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New Forest History & Archaeology Group

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Counterscarp, outer ditch and outer bank at Buckland Rings hillfort

New Forest History and Archaeology Group – Committee

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The New Forest History & Archaeology Group's Annual Excavation

Subject to consent, this year's excavation will take place from Saturday, 20th to Sunday, 28th August at a site in the New Forest, near Brockenhurst. (Backfilling will take place one evening the following week.) The excavation will be under the direction of Prof. Tony King of Winchester University.

If you would like to participate, please contact Wendy Wiseman on 01590 626516 or email wendy@arthur5.plus.com

A NEW MONUMENT TYPE FOR THE NEW FOREST: Excavation of a Late Iron Age/Early Roman 'Platform Site' at Leadenhall, Godshill, 2015

Anthony King

As part of its comprehensive and detailed survey work in the Open Forest, the New Forest History and Archaeology Group survey team located a circular feature terraced into the valley side at Cockley Bushes, Leadenhall (Site 59/09; NGR SU 198155). This appeared to be similar to later prehistoric house platforms, of the sort well-known from hillforts, such as Hod Hill, Dorset (Richmond 1968, fig. 2; Stewart 2008), but was a single example rather than the groups of such monuments as usually found. Accordingly, the site was investigated by excavation in August 2015, with the unexpected result that the platform was not for habitation, but appeared to be linked to charcoal-burning. Finds were very few, being limited to a small number of struck flakes and a quantity of fire-affected flint. Large pieces of charcoal were also recovered, and radiocarbon dates from these yielded dates of 2046 ± 35 BP and 1939 ± 35 BP, placing the platform site into the Late Iron Age to Early Roman period.

At the time of the excavation, a second platform site was surveyed, c. 100m to the east, and a third was also identified in the Cockley Bushes area, but not surveyed. These platform sites are a new monument type for the New Forest, and suggest that charcoal preparation and processing was the primary activity to be associated with them.

Location and Topography

The location of the excavated site at Leadenhall is on open forest heathland, where a plateau at c. 105m OD is dissected by shallow stream valleys running west towards the river valley of the Avon. The platform site lies on a north-facing slope of one of these valleys, more-or-less halfway up the slope from the stream level to the plateau, at c. 98m OD (figs. 1 & 2). The valley is sheltered and relatively narrow at this point, with the opposite slope located only some 150m to the north.



Fig. 1 The platform site (foreground), the valley and Cockley Bushes, from the southeast. Godshill Ridge is in the background.

The geology of the platform site is the Selsey Sand Formation consisting of poorly-drained acid to very acid sands, silts and clays, locally variable in composition. This zone is of poor to medium agricultural potential (Soilscape type 18 grading to type 15; Soilscape website),

