

BEACON HILL WOODS
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY
2002-2003

By

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With

Peter Leach and Richard Tabor.

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PART 1: Background

Introduction

This survey of Beacon Hill Wood was undertaken in the Spring of 2002 and the Winter of 2003 on behalf of its owners, The Woodland Trust, as a contribution towards the formulation of a management strategy for the woodland. The woodland and adjacent areas contain an important group of archaeological earthwork remains, including a Bronze Age barrow cemetery, two Roman roads, ancient quarries, holloways and a post-medieval tree ring. An earlier desktop and sketch survey of the whole wood undertaken by Ian Powlesland (1997), provided an invaluable starting point, but a more accurate survey and assessment of the remains is now required.

The area for detailed survey comprised the entire wood, (Fig. 1). A public right of way classified as a RUPP (Road used as a Public Path) runs through this part of the wood, running close to or crossing the assumed line of the Fosse Way and some of the holloways (Banks 2002, Figure 16). The Trust is considering changing the course of the right of way to minimise damage to those features, and require this survey and assessment to inform that decision. Additional considerations include the possibility of improving the ground surface (e.g. digging out or draining muddy areas) of the RUPP, the potential impact of a new route for the RUPP, conservation constraints - for wildlife in particular, as well as the enhancement of information on the archaeological interest of the site for the benefit of those who visit and care for Beacon Hill Wood.

Initially, a separate report on the surveys covering the western end of the wood in 2002 was prepared and submitted to the Woodland Trust (Corney, et al 2002), the content of which is now amalgamated within this report.

Setting and Geology.

Beacon Hill Wood is located on an east-west ridge 2km north of the town of Shepton Mallet in Somerset. With a maximum elevation of approximately 295m AOD, Beacon Hill is a prominent local landmark commanding extensive views to the north and the south. Today, Beacon Hill Wood is set within the parishes of Ashwick, Stoke St Michael and Doulting. A fine inscribed stone of eighteenth century date (Fig. 2, 26) marks the junction of these three parish boundaries.

The geology of Beacon Hill is complex, consisting of a dome of Old Red Sandstone (Portishead Beds) that includes pockets of marl and quartz conglomerate. To the south, the lower slopes are white lias limestone and to the north, lower limestone shale. In places drift deposits derived from the sandstone dome of the hilltop overlie these deposits. To the east of the survey area, an intrusion of igneous rocks has resulted in outcrops of Andesitic lava with pockets of tuff and volcanic conglomerate on the southern slopes (Green & Welch 1965).

This geology has had an impact on the past landuse of the area with poorly drained acidic soils prone to gleying and the formation of iron pan. The generally poor quality of the soil profile will have contributed to the lack of intensive agriculture on the hilltop until improvement commenced in the late eighteenth century (Billingsley, 1798).

The drainage of the area, despite the improvements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is still poor. Much of the wood is still prone to waterlogging with numerous seasonal springs being evident at the southern foot of the escarpment within the survey area.

Survey Area and Methodology.

The survey reported upon here examined the entire area of the present wood, centred on NGR ST 638459, covering an area of approximately 15.5 hectares. In addition to the detailed instrument survey of visible surface earthworks throughout that area, several smaller areas were targeted by geophysical prospection. This technique was applied at the northern and southern extremities of the wood in the winter of 2002, in an attempt to locate and enhance information relating to the remains of the Fosse Way. In Autumn 2003, the technique was also used to explore the environs of some of the round barrows within the wood (Figs. 3 - 5).

All control points were established with a Topcon GTS 212 Total Station Survey System, with detail measurements being made either with the Total Station or by taped offsets. All contour data for the plan was captured with the Topcon GTS 212 and related to the mean Ordnance Datum. Ground survey was plotted at a scale of 1:1000.

Depiction of all archaeological features has been prepared in accordance with the survey guidelines produced by RCHME (1999).

Weather and ground conditions during the first survey period (February and March 2002) were generally inclement, with high winds and above average rainfall. Despite these factors, the season was ideal for detailed woodland survey with little surface vegetation evident, although dense spreads of brushwood did hamper detailed recording in the southernmost third of the survey area. The weather during the second survey period (January and February 2003) was generally good with little rain and strong sunlight assisted in the recording of some subtle features.

Archaeological background.

There are no confirmed finds of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic date in the immediate area of Beacon Hill Wood, although activity of these periods is well documented further to the west, on Mendip (Aston and Burrow 1982, 5-27). A long, low mound in the pasture immediately beyond the western edge of the wood at ST63414620, tentatively identified as a long barrow by the Ordnance Survey and as four confluent round barrows by Grinsell, (1971) is now thought to be a pillow mound of medieval or early post-medieval date (Powlesland 1997, 19).

The earliest documented remains on Beacon Hill are of Bronze Age date (approximately 2000BC-800BC) with an emphasis on the earlier Bronze Age (approximately 2000BC-1400BC). The surviving remains consist of a major cemetery comprising at least 15 surviving round barrows (Grinsell, *ibid*). Eleven are located inside the present boundary of the wood with the remaining four barrows within the

area of pasture immediately beyond its western limit. These barrows were the focus of antiquarian activities in the late eighteenth century and earlier nineteenth century, the best documented campaign being that undertaken by the Reverend John Skinner, rector of Camerton (Powlesland, *ibid*, 24-5). The full and original extent of the Beacon Hill barrow cemetery is unknown. Comparison with other major Bronze Age barrow cemeteries elsewhere in southern Britain would suggest that there is a strong likelihood of other, related features, in close proximity to the mounds, although no surface remains survive.

Visible remains or finds of Iron Age date are absent from the wood although the large hillfort of Maesbury, 3km to the north west (Tratman 1959) demonstrates the presence of a substantial population in the area during the first millennium BC. More recently an Iron Age settlement of unknown extent has been investigated at Cannards Grave, 3km to the south of Beacon Hill (Birbeck, 2002). Of greater significance for Beacon Hill in the Iron Age is the petrological analysis of Glastonbury Ware undertaken by Peacock (1969). Thin section analysis of the Group 2 products (*ibid*, 46-7) strongly suggests a source on the Old Red Sandstone of the east Mendip region, most probably the outcrop on Beacon Hill. The distribution of this group is common in southern and central Somerset although rare north and east of Mendip (*ibid*, 47). In addition to pottery production, Beacon Hill is also the probable source of Old Red Sandstone rotary querns with examples from late Iron contexts at South Cadbury hillfort (Roe, 2000, 263-4). It is *possible* that some of the quarries recorded in the survey relate to these and later Romano-British, quern production (see below). The likely presence of a major late Iron Age pottery and quern production and distribution centre at Beacon Hill is a further argument in favour of a pre-Roman origin for the route formalised as the Fosse Way after the Roman conquest (Leach 2001, 315).

