

**ROAD CASTLE, WINSFORD,
EXMOOR**

An archaeological survey by the Royal Commission on
the Historical Monuments of England

July 1998



ROAD CASTLE, WINSFORD, EXMOOR

An archaeological survey by the
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

County: Somerset
District: West Somerset
Parish: Winsford
OS Map No: SS 8637
NGR: SS 8629 3758
NMR No: SS 83 NE 5

Surveyed: R Wilson-North, H. Riley
Report by: R. Wilson-North
Illustrations: P Newman

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National Monuments Record Centre, Kemble Drive, Swindon, SN2 2GZ 01793 414700

SUMMARY

Road Castle is an Iron Age enclosure within the Exe Valley. This report describes the results of a survey of the site carried out by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) in 1998.

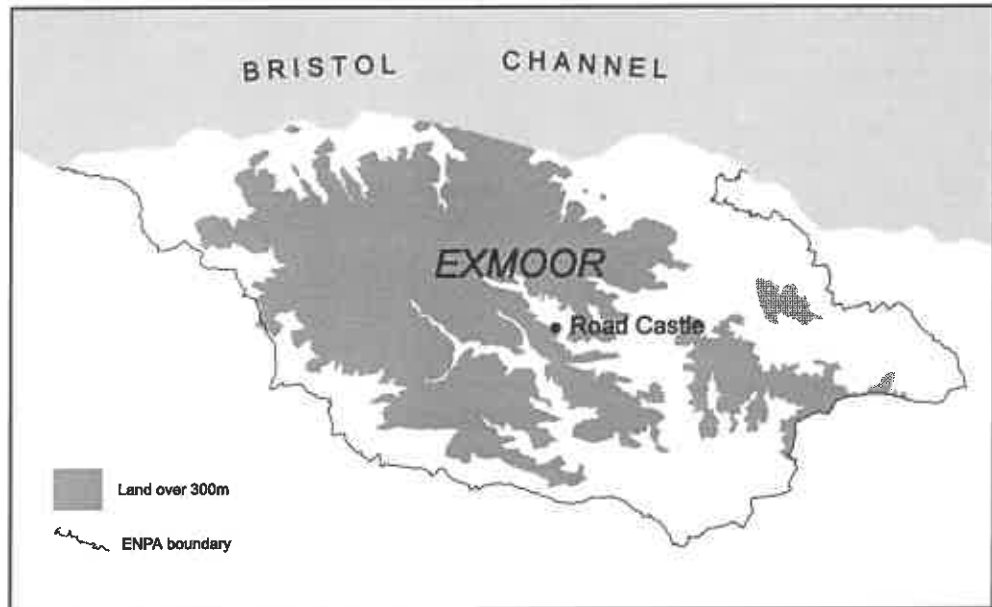


Fig. 1. Location

INTRODUCTION AND TOPOGRAPHY

Road Castle was surveyed at 1:500 scale in January 1998 as part of RCHME's archaeological survey of Exmoor. It is an almost square enclosure of late prehistoric (Iron Age) date. It occupies a spur end position, at 300 m above OD on the southern side of the Exe Valley. The spur is some 100 m lower than the upland expanse of Road Hill to the south-west from which it projects. The isolation of the site is less palpable today, as from it the landscape is largely enclosed fields. However, the remoteness of Road Hill and Room Hill was felt into the earliest years of this century when wild cats were alleged to roam its slopes (Bourne, 1992)

