Elaine Jamieson
Surveyors:	E. Jamieson, H. Riley, C. Bains
Illustrations:	Elaine Jamieson

© Copyright English Heritage

Applications for reproduction should be made to English Heritage, NMR Services (01793 414 600)

English Heritage, 5 Marlborough Court, Manaton Close, Matford, Exeter EX2 8PF

National Monuments Record Centre, Kemble Drive, Swindon, SN2 2GZ
Telephone: 01793 414 700

CONTENTS

Summary

INTRODUCTION

Location and Geology

HISTORICAL SOURCES

THE EARTHWORKS

The enclosure

The entrance

The pillow mound

Other features

DUSCUSSION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Figure List

- Fig. 1. General location plan.*
- Fig. 2. Plan showing location of Plainsfield Camp in the Quantock Forest.*
- Fig. 3. Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" scale map dated 1888.*
- Fig. 4. Plainsfield Camp: English Heritage 1:500 scale earthwork plan.*
- Fig. 5. Plainsfield Camp: section through the earthworks.*
- Fig. 6. Aerial photograph showing enclosure cleared of trees.*

Summary

Plainsfield Camp is a hill-slope enclosure of probable Iron Age date, situated west of Plainsfield Court Farm. It comprises a rampart and ditch, the latter surviving intermittently, and lies within a Forestry Commission plantation. There would appear to have been one original entrance in the northern corner. In the post-medieval period the enclosure was used as a warren and has a pillow mound at its centre. Extraction or trial pits, possibly for copper ore or stone, are also located on and within the ramparts. More recent features include slit trenches, probably dating from the Second World War.