During the Romano-British period Beacon Hill is the focus for a number of activities that have left visible remains. Quern production that had commenced during the Iron Age continued, with examples of products known from a number of Somerset sites. These include the extensive settlement (and local market centre) at nearby Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet, (Roe 2001, 235), Ilchester (Leach 1982, 217) and Gatcombe (Branigan 1977, 101).

Movement of these products will have been greatly facilitated by the proximity to two Roman roads. The Fosse Way, a major early Roman route linking the south-west with Lincoln and the north of Britain, climbs the steep south-facing escarpment of Beacon Hill within the area of the survey (see below). At the crest of the hill, the Fosse Way crosses the line of the road linking the lead mines at Charterhouse on Mendip with Salisbury and Southampton Water. This route is marked today by the modern east-west ridge top road that forms the northern boundary of Beacon Hill Wood. Individual finds of Romano-British material in the immediate vicinity are sparse. Pottery has been found in a disused quarry scoop on the south side of the hill (Leach 1993, 139) and the Somerset County SMR records the discovery of Roman pottery and coins at an unspecified location on Beacon Hill in the nineteenth century (SMR 23053). On present evidence, exploitation of Beacon Hill during the Roman period appears to be primarily industrial.

In the post-Roman period, the area seems to have been regarded as an extension of the Mendip uplands. There is little field evidence of medieval agriculture such as extensive remains of ridge and furrow and the land-use appears to be dominated by heath or common land. The Fosse Way continued to exert an influence upon the landscape – both as a route and as an estate and parish boundary – in the late Saxon and early medieval period it formed the eastern boundary of the Pilton estate, held by Glastonbury Abbey (Grundy 1935). It is likely that exploitation of the stone on

Beacon Hill continued and a number of possible pillow mounds to the east and west of the wood suggest that rabbits were introduced to the area. During the mid eighteenth century new roads were being laid out and the Frome Turnpike was established along the line of the Roman road to Charterhouse soon after 1757. Much of the present field pattern around Beacon Hill was created between 1776 and 1785 and it is probably during this phase of Inclosure that the planting of Beacon Wood commenced. By 1884 (1st Edition OS 6" map) the wood had reached its present boundaries, although most of the existing woodland was planted in the early 1950s by the Forestry Commission. This was accompanied by deep surface ploughing as a prelude to planting in many areas, much of which is still visible and has severely damaged some earthworks in the wood.

PART II: The Survey.

Gazetteer of Archaeological Features. (Fig. 2).

In the following section, all of the features recorded are described in detail. The unique identification number for each feature correlates with the numbering sequence that appears on the survey drawing (Figure 2).

L1, Linear Features

Linear features of various form and function occur throughout the detail survey area, they can be subdivided into three categories: L1.1, roads and trackways; L1.2, boundaries; and L1.3, linear quarrying and related activities.

L1.1 Roads and Trackways.

- 1 Linear bank. This feature is visible for a distance of 150m at the southern end of the wood and was the focus of the main southern area of gradiometer survey (see report by Richard Tabor, below). Where best preserved this feature is 12m wide and stands up to 0.5m high. It extends from the southern boundary of the wood to a point immediately below the foot of the steep, south-facing escarpment at which point it has been truncated by a series of holloways (Fig. 2, nos. 3 and 5). The bank is best preserved at its northern and southern extremities, the central stretch having been extensively mutilated by modern forestry activities that have distorted and pushed it westwards. There is little doubt that this earthwork represents the *agger* of the Roman road - the Fosse Way. A short length of narrow bank on the east side of the *agger* is modern and probably the result of forestry activities.

In Autumn 2002 an opportunity was taken to examine the junction of this earthwork with the holloway 3 (below) by means of archaeological trial trenching along both sides of the holloway. No evidence was recovered to support its interpretation as the *agger* of the Roman Fosse Way, although a pit containing a flint blade of Neolithic type was found. Absence of evidence for the Fosse Way at this point may well be accounted for by the scale of subsequent erosion and destruction resulting from prolonged subsequent use of this locality to facilitate a steep ascent of the hill (Leach 2002).

- 2 Embanked causeway. Visible for approximately 40m and aligned south-west to north-east, this feature is well-made and of careful and uniform construction. It is 5m wide and parallel to the foot of a steep natural escarpment. On the north side, the feature forms the boundary of a rectangular,

levelled platform, partially cut into the living rock (22), probably marking the site of a structure. The causeway is undoubtedly a well-constructed access way of unknown date that appears to be aiming for the point where the Fosse Way would have begun its ascent of the main escarpment of Beacon Hill. Alternatively the causeway was linked downhill to the southwest with a trackway, probably created in the 18th century, that gave access to fields along the foot of the southern scarp of Beacon Hill (Shepton Mallet Enclosure Award map, 1785)

- 3 Holloway. This holloway branches westwards from the modern track that runs adjacent to the *agger* of the Fosse Way. It follows a gently curving westerly route cutting obliquely across the *agger* and the contours before making a sharp turn to north at the crest of the ridge. Averaging 7m in width at the top of the cut, the actual carriageway is only 2m wide and has worn down to the underlying bedrock. On the southern side on the lower slope, there are intermittent traces of a bank on the downhill side, possibly the result of periodic cleaning and maintenance. At one point, (20), this route has been partially truncated by a stone quarry. From this point, and again on the plateau top, this holloway clearly truncates holloway 4 and thus post-dates it.

Clearance of silts and vegetable debris in autumn 2002 from the bottom of this holloway by The Beacon Society, in conjunction with the archaeological excavation at its junction with the putative Fosse Way *agger* (1), above, revealed a relatively compact, worn cobbled surface extending east from the quarry (20) to its junction with the modern north-south track. No date of origin for this track was established.