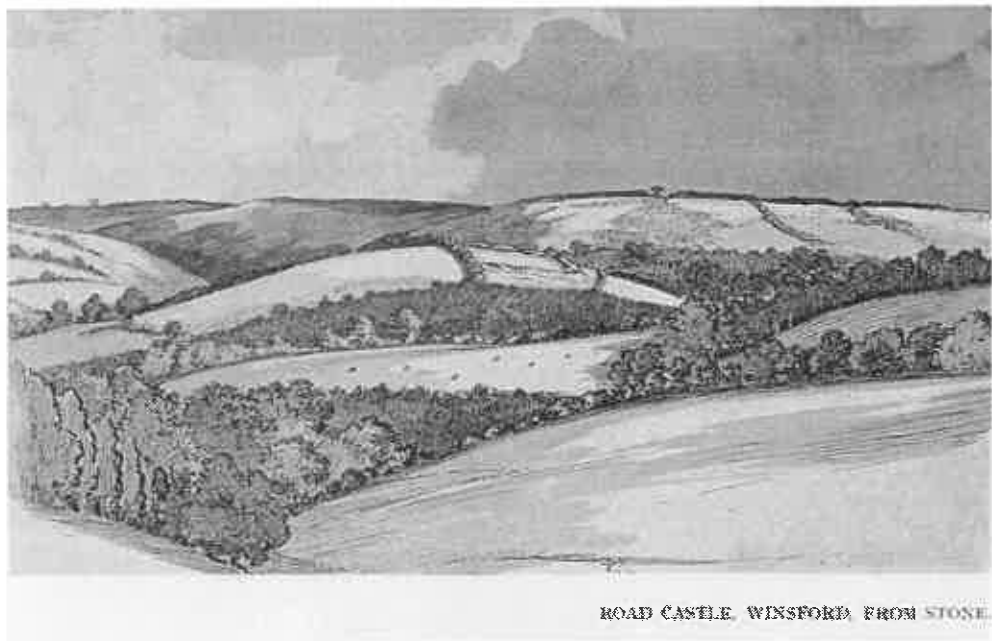
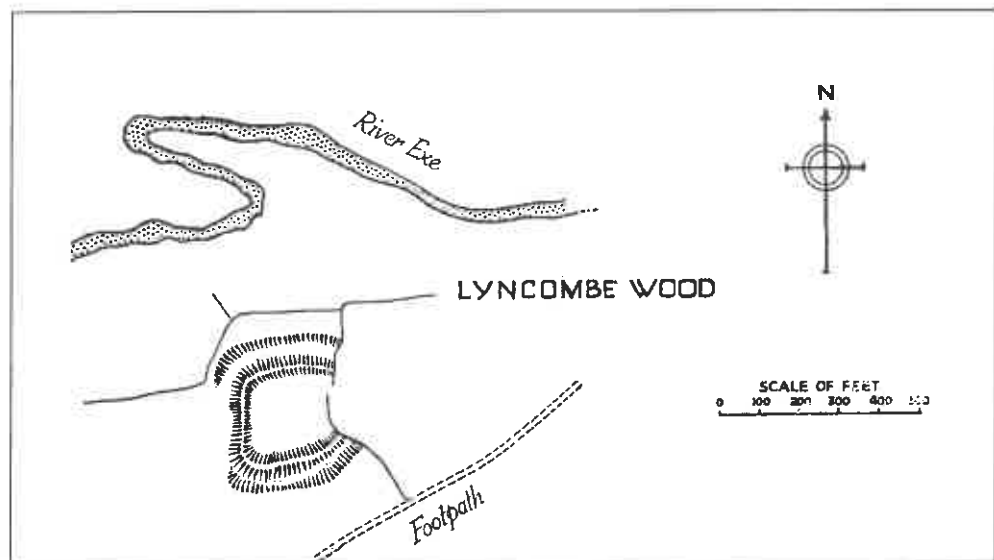


Fig. 2. Sketch view of Road Castle from Burrow 1924.

ROAD CASTLE, WINSFORD FROM STONE

Fig. 3. Plan of Road Castle from Burrow 1924.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest mention of the place name is in or about 1219. The reference occurs in one of the Perambulations of Exmoor Forest:

...by the course of the Great Eisse to la Rode, and from thence to Ernesburg..

