An Archaeological Assessment

of

Castle Plantation,
Milber Down Camp, Newton Abbot, Devon

in advance of damage remediation

March 2015
(revised May 2015)

report prepared by

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on behalf of

Castle Plantation Residents Association

and

English Heritage

Southwest Landscape Investigations

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Summary

Following the discovery of an area of severe, deliberate damage to a 62m section of the ramparts at Milber Down Camp in 2014, a detailed survey of the affected area and record of the damage was requested in advance of remediation, by the English Heritage Historic Environment Field Advisor, Caroline Vulliamy. An earthwork survey of the northern half of the camp, within Castle Plantation, was also undertaken, to offer context for the damaged area. The disturbed earthwork was recorded at 1:500 scale as a hachured plan, while cut features were recorded in section and accompanied by photographs. The work was timed to take place just after a campaign to clear the northern section of Castle Plantation of invasive laurel and the reduction of scrub within the inner enclosure.

Introduction

Milber Down Camp is a multivallate hillslope enclosure of late prehistoric (Iron Age) date, located on a gentle NW slope overlooking the town of Newton Abbot (Fig 1). An inner, approximately sub-rectangular, enclosure has a substantial bank and ditch, and is surrounded by two further concentric enclosures (middle and outer) of similar shape and character, providing additional lines of security. The distance between these ramparts is up to 45m.