- 4 Holloway. Running within the southwestern arc of holloway 3, this feature is of similar dimensions to 3, and has been truncated by it and stone quarry 19. As it reaches the plateau top the holloway divides, the western branch now cut through by 3, but originally probably following the same line.
- 5 Holloway. A short, 25m length of a shallow (up to 0.7m deep) holloway running parallel to and 3-5m north of holloway 3 at the foot of the main escarpment and truncating the postulated *agger* of the Fosse Way.
- 6 Holloway. A broad (up to 10m wide) and relatively shallow holloway (maximum depth, 0.4m) running within, and truncated by, the southwestern arc of holloway 4.
- 7 Terraceway and embanked causeway. Set within an area of eroded quarry scoops (18), this feature makes a clear, but steep ascent up the steep natural escarpment. At the southern end, a 4m wide track appears to be set upon a stone-revetted causeway that curves to west before turning north into a deep holloway cut into the scarp. This feature is of some antiquity as it is cut by a linear feature with an eighteenth century boundary stone (28) set within it and the southern end has been truncated by quarrying.
- 8 A broad hollow aligned north-south, up to 12m wide and 50m in length, with a low bank on the east side. Situated immediately to the west of holloway 3 and a modern track, the feature also has traces of a low (up to 0.2m high) causeway set within it.
- 30 Track aligned south-west – north-east visible as a causeway and holloway utilising a natural fold in the steep south facing escarpment. The track is up to

8m wide and is on a causeway up to 2m high towards the south-western end. The track appears to be providing access to a series of quarries along the scarp edge (40) and, as it reaches the crest of the escarpment, is overlain by a woodland bank (33). The route is now continued by a modern woodland track running to the east through the wood.

L1.2 Boundary Features.

- 9 Gently curving arc of bank, up to 1m high and 3m wide, with a slight ditch, up to 1.5m wide and a maximum depth of 0.8m. An external bank, up to 2m wide and 0.75m high is visible for most of the northern arc. The full circuit is still clearly visible and defines a circular enclosure approximately 3.7ha (9 acres) in area. At the centre of the enclosure is a large prehistoric bowl barrow (45) with an undated standing stone set upon the summit. The diameter of the enclosure ditch averages 105m which is very close to 5 chains (1 chain = 22 yards) and is centred upon the standing stone set on barrow 45. It appears that the stone was used as the centre point for the laying out of the enclosure. This enclosure can be identified as a 'tree-ring' enclosure for which Powlesland (1997, 13) has suggested a construction date of 1776-85, although the stone was evidently erected sometime prior to 1736, referred to at that date by Strachey and depicted on his map of the East Mendip area. The feature overlies, and therefore post-dates, a number of substantial quarries (13-15, 38 and 40).
- 10 Woodland bank, turning through 90° up to 0.9m high and 2m wide, with intermittent and very slight traces of a ditch on its western and northern sides. Most prominent on the plateau immediately north of the main natural escarpment, this bank aligns with the eastern boundary of the wood and is contemporary with its planting in the mid-nineteenth century.
- 31 70m long stretch of bank, aligned approximately east-west, with slight ditches either side of and parallel to the bank. Overall width of 8m and overlain by circular enclosure 9.
- 32 90m long stretch of multiple ditch and bank aligned approximately east-west and, at its western end, abutting circular enclosure 9 and overlying quarry 38. In form this feature is of identical construction to 9 and appears to be contemporary with it. The bank is up to 3m wide and 1m high with a ditch 2m wide and 0.7m deep on the south side. To the north of the bank another ditch, 2m wide and up to 0.5m deep has slight traces of a counterscarp bank along its northern edge. The bank and ditches are on the line of the parish boundary between Doultling and Ashwick and is aligned exactly upon the parish boundary stone, 26.
- 33 Bank and ditch following the top of the scarp edge and extending from a point immediately to the west of the track 30, to the present north east corner of the wood. The feature is defined by a ditch, up to 3.5m wide and 0.6m deep, with intermittent traces of an accompanying bank on its south side. It is probable, based on cartographic evidence (Doultling Tithe Map, 1836), that the feature originally ran further west to make a junction with the tree-ring 9, but all ground traces here have now been truncated by a modern forestry track running along the top of the steep natural scarp. The Doultling Tithe Map of 1836 shows this feature as marking the northern boundary of the wood at that date. Clearly, at this period, the wood was confined to the area west of the tree-ring, within the tree-ring (9) and between 33 and the southern foot of the

Beacon Hill escarpment, along the line of the present southern boundary of the wood.

- 34 25m length of bank, with a ditch on the east side, running south from the tree-ring enclosure 9. The bank is 2.5m wide and 0.3m deep, the ditch is 1.5m wide and 0.2m deep. The feature does not accord with any former boundary on the cartographic sources.

L1.3 Linear Features Associated with Extractive Activities.

The surface remains of quarrying and other extractive industries dominate the surface of Beacon Hill Wood. These take a number of different forms that may reflect both the material exploited and the date of the activities. There are 8 substantial linear quarries within the survey area (11-15, 35-37), all on a similar alignment along the east-west axis of the ridge.

- 11 Linear cut, up to 9m wide and 1.5m deep, terminating in an oval hollow 12m by 15m that respects the western edge of the postulated course of the Fosse Way.
- 12 Slight and intermittent linear cut, up to 8m wide and 0.8m deep. Like no. 11, this also stops against the western edge of the postulated course of the Fosse Way.
- 13 Substantial linear quarry, 170m in length, up to 18m wide and 2.5m deep, that cuts through the postulated course of the Fosse Way. The bank of the tree-ring enclosure, no. 9, overlies it. Within the area of the tree-ring, there are numerous small, subsidiary quarry pits along the northern edge of the main linear cut.
- 14 Substantial linear quarry, up to 20m wide and 3m deep, extending eastwards from an area of extensive and complex quarry hollows (17), for a distance of 60m and cutting across the postulated course of the Fosse Way. As with no. 13, the bank of the tree-ring enclosure, no. 9, overlies it.

Quarries 13 and 14 are crossed by a substantial post-World War II cast iron service pipeline, which has been lain along the assumed line of the Fosse Way.

