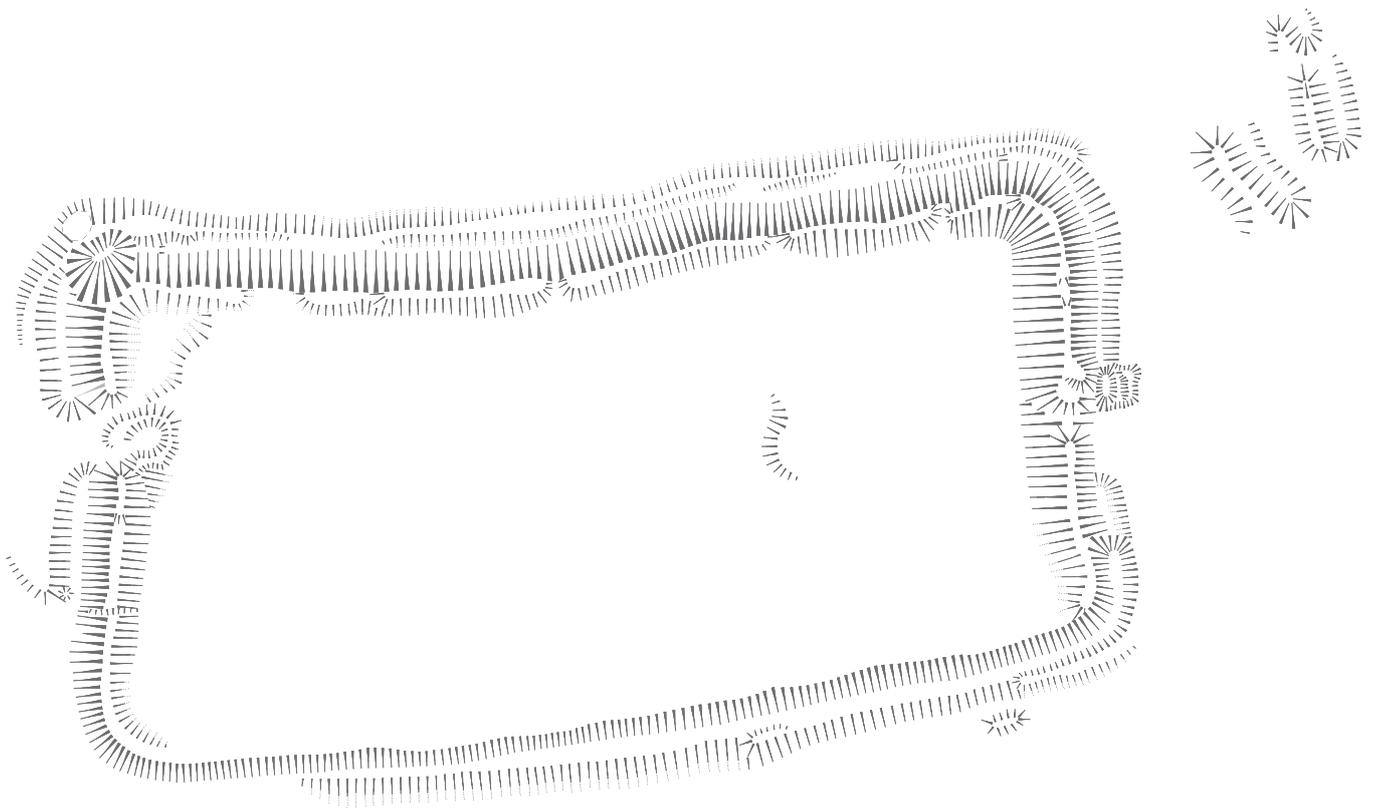


# Berry Castle, Huntshaw, North Devon

## An Earthwork Survey

October 2016



Southwest Landscape Investigations



*Dr Phil Newman MIFA, FSA*

# Berry Castle, Huntshaw, North Devon

SS 49503 22281

## An Earthwork Survey

October 2016

Devon HER No. MDV5627; SM No. 1016225

Survey on behalf of

**Devon County Council Historic Environment Service  
and Friends of Berry Castle**

by

Dr Phil Newman MCI(A), FSA  
Southwest Landscape Investigations

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## Context

Berry Castle is a hilltop enclosure, with likely origins in the first millennium BC. It occupies the western end of a conifer-covered spur of land, 1.3km to the southwest of the hamlet of Huntshaw, within the parish of the same name in North Devon. The nearest town is Great Torrington, 3km to the south (Figs 1 and 2).

The west-facing spur, now occupied by Huntshaw Wood, descends on three sides to meet minor tributaries of the River Torridge, which form the northern, southern and western limits of its slopes. The lower ground surrounding the spur, beyond the edges of the plantation, is currently farmed as a mixture of pasture and some cultivation.