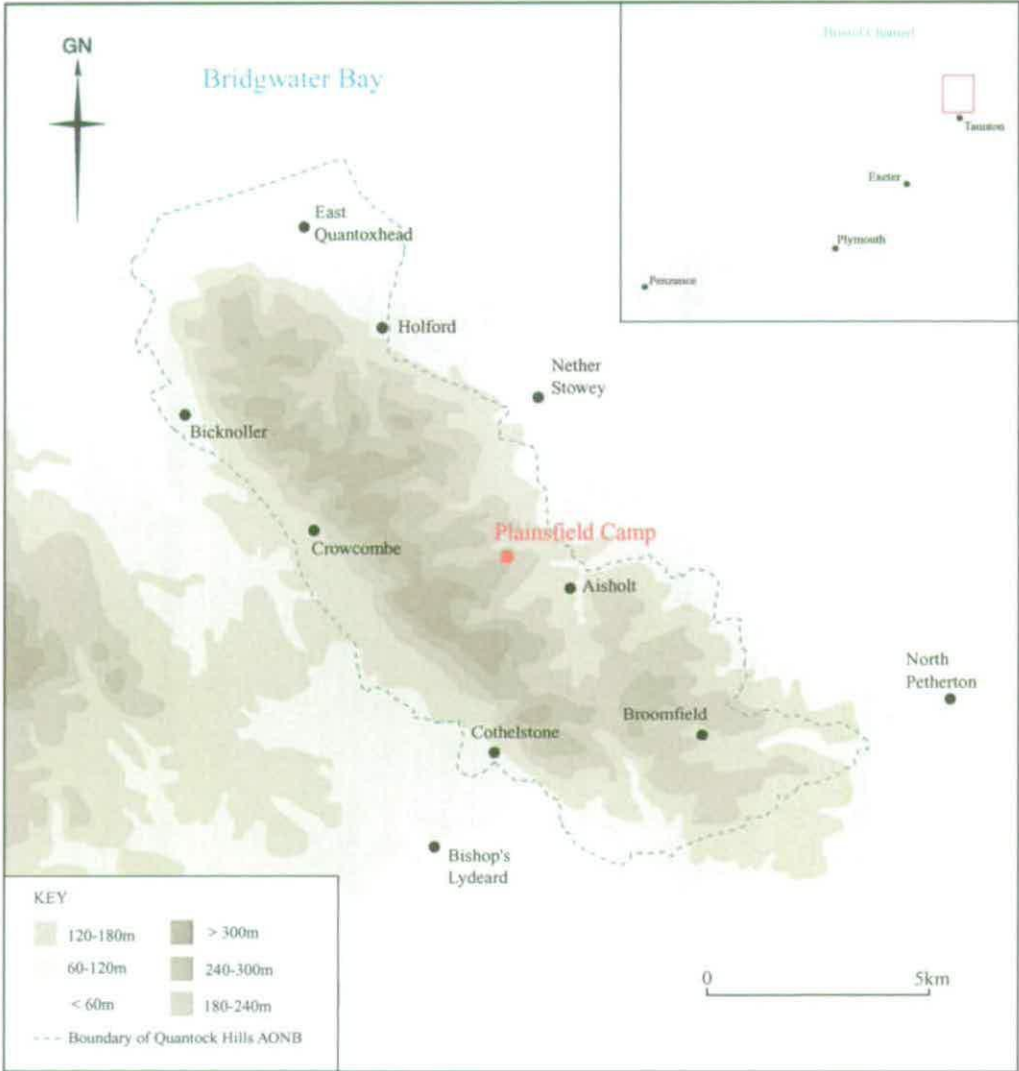


Fig. 1. General location plan.

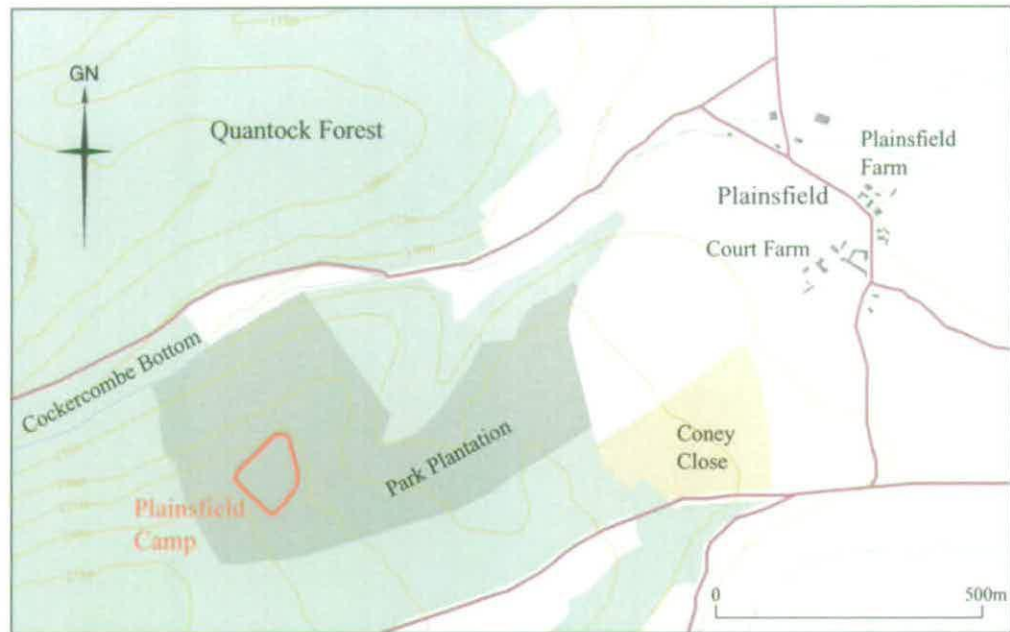
INTRODUCTION

The earthwork remains of Plainsfield Camp, also known as Cockercombe Camp (ST 13 NE 17), lie within coniferous woodland towards the eastern edge of the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (Fig. 1). The enclosure is of late prehistoric date, most probably Iron Age, and falls within a group of sites known as hill-slope enclosures. A large scale survey of the earthworks was undertaken by the Exeter office of English Heritage in May 2002, using a combination of Trimble GPS (Global Positioning System) equipment, a Leica 1610 total station theodolite and graphical survey methods. The survey was carried out as part of the English Heritage archaeological survey project of the Quantock Hills AONB.

Location and Geology

Plainsfield Camp lies on the north-eastern side of Aisholt Common $\approx 1.2\text{km}$ south-west of the hamlet of Plainsfield, at about 235m above OD (Fig. 2). The enclosure, centred on ST 1843 3621, sits on a small, north-east facing spur of land which falls steeply down to Cockercombe Bottom on the north. To the south-west the ground rises gently to an unnamed hill $\approx 300\text{m}$ above OD, with the hamlet of Aisholt lying to the south-east. Plainsfield Camp now lies within Park Plantation, an area of Forestry Commission woodland that forms part of the Quantock Forest. The interior of the enclosure has been actively cleared of trees and vegetation, though gorse, bracken and rhododendron bushes have begun to re-colonise the area. Prior to the planting of the woodland, there would have been extensive views across the Bristol Channel to the north, over the Somerset Levels to the east and southwards towards the vale of Taunton.

