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REPORT ON A TRENCH ACROSS THE DITCH AT WALLDOWN MONUMENT, WHITEHILL, HANTS

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Walldown Monument (National Heritage List no: 1017368; Hants AHBR no: 17320) is a small undated, but almost certainly multi-period, univallate hillfort situated in the parish of Whitehill, Hampshire at SU 7983 3418. The earthwork, enclosing an area of *c.* 0.64ha, occupies the summit of a hill and, subject to the tree cover, has extensive views across the surrounding countryside – particularly to the east and southeast. In the National Heritage List entry the monument is described as 'two enclosures [...] the later of which is banked and ditched and was used during the Civil War as a field work.'

There are clearly at least two main phases to the earthwork, the inner and earlier of which is curvilinear. This has been remodelled to the south by the addition of a series of sections of straight ditches meeting at sharp angles and expanding slightly the inner area of the fort. The archaeological trench described below lies in the northern section of the defences where the line of the earlier ditch appears to have been retained in use.

The hill itself consists of the sands of the Folkestone Beds. The site is covered in pine trees, heather and gorse with the occasional open area where grass is encroaching on the heathland vegetation. The monument is open to the public and is crossed by a number of footpaths. These are causing erosion particularly where the paths cross the line of the defences.

Whitehill Parish Council and the Deadwater Valley Trust, which manages the site, were granted Scheduled Monument Consent to clear some of the tree growth from the monument and to control access by means of a fence around the perimeter with limited entry points. The Trust plans to fit wooden steps across the ditch and rampart, by the main entry point, in order to reduce further erosion. Part of this proposal was to undertake a limited archaeological investigation of the ditch on, or close to, the line of the proposed steps in advance of their installation. The aims were to ensure that any works do not damage unrecorded archaeological deposits; to obtain a profile of the ditch, and any recut(s), and recover any possible dating evidence. The work was carried out under the auspices of the Woolmer Forest Heritage Society in July 2015 and directed by the author.

The Trench: Due to problems with root cover the trench (4.5m × 1.8m) was sited slightly to the east of the proposed position of the new steps, but still at the centre of the northern section of the defences (Fig. 1). In order not to destabilise the inner and outer ramparts the trench was not extended to the full width of the ditch (which is shown by the dotted lines on figure 2). This would have been originally around 5m wide and 1.3m deeper than the current ground surface. The original height of the inner rampart is unknown, but the difference between that and the bottom of the ditch must have been in excess of 4 to 5m. If, as seems likely, most of the ditch fill originates from the inner rampart then the height difference would be somewhere in the region of 6 to 7m with any palisade adding to that.

The trench section (Figs 3 & 4) consists of a number of fill levels commencing with a thin surface scatter of leaf litter (100). At what is now the centre of the ditch this covered a concave deposit (101) of light brown humic material, which contained modern plastic rubbish. Beneath this, and elsewhere beneath the leaf litter, lay a band of grey sand (102) that must represent a recent episode of erosion. This in