Huntshaw Wood has been managed as woodland for several centuries, being depicted on the old series OS map of 1805 as well established and covering a similar area as today. A complete absence of field boundaries within the wood on large-scale OS maps provides a strong indication that this area has never been subject to enclosure and that its use as woodland rather than farmland has remote origins. Currently, the hilltop and slopes are populated with densely-planted commercial conifers, but also some mature deciduous areas on the south slope. However, at the time the enclosure was occupied, assuming less tree cover, it could have possessed impressive views towards the slopes of the Torridge estuary and much of the surrounding countryside to the west and north, with limited views to the south. The trees covering the remains of the enclosure were felled in 2015.

Huntshaw has comparatively few extant prehistoric landscape features within its boundaries, though a group of scheduled Bronze Age round barrows straddles the boundary with Torrington on Darracott Moor to the east (SM List No. 1013671). Berry Castle is the only surviving Iron Age settlement in Huntshaw and although other, nearby examples are known in the neighbouring parishes, these are reported as ploughed out and no longer extant (Alimo 2012, 13).

The parish of Huntshaw is first mentioned in Domesday in 1086 as one of several manors held in Devon by William Cheever (Thorn and Thorn 1985, 110b). The parish is made up of dispersed settlements, one of which, the hamlet surrounding Huntshaw Barton, was mentioned in Domesday Book and forms the hub of the parish where the church is also located. This building includes 13th-century elements in its current structure, though was heavily restored in 1862 (Cherry & Pevsner 1989, 498).

Huntshaw lies within the Carboniferous Bude Formation of sand stones, described by BGS as 'Grey thick-bedded, somewhat argillaceous and silty sandstones, in laterally discontinuous internally massive beds 1-5m thick and commonly amalgamated into units up to 10m thick.' (Internet source <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?pub=BF> [accessed 27-10-2016]). Where disturbed, the ground contains an abundance of loose boulders and fragments of the sandstone.

## The survey

An earthwork survey was commissioned by Bill Horner, Devon County Archaeologist, in support of a project commenced in 2015, by a local group (Friends of Berry Castle) concerned with conservation and future management of the site, working in conjunction with the owners, Clinton Devon Estates, and Historic England. In 2015, trees were clear-felled from the earthworks allowing archaeological investigations, using a variety of techniques, to progress.

The earthwork survey (Figs 7 and 8) was undertaken in October 2016. The survey methodology is compliant with Historic England's Level 3 recording standard, i.e. 'An accurately located, measured survey (map based or divorced) at an appropriate scale (at 1:1,250 or larger), designed to represent adequately the form and complexity of the monument' (English Heritage 2007, 23-4).

Data-capture was via a combination of survey grade GPS in the open spaces, supplemented by use of a total station theodolite in the tree-covered area along the southern rampart. The data was downloaded into a CAD environment and annotation was carried out in the field using a tablet computer. Reference to the OS grid was established from two points within the cleared area using map-grade GPS.