Fig. 2. Plan showing location of Plainsfield Camp in the Quantock Forest.



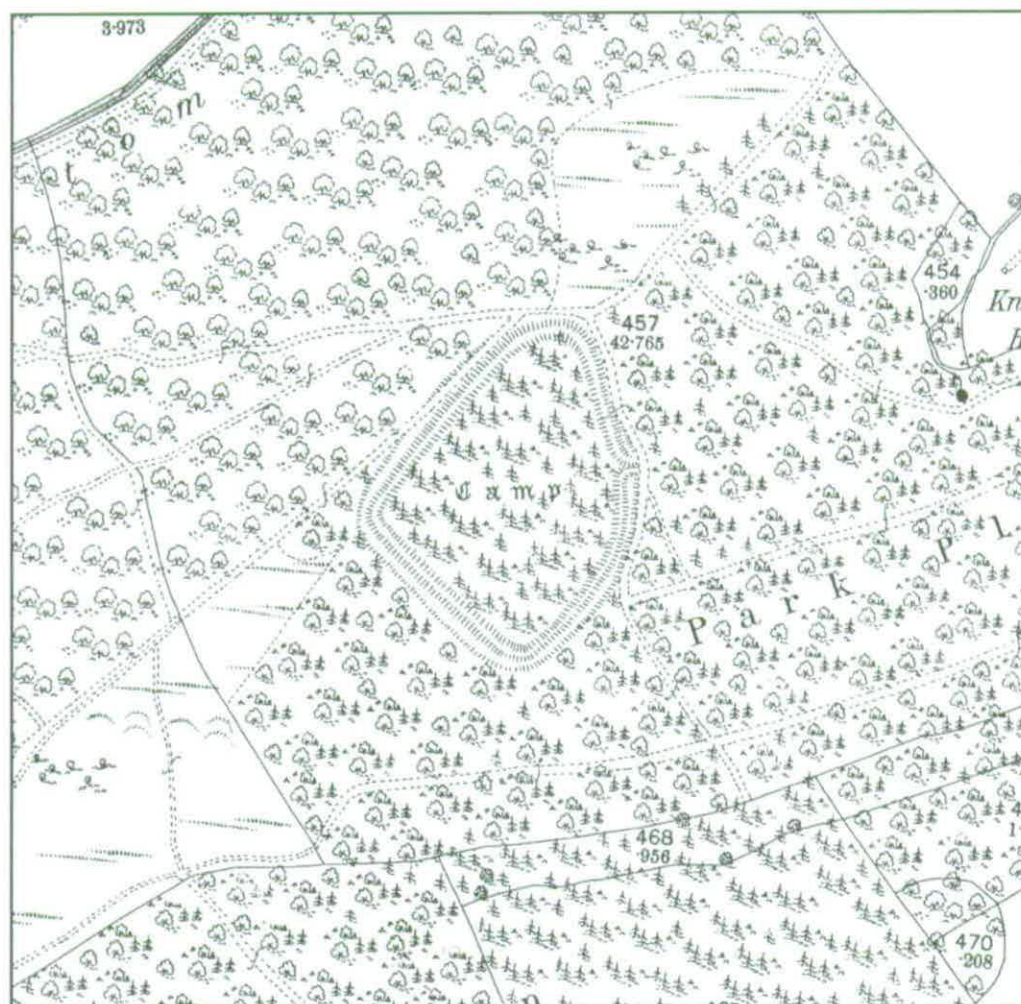
The spur is formed of the Devonian Ilfracombe Slates which make up the lower south and eastern edges of the main Quantocks ridge (British Geological Survey, 1:50 000 series, sheet 295).

HISTORICAL SOURCES

The earliest known depiction of Plainsfield Camp is on an estate map entitled '*A plot of Quantock belonging to the right honourable the Earle of Northumberland*', dating from 1609 (SRO, DD/SAS C/923). This map shows a large square enclosure named *Cocorcum Castle* lying within an area of open grazing land adjacent to *Cocorcum Wood*. The depiction of Plainsfield Camp on this map would suggest that the enclosure was a prominent feature in the landscape in the early 17th century.