(MacDermot 1973, 117)

The place name is also attached to a deserted farmstead lying 300 m to the south-west (Fig 4). This was presumably occupied in 1327 when 'John atte Rode' is referred to in the Lay Subsidy returns (Aston 1983, 101), but had deteriorated to 'Road Linhay' by 1889 (OS 1889).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORY

Road Castle is a well known monument, and is mentioned by Hadrian Allcroft (1908, 383), described by Page (VCH 1911, 504) and by E J Burrow (1924, 96) and I Burrow (1981, 258). There has been no excavation on the site nor have any surface finds been collected (Burrow 1981, 258).

The site belongs to Lyncombe Farm which is within the Exmoor National Park Authority's (ENPA) Farm Conservation Scheme. Recent management work has involved the erection of a stock proof fence around the site to prevent erosion (pers comm, Vryan Heal).

DESCRIPTION (FIG. 5)

The defences

Road Castle consists of an almost square enclosure measuring 57 m between its rampart tops. It is defined on the south, west and east by a sharp single bank 4 m high with external ditch 1.4 m deep. On the north side steep natural slopes fall to the River Exe below and the rampart is replaced by a sharp outward facing scarp, whilst the ditch is replaced by a berm 4 m wide. On the southern side there are traces of an external counterscarp bank (noted by Grinsell). On the north part of the eastern side a hedgebank occupies the course of the rampart, before veering off south-eastwards. Most earlier writers consider this to have destroyed the Iron Age rampart, but it is more likely that the rampart has been incorporated into the later hedgebank, and that elements of it are thus preserved. A spread external ditch 0.3 m deep is just visible to the east of the hedgebank.