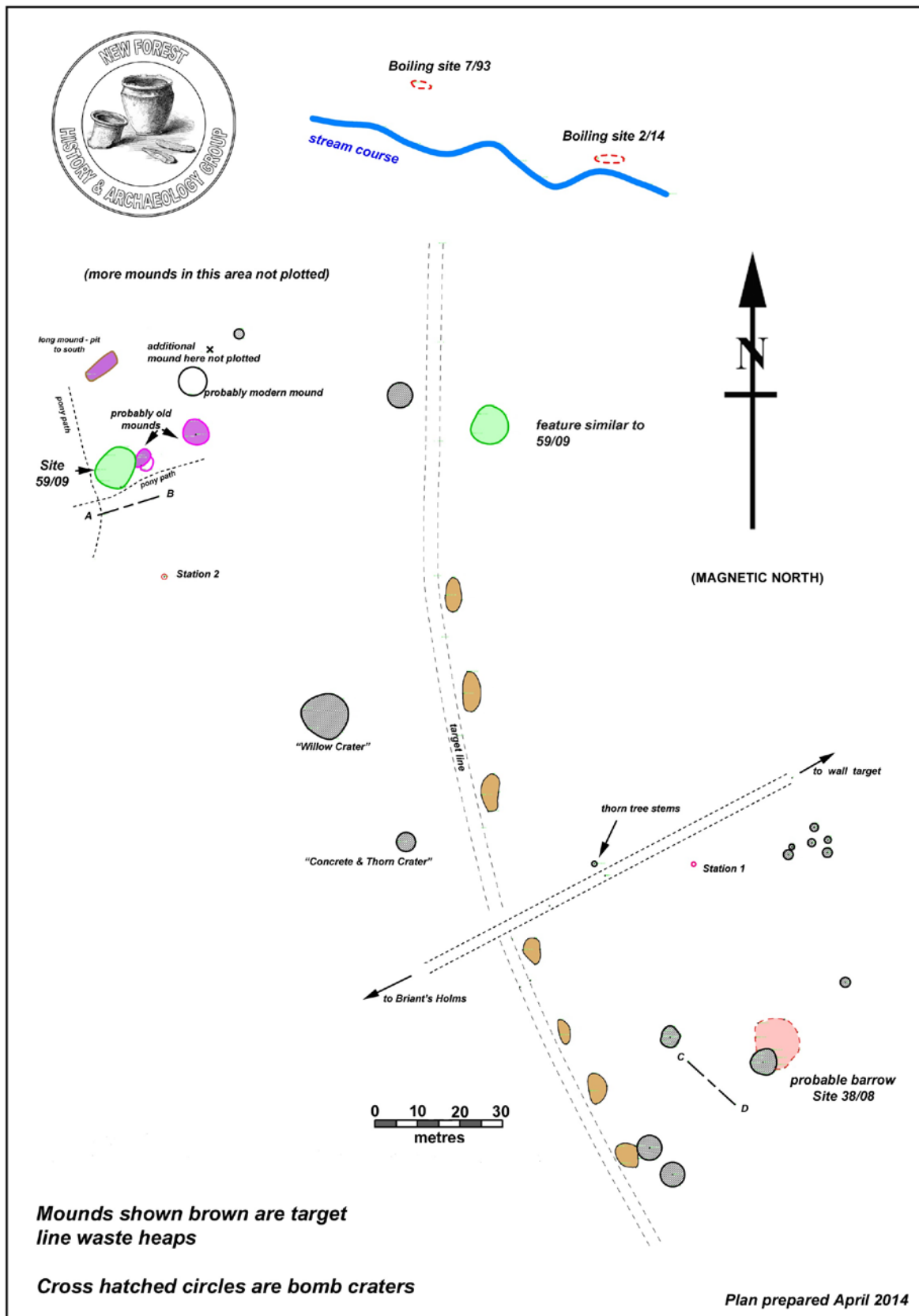


Fig. 2 Detailed survey of Site A (59/09), platform site, marked in green (NGR SU 198155), and Site B (38/08), Tumulus Site, marked in red (NGR SU 199153). The second platform site, to the west of Site A, is also marked in green. WW2 bomb craters are marked in grey, and low mounds associated with the target features of Ashley Walk no. 2 target are marked in brown. Other archaeological features are marked in purple. A-B and C-D are NFHAG survey base-lines marked by wooden pegs hammered down to ground surface level.

consistent with its current status as heathland, grazed by cattle and horses, with extensive clumps of bracken growth. The site itself is largely covered by heather, with limited bracken growth.

The excavation

Detailed survey of the site showed that the platform was terraced into the valley slope, so that its southern, upslope side had a semi-circular low bank surrounding it, with a poorly preserved gully on its exterior margin (figs. 3 & 4). On the northern, downslope side, a bank similar to a lynchet had been formed to create the platform at a higher level than the local ground surface. Animal burrows had disturbed this bank to a limited extent.

LEADENHALL 2015

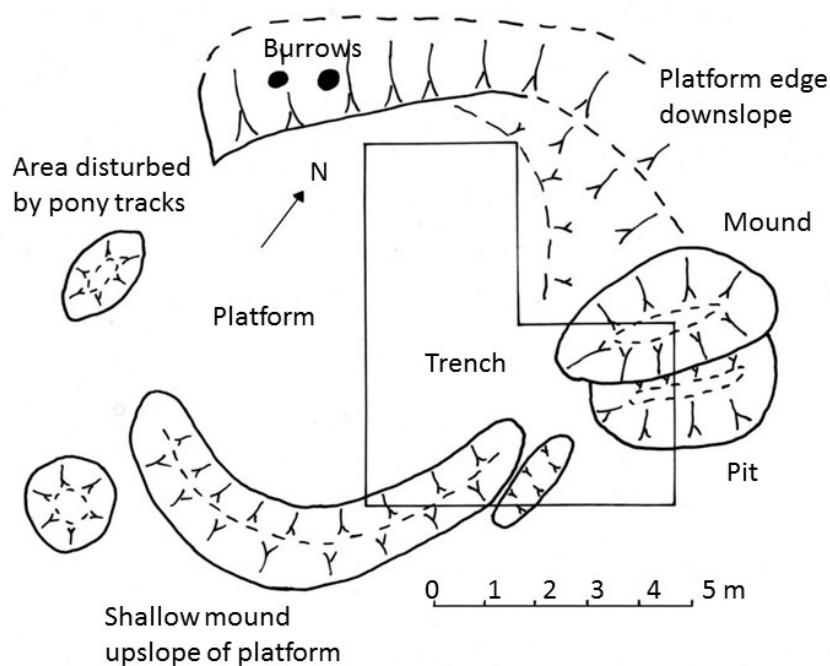


Fig. 3 Plan of the earthworks forming the platform site and the pit-and-mound feature, indicating the trench position.