The Over Stowey Tithe map of 1838 does not depict Plainsfield Camp but shows it was part of the Plainsfield Court Farm estate, lying within Plainsfield Park. The manor of Plainsfield is first mentioned in the Domesday Book and was held by Hugh d'Epaignes under Alfred, Lord of Stowey, in 1086. By the 16th century the manor buildings at Plainsfield Court are recorded as including a chapel house, pigeon house, and gatehouse (VCH 1985, 163). Plainsfield Camp is recorded as being under pasture at the time of the tithe award in 1838, though ground to the north and to the west, also recorded as being part of Plainsfield Park, was covered in wood and copse.

Fig. 3. Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" scale map dated 1888. © Crown Copyright.



The Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" scale map of 1888 shows Plainsfield Camp lying within an area of mixed woodland (Fig.3). The enclosure is depicted as having only conifers planted within it. The OS map also shows that many of the tracks and rides which exist today were in place by the late 19th century, including the tracks which pass the eastern and northern edges of the enclosure.

The site appears as Aisholt Camp, Park Plantation in *Ancient Earthworks & Camps of Somerset* (Burrow 1924). It is recorded as having been cleared of trees at this time and Burrow's illustration clearly shows the magnificent views from the enclosure looking over the Somerset Levels towards Bridgwater Bay (Burrow 1924, 112-113).

A watching brief was carried out at Plainsfield Camp in 1982 for the DoE during the construction of an access track for the Forestry Commission (below) (Burrow 1983, 16). The site was surveyed as a student project in 2001. No known archaeological excavations have taken place.

THE EARTHWORKS (Figs. 4 & 5)

The enclosure

The hill-slope enclosure is sub-rectangular in shape with rounded corners and encloses an area of c 1.2 hectares. The earthworks lie on gently sloping ground, rising c 20m from the north-east corner to the south-western edge. The enclosure comprises a rampart and external ditch, the latter now intermittent, with a maximum overall width of 14m. The rampart is composed of

stone and earth and is 7-10m in width, standing to a maximum of 3m on the down slope side. The rampart contains a large proportion of stone with surface stone visible along much of its length. The ditch is most prominent along the south-western side of the enclosure where it is 2m wide and 1.2m deep. The ditch and rampart along this side are visibly more substantial than in other parts of the circuit. This is not surprising, as it is the up-hill side of the enclosure and as such would be in need of stronger defences. The counterscarp of the ditch only survives on the southern edges of the enclosure where it stands a maximum of 1m high. Much of the ditch has been destroyed by modern forestry tracks.