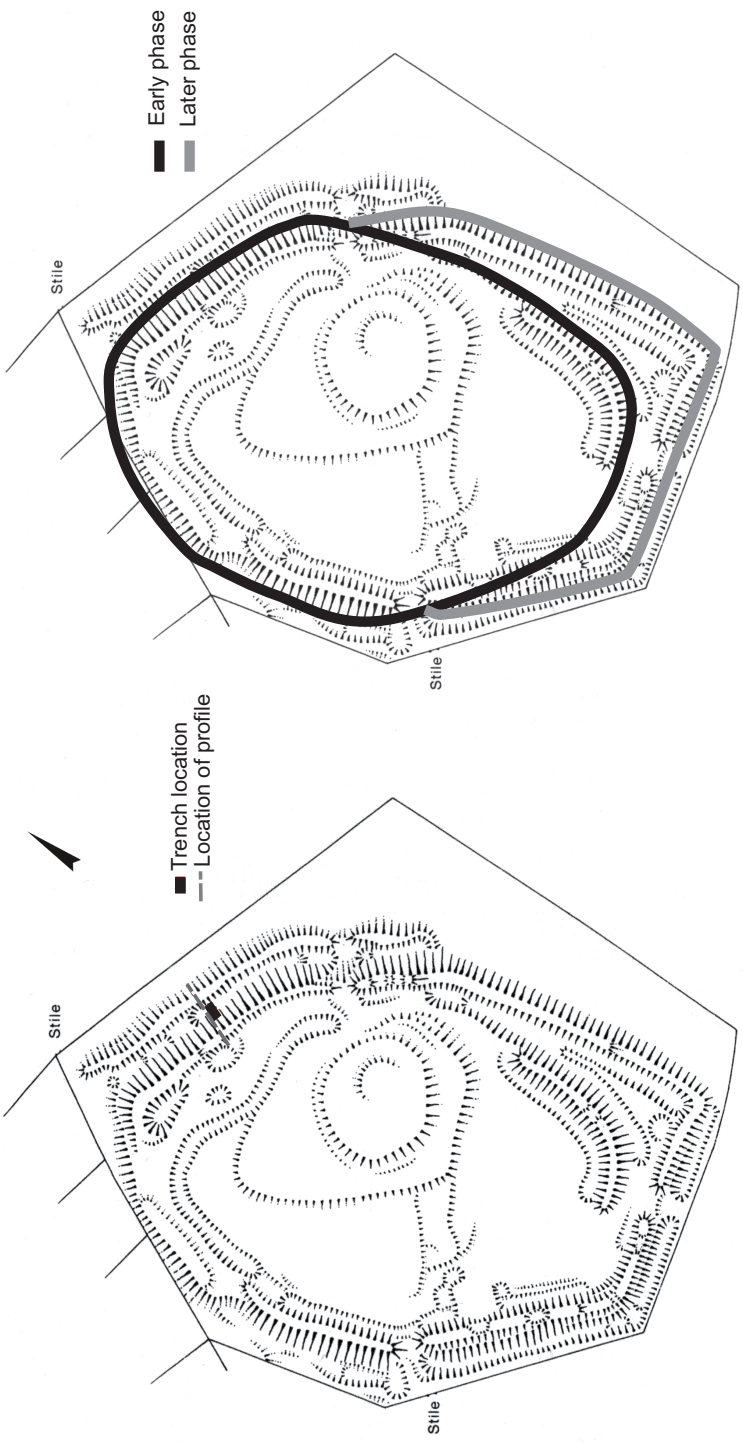

Fig. 1 Trench location plan (left) and suggested main phasing (right) (© Crown Copyright.HE)

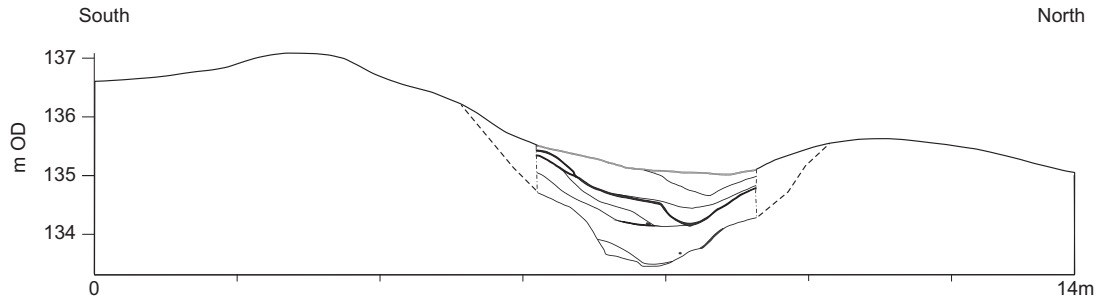

Fig. 2 Position of section within profile

turn overlay another concave deposit of brown humic material (104) within what appeared to be a cut (103). The humic fill contained disposable cigarette lighters, crisp packets and other rubbish and cannot be any earlier than the late 1970s or 80s. Coming down from the inner rampart and underlying the grey sand (102) and humic layer (104) was a thick band of black ashy sand (105). This may relate to a serious fire which is reported to have occurred in 1976 (Adam Carew, pers. comm.).

Beneath this ashy layer was, on the rampart side, a band of yellow sand (106), in turn partially overlying a band of pink-grey sand (107) with a layer of hardpan forming at its base. Again both these (106, 107) must relate to episodes of erosion from the inner rampart. Beneath these and cut by 105 is the continuing curving band of a probable recut (108) of the ditch. Below this, the main deposit was the band of buff-coloured sand (109) that filled the base and extended up both sides of the original cut of the ditch. This presumably represents the initial phase of erosion, although over what period is uncertain as there were no signs of layering within the deposit. At the very base of the ditch, next to the inner rampart, was a thin band of light grey sand (110), which presumably is the primary silt level. The ditch had been cut (111) into the natural yellow sand.

No finds were recovered from any context other than the humic fill levels (101, 104) nor was there any sign of a revetment to the face of the inner rampart, although it is conceivable that this could still exist in the section of the ditch face that was left unexcavated (Fig. 2).

CONCLUSION

While the trench has established the depth and width of the ditch, the date is still uncertain. The ditch profile and, in plan, the curving nature of the earlier defences might indicate an Iron Age date for the first phase of the earthwork. This was the opinion of Dr Mark Corney who surveyed the monument for the RCHME (1987). There are no known Iron Age sites in the immediate vicinity, but a possibly similar site is known at East Worldham *c.* 5.5km to the north-west. This consists of a settlement at the top of a steep hill and is described as a hillfort with slight defences enclosing an area of *c.* 0.8ha and dated to the Late Iron Age (Williams-Freeman 1940; Historic England List no 1020314).

At Walldown the curving juncture (108) at the top of the layer of buff-coloured sand (109) may well be a recut of the ditch – perhaps a refurbishment of the defences linked to the addition of the straight ditch sections on the south and east sides of the circuit and probably dating to the late 19th century. Finally, it is also the case that material from the 1970s–80s was recovered from two-thirds of the way up the ditch fill. This undoubtedly means that considerable erosion has occurred in recent decades.