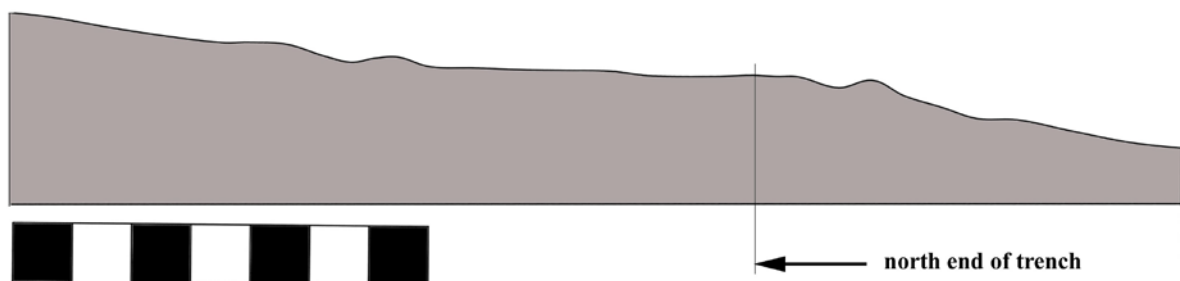


Fig. 4 Profile of the ground surface at the west side of the excavated trench, with continuation north and south to give a complete cross-section of the platform site earthwork. North is to the right-hand side of the profile. Scale in metres.

On its western side, further disturbance due to pony tracks had dissected the bank on the upslope side, while on the eastern side, a sub-rectangular mound occupied much of the margin of the platform, together with a depression to its south. This seemed to be identical to the pit-and-mound features that had been the subject of previous NFHAG excavations (King 2014a), and because of this the excavation trench was designed to include this feature, and to establish the relationship between the platform and the pit-and-mound feature. The pre-excavation survey also recorded further mounds and other features to the east and north of the platform, but these were not investigated further by excavation.

Excavation took place for a week in late August 2015, and after a good start, was affected by rain, with the loss of a couple of days of digging. However, the later stages of the excavation enjoyed better weather, and it was brought to a successful conclusion.

The trench was laid out in an L-shape (figs. 5 & 6), with its western edge placed along the mid-point of the platform, and thus creating a N-S cross section. The eastern side of the trench was also laid out so that a section could be created that ran across the mid-point of the pit-and-mound.

LEADENHALL 2015 Trench Plan

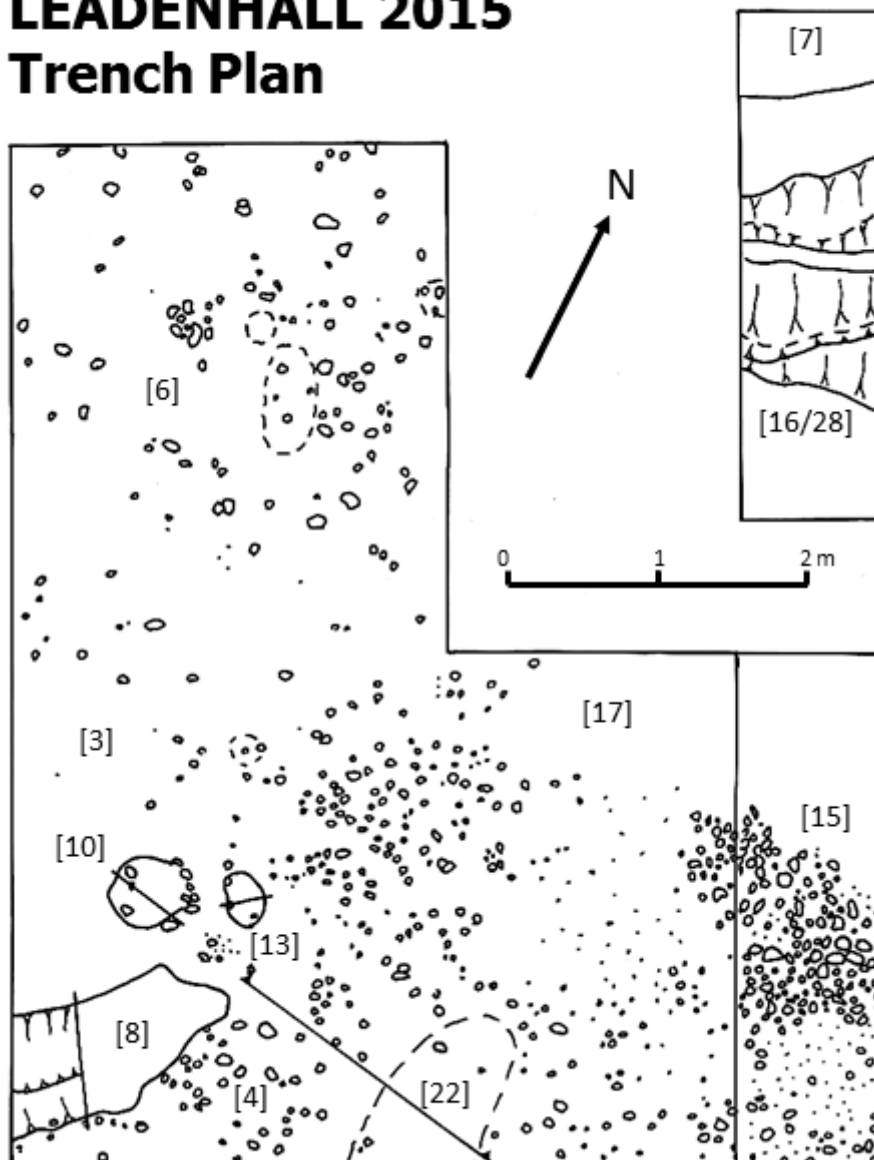


Fig. 5 Plan of excavated features. The inset at top right is the lower plan of the deeper section on the eastern side of the trench, through the pit-and-mound feature.



