

TWO LINEAR EARTHWORKS IN THE NEW FOREST.

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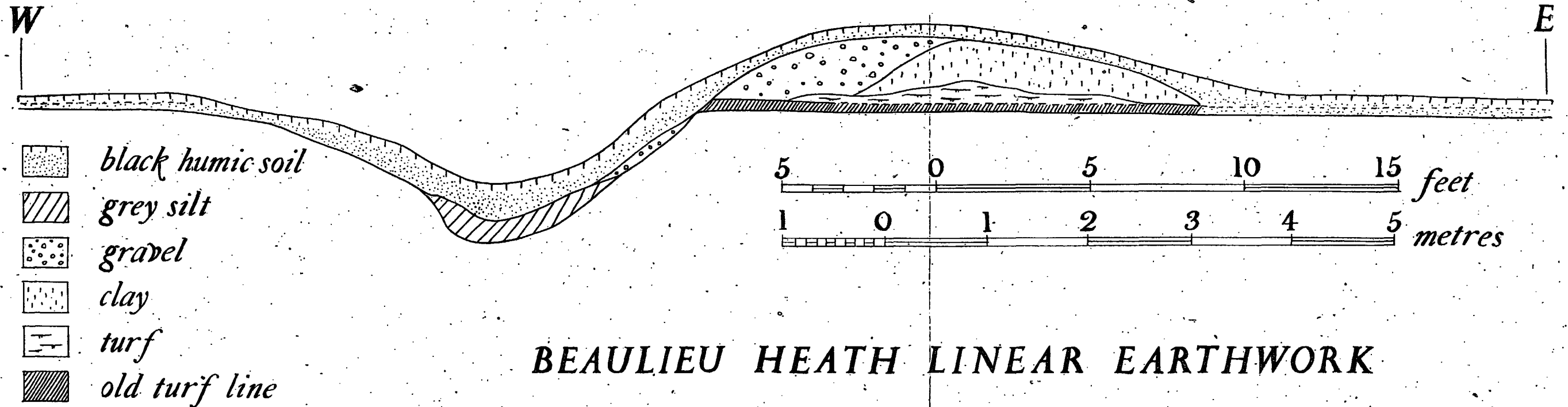
IN 1941, in the course of other excavations, I made trial trenches into two linear earthworks in the New Forest. The first was on Beaulieu Heath (6in. O.S. sheet LXXX S.E.), and the second near Stoney Cross (6in. O.S. sheet LXIII S.E.). Describing that one on Beaulieu Heath,¹ Sumner says: "From the west end of Hatchet Pond a well-defined bank with a ditch on the western side crosses the plain to the Beaulieu and Brockenhurst Road. On the farther side of this road the earthwork is not so well defined, but may be traced across the heath and boggy valley-heads towards Furzey Lodge. The portion that crosses the plain as before said compares in construction and in straight alignment with the earthworks on Beaulieu Heath Hill-top and it seems probable that it represents a medieval boundary connected with the encroachments on the Forest made by the Abbots of Beaulieu." (See *V.C.H. Hants*, vol. iv, pp. 650-51, for references to entries in *Calendar of Patent Rolls* for dates between 1272 and 1327. One of the offences listed in these was for "making three 'breccas' in his (the King's) close of Beaulieu and placing there stakes (stachia) and engines for taking deer. . . .") The other type of earthwork, the boundary type, to which this example may belong, was also in common use in the Forest in medieval times. In the *Beaulieu Abbey Charter of Foundations*, when listing the bounds of the Abbey, there occurs, "*et de longo vado usque ad fossatum de Hurpleya quod dominus rex Ricardus incipere jecit. . . .*"

The excavation, which consisted of a narrow cutting 3 feet wide and 50 feet long, was taken across part of the ditch (now destroyed) about 30 yards south of the road. It showed a roughly scooped out ditch with only 2 feet of silt, and a bank to the east of this had been made by first throwing the turves from the ditch on to the old ground surface and covering these with clay and gravel. An 8 foot length was uncovered along the edge of the bank, parallel to the ditch, while looking for possible post-holes, but none were found. No objects were discovered and I have no reason to dispute the probable medieval origin of the earthwork.

The second earthwork was on Ocknell Plain near Stoney Cross, and in the same publication Sumner describes it as follows: "This dyke may be found about one-third of a mile north-east of Ocknell Pond. It crosses the plateau gravel ridge of Ocknell Plain running due north and south from a boggy combe on the north . . . to another on the south . . . a distance of about one-sixth of a mile. . . . It consists of a wide-topped bank rising about 5 feet between two

1. *Earthworks of the New Forest*, Chiswick Press 1917, p. 71.

FIG. 1.



ditches, of which the eastern is the larger. Its overall measurement is 46 feet." He then continues by quoting analogies from the Forest, emphasising particularly the similarity between our earthwork and that on Setley Plain near Ringwood (undated). Continuing, he says: "In position, astride a natural highway of the Forest, and protected by boggy combes at each end, it may suggest defence, and may be supposed to compare with the scarp to scarp entrenchments that cross the down ridges of Cranborne Chase on Whitesheet Hill. . . . but in construction and in overall measurement it is quite different I do not think that defence was the original purpose of the dyke near Ocknell Pond."

Several barrows nearby were excavated by the writer and published with a plan of the district in *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* (1943), pp. 1-27. In the case of the earthwork now being considered, the excavations, which consisted of only a few trial cuttings, showed that the ditch on the west side was the first to have been dug. Owing to weather conditions it was not possible to obtain accurate profiles of either of the ditches, though that on the east seemed to be flat bottomed. Near the lip of the bank on the east side a palisade trench was discovered. No sign of wood remained, but the gravel packing was noticeable. (See sections, Figs. 1 and 2.) It was possible, before the area became finally waterlogged by melting snow, to take one small cutting (IV) to test the relation between the earthwork and a causeway between cuttings I and II. The end of the ditch was found to have been rounded off, and the causeway, which was evidently an original feature of the plan, was 18 feet wide.

With an earthwork of such simple construction, and without the help afforded by any finds, it is impossible to suggest any date with conviction. In the opinion of the excavator its date is probably medieval, but when further comparative material becomes available it may prove to belong to the class of Dark Age linear earthworks of the type found at Greenham Common near Newbury.² The name *Row Ditch* is given to this earthwork by Wise on his map.³ Mr. Crawford says that this name, meaning "rough", is generally given to ditches of pre-Norman date.

(NOTE.—Section AB is of Trench I on the plan, Section CD is of Trench II. Trench III showed no especial features, the palisade trench not being visible. The trench at the northern end of the earthwork suggested that this was its original end.)

2. *Arch. Journ. C.* (1943), pp. 177-188.

3. *New Forest*, 1883.