- 15 Substantial linear quarry, up to 10m wide and 2m deep, extending eastwards from an area of extensive and complex quarry hollows (17) for a distance of 130m, and cutting across the postulated course of the Fosse Way. As with nos. 13-14, the bank of the tree-ring enclosure, no. 9, overlies it.
- 35 Linear quarry 45m in length, up to 10m wide and 3m deep with a further shallow ovoid scoop immediately to the north east.
- 36 Linear quarry, 90m in length, gently curving to south east and truncated by further quarrying cutting into the natural scarp (40). This is a very substantial quarry, up to 4m deep and 14m wide. It comprises a series of linked 'scoops' and respects the northern arc of the mound of round barrow 45 but has destroyed the barrow ditch.
- 37 Linear quarry, 80m in length and extending south east from quarry complex 38. The quarry comprises a series of scoops with a substantial northern scarp standing up to 2.5m high. Along the southern edge a series of irregular,

low mounds represent spoil from various episodes of extraction.

Q.1 Quarries and Related Features.

The extensive remains of quarrying cover much of the plateau surface, with smaller and more discrete areas being recorded along the line of the main south facing escarpment. On the plateau there are three principal areas of disturbance, 16-18.

- 16 Shallow and irregular area of disturbance extending over approximately 160²m. The eastern limit of this activity is marked by an irregular and meandering scarp up to 1.5m high. The western limit is not clearly defined the feature appears to be the result of low intensity surface workings.
- 17 An extensive and complex area of intercutting quarry scoops and pits covering approximately 0.5ha. The northern side of this complex is defined by a substantial scarp up to 2m high that extends eastwards to join linear quarry no. 14. To the west the limit is marked by the course of holloways 3 and 4, whilst on the south an irregular scarp up to 1.5 high runs eastwards to join linear quarry complex 15. Within the boundaries of this complex are numerous scoops and hollows showing some evidence of intercutting suggestive of lengthy use.
- 18 Deep quarry complex cut into the south-facing escarpment of the hill with a short length of holloway leading up the slope to the northwest. Although very eroded, this quarry appears to be of considerable antiquity and is up to 4.5m deep where cut into the hillside. There are a number of rock exposures revealing Old Red Sandstone with quartz conglomerate. The eastern side has been overlain by a causeway and terraceway, 7, and a later boundary stone (28) is set within the southernmost part.
- 19 Small, deep (up to 3.5m) quarry cut into the north side of holloway 4.
- 20 Small, deep (up to 3m) quarry cut across the line of holloway 3.

Quarries 19-20 are, like 18, cut into Old Red Sandstone with quartz conglomerate and both have substantial exposures of rock face still visible. These are recorded as having been cleared by the Nature Conservancy Council in 1983 (NCC 1985).

- 21 A series of quarry scoops cut into the top of the south-facing escarpment. The westernmost is up to 2m deep and has a series of slighter scoops within it.
- 22 Possible quarry and building platform set into the foot of the south-facing escarpment and immediately adjacent to the embanked causeway, 2. A platform, 22m in length and 10m wide has been created adjacent to a stretch of near vertical quarry face in the escarpment. The south side of the platform is defined by a causewayed track, 2. The platform is at two levels, the southwestern end being the larger, 15m by 10m with a 0.5m high step separating it from the northeastern end. This platform is very regular and may represent the site of a structure utilising a former quarry. There are no surface indications of walling, function or date.
- 38 Extensive area of intercut, shallow quarries covering an area of approximately

0.5ha. The area has the appearance of shallow, surface workings with a complexity of intercutting, slight scarps suggesting a lengthy period of working. The maximum depth of the hollow is 1.5m. To the north the embankment of the modern road has acted as a dam and a pond now fills part of the feature. The quarry is overlain by the perimeter of the tree ring, 9 and the parish boundary bank 32.

- 39 Area of quarrying extending for a distance of 80m and cut into the south facing natural escarpment. A rectangular platform measuring 12m by 6m is comprised of rubble and may be a levelled area for working material extracted from the adjacent quarry.
- 40 Extensive area of scarp-face quarrying extending for a distance of 120m along the south facing scarp. Overlain by the tree ring, 9, this area of workings has cut a series deep scoops into the scarp, truncates linear quarry 36 and is partly overlain by track 30 at its western extremity. At the southern edge of the workings there are a series of regular platforms that may represent either working/preparation areas or even possible structures.
- 41 Scarp-face quarry with a massive rectangular platform at the scarp foot. The platform measures 35m by 20m and stands to a height in excess of 5m. The massiveness of the platform is noteworthy and is by far the largest such feature within the wood.
- 42 Area of scarp-face quarrying extending for a distance of 90m and comprising a series of small, shallow workings cut no more than 3m into the scarp and a maximum of 10m wide. All of the quarries in this group are very eroded in profile.

B. Barrows.

An extensive barrow cemetery is known along the crest of Beacon Hill (see above). Nine certain barrows were located within the survey area (24-5, 43-50) and another (23) was recorded immediately beyond the western boundary of the wood. A slight curving rubble platform, possibly associated with prehistoric ritual activity was identified (51), while a feature previously recorded as a barrow was located, surveyed and the identification refuted (52).

- 23 Bowl barrow located just beyond the western boundary of the wood. Grinsell (1971), Ashwick 4. It survives as a low mound 20m in diameter and standing up to 0.7m high. No trace of a surrounding ditch.
- 24 Bowl barrow. Grinsell (1971), Ashwick 5. The mound, some 22m in diameter and 1m high, has been severely mutilated by forestry activity and has the remains of a central depression suggestive of an unrecorded antiquarian investigation. There is no trace of a surrounding ditch.
- 25 Bowl barrow. Grinsell (1971), Ashwick 6. Very little now survives of this barrow and it has been very badly mutilated by forestry activities. The exact dimensions are impossible to define with any accuracy, so spread is the slight mound. The remains are little more than a subtle difference in vegetation and a low mound no more than 0.2m high.
- 43 Bowl barrow. Grinsell (1971), Doultling 1. The mound, approximately 14m in diameter and 1.8m high has been disturbed on the north by linear quarry 14.

The top of the mound is flat but indications of disturbance, whether by tree, animal burrows or antiquarian activity is difficult to assess due to the overgrown condition of the mound. No trace of a surrounding ditch.