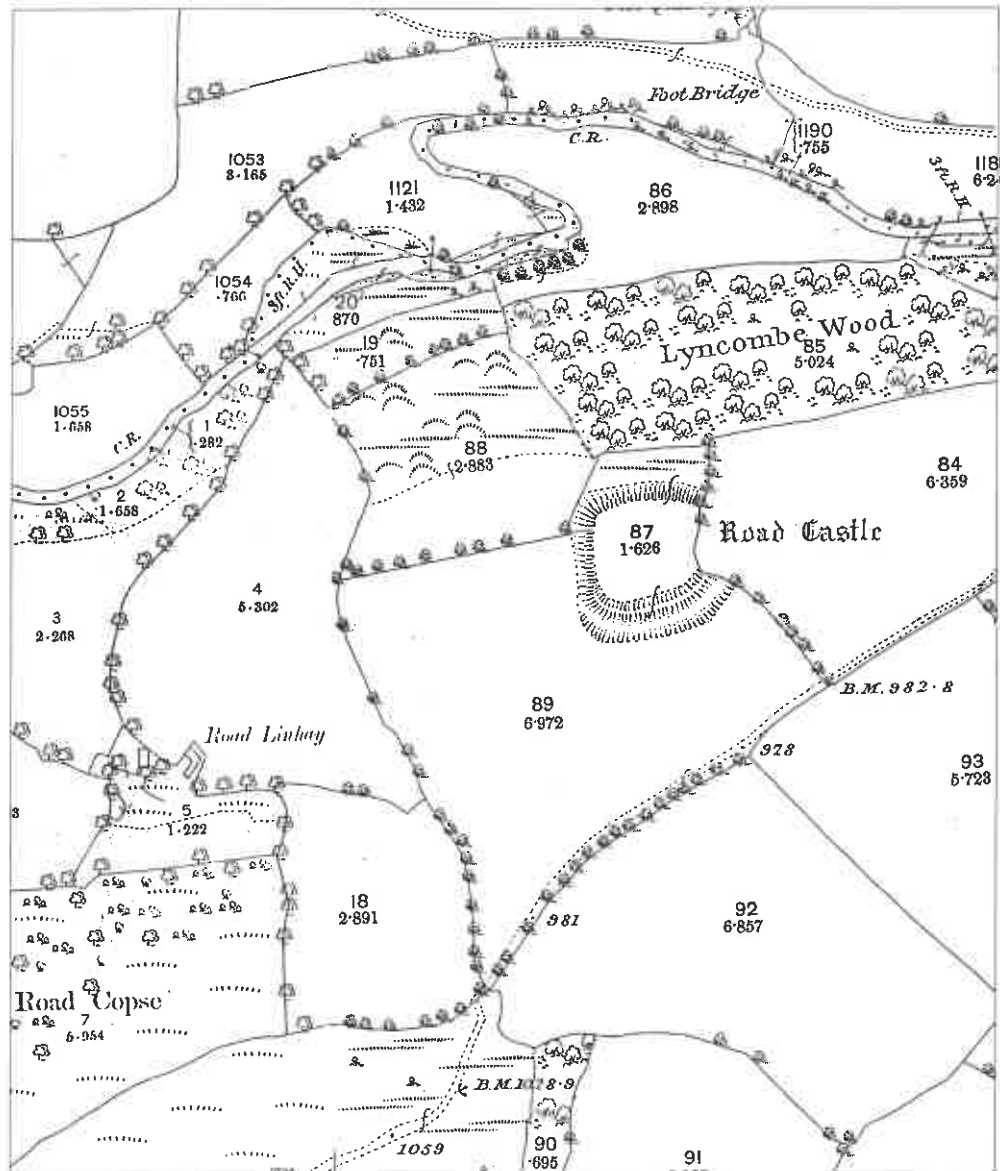


Fig. 4. OS 1st edition showing Road Castle and nearby Road Linhay.

The rampart appears to be composed largely of earth, but at one point on the western side a 3.6 m length of laid slatey stone (0.3 m high) may represent former rampart revetment. This would suggest a predominantly earthen bank with a stone revetment on its front face.

The entrance

Modern access into the enclosure is on the eastern side where a gate through the management fence gives access to an opening 3 m wide, defined by a good earthwork terminal on the south, and by the hedgebank on the north. It is most probable that this opening marks the original entrance.

The interior

The interior of the enclosure slopes very gently northwards and covers about 0.3 ha. It is featureless and appears to have been agriculturally improved.