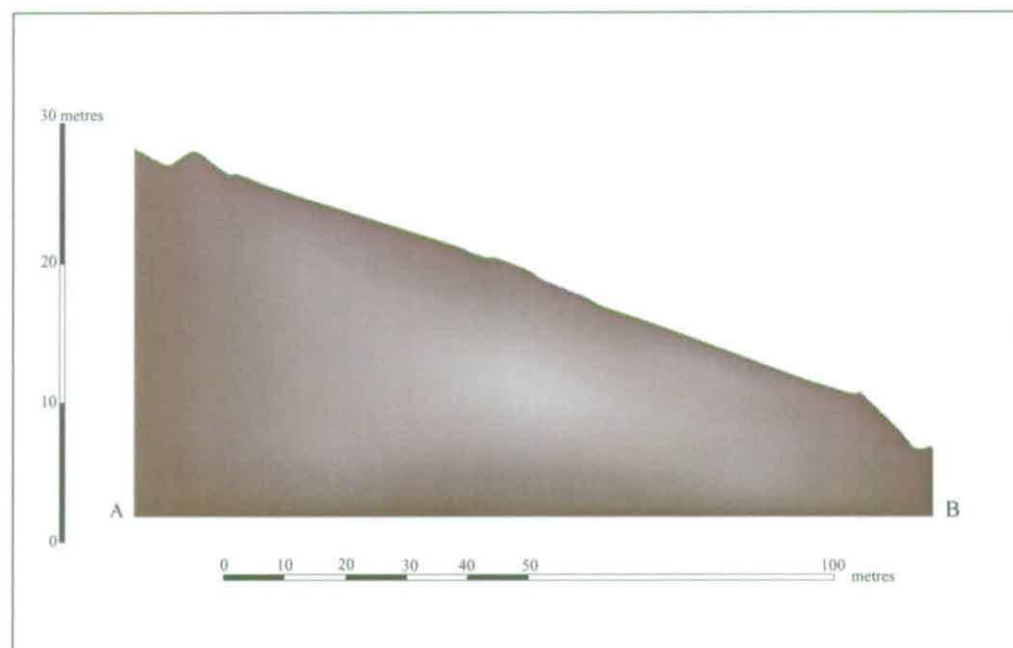


Fig. 5. Plainsfield Camp: section through the earthworks.

The entrances

There are three clear breaches in the rampart, two on the north-eastern side and one in the southern corner. The latter clearly cuts the rampart and may be related to recent work carried out by the Forestry Commission to create a walk, picnic site and viewpoint for the disabled. A watching brief was carried out during the work and revealed that the outer ditch had a flat base and was about 1m deep (Burrow 1983). A levelled stance was recorded during survey work just south of this breach and would appear to be the aforementioned viewpoint.

A second break in the rampart occurs in the northern corner of the enclosure. This breach does not appear on the OS 1st edition map but was recorded in 1965 when the site was re-surveyed at 1:2500 scale by the OS Archaeological Division. At this point in the circuit the rampart shows a distinct rise in height and seems to deliberately swing out to form a large rounded corner. This simple gap appears to be contemporary with the rest of the hill-slope enclosure and is possibly the original entrance. A section of ditch with a well-rounded terminal and small length of counterscarp bank survives to the north of the entrance.

A further breach also occurs near the middle of the rampart on the eastern side of the enclosure and has previously been recorded as the original entrance. It is recorded as the only entrance on the OS 1st edition map of 1888 and is depicted as having out-turned terminals. Recent survey work has revealed that the terminals do not appear to be out-turned as depicted by the OS. There is a large build-up of earth and stone at this point in the circuit, used to gain access to the enclosure, on which stand large tree stumps. The presence of these trees, and the build up of soil round them, may give the impression that the terminals swing out. Closer examination would suggest, however, that this is in fact not the case and the rampart terminals are straight. The

steepness of the access ramp, and the distinct change in the angle of its slope, would suggest that this maybe a later breach in the rampart and therefore not the original entrance. The position of this break, in the centre of the eastern rampart and directly opposite the pillow mound (see below), might also suggest that it is not an original feature. It is possible that the breach was created to gain access to the pillow mound at the centre of the enclosure. Alternatively, the enclosure may have had two entrances and the creation of the forest track could be responsible for the disturbed appearance of the breach, giving the impression that it is not an original feature.

A path enters the enclosure from the western corner and has resulted in some erosion of the rampart at this point but, as yet, has not caused substantial enough damage to be considered as a breach.

The Interior

Plainsfield Camp has until recently been under coniferous plantation. The trees have now been cleared from the interior of the enclosure but it remains littered with their decaying stumps (Fig. 6). Possibly as a result of years under a plantation, the interior contains little evidence of features that can be interpreted as contemporary with the enclosure. Slight ridging was recorded towards the eastern side of the enclosure and is just discernible over much of the area. The ridging runs approximately north-west/south-east and may represent the remains of plantation ridging.

A spread stony bank, c 0.4m high, was surveyed near the northern rampart. The curving bank is c 9m long and c 3.5m wide and sits on the crest of a natural hollow. At present it is uncertain what this feature represents but it may be contemporary with the enclosure and possibly defines an area of settlement. A more plausible explanation however is that the feature was associated with the pillow mound (below) and relates to the management of rabbits within the warren.