- 44 Bowl barrow. Grinsell (1971), Douling 2. The largest barrow of the group within Beacon Hill Wood but clearly heavily modified at an unknown date. The mound is 32m in diameter and up 1.6m high. Traces of a ditch, up to 4m wide and 0.2m deep survive around the northern arc. The top of the mound has been landscaped to form a circular platform 21m in diameter and is defined by a slight bank 2m wide and up to 0.25m high. There are three gaps in this bank, all probably the result of 'scramble' motor cycles rather than original features. Two large, mature Beech trees dominate the interior of the barrow. The modification of the barrow and the construction of the inner bank and the Beech trees strongly suggest that the mound was modified to create an enclosed tree clump, probably in the eighteenth century and before the planting of Beacon Hill Wood. The barrow was excavated by the Revd. Skinner, but apparently without result (Powlesland 1997, 50-1). Very slight depressions may indicate the area of Skinner's excavation or, alternatively, mark the former positions of other trees. See also gradiometer survey report, Area 3, by R. Tabor, below (Fig. 4).
- 45 Bowl barrow. Grinsell (1971), Douling 3. Bowl barrow 22m in diameter and 2.5m high with very slight traces of a ditch, 4m wide and .1m deep around the south east quadrant. To the north, the mound has been enhanced by the partial encroachment of a linear quarry (36). On the summit of the mound a large monolith, 1.8m high, is at the exact centre of the tree ring (9) encompassing the central part of Beacon Hill Wood. Skinner cites this mound as the site of a dinner party in the mid eighteenth century (Powlesland 1997, 51). Most commentators on Beacon Hill have identified the mound as the site of the beacon - Strachey 1736 (although Skinner preferred no 44; Powlesland, *ibid.*). Excavations beside the monolith by Skinner failed to locate any remains of archaeological significance (*ibid.*). See also gradiometer survey report, Area 3, by R. Tabor, below (Fig. 4).
- 46 Bowl barrow. Grinsell (1971), Douling 4. Bowl barrow 16m in diameter and 1.5m high. No trace of a surrounding ditch. Examined by Skinner in August 1820 and a deposit of unurned cremated bone recovered. No grave goods are recorded (Powlesland 1997, 52-3). The surface of the mound has been mutilated by recent forestry activity.
- 47 Bowl barrow. Grinsell (1971), Douling 5. Bowl barrow 22m in diameter and 2m high. No trace of a surrounding ditch. Excavated by Skinner who recovered an inverted urn within a stone cist, close to the surface and probably representing a secondary interment (Powlesland 1997, 54). The surface of the mound has been mutilated by recent forestry activity. See also gradiometer survey report, Area 4, by R. Tabor, below (Fig. 5).
- 48 Bowl barrow. Grinsell (1971), Douling 6. Bowl barrow 19m in diameter and 1m high. No trace of a surrounding ditch. Examined by Skinner in 1826 who recorded a number of large stones but no other finds. (Powlesland 1997, 55). The surface of the mound has been severely mutilated by recent forestry activity. See also gradiometer survey report, Area 4, by R. Tabor, below (Fig. 5).

- 49 Bowl barrow. Grinsell (1971), Doultling 7. Bowl barrow 11m in diameter and 0.2m high. There is a slight trace of a ditch, 2m wide and 0.1m deep around the north east quadrant. Possibly examined by Skinner in 1820 (see Powlesland 1997, 56-8 for a discussion surrounding the confusion in confidently identifying which of the barrows in this part of the wood were excavated). The surface of the mound has been severely mutilated by recent forestry activity. See also gradiometer survey report, Area 4, by R. Tabor, below (Fig. 5).
- 50 Bowl barrow. Grinsell (1971), Doultling 8. Bowl barrow 12m in diameter and 0.2m high. There is a slight trace of a ditch, 2m wide and 0.1m deep around the north east quadrant. The surface of the mound has been severely mutilated by recent forestry activity and is partly obscured by recently cut brushwood. See also gradiometer survey report, Area 4, by R. Tabor, below (Fig. 5).
- 51 Part of a low, roughly circular, stoney platform 20m in diameter and located 8m south of barrow 45. This previously unrecorded feature is very slight but probably artificial. It has a resemblance to a very low cairn, associated with sherds of collared urn, recently investigated close to a barrow cemetery in the Porton Ranges, Wiltshire (Paul Tubb, *pers.com.*). This feature was partly covered by Area 3 of the gradiometer survey but no additional information was recovered (Fig. 4).
- 52 Embanked depression, 12m in diameter. Claimed by Powlesland (1997, 58-9) to be Grinsell (1971) Doultling 9, this feature is difficult to reconcile with his identification as an excavated barrow. The earthwork evidence is far more in accord with the remains of a small prospection pit associated with adjacent quarrying activities. It is possible that Doultling 9 has, given the record of an almost total excavation by Skinner and later forestry activity, ceased to exist as a surface feature.

BS, Boundary Stones.

Three *in situ* boundary stones were recorded. During the time that the survey was in progress two - nos. 28-29, had been uprooted by vandals, but are now restored.

- 26 Parish boundary stone. A rectangular Doultling limestone monolith, 1.5m high and inscribed on all four faces. The east side is worn and illegible; the north reads 'Stoke Lane Parish 1766', the west 'Shepton Parish 1766' and the south 'Doultling Parish 1766'. This dated stone is positioned within part of quarry complex 17 and must therefore post-date any quarrying activity in this area.
- 27 Square limestone block, with a square socket hole in the centre. This corresponds in position to a flagstaff setting marked F.S. on the 1904 ed. OS 1:2500 map.
- 28 Square limestone monolith, 1.2m high and bearing the inscription 'WMFM'.
- 29 Square limestone monolith, 1.2m high and bearing the inscription 'WMFM'.

Powlesland (1997, 64) ascribes the last two stones to William Melliar Foster Melliar, who acquired woodland on Beacon Hill in Douling Parish in 1838.

Possible WWII or military features.

- 53 Rectangular pit, 3m x 2m, with slight embankment on the south side. Cut into linear ditch 33. The form of the feature is in close accord with 2 man weapon pits of mid twentieth century date and may be associated with Home Guard activity between 1939-1945.
- 54 Rectangular pit, 14m x 4m, with a substantial scarp on the south side. This feature, although larger than 53, is of similar form and may also have a recent, military origin.