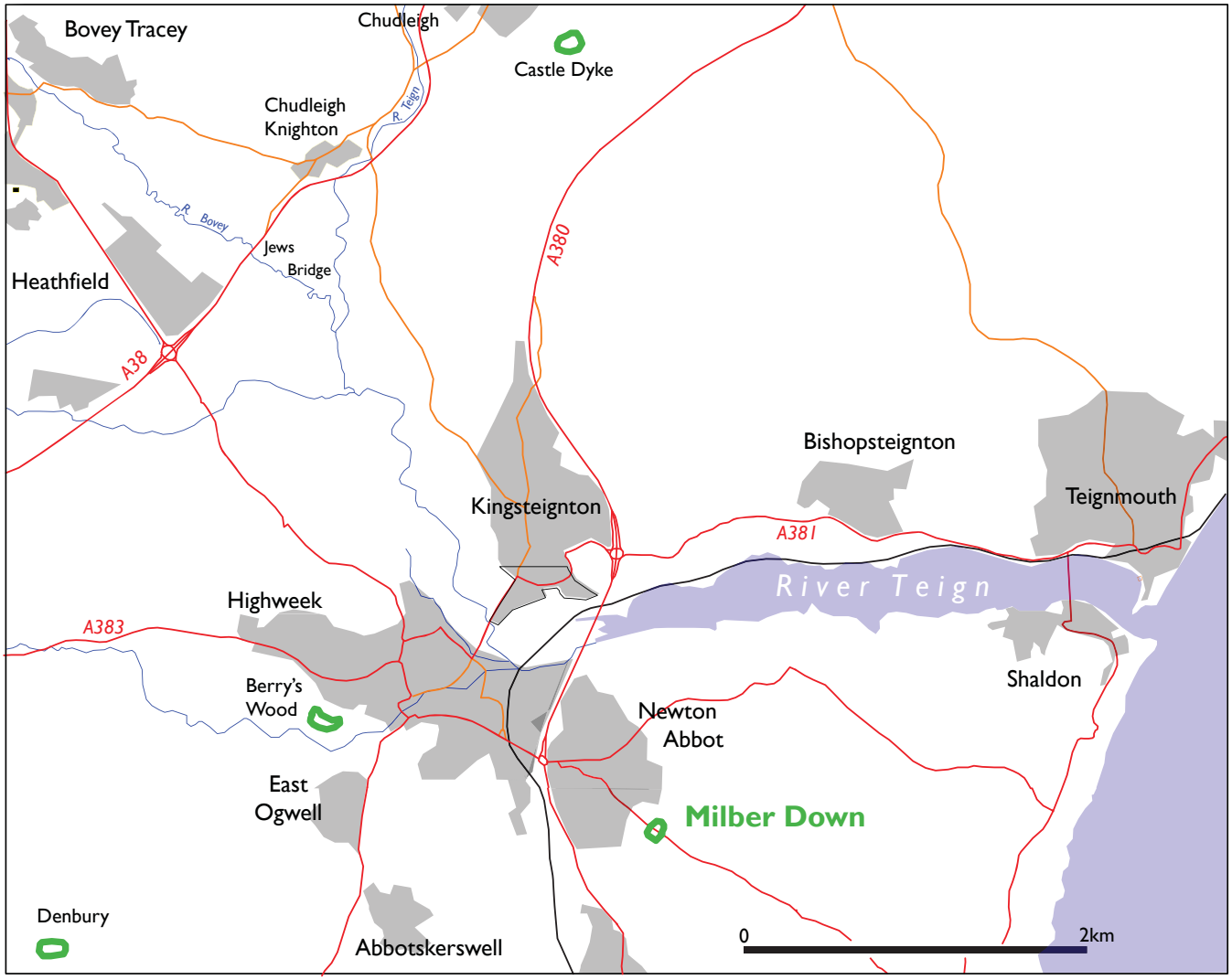


Fig 1 Milber Down location map. Also showing locations of other late-prehistiric defended sites in the lower Teign valley.

An additional outwork enclosure, recorded by the Ordnance Survey on the south side, some distance from the others, only survives in part. On the western slope of the Down, an opening in this outwork probably also served as an entrance from which two curving, roughly parallel, linear banks lead off to the SSE, and formed the sides of an approach road to the entrances of the inner series of enclosure. Unfortunately, the westernmost sections these banks, where meeting with the outwork, have been destroyed by more recent quarrying.

The entrance through the outer enclosure was sited centrally on its western side but has been completely effaced by the modern road, which transects all three enclosures. The outer rampart has also been effaced along its northern section, partly within the plantation but also within a small field to the north, and together with the middle enclosure and the ditch of the inner enclosure, has been mostly ploughed out in an arable field to the east.

Although now partly covered by trees, when occupied, the place would have commanded wide vistas across the South Devon countryside, including the lower Teign valley and the fringes of Dartmoor at Haytor and Lustleigh Cleave. Milber is one of several fortified settlements from this period which occupy the flanks of the Teign and Bovey valleys (Fig 1), including Ugbrook (Castle Dyke), Denbury and Berry's Wood in the immediate locale, but the group extends further to include Cranbrook, Prestonbury, Wooston and Hunter's Tor in the upper Teign valley. In Devon, the site which bears the closest resemblance to Milber, in layout and character, is Clovelly Dykes in North Devon (*see* Griffith 1988, *front cover*)

Although several of the above are depicted on Donn's map of Devonshire (1765), Milber was omitted, as was the St Marychurch road, which bisects the enclosures, cutting a *c.*15m swathe across each of the ramparts and their interiors. The road existed by 1802 when depicted on the OS 1st edition maps, which show it cutting across the earthworks from NW to SE. This division has, over time, led to different forms of management for the northern and southern sectors of the site. The northern sector, now known as Castle Plantation, has been covered by trees for much of the recent past, although an aerial photograph of 1952 shows both sectors to be open but affected by scrub (Griffith 1988, pl 25). Currently, the southern sector is managed as pasture but the ditches are obscured by patchy, mature gorse. This report is concerned only with the area north of the St Marychurch Rd (Castle Plantation), which is currently managed as woodland, with a single open glade within the central enclosure.