Fig. 6 General view of the excavation, with the platform in the foreground, from the southwest.

Features and layers excavated

- 1 topsoil, turf and initial cleaning immediately underneath {Ph 3}
- 2 sandy charcoal-rich black fill in the hollow formed by the pit [16] of the pit-and-mound feature {Ph 2b}
- 3 sandy charcoal-rich black fill (as 2) covering platform area in the south/central sector of the trench {Ph 2b}
- 4 hard sandy/pebbly curved ridge forming the southern edge of the platform {Ph 2a}
- 5 sandy charcoal-rich black fill (as 2) in gully [22] on the up-slope exterior of [4] {Ph 2b}
- 6 sandy charcoal-rich black fill (as 2) covering platform area in the north sector of the trench {Ph 2b}
- 7 mound to the north of pit [16], forming the mound of the pit-and-mound feature {Ph 1a/1b}
- 8 curved gully inside ridge [4] and forming the inner perimeter of the platform {Ph 2a}
- 9 dark charcoal-rich fill of [8] {Ph 2b}
- 10 very shallow possible post-hole in the platform {Ph 2a}
- 11 grey/black sandy fill of [10] {Ph 2b}
- 12 lower, brown sandy fill of [8], under[9] {Ph 2b}
- 13 very shallow possible post-hole in the platform {Ph 2a}
- 14 dark charcoal-rich fill of [13] {Ph 2b}
- 15 layer of flint cobbles in hollow [16], under [2] {Ph 2a}
- 16 pit/hollow, as recut, forming the pit of the pit-and-mound feature {Ph 1b}
- 17 grey/black charcoal-rich dump of sandy fill over [7] {Ph 2b}
- 18 brown sandy dump forming upper part of mound [7] {Ph 1b}
- 19 light brown/yellow clayey dump forming the core of mound [7] {Ph 1a}
- 20 possible post-hole formed during the recut for the pit/hollow (= 16) {Ph 1b}
- 21 loose dark fill of [20] {Ph 1b}
- 22 curved gully on the up-slope exterior of the ridge [4] forming the southern perimeter of the platform {Ph 2a}

- 23 brown clayey/silty sand fill (= 18) {Ph 1b}
- 24 mottled grey sand fill with many flints, in hollow [16] and covering the side of the mound dump [18]; overlain by [15] {Ph 1b or 2a}
- 25 clean white/grey sandy fill of pit/hollow primary cut [28]; overlain by [26] {Ph 1a}
- 26 dark brown/grey humic and iron-stained fill in base of primary cut [28] {Ph 1a}
- 27 thin black layer forming primary fill of the primary cut [28] {Ph 1a}
- 28 primary cut for the pit/hollow forming the pit of the pit-and-mound feature {Ph 1a}

Phasing

- 1a Pit-and-mound feature: initial digging of pit and construction of mound. Composed of contexts 7, 19, 25, 26, 27, 28.
- 1b Pit-and-mound feature: secondary recut of the pit/hollow and enlargement of the mound. Composed of contexts 7, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 24 (could also be phase 2a).
- 2a Platform: construction of the platform and dumping within the pit/hollow of the pit-and-mound feature, intended to ease access to the platform from the east side. Composed of contexts 4, 8, 10, 13, 15, 22, 24 (could also be phase 1b).
- 2b Platform: use of the platform, and accumulation of charcoal-rich layers covering it and surrounding areas, such as over the pit-and-mound feature. Composed of contexts 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 14, 17.
- 3 Modern: topsoil and turf. Context 1.

A test-pit dug in the northern sector of the trench revealed that the greyish natural sand was underlain at c. 20cm depth by an iron-pan layer c. 15cm thick. Under this, yellowish/brown clay at c. 35cm depth formed the natural deposit (also seen in the lower part of the pit [28] of the pit-and-mound feature). The clay continued to at least 1m depth within the pit section, but was not investigated further.

The archaeological sequence starts with the construction of the pit-and-mound feature (Phase 1a). The core of the mound was composed of sandy silty clay, solid and compact, and almost certainly dug out from the pit immediately adjacent to the south. The mound at this stage is estimated to measure 3 x 1.5m, fairly small by comparison with others previously investigated. The pit was only observed to the south of the pit, and does not run under the mound, again unlike some of the previously investigated pit-and-mound stratigraphies (cf. King 2014a). The maximum depth of the pit was c. 1m below present ground surface (fig. 7, 8 & 9) and it presented a steep V-shaped profile. A thin primary silt [27] formed at the base of the pit, rapidly covered on the south side by a clean sandy dump probably derived from the mound [25]. The main part of pit was then filled by a dark humic layer [26], which had some evidence of iron-pan formation.