Gradiometer Surveys (Figs. 3-5) By Richard Tabor

Introduction

Two episodes of geophysical prospection were undertaken to complement the earthwork surveys of Beacon Wood and to target specific questions relating to known or postulated archaeological remains within the woodland. The first magnetic survey was carried out in the spring of 2002, its principal aim being to locate the route of the Fosse Way. In particular it was hoped to locate the points at which it deviated from a straight line to avoid the steepest ascent of Beacon Hill. The survey method of choice for such a target is resistivity, depending on the characteristic hydrology of the area. However, the woodland setting of trees and their fallen debris presented a probably insurmountable problem for the insertion of probes at sufficiently frequent, regular, intervals. Magnetic survey, using a gradiometer, requires no direct contact with the ground, and was possible, if rather difficult, in this setting. The second episode of survey took place in November 2003 and was focused upon the environs of several of the prehistoric round barrows identified within the wood. In this instance magnetic survey was judged to be the more appropriate technique, although once again, ground conditions were a considerable hindrance, limiting both the extent and probably the effectiveness of survey.

Two areas were selected for survey in 2002. Area 1 was south of the hill, on and immediately west of the main south to north track through the wood. Area 2 was close to the north boundary of the wooded area, south of Green Lane, which is thought to represent the route of the Fosse Way continuing northwards. Two further areas in the vicinity of round barrows 44-5 and 47-50 were surveyed in 2003. The location of all gradiometer surveys are shown on Figure 2.

Equipment

Fluxgate gradiometer - Geoscan FM36 (2002 survey)

The Geoscan FM36 comprises two fluxgates aligned at 90° to each other, one set 0.5 m above the other. The instrument is designed to be carried at a consistent height not exceeding 0.3 m above the ground.

Variations in the magnetic field between the two fluxgates are measured in *nanoTesla* at each sampling point within a grid. The depth range is approximately one metre.

Data were stored on a built-in logger, then transferred directly to a computer, using the Geoplot 3.0 programme.

Fluxgate gradiometer - Bartington Grad601-2 (2003 survey)

The Bartington Grad601-2 comprises two tubes held vertically at a 1 m separation, each with two fluxgates aligned at 90° to each other, one set 1 m above the other. The instrument differs from the Geoscan FM36 (used in 2002 in a survey of the possible route of the Fosse Way through Beacon Woods) by having double the separation between fluxgates. The manufacturers claim that this increases the depth range of the instrument to around 3 m, a claim born out my own recent work (Tabor forth).

Variations in the magnetic field between the two fluxgates are measured in *nanoTesla* at each sampling point within a grid.

Data were stored on a built-in logger, then transferred directly to a computer, using the Bartington Datalog programme.

Software - Geoscan Geoplot 3.0

Geoplot 3.0 facilitates the transfer of data to a hard disk from a data logger. It allows the presentation of data in four graphical forms: dot-density, grey scale, pattern and X-Y (or *trace*) plots. The latter are particularly effective when used in conjunction with other graphical modes to emphasise ferrous magnetic anomalies or other distortions that show as accentuated peaks or troughs. The programme supports statistical analysis and filtering of the data.

Method

Each area was divided into 20 m squares. In 2002, readings were logged at 0.5 m intervals and in 2003 at 0.125m intervals, along east - west traverses set 1 m apart, in a zig-zag pattern.

Area 1 Fig 3 (March 2002)

The area comprised a 20 x 40 m strip of open pasture immediately south of the enclosed woodland, and a length of 40 x 120 m on and to the west of the track, within the woods. The two areas formed part of a contiguous grid, although a gap in the data plot appears where the existing modern boundary could not be surveyed. Towards the north end, the surface was deeply rutted due to forestry activity, rendering survey ineffective. The north west grid was omitted from survey.

Results (Figure 3)

The processed plot shows a N to S linear of extreme dipolar magnetic intensity, replaced by *null* readings to unmask weaker anomalies. The readings are commensurate with a very large ferrous magnetic pipeline which clearly follows the line of the track. A large, possibly curvilinear, dipolar anomaly, from SW to NE, bisects or is cut by the north end of the pipeline. This may indicate the junction of geological strata, but it would also be consistent with a very substantial ditch. Several strongly positive magnetic anomalies in a very unsettled area south of the possible curvilinear tend to share a roughly SSW - NNE alignment, common to two similar features in the area of pasture further south. One of these appears to extend beneath the existing boundary of the enclosed area, providing a probable *terminus ante quem*. These anomalies are likely to represent the fills of cut features.

The data show no evidence for a stone road surface, nor for the characteristic parallel ditches on either side of a major Roman road.

Area 2 Fig. 3 (April 2002)

Substantial quarry scoops limited survey to a 20 x 30 m area over and west of a track. There was less woodland debris than in Area 1 but, before survey, it was noted that a

very substantial ferrous magnetic pipe south of the survey area was aligned with the track.

Results (Figure 3)

The negative halo of the pipeline's dipolar linear is plainly visible along the east side of the plot. To the north, a second area of ferrous magnetic activity is indicated by *null* readings on the shade plot and by peaks on the trace plot. Three roughly east-west weak linears are probably the results of forestry activity.

Area 3 Fig. 4 (November 2003)

Area 3 covered the large middle barrow (44) with three full grids and four traverses of a fourth, and 31 m by 20 m in a full and a partial grid south of the east barrow (45) (distinguished by an upright stone on it). Both areas included some trees but were deemed clear enough for survey. The large barrow now comprises a circular bank around a depression, the greater part of which was accessible to survey.

Results

The quality of data collection in Area 3 was extremely good, requiring little processing. Initially readings exceeding 30 nT above and below the mean were replaced by "nul", and then two runs of interpolation were carried out along the Y-axis, in effect creating a symmetrical distribution of data. Zero mean traverse was not applied as it removed parts of arcing anomalies (Figure 4A). Subsequently a run included the latter function, revealing further weaker anomalies east of the mound (Figure 4B).

The large barrow "bank" is plainly visible as a ring of negative readings. It encloses a ring of positive anomalies of varying strength, in turn enclosing strongly dipolar readings, showing as pronounced peaks in Figure 4C. South south east of the barrow, appearing to butt with the outer ring, is an arc of positive readings (Figure 4A). After the application of the zero mean traverse function three short, feint, positive linears are visible immediately to the east of the barrow (Figure 4B).