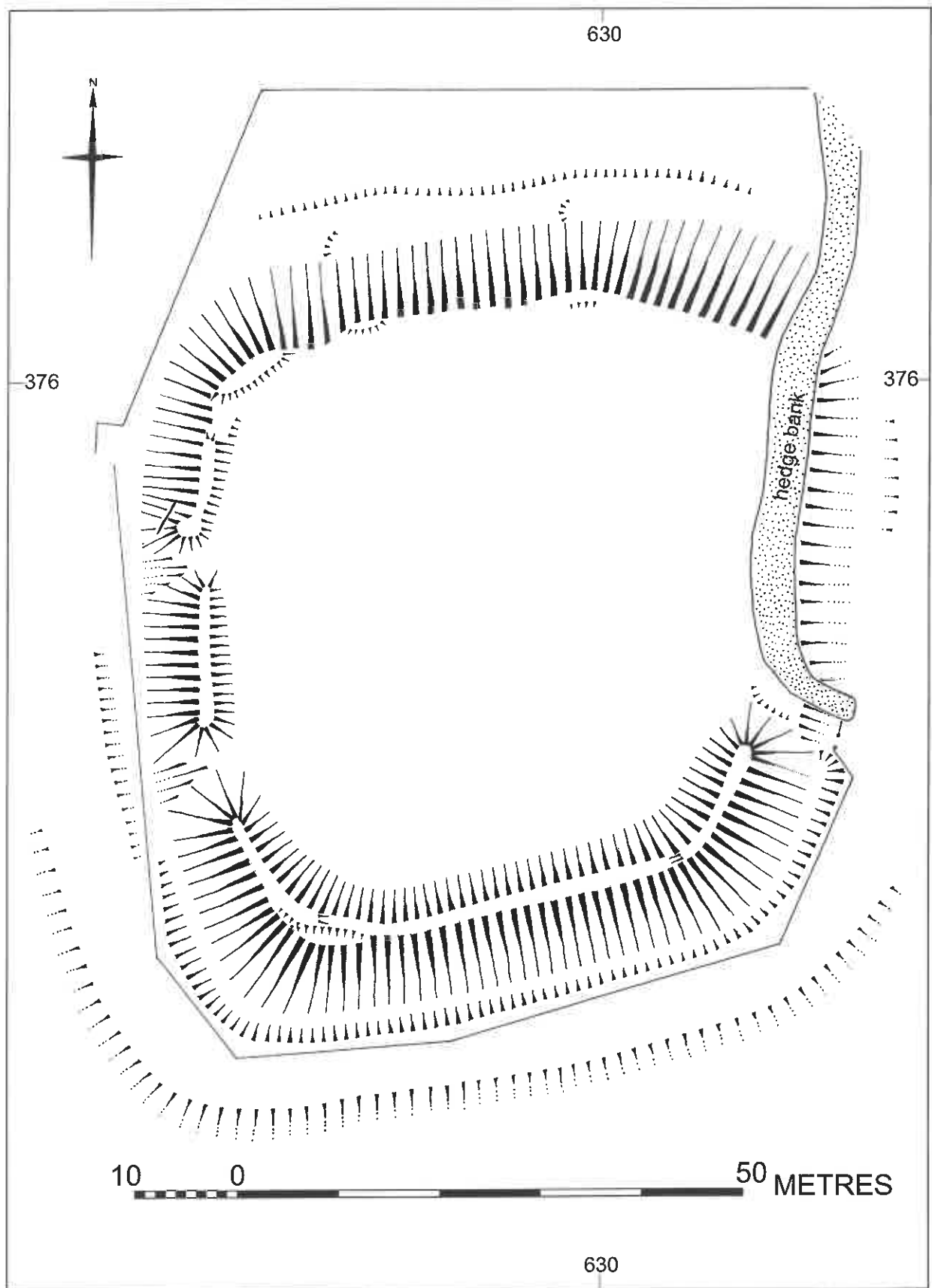


Fig. 5. RCHME 1:500 earthwork survey of Road Castle.

Fig. 6. Aerial photograph of Road Castle, NMR 15885/25 (RCHME Crown copyright)



Condition

The earthworks are on an impressive scale and are in reasonably good condition. There is evidence of previous erosion from two agencies. Firstly farm vehicle access has caused damage on the western side at three places. Secondly at a number of places on the rampart top are areas of erosion caused by livestock. No further damage is occurring.

CONCLUSIONS

Road Castle is an impressive example of a small well defended Iron Age enclosure. Its size is typical of other such sites on Exmoor, but its defences are more substantial than is usual. Its rectilinear shape is not unfamiliar; other such examples on the moor include Timbersombe (SS 94 SE 90) and Myrtleberry South (SS 74 NW 15).

Road Castle occupies a striking topographic position dominating the Exe Valley. There is a notable concentration of strongly defended enclosures along the major valleys like the Barle and Exe.

The proximity of the prehistoric enclosure to the deserted farmstead has been pointed out by Aston (1983, 73) and is of considerable interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Mr Webb the owner of Road Castle for allowing the survey to take place. The staff at SCRO, the Somerset Studies Library and Somerset SMR provided background information.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Road Castle was surveyed at 1:500 scale in January 1998. Both modern detail and archaeological features were surveyed with a Leica 1610 electronic theodolite. The survey stations were also recorded by Leica single frequency differential GPS (Global Positioning System). The electronic data was processed via Trimmap survey software. The survey data was located to Ordnance Survey National Grid using OS triangulation pillar co-ordinates.

Field completion was by normal graphical methods.

The survey archive has been deposited in the National Monuments Record: NMRC, Kemble Drive, Swindon, SN2 2GZ.