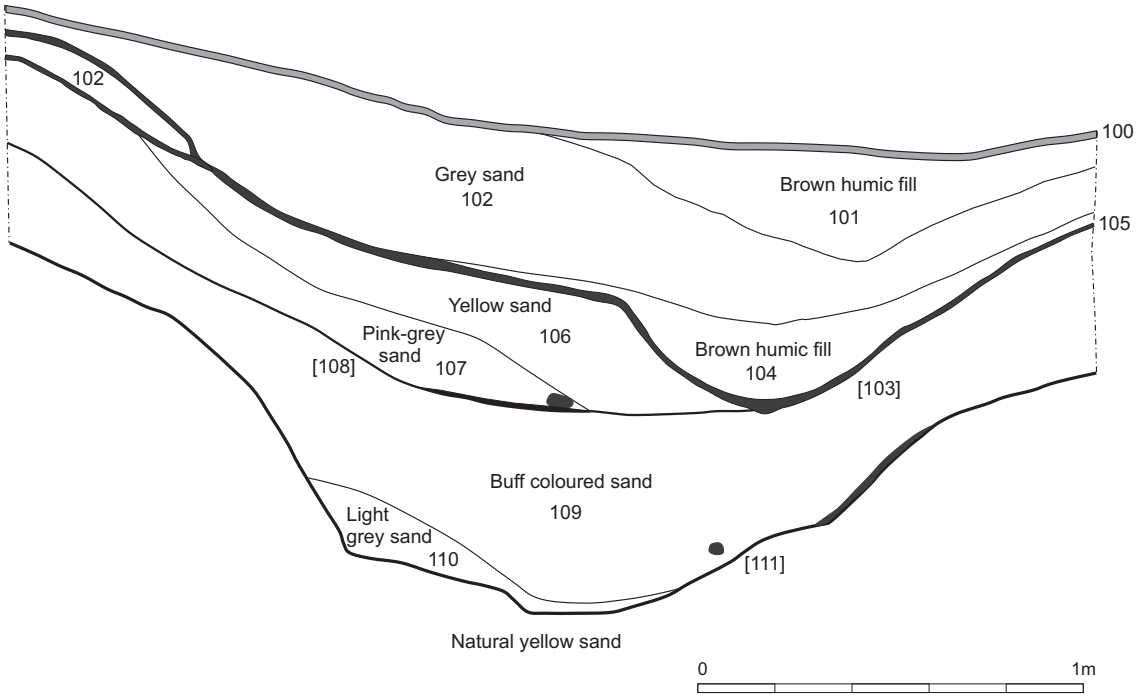

Fig. 3 West section

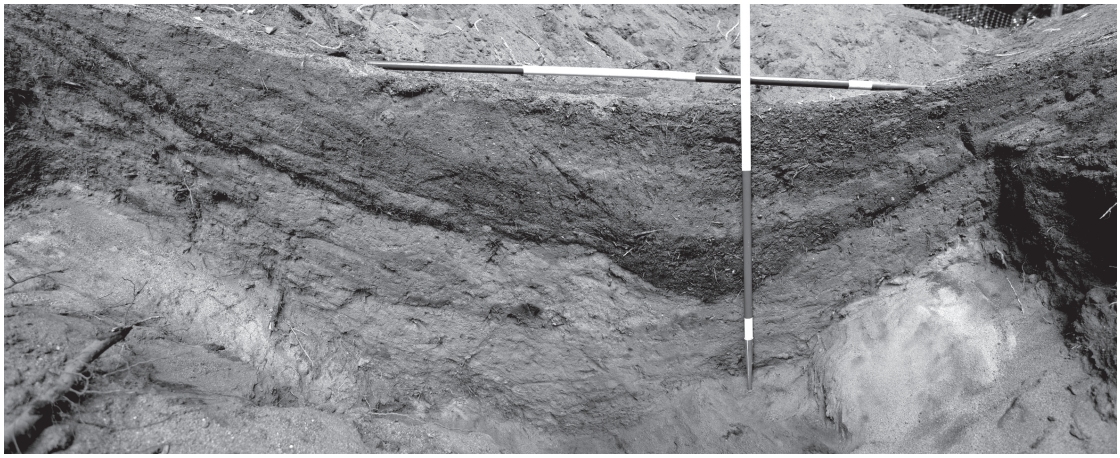

Fig. 4 Photograph of west section

The attribution to the Civil War period appears to be based on the assumption that Walldown is a continuation of a line of temporary earthworks of that period around Isington (Lyne 1990) commanding the route between Farnham and Alton – respectively parliamentary and royalist bases in the first part of the Civil War. Walldown is 9km south of Isington and well clear of the route between the two towns and nor does it resemble the earthworks described by Lyne, who makes no mention of Walldown in his paper. It therefore seems much more likely that the second main phase at Walldown dates to the 19th century and is a military practice camp or experimental earthwork (Saunders 1998; the site is adjacent to the 19th and 20th century army camp at Bordon), although there is no certainty for the dating of either of the main phases of the earthwork.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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