In a secondary phase (Phase 1b), the pit-and-mound feature was enlarged by a brown sandy dump [18/23], to reach its full dimensions of 4 x 2 m, and the pit probably recut to make a shallower, more rounded profile (the upper line of [25] and [26] on fig. 7). The shape of the recut was not even, however, as a possible post-hole was observed in the base of [16] during excavation [20/21], but it was ultimately considered to be a non-functional variation in the outline of the pit (not on figs. 5 or 7).

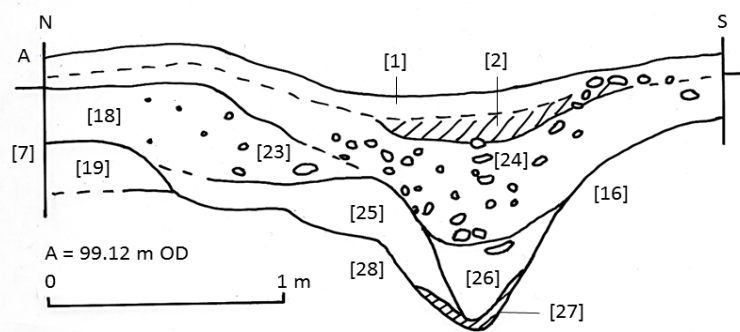


Fig. 7 Section drawing of the east side of the cut through the pit-and-mound feature.



Fig. 8 The section cut through the pit-and-mound feature, from the northwest, showing the mound [7] (left) and the pit [16/28] (centre).



Fig. 9 East section of the pit [16/28], from the W, showing primary fills below the secondary recut, subsequently filled with layer [24], containing flints to consolidate the hollow formed by the pit.

The final activity associated with the pit-and-mound feature was a thick grey sandy fill [24], with many flints up to 150/200 mm in length, some well packed-in, as if deliberately placed to form a solid footing within the pit. This activity has been phased as 1b/2a, on the basis that it could represent the ending of the pit as a functional feature, or part of the primary activity associated with the construction of the platform. Two radiocarbon samples were taken from this context, but neither yielded enough carbon for a viable result, due to humification.

Expansion of human activity across the whole excavation area is seen in Phase 2a, when the platform was constructed to the west of the pit-and-mound feature. The slope was transformed into a level platform, by truncation on the southerly, upslope side, and the formation of a curved shallow mound [4] around the perimeter. Inside this, a shallow gully [8], slightly lower than the surface of the platform, was probably created as a surface-water control feature to prevent the platform itself from becoming too wet. Similarly, a gully was created on the exterior of the perimeter mound [22] which ran out close to the eastern margin of the filled-in pit [16] of the pit-and-mound feature. This implies that any water diverted around the platform would be channelled into the pit and from there, downslope and away from the platform site. Rounded flints up to 250 mm [15] (not on fig. 7) had been placed in

the top of [24] in the upper fill of the pit, apparently to stabilise the fill of the pit, and to form a working surface.

The down-slope margin of the platform was, in effect, a miniature curving lynchet (fig. 3). It was not sectioned in the excavation trench, and it was not possible to detect any change in the sandy soil matrix of the platform itself, so the dump of soil used to create the level platform was almost certainly simply effected by scraping soil from upslope and dumping it downslope. The platform had an effective working area of c.6m diameter, with access easiest on the east and west sides where the platform and the natural ground surface coincided. The Mound of the pit-and-mound feature was still in existence, however, which may have constrained access on the east side.



Fig. 10 *Oval features [10] (right) and [13] (left), possibly very shallow post-holes, within the platform area, from the north. Gully [8] and the perimeter upslope mound [4] are behind.*



Fig. 11 *The surface of the Platform, showing the dark charcoal-rich layer that covered it, from the northwest.*

Features within the platform area included two areas of dark, charcoal-rich fill [10/11] and [13/14], which were initially identified as post-holes, located on the east side of the platform and conceivably part of an entrance feature (fig. 10). However, on excavation it became apparent that these features were simply slightly deeper (c. 20-50 mm) parts of the platform itself and had no structural function. Elsewhere, small groups of flints and dark sandy patches were planned (fig. 5), which did not form any clear pattern, and were probably random concentrations within the platform matrix.

The final ancient phase of activity (Phase 2b) marked the usage of the platform site, and was formed principally of a relatively uniform fill layer [2, 3, 5, 6] covering the platform itself, the gullies and the pit to the east (fig. 11). This layer was not found on the apex of the Mound of the pit-and-mound feature, but stratigraphically covered its lower perimeter [17]. The fills [11, 14] of features [10] and [13] were also indistinguishable from the general fill layer. The characteristics of all these fill layers were dark sandy silt, with many pieces of charcoal and a scatter of flints up to 150mm in length. One of the radiocarbon samples was selected from this layer, specifically from [6] in the northern sector of the platform.

The interior gully [8] also had a fill [9] that was effectively identical to the overlying general layers over the platform. Under it was a narrow curving primary layer [12] (fig. 12), again more-or-less identical with the overlying general layers, but having a more mottled brown/grey sandy appearance. This sealed layer provided a charcoal sample for a radiocarbon date (see below).