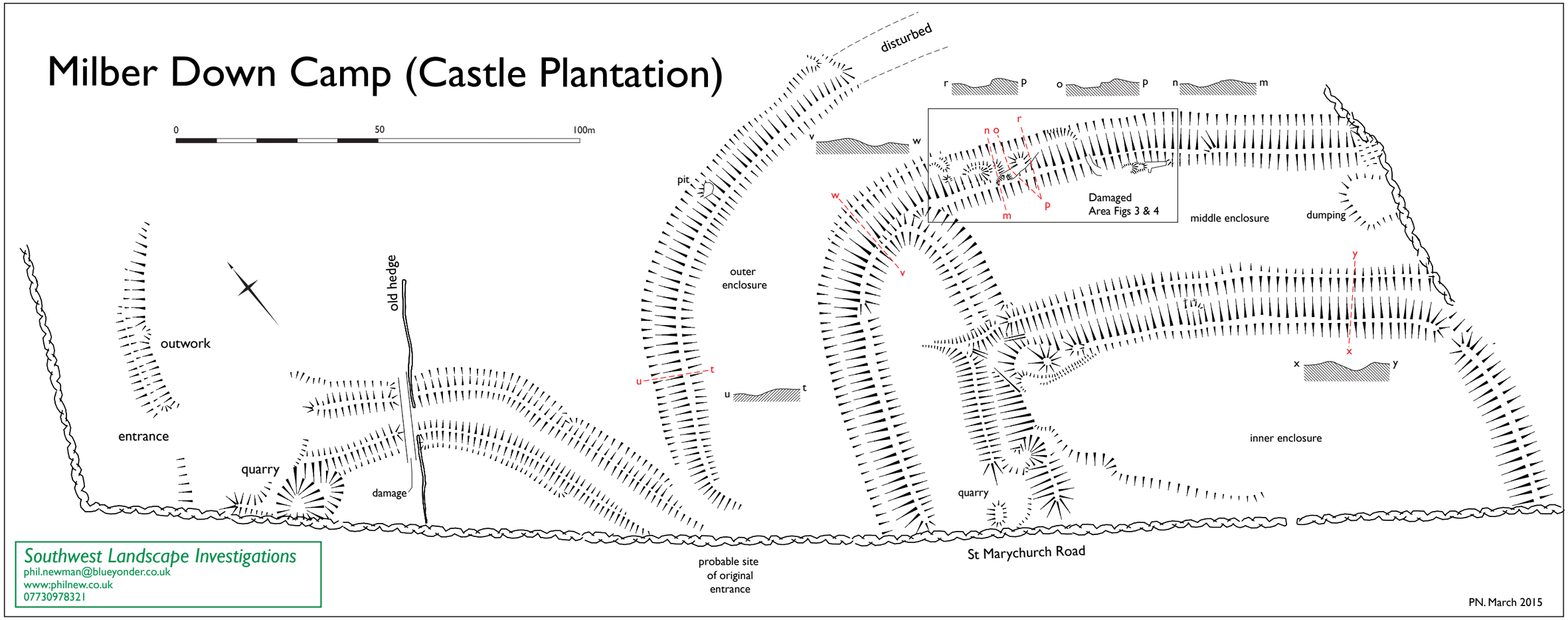
The Devon HER contains many entries concerning this Scheduled Monument, but archaeological investigation has been limited to earthwork survey by the Ordnance Survey (most recently by N V Quinnell in 1980) and an excavation in 1937-8 by F Cottrill (Fox et al. 1950). The latter involved cutting several trenches across and within the ramparts, including one of 91m across all three earthworks. However, all of this activity was confined to the area south of the road; the north side is as yet untouched in terms of recorded archaeological interventions, other than the monitoring of a pipe trench along the verge of the road in 1980 (Moxon Browne 1980, 121).

Methodology

The earthworks of the northern sector of the camp, i.e. north of the St Marychurch road, were surveyed electronically using a total station theodolite from a series of fixed stations on an open traverse. The survey data was downloaded into CAD software then annotated in the field on a tablet computer to produce a 1:1000 earthwork plan with profiles. The same process was used to record the damaged area (Fig 3), although the product was annotated at the larger scale of 1:500.

Four sections were cleaned back to enable recording of the damaged material before repairs could be undertaken. The faces of these damaged areas had not been cut completely vertically when the damage was inflicted, so no

Milber Down Camp (Castle Plantation)



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attempt was made to make them so, as this would have damaged them further. Instead, all moss, humus and loose stone was scraped back and small roots removed with secateurs before recording. Three of these (a-c) were recorded graphically at a scale of 1:20 (Fig 4), and photo records were also made.

The recording work carried out in February 2015 was timed to coincide with a programme of other conservation works including vegetation clearance and tree management. In particular, a large patch of mature laurel had become established between and covering parts of the middle and outer rampart on the north side, which was likely to spread further if unchecked.

At the time of survey, all the rampart ditches, except the areas cleared of laurel, were covered by bramble and scrub, but this was for the most part manageable. However, the inner enclosure was also covered by bracken, which was cleared to facilitate the survey.

Earthworks (Fig 2)

The ***inner enclosure*** is 105m wide east to west, and the section remaining within Castle Plantation is 45m across north to south; in places this enclosure has the most substantive sections of rampart. The long, northern section has a ditch of 10.5m wide and the summit of the rampart bank on the interior stands 2.3m above the silted base of the ditch, but is only 0.9m higher than the interior of the enclosure. This inner bank does not survive so well on the western side, though a short, spread section is still visible just north of the road where a small quarry has cut into the earthworks. The eastern side of the enclosure was only surveyed on the interior as the ditch now lies within a separate field, but the rampart here was at its tallest with a height above the interior of 1.6m.