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APPENDIX 1

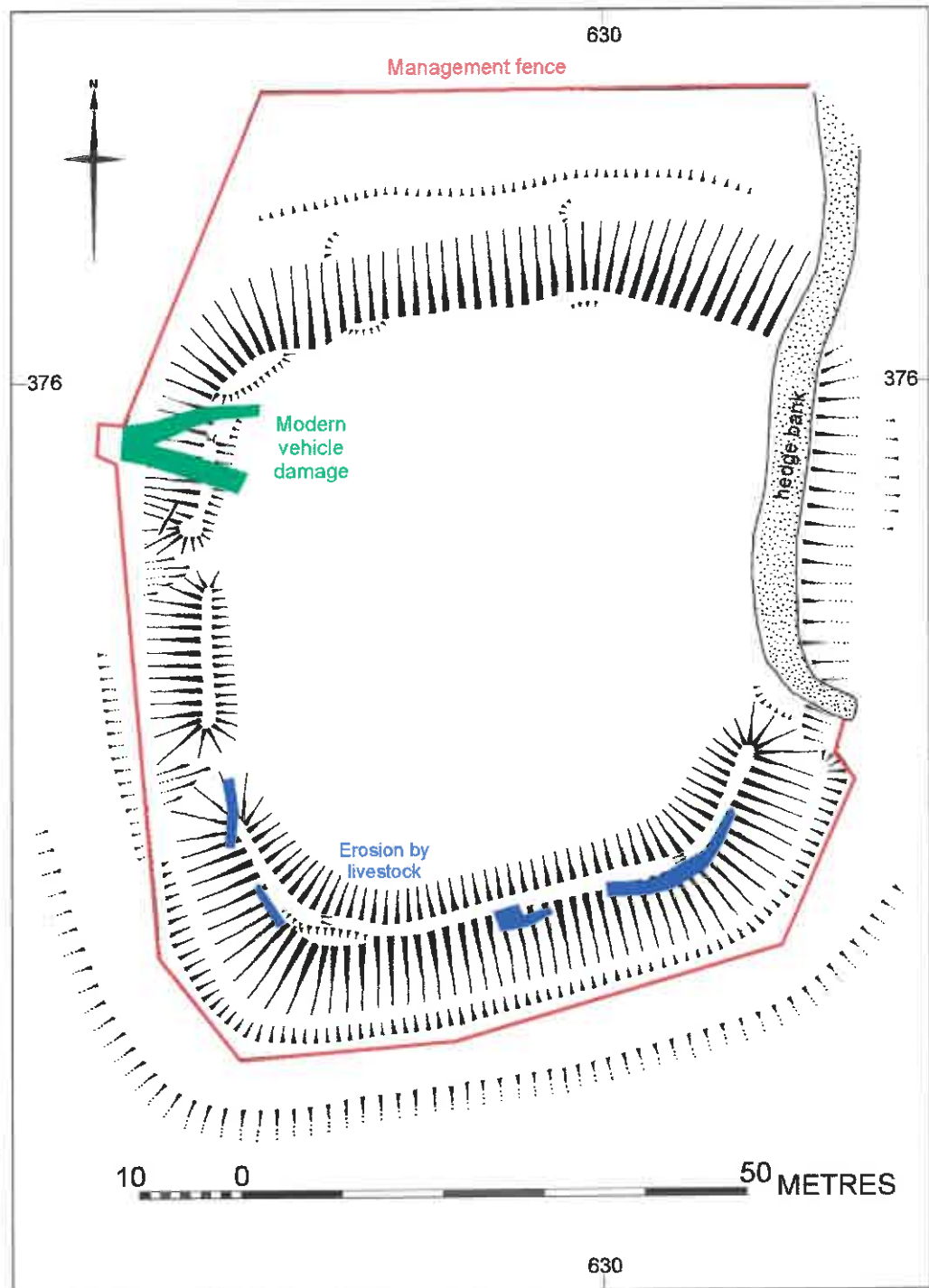


Fig. 7. RCHME 1:500 earthwork plan with additional management information