Above the Phase 2b layers was modern topsoil and turf (Phase 3). No features were found, and it seems that the activity of the World War 2 bombing range had little effect on the site, save the recovery of a small piece of shrapnel in a pre-excavation metal-detector scan.

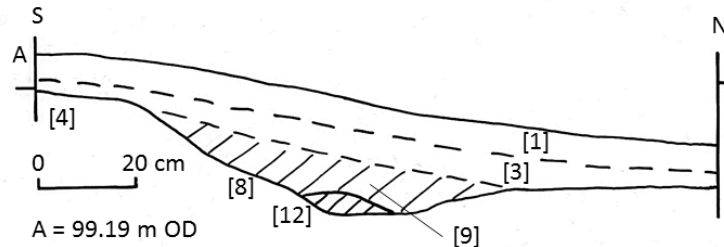


Fig. 12 Section drawing of curving gully 8. The section is positioned along the west edge of the trench, in the southwest corner.

Finds

Most of the finds were lithic. There was a small quantity of burnt or heat-crazed flint, c. 250g, but not enough to suggest that the charcoal present on the platform was heated in association with a boiling/burning mound.

Five pieces of non-local-stone (NLS) were found (90g), including a shaped and worn piece of sandstone that may have been a whetstone, together with seven local flints that showed signs of surface wear, including a round and dimpled fossil, probably a sea urchin (510g). These may have been used in a processing activity on the site.

Struck or possibly struck flakes occurred in several contexts [2, 4, 5, 6, 17, 18, 23, 24, 26], amounting to c. 360g. These will be the subject of a more detailed report in a future Annual Report. All have the characteristics of a Neolithic/Bronze Age assemblage.

There was no pottery, and a single modern piece of ironwork, probably a fence post. During a pre-excavation scan using a metal-detector, another piece of modern metal was found, probably shrapnel from the nearby World War 2 bombing range (Pasmore & Parker 2006).

Inventory of individual finds, giving context in square brackets

- 1 flint flake, 8g [2]
- 2 flint flake, 6g [6]
- 3 NLS, shaped and worn, possible whetstone, 20g [6]
- 4 flint flake, 1g [5]
- 5 NLS flake, some wear on surface, 11g [17]
- 6 flint flake, 12g [2]
- 7 flint flake, 4g [23]
- 8 2 flint flakes, 8g [26]
- 9 flat, blade-like iron object, 190 x 40 x 10mm. Corroded. Probably part of a modern fence post [unstratified]

Dating

Four samples were sent for radiocarbon dating at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre AMS Facility (SUERC). Two, from [24] in the upper fill of the pit (Phase 1b/2a) proved to have too little carbon for dating, due to humification, with the consequence that the pit-and-mound feature remains effectively undated. This type of feature seems to be late prehistoric, possibly Neolithic/Bronze Age, to judge from the general lithic assemblage, and also the findings from other sites investigated by NFHAG.

The other two radiocarbon samples produced dates of 2046 ± 35 BP (SUERC-65053 (GU39611)) from [12], and 1939 ± 35 BP (SUERC-65054 (GU39612)) from [6]. Context [12] is stratigraphically earlier than [6], being the lower, sealed fill of the curved gully [8] within the perimeter of the platform. Context [6] is part of the general layer covering the surface of the platform, and is unsealed, being directly under the turf and topsoil [1]. For the sample from [12] there is 68.2% probability of the calibrated date lying between 104 BC and 3 AD, and 95.4% probability of it lying between 168 BC and 25 AD (fig. 13). For the sample from [6], the calibration is a little more complex, but overall, it gives a 68.2% probability of a calibrated date lying between 23 AD and 120 AD, and 95.4% probability of a date between 36 BC and 130 AD (fig. 14). Stratigraphically, [12] underlies [6], and it should be noted that the date is a little earlier. However, the statistical overlap in the dating results means that the dates should be regarded as representing the same phase of activity.

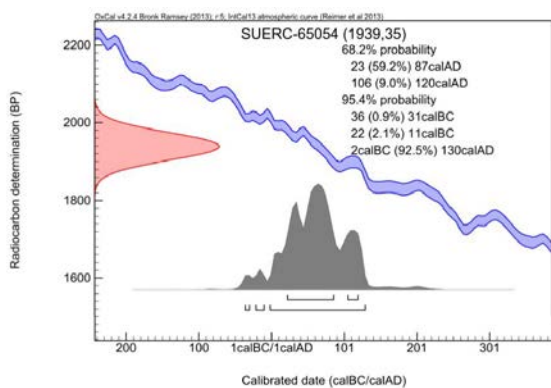


Fig. 13 Graph for calibration of radiocarbon sample SUERC-65053 from context [12].