An external bank survives on the northern and western exterior of the ditch, its summit being 1.1m above the exterior ground surface at its maximum.

Apart from the quarry, which cuts the western rampart, later interference includes an apparent track cut across the NW corner of the ditch where, on the exterior, soil has been displaced to form a ramp. A breach in the NE corner of the enclosure was covered by scrub at the time of survey but is likely to represent modern disturbance. The ground-level of the interior has been lowered by up to 1.5m near the southern boundary hedge, adjacent to the road, forming a terrace, which probably represents disturbance caused by the imposition of the St Marychurch Road.

The ***middle enclosure*** was approximately 180m wide before the area within the ploughed field to the east was effaced and the earthwork now terminates at the boundary hedge of the field. Only a section 130m wide, east to west, remains within Castle Plantation, which measures 90m across, north to south. The remaining section, which includes the NW corner, represents remains of a strong rampart with a continuous ditch of 8.5 to 10m wide and an interior bank with summit 2m above the base of the ditch. A spread external bank survives along parts of the west side, standing up to 0.3m above exterior ground level.

Within the plantation, the ***outer enclosure*** has suffered the most damage and erosion over an extended period, particularly along the northern stretch where the rampart and ditch within the plantation no longer survive as earthworks and there is no trace either within the small pasture field to the north. This feature has been badly affected by overgrowth of laurel in recent years, causing massive root damage. The best preserved section is to the south near the road where the ditch is 7.5m wide and the summit of the rampart bank is 1.8m above the base of the ditch.

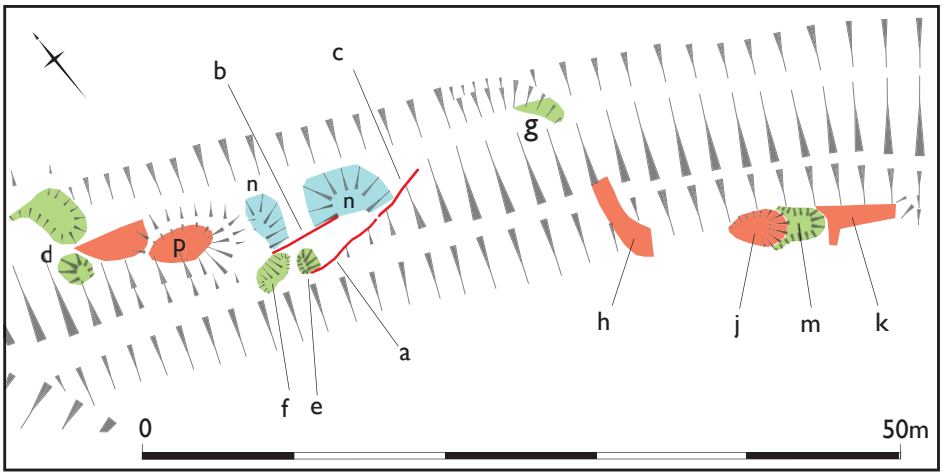


Fig 3 Enlarged plan of middle rampart showing damaged earthworks and outline instructions for repair.

negative feature to be backfilled

positive feature to be removed

positive feature to remain *in situ*

cut feature/ sectionline (see fig 4)

