

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT DANEbury HILLFORT, 1995

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ABSTRACT

Six foundation pits were excavated prior to the erection of new air navigation lights on the hillfort at Danebury. One of these cut through the middle earthwork and revealed information on the techniques used to construct it. Also found was an earlier feature, possibly a ditch, which contained little dating evidence but may be as early as the 6th century BC. A small collection of pottery and struck flint was recovered, together with four large chalk blocks bearing tool marks, which may have been made during the construction of the earthwork.

INTRODUCTION

The major Iron Age multivallate hillfort at Danebury is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Hampshire 530) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Located some 4 km west of the river Test, and 2 km east of Wallop Brook, one of its tributaries, the hillfort encompasses high ground at the far eastern end of an east-west ridge which rises out of the chalk downlands of north-west Hampshire (SU324377). At a maximum height of 143 m above Ordnance Datum the interior of Danebury occupies a dominant position some 40 m above the surrounding landscape.

Danebury has three main circuits of earthworks: the inner and largest earthwork served as the main defensive barrier throughout the life of the site, from 550 BC to 100 BC; the smaller middle earthwork runs from the blocked south-west entrance to the eastern entrance, thus forming an elongated enclosure bounded on the north by the inner earthwork; encircling these is the even slighter outer earthwork which links with a linear ditch system. Major archaeological exca-

vations were carried out at Danebury by Professor Barry Cunliffe between 1969 and 1988. Forty percent of the area enclosed by the inner earthworks was fully excavated, extensive excavations were carried out on the eastern entrance, and selected sections were excavated through the middle, outer and linear earthworks. No previous investigations have been carried out in the areas between the inner, middle and outer earthworks.

The Ministry of Defence planned to erect six new steel air navigation light towers to replace the existing wooden ones around the top of the monument. Each required a concrete foundation pit 2 m square by 2 m deep and these were hand-excavated by archaeologists during July and August 1995. Four of the foundation pits (1, 2, 3 and 4) were located between the outer and inner earthworks and two (5 and 6) were located within the area bounded by the inner and middle earthworks (Fig. 1). The existing tower in the vicinity of pit 5 was located on top of the inner bank of the middle earthwork and it was therefore agreed that the foundation for the new tower be moved clear of the earthworks. Pit 5 was therefore located just to the north of the bank. A trench 0.8 m wide and 5.6 m long was excavated by archaeologists to take new services from the line of the existing cable to the location of pit 5. It was in this trench that a section of the bank was revealed and recorded (Fig. 1).

RESULTS

The inner bank of the middle earthwork (2) stood at a maximum height of 1.0 m above a buried soil (52) at a break of slope in the ground surface upon which it was constructed. It con-