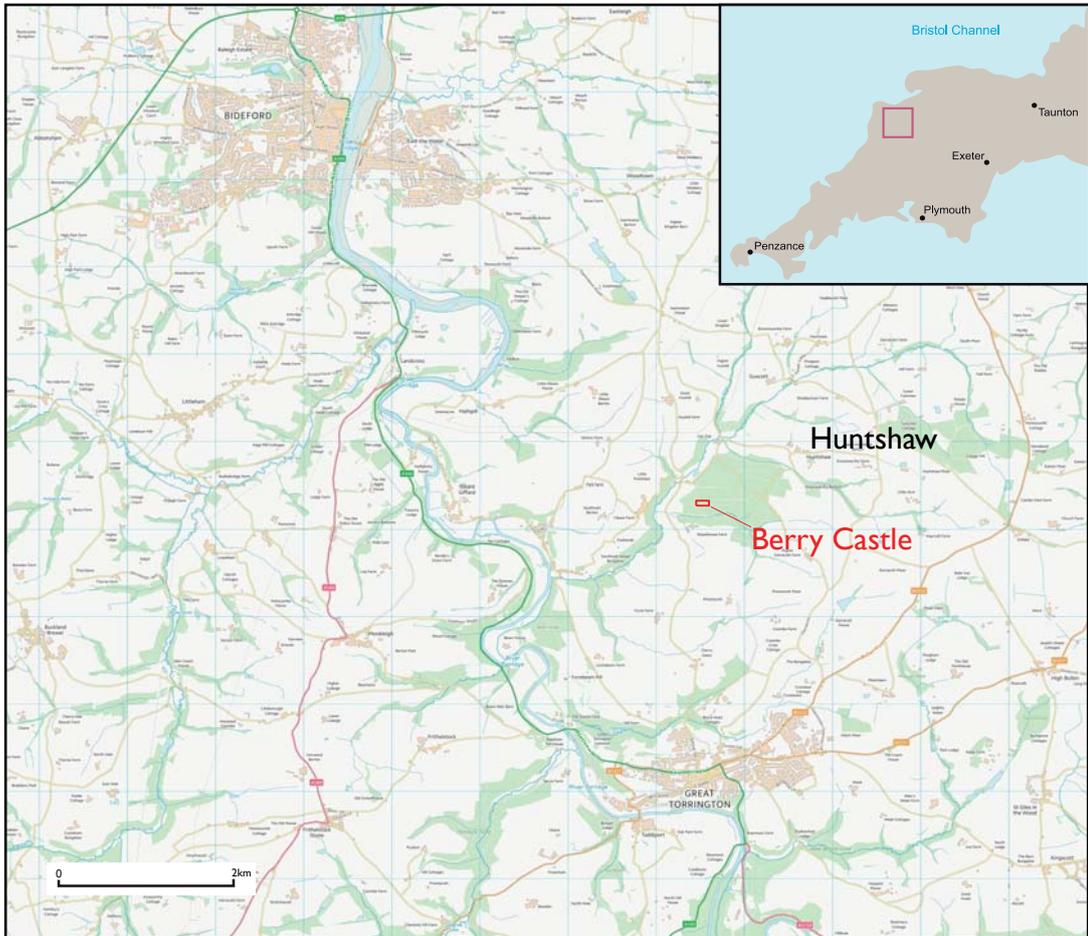


Fig 1 Location map showing Berry Castle in its North Devon context. (Ordnance Survey © Crown Copyright and database right 2016).

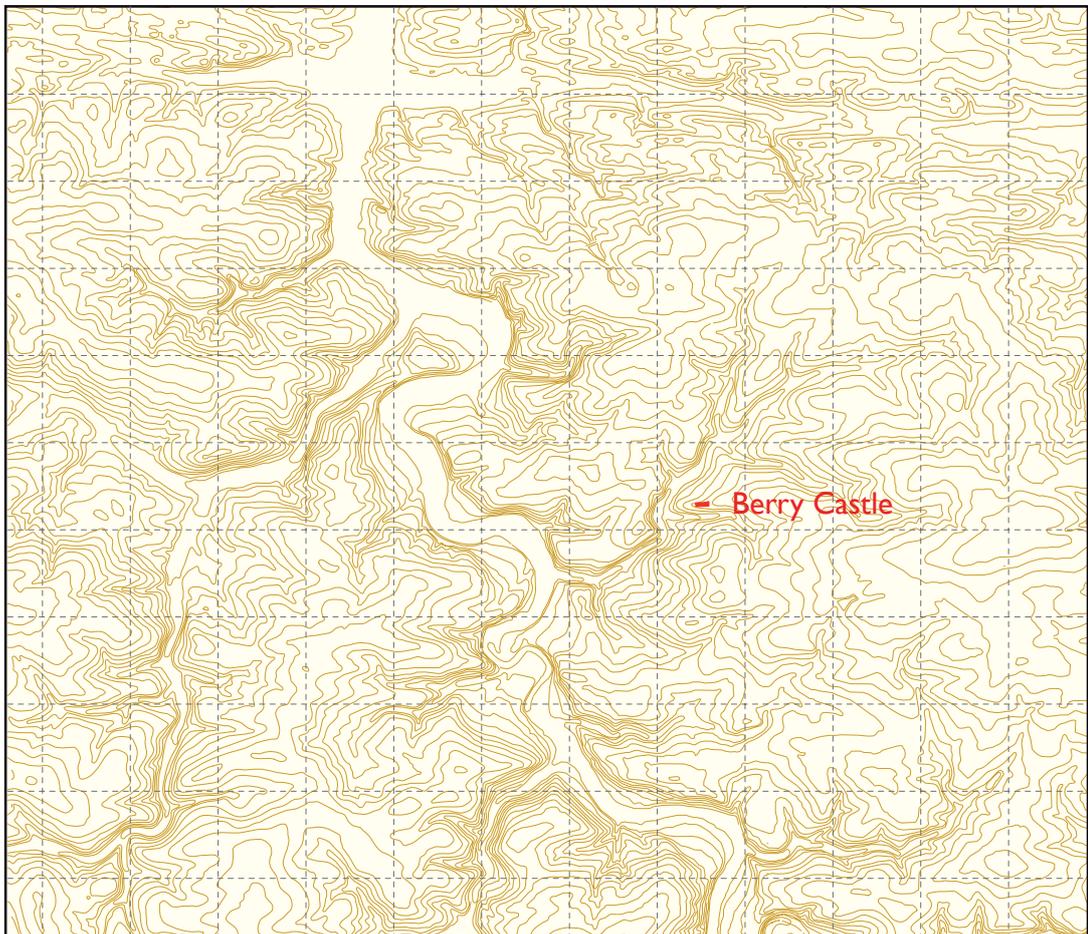


Fig 2 Topographic location map with contours at 10m intervals (Ordnance Survey © Crown Copyright and database right 2016).

## Previous research and historical references to Berry Castle

Due, probably, to the inaccessibility of the site, investigation at Berry Castle has, until recently, been confined to map-scale surveys and descriptions of the earthworks, and all research in the past has been undertaken within the constraints of the dense tree coverage. No recorded excavations have taken place.

