

## COMPLEX BOUNDARY FEATURES IN THE LATE PREHISTORIC LANDSCAPE AT PICKET TWENTY, ANDOVER

By CHRIS ELLIS *and* GARETH CHAFFEY

### ABSTRACT

*A small area of strip-map-and-record excavation at Picket Twenty, Andover, revealed a complex of possibly associated features along a section of a double-ditched boundary, including two parallel lines of small but closely spaced post-holes, and a shallow arc of oval pits or short ditch segments. These occurred at the point where a slight kink in the boundary was marked by a staggered break in the two parallel ditches, one of the ditch terminals being marked by a pit or large post-hole. The only dating evidence was a small assemblage of very fragmented and abraded sherds, with a broad date range of Late Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age. While the function and meaning of these features are unclear, they may have been related to the control of movement both along this boundary, and across it between different zones in the landscape, as well as to historic and current landuse and ownership.*

### INTRODUCTION

In 2010, two small areas within the c. 110ha Picket Twenty development site, east of Andover, were subject to strip-map-and-record excavation, revealing a number of later prehistoric ditches and post-hole and pit alignments (Wessex Archaeology 2011). The two areas (Area 1 covering c. 600m<sup>2</sup> centred on NGR 438403 145824; and Area 2 covering c. 2870m<sup>2</sup> centred on NGR 438790 145950) (Fig. 1) were targeted on the findings of desk-based assessments (Wessex Archaeology 1997; 2004a), geophysical surveys (GSB 2000; 2001) and archaeological evaluations (Wessex Archaeology 2004b; 2011).

The geophysical surveys had identified a number of areas of potential archaeological significance (Areas A–M). Apart from Area

E, where a small round barrow cemetery was identified (now preserved *in situ*), geophysical anomalies were targeted by a total of 32 evaluation trenches. Only in Areas A and B, however, were features found of any archaeological significance, these matching well with the geophysical results, leading to the excavation of Areas 1 and 2, respectively; the other anomalies investigated proved to be of natural origin or modern.

The development site, which lies on downland between the valleys of the River Test and River Anton river valleys, is bisected through its centre by a dry river valley running towards the south-west. The underlying geology is Upper Chalk (Geological Survey of Great Britain sheet 283, Andover).

### RESULTS

The excavation of Area 2 revealed two, possibly three, broad phases of activity. One (Phase A) is represented by an arc of elongated pits or short ditch segments; as these lay to the south of the other features, and did not overlap with them, they float within the stratigraphic sequence. Phase B is represented by an arrangement of associated and roughly parallel features, including two lines of post-holes, two lines of long ditch segments, and a shallow gully; a single pit/post-hole was probably also associated with this phase. Phase C is represented by a later ditch which cut across the silted up Phase B features; possibly the same ditch was exposed in Area 1.

#### *Phase A*

Four features, all with similar U-shaped profiles, and measuring 1.6–1.9m wide and up to 0.46m