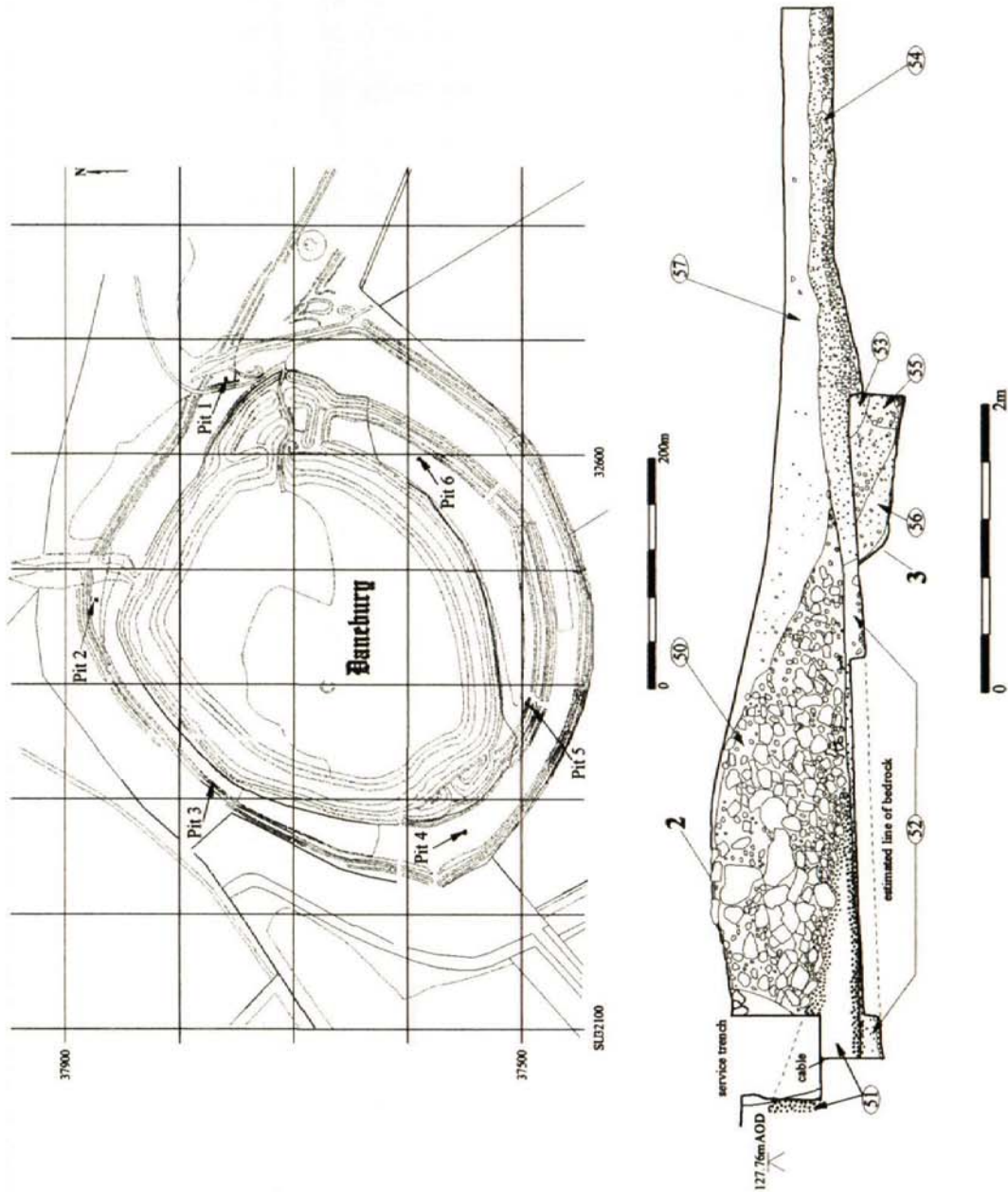


Fig. 1 Danebury: location of the foundation pits around the circuit of the hillfort and a section across the earthwork seen in pit 5

sisted of two distinct tips of quarried chalk: the primary tip (51) consisted of finely broken chalk pieces forming a bank rising from the top of the buried soil to a maximum height of 0.63 m; the secondary tip (50) formed the main body of the bank overlying the top and back slope of the primary tip (51). It largely comprised unshaped chalk blocks which appeared to have tool marks on them, probably a result of the quarrying process. The buried soil (52) had been preserved by the bank of the middle earthwork and was of the same depth as buried soils previously discovered by Professor Cunliffe (1984, 21, fig 3.8).

Also discovered was a pit or ditch terminal (3), semi-circular in plan and 0.60 m in extent. This cut the buried soil and had steep to vertical sides and a gently sloping flat base (Fig. 1). It had a maximum depth of 0.52 m and appeared to have been deliberately backfilled with three layers of

loose loam, each containing different proportions of chalk inclusions (53, 55 and 56). This feature contained one very abraded sherd of pottery, identified as Danebury Fabric type DO/D18, a common fabric at this site, indicating a *terminus post quem* possibly as early as the 6th century BC. This feature could, therefore, belong to one of the earliest phases of the site and may represent an earlier boundary which was later reinforced with the construction of the bank.

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