Various investigators have carried out somewhat limited fieldwork at the site in the 20th century and these have been adequately summarised and re-assessed by Alimo in a detailed discussion of the earthworks within their archaeological and landscape context (Alimo 2012). This material has also been reviewed to provide context for a recent magnetometer survey by Substrata (Dean 2016). It is therefore unnecessary to repeat this information here, other than when it directly concerns the discussion and interpretation of the new survey presented below.

The site is a Scheduled Monument (List No. 1016225), its original designation occurring in 1923, with the description being updated in 1997.

The Ordnance Survey County Series 25-inch map, surveyed 1886, is the earliest to depict the earthworks with any level of detail, showing the ramparts of the enclosure as a single, continuous bank or, in places, simply a scarp, forming a circuit set within an area of mixed woodland. The ditch, although probably clear at that time, was omitted from this early survey. The plan remained unchanged on the 1903 edition of the map (Fig 3), but on the 1956 revision (Fig 4) the ditch had been added to the depiction along the west, north and eastern sides, as well as a short section of counterscarp on the NW corner. The weighting of the ditch is somewhat exaggerated on this plan, probably due to the constraints of 1:2500 scale. The entrance opening on the western end was also included, and the modern trackway, which bisects the site east to west, had a slightly altered course, reflecting what exists today. However, the difficulties of using graphical survey techniques amidst dense tree coverage are evident in the morphological inaccuracies of the overall plan.



Fig 3 Ordnance survey depiction of Berry Castle at 25-inch (1:2500) scale, surveyed 1886 for the OS County Series.

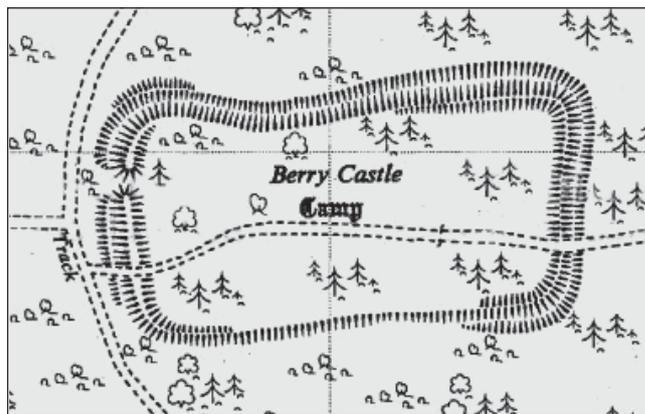


Fig 4 Ordnance survey depiction of Berry Castle at 1:2500 scale, revised 1956.

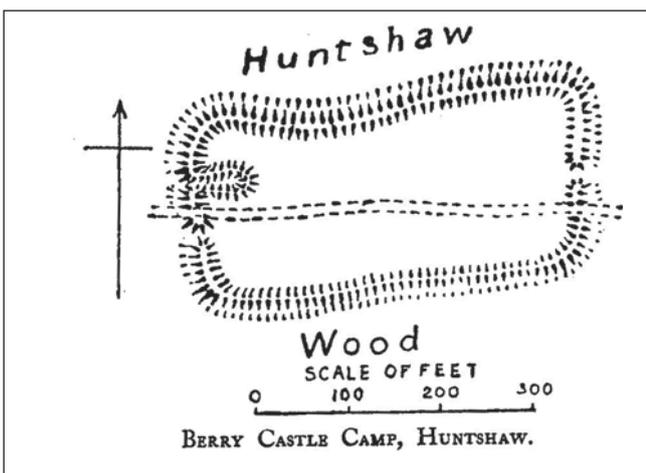
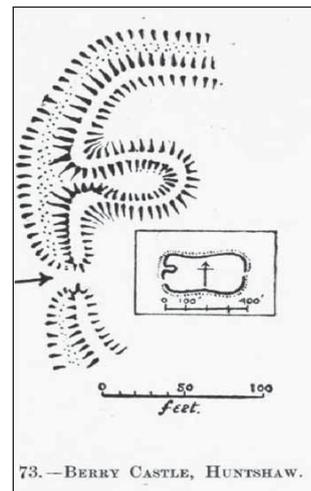


Fig 5 (left) 1906 depiction of Berry Castle from Victoria County History (Page 1906).

Fig 6 (right) Western entrance as depicted by Allcroft 1908.



A very basic plan appeared in the Victoria County History, which depicts the site with an entrance on both the west and east ends as well as a large loop earthwork on the western interior (Fig 5), which the authors considered to be a 'decoy to the invader' (Page 1906, 597). Allcroft (1908, 201) also focused on this feature, to the exclusion of other components (Fig 6).

### **The Earthworks: description**

From east to west, the upper surface of the spur loses height gradually, until falling more sharply on the west and south flanks. The enclosure is located almost at the western upper tip of the spur (NGR: 249503 122281), just before the point where the steeper slope falls away; approached from the east, therefore, the site is overlooked by slightly higher ground. This section of the spur has an evenly arched summit ridge at a height of 85m above OD, onto which the enclosure was constructed with a slight bias to the south of the crest (Fig 7).