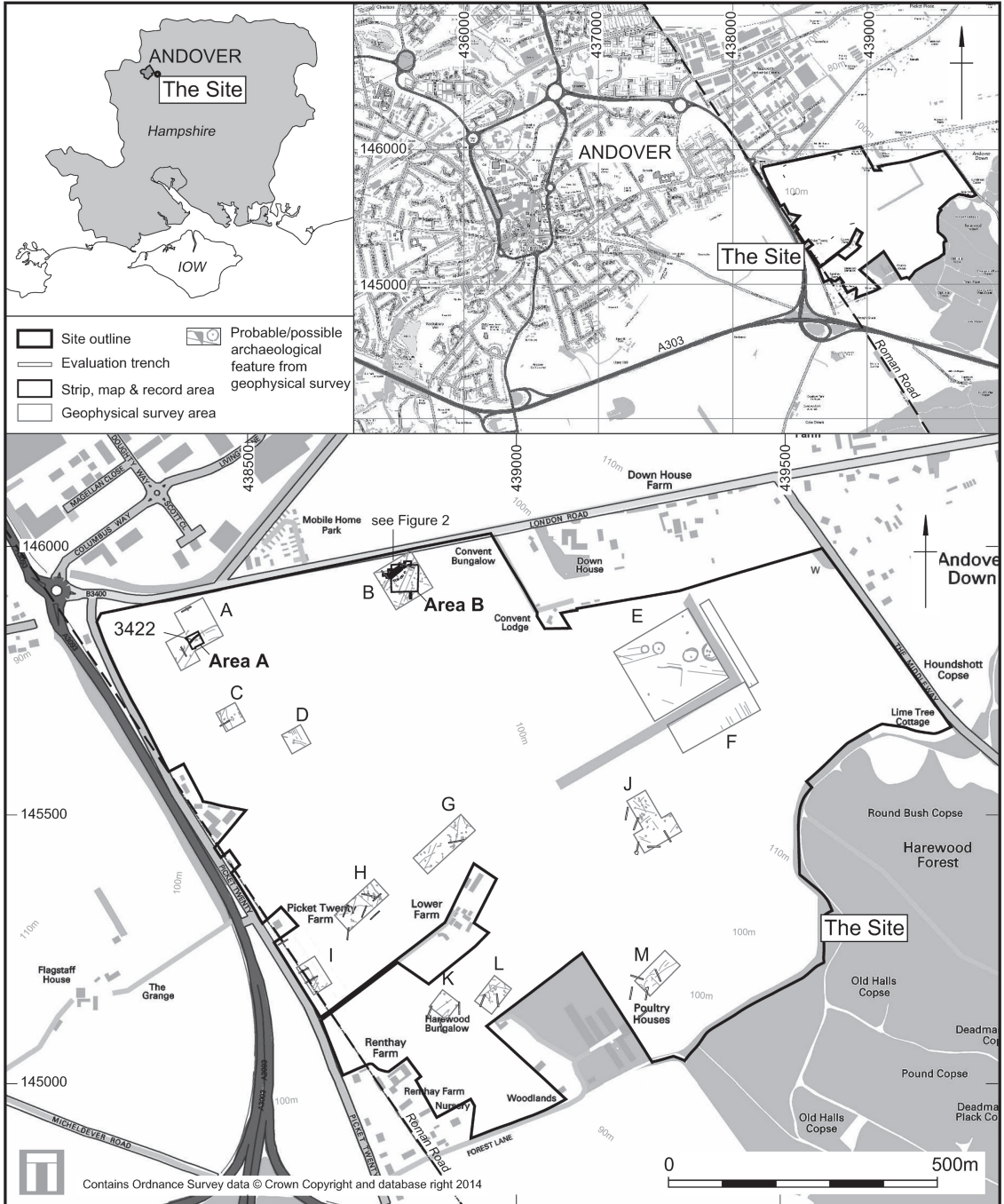


Fig 1 Picket Twenty – site location plan, and archaeological works

deep, lay along a shallow, *c.* 30m long arc with the same, generally south-west to north-east orientation as the Phase B ditches and post-hole alignments (below) (Fig. 2); if the arc was extended it would describe a circle *c.* 50m in internal diameter. While the outer two of these features (3139 and 3179) had the appearance of oval pits, 2.2m and 2.7m long, respectively, the inner two (3173 and 3167/3207) resembled short ditch segments *c.* 4.9m and 5.7m long, respectively. The inner two were also slightly curved in the opposite direction to the arc, but were distinct in their appearance from the many tree-throw holes exposed in the area (Fig. 3). Moreover, unlike the tree-throw holes, they all contained finds, producing as a group very fragmented pottery – of probably Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age and Early/Middle Iron Age date (from features 3139 and 3173, respectively) – along with worked flint and burnt flint.