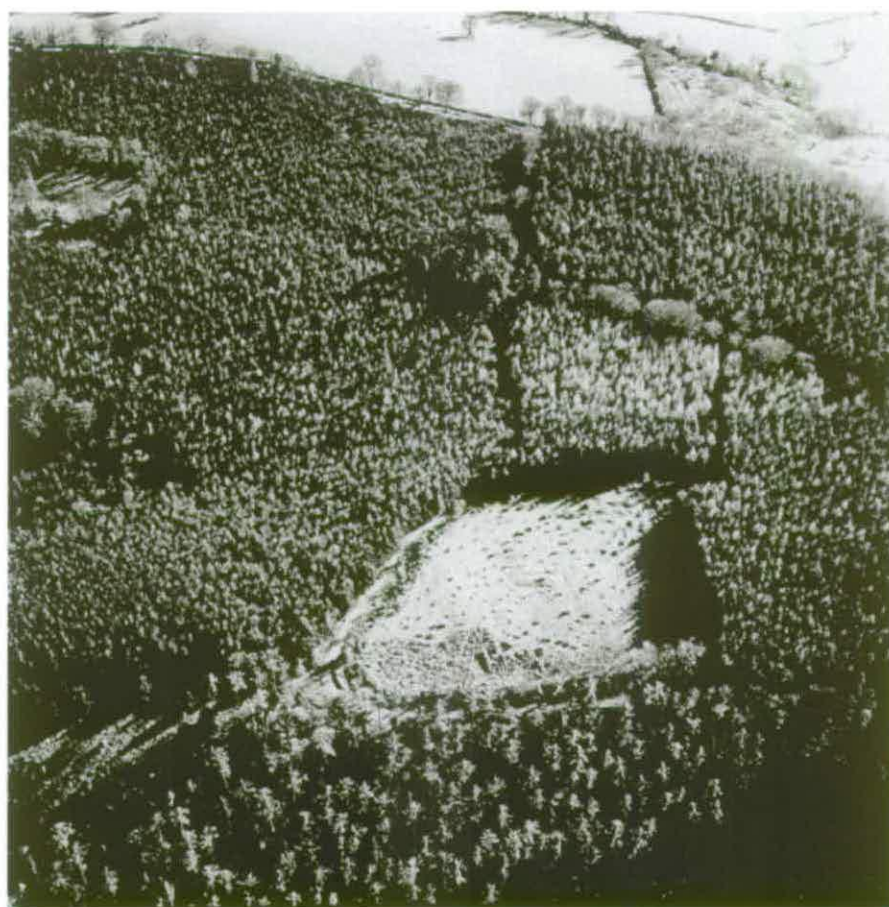


Fig. 6. Aerial photograph showing enclosure cleared of trees. NMR 15878/06. © Copyright English Heritage.

Two small sub-rectangular pits, c 0.6m deep, were also recorded in the interior and most probably represent small trial pits.

The pillow mound

A substantial linear mound, running north-east/south-west, lies at the centre of the enclosure and is a pillow mound (ST 13 NE 66). The grass-covered feature stands up to c 1m in height, c 19m in length and c 7m in width. A shallow ditch is visible on its up-hill side, surviving to a depth of c 0.7m. The mound has several slight hollows along its length that may represent the remains of collapsed burrows. There are several gorse and rhododendron bushes growing on the mound as well as the remains of a large tree stump. The slight earthwork remains of ridging can be seen crossing the mound.

The date of the Plainsfield Camp pillow mound is uncertain but the keeping of rabbits within warrens dates from the medieval period. Warrens most commonly took the form of small enclosures surrounded by earthworks and fencing, often located close to residences or in parks. It was not uncommon for warrens to be established within earlier earthworks, presumably as they provided a ready-made enclosure in which to house the warren (Williamson 1997, 96,99). Several examples of this have been recorded including Pilsdon Pen Hillfort, Dorset, in which five pillow mounds were identified within a multivallate Iron Age hillfort (Probert 1995). Rabbit warrens became a common feature of the post-medieval landscape and it is perhaps more likely that the pillow mound within Plainsfield Camp is early post-medieval in date. The tithe award of 1838 names a large enclosed field to the east of Plainsfield Camp as *Coney Close*, suggesting this area may also have been used for the exploitation of rabbits, though no earthwork evidence for this survives today. Several other pillow mounds have been recorded within the Quantock Hills AONB, for example on Cothelstone Hill.

Other features

Three pits of varying size have been cut into the rampart. The largest of these is located near the southern corner of the enclosure and takes the form of an oval hollow, c 9m long and c 4.5m wide, with an encircling bank of spoil. The pit survives to a depth of c 1.9m and is now partly obscured by dense vegetation. These features probably represent trial pits or extraction pits for copper ore or stone. Prospecting for ore within prehistoric sites is not uncommon and evidence for such activities has recently been identified within Dowsborough hill fort, 2km to the north-west (Riley 2002, 5). Alternatively, one or more of these pits may have been used as a source of material for the construction of the pillow mound.