Although the conifers that once covered the entire site have been clear-felled, the damage caused by the root systems, beyond the underground disturbance, from trees over several centuries is clear, causing the earthworks to become misshapen and eradicating much detail.

### **The ramparts (Fig 7 and 8)**

The site comprises a single banked (univallate) enclosure, roughly rectangular, with curving corners. The rampart circuit is complete but its condition varies, with some sections clearer and stronger than others. It has a perimeter of 370m, enclosing an area of 0.76ha. A ditch is visible for part of the circuit and a probable entrance survives on the western end. With the exception of a slight curvature on its long flanks, the rectangular form of the circuit is surprisingly regular. The interior length varies between 125m and 128m and the width is between 59m and 63m, an approximate 4m variation in both directions. Much care seems to have been taken in setting out this parallel-sided layout, despite the moderate curvature of the ridge crest.

The strongest sections of the rampart are along the north side and on the NW and NE corners. Along the north flank, the rampart is formed by a scarp of up to 2.5m high<sup>1</sup>, with slight evidence of an external ditch, and an intermittent bank of up to 4.7m wide and up to 0.45m high<sup>2</sup> which runs along the interior. An extremely slight counterscarp runs along the outside of the ditch, spread to over 3.7m in places but is 0.36m high maximum<sup>3</sup>. The ditch, where measurable is 1-2m wide and between 0.1 and 0.2m deep.

On the NW corner, as the rampart turns south, both the bank and ditch are more clearly defined. The scarp is 1.8m high<sup>1</sup> while the ditch is 4m wide and 0.4m deep. The inner bank is less spread, though remains to a height of 0.75m<sup>2</sup>. South of the entrance opening (*see below*), the bank is more spread, becoming extremely faint as it rounds the SW corner before fading out. The ditch also becomes shallower, and it too can only be traced for an additional 19.5m south of the entrance. The counterscarp is better defined on the corner, but a large tree growing within it has recently been uprooted, causing considerable damage.

As it rounds the corner, the ditch has been deepened and widened by a probable attempt at stone extraction. The resulting conical quarry pit has a maximum diameter of 10.4m and has cut down from the top of the scarp, into the ditch and counterscarp, penetrating the ground a further 1.2m below the base of the ditch.

The inner bank is at its strongest as it rounds the NE corner where it is spread to 6.8m wide and stands to 1.8m high<sup>2</sup>; the main scarp is 1.7m high at this point<sup>3</sup>. However, the ditch gets weaker here, only 0.4m deep, before becoming untraceable midway along the eastern rampart, then reappearing south of the modern track. At this point it is 5.4m wide and up to 0.9m deep, but after rounding the SE corner it again loses its shape.

The southern flank comprises only a scarp of up to 1.2m high. It lacks evidence for a bank and the ditch has become silted, leaving only a narrow terrace of up to 4.5m wide in the place of the hollow, and an extremely faint counterscarp.