### *Phase B*

The arrangement and extent of the lines of post-holes in Area 2 appears to have been closely related to a *c.* 28 m long segment of ditch (3111) which formed part of a more extensive layout of parallel ditches, aligned broadly north-east to south-west, crossing the north-west part of the excavation (Fig. 2). Both the ditch and the lines of post-holes display a slight change in direction near their midpoints. The post-holes almost surround the ditch, although there are gaps at either end. There were 35 post-holes in the north-western line (3103), and 38 in the south-eastern line (3104), two of the latter lying just off-line near the centre; four or five post-holes in each line had been destroyed by the cutting of the Phase B ditch (below). The post-holes, which were spaced on average at *c.* 0.75m intervals, averaged *c.* 0.26m in diameter and were up to 0.44m deep; some contained well-preserved post-pipes. They produced a number of sherds of pottery of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date, as well as worked flint and burnt flint.

It is unclear whether the lines of post-holes continued beyond the limits of Area 2; at the north-east they appear to end in line with the terminal of ditch 3111, while at the south-west

both lines appear to turn towards the south, the south-eastern line possibly continuing beyond the limit of excavation.

Three post-holes in north-western line just overlap with the edge of the south-western terminal of ditch 3111, but since there was little distinction between ditch and post-hole fills it is far from clear whether they were contemporary, or one preceded the other.

Ditch 3111 was 1.3–1.9m wide and up to 0.36m deep, with concave sides and a flat to concave base. Its fills contained very fragmented Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery, worked flint and burnt flint; in addition, a few sherds of Romano-British greyware were recovered from the secondary fills. Towards the north-east its line was continued after a *c.* 0.8m gap by a smaller ditch (3168), 0.8m wide and 0.35m deep, whose course was traced by the geophysical survey for a further 10m, curving towards the north-north-east; it contained very abraded Early–Middle Iron Age pottery. The geophysical survey also indicated that a short linear anomaly continued the general line of ditch 3111 at its other end, curving to the south-south-west.

In line with the south-western terminal of ditch 3111, and 0.7m outside it, there was a pit or large post-hole (3108), 0.9m in diameter and 0.46m deep, with steep, convex sides and a slightly concave base. Its position suggests it was closely associated with the ditch, although it also marks the point where the north-western line of post-holes turned to the south.

Ditch 3130 lay parallel to, and between 3.4m and 4.3m to the south-east of ditch 3111, and was of similar scale and profile; it too contained fragmented Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery. A 35m length of the ditch was exposed, running from a terminal at the north-east (*c.* 3.5m beyond the terminal of ditch 3111) to the edge of Area 2, beyond which the geophysical survey traced its course for a further 23m curving to the south-south-west. At the north-east its line was continued, after a 4.6m gap, by a smaller ditch (3313) up to 0.7m wide and 0.17m deep, running towards the north-north-east, its course traced by a line of geophysical anomalies which appear pit-like but could indicate a ditch (GSB 2001, 2).