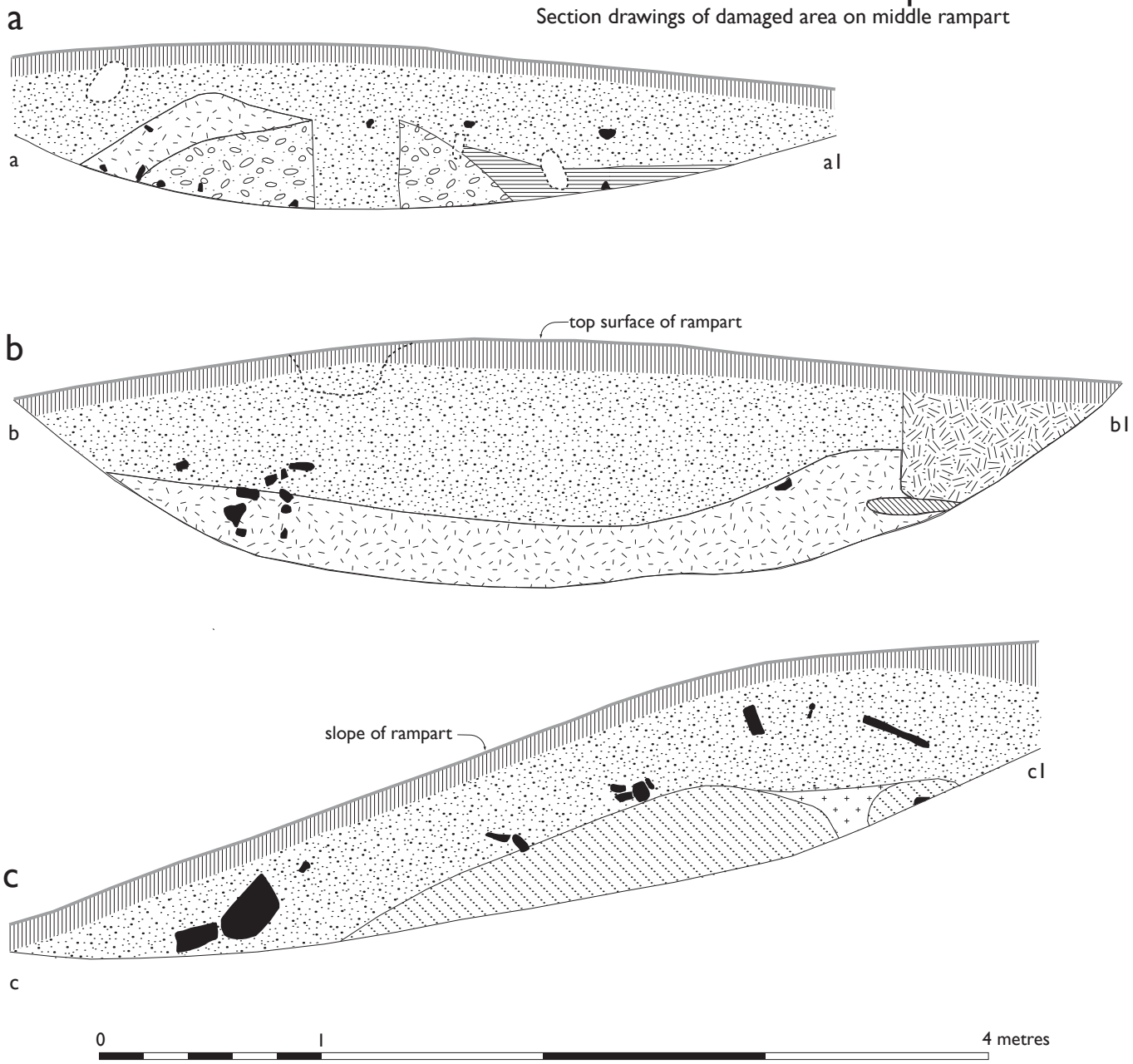
Two parallel ***outworks*** run for approximately 60m north from the site of the putative entrance on the outer enclosure. They then turn NW for a further 5m before terminating, where badly disturbed by a post-abandonment quarry pit. The outworks comprise linear banks, now very spread and only up to 0.35m high, but 6m wide in places. The distance between the tops of the banks is approximately 9m. Both banks have shallow, external ditches. Further damage was inflicted to this outwork when wheeled vehicles cut a track across the banks following the line of an old hedge.

The position of the outer entrance survives 32m west of the remaining terminals of the bank. Only a short section of the westernmost section of the outwork survives but enough to see that it comprised a shallow ditch with an outer bank.

Damage

Damage has been inflicted on the northern, straight section of the middle rampart, approximately 55m south of the footpath. Approximately 62m of this earthworks has been subjected to a deliberate, unauthorized intervention in which unknown perpetrators have re-shaped the bank and part of the ditch to form an apparent mountain biking obstacle course. The most severe of these interventions are three, vertical cuts into the bank of the rampart to form hollows (a – c). These have sliced not only into the turf and topsoil but quite severely into the substance of the built earthwork. The deepest (b) has a vertical cut face of over 1m. Substantial amounts of earth have been removed from these cuttings and either dumped on two small spoil heaps (d) in the centre of the rampart ditch, or used to form artificial humps (e and f) as additional obstacles for the cycle riders. Additional damage was inflicted to the base of the ditch (g) where a cutting has been made into its flank on the north side. Other, less severe cuttings have been made at the top of the rampart on the inside (h-k). These have the appearance of shallow trenches but have not penetrated the ground to a depth likely to have affected the archaeological layers. A ramp (n), comprising two lumps, has been sculpted from the rampart, and stands to 1m high; the remaining soil appears to be undisturbed. A large scooped hollow at the western extremity of the disturbed area (p) is unlikely to have inflicted deep damage.