## PROFILES

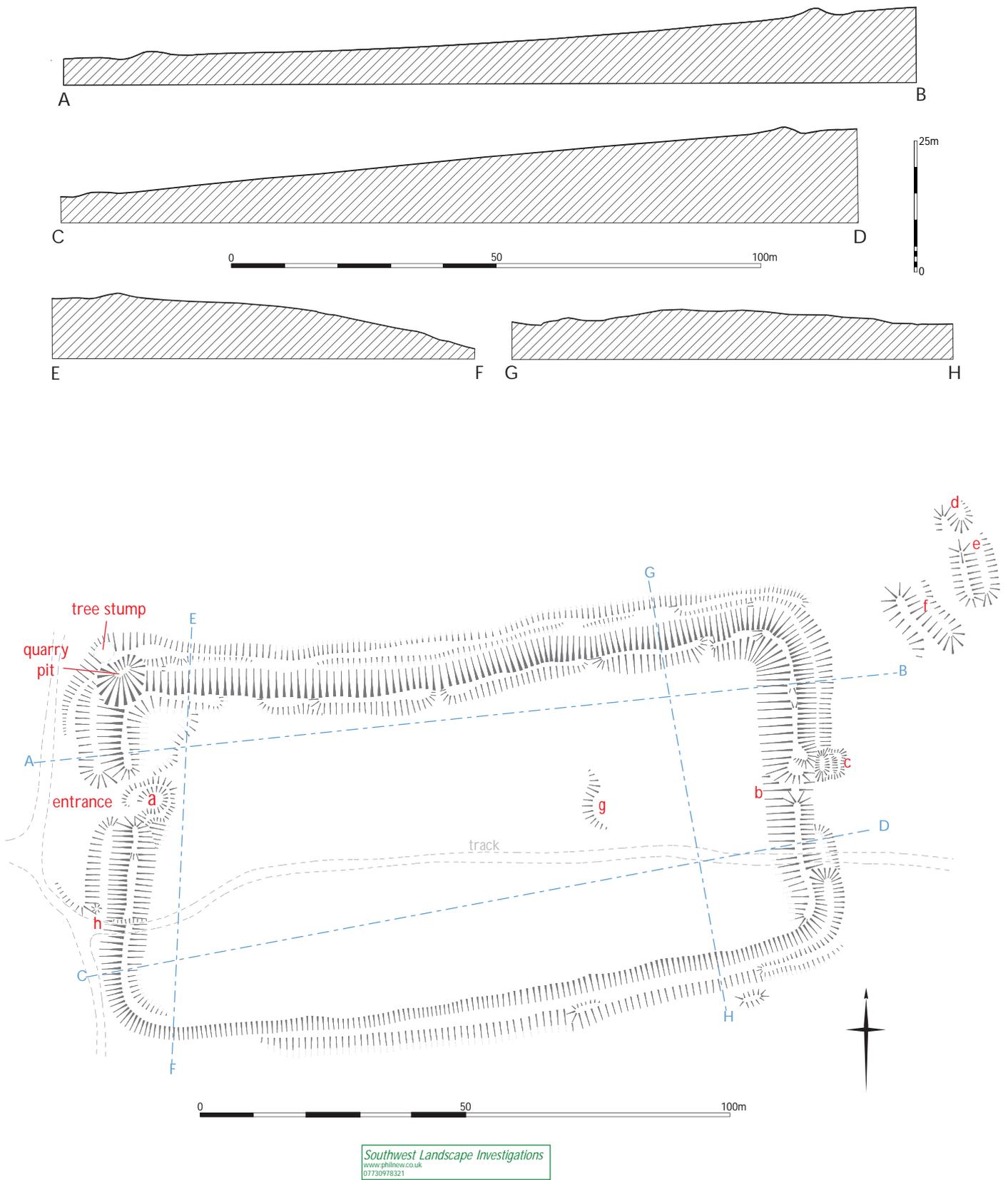


Fig 7 Profiles across the earthworks. Plan (below) shows locations of profiles and items mentioned in text. ©Copyright P Newman

### The entrance

Earthwork evidence for an entrance survives on the western end of the enclosure. It is located slightly north of the centre point on this stretch of rampart, where a 6.9m-wide breach in the bank has bull-nose terminals, and where a level causeway interrupts the ditch. Inside the entrance, a small, upstanding, circular earthwork (a) with an approximately level floor, has an internal diameter of 5.6m and a height of up to 0.5m, though higher where it

adjoins the rampart. This feature has been the focus of discussion by previous writers, claiming it to be an original component of the defences (*see below*).

On the eastern end of the enclosure, a minor breach in the rampart of 1m wide (b), could also be interpreted as an entrance, but is less convincing than that to the west and more likely to be evidence of a later path which has traversed the earthwork, causing erosion. Although having slight bull-nosed terminals, the breach between them does not cut the bank down to ground level. Nevertheless, there is a 14m gap in the external ditch at this point suggestive of an entrance.

### Quarry pits

In addition to the quarry pit described above, a second example (c) is located on the exterior of the eastern rampart, adjacent to the supposed entrance and penetrating the ditch. The pit has a sub-rectangular footprint of 6m by 5.5m and a stepped profile. At its deepest point it measures 1.57m. No spoil heap is associated with the pit and it is to be assumed that the entire product of the excavation was hauled away.

Thirty metres NE of the enclosure. A single, semi-circular pit (d) and two linear trenches (e & f) are also possible evidence of stone extraction or other more recent activity. The linear examples are 14m and 16m long, 5.5m wide and up to 0.8m deep, with rounded ends to the south but open on the northern, lower ends. Both have linear, flat topped mounds with rounded ends, running along their western edges. The semi-circular pit is much smaller, only 4.3m diameter, but also has a spoil heap on the western side. All three are suggestive of a trench being dug starting from the lowest point and working up hill, while dumping excavated material alongside. Most of this material appears to have survived in the heaps and very little, if any, has been hauled away.

### Internal features

The densely-packed conifers of the plantation have obliterated nearly all internal earthworks, with the exception of an amorphous platform (g), just north of the footpath with a 0.3m scarp on its western side. Assuming it was approximately circular, the platform could have had a diameter of 7.5m. This location coincides with an anomaly recorded during the magnetometer survey (Dean 2016 Table 1 item 13), interpreted to be a charcoal burning platform, or meiler. This would have been associated with woodland management in Huntshaw Wood, potentially as early as the medieval period, but more likely 18th or 19th century.

### Discussion

This survey has provided the first large-scale, metrically accurate, earthwork plan of the ramparts at Berry Castle, adding detail to the layout and confirming the survival, or otherwise, of each of its earthwork components. In conjunction with the magnetometer survey (Dean 2016), these data will offer a basis for interpretation, future research potential, and conservation management.