Parallel to, and *c.* 1.5–2m south-east of ditch

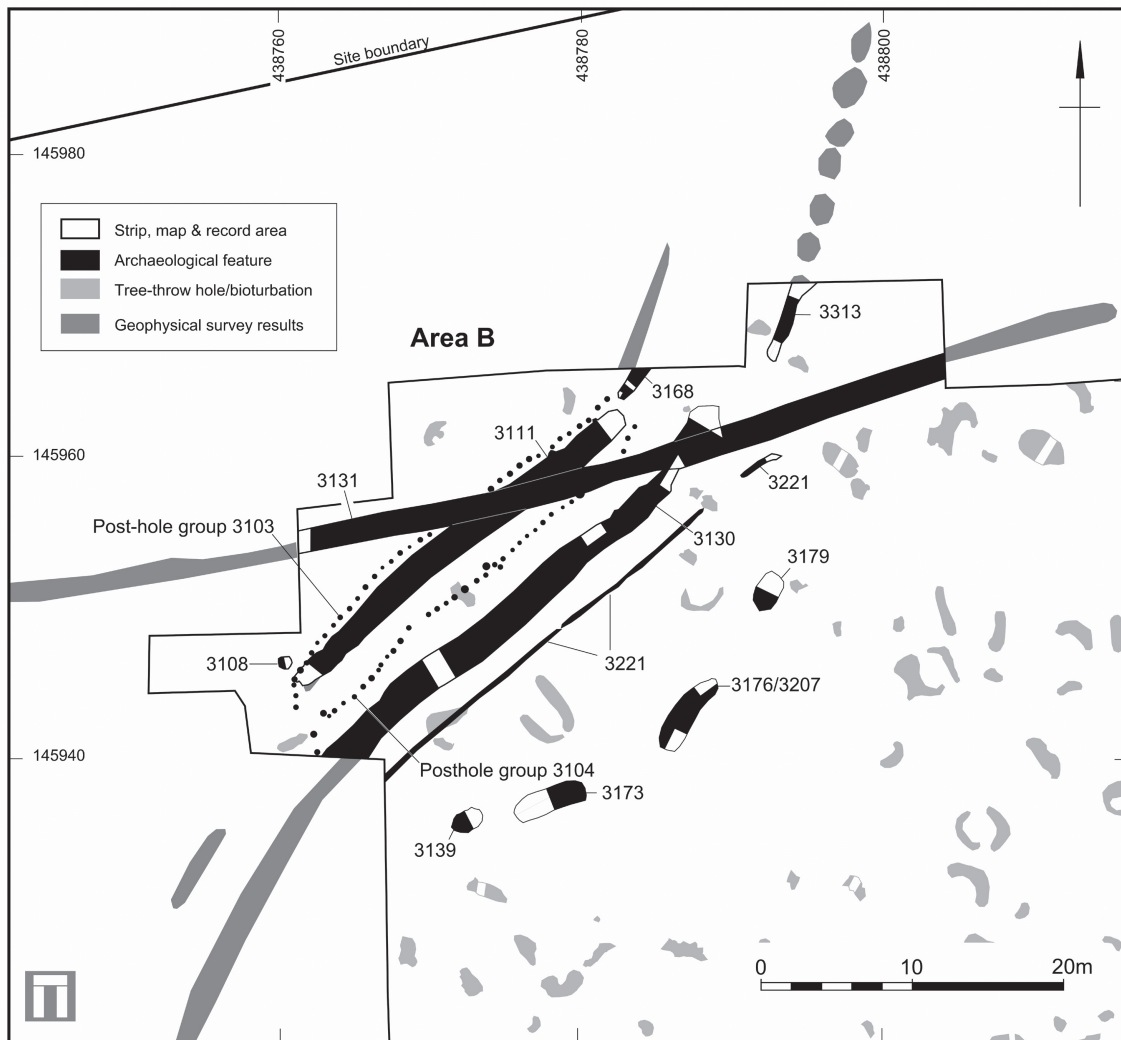


Fig 2 Area 2 archaeological features, and selected geophysical anomalies

3130, there was a truncated gully 3221, no more than 0.3 m wide and 0.1m deep which, in contrast to the other ditches and the lines of post-holes, followed a much straighter line, only curving to the east at its north-eastern end, at a point in line with the terminal of ditch 3130.

*Phase C*

Ditches 3111 and 3130, and both lines of post-holes, were cut across by ditch 3131. It was up to

1.85m wide and 0.6m deep, with steep, slightly convex sides with a slight ‘ankle breaker’ slot in its base, a feature common in ditches of the Romano-British period. Its fills suggest the possible erosion of a bank on its northern side. The geophysical survey showed the ditch to extend both eastwards and westwards, and its westward continuation may be represented by ditch 3422 in Area 1, c. 370m to the west-south-west (Fig. 1).