Fig 4
Milber Down Camp
Section drawings of damaged area on middle rampart



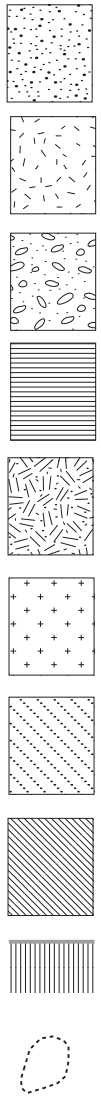


Fig 5 View across the damaged area looking south west.

A pit dug into the outer rampart near its NW turn (Fig 2) , measuring 3.8m by 2.3m by 0.8m deep also represents a recent intrusion, though possibly not associated with the main area of disturbance.

Recording (Fig 4)

The sections (a-c) have revealed the upper portions of the constructed rampart bank, where the natural clays and sandy soils were dug out in prehistory to form the ditch, and redeposited onto the bank. The upper strata of all three cuts comprises a brown sandy soil, which probably represents a natural build up of earth since abandonment of the settlement.

Section a (Fig 4a) represents the south face of a hollow, which was cut obliquely across the upper rampart bank. Although only 0.8m deep, the cut has exposed the arched upper profile of the rampart bank, constructed from a redeposited pale sandy clay, with small flinty inclusions, with an addition layer of an orange, sandy loam. A 0.2m-wide cut feature with parallel, vertical sides (h), could be interpreted as a post hole, though it is rather high up the bank for a palisade.

Section a (Fig Fig 4b) is sited 2m north of a, slightly lower down the rampart. The same pale grey sandy clay was encountered but very little variation in the stratigraphy.

Section c (Figs 4c) follows the same axis as 'a', cutting obliquely across the lower section of the rampart into the upper section of the ditch. At the base of the cut, orange clay with darker orange flecks probably represents undisturbed natural subsoil, its rounded, sloping profile may have resulted from the digging of the ditch. Within the upper layer of brown sandy soil are two largish boulders and several smaller stones.

Fig 3 is an earthwork plan showing the extent of the damage. Red shaded areas represent negative (i.e. cut) features which require filling and consolidation. Green shading highlights positive features, such as mounds, which should be carefully removed and blue shows positive features sculpted from the rampart and should be left *in situ*.

General condition

Castle Plantation is currently populated by mature deciduous trees, mostly birch, but including ash, sycamore and holly. There is also a large patch of laurel along the northern border, which at the time of this survey was being

felled with the stumps being treated to prevent regrowth. The floor of the woodland is covered by bramble, and an open glade within the inner enclosure has a dense cover of bracken. These two were also being reduced at the time of survey (Feb-March 2015).

Apart from the deliberate damage to the site recorded above, the ramparts and interior surfaces do not appear to have suffered any other recent damage through human agency. However, storm-felled trees are the most destructive problem at this site. At the time of this survey, several examples could be seen to have occurred in the winter of 2014-15, including two which seriously affected sections of ramparts. A future management plan should include giving health checks to all trees situated on the ramparts, ditches, and within the enclosure interiors, with a view to a controlled felling of any whose demise appears imminent. Self seeded saplings should also be removed, especially on the ramparts. Laurel regrowth will certainly remain a major problem for the foreseeable future; its continued monitoring and reduction will be essential to the welfare of this monument.

References

Fox, A, Raleigh Radford, C A, Rogers, E H and Shorter, A H 1949-50 'Report on the Excavations at Milber Down, 1937-*8' Proc Devon Archaeol Soc* **4.2-3**, 27-66

Griffith, F 1988 *Devon's Past. An Aerial View*. Exeter: Devon Books

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Fig 6 View looking south west across damaged area and sections a and b, before cleaning back and recording.

Fig 7 Section a following cleaning back and recording.

Fig 8 Section b following cleaning back and recording.

Fig 9 Section c following cleaning back and recording.