Although sited on a prominent hilltop, and possessing 'defences', the term 'hillfort' has been avoided in this report, in favour of 'hilltop enclosure', because the former somewhat overstates the character of the remains and the likely purpose of this site. The Historic England Thesaurus describes the 'hilltop (palisaded) enclosure' as follows:

*A small, defended settlement dating to the Iron Age, located on spurs, promontories or hilltops. The defences are marked by single or double trenches which originally held substantial palisades.* (Internet source [http://thesaurus.historicengland.org.uk/thesaurus.asp?thes\\_no=1](http://thesaurus.historicengland.org.uk/thesaurus.asp?thes_no=1) [accessed 28-Oct-2016])

This accords well with what remains at Berry Castle, where protection of the enclosure's interior relied on a scarp with a mostly shallow external ditch, surmounted by a timber palisade. In terms of defence the enclosure is poorly located, being overlooked from its eastern approaches, while on the west the rampart cuts across the spur rather than extending around it, denying the occupants the view needed to provide warning when being approached from the valley immediately to the west. The light defences would not have offered much resistance to determined human aggressors, but were well-suited to providing protection to homes, property and livestock against lesser dangers.

It is likely that the enclosure contained a number of timber roundhouses and other timber structures, although

no trace of these has so far been detected archaeologically. The entrance on the western end would have comprised a timber gateway sited in the gap within the rampart that survives today.

The enclosure was probably constructed and occupied in the first millennium BC during the Iron Age. Its hilltop location, single-ditched rampart and layout is typical of settlements of that period in Devon and elsewhere. Attempts to further refine the dating on the basis of what is currently known of the site would be purely speculative. However, although there is no evidence as yet for earlier settlement at this place, it is quite feasible that earlier 1st or 2nd millennium BC occupation may have preceded that of the Iron Age. Similarly, later re-use and occupation of this type of earthwork has been recorded elsewhere and should not be ruled out, although it has been suggested this may not have been quite so common in Devon (Grant 1995, 97-108).

The defensive circuit is mostly intact, though the survival of the rampart is inconsistent as a whole and, in places, the earthworks have been altered by later interventions. The surface geology, where much loose stone is available, suggest that stone may have been utilized in the rampart bank, perhaps using a linear dump construction, or as drystone revetments, although no exposed sections survive. Either could have been used in association with a timber palisade.

Along the strongest sections, on the NW and NE corners, a steep scarp with moderate ditch survives. However, the ditch is less substantial along the northern side, where that steep scarp is also present. The rampart bank, though substantive on the NW and NE corners, is low over much of the remainder, and non-existent along most of the south flank. The absent bank on the south may not have been completed, or was perhaps of less massive construction than those on the other three sides and its profile has been smoothed and eroded over time. It is notable that this south section of rampart, where these elements are missing, runs across the steepest sections of the slope, where hillwash might cause erosion and silting (Fig 8 section E to F). The magnetometer survey (Dean 2016) certainly suggests that both positive (banks) and negative (ditch) elements remain *in situ* below ground, though the extent of their survival is not known. Robbing of these banks as a source of building material is an alternative explanation for their apparent absence and in 1922 a Ministry of Works investigator assumed that material had been removed for road building (MoW scheduling document, 1922: *see* Devon HER entry). However, this is unverifiable and the complete lack of visible disruption (i.e. uneven ground and pitting) to the earthwork itself, which would be expected had substantial quantities of stone been dislodged and removed, suggests that this is unlikely to have occurred in recent centuries, if at all.

The entrance on the western end is almost certainly the only one associated with the original construction and occupation of the enclosure, though the circular earthwork (a) just inside this entrance has distracted earlier writers (Page 1906; Allcroft 1908) to offer alternative interpretations. However, the depictions used by both authors, exaggerate the size and form of the loop, which in reality does not fit with the original layout of the ramparts as shown on their plans, but overlies and partly blocks the entrance, and is clearly a later intrusion. It is possibly the foundations for a shelter, perhaps associated with woodland industries such as charcoal making, which is evident by the charcoal platform to the east.

A second entrance on the western end, just south of this feature, (h) is also depicted by both writers but is erroneous, as the rampart bank continues through the breach depicted on these plans and the bullnose terminal is simply a small erosion scarp created by the modern track that traverses the rampart at this point.

An entrance at the eastern end of the enclosure (b) may be dismissed as such on similar grounds (*see* above), because although the upper surface of the bank has a hollow across it, its continuity has not been breached. These observations at both alleged entrances are confirmed by the magnetometer survey results (Dean 2016, 8).

The two linear earthworks (e & f) to the NE of the enclosure are unlikely to be contemporary or associated with the enclosure. The mounds and their associated cuttings are well defined, neither silted or eroded, suggesting they are a much more recent imposition. They appear to have been dug in a random location and are certainly not related to the layout of the rampart. The suggestion that they are part-finished outworks can probably be discounted. The fact that very little, if any, of the material dug from the trenches was removed from the site implies that either this was an unsuccessful attempt to find usable stone, or that the construction of trenches or

mounds was in itself the objective. In the latter case, pillow mounds for rabbit farming are a possibility, though they are not normally found so close together.