The slightly curved line of ditch 3422, which was 1.8m wide and 0.9m deep, reflects

its turn to the south-south-west as revealed by the geophysical survey. A small quantity of highly fragmented and abraded Late Bronze Age pottery (1100–700 BC) was recovered from its basal fill, along with a few pieces of worked flint and burnt flint, but it is possible that this material is all residual. The western side of the Picket Twenty development site corresponds approximately to the line of the Roman road between Winchester and Marlborough.

## DISCUSSION

The date and function of the curious arrangement of Phase A and B features in Area 2 are hard to determine, not least because the chronological relationship between them cannot be established. In addition, the condition of the pottery assemblage, comprising small and abraded sherds (many possibly redeposited), in fabrics with a long currency of use from the Late Bronze Age into the Middle Iron Age, prevents close dating.

The features comprise five parallel elements – two lines of ditches, two lines of post-holes and a gully – which are clearly associated in some way, and a sixth element, possibly unrelated but the extent, layout and general orientation of which appear to correspond closely to the arrangement of the other features (although this could simply reflect the small area of excavation).

Although the geophysical survey results show that the parallel ditches continued at least some distance beyond the excavation area, probably forming part of a more extensive organisation and division of the landscape, it is noticeable that the post-hole settings occur at a point where there is distinct kink in the line of the double ditch. The ditches, as traced from the north-north-east and the south-south-west are not aligned on each other and do not meet, and it is the short (*c.* 40m long) linking section, at a distinct angle to them, which appears to be marked not only by the Phase A arc of pits/ditch segments, but also by the terminals of the parallel ditches (and pit 3108), and the lines of post-holes.

This suggests that this point along the

boundary had some particular significance, potentially both functional and symbolic. This could be related to movement (and its restriction) both along the boundary and across it. While the relatively close spacing of the parallel ditches, in places under 3.5m apart, is narrow for a trackway or driveway, these ditches might nonetheless have marked some form of route through the landscape, with this kink marking a point of change along that route.

These features could also have marked a point of controlled access across the boundary. On the south-easterly line of ditches, there was a 4.6m wide break between the north-eastern terminal of ditch 3130, and the opposing terminal of ditch 3313, allowing access into, or exit from, the narrow corridor between the ditches. There appears to have been a break of possibly similar width at the south-west end of ditch 3111, marked by pit/post-hole 3108, before the ditch resumed (as revealed by the geophysical survey) outside the excavation area. If the lines of post-holes predate ditch 3111, then they would have further restricted movement, forming a narrow timber passage, no more than 1.5m wide at either end.

Such restrictions could have had a primarily functional origin, perhaps for livestock management and control. However, by their nature, all boundaries also have potentially symbolic dimensions, and in addition (perhaps) to defining areas of current land-use, ownership and tenure, this boundary could also be related to the landscape's history – small round barrow cemeteries lie both *c.* 500m to the east-south-east and a similar distance to the west-north-west (Wessex Archaeology 2004a).

The relationship to these features (if any) of the arc of pits/ditch segments cannot be determined. The segmented nature of the group might hint at a date earlier than the later prehistoric date suggested by the fragmented Late Bronze Age–Middle Iron Age pottery that was recovered not only from the upper fills of two of these features, but also from the ditches and post-holes; no diagnostically earlier material was recovered during the excavation.

Much of the wider landscape around the site appears to have been intensively occupied and exploited during the later prehistoric



Fig 3 General view of Area B with post-hole alignments, viewed from the south-west

period. A number of enclosed settlements have been examined to the north-west, as at Old Down Farm (Davies 1981), Charlton and Knights Enham (Heaton & Adam 1995), while an enclosure, of possible Early Iron Age date, identified from aerial photographs, lies to the south-west. Immediately west of the River Anton, north of Pillhill Brook was the large Late Bronze Age hilltop enclosure at Balksbury, while just south of the brook was the Iron Age hillfort of Bury Hill (Ellis & Rawlings 2001; Cunliffe & Poole 2000). Extensive field systems have been identified from aerial photographs to the east of Andover, extending into the eastern part of the Picket Twenty development site. These are largely undated, however, and could date from the Middle–Late Bronze Age through to the Romano-British period (Wessex Archaeology 1997; 2004a).