Several slit trenches were recorded during survey work, three of which were cut into the base of the rampart. A fourth was located to the south west of the large breach in the eastern rampart. These features show that the enclosure was used as a training area by regular troops, or possibly the Home Guard, during the Second World War.

A sharply defined bank and hollow was recorded to the south of the breach in the eastern rampart. The bank, c 0.5m wide and c 0.3m high, can be seen to run up against the inner face of the rampart and displays a sharp right angled turn. The sub-rectangular hollow, c 0.4m deep, may represent the remains of a stone filled pit or possibly an excavation trench only partially back-filled.

DISCUSSION

Plainsfield Camp is now hidden within a dense coniferous plantation but up to the mid-19th century it must have been a prominent feature in the landscape. Its location is similar to that of the Trendle, a hill-slope enclosure located above Bicknoller which was recently surveyed by English Heritage (Newman 2002). Both these sites occupy similar locations, sitting on small

spur ends, and have extensive views out over the surrounding countryside. The purpose of hill-slope enclosures is unclear, it is assumed most were settlement or stock enclosures but few have been excavated therefore our knowledge of these sites is limited. As with the Trendle, no clear evidence for settlement was located within the ramparts of Plainsfield Camp, though tree planting may have destroyed any fragile settlement evidence. Comparable enclosures can be found across Exmoor, where over 40 such hill-slope enclosures have been identified as upstanding earthworks (Riley & Wilson-North, 2001). It is worthy of note that the two recently recorded sites on the Quantocks would appear to be greater in both size and strength than the large majority of similar sites on Exmoor. These differences may indicate that the hill-slope enclosures on the Quantock Hills possibly played a more symbolic roll than those on Exmoor. They may have been used as devices for conveying messages of power and status, their size and prominent location ensuring clear messages were sent out to the inhabitants of the surrounding area.

The hill-slope enclosure was utilised again in the post-medieval period as a warren for the exploitation of rabbits. As in the prehistoric period, the enclosure may also have had a symbolic function at this time. The keeping of deer, fish, pigeons and rabbits was a privilege reserved only for the ruling elite in the medieval and early post-medieval period. The structures and landscapes associated with these - parks, ponds, dovecotes, and warrens - may therefore be viewed as symbols of power and status (Williamson 1995, 94). The warren, sitting within its associated parkland, would have been clearly visible from the manor house at Plainsfield Court. Through conspicuous display, the warren may have been used to demonstrate that Plainsfield Court was a manorial residence and its owner a man of status.

Plainsfield Camp is a well-preserved example of this type of monument even though it has been under a plantation for many years. The rampart survives almost intact and several sections of the external ditch are also still evident. The enclosures later re-use as a warren also adds to the importance of the site.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Forestry Commission kindly allowed the survey to take place; Chris Bains helped with some of the fieldwork.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Burrow, E J 1924 *Ancient Earthworks & Camps of Somerset*. Cheltenham: Ed. J. Burrow & Co., Ltd.

Burrow, I 1983 Over Stowey, Cockercombe Castle. *Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society* 127, 16.

Geological Survey of Great Britain 1969. 1:50 000 series, sheet 295 (Taunton).

Newman, P 2002 The 'Trendle' hillslope Enclosure and the Bicknoller Cross-ridge Dyke, Bicknoller, Somerset. English Heritage survey report.

OS 1888 Ordnance Survey First Edition 25" County Series, Somerset.

Probert, S 1995 Pilsdon Pen Hillfort, Dorset. RCHME survey report.

Riley, H 2002 Dowsborough Camp, Holford, Somerset. English Heritage survey report.

Riley, H & Wilson-North, R 2001 *The Field Archaeology of Exmoor*. English Heritage.

Tithe Award 1838. Over Stowey, Somerset.

Williamson, T 1997. Fish, fur and feather: Man and nature in the post-medieval landscape, *in* Barker, K & Darvill, T (eds) *Making English Landscapes*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 92-117.

VCH 1985. *A History of the County of Somerset*, Vol 5.