Archaeological investigation at this site is at an early stage and it is hoped that further geophysics and, eventually perhaps, excavation could throw more light on the construction methods as well as its origins and dates of occupation. Among priorities, an investigation to explore the status of the south rampart should be considered and to resolve definitively the issue of the eastern entrance proposed by earlier writers.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to the landowners, Clinton Devon Estates, for permission to undertake the survey and for allowing vehicular access to the site. The Friends of Berry Castle are grateful for permissive rights granted by Clinton Devon Estates. Audrey Alimo (Friends of Berry Castle) provided a helpful walkover introduction to the earthworks and supplied much useful background. Lynne Newman assisted with the EDM survey. I am grateful to Bill Horner of Devon Historic Environment team for inviting me to contribute to this research.

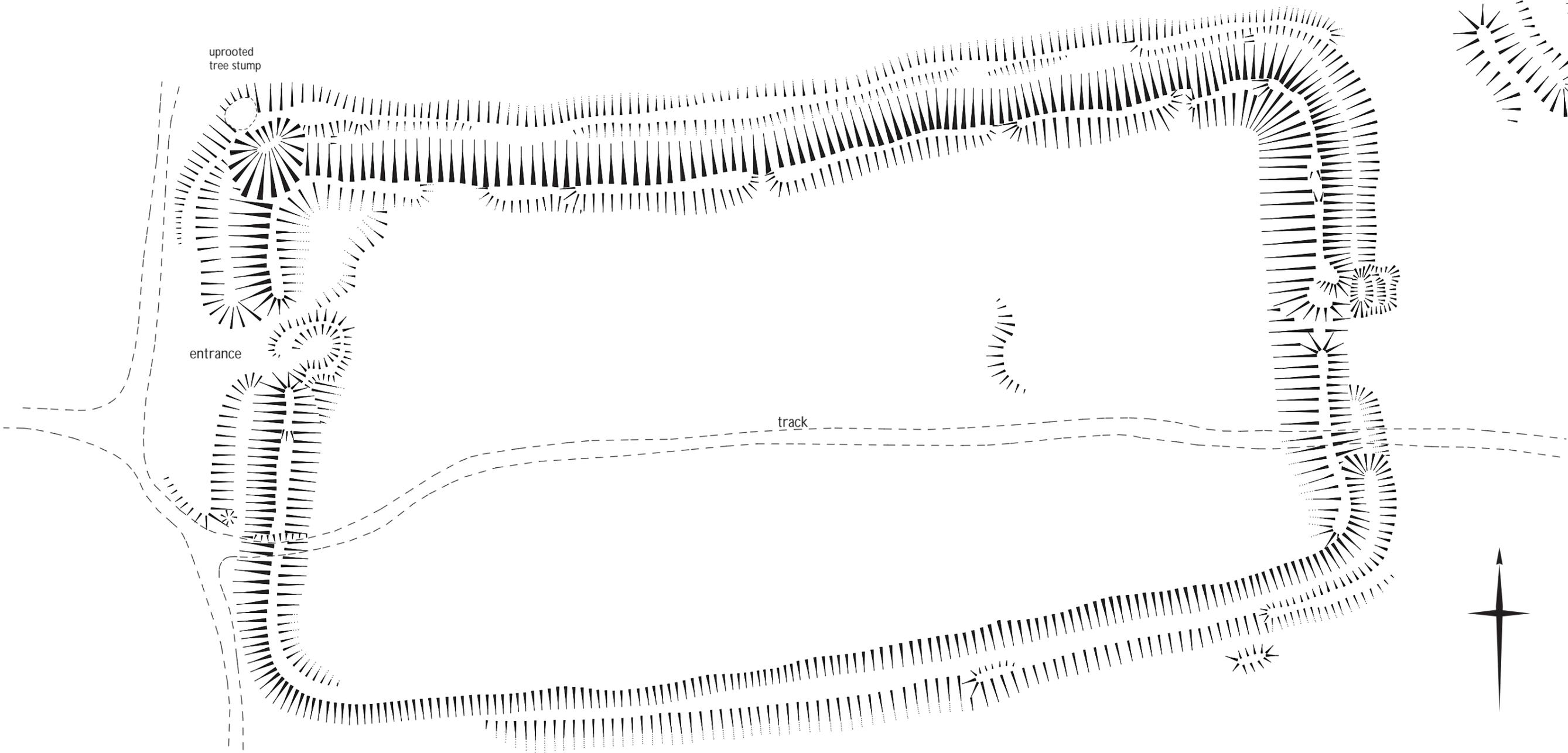
### **Notes**

1. measured from bottom of ditch
2. measured from interior surface of the enclosure to top of bank
3. measured from bottom of ditch.

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# Berry Castle, Huntshaw



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Fig 8 1:500 scale earthwork survey of Berry Castle, Huntshaw, October 2016 ©Copyright P Newman