In the area south of the east barrow, two irregular positive linears are visible as slight trends after the application of the zero mean traverse function, but otherwise it is dominated by sporadic dipoles.

Area 4 Fig. 5 (November 2003)

The north east of Area 4 comprised a complete grid with opposing corners encroaching onto the outer mounds of two barrows (nos. 47-48, Figure 5A). Although at a short distance from these barrows, the south west part was designed to overlap with an amorphous mound to its west and a low mound to its south. Fragments of angular Old Red Sandstone were visible on the former. The mounds of the latter two presumed barrows are not marked on the current 1:2500 Landline map but are identified as nos. 49 and 50 in this survey). In the north east part there were several trees within the grid but in the south west area the frequency of closely set ridges and furrows disguised by some brushwood proved more problematical causing a stagger pattern in the data distribution (Figure 5A).

Results

The data from Area 4 required the use of zero mean traverse to compensate for instrument drift accentuated by the zig-zag collection pattern. In addition, a gaussian low pass filter was applied to reduce the stagger effect in the south west area (Figure 5A).

There are several small amorphous positive anomalies in the north east part of the area, but most striking is an negative arc anomaly appearing to intersect the middle barrow mound. Its location at the edge of a grid makes it impossible to assert whether it is a continuous feature, a discontinuous feature, or two distinct features.

A substantial area of dipolar response in the south west part (Figures 5A and 5B) is situated where three weak negative linears converge. Beyond this, the south west data plot has a very speckled appearance caused by offsetting of the relative positions of readings collected in zig-zag traverses. It is not possible to correct “stagger” errors in data collected with the Grad601-2 but in this case, it is still possible to make out trends representing the ridges and furrows created by forestry work.

Interpretation (Figures 4D, 5C)

Data from within the arc of the large mound, 47 (Area 4) suggests that it has been very disturbed. The dipolar readings are consistent with a low background scatter of ferrous magnetic material or thermo-remnance. At the time of survey, the remains of several bonfires were plainly visible and this may have heated some of the local stone sufficiently to magnetise it. The positive arc butted with the mound is likely to be part of a curvilinear ditch, a possible prehistoric feature. In the east part of Area 3 two roughly parallel positive linear anomalies may possibly be two ditches bounding a droveway (Figure 4D).

The amorphous positive anomalies in the north east part of Area 4 might either represent cut or thermo-remnant features or perhaps more probably modern disturbance. The negative curvilinear anomaly(s) appears to be a bank or wall.

The converges of three negative linears may result from the digging of a trench for a non-metallic pipe, subsequently backfilled with local stone (Figure 5C).

Conclusion

Despite the very difficult conditions underfoot the data are of good quality. Three possible explanations for the lack of evidence for the Fosse Way must be considered: 1) it does not follow a route within either surveyed area; 2) its route has been used by the pipeline, and hence entirely obscured by it; 3) the background geology has masked the negative and positive anomalies (road and ditches respectively). The latter explanation seems least likely as one or other anomaly type should show; indeed the fills of cut linear features in Area 1 are readily apparent. In areas 3 and 4 the absence of clear negative indicators of ditches around any of the barrows is notable, although at least two other curvilinear features of possible prehistoric origin were located – south of barrow 44 and between barrows 47 and 48. From a technical point of view, it is interesting to note that negative features are the most coherent. The survey has been more productive than was expected in view of the difficult ground conditions.

Thanks are due to Peter Leach and Peter Banks (Secretary of the Beacon Society) for their assistance in clearing the worst of the brushwood and for setting up the grid.

Part III. Discussion.

The survey has demonstrated both the value of woodland as an archaeological resource and the contribution that analytical earthwork survey can make to woodland archaeology. The range of monuments recorded, from Bronze Age round barrows to

recent woodland management features, bears clear testament to the diversity of landscape exploitation on Beacon Hill over the last four millennia.

Prehistoric features.

The only certain prehistoric features recorded are the round barrows, nos. 23-25 and 43-50, which form part of an extensive monumental ritual landscape of the early to mid-second millennium BC. A further possible prehistoric ritual or funereal monument has been identified as a result of this survey, 51. The identification of the latter feature, if correct, underscores the importance of the level areas in close proximity to barrow cemeteries, an importance that could be enhanced by features identified on the gradiometer survey. In many other parts of Britain it is not uncommon to find 'flat' cremation cemeteries of later Bronze Age date adjacent to Early Bronze Age barrows. Although there has clearly been substantial modern damage through forestry activities over the westernmost, 24-5, and the easternmost barrows 46-50, the environs of the central group, 43-5 appear to be relatively intact apart from later quarrying. These areas therefore should be regarded as having a high archaeological potential.

As mentioned above, petrological work has also identified Beacon Hill as the most likely source for rotary querns found at the Iron Age hillfort of South Cadbury and at the Glastonbury lake village (Fiona Roe, pers. com.), as well as for late Iron Age ceramics - Group 2 'Glastonbury Ware'. Both activities will have necessitated quarrying for raw material as well as preparation and production areas. Although extensive areas of quarrying have been recorded in detail, it is not possible on purely surface evidence to identify with any degree of certainty areas of prehistoric extractive industries. Indeed, such areas may have been masked by activities of Romano-British and later date. One area however may be tentatively suggested as having some potential. Quarry complex 18, cut into the escarpment, is overlain by the causeway and holloway 7. This feature is conceivably the remnant of a possible route for the Roman Fosse Way up the steep escarpment. If so, then 18 could be of pre-Roman, or very early Roman origin; a question that might only be resolved through excavation.

Romano-British Features.

The principal Romano-British monument recorded is the *agger* of the Roman road, the Fosse Way, no. 1. This is visible as a low earthwork for a distance of some 150 metres in the southern part of the wood, approximately 10m to the west of the current track known as Fosse Lane. This portion was also subjected to a gradiometer survey, which regrettably did not provide any clearer evidence of its presence or character. The subsequent excavation of sections along both sides of holloway 3 at its intersection with the postulated *agger*, were equally inconclusive.