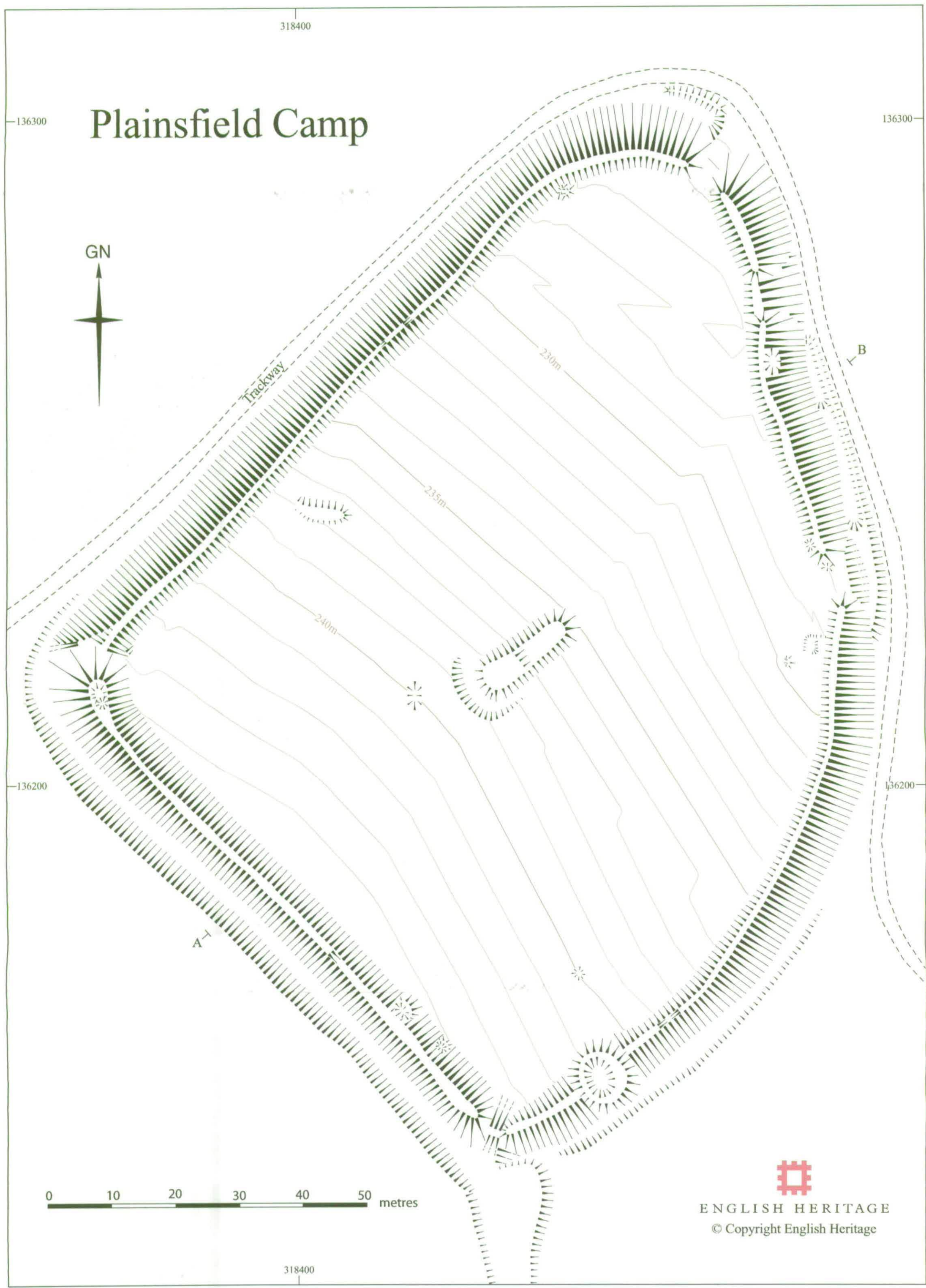


Fig. 4 Plainsfield Camp: English Heritage 1:500 scale earthwork plan.



ENGLISH HERITAGE

NATIONAL MONUMENTS RECORD

*The National Monuments Record
is the public archive of English Heritage.
It contains all the information in this report - and more:
original photographs, plans old and new,
the results of all field surveys, indexes
of archaeological sites and historical buildings,
and complete coverage of England in
air photography.*

World Wide Web: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk>

National Monuments Record enquires: telephone 01793 414600

National Monuments Record Centre, Great Western Village, Kemble Drive,
Swindon SN2 2GZ