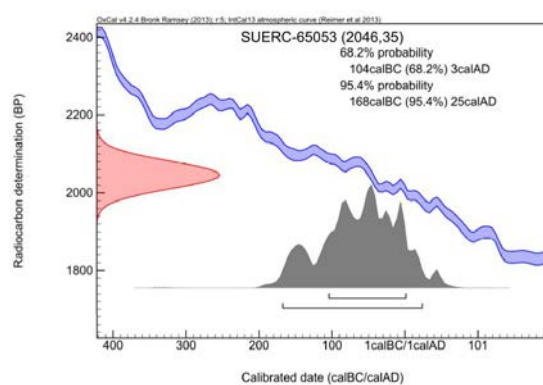


Fig. 14 Graph for calibration of radiocarbon sample SUERC-65054 from context [6].

In terms of cultural chronology, these dates fall into the Late Iron Age and Early Roman period, with a focus on the early 1st century AD. Given that the two samples are from relatively large pieces of charcoal, from heartwood, and therefore from mature tree branches/trunks rather than small roundwood, there is the possibility that the wood was old at the time of its conversion into charcoal. The radiocarbon age represents the date of felling of the timber, so it is conceivable that the charcoal-burning was taking place in the Early Roman period, using timber that had been felled somewhat earlier. However, the time lag between felling and burning was probably not very long.

Discussion

A significant finding was the establishment of a stratigraphic relationship between the platform and the pit-and-mound feature. The pit-and-mound itself had two stages; an initial

phase of mound construction and pit digging (Phase 1a), followed by an enlargement of the mound, possibly as a result of recutting the pit to remove more material (Phase 1b). The subsequent filling of the pit by layers of sandy soil with many pieces of flint may represent the final usage of the pit-and-mound in Phase 1b, but it is also possible that this filling episode was the first activity linked to the platform (Phase 2a). Dumping of material to consolidate the upper fill of the pit certainly can be associated with the platform, as a possible cobbled surface sloped down from the platform into the western side of the pit. It seems likely that access to the platform from the east necessitated a levelling operation within the pit. In all, it is clear that the pit-and-mound preceded the platform, though by how long has not been resolved. A best estimate is that the pit-and-mound is probably Bronze Age, whilst the radiocarbon dating indicates a Late Iron Age/Early Roman date for the platform.

This is now the fourth pit-and-mound site to be excavated by NFHAG in recent years. It conforms with the results obtained earlier, and can be seen to have similar characteristics. It is not part of a group, however, and in some respects is somewhat smaller and simpler in structure. As before, a funerary function seems unlikely, and some sort of as-yet unknown material processing system is the most likely interpretation of their usage (cf. King 2014a).

The main outcome of the excavation, however, was the defining of a new monument type for the New Forest, which has been designated as a platform site. The terminology is deliberately non-functional, since it is still not entirely clear what precise purpose the platform served. The excavation commenced on the working hypothesis that the platform was for a house, but the lack of structural post-holes led to this interpretation being discarded during the course of the dig, in favour of a charcoal-burning platform. Possible post-holes [10] and [13] were so shallow (less than 5cm) and vague in outline as to be unlikely as post-bearing features, whilst the quantities of charcoal and dark sooty sandy soil covering the platform and adjacent areas favoured the possible burning of wood for charcoal *in situ* on the platform. Pieces of charcoal were up to 40 x 30 x 20mm, derived from quite substantial heartwood from hardwood sources. It seems likely that the platform was constructed to provide a level surface for a roughly circular wood stack, up to 6 m in diameter, which was fired to create charcoal. The small number of burnt and heat-crazed flints were probably on the ground surface at the time of firing. However, no traces of reddening or burning were detected in the sandy matrix of the layers covering the platform, so it remains possible that firing took place elsewhere, and the platform was used for secondary processing of the charcoal pieces.

In terms of morphology, this type of circular platform site, with its charcoal-burning association, is unlike the medieval and post-medieval charcoal-burning pits found in the New Forest (inf. R. Reeves, A. Pasmore, C. Read), and therefore represents an earlier system that did not use pits. It is more likely that clamps or stacks were utilised.

The positioning of the excavated platform site in the landscape is reinforced by the finding of a second platform just to the east and the probable existence of a third to the west. Topographical survey during the excavation established the plan and profile of the second platform site 150m to the east (figs. 15 & 16). It had a similar landscape location, on a north-facing slope, but was a little nearer the head of the small valley, and lower down the valley side. Both sites have the characteristics of being sheltered from prevailing westerly winds by the shape of the valley having a protective spur of land c. 400m to the west; also their position between the valley bottom and the plateau to the south affords additional protection. It is apparent that the sites did not need to be very close to the water source of the stream

itself. Charcoal was noted in a subsoil exposure of the upslope curvature of the platform, during the topographical survey.