One of the main questions to be addressed by the survey was how the Roman engineers carried the route up the escarpment to rejoin the main alignment. The gradient is such that a straight ascent would be impracticable for vehicles drawn by draught animals and highly demanding on pedestrians. The topography of the hill suggests that a deviation to the west be the most logical route. A number of holloways follow this route up the slope, and at least two, nos. 3 and 5 can be seen to actually cut across the Roman *agger* and therefore post-date it. The causeway and holloway no. 7 does continue the line of the *agger* and makes a steep ascent of the hill. The 90° turn made by this feature towards the top of the escarpment would be extremely difficult for vehicles and although it is tempting to postulate a possible Roman date, it cannot be regarded as the main route. It is highly probable that later reuse of the Fosse Way

has obliterated all traces of the original main route up the hill. The problem is compounded by the complete lack of surface evidence for the Fosse once it reaches the plateau. The line shown by the Ordnance Survey does not have characteristic features such as the remains of an *agger* or side ditches and the presence of a pipe line along this line may well have removed any such remains. Indeed the pipeline has also effectively masked the area to meaningful geophysical survey (Tabor, this report) and quarrying has further disturbed the ground along the published route.

Quern stone production during the Roman period is well attested by the products found at several contemporary local sites (see above). As with the Iron Age activity, it is difficult to be certain in identifying quarries of Roman date. Such an industry would require areas set-aside for various stages in production. The platform and quarry at 22 are of interest in this context. Although undated, the possible association with the scarp-edge quarries at 21 and the causeway, 2, make this an area of some potential. Other areas with potential for further investigation could include the large platform and quarrying at 41, and perhaps the western part of 40, which might predate the causeway 30 – itself possibly originating as an access for the quarrying at 41 and 42.

Quarrying

The surface evidence for quarrying is widespread across the survey area although the dating of these features on purely morphological grounds is problematic. The linear quarries, nos. 11-15 and 35-37 have the characteristics of ‘rakes’, following sub-surface deposits. Their similar trend is presumably a reflection of the outcropping of the rock strata exploited. Two, 11-12, respect the postulated line of the Fosse Way, although this cannot be taken as evidence of a Roman date *per se*, but only that the route may still have been in use at the time of exploitation. 14-15 clearly post-date the use of the route as they cut through the line. The quarry scoops and hollows, 16-21 and 38-42, vary considerably in scale and extent and clearly indicate extraction over a lengthy period of time. Those on the south facing escarpment, 40-42, also have associated platforms that may represent working platforms or even structures. The location of boundary stones, 26-28, all set within quarry scoops and the boundary banks, 9,10 and 32, that overlie the scoops, all indicate that extraction had ceased by the 18th century. However, creation of the Frome Turnpike from 1757, marking the northern boundary of the wood, might have exploited the sandstone outcrop as a source of road metalling, and might, for example, account for the extensive quarrying around the pond, 38. Nevertheless, the generally rounded profile of the majority of quarry earthworks suggest that they are of some antiquity, though any closer dating could only come through excavation. Sampling of rock exposures and petrological comparison with known Iron Age and Romano-British querns ascribed to a source on Beacon Hill may help to narrow down potentially earlier quarries.

Tracks and Holloways

The succession of tracks and holloways recorded demonstrate the long importance of a route following the Fosse Way, and the need to deviate from its straight line to find an easier ascent of the steep southern scarp near the summit of Beacon Hill. In terms of the earthwork relationships, the earliest routes appear to be those marked by nos. 6-7, both of which have been truncated by later tracks or quarrying. The most substantial holloways, nos. 3-4, have also been partly interrupted by small areas of quarrying, 19-20, although this can probably be ascribed to the NCC clearance of 1983 (*op cit*). The latest holloway in the sequence is probably no. 5, which branches off the line of the Fosse Way Lane and is the present route taken by the public right of way (RUPP).

Forestry activity during the 20th century has had a detrimental impact upon many of the monuments recorded in the survey area. Deep ploughing associated with the planting of trees has caused considerable damage to barrows 24, 46-50 and to the *agger* of the Fosse Way, no. 1. In addition, this cultivation has disturbed much of the surface area of the wood and will have damaged some of the sub-surface archaeology. The impact of tree felling or natural fall in recent times has so far been minimal, although the barrows 43-45 and their environs are perhaps most vulnerable in this respect.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The surface survey has demonstrated well, both the range and potential of the archaeological resource within Beacon Wood. The complex of holloways, quarries, funerary monuments and other features demonstrate both the time depth and the variety of past use of this landscape. Geophysical prospection has proved less helpful, either in revealing new information or in amplifying the results of the measured survey. Although absolute dates cannot be ascribed to many of the features, their character has been defined within a broad chronological framework, and this will prove an important first step in the formulation of a long-term management and research policy for the remains.

Recommendations

The survey has led to the detailed mapping of the entire wood allowing the formulation of a set of recommendations for the long-term management of the area.

- 1 Any woodland management projects need to take into account the fragility of the archaeology within the woods. The earthworks are vulnerable to erosion and damage from clearance, planting etc. Any management of the woodland should include consultation and assessment of the likely impact on the archaeology.
- 2 The designated right of way ascending the steepest part of the hill appears to follow an existing route, no. 5, although the preferred route for the RUPP is along the holloway, no. 3 (Fig.2). This route would not impinge upon any of the recorded archaeology and has already been subjected to limited clearance and improvement to encourage its use. The other former routes and quarries in this part of the wood that survive as holloways and earthworks are of some antiquity and vulnerable to continuing erosion. Any further grading, consolidation or other improvements to the preferred route should be monitored through an archaeological watching brief.
- 3 The archaeology of the wood is both extensive and varied, although a full understanding of the many episodes recorded is far from being achieved. A number of areas of significant archaeological potential have been identified and should be considered for investigation by selective excavation in the future. Key areas would include the *agger* of the Fosse Way (no. 1), especially in the area between the holloway 3 and trackway 7 and perhaps near the southern boundary of the wood. The possible building platforms and quarry complexes (21-22, 40-42) would repay further investigation to establish their date and function. The causeway/terraceway (no.7) and adjacent quarry (no.18) are also of some potential, and judging from the eroded nature of the

quarry scoops could prove to be of considerable antiquity. Some assessment of the survival of badly damaged barrows and their environs – structural remains and deposits – notably nos. 49 and 50, would be worthwhile.

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