Few sites, however, have been identified in Harewood Forest which flanks the River Test to the south and east of the site. This was part of the medieval Forest of Chute, and the lack of prehistoric evidence may reflect a more wooded landscape also in later prehistory, in comparison to the open, cultivated downland. A univallate earthwork enclosure known as *Old Pound* lies within the forest *c.* 1.6km south-south-east of Area 2, and although it could be of Iron Age date, a later, perhaps medieval date, is also possible. The enclosure sits on the edge of one of the dry valleys that run up from the Test and which could have provided a route from the river onto the more open and settled downland. The Picket Twenty site lies at the head of this valley, and it is possible that the location of the complex boundary excavated on the site had some role in defining different landscape zones.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The archaeological works were commissioned by Persimmon Homes (South Coast) Ltd. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of David Hopkins (Hampshire County Council, County Archaeologist) for his continued help, advice and comments throughout the fieldwork. Charlotte Malone (Hampshire County Council, Assistant Archaeologist), is also thanked. Andrew Manning managed the project on behalf of Wessex Archaeology. The

fieldwork was undertaken by Chris Ellis, Jon Martin, Victoria Gallagher, Daniel Joyce and Virginia Vargo. The artefacts were assessed by Lorraine Mepham and Matt Leivers, and the environmental samples assessed by Chris Stevens and Sarah Wyles. The figures were drawn by Elizabeth James, and the report edited by Andrew Powell. The archive is currently stored at the offices of Wessex Archaeology under the project codes 69390–92; in due course it will be deposited with the Hampshire Museum Service.

## REFERENCES

- Cunliffe, B & Poole, C 2000 *The Danebury Environs Programme: the prehistory of a Wessex landscape, vol 2–2, Bury Hill, Upper Clatford, 1990*, (OUCA Monograph), Oxford, 49.
- Davies, S 1981 Excavations at Old Down Farm, Andover. Part II: prehistoric and Roman, *Proc Hampshire Fld Club Archaeol Soc* 37 81–163.
- Ellis, C.J & Rawlings, M 2001 Excavations at Balksbury Camp, Andover 1995–97, *Proc Hampshire Fld Club Archaeol Soc* 56 21–94.
- Heaton, M J & Adam, N 1995 *Pits and Postholes at Saxon Fields, Charlton, nr Andover*, Salisbury, Wessex Archaeology unpublished report.
- GSB Prospection, 2000 *Picket Twenty, Andover: geophysical survey report*, Bradford, unpublished report 2000/103.
- GSB Prospection, 2001 *Picket Twenty II, Andover: geophysical survey report*, Bradford, unpublished report 2001/53.
- Wessex Archaeology, 1997 *Land at Picket Twenty, Andover; Hampshire: archaeological appraisal*, Salisbury, unpublished report 43744.1.
- Wessex Archaeology, 2004a *Land at Picket Twenty, Andover; Hampshire: initial archaeological desk-based assessment*, Salisbury, unpublished report 43744.05.
- Wessex Archaeology, 2004b *Land at Picket Twenty, Andover; Hampshire: initial archaeological evaluation*, Salisbury, unpublished report 43744.04.
- Wessex Archaeology, 2011 *Land at Picket Twenty, Andover; Hampshire: archaeological evaluation (Areas J, K, L and M) and post-excavation assessment (Areas A and B)*, Salisbury, unpublished report 69391.02.

*Authors:* Chris Ellis and Gareth Chaffey, Wessex Archaeology Ltd., Portway house, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP4 6EB. David Bridgland, Department of Geography, Durham University, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE, UK