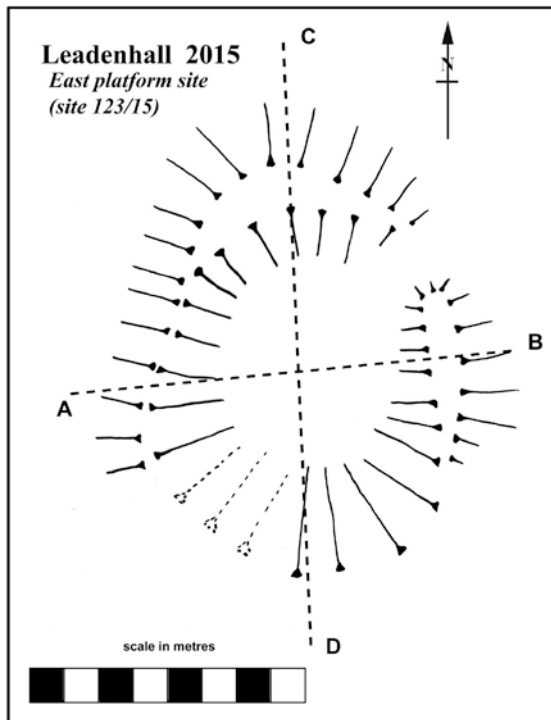


Fig. 15 Plan of the second platform site (123/15) (see Fig. 1).

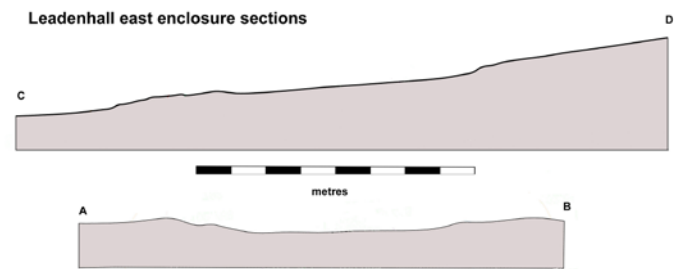


Fig. 16 East-west and north-south profiles through the second platform site.

A charcoal-burning function for the platform implies woodland management on the part of those operating the site during the Late Iron Age/Early Roman period. The species involved have to await specialist examination of the charcoal and soil samples taken during the excavation, but some preliminary observations can be made. Sites in the Southampton Basin area show that oak, elm, hazel and ash were all present in charcoal analyses from hearths (cf. Dowd's Farm, Hedge End: Pelling 2012; Clelland 2012 156-7), and pollen analyses indicate widespread oak, hazel and elm mixed woodland being gradually cleared during the 1st millennium BC in favour of oak, beech and holly dominant woods (Tubbs 2001, 65; cf. also Barrow Moor: Silva & Phillips 2015, 71-2; Grant & Edwards 2008; Dowd's Farm: Grant 2012). The presence and extent of beech in the Leadenhall samples is a question of some interest, in view of its association with woodland management in the historic period (Grant *et al.* 2011, 402; Tubbs 2001, 67), but further discussion will have to await specialist reports. A final observation is that the current open aspect of the site is somewhat illusory, since the sparse tree cover of Cockley Bushes, just to the west of the site, is in fact a relict of more extensive medieval and post-medieval woodland in the valley (inf. R. Reeves).

The radiocarbon dates have revealed that the platform site was functioning in the Late Iron Age into the Early Roman period, with more chronological emphasis on the latter period. This would fit with the notion of charcoal production for export out of the New Forest, for use in furnaces or braziers, probably linked to metal-working. It seems unlikely that these activities were taking place in close vicinity to the excavation site, in view of the complete absence of any indicative evidence, either artefactual or topographical. As such, the economic model in operation was probably one of small-scale and relatively impoverished charcoal production, exploiting the wooded marginal land of this part of southern Britain. Export was probably regional, to towns such as Winchester or Old Sarum, and to villas and other settlements within the Iron Age territories and Roman *civitates* of the Durotriges and the Belgae. It is probably no coincidence that Leadenhall is close to the New Forest Late

Roman pottery production area (Fulford 1975; Smith 1999, fig. 24), which exploited this landscape in a similar fashion, albeit more intensively. The lack of any Late Iron Age or Early Roman finds such as pottery from the site indicates that charcoal production was taking place in isolation from contemporary settlements, and may have been an itinerant activity conducted by low-status individuals, or by dependent labour, such as slaves or workers attached to an estate or villa located off the Forest. It is a valuable insight into an activity and a social group largely invisible in the archaeological record.

Site B

In the original scheme of excavation (King 2014b), the platform site was designated as Site A, while a second site (B) was a probable Bronze Age tumulus (site 38/08; NGR SU 199153) of approximately 12m diameter, that had been partially obliterated by a small World War 2 bomb crater, c. 6m in diameter (fig. 2; fig. 17). The intention had been to clean the curving section created across the tumulus by the bomb crater, and if possible, recover artefactual material to test the hypothesis of a Bronze Age date. Unfortunately, the bad weather at the start of the excavation led to the abandonment of this project for logistical reasons.



Fig. 17 View of Site B (38/08) from the southwest, showing the tumulus, with bracken growth covering it, and the bomb crater in the foreground, containing a shallow pool of water. Photo by ACK, June 2014

Acknowledgements

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Answer to Puzzle Picture on page 46

The best theory advanced for this crater is that it marks the site of a recent detonation by bomb disposal people of a device found in the Forest in an area formerly used by the army. It is on the heath just south of Ipley.